

# Approaching a Pedagogy of Game Writing

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# My background



- Writing Teacher
- Writer
- Researcher
- Teaching Writing Researcher

 ped·a·go·gy

/ˈpedəˌɡæjē/



Learn to pronounce

*noun*

the method and practice of teaching, especially as an academic subject or theoretical concept.  
"the relationship between applied linguistics and language pedagogy"

*Pedagogy, you say?*

(fancy) term for:

- Teaching
- Instruction



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# Assumptions

- Instructors are vital in developing effective pedagogy.
- Effective pedagogy relies on more than personal experience or teaching skill.
- Effective, well-established practices from a range of disciplines can be applied to other fields to enhance instruction.



# Assumption I

- Instructors at the center: leverage the experience of educators.



# Assumption 2

- Effective pedagogy evolves: educator-scholars who are receptive to students; recognize & navigate the structure/systems of their institutions.





# Assumption 3



- Effective instructors should engage established disciplines
- Whatever you studied fuels your passion as an educator—lean into that resource.

# Arriving at a topic

- Sought 20,000-foot view of CGD
- Tried and failed (but learned) with previous studies.
- In memoriam:
  - How/what narrative literature should we...?
  - What skills should we “*really*” be teaching...?
  - What do they (industry) think we’re teaching...?



# Failed Research Questions

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How/what narrative literature should we...?

- *Interesting, no direction.*

---

What skills should we “really” be teaching...?

- *Many directions, few of them interesting.*

---

What do they (industry) think we’re teaching...?

- *Just frustrating, really*

# Conceptual Framework

- Defined Purpose
- Bracketed
- Stayed Flexible

Develop/improve pedagogy  
for game writing.

Review relevant literature

Engage practitioners

Learn about their  
experiences

Repeat

# Areas of Competence, Explained

## Writing and Storytelling

- Not the same as having/pitching ideas or possessing vast knowledge of existing media

## Communication and Collaboration

- Not just buzzwords; desire to know the minds of others; emotional intelligence

## Understanding Systems and Dynamics

- Not just how games are made; seek to understand and appreciate the processes of development; find creative identity

## Tool Proficiency

- Not just Twine, etc.; understanding how various tools work at a basic level; capacity of self-teaching; transfer

## Understanding Play

- Not just a super fan; knowing the line between interactive and traditional storytelling in games

*Remember: ...what we want students (to be able) to do, not just what we want them to know.*



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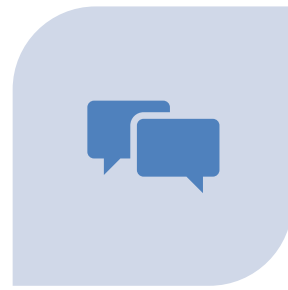
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# Functional Competencies



WRITING AND  
STORYTELLING



COMMUNICATION  
AND COLLABORATION



UNDERSTANDING  
SYSTEMS AND  
DYNAMICS



TOOL PROFICIENCY



UNDERSTANDING  
PLAY(ERS)

# Why Fun-comps?

Malleable; accurate as a result

- Nothing definitive in coding.
- Nothing like game writing.

Allows instructor freedom & effectiveness

- Engage individual strengths, contextualized
- Ability to assess meaningfully



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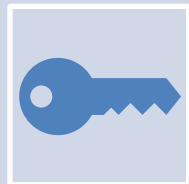
# Writing and Storytelling



Not the same as having/pitching ideas or possessing vast knowledge of existing media



English, Creative Writing, Journalism.



Keys: Understanding, Practice, and Rigor

- Understanding writing is a process;
- Seizing opportunities to practice;
- Enforcing standards (please!).



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# Communication and Collaboration



Not just buzzwords; desire to know the minds of others; emotional intelligence



Communication, Business, Psychology



Keys: Reflective Practice, Demonstrated Value, and Emotional Intelligence

- Deepen learning through reflection;
- Provide models and assess;
- Situate as emotional intelligence and intellectual empathy.



