CAPITAL GAMES

Weekly Newsletter   9/7/2012

This Week

This week's been a productive one, as we've been building the ship that will carry us through the semester. Susan Neuman and her team at the University of Michigan provided us with helpful resources to start tackling our major development goal: improving literacy in young children, ages 4-6.

The team quickly tore through the materials, and started churning on important questions for working with this subject matter and with this demographic. What sort of technology can we reasonably expect a lower-income household to have access to? Can we rely on having an older sibling or a parent to provide access to a web-based game, or even to serve as a companion/guide, or even an opponent, to the player? With the large amount of educational games for this demographic, how would we distinguish ourselves from those games?

We had our follow-up call with Susan Neuman and her team this Friday afternoon, where each group seemed to have independently arrived at a similar place. Worrying about access and distributions would put a lot of restrictions on this project, while undercutting one of our greatest strengths: being able to look at experimental gameplay and iterative prototyping. On the other hand, working with something like the iPad gives us a better platform for interaction with our target demographic. Since children of this age are likely not computer literate, we need to provide them with a program that they can easily launch themselves, that will not require a web connection, and that utilizes touch interaction for intuitive control paralleling their everyday experience. This was capped off with a brief, helpful conversation with Michael Levine from Sesame Workshop, who may act as a helpful resource and advisor to the team this semester.

Generally, we'll be looking to create individual experiences for the iPad, with a primary focus on literacy, using a more advanced vocabulary with the benefits of context, feedback, and game mechanics to help push a player forward. Susan's desire for something more challenging than other educational games for this age group was something that really resonated with our project team, and we're looking forward to trying to deliver this experience.

THE TEAM

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Programmers
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Artists
Tim McMulllan
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The Week Ahead

On Monday, we'll begin prototyping in earnest. At this point, we feel we have a solid foundation in our subject matter and demographic, enough to start trying to translate content into game mechanics. We intend to have our first prototype ready in two weeks, in time to be displayed at our Quarters Walkarounds, where we'll have an opportunity to share our project with all ETC faculty and benefit from their feedback.

We'll likely be developing in Unity, as the entire team has experience in the environment, and it gives us the flexibility to build a wide variety of games in a collaborative development environment, and (most importantly) can be deployed to iPads readily.