



JOURNAL OF THE

EUROPEAN HONORS COUNCIL

Note

Teaching Through Hack, Play and Game-Design

Author: Sarit Youdelevich

Kristiana University of Applied Science, Oslo

Correspondence e-mail: sarit@nyu.edu

Received: September 24, 2025; Accepted: September 24, 2025; Published: October 6, 2025

Keywords: *transdisciplinary learning, zone of proximal development, transformative learning*

Students engage most with complex problems when they learn to hack existing systems instead of building solutions from scratch (Youdelevich & Hvidsten, 2024). In my teaching, hacking means critically engaging with what already exists: repurposing, questioning, and reshaping mechanisms to uncover limitations and possibilities, to encourage playful creativity. For example, when working with toys, students encounter complicated technologies in accessible forms, gaining confidence through adaptation rather than invention. This mindset fosters a systems view: problems become structures to be understood and reconfigured, not solved outright (Gee, 2005). Rapid prototyping and hands-on sketching help students think through complexity, while digital tools support ideas that are temporal, abstract, or data-driven: things that are harder to express on paper. Game design reinforces this approach, offering structured environments where students explore strategies rather than chase singular “correct” answers, learning to navigate uncertainty with creativity and critical insight, exploring different strategies within structured frameworks (Zimmerman, 2008).

Student agency comes from concrete practices that help them take ownership of their ideas and express them clearly (Gee, 2005). Since they haven't yet settled into fixed disciplines, students are naturally open to crossing boundaries, making this a crucial moment to support fluid, interdisciplinary thinking. As an educator, I move constantly between doing and explaining, using hands-on methods like gaming, rapid sketching, and storytelling to foster game-like learning (Gee, 2005). These tools and methods help students clarify their thinking, communicate it, and stay open to feedback. When they learn to frame their ideas as stories, they gain the confidence to defend, adapt, and build on them (Rylander Eklund et al., 2021). Feedback then becomes fuel for iteration. For this to work, interdisciplinary education needs to combine concrete content with broader horizons, giving students both practical tools, upper-level understanding of how systems function in the world and opportunities to prototype ideas (Gee, 2005; van der Tuin, 2025).

Working with cross-European and international student communities has taught me that the real magic happens when students learn to communicate across cultural boundaries, not just disciplinary ones. Through collaborations with institutions like RISD, CAA China, University of Tokyo, and Georgetown University, I've watched communication challenges transform into growth opportunities. Students and educators gain insight into how systems function elsewhere while recognizing their own cultural assumptions as just one perspective among many (Slot, 2025). This exposure fosters both confidence and intellectual modesty, learning to own individual views while keeping a wider perspective centered on shared humanity. Confronting with diverse ways of thinking reveals that innovation often emerges at cultural intersections. This is true to the education system, as a whole. And so, in this we have the opportunity to prepare students to engage meaningfully in global collaboration and complex, shared challenges.

My role has evolved from instructor to what I call a process orchestrator, learning how to facilitate learning (Hanghøj, 2013), which I practice through games and play. When the syllabus, project briefs or the system's rules are strong enough to stand on their own, my job becomes navigating the learning process rather than delivering content. I provide structured frameworks within which students can explore, experiment, and develop their own understanding through practice, play and game-design. I become a facilitator who helps students navigate challenges, make connections, and reflect on discoveries. The learning happens through doing, and my role is ensuring the conditions are right for that learning to emerge naturally (Hanghøj, 2013). When students have solid tools, clear processes, and opportunities to test ideas through making and sharing, they develop the confidence to tackle complex challenges on their own terms.

References:

Hanghøj, T. (2013). *Game-Based Teaching: Practices, Roles, and Pedagogies*. In: New Pedagogical Approaches in Game Enhanced Learning: Curriculum Integration. 81-101. 10.4018/978-1-4666-3950-8.ch005-

Gee, J. P. (2005). Learning by Design: Good Video Games as Learning Machines. *E-Learning and Digital Media*, 2(1), 5-16. <https://doi.org/10.2304/elea.2005.2.1.5>

Rylander Eklund, A. Navarro Aguiar, U. and Amacker, A. (2021), "Design thinking as sensemaking – developing a pragmatist theory of practice to (re)introduce sensibility", *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 2021, 1-20. 10.1111/jpim.12604. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12604>

Slot E., University Utrecht. (2025, July). A four-stage model for interdisciplinary learning. <https://www.uu.nl/onderwijs/onderwijsadvies-training/publicaties/kennisdossier-hoger-onderwijs/four-stage-model>

van der Tuin, I. (Ed.). (2025). *Designing interdisciplinary higher education*. In: Key Texts on Interdisciplinary Higher Education (1st, First Edition ed., pp. 51–124). Bristol University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.18323808.10>

Youdelevich, S. & Hvidsten, A. (2024). Monopoly Reimagined: Cultivating Gaming Literacy for Tackling Real-World Complexities. European Conference on Games Based Learning. 18. 878-894. 10.34190/ecgbl.18.1.2857.

Zimmerman, E. (2008). *Gaming literacy: Game design as a model for literacy in the twenty-first century*. In: The video game theory reader 2 (pp. 45-54). Routledge