



MAKING BEAUTIFUL COLLABORATION
BETWEEN INDUSTRY & EDUCATION
OR
HOW TO AVOID THE PAIN WE HAVE SUFFERED

by

Jolyon Webb - Art Manager, Blitz Games Studios

Heather Williams - Senior Lecturer, De Montfort University

GAMES:EDU:08
Brighton, England

Co-ordinated & Presented by

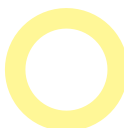
Pixel-Lab

with

tandem events



About Games:Edu



GAMES:EDU offers a unique opportunity for those who have a passion to transform the UK development community. It brings together the UK's foremost educators from across all disciplines to connect directly with computer games developers and producers, to exchange ideas and perspectives.

GAMES:EDU is backed by Skillset, which works with both the industry and government to identify and tackle the skills and productivity needs of the audio visual industries throughout the UK.



www.gamesedu.co.uk

About Pixel-Lab

Pixel-Lab is a consultancy and production company that works to expand and support the videogames and digital content industries. Our work ranges from research to developing longer-term strategies for organisations.

As well as Games:Edu, Pixel-Lab has produced Skillsweek, Playful: Game Design London, and Indie Games Arcade.

www.pixel-lab.co.uk



Introduction to Blitz Games Studios

Philip & Andrew Oliver started making games in their teens. In 1986 they were responsible for 7% of all UK games sales. They founded the company in 1990 as Interactive Studios.

There are five divisions covering a wide range of customers.



Renames Blitz games in 1999, the company as 235 staff and is still expanding. Their mission statement:

“To create critically and commercially successful games within a stable, friendly and professional environment.”

Introduction to De Montfort University



dmu.ac.uk
**DE MONTFORT
UNIVERSITY**
LEICESTER



Based in Leicester, De Montfort University is:

- Committed to excellence
- Committed to professional, creative, and vocational education
- Committed to research aligned with our mission
- Committed to the application of our knowledge

About The Speakers



Jolyon Webb - Art Manager, Blitz Games Studios

Ten years as a freelance illustrator, and from a traditional arts background. After ten years in the games industry, Jolyon has experience in both art direction and technical work.



Heather Williams - Senior Lecturer, De Montfort University

Heather has a traditional arts background in illustration and received her education at Camberwell School of Art. Having twelve years experience in the games industry, Heather has worked with Adventuresoft, Eutechnyx, Acclaim, Runecraft, Blitz, and Codemasters.



What We Will Tell You ...And How It Might Help

We will tell you:

- What worked for us
- What went miserably wrong
- How industry can work effectively with education (and not go broke or insane)
- How education can work with industry (and not sell its soul or become pimps)
- Hideous gotchas of all shapes and sizes
- Expected and unexpected positives



We will encourage you to get involved with one another...

- Even though we both seem a bit weird to one another
- Even though there appears to be no immediate financial payoff
- Because disaster stalks the ignorant



This Is Good

Developers: Use Real Games Industry Files

- Take in examples of real assets from your games
- Talk through these assets while running them in Maya or Max
- Have key points to make (guided by the choice of assets) but be prepared to adapt to questions.

Keep it interactive.

Educators: Industry Briefs

- Working on live projects
- Students get a genuine feel for work
 - Realistic specifications
 - Sticking to budgets

Developers: This Is Bad (Avoid At All Costs)

Talking To A Handful Of Geography Students...

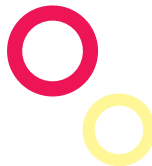
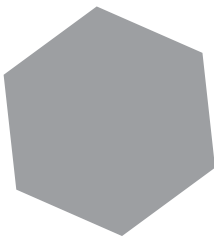


- If you don't get numbers, dates and publicity fixed upfront, expect to waste your time.
- Lack of facilities, double-booked lecture rooms, IT failures and student 'exam leave' can all waste time too.
- Don't go back if this happens.

Educators: Issues We Face

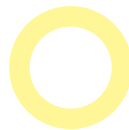
Student Attitude...

- Students who won't be motivated or turn up
- Students who will always make the minimum effort
 - Deadline junkies



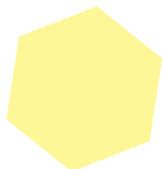


This Is Good



Developers: Short, Focused Workshops

- Brief specific walkthroughs and tutorials on specific tools and techniques, e.g., unwrapping.
- Present while using the package, this is hugely more effective than just notes and images.
- Again, adapt to questions - keep it interactive.



