INTERFACE DESIGN DECISIONS

HOW SHOULD WE REPRESENT MENU ITEMS?

Options
- Text
- Graphic icons
- A combination of the two

Criteria
Menus should be fun and interesting for children but also clear and appropriately representational of where the menu item will lead the child. Menu icons, if used, should be age-appropriate. For example, cartoony icons are not appropriate for 15 year olds but may be appropriate for 9 year olds. Menu items need to be large enough that a child with developing mouse skills can click on them.

Evidence

“Children want content that is entertaining, funny, colorful...” (Nielsen, 2002)

“Children do not necessarily prefer a gaudily colored interface, although color and design in general are important for them.” (Large, Beheshti, Nesset, Bowler, 2004)

Large, Beheshti, Rahman (2002):
“Lots of color in both the background and foreground, interesting graphics, and especially use of animation were widely advocated.”
“Graphics – again, universally popular.”
“Icons – if icons are used they must obviously match the concept they represent. Children may be more sensitive to the visualization of concepts than adults.”

Druin (1999):
“Design icons to be visually meaningful to children. The best icons for children are easily recognizable and familiar, representing items in the everyday world.... Design icons and accompanying hotspots to be large to accommodate young children’s developing cursor control. A common rule is to make icons at least the size of a quarter.”
“Children are sensitive to what they see, much more so than adults would imagine. They care what something looks like just as much as how it works or what it does. They don’t want the visual look of things to talk down to them or question their intelligence. They want what adults want – things that look good and respect who they are as users.”

“Icons are increasingly used in interfaces because they are compact universal pictographic representations of computer functionality and processing and exploit the graphical ability of the computer.” (Uden, Dix, 2000)

Galitz (1997) says that icons must be familiar and simple, “devoid of unnecessary embellishment,” and consistent.

Discussion of Evidence
There is evidence that children respond especially well to graphics. Using a graphical representation of the menu choices will make the menu more attractive for children, making them more willing to use the interface. However, as the goal of the interface is to help educate children, adding the textual meaning to the graphic will enhance the educational experience for the children as well as reinforcing their understanding of the used vocabulary. It is also important to ensure that the functionality of the
interface is not impaired through any ambiguity as to the correct interpretation of what the graphics represent.

**Decision**

Menus will include a combination of a graphic icon with a word or words to label it. For example, one section of the website will be the World section. The menu item to represent a link to this section will include a graphic of a world with the word “WORLD” accompanying it.

**REFERENCES**


