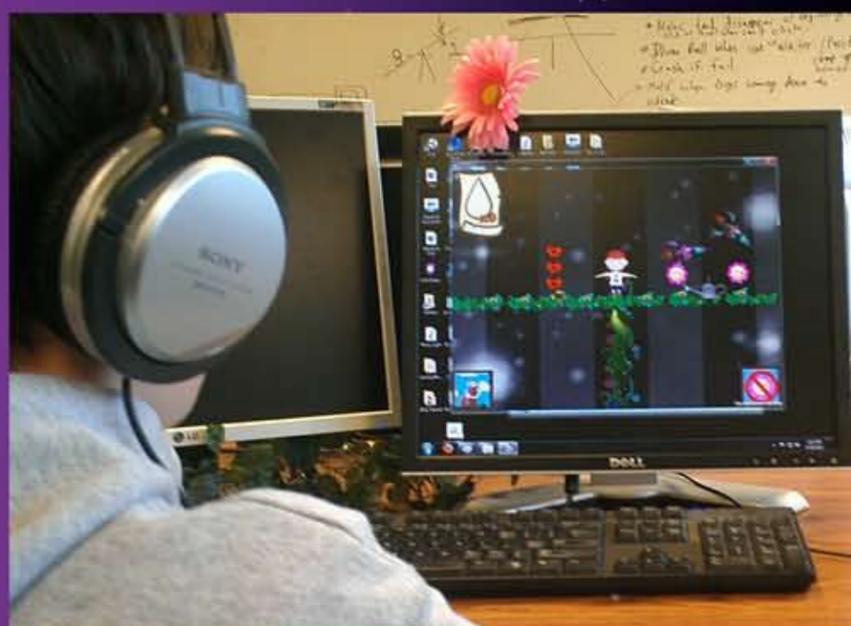


Playtest @ ETC

On April 26th, we had some of the faculty and staff members' children come in and test our game. This test was with 8 kids: 5 girls, and 3 boys, ranging from ages 7-11. We tested with both PC and tablet builds of our game and made some good observations. The game, while more active than our first version of Beanstalk, still needs more of a fun factor: the game's pacing is a bit off. The kids would click before the bugs even landed, rather than waiting for the problem to present itself. Also, for the tablet, users wanted to move flowers around, rather than removing them completely from the space. One user, made a keen observation that the game is a bit more of a math game than we had anticipated, due to the fact that they have to understand the math formula in order to progress through the game.

Based on this feedback, we've thought of a few design changes to implement. One idea is to give the game levels phases. While the player waits for the bugs to fall, this would be the "readying" phase: during this phase, the player would not have a cursor, and can't click. Once the bug(s) land, the player will be able to grow flowers. This would be the play phase. After they use all their water, they are placed into the "wait" phase, in which they are watching to see if the beam balances correctly or if it fails. We feel that this will help to give the user more time to watch the problem present itself rather than jumping right in and making mistakes. To help make the phases less static, they will have different musical tones as the level progresses. For example, during the "wait" phase, there will be a drum roll that cascades up in tempo as the beam becomes more balanced.



Soft Opening

On Monday, we had our Soft Opening. Soft Opening is a chance for faculty and guests to visit our project room and see our product. At softs, the product should be complete and ready for critical feedback. Our "Beanstalk" product was received very well and the criticisms we received were all of one mind. The tutorial needs an overhaul: it's not clear what the goal is and it provides a mild frustration to the player. Similarly, our user interface needs an overhaul as well. Players didn't realize they were out of water, and were confused when they could not water anymore. We also needed some kind of communication for user progression; currently, there is no easy way for a player to know how far in the game they are. Lastly, the game is started by pressing spacebar, but the keyboard is never used again, which is confusing and so we should stick with one primary input for the game experience. All of this feedback is great, and we will be addressing changes based on this feedback up until our final presentations.

Next Steps

As we reach the end of the semester, we are starting to think about the next steps for the ENGAGE project. With the Beanstalk game, we are communicating with HCII to determine what data they would want the game to log so that over the summer and next semester, they can run user studies with Beanstalk to measure children's learning. In regards to RumbleBlocks, HCII will be finishing up another large-scale user study this week. Based on this study and the previous one, the data analysis will give our team insight into further changes that RumbleBlocks might need in the future for increased learning.

We're also starting to think about how to incorporate adaptability into our games for widespread user testing. These design implementations will be geared both towards measuring if users are having fun as well as if adaptability is affecting learning. We will be focusing on the fun aspect while our HCII partners focus on the learning aspect.

