Becoming, Circumstances and Practice: A Collective Biography of 3 Games Lecturers

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Becoming a Game Studies lecturer. What is the point? We work in a field that is interdisciplinary (Deterding 2017). Yet, the ways in which our field is imagined can be relatively narrow – as in the recent UK Video Games Research Framework (UK DfCMS 2023). Here, we focus on the relationships between teaching Game Studies and the field. Ongoing questions about the field are one reason why it is important to continue to reflect on what we are doing, and why. In this paper, three games lecturers, collectively reflect on our teaching practices as a form of 'cultural work' (Freire 2005), constituting and cultivating the future of Game Studies.

During the last two decades, there has been considerable expansion to Higher Education (HE) provision related to videogames (Keogh and Hardwick 2023). We have seen writings and reflections on the act of teaching games in HE, including: how game-related courses can be shaped by multiple epistemological affiliations and pedagogical models (Barba 2022; Rouse and Malazita 2023) the relationship between students and the subject matter (Zagal and Bruckman 2008; Ashton 2009; 2010) pedagogical approaches and challenges (Waern 2013; Geyser 2018; Bettochi, Klimick, and Perani 2020; Phelps and Consalvo 2020; Prax 2020; Bergstrom 2021; Weiller 2021; de Paula and Carr 2022; Wu 2023) and, more recently, the interconnections – especially in Anglophone Global North HE – between games education at universities and discourses on employability and labour conditions (Harvey 2019; 2021; 2023; Keogh and Hardwick 2023).

The work presented here proposes a contribution to Game Studies by looking at a particular element that is often implied, but rarely addressed in this body of research: how does one become a games lecturer? What kind of epistemological affiliations, pedagogical practices and traditions, and aspirations towards our own teacherly work do we have? And how do we, lecturers, respond to emerging interests shaping the evolution – understood here not as 'bettering', but as 'moving onto different phases' – of Game Studies as a field?

In this small-scale, reflexive study we examine our own experiences teaching videogames at different HE institutions in the UK. Beyond our commonalities – e.g., we all found ourselves working in the UK as Game Studies lecturers after having experienced transnational migration; we all are committed to socially-situated, critical

readings of games as elements of cultures –, we are academics with different backgrounds, trajectories, and at different career stages – e.g., one is a professor; one is transitioning between early and mid-career academic; one is an early career academic.

In this paper, then, through a collective biography approach (Gonick 2015; Clift and Clift 2017), we leverage our own experiences, including our relationships with games and games research, the challenges found in different stages and iterations of our different teaching practices (including encounters with diverse students), and our own aspirations regarding games in HE in a productive way to understand how our different experiences and perspectives can both help challenge limited understandings of our field (Phillips 2020; Bergstrom 2022) and inform discussions on the possible futures for games in academic contexts. With this work, our goal is not to produce a 'how to' manual on teaching games as this would be inappropriate, considering the interdisciplinary nature of game-related education in HE. On the contrary, we argue that, in the same way that the teaching of games in HE should to aim prepare students into becoming cultural workers (Harvey 2019; Keogh 2023), we must recognise ourselves—games lecturers—as cultural workers in the Freirean (Freire 2005) sense: as cultural mediators helping to shape the field.

Keywords

Game Studies, Teaching game studies, collective biography, reflexivity.

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