

GAMES FOR HEALTH EUROPE

2026



GAMES FOR HEALTH
EUROPE

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for presentations at the

GAMES FOR HEALTH EUROPE 2026 CONFERENCE

I herewith confirm that there is not any conflict of interest with the conference organization or any of its sponsors.

Transparent Game Design:

A Framework for Making Learning, Health, and Rehabilitation Playable

David (D.S.) Cohen

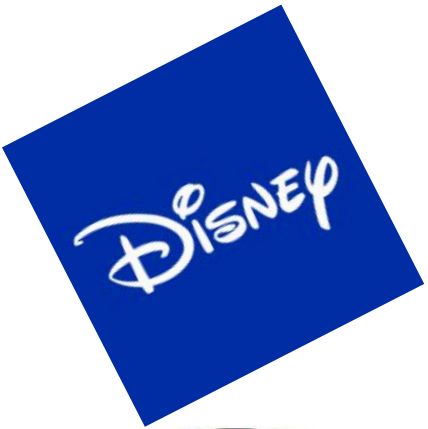
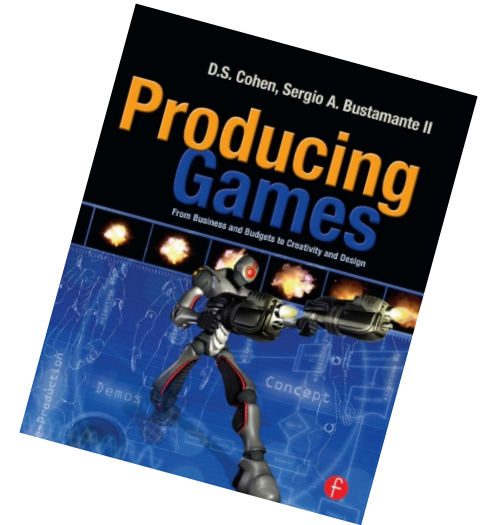
Department of Arts and Entertainment Technologies

The University of Texas at Austin

David (D.S.) Cohen

The
New York
Times

- Associate Professor of Practice
University of Texas at Austin, College of Fine Arts,
Arts & Entertainment Technology - Game Development & Design
- Games industry veteran and consultant



...a story about a playtest

- Goal - Social development, healthy habits
- Target age – Tweens (12 to 14)
- Focused on gameplay
- Educational Content - Implied Over Direct



Group 1

Told them its educational in advance



Expectation bias, it is “bad” before playing

Group 2

Told them halfway through



They Felt Tricked and Angry

Group 3: Just let them play

Then asked to describe their experience

Excitedly discussed what they learned through play



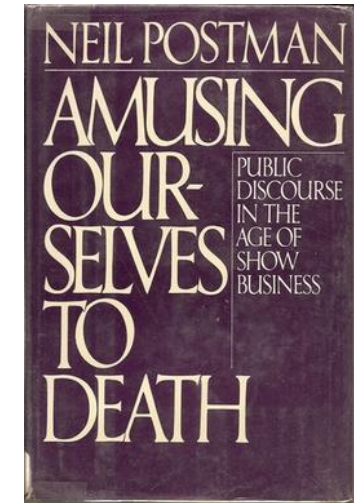
Then Why?



Learning through Play + Game



Criticism: Learning Should Not Be Fun!



Argued that when learning through play...

- Student take learning less seriously
- Makes learning seem too easy
- Neil Postman (1985)
 - Too minimal
 - Commercialism
 - Learning should be “hard-fought victories”

Early Game Attempts

Conflict, Disruption, and Disconnection



Learn  **Play**

Learn

Play

Learn

Play

Lead ~~in~~ Play

This is Transparent Game Design

Making the learning, health, and rehabilitation imperceptible to the player

Transparent Game Design Pillar 1 Game Designers Are Teachers

Progressive Stages

Commercial games teach the user through play.

Example: Levels are player progression in...

