



The Parents for Teaching team

Parents for Teaching: Games add new chapter to reading app

Create a game that will essentially expand the user base of its reading app, Teach Me Phonics, Please – Oakville-based Parents for Teaching Inc. certainly loved the sound of that!

The company first developed this reading tool in the 1990s as a physical flashcard kit that parents and educators used for teaching children the basics of reading using phonics.

Going digital, a Windows 8 application was created in 2012, following a similar style and flow of the original flashcard kit. Gaining momentum, Teach Me Phonics, Please has since been translated into Mandarin, Spanish and Russian. But Parents for Teaching wanted to take this app to an even broader audience by making it iPad compatible.

PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES

“We asked ourselves, ‘How can we push the boundaries of our existing product to make the app more competitive?’” said Larysa Foty, Parents

for Teaching’s Director. “We had a few ideas, but really weren’t sure which direction to take.”

The company pointed its compass toward Sheridan College under the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) Applied Research and Commercialization (ARC) Initiative.

The ARC initiative matches small- to medium-sized companies with Sheridan faculty and students to conduct applied research, development and innovation activities that help companies become more productive, competitive and ultimately create jobs. (Funding of up to \$100,000 is matched by 50% in cash or in-kind contribution by the participating company.)

But wait...instead of just making another version of the app, why not make the app more appealing by adding gaming components? That idea was music to the ears of four applied computing Sheridan students from the Faculty of Applied Science and Technology (FAST) and two faculty mentors, Paul Bonenfant and David Horachek.

Using modern gaming techniques, the students designed, implemented and refined a wide variety of compelling games within this app.

The four games range in style from arcade-type (Letter Grab and Letter Drop) to more puzzle-like (Memory Match and Word Search), providing a variety of engaging ways to make learning to read more fun.

“[Sheridan] provided us with a level of support that went beyond our expectations. They even took the initiative to implement unexpected improvements.”

- Larysa Foty, Director, Parents for Teaching Inc.

SHERIDAN SYNERGY AT WORK

The Sheridan students involved in the project learned a few things themselves. The students realized that being able to see each step of the software development life cycle from start to finish was invaluable.

One student, Michael Potvin, received a life lesson about the importance of planning. “Naturally the urge to dive in and start coding away is pretty strong,” he said.

But this project demanded what he called “compatibility forethought”, meaning he needed to plan just how the data files, components and overall performance would all fuse together. He intends to use this planned approach for future projects. “Instead of hacking code together, I now try to first form a synergy for all my components,” he said.

Larysa was delighted with the synergy of the entire Sheridan team. “What impressed me was the depth of Sheridan’s involvement and how responsive they were to feedback and suggestions,” she said. “They provided us with a level of support that went beyond our expectations. They even took the initiative to implement unexpected improvements.”

Parents for Teaching is now reviewing its options to advance the Sheridan app development in order to bridge the gap and bring an iPad version to market and further share this exceptional literacy learning tool.

 Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario Agence fédérale de développement économique pour le Sud de l’Ontario



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