

Halves

On Monday we gave our halves presentation at the ETC. We showed our game, described our process, and answered questions from the audience. Reception to our project was positive: as always, there are things to improve on, but we have made good progress since quarters. We should have the full official feedback from the faculty before the start of next week.

We were pleased to have Russell Schilling from DARPA available to attend the presentation. After the presentation we sat down for a meeting with him, our advisor Scott Stevens, logging server guru Bryan Maher, and Vincent Aleven from HCII to talk about where the game is at and where we should go next. We were encouraged to let the game be even more experimental, letting the kids fail more, see why they failed, and then try new things. Russell and Vincent had some opportunity to play our game and had fun trying to figure out how outrageously they could build while still triggering all the checkpoints. A handy earthquake took care of the most outrageous structures.

Mini-Game Assessment

In keeping with our discussion last week about contrasting cases, we have taken HCII's suggestion to build a simple mini-game that can be placed between levels of the main game. This mini-game confronts the player with two buildings that are identical in all except one aspect: For example, both might be the same height and average width, but one is wider at the top and one is wider at the bottom. Students pick which structure is safer for the spaceship to land on and then their guess is tested by having an earthquake shake both buildings.

This test of contrasting cases will help HCII assess the learning progress of each child through the course of the game. Hopefully, this will complement the final level designs of our main game to create a rich and fun learning experience.

Platform Implementation

At the time of our quarters presentation, we thought we might use Wiimotes as a secondary platform besides our main platform of mouse and keyboard. Ultimately, we decided to move away from WiiMote development for two reasons. First, we've always known that the distribution of WiiMotes throughout schools would likely be problematic. This is okay for research but not for wide dissemination of the game. Second, our early investigation suggested that WiiMotes would not allow the precise selection and placement of blocks that we need.

We've decided to move towards tablet implementation. The feeling of dragging blocks from an inventory makes sense for a tablet experience. A teacher at the Children's School also shared with us her observation that the newest generation of kids seems to be even more comfortable with touch interfaces than they are with the mouse because they tend to play with the smartphones and tablets of their parents.

We went with Android tablets because there is a broader range of prices for tablets. This week, we were able to port our current build over to Android and test it on 2 different tablets with 2 different Android OS versions. The game feels really fluid and natural on the tablet. You can drag blocks out from the inventory and using a second finger, you can rotate the objects to orthogonal angles.

The PC with mouse and keyboard remains our first priority as a platform, but we should be able to develop both in tandem, and we're really excited about what tablets are bringing to the game experience.

Calendar

November 28th

Soft Opening
-Faculty walkarounds to see
near final build.

December 12th, 14th, 16th

Final Presentations

