Developing playful cultures in education

Invited talk for Playful Learning SIG

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Quick overview

1. Our background
2. Game//Play studies: A framework for developing playful cultures in education
3. House of Game//Play
4. An example of developing playful cultures in higher education beyond the campus
5. An example of developing playful cultures in hybrid education beyond the classroom
6. Signature pedagogy: A framework for developing educational playfulness
1. Our background
Hybrid researchers: researching playful cultures in education

Claus research


Joint research


Rikke research


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Hybrid projects: developing playful cultures

Projects @ CUDiM we are involved in


Coding Pirates GameDev & Coding Pirates CUDiM (2015–)

House of Game//Play (2016–)
2. Game//Play studies
A framework for Developing Playful Cultures in Education

1. Playfulness
2. The magic circle
3. The lusory attitude
4. Hybridity & hybrid pedagogy
“Playfulness is a way of engaging with particular contexts and objects that is similar to play but respects the purposes and goals of that object or context”

“What we want is the attitude of play without the activity of play. We need to take the same stance towards things, the world, and others that we take during play. But we should not play: rather, we should perform as expected in that (serious) context and with that (serious) object. We want play without play. We want playfulness - the capacity to use play outside the context of play”

(Miguel Sicart, *Play Matters*, 2014)
Core concepts for playful education: The magic circle (Huizinga)

“The magic circle” is a metaphor for the creation of a specific social situation, in which participants across a virtual boundary into a secondary world or a ‘playspace’. This playspace is beyond profane seriousness and profane codes of practice, moral and ethical structures, and ways of being.

This also means that the circle is not something that is not either intact or broken, but rather is a “fuzzy social process”, a boundary between the real world and the play-world (Remmele & Whitton: 2014). The magic circle is then a liminal space - a sacred space.

The boundary of a liminal space is based on an implicit agreement between those engaged in play / the players. This is essential in order to preserve the sacred reality.
Core concepts for playful education: The magic circle (Huizinga)

The magic circle is interesting for education: Because it allows us to conceptualize a different kind of learning environment - a safe, collaborative place, in which learners can take control, take risks and where failure and mistake-making is not only accepted, but customary (Whitton, 2014).

Within this magic circle the learners can together conjure alternative futures and new worlds to explore new ways of being, doing and knowing through integrating lusory attitudes and engaging education playfully.

In doing so, we adopt what is called a lusory attitude.
Core concepts for playful education: The lusory attitude (Frissen et al)

The classical version: The willingness to accept voluntary obstacles (e.g. rules, goals, skill challenges) to make an activity enjoyable in itself and in the end makes it more rewarding, as actions gain special meaning (Suits: 1978).

Ludification of culture: playful attitudes, practices, and objects coming together in ludic worldviews that are potentially transgressive, sacred, revolutionary (Raessens 2006 & 2014)

Lusory attitude: playfulness is no longer restricted to childhood, but has become a lifelong attitude (Frissen et al 2015, p. 10)

Ludic technologies always embody freedom (Frissen et al 2015, p, 38)
Core concepts for playful education: The lusory attitude (Frissen et al)

- freedom to be playful, freedom to make decisions, freedom towards the world
- contains its own course and meaning - being in and out of control
- being playful is beyond profane seriousness - in the act of play, profane reality is enriched by a layer of sacred seriousness
- being playful can become a genuine medium of scholarly inquiry into the roots of philosophical activity (Frissen et al 2015, p. 24)
- playing with the rules - playing in/with worlds - participatory cultures
- potential ‘rite de passage’: a room for new combinations of actions and thoughts.
Developing playful cultures: towards hybridity & hybrid pedagogy

**Hybrid Pedagogy** embody the combination of a lusory attitude, magic circle and playfulness. It is about the intersections and intermingling of:

