



Weekly Newsletter

10/5/2012

First Playtest:

On Monday, Capital Games conducted its first playtest with kids at the Pittsburgh Children's Museum. Our game had seven testers, aged 3 ½ to 6. This first test was mostly focused on



the physical interaction between the player and the iPad. Our team has never worked with children this young, so it was extremely valuable to see how they reacted to our game and what they wanted to do with the device. Going forward, the fact that Capital Games now has this shared experiential vocabulary is making it that much easier to discuss our demographic and design our game with our players in mind.

THE TEAM

Producer
Albert Gea

Designer
Anthony Hildebrand

Programmers
Cintia Higashi
Mike Lee

Artists
Tim McMullan
Evan Brown

Processing Our Current Game, the Project:

As any first playtest, Monday was humbling as the first reflection on the wide gap between a game designer and its target audience. Player interactivity and agency was low, even when the player knew what was expected to continue the game.



In internal conversations and with our advisors, we wondered if we were playing things too safe and if we were building something we are passionate about and can be proud of. As a student project (and a noncommercial product), we're in a unique position to try to push the envelope. Whether we're an overwhelming success or we make some mistakes along the way, we can only learn things for ourselves and for this area of educational game design.

We know we want to design an experience that can be played without supervision or outside assistance. At the other end of the spectrum, the cognitive abilities of 4 to 6 year olds present a limit to how much we can push.

As most of us are game designers and advanced, high-information gamers, we've struggled with the fact that most "games" in this space aren't actual "games" in that they lack true fail-states and tough decisions on the way to a clear, defined win. Most would better fit a "toy" label, with a few of the more advanced experiences including puzzles and elements of games.

And while our current iteration has obvious shortcomings, we have realized that we're different in that we are directed and intentional, and that we're not just a toy.

Conclusions; Future Direction

After additional brainstorming, game research, and watching lots of Grover, we've come to some exciting conclusions about our future direction. We're excited about our card mechanic – it's been a success in many ways: a collectible, a way to give the player a vocabulary, and a way to tie our abstract art style to real world representations.



We feel that we're on a good path, if we make sure to include some additional elements. While we've described our game as an adventure game, we've left out the most important aspects of adventure games: a zany story and puzzles. Going forward, we're making sure to give the player more opportunities to interact with the game world, more agency within that world, and a more comedic story. With such a story, we've realized that we can reframe our questions as puzzles. For instance, rather than asking "what do chickens eat?" and awaiting an answer, we can present a hungry chicken as an obstacle or puzzle to overcome to advance in the game. In either case, the player can play a CORN card, but in the latter, the payoff is not just a "you're correct." Instead, the payoff is game advancement, and observing the world react to this correct answer.

On the Next Episode of Capital Games

For the coming week we'll be looking forward to welcoming back Tim and Mike. As they return from their exciting trip to Indiecade we will also be saluting Anthony as he departs for Austin, Texas and the GDC Online convention. As the team returns, we'll be hitting the ground running to get our next iteration of the prototype on track with our goals. On Wednesday we have an opportunity to be hosted again by the Children's Museum and a chance to see a more polished product in the hands of youngsters. Until next time, have a Capital Week!