

Notes from the Teaching Game Studies Workshop DiGRA Luneburg 16 May 2015
Organized by Mia Consalvo and Christopher A. Paul

- There is no 'game studies 101' course in a box
 - Depends on the multiple, individual factors you face
 - Level of student (grad, undergrad + are they theory/studies focused; design focused, or some mixture)
 - What kinds of resources do you have- tech, support, other courses
 - What kinds of sequencing do you have, or are all courses stand alone
 - What discipline/field do you come from
 - Integrating theory and practice - what ratio of each?
 - Student backgrounds and levels of interest, expertise will vary
 - Helpful tip: Seed the class with students who will question the premise of the class

Popular readings

- Huizinga's *Homo Ludens*, not reading the whole thing, but reading selections
- Callois's *Man, Play and Games*, same as above
- Sutton-Smith's *Ambiguity of Play* because of the rhetorics of play and the frames that we put on play
- Clara Fernandez-Vara's book on doing game analysis
- Have them select papers out of the DiGRA library and participate in an online discussion then take it into the class as well
- First issue of *Games and Culture* has some nice, short pieces that are fairly accessible
- Marcia Kinder's *Playing with Power*
- Eugene Provenzo on *Nintendo Kids*
- Sudnow *Pilgrim in the Microworld*
- Persuasive Games – the blog post, *The Rhetoric of Video Games* in Salen's edited collection,
- Sicart's *Game Studies* response "Against procedurality"
- Extra Credits piece on *Missile Command*
- Jerking around with the magic circle by Eric Zimmerman (*Gamasutra* post) and selected academic comments
- Jaakko Stenros on game definitions presented in the *Critical Evaluation of Game Studies* seminar, coming out in a special issue of *Games and Culture* next year ("The Game Definition Game: A Review of the Meanings of 'Game' ")
- Likewise there is Jonne Arjoranta's published article to recommend:

"Game Definitions: A Wittgensteinian Approach"

<http://gamestudies.org/1401/articles/arjoranta>

- Modern classics like Salen and Zimmerman, Juul, Murray
 - Keynotes from 2003 DiGRA conference are now available online
- First paragraph of McLuhan reading – focused on for 60 minutes. Discuss word by word. Let them understand how to read a humanities text; focus on choice of words. How do you make an argument?

Question about readings/how to engage students better with them

- Require/gather reading response papers in advance of class discussion
- Small group driven discussion – often with questions about the readings to structure them
- Reading original texts can be helpful; more interesting than derivatives (Huizinga- games/play used interchangeably in original- translator made judgment calls on how to translate)
- Assign students to get papers from DiGRA digital library, Games and Culture journal, elsewhere; students have to summarize and critique; students get points for participation/comments in online environment.
- Students have reading circles: somebody pre-reads chapters; other is secretary; all need to share the workload.

Gameplay in the course/classroom

- What part of the class do you want to be playing games?
- What if students don't have exposure to games? What if they don't have the resources?
- Finding resources within your institution where you can, find allies
 - Pick games that you can support as best you can
- It's great to put people in an atmosphere where they can show expertise that may not be expected or experience a lack of ability when they thought they'd rock games
- Sites with free games, browser games
- Consider allowing cheating in assigned games (this can even the playing field between novice and experienced players), but demand reflection on the practice of doing so in later analyses
- Uploading videos of play and playthroughs, often captured on phones, got engagement and buy in
- Using reflective writing or journaling as a means of assignment
- Need to shake them out of doing game reviews

- Working with and through potential comfort and cultural issues with how it works and what you expect
- Often in a games program you attract gamers, which brings problems with evidence and what they want to write
- Offer a dual track at Tampere with traditional academic writing and writing journalism type writing for a games magazine with students writing feedback on game reviews with credit for feedback
- Have students pick the games to play
 - Makes them more likely to play. Often games are short or a demo; that seems to work; rather than the professor saying 'play this game.'
- Play analog games to shift dynamics of expertise and comfort
 - Play African traditional board games- creates another shift in power dynamics
 - Use Tarot cards to teach narratives

Creativity in assignments

- Reading academic texts is already outside of their comfort zone, especially with programmers and in design classes
 - Mark Chen has them create Let's play videos over a series of assignments where they play and critique the game and make the rough draft they show to other students and they edit as they go along
 - Gets them playing, teaches them critique, teaches them iteration over the course of the term—end with videos they can share and analyze as a group
- Assignment to break down a reading and helping them through it if they're not familiar, walk them through a text together—reading questions can also help
 - Do a reading circle in a café or outside of class with each person has a job and share the workload to develop a join paper, can be done for extra credit
- Assignment to help them play games and walk through games because they may not have the background, helping them ask how to do things, which can also get them toward a reflective essay
- Student negotiated assessment models
 - Combination of uploading videos of play experiences; varied in quality; and commenting on one another's materials; others did blogs or written materials. Written piece at the end of the semester