- Physical Learning Space / Virtual Learning Space
- Academic Space / Non-academic Space
- Institutional Education / Informal Education
- Garden-walled Academia / Open Education
- Disciplinarity / Interdisciplinarity
- Academic Product / Learning Process
- Use of Tools / Critical Engagement with Tools
“As a philosophical concept, hybridity suggests hesitation at a threshold. Hybridity is not an attempt to neatly bridge the gap, but extends the moment of hesitation and thereby confuses easy categorization [...]. **Hybridity is about the moment of play, in which the two sides of the binaries begin to dance around (and through) one another before landing in some new configuration**” (Stommel: 2012 “What is hybrid pedagogy?”, u.p.).
3. House of Game // Play
A multi-hybrid house for developing playful cultures
Developing playful HoGP cultures
Hybridity from cradle to coffin & across ages and stages

- Coding Pirates CUDiM (7-12 years)
- Coding Pirates GameDev (12-17 years)
- GameIT College
- Aarhus University
- Game//Play institutions & corporations
Developing playful HoGP cultures
Hybridity against boundaries

Interminglings
Cross-sections
Hybrid domains

Research Education
Business Innovation
Culture Society
Developing playful HoGP cultures
Hybridity beyond artifacts

Play & Games: design & artifacts

Playful & Gameful: interactions & experiences

Ludification & paidiafication: culture & society
Developing playful HoGP cultures
Hybridity across dimensions

Institutions, corporations, organisations

Against the grain

Ahead of the curve
Developing playful HoGP cultures
Hybridity for growing playful together

- Togetherness around: STEM / Humanities
- Togetherness around: solution-making & future-making
- Togetherness around: wicked problems & wicked ideas
4. An example of developing playful cultures in HE

Game.Play.Design: ReThink (2016)
An example of developing playful cultures in HE: Game.Play.Design: ReThink (2016)

Game.Play.Design: ReThink
(playful courses, processes and pedagogies)

The Public Library Exam-Exhibition
(playful assessment & evaluation)

House of Game//Play Education Lab
(playful activities, principles and patterns)
Growing playfulness: Game. Play. Design

Theorizing the domain through playing with theory

Empathizing with people through playing in the world

Conceptualizing the design through playing with ideas

Finalizing the knowledge by dis-playing sacred worlds
Towards a playful pedagogy

Playfully curious (divergent thinking / imagination - the new & unknown) - digging in the dirt

Playfully courageous (inclusion / diversity - the different & strange) - intercultural togetherness

Playfully critical & creative (dialogue / reflection - the wise & sacred) - painful play / playful pain

playfully co-operative (sharing / remixing - the global & collective) - becoming bonkers in the world
“The key insight, to this end, that we gained from this first week was the value in working in diverse teams and applying a critical lens to deconstructing and constructing gameplay”. ⇒ Room for developing critical thinking.

“Rather than coming together to solve one specific, closed ended problem, the design space and constraints allowed for horizontal thinking. Each person in the group could meaningfully contribute to the discourse and production [of the game]” ⇒ Collaborative effort, bite size problems.
“Having a low-key working environment with room for play and experimentation - and enough caffeinated beverages to keep us energized throughout the day - was a definite strength of the structure of week 1.” ⇒ Having room to play.

“From the beginning the theme of rethinking was clear - from the texts we were asked to read, to the games we created through the jams - everything centered around being creatively critical” ⇒ Clear instructions and framing of the rules of the course.

⇒ Daily feedback from the teachers and the other groups: Giving support and assessment (feedback) and allowing the groups to fail early and learn from that failure (through the design challenges and constraints), rather than a huge catastrophic fail at the end of the course.
Playfulness and fun in a hectic HE course?

- “It is always fun to do practical tasks as sitting still for too long gets pretty boring”
- “The GameJam was a fun and fast assignment which got us into thinking about what ‘ReThinking game design’ actually is”.
- “So far, we are tired, but having fun :) Thank you.”
- “It has been fun and it works well to play a game and then work with it”.
- “The slightly playful and fun atmosphere (yet academic) is nice and very designerly!”
5. Coding Pirates GameDev
an example of developing playful cultures in hybrid education beyond the classroom
New technologies creating new practices creating new cultures

Children thinking / tinkering their own culture forward
This again comes to shape their game identities, practices & cultures

One example of this:
Coding Pirates Denmark & Coding Pirates GameDev
1500 Danish children (7-17), 500 volunteers, 50 departments
Weekly workshops educating through learning by doing

Workshops & exhibitions (9 run-throughs 2013-2016)
Coding Pirates Arcade Hall - Coding Pirates Playing the Refugee Crisis - Coding Pirates Game Hacks - Coding Pirates GameJam
Growing cultures for future citizens

**How** can we educate hand, heads, and hearts of future citizens and not ‘just’ transfer the surface structure or hidden curriculum of e.g. societal ‘value’?