Educators: Professional Criticism

- Students become impervious to their tutor's opinions
- Critiques from industry have impact



Developers: This Is Bad (Avoid At All Costs)

Multi-stage Projects = Step-by-step Failure...

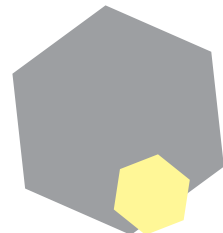
- Multi-stage projects seem a great idea but have all failed
- Multiple stages and reviews lead to a lack of urgency and pitiful levels of commitment from students
- Dev staff have become increasingly disillusioned with the students' progress and attitude
- The whole thing is hard to manage logistically.



Educators: Issues We Face

Delusional Applicants...

- Applicants who believe that playing games is the only qualification they need
 - Downloadable engines make it look easy



This Is Good

Developers: Present In Teams

- Nurture your new presenting talent in the company
- Present in a conversational style, this is really helped by doing a double header
- It's also possible to play 'good developer, bad developer' this way
- Effort on driving and preparation is shared
- Great 'out of office' conversational time for developers

"Game art isn't a game..."

Educators: Guest Speakers

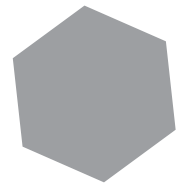
- Students get a realistic idea of the career they aspire to
- They realise they need to be serious. Game art isn't a game
 - Validation of our course content
 - Enthuses students
 - Gives them focus

Developers: This Is Bad (Avoid At All Costs)

Making Briefs Too Hard...



- Pitching the brief at a professional level
- Making the brief too long or involve too many steps
- Requiring a good deal of research or drawn preparation
- This all goes double with cherries on top at a Further Education level.



Educators: Issues We Face

Lack Of Basic Art Skills

- A lack of skills is a real handicap
- In general there appears little evidence of core skills taught at secondary level.

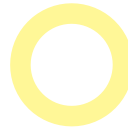


This Is Good

Developers: It's All About The Reference

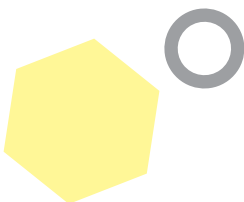
- Keep emphasising the importance of reference
- Point out this is a really effective way of making the better students shine and the less able make progress
- Emphasise how varied visual stimulus should be. Films, books, traditional painting, nature documentaries etc. Show how these all influence real projects
- Take the piss out of Manga
- Show mood boards
- Show Corbis and other photo search sites

“Take the piss out of
Manga.”



Educators: Pertinant Content

- Look at texture and light
- Effects of weathering and age



Developers: This Is Bad (Avoid At All Costs)

Visiting Too Regularly...

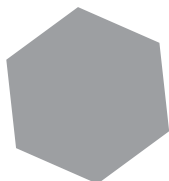


- Each visit is devalued and students become blasé
- Within the company the cost in resources is challenged
- It stops being fun

Educators: Issues We Face

What The Hell Is An Emissive Map?

- Developers have dedicated research departments
- Obviously this information isn't generally available
 - We struggle to keep up



This Is Good

Developers: Keep It Low Poly

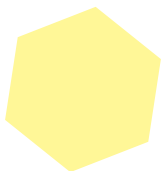
- Tell people to work simple and fast
- Iterate with reviews for quality at each step
- Paint over students work
- Value good art decisions over laboured work
- Don't let students 'polish turds'
- Speed-modelling competitions
- Warn that nurbs are the devils work
- Avoid Z-Brush 'idiot's pebble dash' models

“Software is only a tool. Real
sculpting, then virtual sculpting.”



Educators: Communication Helps Us Refine Course Structure

- We can concentrate on what's important to developers
 - Shorter relevant projects
 - Mistakes are good
 - Software is only a tool
- Real sculpting, then virtual sculpting



Developers: This Is Bad (Avoid At All Costs)

Making Critiques Too Hard.

- Unintentionally crushing students by critiquing like you would at work
- Expecting near-professional results
- Forgetting you are experienced, do this for a living and are old - they are close to absolute beginners
- Again, this all goes double with cherries on top if at a FE level.

Educators: Issues We Face

Student Recruitment Process

- We don't recruit the way developers choose staff
 - We can't cherry pick superior talent

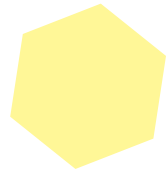
This Is Good

Developers: Return Regularly



- Plan to come back and let students know when
- This reinforces the company's profile
- It actually makes it possible to see improvements (remember these will be slow)
- Remember, none of this is worth a damn if you're not building relationships
- 'Regularly' and 'often' are not the same thing.

