Towards Diversity: Interventions in Curriculum and Pedagogy of an Introductory Game Design Course
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ABSTRACT
Transformation and the decolonization of the curriculum, modes of teaching, and classroom are key concerns in South African Higher Education. In game design education this need is exacerbated by the slow pace of diversification in both academia and the industry. This paper presents a close analysis of interventions undertaken into an introductory game design course to address the difficulties of diversification across racial, gender and economic divides. The results of the interventions are assessed, and recommendations for future adjustments to the course in aid curricular decolonization is are made.

Keywords
Game Design Education, Pedagogy, Course Analysis, Transformation, Diversity, Curriculum

EXTENDED ABSTRACT
There is a lack of diversity in games evident in both the content that is created, and the workforce that is creating it. This can be observed in the representation of gender, race, culture, financial access and geographic location. This concern has enjoyed ever increasing academic study and public debate, but the systemic depth of the issue remains. However, game education may perpetuate this problem by being deeply embedded in Eurocentric and Gendered discourse. The question then is how do we, as Game Scholars, impact and shape the narrative of the industry to come?

This paper argues that a fundamental impact on increasing diversity within games can be made by systemic interventions to our teaching practice and conducts a close investigation of a series of such interventions. The pedagogic methodologies specific to games should be examined in equal standing to core disciplines of game studies and game design, and the ways in which we teach be interrogated alongside the content of our courses. Teaching methodologies that are specific to game design are emerging, and these should be critically addressed from within the greater fields of Game Studies and Game Design. The research examines a series of pedagogic interventions undertaken to encourage the diversification of learning and the decolonisation of the curriculum in the first year introductory course to the Game Design program at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. These interventions hope to encourage more socially aware game design practice, the creation of
more diverse games, as well as to create a safe space for underrepresented groups to participate.

While the lack of diversity in games is pertinent internationally the inequalities that underlie these issues are heightened in Developing Nations, where the field is very young and the terrain uneven. In both contexts the issues are systemic, but they arise from varying socio-cultural conditions. This study focuses on a South African context but it can still shed light on approaches that could be internationally applicable to the teaching of game design.

The situation of Higher Education in South Africa is precarious, with the continuing #FeesMustFall student protests focusing the nation’s attention to the systemic inequalities in the education sector. (#FeesMustFall 2015) While the protests started with issues of economic access, they have expanded to encompass far reaching issues of transformation and diversity. (#FeesMustFall 2015) Curriculum transformation, which has always been emphasised by the South African Department of Education has now become imperative (South African Department of Education 2003; Habib 2015; Prinsloo 2016).

The accessibility of STEM fields in South Africa is skewed not only across an entrenched gender divide, but also across racial and economic divides. This has far reaching implications in the Games industry in South Africa which is overwhelmingly white male dominated. (Hall 2015) Games are seen as a luxury, with the vast potential they present obscured by the false assumption that they belong to an elite upper class (Walton and Pallitt 2012). The perception of games belonging to the elite is compounded by the severe socio-economic difficulties of entering the fledgling industry. It is the position of this paper that one of the fundamental ways to address this issue is through the creation of inclusive game design education environments and curricula to prepare a more diverse and critically engaged new generation of industry professionals.

The South African milieu necessitated an approach to teaching game design that lowers intimidation levels experienced through the demands of a high technology environment. In the introductory course Key Concepts in Game Design, which is the focus of this study, students are therefore introduced to game analysis, design and development through analogue games as a strategy to bridge the technological divide and to establish game design as discipline without the distractions of the digital. The usefulness of analogue games in the teaching of game design principles is well documented (Salen & Zimmerman 2003; Brathwaite & Schreiber 2008; Davidson & Costikyan 2011). This approach is augmented through a focus on the abstraction of design principles and continual comparisons to the systems of abstract analogue games, a genre firmly entrenched in much of South African culture. (Bogopa 2012; Burnett and Hollander 2004; van Binsbergen 1997)

In this paper the course is investigated in detail to determine the effectiveness of the initial approach, and interventions designed to further transform and diversify the curriculum are interrogated. The methodology used is that of Action Research investigating a range of data collected through a multimodal approach. (Archer and Newfield 2014; Avison et al. 1999) The process is a cyclical repetition of observing, reflecting, and intervening, collecting information on the process and critically engaging with the themes that emerge. This takes the shape of a close analysis of a series of curriculum transformation workshops, questionnaires, and interviews held with students as well as of artefacts collected from the lived course itself. The paper sets out the interventions taken in both curriculum design and teaching methodology that stemmed from these discussions and critically reflects on their impact and reception.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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