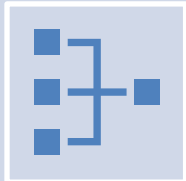
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# Understanding Systems and Dynamics



Not just how games are made; seek to understand and appreciate the processes of development; find creative identity



Activity Theory, Industry Research / Case Studies, Systems Thinking and Logic



Keys: Understand role in system, Promote creativity amidst restriction, Appreciate social components of industrial production

- Identify individuals within production;
- Understand power structures of development
- Roleplay to understand minds of others

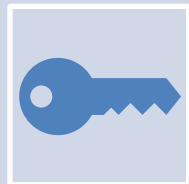
# Tool Proficiency



Not just Twine, etc.; understanding how various tools work at a basic level; capacity of self-teaching; transfer



Game dev work in the classroom and elsewhere; Professional Writing; Web Design; Research (SPSS / NVIVO) (actually).



Keys: Develop self-reliance and resourcefulness; use Effectiveness as key criteria; creative curiosity

- **Willingness to self-teach; openness to explore.**
- **Not always a “right” way; effective is the goal;**
- **Thoughtful tinkering to become own best critic.**



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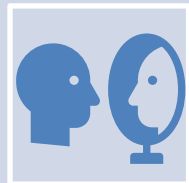
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# Understanding Play(ers)



Not just a super fan; knowing the line between interactive and traditional storytelling in games



Game Studies, Media Studies, Economics, Behavioral Psych



Keys: Leverage students' prior knowledge; Incorporate historical context; Create for someone else

- *Someone* likes this game... tell us why;
- Learn from historical trends;
- Create for other demographics or the differently abled.



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# Take Action: Areas of Competence In the Classroom

## Writing and Storytelling

- Practice writing as craft; focus on flexibility; understanding conventions through courses in literature, film, etc.

## Communication and Collaboration

- Activities that complicate authorship; iteration; reflection

## Understanding Systems and Dynamics

- Genre knowledge of industry; reflective practice in collaboration

## Tool Proficiency

- Writing outside of word processing; (conceptual) tool manipulation; low barrier software

## Understanding Play

- Critical play; ludology; theories of immersion; Game Narrative Review competition (IGDA Writer's SIG)

Keep in mind: not all of these areas are conducive to traditional assessment, so be flexible.



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# Essential Roles

## (Word)smith

- Does many things with words; does anything with words.

## Sensemaker

- Makes things clear in/through execution.

## Advocate

- Appreciates ideas in context and acts accordingly.

- Situating student activities leads to transfer.
- Any chance is a good chance.



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*Fill in the particulars as you like...*

- Not everything has to be a semester-long course;
- Student learning can—and **SHOULD**—be assessed through more than just grades.

*Lack of rigor leads to ruin: don't let students go through the motions.*



# (Word)smith

**2.** As the second element in compounds, denoting a person who uses or makes with skill that specified by the first element.

See also *clock-smith n.* at *CLOCK n.*<sup>1</sup> Compounds 2, *fingersmith n.* at *FINGER n.* Compounds 2a, *GUNSMITH n.* 1, *jawsmith n.* at *JAW n.*<sup>1</sup> Compounds 2, *JOKESMITH n.*, *SONGSMITH n.*, *sword-smith n.* at *WORD n.* Compounds 5, *TUNESMITH n.*, *verse-smith n.* at *VERSE n.* Compounds 3a(a), *WORDSMITH n.*, etc.



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# In curriculum development:

*CGD Course Availability Sample*

Course	Required of All Students	Required in Some Specializations	Elective	Not Available
Interactive Narrative	24.2%	19.7%	21.2%	30.3%
Animation	22.7%	31.8%	21.2%	21.2%
Game Research	24.2%	13.6%	31.8%	24.2%
Game Programming	31.8%	24.2%	25.8%	16.7%
Critical Game Studies	30.3%	4.5%	21.2%	39.4%
Project Courses	56.1%	6.1%	12.1%	19.7%



