

Rumble Blocks Testing @ Trafford-Elementary

On Thursday, April 12th and Friday April 13th, HCII ran a formal evaluation study at Trafford Elementary School with grades K-3: 3 1st grade classes, 2 2nd and 3rd grade classes, and 2 Kindergarten classes. This was an all day study and the kids had roughly 30 minutes of playtime. We helped to proctor the study on both days and made some keen observations about the kids. On day 1, most of the kids understood the premise of the game and the mechanics. As they played through the game, there was a clear sign that they were learning how to win the game. Whether or not they are learning about the principles behind stable structures will be answered through the data logs that HCII will analyze. After a few structured levels, the kids played a few free-form levels, so that HCII could get an idea how a child's thought process before the game. The new features we implemented this semester (new contrasting cases and block removal) were well-received and also understood. When one user asked how block removal worked, another student chimed in saying "You have to get rid of the blocks you don't need". In regards to the contrasting cases, one student made the observation "it's like an estimate of which one is safer". Some of the 3rd graders made it all the way through the game in the time allotted, as did 1 kindergartner.

On Day 2 of the study, the kids played a different version of the game. This version had levels that were a bit harder, so there was some concern on how they would perform. For the most part, their performance was not impacted heavily by the difficulty increase. We did have to help some of the kindergartners with the first level, but after a hint or two, they understood it and were able to progress through the game. Day 2 of the study also had the kids play a few free-form levels similar to day 1. This was to see if there was any difference in children's build patterns after going through the game. From our observations, we did notice a difference, and the data log analysis will confirm or disprove our observations.



Beanstalk Playtest @ The Children's School

As we continue to polish the Beanstalk game, we wanted to get more feedback from the Children's School. Based on feedback from our last visit, we wanted to change the UI for the kids; in the previous version, they didn't realize that they had limited water, so we changed the UI to represent the number of flowers available. From our last playtest, we also noticed that while the kids are waiting for something to be balanced, they want to click on things. We added elements in the background, like butterflies and hot air balloons, that kids will be able to click on that gives them visual feedback. This feedback will be subtle, as we don't want the kids to stop playing the game because they've gotten distracted clicking on background elements.

This playtest gave us more insight into the growing and removal system of the flowers. Initially, we were going to have the flowers grow roots on the underside of the plank so that the user could have a clear space to cut flowers. However, this was visually confusing as there was more things on one side, which makes it especially hard for kids to understand. So we have spaced the flowers out in order to keep everything on the top of the plank. The kids had an issue with this however due to their dexterity, so we're looking into new ways for them to grow and cut easily.

