



[Home](#) > PL25 Programme

Playful Learning 25 Programme

The Playful Learning Conference Code of Conduct is [here](#). Please take a look before taking part in the Conference.

There is a 15 gap between most sessions for you to move between spaces.

At any point you can [ask a question or provide feedback](#) – we're here to help!

You can join the Playful Learning Association Discord server [here](#).

Wednesday 2nd July 2025

	<p>☐ Spotlight Activities throughout the day:</p> <p>☐☐ The Feedback Game – Liz Cable</p> <p>☐ Unlock the Fun Escape Room – David Anderson supports his session at 13:45</p>
10:00	☐☐ Registration and Coffee, Bramber House 3rd Floor
11:00 – 11:30	☐ Welcome to Playful Learning 25
11:30 – 12:15	☐🎧 Keynote 1, Terrace Room – Alfie Ordinary
12:15 – 12:45	☐ Discussion Groups 1
12:45 – 13:45	☐ Lunch
13:45 – 14:30	1☐☐☐ Click to open Session 1 (45 minutes)
14:45 – 15:30	2☐☐☐ Click to open Session 2 (45 minutes)
15:30 – 16:00	☐☐ Break
16:00 – 17:00	3☐☐☐ Click to open Session 3 (60 minutes)
17:00	☐☐ Finish / Free time
18:30	☐ Upside-down meal (outdoors) Including the launch of the RE:PLAY project

Thursday 3rd July 2025

	<p>☐ Spotlight Activities throughout the day:</p> <p>☐☐ Inclusive Play Framework – Elliott Spaeth</p> <p>☐ Yahtzee: Dice Games for Learning – Roger Saunders</p>
08:00	☐ Breakfast and optional campus run or walk
09:30 – 10:00	☐ Welcome to Day 2
10:00 – 10:45	4☐☐☐ Click to open Session 4 (45 minutes)
10:45 – 11:15	☐☐ Break (30 min)
11:15 – 12:00	5☐☐☐ Click to open Session 5 (45 minutes)
12:15 – 12:45	6☐☐☐ Click to open Session 6 (30 minutes)
12:45 – 13:45	☐ Lunch
13:45 – 14:30	☐🎧 Keynote 2, Terrace Room – Think with Things
14:30 – 15:00	☐ Discussion Groups 2
15:00 – 15:45	7☐☐☐ Click to open Session 7 (45 minutes)
15:45 – 16:15	☐☐ Break (30 min)
16:15: 17:00	8☐☐☐ Click to open Session 8 (45 minutes)
17:00	☐☐Finish / Free time
18:30	☐ Chill out night – beer, pizza and games on campus. Take our Campus Tour to see the sights on your way to the Meeting House

Friday 4th July 2025

	<input type="checkbox"/> Spotlight Activities throughout the day: <input type="checkbox"/> Explorers Wanted: Unveiling the new Playful Learning Community Library <input type="checkbox"/> Visit and contribute to the developing library (online)
08:00	<input type="checkbox"/> Breakfast
09:30 – 10:15	<input type="checkbox"/> Click to open Session 9 (45 minutes)
10:15 – 10:30	<input type="checkbox"/> Break (15 min)
10:30 – 11:00	<input type="checkbox"/> Click to open Session 10 (30 minutes)
11:15 – 12:00	<input type="checkbox"/> Keynote 3, Terrace Room – Hoopla
12:15 – 12:45	<input type="checkbox"/> Discussion Groups 3
12:45 – 13:15	<input type="checkbox"/> Light Lunch
13:15 – 14:00	<input type="checkbox"/> "Wish you were here": Building a Playful Learning Community – Suzanne Faulkner, Clare Timmins, Simon Grey <input type="checkbox"/> Conference Close
14:00	<input type="checkbox"/> Depart

Other Activities

Ongoing	<p>There are two "spotlight" rooms with differed features each day for you to visit during breaks.</p> <p>The lounge and corridor spaces also host a range of activities you can do between or instead of session. Feel free to explore the campus.</p>
Chill Out	<p>If you need some quiet space away from the conference at any time, then head to the far end of the conference area. Our chill out room is there when you need it, or speak to the reception team if you need anything else.</p>

No need to confirm your choices now – you can choose on the day depending on what interests you!

