Meet Caesar
A Robot Created in the Robotics Lab Along with Teddy Bears to Treat Autism, and more...

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WHIZ KIDS from a downtown Brooklyn college are designing a robot to serve as a surrogate gran-
y — and there’s an app for that.

Cesar the robot will be able to read bedtime stories to the kids by using an app on a cellphone cre-
ed by students at NYU’s Polytech-
nic Institute.

"Robots are going mobile," said Prof. Vikram Kapila, who runs the NYU-Poly robotics lab where students are working on high-tech projects to make ma-
chiney act like human beings.

"It’s all about the apps."

Mobile apps, a new trend in ro-
botics, will make robots easy for
regular folks to operate — and
Polytech students are working on
robotic apps for a variety of uses,
such as making a teddy bear seem
empathetic to autistic kids.

"If robots are going to function in
society, they need to interact
with people in an intuitive, simple
way," Kapila said. "If you give an
iPhone to a 2-year-old, they figure
out what to do with it."

To make Cesar work, a real-
life granmy will use her phone to
transmit her voice through the ro-
bot’s mouth to do the reading. She
will be able to watch her grand-
children’s reactions through the ro-
bot’s eyes, which are twin camer-
as.

"It can be your avatar," said grad student Jared Frank, 25, who’s in the early stages of design-
ing Cesar. "It can read a bedtime story to kids in Brooklyn if they are a granmy and live in Miami."

Right now the robot — whose
name stands for "cellularly acces-
sible expressive semi-autono-
mous robot" — can swing its head
and eyes to watch people walking around the lab.

Cesar could also be turned in-
to a robot receptionist who takes
visitors’ pictures and matches them with online photos so it can
greet them by name, Kapila said.

Polytech students are also train-
ing a motorized teddy bear into a
playmate for kids with develop-
mental disabilities like autism.

The kids’ phone cameras will
transmit their facial expressions to
the stuffed animals, which will
react with appropriate ges-
tures. "This toy will be therapeu-
tic," said Frank.

Fellow grad student David Lo-
pez, 23, can make a robotic arm pick up a pair of glasses or hand over a medicine bottle with an
iPad app he’s created.

Exchange student Vinicius Fernandes, 20, is designing jack-
ets and shirts with knitted fabric sensors in them that tell robots what to do.

"Robots have been science fic-
tion for so long," Frank said. "We’re a part of making science fiction into reality."

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NYU-Polytechnic Institute
student falls (left) shows
how robots can be
controlled by apps on
a mobile device. Prolif
ephants under develop-
ment at the
downtown Brooklyn
college include
an android that can
be remotely controlled.
It seems to be speak-
ing in user’s voice while it
transmits images through
"eyeballs" that are cam-
neras. Photos by Todd Maisel/Dail-
ly News