Massively Multiplayer:

A Dozen Schools Teach Together, Collaboratively and Competitively

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GDC EDUCATION SUMMIT

GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE 2014
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Sixteen! Schools Teach Together, Collaboratively and Competitively

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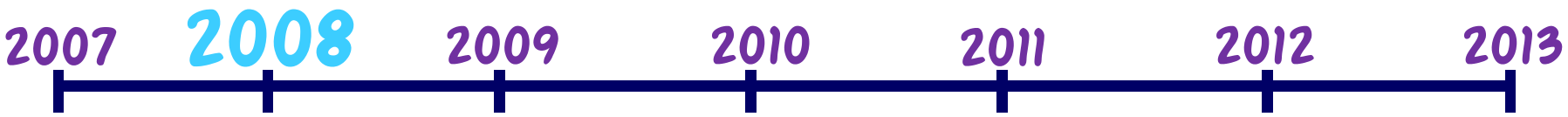
In the beginning...

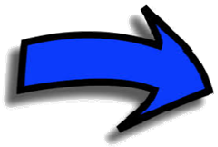
2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013

- First game development course in computer science @ University of Toronto.
  - No collaborations
    → yay programmer art.
  - Very little industry interaction.



- First attempts at collaboration:
  - First-year class, collaboration with environmental science students.
  - Fourth-year class, collaboration with students from art schools.

Mild Success



Total Failure

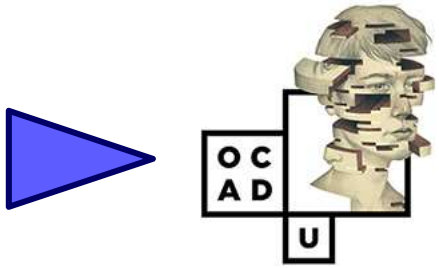
2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013

2007 2008 2009 **2010** 2011 2012 2013

- Industry involvement!
  - Guest lectures
  - Recruiting talks
  - Game showcase guests
    - Including: Toronto International Film Festival

2007 2008 2009 2010 **2011** 2012 2013

- Second attempt at collaboration:
  - Fourth-year class, collaboration with students from local art school.



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IMAGINATION IS EVERYTHING

Surprising Success ☺

2007 2008 2009 2010 **2011** 2012 2013

- Created "Level Up"
  - Public showcase event for student projects
  - Hosted at external venue
    → TIFF Bell Lightbox
  - Joined by:

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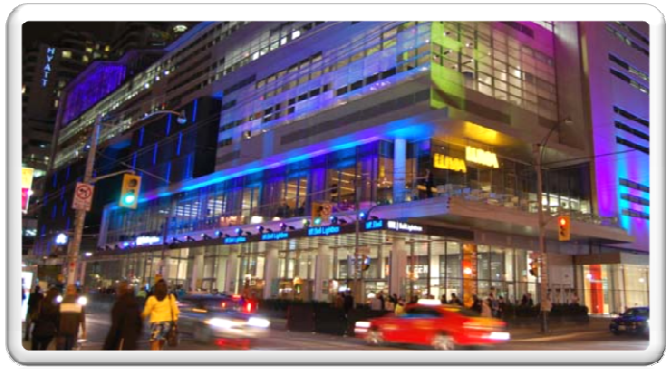


2007 2008 2009 2010 **2011** 2012 2013

- Game Faculty Mini-Summits
  - May Summit
    - 14 faculty from 8 schools
      - Industry guests too!
    - Visit to Ubisoft Toronto
  - February Summit
    - Hosted at XMG Studios

2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 **2012** 2013

- Level Up showcase grows
  - 6 schools, 35 projects
  - 600 attendees in one night
  - Industry sponsors

Cool.

2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 **2012** 2013

- Industry collaboration grows
  - Student-industry projects
  - Involvement in classes & curriculum
  - Research projects
- Community involvement too!

2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 **2012** 2013

- GameProfs get organized.
  - Communication
    → mailing lists, Google Docs
  - Coordination
    → sharing opportunities, contacts
  - Collaboration
    → courses, research

2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013

- Level Up showcase grows again
  - 12 schools, 60 projects
  - 800 attendees
  - Media attention

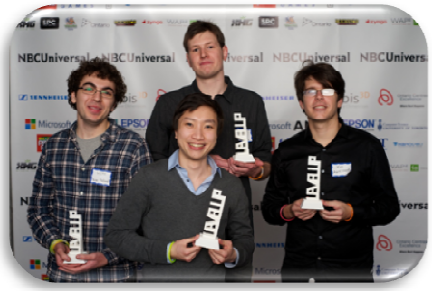
Holy cow.

