

Beanstalk Playtesting

Since after halves we had two prototypes, we had to make a decision on which prototype to go with. While both prototypes are nice experiences, there is not enough time to polish both in the remaining semester. We took both prototypes to the Children's School on main campus for playtesting in order to get insight from our demographic about which experience kids will enjoy more.

Our playtest had 7 playtesters; 5 boys and 2 girls. There was more interest shown from other children, but there wasn't enough time to test all the interested children. Our first prototype that focused on growing the beanstalk to get Jack/Jackie up to the platform was received fairly well with a few critiques/questions. First, the kids loved growing the beanstalk and watching it react; for them it was the most exciting part of the game. They also liked how the game looked, but they made suggestions of more things to add (since the game starts off in a farm, they wanted to see cows). Some players did seem to lose interest in the game however, while they wait for Jack to climb up the stalk; there was nothing for them to do as they waited. Another concern is that they didn't really understand why things were happening; they were just repeating actions from previous levels.

The second prototype that focuses on keeping Jack balanced on the plank was also received very well. The children definitely enjoyed the more fast paced experience that game and felt a great satisfaction from winning. Even though the kids enjoyed the game, they did have difficulty finding the right solutions and had to retry the levels quite a few times. The kids also wanted to click on other things in the space, like the bugs, just to see what happened. Based on our observations from this playtest as well as discussions with HCII, we have decided to develop the second prototype into a full polished game for this semester's product.



Prototype Development

After halves, we started designing and developing a new prototype based on our current beanstalk concept. This concept was developed based on a paper done by Dr. Robert Siegler from CMU that discusses how to teach balance to kids as well as adults. Based on this paper, we developed a prototype that focuses on keeping the in-game character balanced on a plank resting on the growing beanstalk. In order to do this, the player must plant flowers on the plank to counter the weight of the bugs that will drop down during the levels. Following Siegler's experiments, we based our level designs heavily on the experiments he discusses in order to stay in line with the teaching methods. We are also working with HCII on how to refine this more to test the child's understanding of what's happening through audio menus as well as gradually increasing the difficulty as they go that also contributes to learning.

