

Decentring the Canon

Building a Community-Endorsed (Curriculum) Framework
for British Games Education

Introductions



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Growth in Games Education

- British games education has expanded rapidly since 2001:
 - Critical Game Studies
 - Games and Society
 - Game Design
 - Game Programming
 - Visual Design
 - Audio Design
 - Interactive Storytelling
 - Game Production
 - Business of Gaming

Context

- Game education tends to span across cultural studies, creative practice, technical development
 - Transdisciplinary, with different approaches to education
 - Programmes vary widely
- Research-informed guidance exists, but is scattered
- Current trends:
 - Widening participation and social mobility
 - Skills and employability agenda, growing UK creative industries
 - Industrial strategies (immersive, createch, etc.) – proliferation of digital game technologies and design skills

Limited Curricular Guidelines

- IGDA 2008 guidelines outdated
 - HUG framework forthcoming
- Computing QAA benchmark 2022 frequently used, which references ACM/IEEE/AAAI guidelines that are rather techno-centric
- Games Research Association of Poland 2018 offer a whitepaper with a design-focused framework

We have a maturing discipline without a contemporary community-endorsed curriculum framework

HUG vs CS-2023 vs GRAP2017

- IGDA HUG (Holistic Undergraduate Games):
 - Conceptual compass, limited specificity
 - Aspirational / universal ambition
 - Unresolved practice-theory tension
- ACM CS2023:
 - Defined knowledge areas, of which “games” is a small part
 - Structured techno-centric learning outcomes
 - Prescriptive core/elective structure
- GRAP 2017:
 - Tight focus on design
 - Scaffolded progression
 - Fewer socio-cultural or theoretic parts

Defining Some Terms

- **Curriculum:** The planned educational experience.
- **Programme:** A structure of modules leading to an award.
- **Module:** A single unit of study.
- **Syllabus:** A sequence of topics covered within a module.
- **Learning Outcomes:** What students should demonstrate.
- **Assessment:** How attainment is evidenced.

Why Curriculum Matters?

Curriculum is where inclusion becomes operational.
Every curriculum tells a story about:

- What knowledge matters
- Who belongs
- What success looks like

A curriculum isn't just content: knowledge; skills; values and virtues; identity; power; and so on.

The Canon

- The *canon* is the collection of ideas, practices and histories treated as normal, foundational or indispensable within a discipline.
 - We mean **socially established** rather than *correct, universal, or timeless*
- Rather than seeing the canon as an absolute truth, a curricular framework could frame it as historical artifact: one approach, but not the only way.

The Canon

- We're using the term a bit more broadly today, thinking beyond well-known game titles to a range of curricular considerations
- One might consider:
 - Eurocentric/North American design histories;
 - Industry-standard engines and tools;
 - Triple-A (AAA) production pipelines;
 - Foundational design/development principles and processes;
- Potentially, a framing of "success" which leans towards commercial viability in the mainstream

Decentring

Decentring is the deliberate political and scholarly act of moving the canon to the periphery to make room for alternative voices, methods, and identities. We seek:

- Plurality
- Context
- Dialogue

Overreliance on existing canons can marginalize concerns and can reinforce existing power structures.

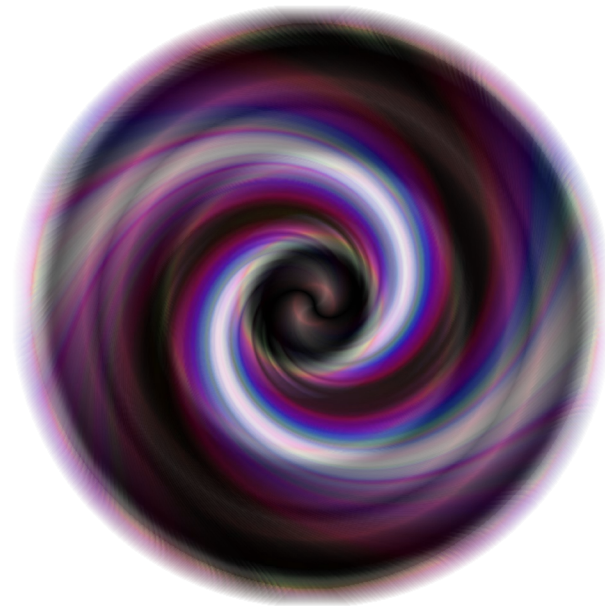
Decentring

- However, decentring does not reject the canon. It does not mean completely deleting technical fundamentals or ignoring industry practices.
- Instead, it displaces them from being a centre of gravity. There is value in repositioning marginalised topics as foundational pillars rather than afterthoughts.
- It's about asking why some knowledge has become central while other knowledge remains peripheral. Why is this the centre?

Exploring the Periphery

Whose games?

Whose
accessibility?



Whose histories?

Whose success?

Whose labor?

Whose knowledge?

Whose future?

