



App adds maths skills

■ Bethany Hiatt

Educational computer games could help children improve maths skills and lead to more studying high-level maths at Year 12 and university, according to a WA academic.

Edith Cowan University psychology professor Craig Speelman said children who failed to master basic skills before being asked to do more complicated problems were often turned off maths for life.

But because they learnt at different rates, it was difficult to teach 30 students and make sure all kept up.

"It's easy for kids to get left behind and soon start to believe they don't have a 'maths brain', whereas in fact they've really not had the chance to master something that was rudimentary before they

go on to the next thing," he said.

Professor Speelman designed an iPad app called Numbeat with the help of a grant from the Association of Independent Schools of WA.

It is based on the psychological principles of skill acquisition, which show that with repeated practice, simple tasks such as counting become automatic and free mental resources for more difficult problems.

The game differs from rote learning of tables because it encourages students to use knowledge rather than just repeat it.

Testing of 130 students from four private primary schools showed a 5 per cent average reduction in the time it took them to answer questions correctly after using the app for half an hour a day for two weeks.



Screen savers: Craig Speelman with Lance Holt School students, from left, Angus Campbell, Patrick Mcphail, Jessica Birt, Sigrid Harban-Guttinger. Picture: Bill Hatto