

Creativity in the Game Design Classroom

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The way we educate new game designers has profound implications for their later creativity and productivity – and for the health of the game industry as a whole. Will we turn out a generation of students who are comfortable with innovation in game design? Or will we teach them to make safe, conventional, predictable choices?

In this workshop, we will collaborate to develop a working definition of creativity as it relates to games education. What do we really mean when we talk about creativity? Scholars from Amabile to Weisberg have different approaches, and we will draw on their ideas as we define what we hope to achieve, both for ourselves and for our students.

Next, we will get to know a variety of structured approaches to creativity in a hands-on way. We will experiment with guided brainstorming, de Bono's Six Thinking Hats, the incubation model and more. What are the benefits of different structured creative processes? What are the limitations of each? What are the limitations of using structured approaches in the first place?

Third, we will discuss the challenges of applying creativity research to game design education. For example, the bulk of research on creativity focuses on the creativity of an individual, while game design is highly collaborative. We will examine the work of Sawyer and others studying collaborative creativity, and explore the ways theories from the first half of the workshop can be modified to better apply to game design.

Finally, we will brainstorm ways to apply the workshop's lessons to our own game design curricula. Although classes in theory, design, programming and art have different specific needs, there are cross-domain approaches that support student creativity instead of stifling it. We will cover creativity in the game design classroom from beginning to end – curriculum design, teaching practices, grading and assignments, classroom culture, student recruitment and more.

This workshop combines research results from creativity studies with lessons from hands-on experience. Participants will become familiar with the major names in creativity research, and develop applications for that research to their own educational practice. Learning theory will also be considered. Participants should expect to leave the workshop with concrete ideas about how to modify their educational practice to better support student creative development.

Classroom learning is, of course, only a part of what it takes to make a creative designer. Student clubs, game jams, mentoring programs and more all play their part. What goes on in the game design classroom, though, can either support or undermine our larger educational enterprise. Let's see that it does the former!

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