Building virtual towns to expand vocabulary

NUS students develop game to let children learn through play

BY LEOW SI WAN

A GROUP of National University of Singapore (NUS) students who developed a prize-winning educational game may find their invention used in kindergartens here.

The vocabulary game – which won the top prize in the tertiary student category at the Singapore Infocomm Technology Federation Awards in September last year – involves children setting up virtual towns using a deck of cards, a laptop and a web camera.

The students from the university’s School of Computing had developed the game last year as a project for one of their academic modules, which involves coming up with innovative forms of interaction using technology.

The team comprises Mr Chen Lingwei, 25; Mr Ee Wai Lay, 26; Mr Liu Peng, 25; Mr Tan Rei Wen Alex, 26 and Ms Chin Su Yuen, 25.

Ms Chin, who graduated last year, is now running a start-up to look into commercialising the project. She has applied to Spring Singapore for funding under its Young Entrepreneurs Scheme for Start-ups.

It is also under the NUS Enterprise Incubator Ecosystem, which provides infrastructural support for technology start-ups founded by NUS staff, students and alumni.

The game she and her university mates developed works this way: A robot asks children to look for something where people can live in. The kids then look for the card with a house and flash it at the web camera, which will register the card.

A virtual house then appears on the screen, and other items are added as the children play the game and pick up new words.

Ms Chin said: “We wanted to look for a new way of doing something for our project and thought of looking into children’s education.

“After classroom observations in kindergartens, we realised that vocabulary is taught a lot using books and flash cards.”

Children, she added, seemed to get bored quickly so the group decided to come up with something where children could learn through play.

“We tested the game several times at Tanjong Pagar PCF Kindergarten and the children have responded very positively,” she added.

Mrs Magdaline Kang, 45, principal of a kindergarten where children tried out the game, said: “It is very interactive, fun and the children loved it. With the programme, active learning can take place.”

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