

Halves feedback

Last Friday, we had our halves presentation. Halves provide insight into the project's process and development thus far. Since it's half way through the semester, the product should be halfway done. We presented our progress so far, on both RumbleBlocks and our "Beanstalk" game currently in development. The changes on RumbleBlocks (contrasting cases and block removal) was showcased as well as the results from our test in the Propel School with those changes. The feedback from the faculty was mostly positive, with a few concerns about the current "Beanstalk" prototype and that we needed more evidence of learning for RumbleBlocks. The latter will come from the April test of RumbleBlocks and the former we will address as we polish the game further.



Beanstalk Development

We presented our current build of "Beanstalk" last week during our halves presentation and got some crucial feedback. The biggest takeaway was that the game was currently open to many misconceptions and it wasn't clear how it was teaching balance. To this, we've implemented our variable system for the prototype. By doing this, we've created a clearer vision of how the game will ultimately function to teach balance. We've also come up with a new design as another way of teaching balance more explicitly, following a paper teaching balance provided by Siegler. This design features Jack (or Jackie--the female avatar) trying to stay balanced on the center of a plank. Each sides of the plank will have bulbs that the player will have to water in order to keep the plank balanced. Watering the bulb will be necessary to balance the plank from falling bugs that will try and unbalance it. We've created a small prototype of this work-in-progress design and we're in discussion with HCII to finalize how to integrate scientific reasoning into the game.



RumbleBlocks

We're in the final stage of development for RumbleBlocks and preparing to hand it off for HCII's playtest in mid-April. We also had aims to release the game externally on educational websites to further expand exposure to RumbleBlocks. Unity, by default, allows the creation of game builds for the web. However, any user would have to install the Unity Web Player plug-in in order to play the game, which gave educational websites a bit of hesitation for hosting them and expressed interest in a Flash build of the game. The most recent version of Unity, 3.5, allows for exporting games to Flash and HTML5 versions. We attempted to port our game to both Flash and HTML5, however both builds came with numerous bugs. These bugs could be because Unity 3.5 is still in "development preview" mode, meaning the Flash and HTML5 exports may not be as refined and tested yet, or it could be an in-game feature of RumbleBlocks that is incompatible with Flash. Since our main focus is on making a stable build for the test in April, we are going to stick with Unity 3.4 for the time being, which will delay external deployment.

We've also been working on making build compatible with the machines inside the schools that HCII plans to test in. We sent the schools a build of RumbleBlocks, but with our current game build, the game would freeze whenever the spaceship was released. As such, we've spent some time debugging the build to figure out why the game freezes. This has not been an easy task, as the machines are very dated, so developing software to run on them is not that simple. We were able to sort out the bug and we have provided a build that works on the schools' machines. This will be the biggest test of RumbleBlocks to date and we are excited to see the testing results.

