New app provides templates for kids to create their own stories

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Allison Koberstein.

(Phys.org)—Thinking like a five-year-old is helping a team of Simon Fraser University students and grads create an app that allows children to create their own books.

Working as interns and co-op education students at Kibooco Interactive, a Vancouver-based company that helps kids make e-books, they've created The Kibooco Workshop, an app which uses book templates, such as an ABC book or a story book, that children can choose and add to

with their own creations.

"We've put a lot of thought and effort into designing tools that minimize the effort a child has to put into understanding the interface - we'd much rather have them focusing on their creations," says Allen Bevans, a PhD student with SFU's School for Interactive Arts and Technology (SIAT) in Surrey.

That's meant revisiting many of the common tools that content creation packages like Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator use.

"These tools have become the de facto standard for a lot of content creation software, but they often rely on abstract ideas or high-accuracy mouse gestures to work well," Bevans explains.

"For example, the small square handles that are often used to scale and rotate images aren't the best design for children because they require very precise, small mouse movements. And effectively using the undo/redo feature found in most software requires understanding that a small backwards arrow means go a step back in time."

They've already tested early versions of Kibooco Workshop with kids from a local daycare network, catching many problems that adults would never have seen.

Kibooco is planning a public launch of the app later in the fall. "That will hopefully mean more feedback from kids on what works and what still needs to be tweaked," says Bevans, whose MITACS internship with Kibooco ends in November.

Meanwhile Nathan Sorenson, a graduate of SIAT with a master of science degree, will be staying on as the lead programmer. Other SFU students include SIAT co-op student Allison Koberstein and computing

science student David Choy, also a former SIAT graduate.

"Out of a team of seven, that has us leaning very heavily on SFU students and grads," says Shneeberg, who co-founded the company two years ago. "They are all outstanding and add huge value to our company. We are huge fans of SFU and SIAT and have benefited immensely from the co-op program."

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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