

# **MEDIA RELEASE**

**NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA**

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## **UTAS professors' new phonics app decodes the sounds of reading**

A new iPad app, developed by a team from the UTAS Faculty of Education, has been launched at Goodwood Primary School by the secretary of the Department of Education, Colin Pettit.

*Profs' Phonics*, being sold worldwide through iTunes, is designed to help early readers decode the sounds of the letters in the alphabet.

Teachers often need additional resources to teach early phonics and phonemic awareness, said UTAS Dean of Education, Professor Ian Hay, and Associate Professor Ruth Fielding-Barnsley.

Teaching resources in this area are often limited and of a poor quality.

"This app works on phonemic awareness, which is one of the early stages of learning to read," Prof. Hay said. "It helps early readers match sounds to letters.

"In the past it's been seen as an uninteresting part of learning to read. We've overcome this by having a professional artist work with the app developers so that images and sounds are highly correlated to provide stimulating and motivating activities for children."

The app gives children an iPad/iphone screen full of engaging illustrations of things starting with the same sound: for example, a panda, a painter, and a princess (all starting with the sound 'p').

The child touches an individual picture and, if it starts with 'p', the full word flashes onto the screen.

This first app covers five sounds: four consonants and a vowel. A second app, which is currently in production, covers a further 10 sounds in the beginning, middle and at the end of words.

Profs Hay and Fielding-Barnsley note that other phonics apps have problems for Australian readers: they assume early readers know about letter sounds, and they often use American accents and words.

“Many of them have been developed by people who know about computer programming rather than linguistics,” Prof. Fielding-Barnsley said.

“*Profs’ Phonics* involves a positive approach with fast and high-quality feedback for the reader, which is an attractive feature for teachers and parents.”

The program is especially appropriate for students from low socio-economic areas and developing countries, where the foundations of reading may be poorly developed.

“Without strong foundations in early reading skills, children struggle throughout their schooling and later life,” Prof. Hay added.

“Research evidence highlights that programs like this have a long-lasting impact on the academic progress of children who have come into formal schooling with poor early reading experiences.”

**For more information, please contact Sharon Webb, University of Tasmania, ph. 0438 510 616**

**For professional photos of Associate Professor Ruth Fielding-Barnsley and a child using the new app, please email Cherie Cooper, University of Tasmania, [chcooper@utas.edu.au](mailto:chcooper@utas.edu.au)**

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