Weekly Newsletter

Starting Development:

This week was an exciting one, as we ran through our last major pre-production steps on the road to development. Our team now has all of our hardware and software setup for iPad development.

We had a great follow-up meeting with Susan and her team at UMich to further refine our educational goals and approach, as well as a productive session with Anthony Daniels where we ironed out some of our story and interaction ideas.

First Prototype:

On Wednesday, we completed most of our high-level design for our first prototype. We'll be creating an adventure game where the player heads to an empty grocery store and must help the grocer restock his shelves. Over the course of the game, the player will learn where everyday food items come from – such as eggs from chickens on a farm, for example. We also want to cover some basic processes , such as how wheat is ground into flour then baked into bread on its way to a store.

The overall goal of the game is to encourage children to ask the next question about other items in their life. If a player now understands where milk comes from, hopefully they can apply this sort of investigation to other aspects of their life. "Where did this chair come from?" If a child is invested in and encouraged to proactively explore their world, we feel that this would be the most effective way to "level the playing field" – where disadvantaged children can create a vocabulary and an educational foundation on par with their more privileged peers.

As the player goes on this quest to restock the shelves of their local grocery store, they'll also collect an inventory of cards that represent important items, concepts, or places in their journey. Because we can't rely on a player's reading and writing abilities, these graphical representations will form a vocabulary that the player can use within the game. As virtual cards, these will also leverage the tactile interactions of the iPad.

So at the end of the journey, when the grocer asks "where did these eggs come from?" the player can respond with cards to say that "CHICKENS" laid the eggs. This prevents us from using a trite multiple choice question, and gives us the ability to guide the player in case of an incorrect or incomplete answer. If the player were to answer "FARM," the grocer can then affirm that as correct and prod for further information: "What on the farm made the eggs?"

We've begun our first passes at art and a script for the game. We'll be building the introduction and the egg experience from start to finish, then copying that process as we look at bread, milk, cheese, juice, and fruits and vegetables.

THE TEAM

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On the Next Episode of Capital Games

Ideally, we're looking to have this first prototype finished in time for Quarters, the week of September 24. As such, we're looking back at our time in Building Virtual Worlds and running through a "Lightning Round" – building a complete experience in a little over a week. From there, we'll be able to test it with kids, and use those results to iterate upon this game or apply those lessons to a future prototype.