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Papo & Yo and the evolution of the game designer

September 16, 2013 | By Brandon Sheffield

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Vander Caballero worked in triple-A for many years, on *Fifa*, *The Sims*, *Need for Speed*, and *Army of Two*. But he was discontent, as he told the audience at [GDC China](#). "I was not happy," he said. "I wasn't happy with the game industry. I was a creative director - I had a really good position, a lot of power, a lot of influence. Why did I leave?"

First he had to think about why he worked in video games at all. "We have a lot of games that are about escape from reality, and power fantasy," he adds. "But the reality is actually quite scary." Consider the power fantasy of *Army of Two*, versus the terrible reality and fallout of war, for example.

"When I was a kid, I didn't play violent games, I played *Mario*," he says. "It wasn't so violent. But now, if you ask school kids if they know what an AK-47 is, they all know. Why are we giving kids all this warfront knowledge?"

"I have to change it," he thought. "I don't want to make games like that. I want to make games that help people, and help them to cope with life, like good movies or good books do."

In his youth, Caballero spent hours and hours playing *Mario*, and trying to beat Bowser, but then he had to go back to reality, a reality in which he had a father who was an alcoholic. "You don't defeat an alcoholic father by bouncing on things, and shooting fireballs," he says. "How do you defeat an alcoholic father? That's why I made *Papo & Yo*, to try to help kids defeat that feeling."

The average kid plays 13 hours of video games per week: "We have a huge responsibility today, for what we are teaching kids," he says. Emotions that games do well include fear, ecstasy, and rage. And that's all well and good when you want to escape a rule system in the reality of life. But what happens before? What happens after?

How can we create feelings of love, and grief, the way movies can? "These emotions are really hard to achieve in games," he says, "because for love and grief you need empathy. You can't feel love, if you don't feel for someone else. You can't feel grief if you don't feel for someone else. We have to start making games that make us feel these emotions, but not in a linear way."

One of the problems, he says, is that most character development in video games is terrible. Most character development starts with you getting a gun, and progresses by setting up barriers between yourself and everyone around you (guns, shields), because everyone wants to kill you. But in reality, character development is the opposite. It's about breaking down the barriers, and opening yourself up to other people.

We have to change our roles as a designer, if we want to achieve these emotions, he says. "Our role is to tell stories to people. To tell stories from a different point of view," Caballero concludes. "We have to become storytellers, not designers. So I ask you: change the game industry. Please."

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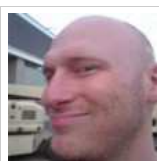
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Raul Hernandez Solano

16 Sep 2013 at 4:31 am PST



I agree totally with Caballero!

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William Johnson

16 Sep 2013 at 6:59 am PST



I love that last paragraph. When I was in high school, yeesh seven years ago, I made the decision to pursue developing games because I loved telling stories and I felt that the game industry didn't have many developers that really focused on telling good stories and having good character development. I'm a long way away from being good enough, but I'll just keep making them and refining my skills until it is good. So that part where you ask "change the game industry. please." I say to you, "Working on it."

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Jack Everitt

16 Sep 2013 at 2:32 pm PST



" "Our role is to tell stories to people. To tell stories from a different point of view," Caballero concludes. "We have to become storytellers, not designers. So I ask you: change the game industry. Please.""

Wow, I so disagree with this. First, if it's that important for you to tell stories, write novels, write plays, make films, etc. Second, the job of a game designer is to make a great game. If you want to make a great game that has a great story, fine, go for it. But to suggest that the game industry needs to change to become story-driven is absolutely ludicrous.

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