- Experience
- Engagement
- Learning



Experience In Relation to Environment



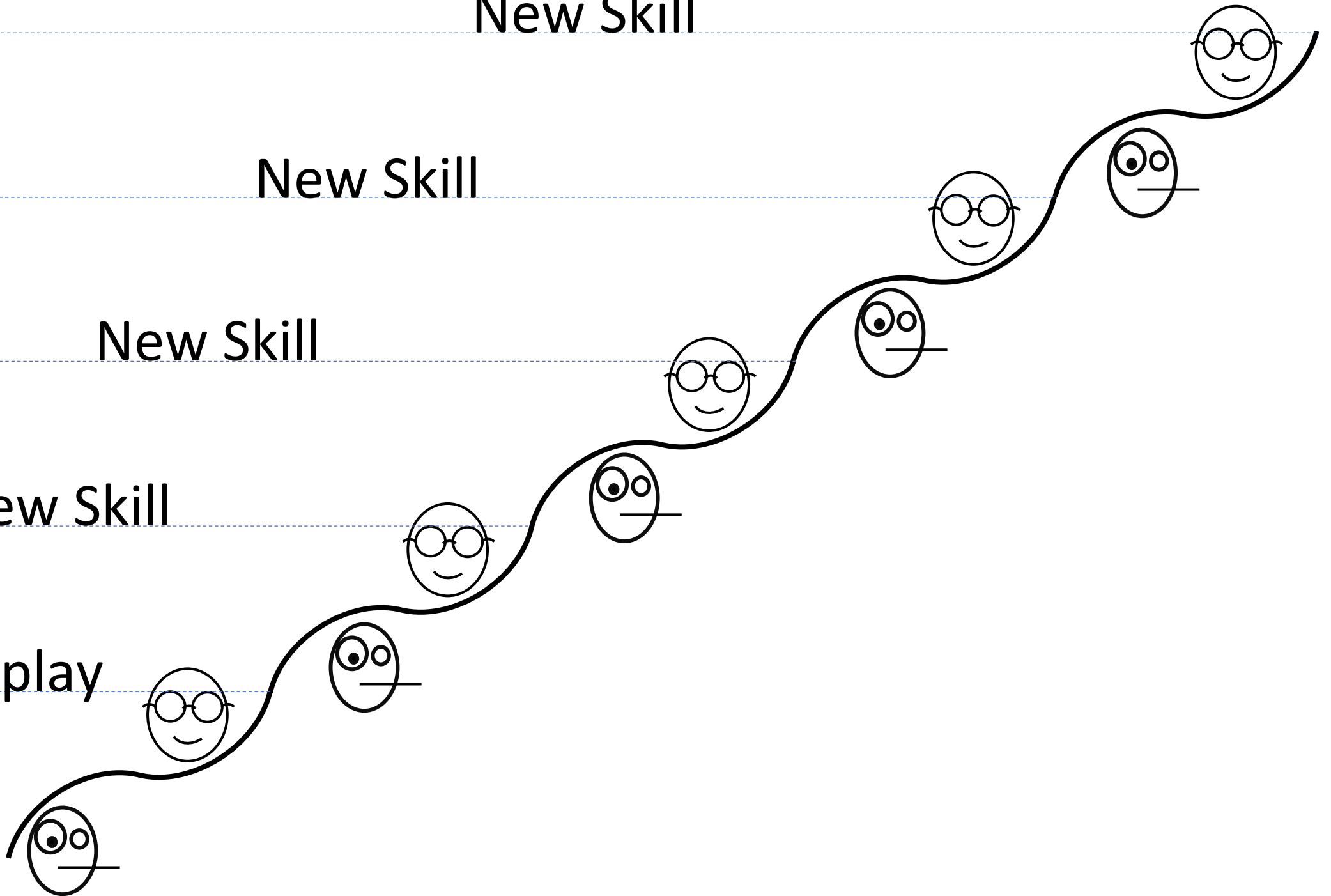
New Skill

New Skill

New Skill

New Skill

Basics of play



Transparent Game Design Pillar 2

Game Designers Are Coaches

AN ATHLETIC COACH



SETS
GOALS



BREAKS SKILLS
INTO LEARNABLE
STEPS



PROVIDES
REPETITION
WITH VARIATION



TRACKS
PROGRESS



MOTIVATES
THROUGH
FEEDBACK

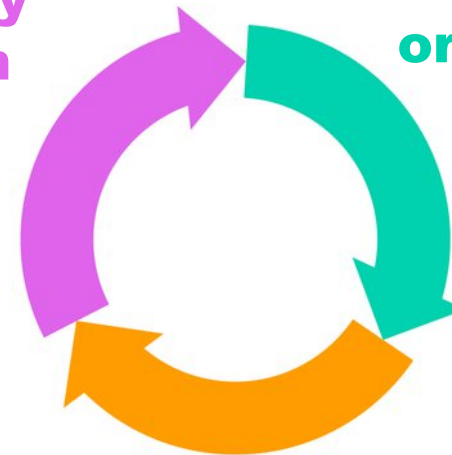


CREATES AN
ENVIRONMENT
WHERE
IMPROVEMENT
FEELS REWARDING

Player compulsion, engagement, and habits are built around loops

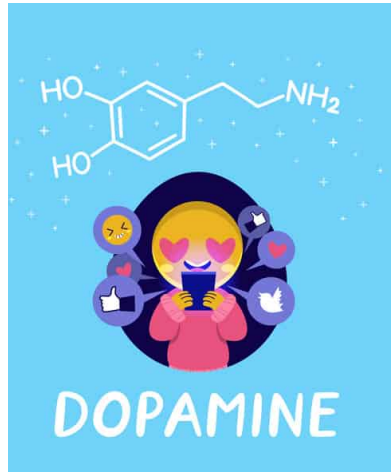
Primary
Action

Secondary Action
or Response



Contingent Action,
Feedback or Reward

How games “compel” us to play



Video Games Captivate Players

By CHRIS MASTERS

They're evil. They must be. They rob you of your last quarter, your last waking hour, your last ounce of integrity. They make previously normal people into the Living Dead.

Well, okay, they may not be all that bad, but video games undoubtedly can be addictive. And they even have them right here at Pomona, right over at the Coop, waiting to eat up all your laundry money. And there are even real people, college students, who play on the things for hours until their wrists ache and their eyes are fried inside out by the radiation. They can't stop.