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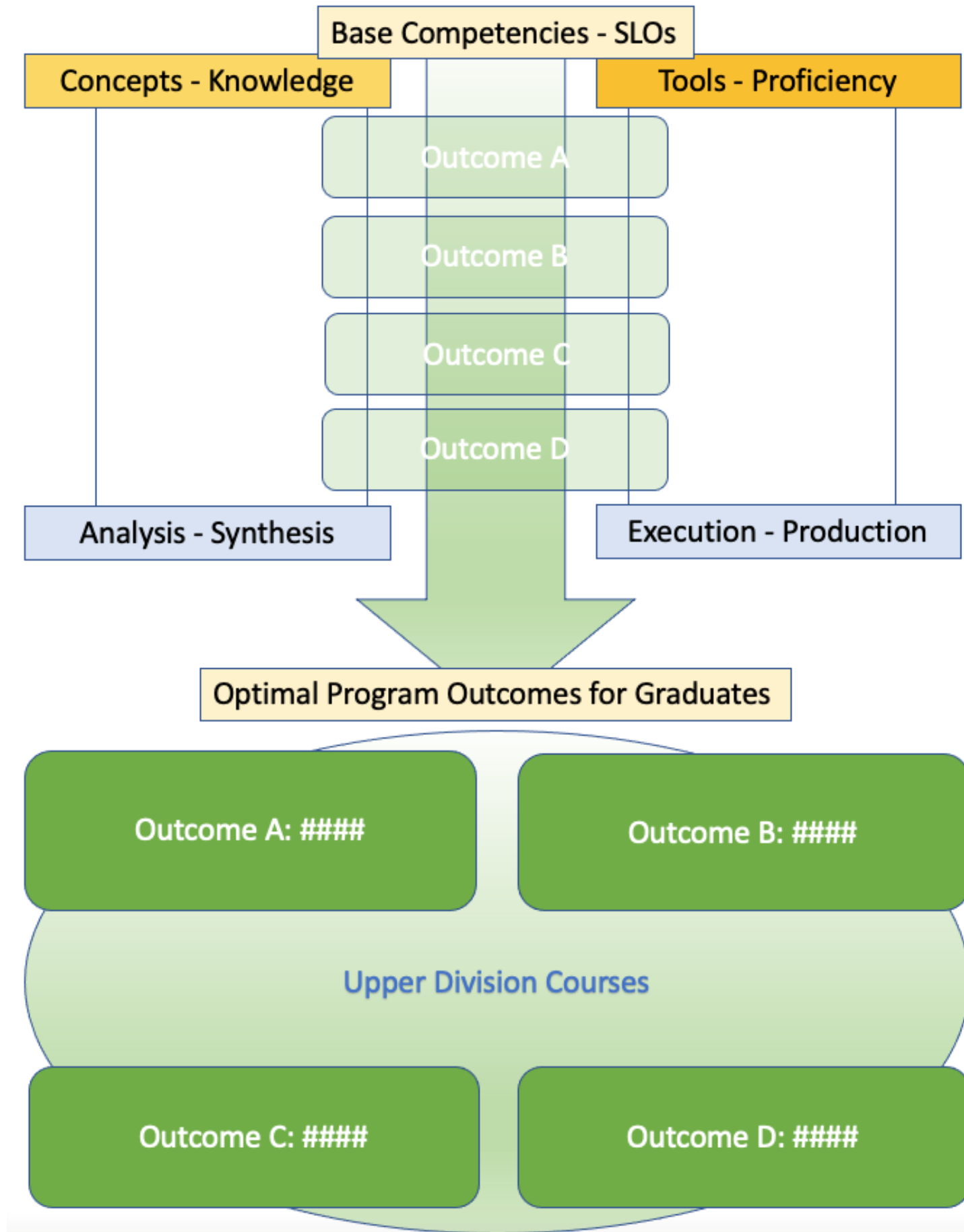
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# Why just “approaching” a pedagogy...

- Must continue to evolve;
- Leverage past experience
- Engage other disciplines
- Hold ourselves accountable to our students.

**Thank you!**

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[\*\*game.gmu.edu\*\*](http://game.gmu.edu)

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