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ETEC 544, DIGITAL GAMES & LEARNING
VIDEO GAME PLAY/FIELD NOTE EXERCISE

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While reading about Astro's Playroom on the PS5 site and while talking to my gaming family members, I feel I am going to enjoy Astro's Playroom on the PS5. The game's design promises to showcase the capabilities of the DualSense controller while providing a fun and engaging platforming experience.

Astro's Playroom promises the distinctive capabilities of the DualSense controller, including adaptive triggers to elevate the level of immersion in gameplay. The game's intricate graphics and animations contribute to its appeal, creating a visually captivating experience. Furthermore, engaging with these elements, especially when viewing a gameplay clip, gives me a sense of enjoyment and relaxation.

As a youth, I played Legends of Zelda, similar to Astro's Playroom.

Legends of Zelda was an adventurous game that required players to complete various tasks and challenges to progress through the levels and earn rewards such as *fragments of the Triforce of Wisdom to save Princess Zelda from Ganon*.

Meanwhile, in **Astro's Playroom**, players must acquire avatars by *exploring four worlds and collecting coins during their adventure* (see Image 1).

It should be noted that in the case of Astro's Playroom, mastering the use of the DualSense controller's knobs and buttons is essential for navigating through the game's obstacles efficiently.

Overall, Astro's Playroom promises a positive gaming experience that combines innovative controller mechanics (which was not the case when I played Legends of Zelda in my youth) with classic platforming gameplay. I feel like Legends of Zelda and Astro's Playroom are similar games.

IMAGE 1



LEGENDS OF ZELDA



ASTRO'S PLAYROOM
GAINING **COINS**



ASTRO'S PLAYROOM
GAINING
ARTIFACTS

SESSION 2

I settled into my home theatre, playing on the large projector screen to fully immerse myself in the experience. A quick tutorial by my twelve-year-old son guided me through the controller buttons and required motions right at the beginning, which turned out to be my favorite aspect of this adventure. The motion sensors provided an immersive and responsive experience; for instance, I sensed a fan's breeze in my hand area, with the sounds of air wind, and the sound of rain. I found myself also having to do gymnast movements, swinging my arms in front of me. This gesture was required in the Astro world, where the character needed monkey-like characteristics to successfully navigate one of the realms. Additionally, there was no need to pause the game - even if I hesitated on which buttons to press for jumps, turns, or camera/perspective adjustments, Astro would amuse itself by dancing around or wearing VR glasses, accompanied by entertaining noises (see Image 2).

SOLO PLAYTHROUGH



Failing a step didn't result in a negative prompt; instead, it gracefully took me back to the previous point with a little squeaky sound "no!" echoed through the game if I 'failed'. Moreover, the fun and playful music and subtle sounds kept me engaged. Also, in the first 15 minutes, I found myself laughing in frustration - missing coins, falling, strategizing on retracing steps, and occasionally yelling - 'no way'! For example, one particular character followed a circular path, and after a few attempts, I realized I needed to approach from behind and jump on him to progress and not fail.

This gaming experience and design not only provides enjoyment but also engages players in a remarkably positive environment. Furthermore, the protagonist's juvenile, innocent, and playful design sets it apart from conventional games, ensuring an emotionally and psychologically safe space, particularly for

younger players. Additionally, what intrigued me was the game's intentional design to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the controller and its immersive capabilities. Also, a distinctive aspect is the absence of a 'failing' tone, promoting a positive approach to those not doing so well.

Moreover, leveraging the engaging controller, the game facilitates multisensory and positive emotional learning experiences, incorporating positive reinforcement. When applied to education, this approach creates a rich learning environment, combining interactive features to foster both cognitive and emotional engagement.

Despite acquiring new learning techniques, the game's inviting design, genre, and immersive controller have made me appreciate gaming not just for entertainment but also as a potential supplementary tool for practicing academic concepts.

