

People make sense of the world through play. For Johan Huizinga, this was the defining characteristic of the human species. For me, this is a call to create playful work that invites users to re-examine and change their surroundings. In my work, I try to find spaces to intervene in traditional narrative and rhetorical processes. I see interaction and play as a way through the postmodern moment, toward a future created by remixing, rewriting, and replaying the present.

Good classrooms are like good playgrounds. Both are designed to foster playfulness, and to provide useful tools and permeable boundaries. As a teacher, I believe that learning requires play -- it is the means by which people retain, renew, and revise their understanding of the world. Play is the fundament of creative thought, an irreducible concept for which there are no substitutes and (unfortunately) no synonyms. For this reason, my primary goal as a teacher and an artist is to create an environment that engenders playfulness.

The first step in creating a playful classroom is to create a safe classroom. In my experience, students cannot play if they do not feel physically, emotionally, and intellectually safe. This is to say that physical safety is necessary but not sufficient for a good classroom environment. Students must feel safe enough to question the knowledge they receive, to measure it against their assumptions, beliefs, and experiences. And they must feel safe enough to express themselves fully, when they share their beliefs and experiences and ideas -- particularly in studio courses, where students must think creatively, produce creative work, and playtest and critique each other's work. To this end, I aim to not only create a playful classroom environment, but a playful classroom culture.

In order to establish a culture of playfulness in my classroom, I attempt to explicitly model playfulness as a teacher. When I present an interpretation of a concept, text, or game, I treat that interpretation playfully -- I attempt to situate it within its surrounding historical and cultural contexts, and offer alternative takes on the subject matter, all while telling the students why I am doing this (i.e. what my pedagogical goals are). This is especially true when I offer my own interpretation of something. As a white, educated, heterosexual, cisgendered male who owns a game company, I have a great deal of privilege that I am obligated to share openly with my students if we are to establish a safe, playful classroom culture. I encourage my students to treat my opinions and interpretations as they would any other ideas: they should be open-minded but cautious, and think critically about the things I say.

My experiences suggest that students will follow my lead, and will share their own privileges, opinions, concerns, and passions more freely, if I am successful in continually modelling this playful behavior. Further, students respond well when I make my pedagogical goals explicit -- they are better able to reflect on the design of the course, work within the constraints of that design, and offer suggestions about what might improve that design. Best of all, students also begin to embrace the classroom culture as *theirs*, and take responsibility for protecting and maintaining it. When my students become co-designers of their classroom experiences, they stop merely following rules and instead begin to play with those rules, with the contexts surrounding those rules, and they imagine what they would do if they were the teacher. In other words, they begin thinking like designers.

This culture of playful thinking serves as the foundation of every course that I teach. I want students to feel safe enough that they can participate with bravery and compassion, willing to take creative risks and share their fears and emotions, knowing that their playfulness will not

result in negative repercussions. Theorists of play generally agree that people become more and more averse to play as they get older: our beliefs and ideas become less malleable; we become less likely to take risks; we have less energy, and less free time. The older we get, the less we play. When I share this information with my students, it is with the hope that they will see the value of playfulness in our classroom, and try to encourage playfulness outside of it. I hope they will see, as Huizinga did, that playfulness continually creates and re-creates our cultures. Inside and outside the classroom, we can change our cultures through play.