Nor can the rest of this great nation of ours, it seems. To hear *Newsweek* tell it, video games are a \$5 billion a year industry. Some games in various places gross over \$800 a week, with corporations like Atari and Midway soaking up 80% of the profits. The industry takes in more money than either the movie or record industries.

So can anyone blame Pomona for getting a slew of the little demons? Actually it's not a slew: the Coop selection of games is pretty limited as far as some colleges go. Occidental has at least three times as many machines as Pomona. But that's Oxy for you. At least the Coop makes sure that what it does carry is popular: "Battlezone," "Donkey Kong,"

this isn't much, especially since the damage done to the beasts is higher than usual (as is true in most unsupervised college game rooms). Because of this and the low revenues, we're lucky to have as good a setup with a distributor as we do.

If nationwide statistics can be believed, nine times out of ten, video players are male and of teen age. Women do not seem to care about the games, or the industry for that matter. The game programmers are almost exclusively male—science whiz kid nerds in their 20's, and some of the games are obviously geared toward a male audience. Many are based on the helpless "damsel in distress" theme, or many are violent. Often winning is a matter of maiming, slaughtering, eating, or just plain killing.

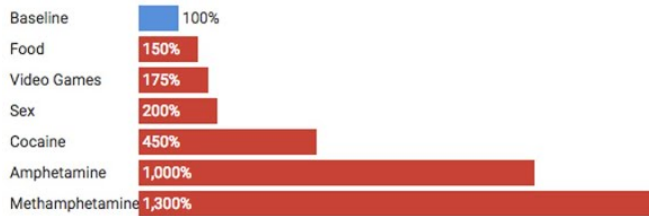
This is exactly the kind of thing teenagers in America love. The Coop often has a problem with kids coming in to dominate some of the games (and the little kids are surprisingly adept).

