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Funology Summaries

Beyond Usability in Games

Video games are an art form combining “traditional” art techniques with more modern technical ones. User researchers can provide useful feedback in each step of the design process. They help the designer create his/her vision, while keeping the user in mind. The researchers believe that looking at “fun, challenge, pace, learning curve, and engagement” is important, but the hard part is translating these concepts into actual gameplay. Design, they believe, should be left to the designers. It is important for the designer to work with the researchers to define their objectives of the game and the problem they want to look at. They use pace as an example of this. A designer would address differently depending on their vision and the type of game experience they want to create. The pace of a tennis video game, for example, might be based on different aspects of the gameplay. This affects the set of questions a researcher looks at. They also think about the pacing in a first person shooter, and whether the pace is determined by being action-packed or based on tension.

Discussion Questions:
How might we see deep engagement usability research working into game design?
What is the role, then, of a usability researcher in game design?
Must a designer always direct their activities, or are there times when they can see problems or issues a designer can’t?
How should a designer take into account usability research?

Computer Games as Interfaces

The author feels that computer games are a good model for fun, and software should incorporate game-like elements. The problem is that these features may not work out of context. The author created a system administration (program manager) tool (PSDoom) that uses a gamelike interface to test out whether it could work with serious software. Instead of programs you want to close, you see monsters associated. It didn’t end up being practical, even though it was a compelling metaphor. The author argues that the metaphor helped people become familiar with the system, but could eventually mislead them. The goals of Doom (the game) were very different from the goals of PSDoom (the application): in Doom you want to kill everything, in PSDoom, just the problematic applications. While game interfaces haven’t been integrated into workplace software, they have been placed in educational software. This software alternates “work” with “fun,” but does not integrate them.

Discussion Questions:
Should educational software be simply “fun” or should it also be challenging, constructive, or supportive of “playful learning?”
Should learning be hidden while playing an educational game?
What are some other areas of life that would benefit from a gamelike interface?