


Chapter 3

Applying a Playcentric Design Process to Creating a First-Year Experience Course

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ABSTRACT

Recent literature on the field of gaming and play in higher education has called for continued innovation and engagement with game-based curriculum and exploration of applications of game- and play-based learning in specific disciplines. In this chapter, the author describes the process of creating a first-year experience course based in game studies. Drawing from Fullerton's model of playcentric design, the author considered how to create a learning experience that simultaneously introduced students to the field of gaming studies and provided a solid foundation of academic literacies. This chapter includes a literature review of current research in the field of gaming and play in education; an overview of the curriculum the author developed for this learning experience, including highlights of learning activities, content, and materials; and discussion on building learning experiences around gaming and play.

INTRODUCTION

Recent literature on the field of gaming and play in higher education has called for continued innovation and engagement with game-based curriculum and exploration of applications of game- and play-based learning in specific disciplines (e.g. Balakrishna, 2023; Brown et al., 2018; Crocco et al., 2016; Faris et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2022).

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In this chapter, I explore and present the process of designing and creating a first-year, interdisciplinary experience seminar around the topic of gaming and play in education. My goal for developing this course was to introduce students to how ideas about gaming and play can be used to develop academic skills and to think about academic issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. Additionally, I wanted to center this experience around the idea of students as creators and contributors to their learning experience (see Gros and López, 2016).

Work on outlining the game design process provides an interesting connection for the creation of this first-year experience course. Through centering the development process around Fullerton's model of "playcentric design" (2019), the opportunities created by a game and play-centered curriculum can be echoed throughout the design and delivery processes. Fullerton defines a playcentric design as "involving the player in your design process from conception through completion. By that I mean continually keeping the player experience in mind and testing the gameplay with target players through every phase of development" (2019, p. 12). For this course, designed around first-year university students, a playcentric design yields an interactive, engaging course design, where students can take ownership of their learning, explore different ways of representing academic information, select ideas and projects that best fit their preferred style of learning, and engage with content and information from different perspectives. Drawing on Fullerton's playcentric design process, I centered the design of this course around three broad areas: Researching and determining player (learner) experience goals, strategies for prototyping and playtesting various course elements, and experimenting with models of iterative design. Each of these areas is presented as a section of the chapter, bookended with an introduction and a concluding discussion.

SETTING PLAYER (LEARNER) EXPERIENCE GOALS

Beginning with Fullerton's concept of setting player experience goals, in this section, I will describe how learner goals are set and articulated. By situating the design and development process on existing literature on game and play in education, this section will simultaneously serve as an exploration of ideas and methods for game-based curriculum development and provide an outline of current trends in first-year course and program experience design. At the core of this course is the first-year student experience, engaging students with academic processes and discourse, learning about research strategies, practicing writing, and building community. Game-based learning provides an opportunity for students to explore these themes while investigating applications of play within higher education. Students will investigate themes of social justice, accessibility, and equity through game-based teaching and learning

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