

FLOW Conference 2008
Response for “Video Game Studies in the Academy”

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The current state of games studies and their place in academia is a tenuous one. Game academics and educational theorists using games remark about their ability to captivate the otherwise complacent, and speak of complex learning structures and appealing visuals that reel in and retain their vast audiences. If an ivory tower for games in learning academics exist, it shakes when we have conversations like the one I had with a school teacher from Michigan. Sharing my rapid-fire enthusiasm for the field and the potential of games, he came back with an absurdly valid grievance:

“Well, this is great for the researchers, but how do I use a game in the classroom when I have no time to learn a new game and figure out how to use it? When will someone tell me 'here is a game, this is how you use it'?”

Although great developments occur in our field of games in learning, we still lack a diverse body of concrete results of teachers using games in classrooms with success, obviously hurting our stance with greater academia. However, I believe it is not academia's attention or approval we should be yearning for. As game theorists in education, we need to gain the acceptance of the teachers, administrators, and most importantly the students for what we believe could augment education as we know it. Without the enthusiasm of teachers and students to use and learn from games which come from documented findings, we will lose interest, funding, and our stance in the learning sciences. How I propose we become a seriously taken field comes in three steps.

First, we diversify our research amongst many game genres. Games such as *Civilization* and *Sim City* are in many ways resourceful for learning aspects of History or Civic Policy, but these games take a great deal of time to learn and require a great commitment and risk from the teacher to inject into a thirty minute lesson with small chance of success. We should try to condense game lessons down and diversify into genres notable for their quick pick up and play factor (first-person shooters, mobile games, etc.). Games that can be quickly picked up and put down could appeal to teachers who only want to use the game for a supporting role. If they find increased interest and attention to these games, they may then be enticed to use more complex games like *Civilization*.

Secondly, we desperately need to keep in constant communication with our most important audience: teachers and students. If the teachers cannot use the game and the students get too frustrated or worse yet, cannot understand why they are playing the game, we lose the audience and the opportunity to learn goes flat. I believe that far too often, we see success after months or years of isolated testing fizzle once it reaches the classroom. This setback could be attributed to those running the experiment having no teaching experience (such as myself) or lack of input from teachers. Judging by the number of teachers I saw at my last conference and the numbers of new teachers who grew up with technology flooding the marketplace, I have few doubts that academic researchers eager to test their new lesson plan would not find willing participants. Working early and often with new and established teachers, gauging their interest on technology and gaming, and together creating a lesson plan workable in a classroom could provide greater numbers of success and generate interest from major gaming companies to introduce educational games into their development schedule.

If we piqued the interest of major gaming companies such as EA and UbiSoft, we would gain allies who have massive amounts of resources and talent. A game that is educational, aesthetically pleasing,

and shown to have success in the classroom could generate interest from additional educators willing to purchase an expensive usage license commonly found with most software. After all, at the end of the day, we are marketing a theory to the teachers and the game companies are marketing a product to a niche audience; if there is dual success it can only lead to increased cooperation and development.

All of my grievances with the game studies community listed above should not indicate that these steps are not already being taken. On the contrary, great work is currently underway both in my department and others that demands increased cooperation with outside educators and the initial findings from these projects are exciting to say the least. However, these steps are what I believe to be essential if we are going to make game studies and more specifically games in learning a serious endeavor; and to prove wrong the many detractors who believe this to be nothing more than a passing fad.