

Transcript

Part 1

Salvo: Okay, so you just took out a mind map.

Maxine: So this is where I see Scottish women in games going: in the first place we've got the support of women who are currently working in the industry so monthly meetings, networking, running workshops, providing mentoring for some of the students and pupils who are coming through showing an interest in moving into the games industry (Chambers, 2012). Running events and presentations and identifying some really strong role models within the industry. Women who are currently doing some amazing work. And also feeding into [Girl Geeks](#) and the other Women in Games throughout the world.

Salvo: Girl geeks, is that a formal group?

Dodds: It's a formal group. There is a very strong Scottish group with monthly meetings and they get very strong speakers. To address the issue of the lack of women coming into games, I strongly feel that we really need to address [women in gaming] at a much earlier stage. So I'd like to see us going into primary schools, addressing children around 11-12 years old, and getting them interested in all aspects of games and how they are made. Getting small teams, looking at the art side as well as the programming side, and developing their own games using software like Scratch or Game Maker, and then developing [game strategies and digital literacies] through secondary school. So there are currently various different game companies that are going out into the schools. But they are all doing their own thing and not working together. My aim is to get a workshop together taking the key experts from each of these areas working together to articulate best practices across the board and roll out [a games curriculum] into schools, learn from that and build on that, and then watch how that progresses and develop it further.

[One goal] is having schools game [jams](#) like we've already started in Glasgow, like the game maker project that's going in Dundee. I am looking at science festivals [for inspiration], but also looking at the art side as well and introducing 3d software packages into schools. Getting students thinking about developing and designing characters. So that's really about getting students excited about making games. Having got that excitement we need to tie that [excitement] in to being able to provide them with the information to take that into a career. So looking at a career pathways, defining career days, and going into schools with role models to be able to talk about their experience in the industry and what sort of roles are out there. Having a clearly defined ideal of what the various roles are that are available, and what path you need to take.

[Another goal] is providing a careers guidance brochure on what courses are out there and what subjects you need to be studying to get into them. Tying that in to students going into games studios to visit and see people who are working [at these studios]. The other part is tying into career forums. We've started with [Skills Development Scotland](#) and are producing small clips that could go onto their "My World of Work" site just to let people see that, yes, women are welcome within games (Skills Development Scotland, 2013). It has been seen previously as a male-dominated industry with only male role models shown on the site. So we now have two females within the industry [shown on the site] to create that balance. We'd like to take it to the next level to actually have a forum looking at different role models in different roles talking about what their job involves, what sort of experience they've had in the industry, and how they got into it.

Salvo: Those entry stories are hugely important.

Dodds: So that's my aim to work towards: getting this forum in place and then it can be available on the various careers websites for kids to look at the get a feel for what it is like to work in the industry. The other thing I've been looking at is the possibility of having a TV program. Ideally what I would like is to have a young female presenter talking about playing games, looking at the new games coming out, and talking about their experience. But also looking at how to go about programming games, looking at art. Having a gallery of people's work so people can send in and have their work displayed.

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Part 2

Dodds: Absolutely, yes.

Salvo: I just wanted to make sure I understood.

Dodds: That's absolutely what it's about. So very much getting audience participation. So that ties together the careers pathway: looking at how we encourage girls into the industry. Obviously I'm not looking specifically, or only, at girls. I encourage anyone to come into the industry. Not looking just at schools, but looking at people returning from career breaks and having the information within job centers on what it would take to move into the games industry, and looking at skills development re-training and developing small workshops to take people's existing skills and move them forward so they could fill a niche within the games industry. And generally looking at the skill sets: that's another area within career development that I feel is worthwhile exploring.

So the other side of this is to have a full directory of all the games-related courses that are out there and have this information available for anyone coming into the industry. The next stage is looking at statistics for how many women are currently in the industry, how many women are coming into career courses. At the moment [the number of women participating] is very, very low. We're only seeing one or two within a class of 25-30 students. And very often it drops further going into taking up positions within the games industry. It's slightly better within the art side, there are more girls coming into doing art courses. But again it is very bad for getting careers advice at schools. Certainly with art kids are directed towards getting art degrees and it tends to be fine art. They aren't really given information on the alternative courses they could do.

Salvo: Illustration versus drawing.

Dodds: Exactly, yes. So again, it's about educating the career staff so that they know what the options are so they can pass that information on to kids.

[And then] going back to statistics, [we need] a snapshot of exactly where we are at the moment so we can then follow that through and see what we can do to improve that moving forward. And provide that information to the Scottish government so we can get their backing to be able to proceed with this. It is a really exciting area to look at and I think the potential is definitely there. [We are] seeing a lot of girls out there who are interested, but just don't know how to follow through.