IMAGE 2



NO NEED TO PAUSE
AMUSING ITSELF BY DANCING AROUND &
WEARING VR GLASSES

SESSION 3

OBSERVATIONS

Meanwhile, my 12-year-old son was immersed in playing the same game, starting from the same level and seamlessly navigating through the obstacles. He appeared genuinely engaged, laughed through his mistakes, especially the monkey gymnast tactic, and successfully tackled the tasks. However, there were instances where he had to repeat specific actions to progress. Occasionally, I overheard him verbally guiding himself through the levels and realms, reminding himself to complete certain objectives or realizing he had forgotten something. In areas where he 'failed', he made a point to backtrack and retrieve what he had missed while striving to complete the task at hand (see Image 3).

I felt comfortable watching my son play with so much contentment. Moreover, the game appears to have been developed with a neutral structure, avoiding any references to race, gender, class, or violence. Additionally, it offers clean, safe, and enjoyable gameplay, aligning with the ideal notion of entertainment. I strongly feel that is crucial to be neutral when targeting specific age groups. Finally, an unbiased and neutral narrative ensures that entertainment remains wholesome, without any potential psychological or emotional impact on players through any hidden messaging and coding.



In the case of observing my son playing, he displayed proficiency and navigating through the obstacles in a positive manner. I noticed resilience in repeating actions in challenging areas and self-talking to create strategies to complete certain tasks with enjoyment. Given the genre of the game and neutral game design, he seemed positively committed even when he made mistakes. Overall, I feel as though it was a very positive portrayal of gaming and displayed a focused experience while he was still strategizing and positively persevering.

IMAGE 3



BACK TRACKING

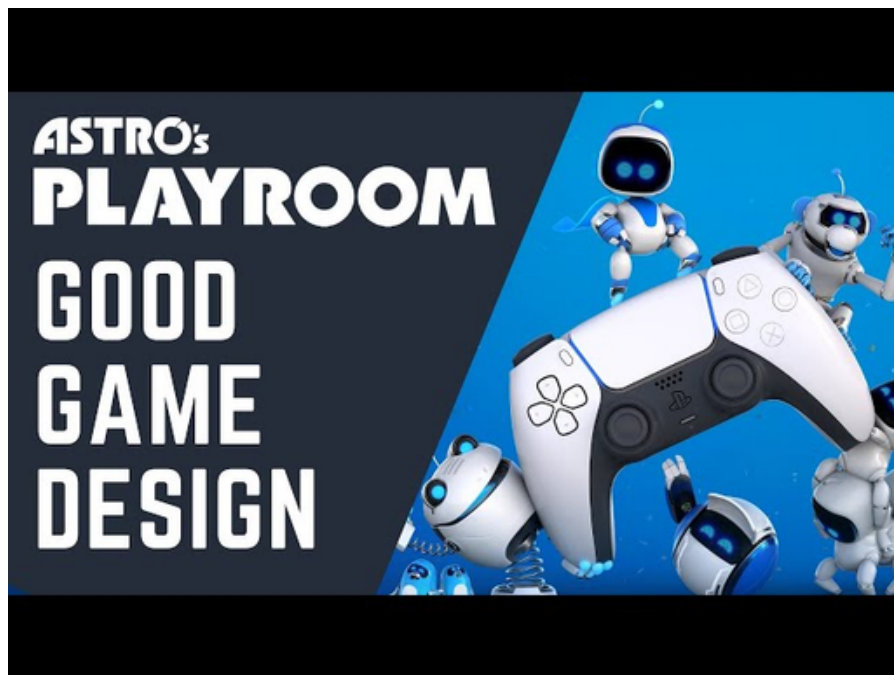
**CIRCLING BACK ONCE BLOWN AWAY BY THE
EXTREME WINDS**



INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of gaming, game designers have consistently played the role of magicians, responsible for crafting the enchanting experiences that define the gaming realm (Fullerton, 2019, p.1). In this report I will be exploring: what constitutes a truly outstanding game.

