Break the Ice with **Meeple(s)**!

Choose the Meeple(s) that best describe where you are, what you know, or how you feel in regards to gamificated instruction.

Discuss with your group:

- Who’s just getting started with learning about gamification?
- What are you most excited or concerned about?
- Has anyone in your group tried gamified instruction before?
- If so, what worked or didn’t?
Argument Architect

Developing a Research Boardgame to Teach Thesis Development and Source Evaluation

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A Big Problem with First Year Research Papers

- Assessment shows that students are disconnected from the research process
  - Thesis seems to come from thin-air, sources are cherry-picked and used out of context to support it
- Sources aren’t the source anymore
  - Students start with thesis, then work backwards to find sources that support it
  - Looking for sources that parrot or rephrase their own thoughts to “legitimize” those thoughts - not thinking of sources as facets of an issue
  - Contributes to bias, bubbles, and inability to critically think or evaluate

In Our Search for Solutions, We Found...
Gamification: the use of game design elements in non-game contexts.

Why Go with a Game?

- **Greater Engagement!**
  - A game could grab students’ attention--And a *board game* would allow for physically active engagement (and hopefully better recall)

- **Wanted students to explore the research process, not be led through it.**
  - A non-linear game structure would let students see the benefits and drawbacks of starting research in different places, compared to a linear approach
  - It’s hard to mimic iterative research in a lesson, but games let you fail, loop back, start over, and try new approaches.
  - The option to repeat a game for additional prizes encourages students to search for more than one winning strategy
Design Guidelines

- **Intuitive**
  - Easy to understand, familiar and positive metaphor, minimize the time and energy students spend learning rules

- **Scalable and flexible**
  - Playable with different timeframes and student skill levels

- **Cooperative-constructive vs. Competitive-destructive**
  - Cooperative-constructive game to foster an environment of students supporting and teaching each other—less rushed, less likely to create fairness issues, more reflection

- **Recommended read** - *Making deep games: Designing games with meaning and purpose*, by D.C. Rusch
Creating a Boardgame (the short version)

● The path is littered with broken prototypes and fizzled ideas
  ○ We explored (and rejected):
    ■ UFO-shooter style Flash game quizzes
    ■ defeating the “dragons” of research
    ■ creating our own (Game of)LIFE-style research journey
    ■ Professor Godzilla, Toppler of Weak Arguments

● Takeaways from our process
  ○ Keep notes on all your ideas, good and bad - even the bad ones have good parts!
  ○ Keep your goals in mind - does your game meet them?
  ○ Pre-test with colleagues, student workers, or partner faculty
Argument Architect

- Students construct an argument through the metaphor of building a skyscraper
  - Shared topic is the foundation
  - Source blocks provide credible and non-traditional sources for a variety of arguments
  - Thesis blocks cap the structure and can be customized

- Followed by essential discussion
  - Students are asked:
    - if they noticed sources or thesis options that seemed problematic
    - what they learned from starting with either sources or thesis options
    - how this relates to their prior experiences researching and writing papers
Our first edition of game boards and pieces
Our first class’ game!

One newly constructed argument, awaiting judgment

Construction sounds = more fun
Healthy debate over what sources to choose

A visit from an argument inspector

Brett offering some helpful advice
Our (Mixed, but Fun) Results

- **At Penn State Berks**
  - Approximately 25-person classes, excellent collaboration with instructor
  - Students grasped the idea and expressed the logic of starting from sources, learning about a topic, and developing a thesis, and searching for more sources from there.
  - **Student comments:**
    - “Find a claim that fits the evidence well, don't just look for any evidence to fit your claim"
    - “Start with your sources, not your thesis statement."

- **At Penn State Abington**
  - Very small class, unfortunate timing
  - Students were more inclined to start with thesis statements, but did acknowledge that they’d have to do more research to find the best sources that way.
What's Next?

- **Penn State Lehigh Valley**
  - New environment, similar population to Abington but different structure
  - Working on introduction to first-year English, Communication, and/or general classes

- **Penn State Berks**
  - Same faculty member has requested new sessions of Argument Architect for this coming fall for introductory English classes, with additional companion sessions

- **Companion game coming soon: Evidence Excavator?**
  - Future offering for courses interested in Argument Architect
  - Additional session focusing on “mining” for good sources, evaluating their characteristics, and determining how they could be best used (from anecdotal discussion to proof of a fact)
Enough Talking - Let’s Build Some Arguments!
You’re the Architects!

- **Start** with your topic block as your foundation.
- **Look through your source blocks**. What ideas or arguments do you see?
- **Choose 3-4 source blocks** that seem to be discussing different areas of the same idea.
- **Choose a thesis statement** that those sources would support. Can’t find one that fits? Write your own!
- **Explain your design** to the building inspectors and make changes as needed.
Your Suggestions, Criticisms, and Thoughts

- Continue to encourage group participation
- Archivists/special collections collaborations - working with primary sources
- Write your own thesis follow-up
- Hide the thesis statements for the 1st round?
- Collect sources for specific audiences
Thank you for attending!

Working on your own gamification plans?

Looking for colleagues to bounce ideas off of?

Have more comments or questions?

Please contact us - we'd love to work with you!

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