The games are for five-college students only, but sometimes a kid believes that since he's a faculty member's child, he has a right to show us up in the game and steal a position as a high scorer.

While many people maintain that it is fine for kids to play, promising Pomona College

How much dopamine does an activity release?

Various activities cause the brain to release more dopamine than usual. Enjoying food brings a 50 percent boost to dopamine levels in the brain, for instance. Video games and sex also increase dopamine, and drug use does so significantly. It's not reasonable to equate the brain response to drug use with that of video games.



GAMING AS ADDICTIVE AS HEROIN

BRITAIN is in the grip of a gaming addiction which poses as big a health risk as alcohol and drug abuse, a Sun investigation has revealed.

Our probe showed how more and more lives are being ruined by thrill-seeking players, with one expert describing the problem as "the scourge of our generation."

Just last week, the Sun told how a 49-year-old woman had been jailed after sinking £1,000 from her disabled mother to fund her Candy Crush Saga habit.

Sally Anne Turner used the cash to pay for extra lives and levels on the phone game, as her addiction

spiralled out of control. Stories like this are usually associated with drug addiction—but psychologists say it is no coincidence.

Dr Aric Sigman, *insert far right*, said: "When you do something like shoot larvae or drink alcohol, your brain produces dopamine to make you feel good, which you learn to associate with the activity."

"Video games can do this too. When young people play them, their brain produces a notable increase in this addiction chemical. That's something that gives you a kick and a chemical buzz. The faster, more violent games are a more intensive experience so will produce more dopamine."

"Violent games have also been found to make young people more likely to cheat, be impulsive and unable to control their emotions."

Dr Sigman believes that parents need to cap the amount of screen time their children are getting—which includes the number of hours they spend watching TV as well as playing video games.

He said: "At the minute, British kids consume three times their recommended limit of screen time."

"Ideally, young children shouldn't be playing video games at all and teenagers should have less than two hours a day of total screen time."

The danger is spelled out by therapist Steven Woodhill, who runs The Alchemy Clinic, an addiction centre for adolescents in London. He receives 3,000 calls a year from parents seeking help for their child's gaming addiction—with many of the children suffering from suicidal thoughts.

Seven said: "There are no physical signs or symptoms of addiction until it's too late. I've been treating with have mainly been now I am seeing teens, mostly young people of our age—earlier this year I up. Call Of Duty inquires more than."

