



Weekly Newsletter

10/12/2012

Refining the Project:

The team met early in the week amongst ourselves and with our faculty advisors to map out the new flow of the game as completely as possible. We also met with Susan's team on Wednesday to clarify their concerns about the current direction.

Most significantly, the game now has a more tangible overarching goal of collecting the ingredients needed to create an apple pie rather than the vague idea of buying groceries.

An issue that has arisen is the conflict between game design and education. Game design often assumes that a player knows nothing and explains as much as possible so that the player does not become frustrated and give up; however, a good education must expose concepts that are a bit above and beyond to help encourage critical investigation and growth. Balancing these two may take a lot of fine-tuning in the near future.

Ollie, our sidekick, also still needs a satisfactory introduction as well as a clear relationship with our players. The team wants the peculiar little guy to be a mentor for the child that knows what to do but doesn't necessarily have all the answers itself. Whether or not that is communicated will need to be tested with kids.

THE TEAM

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Second Prototype:

The second prototype was finished on Friday. It is only a small chunk of what would merely be the egg "slice" of our game: The prototype starts after the player has first arrived at the farm and continues all the way to when the player finishes answering the grocer's evaluative question.

The new prototype implements many of the aesthetic touches that we realized were essential to engagement, including things like animations, sound effects, pulsing highlights, etc.

One of the caveats of this prototype is that it uses scratch dialogue and a temporary script. The design and story have changed a lot since the last playtest, and much needed to be re-written; however, as our writer was at GDC Online, the team had to do some makeshift writing and recording ourselves.

Second Playtest:

Our second playtest at the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, which was scheduled for Wednesday this week had to be pushed back to Friday afternoon due to development difficulties.



Unfortunately, the late time also meant that many guests were exhausted and on their way out of the museum.

Nonetheless, the team got a couple of people to playtest and found out some very useful things.

On the positive side, the highlights and animations have indeed increased engagement and helped cue the children on what to do. Moreover, the expansion of the card mechanic to be a primary interaction with questions and problems within the world was a great success. Without having to provide a tutorial, we found that the kids intuitively discovered to tap and drag the cards into answer spaces.

As to the shortcomings of the current iteration: There are still sections of dialogue that are just a little too long for the kids to stay engaged. Moreover, when kids do miss an important cue, the game needs to have a way to remind them either through tapping on Ollie, their helper, or a timeout. Indeed, we noticed that this was one of the things that parents were still doing to help their kids through certain puzzles and is something that we want the game to be able to do itself.

Initial Results:

The outlook looks good for the basic mechanics. There are just a few more places where the interactive components need to be further distinguished, but otherwise, kids are navigating the interface very smoothly now. Otherwise, the big challenge now is to flesh out the story and the educational portions. As our writer/lead designer is back now from GDC Online at the end of this week, we will be able to make headway on this next week.



On the Next Episode of Capital Games:

We'll be conducting our first playtest with low-income kids at the Thelma Lovette YMCA in Pittsburgh on Monday, and the team is excited about playtesting with our target demographic. Nevertheless, the playtests we've conducted so far with middle-income kids are still very useful: By observing kids from different socio-economic backgrounds, the team can learn even more about the gap between them that we are trying to address. There are a lot of unknowns before us but with these playtests, the team is beginning to decipher them.