The feedback game

Lead Author: Liz Cable

Additional authors:

Timetable: , Wednesday Spotlight

Description:

It's a 10-20 minute game about how to give good feedback.* Intended to be useful for academics marking assessments and students involved in peer feedback. Play the game and give us your feedback. Wear a disguise if you want your feedback to be anonymous. Available in the in-between times, this game is 2 minutes to learn.

Players will contribute to the development of a new version of the game, decide if they'd like to use it in their practice, experience play-testing, the concept of "re-skinning" a game, and reflect on the experience.

*also, how to be nice.

References, web links and other resources:

Disguising your veggies: how to creatively embed intentional practice in experiential learning

Lead Author: C-J Foster

Additional authors: Elle Simms

Timetable: Thursday Session 4: 10:00-10:45, Gallery Room 1

Description:

When kids are little, diversifying their food can be a challenge and somehow we have to get those veggies in! We all know they are important for growth, nourishment and strength, but it takes creativity and a good recipe! This playshop will be an experiential learning opportunity to explore how we creatively disguise the veggies – in our case how you intentionally embed into practice ways to create a space safe, deal with discomfort, build confidence, set up skills, and encourage positive risk taking, interaction and reflection in a way that doesn't feel forced or unpalatable.

As facilitators of the session, we will play in our roles as both games masters and masters of disguise. The experiences that we are scaffolding in these roles will be dictated by the energy, characters and interactions in the room and we will surface ways to respond to that in action. We will explore how to change dynamics and direction through the words we use, the use of our bodies and different delivery methods.

We love a good surprise! And when we facilitate this way, we get the joy of the unexpected learning that takes place and the in-action reflection it allows. By the end of the day, we will all have switched between our learning hats and our experiential chefs hats and be ready to get in our "five a day"!

C-J and Elle are experiential learning specialists who specialise in facilitation and delivery with students at Manchester Metropolitan University.

References, web links and other resources:

Evolving a Game to Teach Sustainable Wildlife Management

Lead Author: Simon Grey

Additional authors: Jen Bright

Timetable: Thursday Session 4: 10:00-10:45, Terrace Room

Description:

Wildlife Management 2.0 is a cross-disciplinary research project, proudly supported by funding from the British Ecological Society. This simple yet FINTastic physical card game is designed to reel in university students and SCHOOL them on wildlife management using the example of sustainable fisheries. Players TACKLE the challenge by proposing policies to create a sustainable marine ecosystem. But beware—if SHELLFISH players are GILL-ty of overfishing, their stocks will become DeFISHient, and they'll FLOUNDER while others SCALE new heights!

Designing even a simple game is no SMALL FRY – game designers make hundreds of interdependent decisions. Combined with unpredictable player behaviour, how can we ensure we provide meaningful choices while still creating the desired learning experience? In designing Wildlife Management 2.0, our cross-disciplinary team used a fancy genetic algorithm to take some of the guesswork out of game design.

In this session, participants will DIVE IN and playtest Wildlife Management 2.0, giving feedback on its mechanics. We'll also explore how Wildlife Management 2.0 was designed using genetic algorithms alongside the Mechanics-Dynamics-Aesthetics game design model in an attempt to NET a well-balanced experience. By the end, participants will leave with an understanding of how genetic algorithms can help STREAMLINE game design – and how this approach can be applied to many other projects. No prior experience is required, just a KRAKEN good attitude!

Also, if participants can think of a better name than “Wildlife Management 2.0” that would be great!

References, web links and other resources:

This project is supported by a grant from the British Ecological Society <https://www.britishecologicalsociety.org/>

For my next trick, I will saw this boredom in half!

Lead Author: James Charnock

Additional authors: Mr O. Terr.

Timetable: Thursday Session 7: 15:00-15:45, Terrace Room

Description:

In an era where audiences of all kinds are increasingly hard to captivate and where participant isolation or disconnection is on the rise, organisers of workshops / seminars / lectures / conferences and events face the challenge of breaking down these barriers and making their session more meaningful and engaging.

This session will explore the application of Magician's Penn and Teller's 7 principles of magic – Palm, Ditch, Steal, Load, Simulation, Misdirection and Switch, to the design and execution of conferences, events and meetings.

By translating these fundamental principles of illusion and perception into the context of event and task design, organisers can create immersive environments that captivate, educate and inspire.

As an example, the first principle: palming an object – hiding the fact that you are carrying it, will be translated into not only the preparation work required to think through a session and prepare elements of delight and surprise, but also consider elements of learning deemed to be the biggest focus, and making sure they are revealed within a session at the moment most likely to foster learning and manufacture focus on that element.