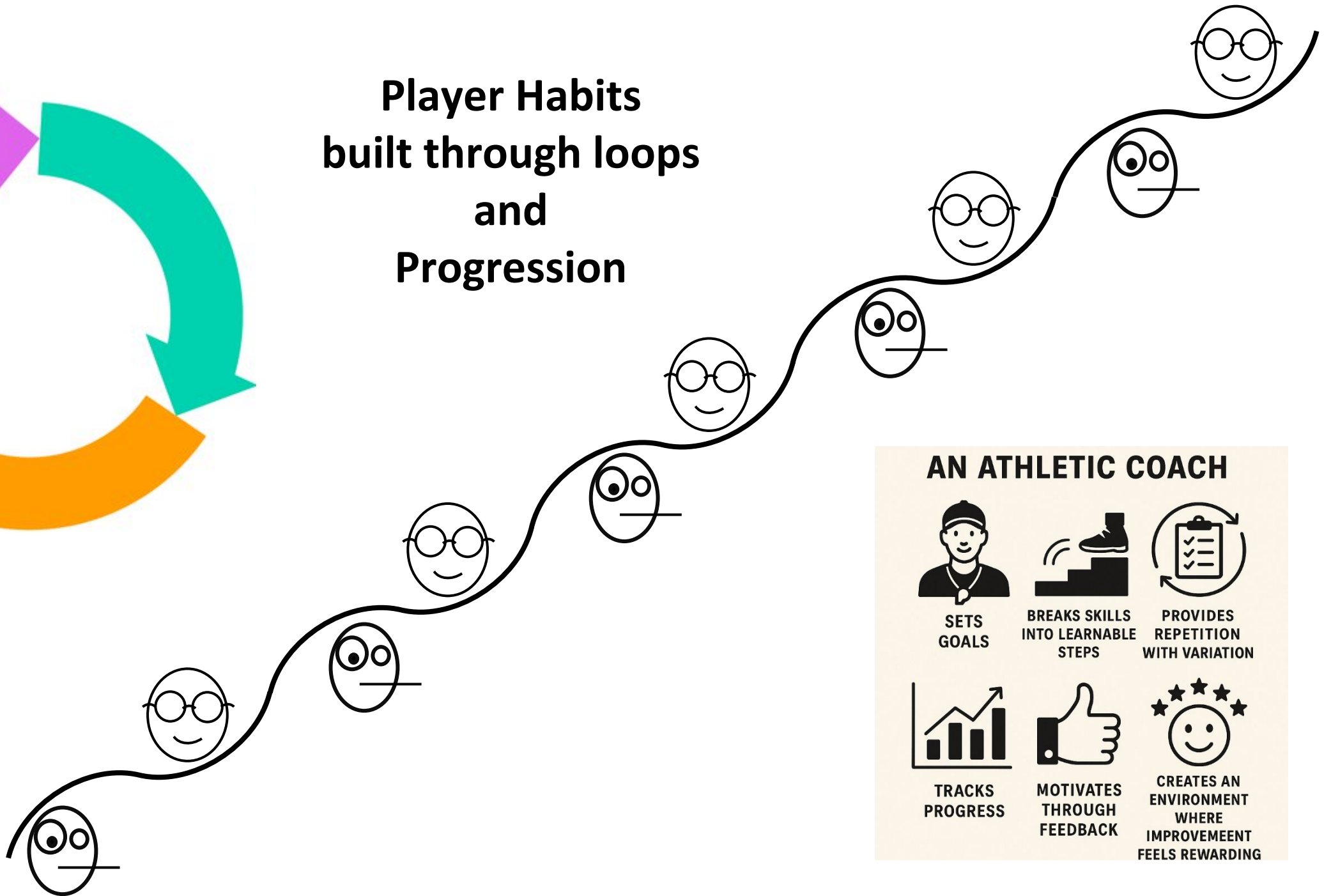
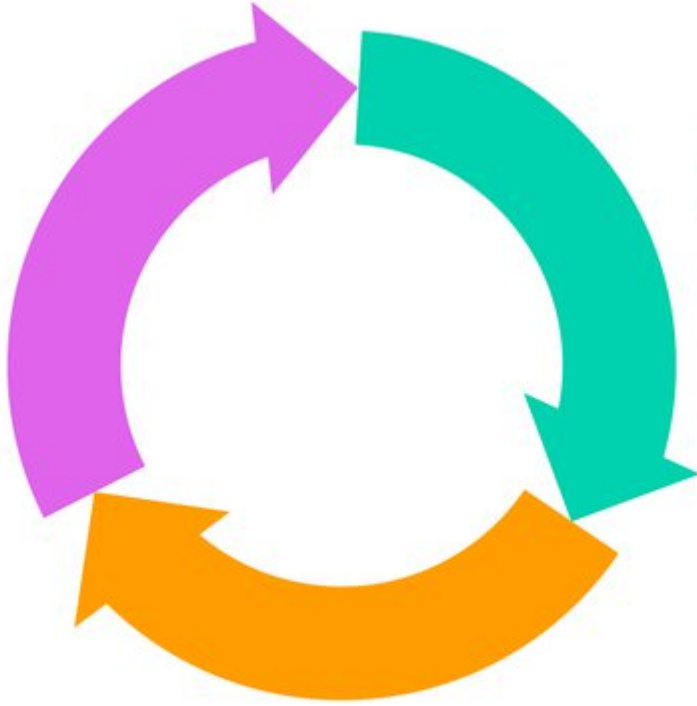
In May, he said to be figuring before death—grievous. It has big deaths which I'm the coroner's eye verdict of suicide for William Merr in Manchester, suffered in his. Pollard had pre death of Call Of Green, 14, who is playing the 19-bit. A state of ga have taken place.