“None of this is worth a damn if you're not building relationships.”



Educators: Mutually Beneficial Relationships



- These relationships are important to us
 - Technology updates
- Fresh ideas and approaches keep our students keen.

Developers: This Is Bad (Avoid At All Costs)

Involving teams that then hit crunch time...

- People are optimistic - 'crunch' always arrives faster than imagined
- Specific presentations that can only be given by a handful of specific people
- Bottom line is that paying work comes first

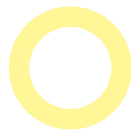
Educators: Issues We Face

We Can't Be Specific

- Development can be very game specific
- We need ot be more generic



This Is Good



Developers: Don't Be A Corporate Whore

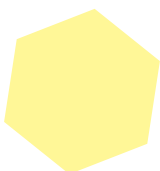
- 'Shareholder' presentations with no valid content are seen through; they do't educate and they put students off
- Cherry picking at graduation time is risky



Educators: Enthuse Your Students



- Don't become lethargic
- Industry associates will help motivate, remind you how exciting game art is.



Developers: This Is Bad (Avoid At All Costs)

Involving Nervous Staff...

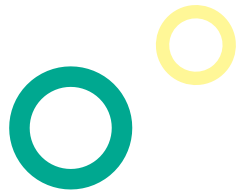
- Nervous developers who 'don't want to be there' can become very negative about links
- They can be very dismissive of student skills
- Students don't like them

Educators: Issues We Face

Updating Resources

- The process of updating resources is painfully slow

This Is Good



Developers: Send Enthusiasts, Generate Enthusiasm

- Enthusiastic presenters get enthusiastic responses (duh!)
- This can generate a positive reinforcement circle
- This gives developers more confidence to present more (remember presenting in teams)

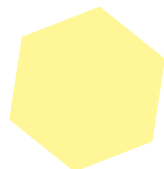
Focus Effort, Don't Go Everywhere

- Limit your company to working with four or five good courses, you cannot do more!
- Once every few years 'hit & run' visits are very little use to anyone
- Make all initial visits conditional on guaranteed student numbers attending and being able to see student work
- Be professional with contacts and expect professionalism in return
- Work with institutes that 'get it' and value and respond to input
- It's good karma to try and help anything very local.

Educators: Industry Inherits Valuable Assets

- Seeing students succeed in their career is a great reward
 - Bring them back as guest speakers
 - It all becomes tangible.

“Seeing students succeed in their career is a great reward.”



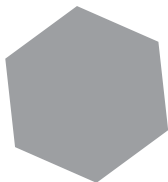
This Is Good

Developers: Be Open - Do Open Days!

- Show students round your company, absolutely nothing entuses them like this
- Know that this is a ball-breaking effort
- Know that it generates a huge amount of re-usable content
- It really works for hiring
- Be sure to select quality attendees
- Don't forget lecturers

Educators: Open Days Help Students Focus

- Use your own open days to attract artists
- Get students involved in industry open days
 - Makes it all real



Be Prepared: A Grab Bag Of General **Bad** Things Linked To Students

Students Crying...

- It's uncomfortable being the first to give no-hopers a glimmer of understanding that they are no-hopers

Pig Ignorance...

- Playing Quake. Using phones. Unmotivated, ignorant students waste your time

Art-free Nerds...

- Know-it-all geek ninjas who have no artistic ability but want to show off by using nurbs

Manga Fans...

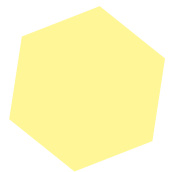
- They won't believe that tracing Japanese comics is a hobby, not an education

'Entitlement Culture'...

- Total disbelief that a degree doesn't guarantee a job

Communication In Grunts...

- Un-evolved young males



Be Prepared: A Grab Bag Of General Bad Things Linked To Education

Vulnerability Of The Links At The Education End...

- These links seem to hugely rely on individuals and not be supported by higher levels of management outside the course

Why Draw?

