**PROJECT POSTMORTEM SUBMISSION FRIDAY 10TH MAY 2019**

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| **STUDENT NAME** | George Heath-Collins |
| **PROJECT NAME** | L6 Group 2 “Gaia” |
| What do you think went well on the project? | I think that we as a group have iterated effectively based on User feedback. At multiple points during the project, we have had the opportunity to actually give members of the public hands on demonstrations of the game. Users that fit our demographic gave us a lot of feedback, especially at the BT Adastral Park event during British Science Week. Here, we learned a lot of stuff about usability testing. For example, the build in this event used a lot of dragging motions yet the Users kept attempting to tap on everything. We soon learned that tapping was far more intuitive to our intended demographic, and so we removed all of the dragging interactions from the game. The mechanics that required these inputs were revised to work with tapping, by breaking the actions down into segments. One example would be the feeding interaction for the Slimes:  Players used to tap the Slime, then drag a fruit from the side of the screen to the slime.  Players now tap the Slime, then tap a fruit on the side of the screen.  Furthermore, we also gained numerous pieces of valuable feedback from our presentations. We revised the UI in order to appeal to our users more and we were advised to carry out some market research so that we might call some of our game elements by more appropriate names targeting the demographic. We solved these issues by visiting toy stores and by buying and sifting through numerous comics for young girls and we discovered that slime making is very popular currently, especially on social media sites such as Instagram. Typically, the demographic made colourful slime and bought pre-made slime kits. The retail packaging for these often used bright blues and pastel colours, especially pink. We used this information to carefully select our UI colour scheme and tweak the colours of the pets, which were now called slimes.  Mechanics were also changed in order to match the feedback. Before, pets would have to breed, and lay eggs. Now that the pets were slimes however, they simply mixed together, and created new colours, merged stats and reduced the island population. This change proved to be very popular with our demographic. Previously, at the Game Anglia Student Showcase, Users found the old system to be clunky, and took too long to pay off (waiting for eggs to hatch) vs the Adastral Park demo in which Users spent a considerable amount of time mixing slimes in order to create all the variations they could manage.  In terms of team communication, I feel like we have excelled. We regularly shared our work with each other and requested and gave feedback, which ultimately helped us to maintain a shared vision for what the game would eventually be. A number of times have occurred where I have submitted my work for group approval and my teammates have raised concerns about an asset and offered suggestions so that it might be improved. By discussing and tweaking these assets, primarily through Discord’s instant screen-sharing feature, we have managed to keep a coherent and consistent art-style. About midway into the first semester, we found that as a team, we were having issues managing our tasks. We would assign our 12 hours, but as we progressed through the week, we would shift our development in a new direction, rendering some of the tasks useless. To solve this, we split up our weekly cycles into two parts. We had 4 hours sprints from Monday to Wednesday to prep and ensure we could have a focused 8 hour sprint from Wednesday to Monday. This style of split agile development was praised by Dan Myers, and allowed us to be far more productive with our time and ensured that we all worked consistently towards a common goal. While we cut back on our hours towards the end of the year due to other modules, this method of handling weekly sprints remained fairly consistent throughout the year, and we sometimes took up to an hour from the major cycle to use in the prep cycle, especially if we had left over tasks in the backlog.  We were able to communicate effectively with consumers too. Using the knowledge that we gained in Heidi’s IWIC sessions in the first semester, we set up and maintained a project twitter for Gaia, where we showcased and demonstrated various points in development and gathered feedback from other online. This allowed us a method of having instantaneous feedback as it was required and helped us to know if a feature would be well received or not.  Ultimately, through the use of teamwork and regular review sessions, I feel that our group was successful in creating a vertical slice of a larger game, and we have been able to effectively target our demographics and employ a set of scoped features that deliver an experience that Users have responded well to during play-testing sessions, public and otherwise. |
