New research from the University of Skövde generates knowledge about the use educational games

It is with great success that Björn Berg Marklund has completed his thesis at the University of Skövde. The thesis creates new valuable knowledge about the use of educational games.

Most academics in the gaming area are making research about the psychological effects of playing games. Most science has simply missed the stage where the games are being put into schools, and that is what Björn Berg Marklunds´ thesis is about. It is about practical issues - problems that teachers and developers face when they unite to create better teaching methods for the educational system of tomorrow.

Björn Berg Marklund has with his thesis tried to find a way to make those problems very easily absorbable in the educational gaming market.

Björn Berg Marklund

• Minimizing the understandings

There are a great number of misunderstandings between teachers and game developers about what games can do and what they are suppose to do. On one hand the developers mostly do not have a clue of the challenges the teachers are faced with like schedules, restrictions and curriculums. Those things are often blank sheets to the developers.

On the other hand it takes a lot of time to integrate games into the teachers' mind-set.

The second a game starts to work, many teachers will abandon it because they do not rely on it. Most teachers also do not know how game developers and games work or why people like playing them.

These issues are often lost in translation, when a developer is talking to a client. The typical outcomes of these misunderstandings are that one part often becomes very disappointed with the result.

These challenges are still new thus the serious game industry is still very young. The time to develop an understanding of these issues has therefore been very short, and the knowledge of this field is so far limited. Björn Berg Marklunds thesis is therefore seen as a great opportunity to minimize future misunderstandings between teachers and developers.

- ## Pioneers and experiences

The staff at Aarhus Social and Health Care College are quite familiar to these issues. Their experience is that it takes somewhere between a year or two for a teacher to integrate the games into their mindset. But once the teacher finally goes gamewise and discovers the possibilities in educational games, they just stay gamewised. And they love it.

Aarhus Social and Health Care College has pioneered in this game field, and their experiences have therefore been of significant value for the work and research at Högskolan in Skövde.

"The PAU Clique", "The Municipality Game" and "Save Your SFO" are just some of the numerous games that Aarhus Social and Health Care College have integrated in their classrooms. By the end of this year they expect to present a photo game "Snap Match" for iPads. The game has been developed in collaboration with students from the incubator at The Ranch at Grenaa.

The it-infrastructure in these classroom activities are important to measure – are the teachers aware of how the game can be used? How do you make assessments possible, and how can you really make sure that the students are learning anything while playing the games? Finally the teachers have to be able to point at the curriculum and say we learned these specific things.

- ### All in one - Cloud Island

Björn Berg Marklund points out that some of the greatest successes in educational games are when a game is able to accommodate to many different types of educational purposes. Every classroom is different, every teacher has different preferences for how to work with their students and curricula differ from country to country as well. A flexible design makes it possible for teachers to individualize and tailor the use of a game after their own circumstances

Ludosity Learning is a company that has done it this way. They have put a whole curriculum into just one game - Cloud Island. Cloud Island is not made only as an app, but as a computer game.

A game that is not out on the marked yet, but out on selected schools to be tested. On the link below you can see a YouTube trailer for Cloud Island:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEF60BPiy_s

The game world is a village, and each village is a class, and those villages can be accessed worldwide. This basic game is up and running, and the players can build houses and turn the village from medieval communities into modern metropoles. In time they will even be able to build zeppelins to fly out in the world and visit other villages.

The only way to succeed in Cloud Island is by cooperation. In this way the game puts up goals for democratic behaviour. The participants select a mayor, and they pull together to make the community better. They have to spend their resources so they have value not only to themselves, but also to the whole society.

Next comes the mini games. The mini games are where the curriculum is. In these the game opens up all sorts of resources - websites, images, informative videos and more. By connecting these things to the game, it becomes possible to learn about a specific subject.

- ## Thesis done - PhD to come

Björn Berg Marklunds thesis is just the beginning of a discussion that is very valuable. Statements about how to use educational games are far from being made as often or as often as they should.

With simple methods teachers can approach and embrace games as a natural part of teaching as well as books. Björn Berg Marklunds research has shown a lot of the difficulties that teachers and developers face when they are creating educational games, and both sides can benefit from this research.

With the making of his thesis Björn Berg Marklund is now look forward to do his PhD about educational games as well. Where his thesis is highlighting the difficulties and the challenges, the PhD is expected to give more concrete solutions to challenges. The deadline for the PhD is so far set to be in 2015.

- ## Contact

Mikkel Fledelius Jensen
Project Manager
Email: mikkel@scangame.eu
Tel: (0045) 2681 5133

Scandinavian Game Developers

Visit scangame.eu for more information about the project and the game