2014

- Industry visits
  - e.g. Gameloft, Autodesk, Ubisoft
- Guest lectures
  - Other faculty
  - Industry speakers
- Collaborative projects
  - Courses (capstone, project)
  - Industry research
  - Community projects

Level Up showcase

- 75+ capstone projects
- 16 schools
- 800+ attendees



The Message:

- If you're not collaborating with others already, you probably should.
- If you are collaborating with others already, consider doing it on a large scale.

Why We Collaborate

The Most Important Outcome

$$\text{Student Experience} = \frac{\text{Faculty Expertise} \times \text{Faculty Time}}{\text{Size of Subject Area}}$$

- Game design is an ever-increasing field.
  - Collaboration helps us do more for less.

Example: CSC404 course:

- Term Start
- School Mixer
- Intro to Tools
- A1: Game Jam
- "Ludology"
- A2: Great Canadian Appathon
- Characters & Levels
- Pitching & Presenting
- Game Pitch / Creative Brief
- Game Mechanics
- Design Document
- Game AI
- Game Production
- Game Alpha
- Bringing Games To Market
- HCI for Games
- Game Beta

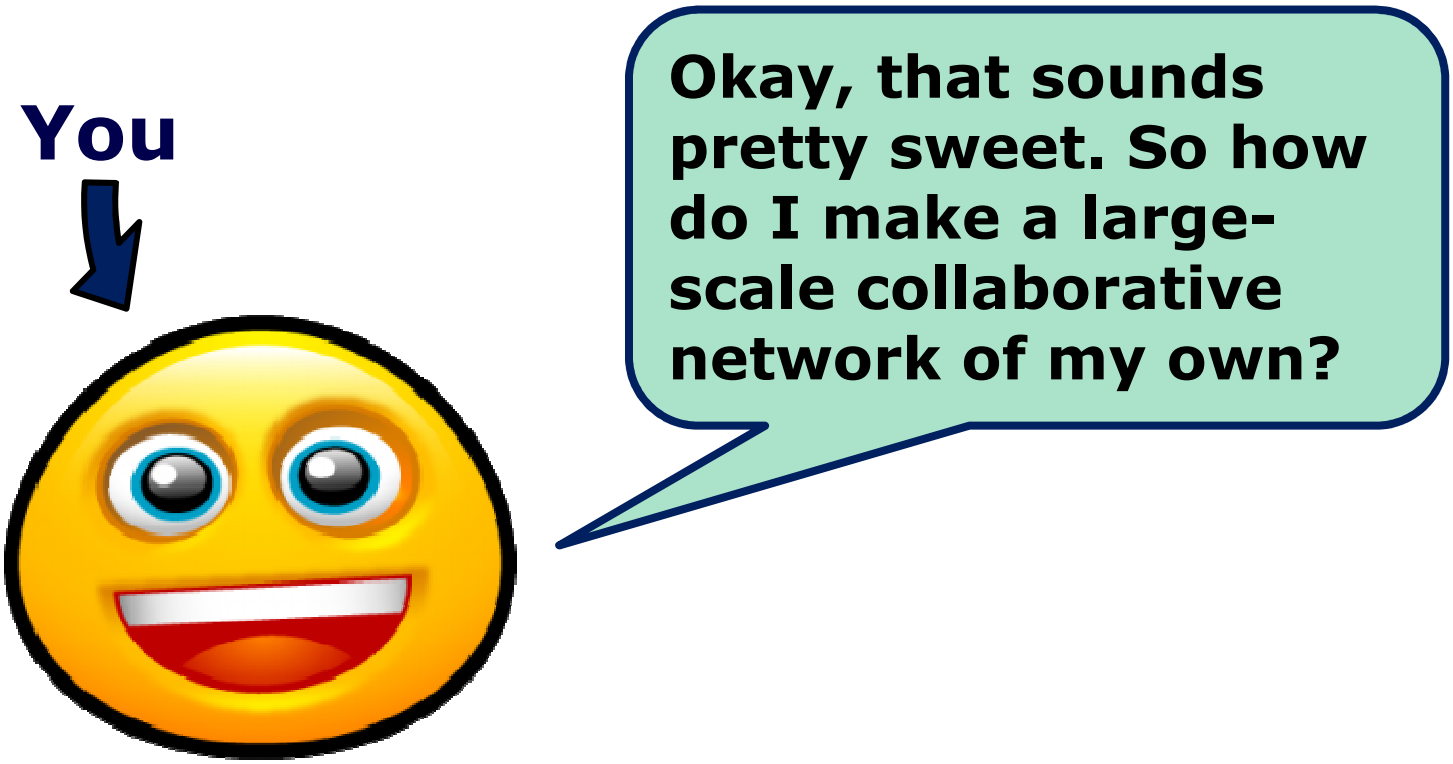
Sheridan

The More We Work Together…

- Shared knowledge & resources
  - Reduce duplicated effort
- Present a united front
  - More power
  - More opportunities
    - Research
    - Industry

Effects on the Students

- Collaboration on external activities:
  - Clubs, contests, game jam events.


You
Okay, that sounds pretty sweet. So how do I make a large-scale collaborative network of my own?

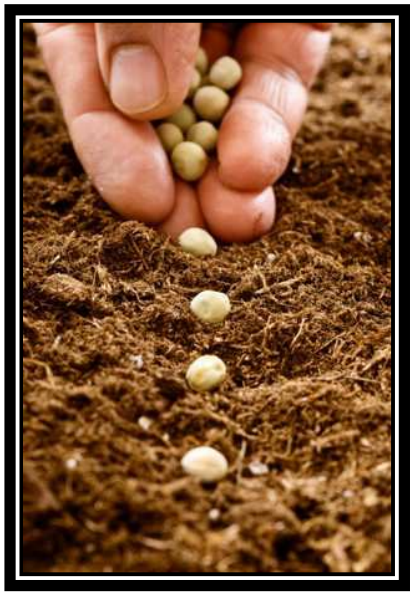
Instructors, Assemble!

