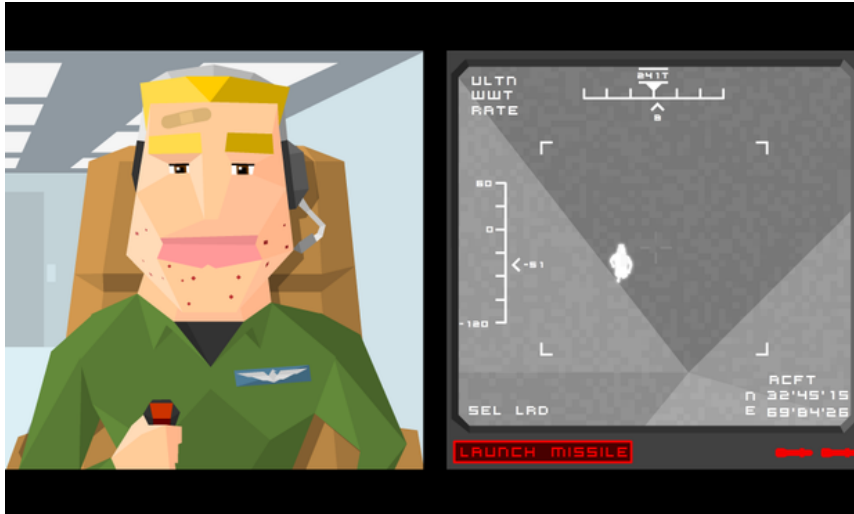




Saving the World One Controller at a Time

Monday, June 25, 2012



Piloting an unmanned drone is just another dayjob in

"Unmanned." (Molleindustria)



The consumer becomes the producer and the creator, and in being able to have the tools to create something new and be innovative and creative, that is what we need to teach kids.

— Leslie Redd

What if all of the time and energy spent playing video games could be energy spent for good? At the ninth annual [Games for Change Festival](#) in New York City, game developers, designers, publishers, and players gathered together to explore the greater potential for games.

Cell phone and internet games, for example, could teach people in the developing world about the spread of STDs. "For some topics in countries where it's taboo to talk about sexually transmitted diseases, games offer a much more anonymous interface to convey that information," says [Virginia Zaunbrecher](#), senior development officer at Relief International, and co-chair of the Gaming Working Group at [NetHope](#).

Educators are also using popular games to teach about topics like physics and math. [Leslie Redd](#), director of educational programs at Valve, says teachers reached out to the company about its game "Portal 2." "[One teacher told me] 'I've written an English literacy lesson plan around the story arc and the character development.' We just heard from another one about the use of sarcasm in the game. We kept hearing all these

interesting stories about how it was being used," says Redd. As a result, Valve has created a new [website](#) designed specifically for educators with lesson plans using Portal on a range of topics.

"The consumer becomes the producer and the creator, and in being able to have the tools to create something new and be innovative and creative, that is what we need to teach kids," Redd says. "That's what they need to know how to do."

But a simple word is what game designers and developers are trying to perfect: empathy.

"Teach empathy," says [Arlene Ducao](#) of [The DuKode Studio](#). "How do we teach sympathy? Those kinds of immersive gaming settings allow us to teach those lessons in a much clearer way."

One game that was profiled was [Unmanned](#), a game that puts gamers in the shoes of the pilot of an unmanned drone in the U.S. Air Force's controversial program. While most videogames that portray combat cast the user as a machine-gun wielding, wisecrack-shedding commando, the gameplay in "Unmanned" is far more realistic, to the point of existentialism. The main character is a disillusioned and thoroughly bored drone operator who deals with the tedium of his job. Instead of frenetic and utterly unbelievable action sequences in the "Rambo" vein, the player stares at his computer screen, exchanges idle talk with his coworker, and takes smoke breaks. It's an unsettling depiction of the reality of modern warfare.

"The mental state you have, playing at a distance, without risk, in a sandbox environment in which nothing can possibly happen to you, that's also the art of videogames," says [Paolo Pedercini](#) of Molleindustria, the game's developer.



- [More on the Games for Change Festival](#)
- [Play Unmanned](#), by Molleindustria
- See how educators can use Portals in the classroom
- Read about a Facebook game to develop peace and community building in Jordan, promoted by NetHope
- Play more of the games featured at the festival

GUESTS: [Arlene Ducao](#), [Yasser Malaika](#), [Paolo Pedercini](#), [Leslie Redd](#) and [Virginia Zaunbrecher](#)

HOSTED BY: [John Hockenberry](#)

PRODUCED BY: [Robert Balint](#) and [Leo Duran](#)

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