- Student engagement went up significantly
- Write a reflection paper on gameplay – have to talk through them to see what it is; a great way to have them engage with gameplay.
- Give them prompts- questions you want them to address. What do you as a professor want to get out of this? 500 words.
- Our programs attract gamers, passionate about their own views; don't really want to hear others' views.
 - Semi-academic arena- for more experimentation; put up a magazine for the passionate game students. A place to write about games you love; but there is also a peer review system- students allowed to comment on one another's writing. They get extra credit for doing this. They can express own views, but learn about critique. But separate this from writing research papers.
- Asking my students to read and write is already a step outside of their comfort zone. Their other classes are about programming, animation, etc.
- Reflective writing-cultural assumptions about reflective writing – a big disparity between what local students could do, and Chinese students. The next time we ran workshops ahead of time.
- Dealing with different levels of students – from the most engaged to the least engaged and prepared.
 - Pitch to the highest student and help everyone else try to get there.
 - If you tone down expectations, it does the top a vast disservice.
- Autobiography as an early way to learn more about the course and use their upbringing to get at things that you can build onto as you go forward

Failure and things that went wrong with teaching

- Having a very homogenous group doesn't allow them to see other perspectives and viewpoints
- Avoiding asking for a ridiculous amount of work to overcompensate
- Asking three questions – what's worked/is working; what didn't/isn't; what would you change if you were in charge
- How do you deal with lectures and physical space?
- Find the pedagogy resources that might be available to you
- Think about what you want them to take away from the course and figure out how to emphasize and assess those things
 - Work backward through what you really want them to get and emphasize getting them there
- With a massive class, using online environments and peer evaluations can help break the class down, recording videos of the lectures and using them online and then using class time for break outs
 - Figuring out how to get rid of the lecture and focus on sharp videos and then do prep activities and work-shopping in the class time
 - Poll Everywhere can be embedded in the slide for polls and word clouds, let's them put something on your slide that they don't have to own, but you can talk about
 - Twitter, or something like Padlet.com
- Gamifying the class with leaderboards and giving out points, can also use as a strategy to talk about limits of gamification
 - Can incentivize participation without being part of the grade
 - Making gamification voluntary and opt in to shake out some of the folks that might not want to play/stress out about it and negatively impact the game
- Focusing on developing an open environment in the course and finding a way to encourage a diverse group in the class
- First class sets the tone for the course
 - Defining key terms in the course as a way to set the class up
 - Talking about biases around certain words in groups
 - Can give an audience analysis tool for the course
- Figuring out and respecting the norms of the local institution
- Failure with colleagues – colleagues that aren't supportive of games
- Gamified the class- gave out points. Sort of failed. Students who missed the first lecture which explained limitations of the assignment – were totally intimidated by it and freaked out about it.

- First class session as a tough session that emphasizes reading and writing. A wonderful way to weed out those who think they are just going to play games and write reviews.
- Biggest failure – the very first lecture; I set up the whole framework of what this class; why it is fun or interesting; still struggling with this.

Assignments

- First think through what you want to get out of the assignment and target things toward that
 - Splitting an assignment into multiple parts: how do people play, how do we understand that play, what does it really mean?
 - Interview people and do at least two game play sessions of at least an hour
 - Design a game for that one person
- Create a diagram about why games are fun
 - Do the assignment at the beginning and end of the term
 - Way of getting at some clash between ideas and adding a chance to assess how they progressed
 - Also a chance to add a reflective paper and get at how students learn
- Students have to bring an artifact about their relationship with games and talk about how they look at the object
 - Can do it first day/last day to get at what they've learned; can do it alongside a dedicated reflective assignment
- Difference in where you teach can alter your student body and if you're not in a games program some people may not have as much background to things
 - Refocus on play rather than games to broaden the discussion and potential audience
- Short research papers where the whole class reads all of them and the teacher can then emphasize deeper points and tease out themes
- To get development students to think about and respond to theory
 - Build a lot of failure in the course to get them to think about the theory
 - Incite a need to get them to think through how they need theory to get through it
 - Give a broad structure and tell them to design, but they don't ask the key questions around the assignment (demographics, targeting, etc.), they struggle and then start to ask the key questions about how it works and what they need and then point them to the theory to work them through it