Objectives

The objective of this workshop is to bring together researchers, educators, and practitioners to critically examine curricular assumptions and canons to collaboratively explore broader, decentered foundations (i.e., additional pillars) for a contemporary curriculum framework for British game education.

Rather than proposing a finalized framework, today we aim to surface shared priorities, tensions, and emerging principles that might inform future efforts.

Listening to Lightning Talks

Rory: Coverage vs Deep Inquiry

- Tension between coverage (particularly of technical skills) and values-led inquiry (critical thinking).
- Potential synergies to explore, aligning outcomes with creation/play as epistemic practices allowing students to learn by making and playing subversive, experimental, hyper-local games,
- Opportunities to evaluate work against ethical and creative standards rather than just economic/populist ones.

Tom: Organic vs Forced Cross-Pollination

- Hidden curriculum
- Studio-style collaboration
- Learning opportunities at game jams
- Typically, extra-curricular processes
- Culture and confidence barriers
- Pigeonholing / gatekeeping

Sokol: Games as Epistemic Practice

- Blurred lines or clear lines between computer science and games
- Spectrum level design and multiplayer networking
- Using games as tools for learning other topics
– why is this acceptable?

Phoebe: Critical Pipelines

- Challenging the view of game development techniques as a fixed workflow
- From rote or tutorial following approaches to creative problem solving as an artist or craftsperson
- Situating present development practice in historical evolution

Undertaking the Workshop Activities

Activity 1: Mapping Curricular Pillars

- **Explore Key Concepts** (10 mins): Individually, write down themes, tools, or concepts that you think *are* or *should be* important on post-it notes (one idea per note).
 - Feel welcome exercise some freedom with these – anything that could be part of a curriculum or syllabus.
- **Sort & Categorise** (10 mins): Draw a circle on the paper. As a table, sort post-it notes. Now, place your ideas for new pillars,
- **Rediscover Pillars** (10 mins): As a table, group the peripheral notes into 3-4 macro-themes. Circle these and label them.
 - These are your new "decentred" pillars.
- **Tension Check** (5 mins): Draw a line between your new pillars and the centre. As a table, annotate the line with any frictions you envision between these new pillars and the centre.
- **Sharing** (2 mins per table): As a table, share your "decentred" pillars and what you think the biggest systemic tensions you envision.

Approx: 45 mins



BREAK

Activity 2: Curriculum Synergy & Friction

If you missed the first session, please feel welcome to join in:

1. **Join a Table** (3 mins): Choose a table, each has its own pillar (identified from the earlier activity).
2. **Explore Curricular & Methods** (15 mins): As a table, imagine the different ways students might learn the topic, consider the various aspects of the curriculum (e.g., learning outcomes, delivery methods, assessments, and so on). Write these down on the paper.
3. **Navigate the Shift** (7 mins): As a table, consider what the barriers and tensions might be to adopt the proposed approaches. Write these on post-it notes and place them on the paper.
 - Consider synergies and frictions. For example, to what extent does it support critical thinking and/or gradueness – how does it shift perspectives? What are the institutional and/or governance barriers that inhibit adoption? What are the practical resource constraints? Are there advantages to integration with other parts of the curriculum.
4. **Share** (1 min per table): As a table, briefly share you approach(es) to covering the topic: “To learn [Pillar], our students will do/create/play X. Their learning is shown by Y, which signals they understand Z...”

Approx: 30 mins



Activity 3: Towards Future Frameworks

Reflect on Current Gaps: As an individual, consider the concerns and tensions that have been raised during the workshop, and whether they surface curricular gaps (5 mins)

- What is being left to the periphery? What are your concerns? What are the tensions?

Articulate Your Asks: As a table, explore what you would want from a new curriculum framework and/or supplementary guidance. Write these down. (10 mins)

- What is still missing? What is hardest to change? What do you need help with?

Imagine Change: As a table, produce a rough grid labelled inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. Map out these theories of change for British curricula for your pillars. (10 mins)

- Inputs: Resources, staff, etc.
- Activities: Tasks, interventions, actions, etc.
- Outputs: Products, deliverables, etc.
- Outcomes: Changes, pathways to impact, etc.
- Impact: Ultimate, long-term vision.

Reporting back: Share your key inputs, activities, outputs, oncomes, and impacts with the rest of the group (1 minute per table)

Approx: 30 mins



Exploring Next Steps

Proposed Next Steps

- Identify core values, curricular pillars, and knowledge areas
- Articulate key competencies
- Map challenges and opportunities:
 - Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
 - Ethics
 - Intersectionality
 - Automation
- Explore ongoing collaboration through a follow-up working group
 - Please sign up if you're interested
- Progress towards community-driven guidelines and research outputs to aid curriculum designers

Proposed Next Steps



If you're interested in joining a working group to take the work further, please provide your email address:

<https://forms.office.com/e/DEG0vtEBcp>

Thank you for listening

Any Questions?

The next session is the BDiGRA AGM
in Cinema-CAB205