

Video Game Design

Mr. B 3/16/2015

Why

I really miss teaching programming at INCH, but my work schedule prohibits me from doing so.

I noticed recently that certain of Kylan's friends have a curiosity about programming, and not a little interest in playing video games. I can leverage this interest to cultivate some learning and maybe even a possible career path, as it did in me.

Learning computer programming, while traditionally a part of a college education, is becoming more and more common among teens, largely due to the explosion of mobile devices.

Lastly, my own concern for inappropriate content in the majority of mainstream video games has inspired me to pursue my own video game projects (though I haven't gotten very far, yet).

What

I would like to start an unofficial "indie" (independent) video game "company" and am inviting your son(s) to participate. We would start out learning elements of video game design, primarily Windows programming, but touching on other aspects of the business (many of which I will be learning myself).

While it would be awesome to eventually publish our own quality video game, the near-term goal is to give the boys some instruction and experience designing software, which can be used to fulfill their high school requirements (occupational, career, or elective credits), as well as provide an excellent extra-curricular activity that they can include on their college applications and resumes. Where it could eventually take us is secondary.

They can be involved as much or as little as they want, in coordination with you. The last thing I want is to introduce another distraction from their required studies. Furthermore, if you decide this is not something you want your son to be doing, I will totally understand; my feelings will not be hurt... much. ;)

I also plan to keep you in the loop, as to what we would be working on next, particularly regarding the theme and content of the software projects, since we all have slightly different ideas of what's appropriate. I will welcome suggestions, as well as avoid elements that would offend any of the families involved.

How

We will begin with creating a very simple, multi-player math game. I will prepare tutorials for the team to study and practice with. Pretty much any Windows XP, 7, or 8 desktop or laptop will work (sorry, Mac lovers!), and the software used is free (licenses are free, and I will provide installation disks). We will start out learning C# (pronounced "see sharp"), using Visual Studio Express 2008 (newer versions are available, but they won't add much capability for us, and I don't like the interfaces).

After this initial project, those who are still interested in programming will begin learning 3-D game design, using Microsoft's XNA library, which is also free and readily compatible with VS 2008. There are many 3-D engines out there, but we will start with one that I am already a little familiar with.

Everyone will also have a chance to learn to use Blender, a powerful and free 3-D modeling software. The models created in Blender can be used in our projects.

Other aspects of video game design, such as music, sound effects, user interfaces, story development, and quality assurance (aka testing) will also be explored, providing something of interest to everyone on the team.

Who

To keep things simple starting out, I am only inviting Kylen's closest friends. It is not my intention to cater to an exclusive group or to shut anyone out, but this is all very new to me, and I prefer to minimize the chaos.

If we are able to establish and maintain a core group of up-and-coming experts, I will likely extend the invitation to a larger INCH group, which the "first class" can help mentor.

When

It will take me some time to prepare, so maybe June will be a good time to start. I would send out tutorials weekly or every other week, and we could meet once or twice a month, for maybe two hours at a time.

Where

While we could meet at our house on occasion, I would like to see if one of the area libraries or coffee shops might be willing to host us. If you have any suggestions, please let me know.

Sincerely,
Mr. B