FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY

Games Academy

Supporting Neurodiversity in Conceptual Design: Lessons Learned from Companies and Classrooms across Finland and the UK

Remember MSN Messenger? Back in 2005 this was our main tool of communication inside an Electronic Arts UK game development studio, on a $10m budget game. I would even use this to "talk" with my colleagues sat right next to me. Did we talk face to face? No - and many colleagues were neurodiverse. Games is very much a "headphones on" career even then.

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2015 Conceptual Art in St Petersburg Russia.

An ambitious 1 week workshop to connect Finnish Vehicle Design students with Russian Vehicle Design students. Very little shared spoken language.

image 1.

Mixed groups of Russian and Finnish students at random, who never met until this day, working together and sharing drawings as seen in image 1. No common language although most groups used broken English to try and speak. The students had a creative task to interpret a word into a sculpture. Drawing and art skills were used for communication! Background to this poster shows one example painting of the word "TWIST". Very difficult social situation, but tacked with enthusiasm against a deadline of just 1 day.

image 2.

How?

2026+

Using Office365 Teams doesn't seem popular with Games Academy students as they prefer Discord.
Success with visual sharing via whiteboard style tools such as MURAL or MIRO.
Falmouth Univeristy has a MURAL license but there are many sharing and collaborative tools out there being used in the games industry.
WFH or hybrid is very common in the game studio model.

Pie chart

ILP does not mention social anxieties 20%

ILP mentions social anxieties 80%

anxious

panic attacks

socially anxious

2023 - 2025 in Penryn Cornwall.

Concept art students are asked to share conceptual artworks in groups of 5 chosen by me at random. Shared spoken language but some refused to sit near others, or move to sit with strangers.
Anxiety issues pushed back on this face to face activity so much that over 3 years I switched almost 100% online peer sharing system using the MURAL software. Orginally MURAL was used in addition to in person, and is still introduced in class.
Groups sometimes never speak in person but more social interation has developed allowing students to form groups themselves.

*some quotes from student ILPs from the last 3 years below

"Social Communication Difficulties. I have panic attacks."

"I am anxious when I am put on the spot and find it difficult to socialise and communicate due to autism."

"Prefers to sit in the same seat"

"Student needs personal space as people sitting next to them makes them uncomfortable - Student will choose to sit somewhere with spaces either side of them if available."

BA Game Art
Developing Concept Art Vocabularies
47% with ILP and 80% of those have social interaction anxieties
50% have ASD diagnosis

mural

REFERENCES:
images: WALTON, Lee. 2015.
icons: Flaticon.com [accessed 2/3/26]
data: MyFalmouth SITs system [accessed 27/2/26]
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