- The GameProfs network provides many benefits, but needed hard work to grow.
  - **Incentives** → social gaming
  - **Engagement** → indie community
  - **Organization** → Agile methodologies

Creating the Large-Scale Collaboration

Challenge #1: Make sure that you're a good collaborator.

- Look for things that you have to offer.
- Look for the long-term benefits.
- Tell yourself it's not all about you ☺



Challenge #2: Leading the charge.

- Somebody needs to start the ball rolling.
  - Waiting for others to lead = waiting forever.
  - Usually one person needs to collect people, organize events, update group, etc.
- Be careful though!
  - Most people don’t want to be led, and you probably don’t want to lead either.

Lesson #1: Don't be a "leader".

- Unless you plan on leading by example:
  - Sharing information,
  - Facilitating events,
  - Connecting people.
    - And always on behalf of the group!

Example: Industry Connections

- Unity reps came to Toronto, offering student workshops.
- Autodesk offered to host a faculty info session for its new products.
- Ubisoft offered feedback sessions for student projects.

Challenge #3: Dealing with silence.

- You can’t make people respond to you.
  - Time constraints
  - Resource constraints
  - Interest constraints

Lesson #2: Provide incentives.

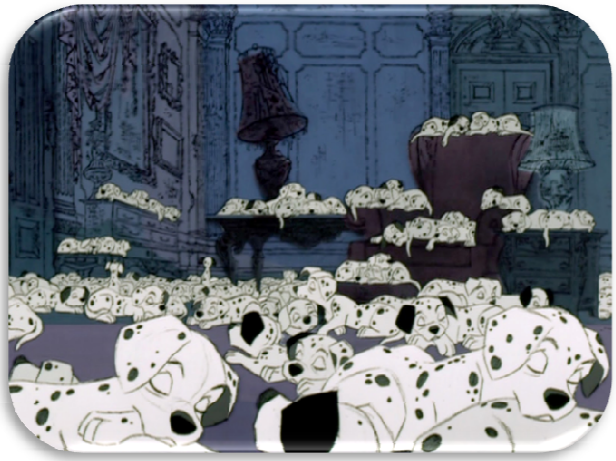
- As with social gaming, any collaboration must compete for time and attention.
  - Activities need to be high benefit & low cost.
  - e.g. tours, social engagements, etc.
  - Later: Level Up showcase
    - Attendance → participation → investment

Lesson #3: Start slow.

