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## Video game aims to hook children on Shakespeare

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Fri Apr 27, 2007 8:29PM BST

By Martin Roberts

TORONTO, April 27 (Reuters) - Children typically spend hours in front of a computer so a Canadian university has decided to introduce them to Shakespeare with a video game.

While zapping enemy spaceships players have to help recover the stolen text of Romeo and Juliet by memorizing lines from the famous play, learning facts about Shakespeare's life and devising synonyms and homonyms for parts of the text.

"The game is a way to capitalize on the time that kids spend on computers," said Professor Daniel Fischlin who headed the team at the University of Guelph in Ontario that developed the game called "Speare."

"I don't know of another medium that has seven-year-olds spouting Shakespeare," Fischlin added in response to charges the game might trivialize learning.

The game was launched earlier this week to coincide with the anniversary of Shakespeare's death after two years and C\$50,000 (22,400 pounds) spent developing it.

Fischlin, who tested it on more than 100 grade 6 students, plans to publish his findings in an academic journal. The game is currently available online from a company set up by the university.

"Speare" contains a link to a database about Shakespeare called Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare that was developed by the university as an educational resource.

The site has lesson plans for teachers, video interviews and e-books of the Bard's plays. It provided the inspiration for the game when professors realized the site's multimedia features were accessed mainly by young people.

Fischlin, who is applying for a patent, said he knows of no other video game linked to a similar online resource.

Ieva Mikelsons, a 12-year-old student at the King George Public School in Guelph, tested the game while it was being developed. She said it taught her more about Shakespeare than books used by her older sister.

"Some of my grade 8 friends have just been learning from a book, and they say this is a more hands-on approach, and they learn more because it's fun," she said.

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