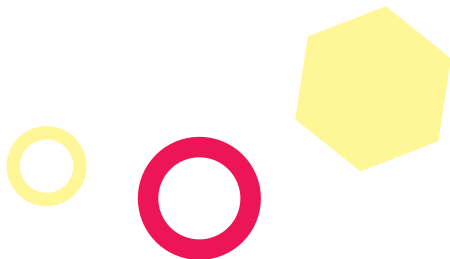
- Tutors questioning the need for drawing (yes really!)

Games Ignorance...

- Tutors who haven't played a game since five minutes on Tetris in 1989

Cynical Course Marketing

The Glacial, Grinding Slowness Of Improvements...



Be Prepared: A Grab Bag Of General **Bad** Things Linked To Development

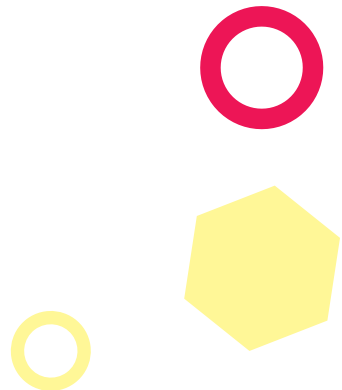
Vulnerability Of The Links At The Development End...

- These links seem to hugely rely on individuals and can sometimes not be supported by higher levels of management

The Glacial, Grinding Slowness Of Improvements...

Developers who don't want to give anything back

Knee-jerk dismissiveness of students and education



Awesome Unmeasurable Positives For Developers

You will...

- Meet raw, un-jaded enthusiasm. This reminds you why you wanted to work in games in the first place and is a powerful antidote to seeing it as 'just a job'
- Make a difference. Make the right point to the right student and your influence can be huge
- Get to work with people you have taught
- Learn more. Each time you explain something you understand it better
- Get challenged. Students ask 'Why' and make you think
- Get to take a long view. Education thinks long term, this is interestingly different to games
- Get out of the office. You think differently out of the office, more conversation, less e-mail
- Show off. This is fun
- Gain confidence. Practice presenting where failure doesn't cost money

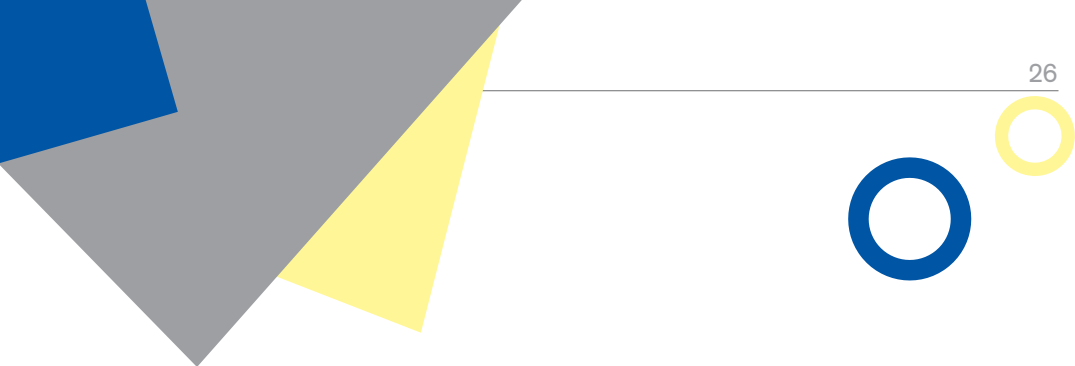
“Raw, un-jaded enthusiasm reminds you why you wanted to work in games in the first place.”

The Elephant In The Corner...

Why All This Could Crash & Burn: Things We Don't Talk About

- Good courses will fail if they are forced to expand without resources
- There are too many courses
- There are vastly more graduates than jobs
- There are no real entry requirements

Please note: neither of us have immediate solutions to these issues. They require profound and long-term changes to educational funding and to the 14 - 18 curriculum.



Summary: If you forget all else, remember this:

Developers do -

- Show real work and explain how it works
- Keep contacts focused and briefs simple
- Plan for re-use out of presentations and encourage new presenters

Educators do -

- Make the effort
- Evolve course content supported by dialogue with industry
- Be honest with students

Super Summary: If you REALLY forget all else, remember this:

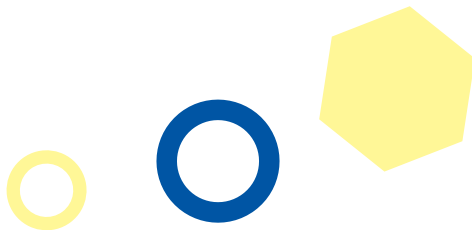
It's all about the art



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