- You'll never get 16 collaborators at once.
- Start with one & get the right fit
  - Certain collaborations are easier, make more sense.
    - e.g. programming + art
  - Can't be forced, needs to evolve organically.
  - If you build it…they will come…

Challenge #4: Managing the network.

- Coordinating a few people is easy, but how do you manage 15?
  - And what will we do as this collaboration grows?



Lesson #4: Stay organized.

- Managing collaborations → agile approaches
  - Collaborative teaching
    - Interact multiple times a week.
  - Guest lectures or showcase participants
    - Interact once every week or two.
  - Try to get entire group of faculty to meet to coordinate and reconnect every few months.
    - Personal touch is important ☺

Lesson #5: Stay sane.

- Invest in collaborative technology.
  - Shared documents, shared schedules.
- Interactions proportional to level of commitment
  - Eventually, tasks can be shared too.
  - For events, volunteers help share the load
    - or sponsorship can help pay for support.
  - Remember: you're not the boss ☺

Challenge #5: Money money money.

- What are the costs involved here?
  - For the most part, collaborating is free!
    - Or more like free trade.
  - Only events cost money.
    - Thank you, industry partners!
      - We love you

Challenge #6: Pleasing everybody.

- Forget about it. It's impossible.
  - Just avoid offending/neglecting anybody ☺

Lesson #6: Communication is key.

- …to finding collaborators:
  - Learn more about potential partnerships by reaching out and encouraging dialogue.
- …to set up collaborative network:
  - Important to be non-partisan.
  - Present/promote the group over the individual.
  - Let people come to you.
- Personal attention always helps ☺

Challenge #7: Admin issues.

- When it comes to collaborations, there is lots of interest from school admins, but often little help or incentive.
  - → Especially when getting authorization ahead of time!
- Better to ask forgiveness than permission.

Challenge #8: I'm not you.

- Figure out what works for your peers.
  - Some of these approaches only worked because these game design profs were:
    - plentiful,
    - isolated, and
    - Canadian.
  - Sometimes, the benefit can outweigh the cost.

Challenge #9: That sounds like work.

- Collaboration as an investment
  - It'll take work.
    - …and *patience*.
  - It'll take time.
    - No instant gratification
    - Results may take years to see
    - Best to start with low expectations ☺
  - It *will* pay off in the end though.

Final Thoughts

The GameProfs Initiative

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The Sorcerer's Apprentices

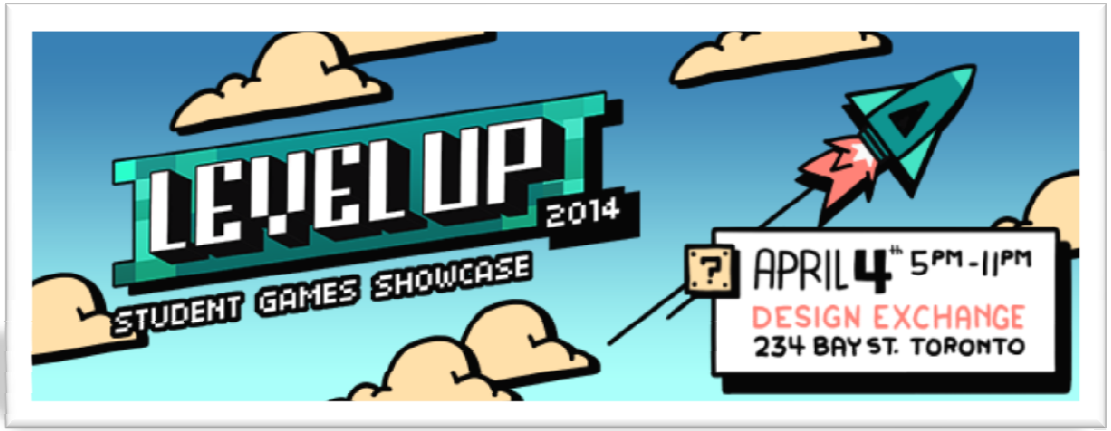
Looking Back

We can't go back to the way things were.

- Collaboration in classes:
  - Interesting idea becomes essential approach.
- Collaboration in general:
  - "We" > "I".

Parting Thoughts

- Come talk to us ☺
  - → We welcome suggestions, or potential collaborators.
  - → Level Up 2014! – http://www.levelupshowcase.com



Thanks, from all of us!

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