Interactive Story Authoring; a Review

This article takes a look at the use of game creation software in the classroom. Story authoring fosters artistic expression, explores the functions and values of writing, stimulates the imagination, helps children clarify and refine their thinking, and is an interesting way to learn to read and write. The authors assert that the creation of computer role-playing games, or interactive stories, is a form of story authoring and provides many of the same benefits as traditional creative writing.

In the past, the creation of computer games has been the domain of computer programmers, who would have to input millions of lines of complex code. Recently a game story construction tool, called ScriptEase, has become available that allows amateur authors to create stories without the need for complex coding. Using ScriptEase, instead of having to write action scripts out by hand, the author selects from a menu of frequently occurring story patterns, and adapts the pattern to the context of the story. The software then generates the script code. This article looks at the use of ScriptEase in a learning environment.

The study involved students in tenth grade high school English classes. The students wrote both a traditional story and an interactive story using ScriptEase. The goals of the study were: to see if high school students were capable of using the tools to author interactive stories; to determine whether any group of students would be disadvantaged in this due to certain factors; and to see whether students who did poorly on traditional writing exercises could show improvement in interactive story authoring.

The results showed that most students were able to use the tools successfully to author an interactive story. Factors such as gender, experience playing video games, and prior

programming experience did not have a significant effect on success. There is weak evidence that some students are able to do better with interactive stories than traditional stories, but the data was not enough to draw any definite conclusions.

The study did not provide significant evidence that interactive story authoring is more effective than traditional writing, but it does show that it is not significantly worse, and with the proper presentation, it can be an effective teaching tool. The use of computers and games in learning has the potential to reach students who are not reached by traditional teaching methods. Game development has the potential to engage students and keep their interest when traditional writing assignments wouldn't. It presents students with material they're familiar with and a product they could share with friends, while still teaching them elements of story construction and creative thinking.

ScriptEase also serves the purpose of introducing students to programming without overwhelming them with complicated code. It shows them the possibilities of game design using an interface that is clear and relatively easy to learn. Further research would need to be done to see if this is an effective way to foster interest in computer science, but the potential is there.

Games have been used in learning since personal computer games were created, but the creation of these games has always been limited to professionals with years of higher education and experience. ScriptEase provides a way to bring game design to the average person, and along with it, opens up the potential for learning.

Reference:

Carbonaro, M., et al. (2008). Interactive story authoring: A viable form of creative

expression for the classroom. *Computers & Education*, 51, 687-707.