Games like Astro's Playroom, masterfully orchestrated by its designers, can immediately capture the player's attention, thanks to their marketing strategies. In this analysis, I will explore aspects that contribute to the love of such games, including player engagement, stunning graphics complemented by integrated controller functionality, the evocation of player nostalgia, the creation of immersive experiences, the cultivation of a positive atmosphere, considerations for player proficiency, and the establishment of a neutral play space.



PLAYER ENGAGEMENT

According to Fullerton (2019), while technical aspects are important, players also desire emotional connections for a satisfying gaming experience. The core of engagement lies in managing challenges to maintain player immersion by balancing emotional responses. Furthermore, timely feedback, including rewards, is essential for sustaining motivation and promoting ongoing participation (pp. 38, 39). This perspective resonates with the approach taken by Japanese designers in the creation of Astro's Playroom for the PS5. They prioritized integrating design elements that empower players through the PS5 controller which they claim is designed to - heighten one's senses, the design evolved for new sensations, and haptic feedback (responsive vibrations) to further enrich the gaming experience (PS5, 2024).

GRAPHICS AND ATTRACTION - INTEGRATION OF THE CONTROLLER

According to Fullerton (2019), the positive influence of the game on design, graphics, and animations suggests a well-executed visual strategy. This is evident in the design and development of Astro's Playroom, where integrating a modern dual-sensor introduces an innovative and immersive feature to the controller. This strategy aims to attract core players, providing novelty and enhancing overall visual appeal and engagement. This also results in improved processing and graphics capabilities, ensuring a more immersive gaming experience (pp. 188, 473). Additionally, Astro's Playroom graphics and audio elements, such as music and emotionally positive vocal cues, cater to a broader audience, while producing positive feedback for its players (PS5, 2024). This aligns with the notions presented by Fullerton (2019) that the absence of emotional appeal poses a risk to player interest, emphasizing the need for emotional and dramatic elements for an enjoyable experience (p. 349).

PLAYER NOSTALGIA

IMAGE 4



**NOSTALGIC SONY
STATION MOUSE**

Fullerton (2019) suggests that players may return to the game later, motivated by nostalgia, seeking comfort, or craving insights (p. 156). It might be so that my choice of this game could have been influenced by the connections established between Astro's Playroom and Legends of Zelda, acknowledging player nostalgia. Fullerton (2019) also argues that deliberately incorporating nostalgia into game design emphasizes the importance of balancing classic elements with innovation, underscoring its enduring impact on player engagement and retention (p. 156). This aligns with the use of old SONY artifacts in the Astro's Playroom (see Image 4).

IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

Motion sensors and quick-response controls enhance the gaming experience, showcasing a focus on detail in game design. Moreover, the PS5 dual-sensor controller, developed by Japanese designers, prioritizes player empowerment through heightened responsiveness, providing immediate feedback via sound and vibration to maintain player engagement during gameplay.

In alignment, Fullerton (2019) highlights the increasing popularity of immersive environments, directing our attention to a significant shift in the future of game design, which emphasizes the importance of advancing technology to deepen player engagement, enhance emotional experiences, and introduce new mechanics (pp. 474, 509). This was evident in my gaming session in Astro's Playroom, where playing on a large screen and receiving a

quick tutorial from my son not only improved accessibility but also enhanced my level of enjoyment. Additionally, sensory engagement, including high-quality graphics and surround sound, significantly enriched the overall gaming experience (Fullerton, 2019, p. 353).

POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE

Fullerton (2019) emphasizes a design philosophy that prioritizes creativity and playfulness, fostering positive emotions, relaxation, and player freedom, free from time pressure or fear of failure. She also suggests incorporating lively music and avoiding discouraging tones to create a positive atmosphere, especially for younger players (p. 253).

