

Designer Research METAGame

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Abstract: Using inspiration generated in the “MetaGame as Teaching Game” (Sharp, J., Macklin, C., Daer, A., Duncan, S., Nealen, A., 2012) workshop, the authors propose a model to foster research and discussion in a design historical context. Students generate questions, then select work to represent their views and finally compete in discussions to see who can mount the most compelling argument. Students explore the aspects of concept generation, visual composition and technical use of materials through the lens of historical research.

How can we design a learning experience that will foster curiosity?

Using a gaming mindset, we hope to encourage experimentation and student initiated investigation of material presented in the historical analysis section of a beginning design course. Previous reading assignments accompanied with “compare + contrast” essays were used to access mastery of historical material. While the written documents were well crafted and factually correct, instructors noted when the students moved to generating their own ideas and solving their own problems, no bridging of the material was evident in either the conceptual discussions with the students or the visual generation of artifacts. The students were good at the process of analysis, however, no real transference or integration was occurring.

Give them the test, and let them write the answers:

Using “decade readings” that were published in Print (November/December 1989.) Students are asked to read and analyze the material specifically questioning:

	<i>Concept</i>	<i>Composition</i>	<i>Materials/technology</i>
Reflection / Learning outcome	<i>what was the idea behind the piece?</i> <i>what was the problem that the designer was attempting to solve?</i>	<i>what are the elements of composition that the designer is using to communicate his/her message?</i>	<i>what are the materials/typefaces being used to visually convey the message?</i>
Q cards	“Which designer was not afraid to fail?” “Which is the best use of a cliché?”	“Which makes the most effective use of symmetry?” “Which makes the most successful use of negative space?”	“Which makes the most affective use of color?” “Which has the most innovative typography?”

Table 1: Directed questions for readings and game play

Students are introduced to the game and are asked to document the analysis of the readings in their process books. In addition to verbal analysis, students identify visuals, from each of the readings, as well as contemporary outside sources, that support their observations. Students then generate a minimum of five cards per reading. They are instructed to select examples that might be appropriate to address multiple questions (table 1). This process encourages divergent thinking about the material, as opposed to reinforcing a “one question – one right answer” mindset. The iterative process of the development of the game is intended to model the iterative design process that students are researching. (Zimmerman, E. 2003) Making the cards is an important step in that it requires students to reflect further on their choices. Students bring their cards to class and participate in several bouts. Teams of three students participate in a series of three bouts, rotating roles. This allows each student to experience the stress of being the judge. As students do not know which questions they will receive before the game, students might have to “expand” their analysis of their cards in order to participate.



Figure 2: Preliminary and Final Bouts.

After each bout students are asked to document cards that they wish they had made or questions that they wish they had been posed from the perspective of having played the game. After the first round the question arises as to whether, when they judge, they are voting for the best card or the best argument. At this point in time, this is determined by the individual student and recorded on the game mat. In the future, this might be a way to apply a new perspective to the game.

Experience the material on a deeper level:

To get past the, “lets get this done so we can get out of here” attitude, all bouts must be documented in all participants process books to receive credit. Arguments, along with the rationale for the judges decision must be recorded on game mats. Students are encouraged to expand upon thoughts they find interesting or notate if they do not agree with a specific decision made by the judge. The quality and quantity of these observations are reflected in the final grade. While comments from the students are positive, the grade is currently the best motivator.

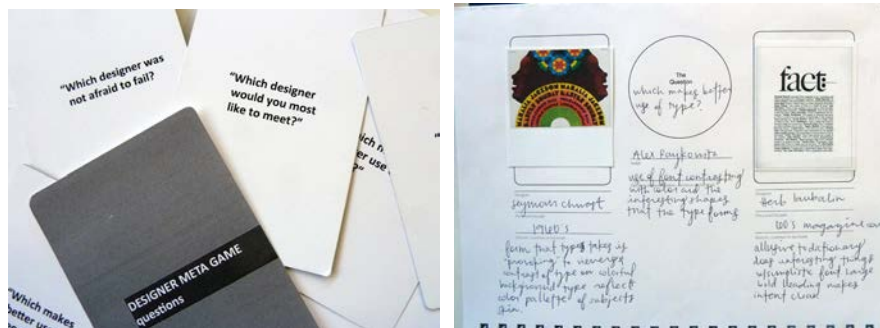


Figure 1: Qcards and Game Mat.

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