**How** can we move from transmission of content & tools to growing critical creative cultures for thinking, being and doing?
Design thinking process: divergent thinking & imagining new worlds

Formation of hand, heads, and hearts of future citizens

Pedagogical ‘signature’ patterns enabling new cultures to emerge

Growing cultures: from the what to the why through the how
From the what to the why - 1. **Empathy**

- Playful **explorations** to create empathy, inclusion & diversity
- Empathy develops through exploring & **dialoguing**
- Pedagogical patterns for exploring & empathizing **with other views**
From the what to the why - 2. Define

Converging **understandings** for valuable & meaningful think/tinker

Defining leads to **shared insight** and understanding of a world

Pedagogical patterns for critical playful **collective knowing**
From the what to the why - 3. **Ideate**

Playful *experimentations* to draw up alternative worlds / worldviews

Ideation forges re-mixed ideas through participatory playful generation of **multiple worlds**

Pedagogical patterns for playfully constructing, de-constructing, and co-constructing
## From the what to the why

### 4. Prototype

| Convergent constructions to collectively create future playful cultures | Prototyping carves out new realities through playful co-creation & worldbuilding | Pedagogical patterns for critical playful co-operative doing |

![Diagram showing the Understand, Create, Deliver phases of design thinking with empathy, define, ideate, prototype, and test stages.](image)
From the what to the why - 5. Test (and back to 1)

Delivery of playful **worlds into reality**
(and back to beginning)

Delivering a **group exhibition / curation & presentation** to invite for other voices & worlds to join in play

Pedagogical patterns for open-ended critical playful **dialogic being in the world with others / otherness**

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**Understand**
Understanding ends in insight.

**Create**
Creation ends in ideas.

**Deliver**
Delivery ends in reality.

**Empathy**

**Define**

**Ideate**

**Prototype**

**Test**

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Images: People working and interacting in a workshop setting.
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Outcome of such divergent processes?

Pavlovian candy-throwing pac-man machine

Bridal veil vacuum-cleaner ping-pong machine

Dr. Who modular board game with robots as Daleks & Weeping Angels
6. Signature pedagogy
a framework for developing virtuous educational playfulness
(into the why-ness of things)
Playful cultures for future education

Developing signature pedagogy beyond the surface level: deep structures in teacher & student interaction & experience

Hybrid signature pedagogies: broadening and deepening playful pedagogies through technology & media potentials
The ‘purpose’ of both education & play often remains hidden

The hidden curriculum of ‘proper’ education & the ‘valuable’ formation of students

- Values & visions exist, whether you acknowledge and recognise them or not
- Education becomes more fulfilling & more able to fulfil its purpose when we make intentional designs and decisions that honor those values & visions
- When you know your own values and visions – as institution, curriculum/course designer or teacher – you can use them to make decisions about how to design, plan and practice education to realise its missions, goals and purpose – and begin to validate your playful practice
Why engaging the virtues education & play becomes important

• Values are fairly stable, yet they do not have strict limits or boundaries (e.g. Nixon, 2008)

• But as society & education change so might its values & visions. As our definition of valuable and meaningful teaching and learning changes so does its values and visions.
In order to grasp what is morally purposeful about academic playful practice, we have to see it as all of a piece and understand how the various activities that comprise it hang together.

We need to extend and deepen academic playful practice to virtuously perform the purpose of education.

Ontological and epistemological uncertainties (changing education) requires a new sense of moral purposefulness.