By LEE PRICE, Gaming Editor

• Call Of Duty has figured in a number of deaths •

• It gives you a kick and a chemical buzz •

Player Habits built through loops and Progression



AN ATHLETIC COACH



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GOALS



BREAKS SKILLS
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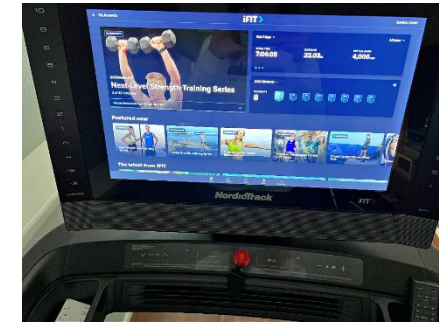
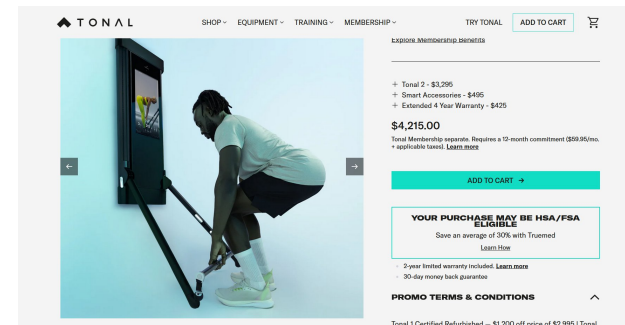
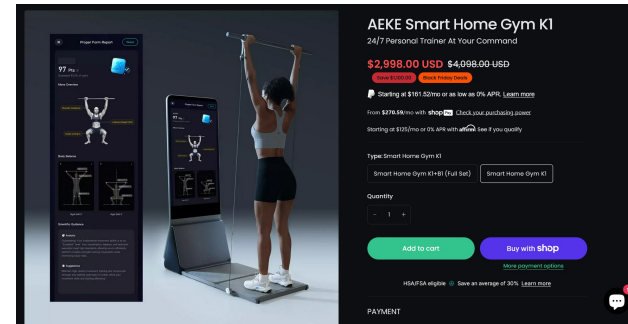
MOTIVATES
THROUGH
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CREATES AN
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So Why I hate to exercise?

- 80% of consumers play video games newzoo.com
- Average 8.45 hours per week 2025 icon-era.com
- 1/3 of adults worldwide don't meet basic physical activity
75 to 150 min a week World Health Organization
- Games are getting integrated into exercise equipment...
...for people who exercise. Not for the average gamer.



Games are fantasy fulfillment



Transparent Game Design Pillar 3 Game Designers Are Students

We Learn By Designing for Others

Every project we learn something new

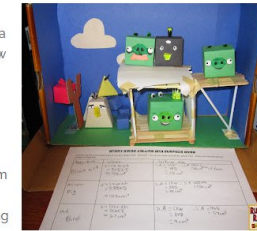
Designers learn through

- Research
 - User Needs
 - Subject Matter
- Experimentation
- Collaboration
- Communication

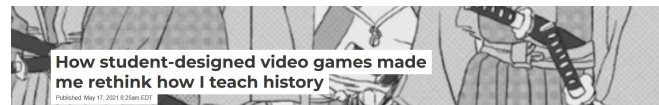
ANGRY BIRDS = HAPPY STUDENTS

16 May 2013

We just finished up our Angry Birds project – integrating math and science. I know I've shared a pic or two already, but I just have to show you how they turned out!