Not only does Fullerton (2019) emphasize the significance of personal investment in game creation with the advice "Don't make games you wouldn't want to play. Persist" (p. 166), but there's also a focus on promoting a singular positive emotion, such as curiosity, or an element of surprise, akin to that found in Astro's Playroom. In this game, designers have encouraged players to strategize for completing tasks, contemplating possibilities with phrases like "What if I did this, or that," all while maintaining a vision infused with intelligence and passion to understand their games' impacts (Fullerton, 2019, p.53). Moreover, incorporating hidden goodies and positive reinforcement appeals to both adults and children, nurturing a love for the gaming experience such as the dinging or shining of coins won in Astro's Playroom (Fullerton, 2019, pg 125).

This comprehensive approach in Astro's Playroom prioritizes positive emotions, personal investment, and emotionally safe spaces in game design. Additionally, intentional choices of music, tone, rewards, and philosophy contribute to an enjoyable and engaging atmosphere for players of all ages.

PLAYER PROFICIENCY

Fullerton (2019) suggests that games should take a holistic approach to design, considering player behavior, skill development, and personal experiences to create engaging experiences that resonate with players through observation, balanced challenges, and empathy (pp. 9, 12). She also advocates for enhancing Player Proficiency by encouraging players to understand game systems deeply, leveraging personal experiences, and prioritizing mastery over solely focusing on winning (p. 9). All in all, the adeptness, resilience, and positive dedication displayed by a 12-year-old player further illustrate effective game design, with challenges promoting skill development and perseverance, as emphasized by Fullerton (2019). Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that the designers of the dual-sensor controller developed Astro's Playroom not only to showcase its intricate functionalities but also to highlight its full capabilities in other PS5 games (PS5, 2024). This aligns with Fullerton's emphasis on creating immersive experiences that enhance player proficiency and engagement, thus demonstrating a cohesive approach to game design principles.



NEUTRAL PLAY SPACE

Fullerton (2019) underscores the importance of an impartial game framework, which deliberately avoids sensitive subjects, ensuring a wide appeal and an enjoyable gaming experience for diverse audiences. Additionally, C.G. Jung emphasized the challenge of inventing good games, considering them as contemporary forms of social interaction requiring a playful yet systematic approach (pg. XXXI). These insights depict the importance of intentional design choices in crafting inclusive and enjoyable gaming experiences. "Astro's Playroom" exemplifies these principles standing as a 'good' game that prioritizes fun while consciously avoiding any negative social coding within its gameplay.



CONCLUSION

This analysis summarizes the importance of implementing **positive engagement** strategies in game design and how they are closely linked to the creative process. It also highlights the interactive essence of video games making them **dynamic experiences shaped by the player's involvement**. Moreover, successful game design, as demonstrated by accomplished designers like Will Wright, entails not just technical proficiency but also a deep comprehension of player interaction and the ability to materialize imaginative concepts (Fullerton, 2019, p.9).

Astro's Playroom, alongside this powerful immersive controller, **embodies play-centric game design principles**, emphasizing the creation of a visually stunning, immersive, and emotionally uplifting gaming experience. Additionally, the intentional incorporation of unique controller features, thoughtful tutorial design, and a well-balanced mix of challenge and enjoyment all contribute to its **well-rounded design** (Fullerton, 2019, p.1). Observations indicate that the game effectively caters to a broad audience, encompassing both experienced gamers and younger players, through its **accessible design elements and emphasis on fostering positive engagement**.

IMPLICATIONS IN EDUCATION

Game design, like Astro's Playroom, has the potential to **enhance engagement** and improve learning outcomes, acting as **supplementary exercises** in younger academic settings and scaffolding learning concepts. By incorporating strategies such as creating immersive experiences and balancing challenges with enjoyment, educational games or gamified learning platforms can effectively enhance engagement and learning. Ultimately, successful gamification in education, serving as **scaffolding and enhancement tools, entails designing experiences that positively engage learners and encourage active participation**, thus facilitating **meaningful learning experiences**.



REFERENCES