And then develop this moral purposefulness into a powerful virtuous signature pedagogy: heart, hand, head of playful academics & institutions.
“A signature pedagogy has three dimensions. First, it has a **surface structure**, which consists of concrete operational acts of teaching and learning [...] Any signature pedagogy also has a **deep structure**, a set of assumptions about how best to impart a certain body of knowledge and know-how. And it has an **implicit structure**, a moral dimension that comprises a set of beliefs about professional attitudes, values, and dispositions” (Shulman 2005, p. 54-55)

“...one thing is clear: signature pedagogies make a difference. They **form habits of the head, heart, hand** [...] Whether in a lecture hall or a lab, in a design studio or a clinical setting, the **way we teach will shape how professionals behave** - and in a society so dependent on the quality of its professionals, that is no small matter” (Shulman 2005, p. 59)
New educational futures?
Presenting signature pedagogy

Horizontally: A particular discipline (‘Pedagogy of the Professions’ Shulman, 2005)
  • Ways of teaching & learning cutting across institutions within a particular discipline, e.g. law (case dialogues) or design (design studio crits)

Vertically: A distinctive practice (‘Signature pedagogy / powerful pedagogy: The Oxford tutorial system in the humanities’ Horn, 2013)
  • Ways of teaching & learning which have such influence that they may in themselves shape disciplines e.g. ‘GO-IT’ or ‘playful education’ or ‘PAC’
New educational futures?
Presenting signature pedagogy

• Signature pedagogies = ‘habits of mind’: the ways of thinking, doing, being in eduction (as teacher / student and subsequently in the world (as professional / citizen)

• ‘We came to see, on the basis of our cumulative findings about creative practice, that there were something as distinctive about creative pedagogies as a handwritten signature’ (Thomson et al 2012) – this also goes for other pedagogies

• ‘When the emotional content of learning is well sustained, we have a real possibility of pedagogies of formation - experiences of teaching and learning that can influence the values, dispositions, and characters of those who learn’ (Shulman 2005, p. 57-58)
Signature pedagogy

Surface structures: concrete operational acts of teaching & learning

Deep structures: Assumptions about ‘how to’

Implicit structures: habits, ethics, values & ‘why’

Pedagogical patterns: mechanics of vision

Signature pedagogy: methods of teaching e.g. ‘playful teaching & learning’

Pedagogies of valuable / virtuous formation: experiences of education shaping the student’s head, hand & heart

“Signature pedagogy in the professions” (Shulman, 2005)
A (beginning) signature pedagogy emerging from the practice of playful education

- **Magic circles** to become daring/adventurous and go into the world beyond the classroom / campus / confinements of education - playing outside
- **Lusory attitudes & actions** to be empowered agents that create educational spectacles/events - dis-play
- **Ludic collectives** to construct alternative belongings together: silliness, children, pain, passion, topophilia - Participatory Academic Communities (Aaen & Nørgård 2015) - playing together
- **Sacred/professional play** to become virtuous academic citizens beyond assessment (Nixon 2008) - making education matter - playful commitment
- **Open-ended playfulness**: no endpoint, no endings - being(s) in play with worlds/words
A (beginning) signature pedagogy emerging from the practice of playful education

- **Freedom to fail**: To undertake activities that are not successful in the first instance without fear of reprisal or repercussions. **Playfully becoming someone** through courage: try-fail-try (THE ITERATIVE LOOPS)
- **Freedom to experiment**: Provides the space to create and invent things, develop ideas, test theories and experiment (in a context where failure is okay). **Playfully making something** with curiosity: make-wonder-make (THE DIVERGENT-CONVERGENT DESIGN PROCESS)
- **Freedom of effort**: Being able to decide how much effort to devote to play at any given time. Playing fully with something, then falls back to relax and rest. **Playfully belonging somewhere** through cycles: build-dwell-build (THE OPEN EDUCATION LAB & EXAM EXHIBITION)
- **Freedom of interpretation**: Learning about the world at the same time as learning with/in the world, and interpreting the meanings of actions and activity within the play space. **Playfully knowing the world/word** through construction: world-word-world (ACADEMIC CITIZENSHIP & SACRED/VIRTUOUS BILDUNG) (Building on Klopfer, Osterweil & Salen: 2009 + Whitton, 2014)
Developing playful cultures in education? Let’s discuss!

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References

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