

Matthew Farber
Professional Growth Plan
August 2015

There is no greater thrill than to see technology empowering today's youth. To me, teaching is an iterative process, continually improved each year. Students are participatory co-designers, providing feedback about how their learning can become more engaging.

My middle school social studies classes are where I put Jean Piaget's constructivist ideas into practice—where students learn by doing, as well as Seymour Papert's constructionist approach—to learn by making (1962; 1993). I accomplish this by implementing a game-based learning (GBL) approach. Games are microcosms of real world, interconnected systems. Furthermore, games and simulations present content in an authentic context, which creates a situated learning environment (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Learning with games teaches: systems thinking; design thinking; user empathy; and persistence.

My teaching journey began after I graduated from the University at Albany with a major in History. I now hold a Master's Degree in Educational Technology, from New Jersey City University (NJCU) and am currently an Educational Technology Leadership Doctoral Candidate and adjunct faculty member at NJCU. This journey led to the 2014 NJCU Trailblazer Award. I also was awarded a Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation Educator Fellowship with Earthwatch, and a nomination to the prestigious Woodrow Wilson Fellowship's nascent HistoryQuest partnership with the Institute of Play.

Leadership

Vision is fundamental to being a transformational leader. This style is exemplified by actions that “change and transform people” (Northouse, 2013, p. 185).

One example of a visionary leader was Steve Jobs. Addressing the 2005 graduating

class of Stanford University, he said, “You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards.” Jobs's triumphant return to Apple can be attributed to his qualities as an effective, transformative leader.

Writing about the accomplishments of likeminded educators, as well as sharing best practice strategies, is a way to affect transformative change. As a leader, it is important to be cognizant of one's own strengths (Rath, 2007). This has led me to the field of educational journalism. Guest blog posts for online magazines, as well as print publications, extend my ability to transform the educational landscape. One example of note is KQED/MindShift, a leading national portal for game-based learning resources. 2015 led to an invitation to become a staff blogger for Edutopia, which is a division of the George Lucas Educational Foundation.

In January 2015, my first book, *Gamify Your Classroom: A Field Guide to Game-Based Learning* was published. It was part of Peter Lang Academic's New Digital Literacies and Epistemologies series. The series editors, Michele Knoebel and Colin Lankshear, have written extensively on new media literacy. Other authors in the series include games for learning academic James Paul Gee and wearable technology visionary Leah Buechley. My book received positive reviews from project-based learning expert Suzie Boss, national faculty member at the Buck Institute for Education, as well as from game design professor Lee Sheldon.

Promoting *Gamify Your Classroom* led to several speaking opportunities. Organizers of the Best Out-of-School Time (BOOST) Conference invited me to deliver a talk at its annual event in Palm Springs California. I was also invited to give the keynote address at the William Paterson University Educational Technology Conference in 2015.

My ability to transform how teaching gets delivered extended to an invitation to the Games for Learning Summit in New York City, in April 2014. Hosted by the United States Department of Education, along with Games for Change, it brought together over 200 game designers, academics, educators, and developers. The Summit led me to participate in sessions that, potentially, will have a far-reaching outcome. This video encapsulates that day: <https://youtu.be/PuCAu2vK-P0>.

The opportunity to help create meaningful educational games for students fulfills a long-term goal. A particular highlight was the co-design of the interactive fiction game, *Time Society Chronicles: Independence!*, with Erin Hoffman, the lead designer at GlassLab Games. The text-based virtual world takes my students, as well as other learners, into colonial Boston.

While my classroom is a space to test and learn, creating digital games for others gives an opportunity to truly transform learning. This is accomplished by playtesting and offering design advice to developers of content, including: BrainPOP, Schell Games, and GlassLab Games. These experiences have transformed my teaching practice; my hope is that my dissertation research will do the same for others in the field.

Service

Volunteering for service exemplifies my long-term commitment to innovative teaching. Leadership opportunities exist each time I give recommendations to boards that I advise. Presently, the developer of the children's e-book, *Dentist Bird: A West African Folktale*, Literary Safari, asked me to join its Advisory Board. Literary Safari develops mobile applications designed to enhance diversity in the children's reading space. Being the North Jersey Director for the New Jersey Council of Social Studies is a position that

enables me to spread the message of best practices in game-based learning into classrooms. As the newly appointed 2015-16 a Member-at-Large for the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Games and Simulations Network, I am able to take an active role at the conference, where I am also participating in three speaking capacities.

I also volunteer time with game-based learning organizations. This spring I became the Member-at-Large for the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Games and Simulation group. I also participate with the Games4Ed nonprofit. Larry Cocco, the Director of the New Jersey Office of Educational Technology, cofounded the group. Working with Cocco has afforded many opportunities to speak about innovation, including the two-part webinar series I organized with the National Writing Project, in 2015: *Game Design Across the Curriculum*.

Locally, in my middle school's community, I co-advise the Kiwanis Builder's Club, in which students raise money and help the local community. Annual projects include a coat and food drive for the Market Street Mission in Morristown, New Jersey, create Thanksgiving boxes for Denville Special Services, and ring bells for the Salvation Army. Other service includes taking part on my district's social studies curriculum revision committee and being a member of both the technology committee and the school-based professional development committee. Advising the school's Student Technology Club enables me to inspire students to learn after the school bell rings.

