Kids Play

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Office Hours: Friday after class

Course Description
Making games for kids ain’t easy, but it sure can be rewarding. Kids can be the harshest of critics and also the most appreciative of players.

Designing a game entails crafting a complex and dynamic system to produce engagement. Designing games for kids demands that you do all of that and make it look super simple. No 20 page booklets of rules. No relying on the good will of the player to hold their attention. Stir in the reality that a 4-year old is radically different from a 7-year old and you’ve got a formidable, but exciting design challenge in front of you.

Designing games for kids forces you to strip your games down to their essence honing your skills as an interaction designer. This class will lay out a basic framework for game design. Then we’ll use that framework to analyze and design games for different age ranges, skill levels and attention spans. We will also look at the interplay between games and education, focusing on ways to draw out learning through scaffolding. The class will focus heavily on production and playtesting. Students will make a series of games for different age ranges. They will also create curricular materials that scaffold one of their games to draw out elements of learning.

Assignments
• Game 1 - Little kids – 2-5 year olds
• Game 2 – Big kids – 6-10 year olds
• Game 3 – v2 – Modify and iterate a game
• Final Game + Curriculum

Expectations
• Attend the class and talk. For every two absences your grade will be lowered one letter grade
• Do all of the reading. I don’t like talking to myself.
• Turn in all assignments on time and complete. For each week your project is late you lose one letter grade.

Grading
• 15% In-class discussion
• 15% Little kids game
• 15% Big kids game
• 15% v2 game
• 40% Final Project + Curriculum

Schedule

1. Game Design Workshop
   A crash course in Game Design. We will lay the foundation for the analysis and design of games throughout the semester.
   • Reading: Marc LeBlanc, MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research, http://www.cs.northwestern.edu/~hunicke/pubs/MDA.pdf

2. Elemental Activities
   Many games, especially kids games grow out of simple activities. We’ll examine how to take something from an activity to a game with simple goals and intuitive rules. This is extremely important when dealing small kids. As part of the class we’ll look at the cognitive development of 2-5 year olds.
   • Reading: STATISTICAL UNDERSTANDING OF LITTLE KIDS
   • Reading: Common Core, English Language Arts, Kindergarten, http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/
   • Reading: Common Core, Mathematics, Kindergarten, http://www.corestandards.org/Math/Content/K/introduction/

3. Playground Games
   The world of playground and folk games offers an interesting view into the culture and abilities of kids. We’ll play some physical games, look at how they work and modify them.
   • Reading: Selection from Iona & Peter Opie, Children’s Games in the Street & Playground

4. Little Kids Games
   We will play and evaluate our first set of projects.

5. Shaping & Rewards
   Failure should be just as fun as success. We’ll look at the ways that games and research on parenting both use feedback systems of rewards and punishments to shape the behavior of players and kids.
   • Reading: Dr. Alan Kazdin, Everyday Parenting Toolkit, Chapter 1, http://www.scribd.com/doc/138957753/EverydThe-Everyday-Parenting-Toolkit-by-Dr-Alan-Kazdin-Chapter-One
   • Reading: Common Core, English Language Arts, Grades 1-4, http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/
   • Reading: Common Core, Mathematics, Grades 1-4, http://www.corestandards.org/Math/Content/K/introduction/

6. Board Games
As kids age, the amount of complexity they can handle increases. We’ll look at a range of simple to complex board games and examine how simple rule changes edge the games toward more dynamic engaging systems.

7. **Big Kid Games**
   We will play and evaluate the second set of projects.

8. **Are video games horrible saviors?**
   Video games educate in some surprising ways. They also terrify parents. We’ll look at the some good and bad effects of video games.
   - Reading: Common Core Grades 5-7
   - Lydia Denworth, “How Video Games Change the Brain,” *Scientific American*, Jan/Feb 2013

9. **v2 Games**
   We will play and evaluate our iterations of games.

10. **Scaffolding**
    Do games teach or do you? Good games teach you how to win them. So how do you help players transfer that knowledge into other domains?
    - Reading: Jim Gee, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, Chapter 2
    - Example Curriculum

11. **To the Future**
    Dynamic systems for dynamic ways of thinking. We’ll look at several forward thinking models for games and education.

12. **Final Games**
    We will play and evaluate the final projects.