Salvo: And then also some who are dissuaded by what they find in a class where they are the only young woman.

Dodds: They're being put off at so many different levels. And I think again that there is, within the school, a move that science is not exciting with girls. And a lot of them are put off fairly early on. Which is why I want to catch them at the primary stage before they've really made the choice at what subjects they take at secondary schools.

Salvo: What do you think it takes, what do you think it will take to change that? And I realize that we're talking about steering a battleship but what kinds of changes in the schools need to happen for that to be seen as a viable option.

Dodds: I think part of it is just making it fun. Letting them see what they can achieve. And make sure schools are giving out accurate and up-to-date careers advice. I think also the way that they are taught may be more aimed at boys than girls and we need to look at teaching styles and what actually works best for girls. From what I've seen in the past is that boys are far more willing to go onto the Internet, do some research, find out what's out there, and just experiment. Girls tend to be [keener] to have a definite structured, processive learning, like having modules to work through. I think it needs to be geared towards looking at those different ways of working.

Salvo: One of the things that we've seen is that women are hesitant to claim an expertise, and that men will run ahead and claim more expertise than they have at the moment and fill it in later. Does that ring true with your experience and how do you encourage women to stand up and say, "I can do this"?

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Dodds: Part of it would be certification. Having actual evidence that they have had achieved this specific thing. To give them pride in what they've done and build their confidence.

Salvo: So then with formal recognition they have credentials to stand on.

Dodds: I agree with you completely. It's been proved with applying for jobs that men are far more willing to go for a job that they only have a limited amount of experience against the criteria, whereas a woman will look at it and say "oh no, I haven't done that, that, and that, so this isn't the job for me." It's just a perception thing.

Part 3

Salvo: So that brings me to why it's Scottish women in gaming and not British Women in Gaming...

Dodds: There is already a couple of organizations which are dealing with the role of the UK. Scotland has its own set of problems. So I'm looking specifically at that. In the first place, we don't have a number of AAA companies. We have Rockstar North. But other than that there really are no others at the moment. Real-time worlds unfortunately went to the well a couple of years ago. And as a result what we have is a lot of very small studios, a lot of indie studios, and it is a different sort of climate. So I think because of that we really need to be looking at our own situation separately to the [rest of the] UK. I know that from the UK perspective TIGA is pushing to get tax benefits for games companies, but in the end they're really only going to benefit the AAA companies that are big enough to have the amount of profits to make that worthwhile. A lot of the indie companies are struggling to make any profit decently, or just struggling to...

Salvo: To keep the doors open?

Dodds: Exactly, yes.

Salvo: It's a tough climate at the moment.

Dodds: It definitely is.

Salvo: How has the economy impacted the role of women? Did you find that in boom times it was easier to get in the door and start conversations?

Dodds: I don't know that [the economy] specifically has affected it; I think that affected everybody. I think at the moment because of the move of the gaming environment we're now at the point where nearly 50% of gamers are women, especially on the social gaming side. I think most games companies are aware of this and are trying to address it. So they're looking to get more diversity within their organizations and really would welcome women applying. But what they're finding is they're just not getting the applicants. That comes back to the fact that they don't have enough people going to University doing the courses. It really has to go back to roots. So I don't think [the economy] has had an enormous impact.

At this point, it is a very good time to be a women going into the games industry, because companies really do want to take on more women. It's just a case that they aren't there.

Salvo: And do you think that there's an untapped market? You mentioned the statistic nearly half of gamers are women. Is that an untapped market?

Dodds: Absolutely, yes. In the end I think that getting more women involved in the industry is going to allow for games companies to be smarter about making games for women, or games that appeal to women. Too many times males try to produce a game for women and get it horribly wrong. As well I think [regarding] the whole diversity aspect, we should be looking at providing games that appeal to a far wider spectrum whereas too much in the past it's been very much young white males that has been the focus, target market, and that's got to stop.

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Salvo: What do you think the significance of the Lemmings statue is?

Dodds: I think it's absolutely brilliant. In the end, Dundee already has the statues of the comic characters [Desperate Dan and Minnie the Minx], which have a very real resonance with the people of Dundee. I think the Lemmings will be good because a lot of Scottish people don't realize that we have a games industry and don't realize what games have actually been produced here (Scottishgames, 2013). So it raises the question of "What is the significance of Lemmings to Scotland?" Which I think is very, very good. They are also beautiful pieces of work.

Salvo: They're adorable.

Dodds: So I think it's a very positive thing and I think they're very good, yeah.

Salvo: What games do you suggest for young women and girls to play? Where do you think they should start? Should they start with board games...?

Dodds: I don't think I would put a specific general [genre] on it. I think it's really just to get kids going out and just playing. And seeing what works, what suits you, and what you enjoy. And just learning from that and just reminded to try different things and see what works.

