Children’s learning tools are product of interdisciplinary collaboration at
Louisiana Tech

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Speech, communication, typography and storytelling are all merging together for three Louisiana Tech University professors’ interdisciplinary research focusing on fostering children’s development.

Todd Maggio, an associate professor of art, and speech faculty members Dr. Kerri Phillips and Christina Madix, are the creative minds behind LMNOBeasts, an educational and therapeutic tool that, as Maggio said, is “also a load of fun.”

“Ultimately LMNOBeasts products will cover a wide range,” Maggio said. “But the real product is the process used to create LMNOBeasts from letters. To start, we will produce a story/workbook and mobile app which will introduce the characters and mythology that the LMNOBeasts are built around. At the moment I am producing hanging mobiles, note pads, vinyl wall graphics, screen-printed goods and an assortment of one-off art pieces.”

Phillips and Madix are developing the lessons and activities for the workbook, Maggio said. They are also setting up tests to evaluate therapeutic aspects and other typography-related communication issues.

“The deeper we delve into our initial investigations the more opportunities we find for research,” Maggio said.

This research is receiving state and even worldwide attention. Maggio will present research regarding LMNOBeasts at the International Toy Research Association’s World Congress in Portugal at the end of July.

“LMNOBeasts started as an assignment in my typography classes as a way to teach basic type anatomy,” Maggio said. “I soon realized that the playful nature of the project made it particularly suitable for younger audiences as a vehicle for teaching a range of communication skills. We are just in the beginning stages of testing so we do not have any concrete results to share just yet. However, there is already a wealth of existing research that supports the foundation of our work.”

LMNOBeasts products will be featured on July 17 at the grand opening of The Agora Borealis, a new artists’ market in downtown Shreveport. Also, the products are competing in the Louisiana Startup Prize competition.

“I became involved with the Louisiana Startup Prize as a direct result of my involvement with the business accelerator program here at Tech,” Maggio said. “I also co-teach an innovative product design class with faculty from business and engineering, and helped establish the Thingery, a new desktop manufacturing lab on campus. My work in these areas was key to making LMNOBeasts a reality.”