Proficiency in technology skills led me to teach educator service opportunities. One example is the Game-Based Learning for Beginners webinar I hosted for Common Sense Education. In the spring of 2015, I volunteered at the Moveable Game Jam at

Quest to Learn, the initiative that helps children design and create games together. I followed up on that day by publishing an article for the Edutopia community. In the summer of 2015, I will be designing a day for the A. Harry Moore School, in Jersey City. It is a school for low incidence special education students. The purpose of my work is for students and teachers to gain exposure to game-based education.

The Future

In the summer of 2015, I spoke several times at the ISTE. My mental model of the conference did not quite fit what I saw as a presenter. While it was widely attended, the atmosphere was frenetic and not always grounded in academia. It was more of a networking experience for me than a space to learn and grow.

I will continue to build my academic credentials and connections by speaking at national conferences. I have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from panels that I have participated in, including at Games+Learning+Society (GLS) and Serious Play Conference, as well as online panels. (The panel at GLS was covered by in the newspaper: bit.ly/1SiOGay.) The organizers of the Serious Play Conference recruited me to be a panelist and speaker; I was featured on its email as a “thought leader” in the field of game-based learning. I also will be speaking for the second year in a row at the Games in Education Symposium asked me to speak. The Symposium is a two-day conference of designers, teachers, and academics that provides professional development experience for K-12 teachers.

The GLS Conference was meaningful to me. It represents at the crossroads of higher education and game design. As a GLS panelist and poster presenter this year, I have harvested invaluable connections. Both of my 2015 submissions will be published

in the conference's peer reviewed proceedings journal. I also spoke with leaders in the field, including James Gee, Kurt Squire, and Constance Steinkuehler—among many others. Many of the people I interviewed for my book project were also in attendance. I feel honored to be considered a part of this community. One immediate goal I have is to keynote the Playful Learning Summit, the K-12 summit that takes place the day prior to the GLS Conference.

GLS is one of the more established programs in the field of research on learning games and is transformative in the space. My long-range goal is to be a part of a program like it—with faculty and game designers on staff, each advising doctoral students. It is the higher education equivalent of how teachers and game designers work together in the grades 6-11 environment at Quest to Learn, in New York City.

Securing academic credentials will only further my ability to affect change. Within the next one to two years, I plan to increase my role in academia. I plan to submit a paper to the American Education Research Association (AERA). I plan on publishing again in a refereed, peer-reviewed journal, as well as to have my dissertation published as a book.

For this upcoming school year, I plan to successfully research, write, and defend my dissertation. Additionally, this fall, I will continue in my capacity as an adjunct instructor at NJCU, integrating my e-learning knowledge into course design.

Games are, after all, a new media literacy skill. In the immediate future, I plan to build relationships with those in the connected learning space, like the National Writing Project (NWP) and the Digital Media Learning (DML) community. Other exciting opportunities are in the field of educational game design. The summer of 2015 brought

an invitation to visit Filament Games's new headquarters, in Madison, Wisconsin, and Schell Games, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

To grow as a leader is to continue to be curious about how game-based learning inspires learning. This starts with a professional reading plan of literature pertaining to conference proceedings—including the University of Michigan's Meaningful Play and the GLS proceedings—as well as reading refereed journals that pertain to games and learning. It is also necessary to read about other educational technological trends, as well as the learning sciences. For example, I need to read more of the original works of Seymour Papert, as well as Yasmin Kafai's work on situated learning in virtual worlds. Professional growth also occurs at conferences and seminars, in which face-to-face discussions bring meaningful connections.

I have established connections with various toy and game companies, including ThinkFun. Visiting game design studios to observe the creative and the iterative testing processes is creatively stimulating. I would be interested in providing advice on pre-existing and new products. I plan to continue developing and working with companies who innovate. My continued plan of study includes finishing the process of becoming a BrainPOP Certified Educator. Next summer, I have an opportunity to be the teacher-in-resident at Filament Games.

Finally, I seek to increase involvement in other professional growth activities that will enhance my development as an effective leader in an interdependent world. This summer, I attended the Edutopia Blogger Mini-Summit. Edutopia has over 600,000 Twitter followers, which enables my blog posts to reach a wide audience. Being an educational journalist affords me the opportunity to join the ranks of other influential

leaders in the field. While there I helped to plan out the future editorial calendar of the website. I am also the co-host of the game-based learning show on BAM! Radio, which features intriguing guests who speak on games and learning.

I plan to continue to deliver workshops, talks, panels, and poster presentations on game-based learning. My passion fuels the direction that my professional life has taken.

I still have much to accomplish in my career as an educator.

References

- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Northouse, P. G. (2013). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Papert, S. (1993). *Mindstorms: Children, computers, and powerful ideas* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Piaget, J. (1962). *Play, dreams and imitation in childhood*. New York, NY: The Norton Library.
- Rath, T. (2007). *StrengthsFinder 2.0*. Omaha, NE: Gallup Press.
- Stanford University. (2008, March 8). Steve Jobs's 2005 Stanford commencement address. Retrieved August 11, 2014 from:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF8uR6Z6KLc>