- Utilizing librarians to help with research assignments and how they can help students move through the project
- Using your own work as something they can deconstruct and talk through why you make decisions
- Create a diagram that explains why games are fun; concretize your mental models; at the end of the course- go through assignment again. Can apply to what are games, what is play; bring your implicit notions to class, then revisit. Can use their answers to then frame later readings and discussions; let me revisit their performance later on- how did their thinking change.
- Make it about play in the past- everyone has some past experiences.
 - undergrads- starting w/the personal starts very well for them. On the other side- doesn't work as well for grad students; they are often there; they want a broader and deep view.
- All play the same game (WoW); every two weeks students write short research papers; they all circulate and read them.
- Design of play- design a game within first week or two; give them broad structure; they don't ask key questions about demographics; etc.; they start to fail; they start asking questions; the next time they start with those questions.
- Making a plan for the research; give me your research question and some initial sources; Kotaku isn't an academic reference. Teach them how to write a research paper.
- Students made a Let's Play video of gameplay. Watched it to do analysis of the specific video.

How do you grade your assignments?

- Grading papers: cut them up in pieces and take parts and review them as you go; research question, bibliography, peer review, drafts
 - Give them a rubric and a rule set
 - Multiple pieces that add up to a final piece, clear expectations and feedback help make the decision clearer
 - In groups you have to submit a plan for who's doing what and what's the plan if things go wrong, post mortems to close the loop
- What grade do you expect out of this project? Have the group have this conversation to let groups reconfigure work.

- Backload grading- early work can be graded harshly so standards can be set.
- Quickfire challenges- the first time they struggle; the last time is great- giving the chance to iterate.
- Importance of trying something again as part of learning
- The need to put points/rewards on an assignment to make it more meaningful and have more student effort
- Peer accountability and using collaborative Google Docs
 - Students enter peer reviews online via rubrics- saves labor
- Problems of teaching a much larger class and how assignments scale
 - Ends up getting more standardized
 - Teaching the other faculty about what your teaching is like and making comparisons that make sense
- Think through the constraints you deal with and maximize what you can do within that space
 - Find the way to recycle work and make things easier on yourself
 - Find the ways to work with your colleagues to divvy up work when you can
 - Pick your battles, choose what you most want to do; what you CAN do in your context and then let the rest go.

General assessment ideas

- Have students go through a reading, ask them to highlight what you don't know and circle what you do
 - Gives them a chance to show the progression of circles as you make it through the term
- What did you understand and what did you not understand – opens space for them to not know everything
- Naturalization of ideologies- find a non-ideological game; one without gender roles, etc.
- Role-play with exaggerated roles to produce polarizing opinions
- Social impact game of the year, have the students find the games

- Demo stations and having students show off games that they're passionate about

Next steps for the Workshops

- Individual activities
- Syllabus exchange and review
- List of games that are good for teaching certain things
- List of games documentaries
- Facebook group for teaching game studies
- Revision of IGDA template for game studies
- How are you getting people to buy games, what are the practical elements of getting the games into class

- Set of knowledge that some people have that others need to access → good for a central repository to get it out
 - Diverse perspectives to get at different knowledge and expertise given the constraints in certain cultural contexts with specific constraints

- Having some sort of event to promote the repository and keep it live

Appendix One – Workshop Schedule

Saturday, May 16, 2015

Session 1

11:15-11:30 Welcome & Introductions

11:30 - 12:30 Game Studies 101

You have been asked (or you volunteered) to teach a game studies course at your university, and you are the only one with the background and expertise to do so. This hour covers basic information to help you, including suggested readings, assignments, goals and objectives. It discusses how different disciplines and fields approach such a topic, and deals (if time allows) with broader questions of institution support such as library and lab requirements, space needs, and general pedagogical concerns.

12:30 – 1:00 You Have Died

This short session asks participants to share their most notable failures, gaps, and omissions from previous experiences – either as the teacher or the student. What did you try and how did it go wrong? What kinds of blunders can actually be useful in the classroom? What can we all learn from such experiences?

1:00 – 1:15 Closing out Session 1

Session wrap-up and exchange of contact information; syllabus exchange.

1:15 – 2:30 Break

Session 2

2:30 – 2:45 Welcome & Introductions

2:45 – 3:45 Crafting the perfect assignment

Participants will be asked to share assignments, including in game studies and game design that have worked particularly well. These can be both solo and group assignments, as well as creative and scholarly products. What were the learning goals and how were the projects/assignments assessed? What types of classes would such an assignment work well for?

3:45- 4:15 TBA

4:15 – 4:30 Wrap-up

Note sharing, and discussion of future workshops, publications, etc. Formation of working group to address these issues.