I have a few students who are completely obsessed with angry birds this year, so when I remembered I had pinned nets for angry bird solids a while back, I knew it was time to pull them out. Our math unit was 3D shapes, so we were looking at nets, constructing solids, and measuring volume and surface area. Perfect. Our science unit was structures and forces acting on structures. Even more perfect. So, we got creative and combined the two. ("Note - I don't have a unit for this, or even sheets to share, as the angry bird brand is very protected by trademark laws, or copyright laws, or something like that. I am going to post pics of everything we did, and if it sounds like fun, feel free to borrow these ideas for your classroom).



"AKO: A Tale of Loyalty" takes players inside a young samurai's world in 16th-century Japan. Epoch: History Games (Univ) University of Texas at Austin. CC-BY-NC-ND

Imagine you're a young samurai in Japan in 1701. You have to make a difficult choice between an impoverished life in exile, or the prospect of almost certain death while trying to avenge the death of your dishonored lord. Which do you choose?

"AKO: A Tale of Loyalty," a video game built in 2020, takes players along a difficult journey through early modern Japan filled with decisions like this one. It's become an essential component of my classes on Japanese history, but it wasn't developed by a professional game studio. Instead, it was created by a team of four undergraduate history majors with no specialized training.



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Disclosure statement
Adam Clarke does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that could benefit from the article, and has declared no relevant interests beyond their academic appointment.

Postscript

View all posts

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-025-14999-9>

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Research | [Open access](#) | Published: 21 October 2025

Evaluating student nurses satisfaction with educational escape rooms as a pedagogical approach to teaching professional nursing values

[Nicola Rowley](#) & [Sandra Lucas](#)

[BMC Nursing](#) 24, Article number: 1300 (2025) | [Cite this article](#)

374 Accesses | 15 Altmetric | [Metrics](#)

Abstract

Background

Understanding the expectations of new generations of students entering higher education can be challenging. Generation Z have been brought up in a digital world, keeping them focused and entertained. Education must respond to the changing student profiles. Consideration should be given to integrating a hyper-cognitive approach to meet the expectations of students and fuel a positive learning experience for all evolving generations.

Current Transparent Game Design Project

- Stroke rehabilitation - balance and gait recovery
- Suite of motion controlled mini-games
- Collaboration Department of Kinesiology and Health Education
- Therapy movements become direct inputs for play
- Emphasizes fantasy fulfillment and engagement
- Focus shifts away from the condition
- Learning and PT become transparent to the player
- Unconscious learning and compliance

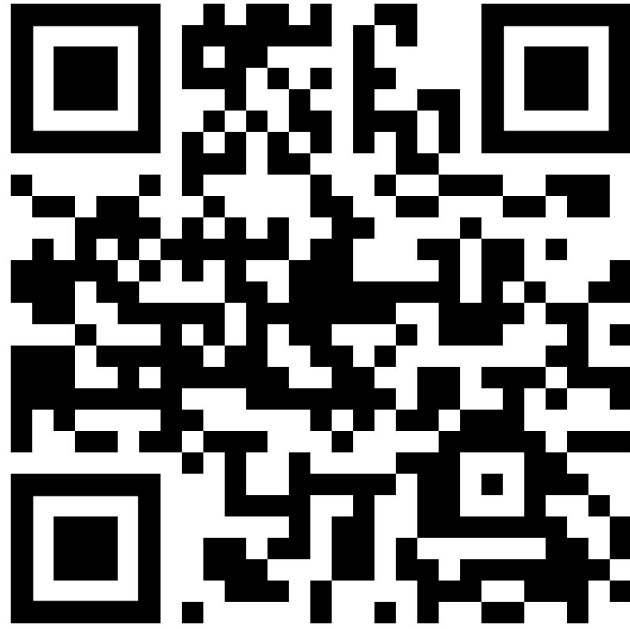
Prototypes completed, preparing for human subject testing

Next steps:

Version for home, clinical settings, and research labs



Thank you and Please stay connected



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