| What do you think needed improvement on the project? | The beginning of the project was largely unfocused. We had numerous game ideas and we had a hard time agreeing to work on a single project. If we had just communicated effectively right from the start, we could have had a smoother development cycle and figured out a lot of our issues sooner.  Our communication during breaks such as Easter or Christmas was poor. We often decided to leave an open sprint during this time with the option for us to start working on anything in our backlogs, but unfortunately, we didn’t spend a lot of time reviewing each other’s work. Therefore, most work that we achieved over these time periods ended up being unused. We also struggled to arrange meeting times where all of us could be in the same place at the same time, and due to this our presentations were not as polished as they could have been. This is because we didn’t have a lot of time to practice and when we did, not all of our group members could attend. To solve this in future, we would build and begin practicing our presentations earlier. I believe that our presentations were arguably the weakest part of the project.  While we did have a focused demographic, it took us far too long to actually carry out effective research so that we could make a game that they would enjoy. This is because we failed to look at media that they consumed regularly, such as comics, television shows and current games on the market. Had we have done this sooner, our game could have reached completion far quicker with a more focused development cycle. Our assets could also have been iterated more effectively and we would have been able to spend a much larger amount of time polishing the game and tweaking it to be as intuitive as possible. |
| What do you think of your own contribution to the project? | I feel that my own contributions to the project were essential in its completion. As the main environmental and character designer, the Users usually gave feedback on whether or not they though that the characters on screen were cute or if they were too easy to see etc. They also would give feedback based on the overall environmental aesthetic.  Most of the assets that I produced were implemented into the game, and I made multiple iterations of the UI elements, not only changing colour but sometimes massively overhauling the design. I feel like my work was consistent, especially after the feedback from users and my teammates, and I was mostly able to complete my tasks on time.  I definitely made regular use of our team’s feedback system, often posting work-in-progress screenshots in the discord, not only for art assets, but also for quick code reviews with Elliot on the odd occasion where I was tasked with scripting a feature. This allowed me to ensure that the work that I was putting into the project would meet the needs of my teammates as well as our users.  I’m happy that I was able to contribute both to the visual and functional elements in the game. Being able to code a few minor mechanics/systems while creating art assets to fit our demographic meant that throughout the development cycle I felt motivated to continue working on the game. |
| **OVERVIEW** |  |
| **Thinking about the project you have worked on this year, what are the important lessons that you will take away from the experience for your next group project?** | I’ve learned a lot from this project, especially when it comes to effective iteration.  Researching a demographic thoroughly is critical to a game’s success and should be a top priority especially at the very beginning of development. This research should constantly be revisited throughout the development cycle too, ensuring that the game doesn’t stray from its intended audience and that any features that are added or removed is done so with the target demographic in mind. Gaia’s development was rather successful towards the end, specifically because in our weekly meetings, we would ask ourselves ‘What does Sally like?’.  Playtesting regularly is something that we always strive to do, but being able to attend public events to get total strangers to play the game has been vital to our development. Going past our comfort zones and allowing users to interact with our game in a hands off manner has been invaluable to our iteration attempts. This was done once during Game Anglia and once again during Adastral Park. The strong user feedback has helped to shape the development of the project repeatedly throughout the development cycle and allowed us to have a constant string of tasks so that we always had something to adjust, fix or add on a weekly basis. Without this, our development would have been unfocused and nowhere near as consistent. As a result, I have learned to take public testing opportunities as frequently as I can. I’ve even used this strategy to upload personal projects to itch.io and gather strangers’ feedback so that I might improve games quicker and more effectively.  Employing the use of social media such as twitter has enabled the group to quickly gather a general consensus when trying out new environmental assets or mechanics changes. It also was an effective marketing strategy used in many other indie projects, and was effective during Gaia’s development too. People online seem more eager to share their opinion on a feature than face-to-face, as it’s almost anonymous in a way. This means that feedback is quick to gather and feels more genuine while building trust with a potential community. Using this strategy will be something I aim to do in future projects.  Regular group reviews on members work has allowed for a smoother workflow resulting in fewer situations where tasks must be revisited in order to improve them, as they are iterated during the creation process. By also splitting up the weekly sprints, and constructing a large backlog full of potential tasks, we were far more productive and were better at delegating meaningful tasks that actively pushed development forward. This is another strategy that I will use in future projects. |