PROJECT TITLE

PlaySpace: An examination of learning in multicultural, digital, playful environments

PARTICIPANTS

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WEBSITE http://concepts.concord.org/playspace

PROJECT SUMMARY

What was the work you did? For what purpose? Who were the collaborators?

A multidisciplinary group, with shared interest in learning about multicultural, digital, playful environments, conducted a literature and product review. The purpose of this work was to generate a rubric and a set of recommendations to be used by software designers, parents, and teachers who are considering the use of playful digital learning environments in multicultural settings [1].

The following questions were at the basis of this work: What is the difference between play and game? What are the relationships between the two? What principles should guide playful learning environments in general, and in digital environments? What cultural aspects should be taken into account when designing playful learning environments for kids? What kinds of educational digital products are available for kids? How does one assess the value of such products? How should product designers, teachers and parents be oriented in the design and use of digital playful learning environments?

A web site was created showing the different concepts behind the project as well as resources available for answering these questions. See <http://concepts.concord.org/playspace>

Each member of the group assumed responsibility for the identification, review, analysis and synthesis of ideas derived from relevant literature and software. All of the members of the group agreed to integrate their findings? of the project in a unique site created using a Conceptual Map managing tool. The purpose of this was to facilitate the academic community to go through the different sources bringing either the documents or going to the corresponding URLs, as well as to review the conceptual maps that are derived from this effort.

RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS

What findings/products did your work produce? What are the implications of those results for the field?

The most important result of this work is the articulation of an idea shared by all of the members of this interdisciplinary group: playful learning environments are worth using in education. However, this can not be left to the inspiration of the business people producing educational interactive materials, it demands active participation by educational agents in different settings. The seed-funded project resulted in a knowledge base that will inform future research and development in this area. In addition, a preliminary proposal was prepared and presented to NSF [2] responding to NSF-00-17 program announcement for

consideration in the ROLE (Research on Learning and Education) category. Pending approval, we will present a proposal in December 2001.

The rubric resulting from this research [1] is another product that is available to the entire academic community, as well as to the intended audiences: software producers, parents and teachers. Our web site shares this and other products of the project.

In addition, 6 papers [3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8] have been written and a panel discussion has been submitted to AERA [9] to disseminate the findings of this group.

LESSONS LEARNED: COLLABORATION
How successful do you consider this collaboration to have been?

Our collaborative efforts, facilitated by an eGroup tool for interaction and by a conceptual mapping tool for dissemination, resulted in a thorough review of current products and literature. Through efficient collaboration, we were able to generate a rubric and a set of recommendations that will guide consumers in their selection of products and developers in their design of new digital learning environments for education.

In terms of less tangible outcomes, it is clear that the interaction through the Internet, as well as through the face-to-face meetings, has been very helpful for building community among participants. Differences of interest, backgrounds, professional roles, and even gender and age became less important as the spirit of community evolved from the interaction. Synergy allowed the group to go beyond the promised outcomes.

What did you learn about the challenges of cross-institutional collaboration and ways to combat those challenges?

Open dialogue and a clear agenda throughout the process has been the key to successful interaction. Sharing common goals leads to commitment which produces results.

Many of you used yahoo groups (egroups) to communicate. Was this tool useful? In what ways?

This has been a very useful tool since it helped us manage the interaction as well as the documents used throughout the process.

Are there others tools and support that would have made the process easier for you?

In our case, a tool called CMAP (Concept Maps), available from <http://cmap.coginst.wfu.edu>, was very useful. It is a public domain software that helped our group build the working Website. CMAP shows the research results and processes in a very simple but comprehensive way. This software allowed us to express ideas and integrate different kinds of resources (i.e., text, multimedia, URLs).

NEXT STEPS
Where will you go from here? Has this project resulted in any subsequent grants or proposals, or ideas that you will carry forward to future work?

With the research findings that resulted from this project, we have generated new proposals to develop playful digital educational resources that help solve some of the problems of educating children in multicultural settings. If we receive NSF funding, the same group will continue its collaborative efforts.

RELATED RESOURCES
If someone else is interested in this topic, where should they go for more information? If you can, please provide links to related websites and other resources of interest.

Our Website < http://concepts.concord.org/playspace> provides open access to each of the resources that we have used and produced. The visitor will be able to access any of them just by clicking on the respective URL

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