Salvo: What's the first game you remember playing?

Dodds: [Pong](#). And [Space Invaders](#) in arcades. But I've been rightly through most of the platforms. We had the ZX80 and 81 going way back and the [Spectrum](#)s. So I have grown up through the various different platforms and various developments of games from the very start.

Salvo: Are there any traditional Scottish games that you remember playing? Anything that pre-dates the digital perhaps?

Dodds: Well Lemmings is the obvious one. I don't know before that I was aware of what was Scottish and what was not. They very well may be, but I wasn't aware they were Scottish at the time.

Salvo: Anyone you care to name?

Dodds: I can't think of anything specifically now. The game I've enjoyed most more recently has been [Pikmin](#). Pikmin 1 and 2. I think it has a really nice dynamic.

Part 4

Salvo: What general advice do you have for women who are considering working in industry as a career?

Dodds: Go for it. Find out as much as you can. Do your research. Speak to the people who are currently working in the games industry. Find out what it is, what aspects of the games industry you like and what role you feel would most work for you.

Salvo: Don't be dissuaded?

Dodds: Absolutely not, no. And so many people will try.

Salvo: Well I don't want to keep you from a cup of coffee. I must have dried your mouth out. I have a couple more questions, but this has been wonderful. The map, the mind map is really powerful. And going from point to point on that has been wonderful.

Dodds: Good. I can send you a copy of that.

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Salvo: I would really appreciate that. Particularly with recent attacks on women in the gaming industry. I'm thinking of Jennifer Hepler at Bioware in particular (GameCentral, 2013). Which actually I think turned out to be an interesting case because the community did in fact come out to defend her, but now she's left Bioware. So I'd be very interested in any thoughts that you have about events like this. Ideas for handling trolling, flame wars, things that go beyond simple criticism and move into a different realm.

Dodds: It's a really difficult one, that's why I keep coming back to. In the end, with what I'm working on, it's about encouraging and promoting women [in] games. I can influence that, and women can influence that. What we can't influence is how people respond to that. And you'll get positive and you'll get negative. I mean some of the trolling and the abuse that women get is really very uncalled for and can be extremely harsh. But in the end, the spirit of what we can positively do about it, other than continue to do what we do. In the end, they don't win if we continue being who we are and achieving great things.

Salvo: And you chose the word abuse, and I appreciate that. I think that was a conscious choice. Just because it happens in the virtual doesn't make it any less abusive, violent, or dangerous. Any thoughts?

Dodds: Well I mean in some cases it has got to the point of being more than that. I have heard cases of trolls who actually found the address of the people involved and have turned up at their door. And that is really quite frightening. But yes, abuse is abuse. It doesn't matter what form it takes. And yes someone I'm helping [was] dissuaded from continuing in the industry because of [abuse she suffered], which is very sad. I think in the end, Trolling is not actually a women's problem, it's a male problem. But the thing is [men in the industry] don't recognize that. That if [male gamers] are willing to think more about their own perception of the industry and why it is that they feel that women are some sort of threat to the industry because in the end [inclusion of women is] a very positive movement within the industry: they have a lot to bring to it. So it's sad that some individuals feel that they are somehow threatened by [inclusion].

Salvo: These are powerful words, and I appreciate what you're saying. Any other thoughts or reflections?

Dodds: Just coming back to the fact that there are some incredibly talented women out there doing remarkable work. And I think what we need to do is to encourage them to promote the very strong role models that we have. And let the world see what these girls are capable of. And the more we do that the more that other girls will come forward and join the industry. And hopefully it will start to change the perception of males as they see women succeeding in the industry.

Salvo: What's the significance of the [Victoria and Albert Museum](#) having a Gamer in Residence?

Dodds: I think it's wonderful for us. We're very proud of Sophia [George] for getting it (George, 2013). It's obviously good for Scotland as well. She helped a great deal in her time up here and setting up her own company and doing DARE as well. She's very enthusiastic about the games industry and has a lot of energy. I think she's really useful in that position. Again, from what you were saying about trolling, there was quite a bad backlash against her when she took the position, around the [perceived] lack of experience, age, and her sex. And in the end I think she is the right person for the job because of her passion for the games industry and her level of energy. And the fact that she will be a really good advocate for moving things forward and getting things happening. I'm really proud that she's in the position.

Salvo: What's the significance of the V&A coming to Dundee?

Dodds: I think it's got to be good for Dundee. It's a very well-recognized institution and again, if there is a gaming element then that is going to be very big for Dundee as well. It will help to tie in the disparate parts of the game industry into raising awareness. It also, from the cultural point of view, and the tourism aspects as well, it's all very, very positive.

Salvo: Well, thank you, Maxine.

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