

Video Game Development in the Humanities as Practice-Based and Arts-Based Research

KEYWORDS: humanities, pedagogy, arts-based research, practice-based research, teaching

Organizers:

Camila Gutiérrez is an Assistant Professor of Arts and Humanities with a focus on Video Game Studies at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. She holds a dual-title Ph.D. in Comparative Literature and Visual Studies. She integrates experiences of video game making in her university-level pedagogical practice, in courses from a variety of humanistic fields, whether they are in culture, literature, or communications.

Molly Appel is an Assistant Professor of English at the Department of Humanities of Nevada State University. She holds a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature with a minor in Latin American Studies and a Master of Science in TESOL. Her work focuses on how Latinx and Latin American literatures have been a space of feminist and decolonial pedagogies of human rights and social justice. She has been an educator in K-12 and higher education classrooms for over 15 years.

Duration: 3 hours

Number of participants: 10

Participant profile: Faculty, graduate students, or researchers interested in the pedagogical application of video game development at the introductory level. Participants should bring a laptop they can use during the workshop.

Participant Selection: Organizers will circulate a Google Forms registration tool and prioritize selecting a diverse group in terms of career positionality and regional representation.

Learning Outcomes:

- Know about at least four instances, in three different institutions of higher education, where video game development was integrated to humanities courses.

- Possess a critical language to support and promote video game development in humanities higher education.
- Understand video game development as an act of producing knowledge and culture, according to the principles of practice-based and arts-based research.
- Ability to use and teach basic tools for game development.
- Create a unit-contained or semester-long video game development project for a university-level humanities classroom.
- Adapt a portfolio of tools for assessment and evaluation, such as check sheets, rubrics, and team-based reports.

Summary

Organizers Camila Gutiérrez and Molly Appel will share and reflect on their experiences teaching video games creation in humanities classrooms at The Pennsylvania State University, Nevada State University, and The Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. They will explain the fundamentals of practice-led research and arts-based research (commonly grouped under the term *investigación-creación* in Spanish) and their relevance to video game projects in the classroom. Their introductory presentations will reflect on the powerful implications of creating digital narratives, such as video games, in lieu of conventional research projects presented in the essay form, which typically favor academic prose over other forms of knowledge transmission. According to the 2018 report of the Alliance for the Arts in Research University (A2RU), research is frequently understood as reproducible knowledge guided by systematic questioning and inquiry (A2RU 2018a, pp. 4-6). Meanwhile, arts-based research opens the door to the creation and dissemination of new culture through practice-led experiences that focus on humans and design (A2RU 2018b). Furthermore, Eisner and Barone (1997) argue that the seven pillars of arts-based research include “the creation of a virtual reality, the presence of ambiguity (...) the promotion of empathy (...) and the presence of aesthetic form”.

Following these tenets of arts-based research, this workshop will demonstrate that the critical creation of video games itself, as digital media loaded with affective value (Anable 2018, Cremin 2023), whether for original stories or adaptations of literary or cinematic worlds, can constitute research for humanities students. Throughout the workshop, participants will become familiar with the genre of zine video games (Anthropy 2012) and will learn to use basic tools for game

creation that include text-based interactive storytelling (*Twine*), and 2D pixel art platforms (*Bitsy*, *RPG Playground*). The workshop will also include a recorded demonstration of *StellarX*, a game-making tool that allows students to create 3D games while immersed in virtual reality. Participant teachers will be guided in the conceptualization and creation of their own video game development assignment, thinking in terms of guiding students to engage in literary, visual, and procedural rhetorics (Bogost 2007), adapted to the learning objectives of the course they may be teaching or planning to teach. Organizers will assist in creating didactic materials such as check sheets, rubrics, and other assessment or evaluation tools for the implementation of the project. This workshop is oriented to teachers whose students do not have a mastery of programming languages. We operate on the premise that video game development assignments can and should introduce humanities students to the logic of interactive storytelling and virtual world creation, which are achievable without prior knowledge of code.

Outline:

Introduction: (approximately 1 hour)

- Brief lecture on practice-based and arts-based research and their relevance to video game as a genre of literary studies in the humanities.
- Presentation of case studies & student-developed games: CMLIT 191 Introduction to Video Game Culture, CMLIT 13 Virtual Worlds, ENG 485 Video Games as Literature, COM 617 Lenguaje del Video Juego

Practice: (approximately 1 hour 20 minutes)

- Game making tutorials for *Twine*, *Bitsy*, and *RPG Playground*.
- Dedicated time for experiential learning.
- Participants present their zine video games to the group and reflect on the challenges and opportunities of creative work.

Reflection: (approximately 40 minutes)

- Pedagogical reflection and development of didactic materials based on available models.

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