The session will ask participants to think through how all the 7 principles can be applied to enhance learning outcomes and networking effectiveness and participants will leave with a checklist of how they could improve their sessions with these tricks.

Join me to unlock the secrets of two of the worlds best illusionists and consider how their principles can make your workshop, conference session, event or conference more magical!

References, web links and other resources:

The 7 Principles of Magic – Penn and Teller.

'Board Round' – The Ultimate Medical Game Night: Learning, Laughter, and Lifesaving Decisions!

Lead Author: Rachel Ruck

Additional authors:

Timetable: Friday Session 9: 09:30-10:15, Gallery Room 2

Description:

The Game at a Glance:

'Board Round' is an innovative educational board game which I designed as a clinical educator to enhance collaborative learning amongst my Undergraduate medical students. Created to encourage teamwork and engagement through play, the game simulates the dynamics of a hospital ward round. Using digital design tools like Photoshop, the game has been professionally printed to ensure a hands-on, immersive experience. The objective is for teams to complete a ward round as efficiently as possible, adding an engaging twist to the traditionally routine experience of clinical rotations. Players progress through different hospital wards by correctly answering specialty-specific questions. Along the way, "Bleep" cards introduce unexpected challenges, such as being called to an emergency in A&E or earning a well-deserved break in the staff room, mirroring real-world hospital scenarios. The winning team is the first to complete the ward round.

Session Overview:

This interactive session will explore how game-based learning (GBL) encourages collaboration, engagement, and problem-solving skills in medical education. Using Board Round, a clinically themed educational board game, participants will engage in structured gameplay to experience first-hand the dynamics of collaborative learning. The session will focus on how individuals interact, learn vicariously, and develop essential professional skills such as teamwork and critical thinking within a playful learning environment.

Session Objectives:

- Demonstrate the value of GBL as a tool for experiential and collaborative learning in medical education.
- Engage participants in 'Board Round' gameplay to explore teamwork, strategic thinking, and decision-making.
- Facilitate discussions on how GBL can be integrated into healthcare education and training.

Session Format:

Introduction (5 minutes):

- Overview of GBL in medical education and the rationale behind 'Board Round'.
- Brief explanation of the research study examining collaborative learning through gameplay.

Interactive Gameplay Experience (30 minutes):

- Attendees will form small groups and engage in a modified version of Board Round.
- Participants will take on medical student roles, answering clinically relevant questions and navigating realistic challenges using "Bleep" cards.

Facilitated Discussion and closing remarks (10 minutes):

- Reflection on learning experiences, teamwork, and the role of GBL in promoting collaborative skills.
- Discussion on the transferability of 'Board Game' learning to real-world clinical environments.
- Q&A session to address participant questions and insights.

Conclusion:

This session will provide a hands-on exploration of how board games enhance collaborative learning in medical education. By participating in Board Round, attendees will gain an experiential understanding of the benefits of GBL, inspiring new approaches to integrating playful learning into clinical training and beyond.

References, web links and other resources:

Xu M, Luo Y, Zhang Y, Xia R, Qian H, Zou X. (2023) Game-based learning in medical education. *Front Public Health*. 3;11:1113682. doi: 10.3389/fpubh.2023. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10020233/>

Surapaneni KM. (2024). "CARBGAME" (CARd & Board GAMES in Medical Education) as an innovative gamification tool for learning clinical enzymology in biochemistry for first year medical students. *Biochemistry and Molecular Biology Education*. 52(6), p: 666-675. doi: 10.1002/bmb.21857

Gauthier A, Kato PM, Bul KCM, Dunwell I, Walker-Clarke A, Lameris P. 2019. Board Games for Health: A Systematic Literature Review and Meta-Analysis. *Games for Health Journal*. 8(2), p: 85-100. doi: 10.1089/g4h.2018.0017

Luke K. (2021). Twelve tips for designing an inclusive curriculum in medical education using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles. *MedEdPublish*. 10;10, p: 118. doi: 10.15694/mep.2021.000118.1.

Farrell, David & Moffat, David. (2014). Applying the self determination theory of motivation in Games Based Learning. *Proceedings of the European Conference on Games-based Learning*. 1. 118-127.

Daniela, L. (2021) *Smart Pedagogy of Game-Based Learning*. Advances in Game-Based Learning. Springer International Publishing.

Earthquakes! Cause one, find one and BE one. An exploration of physical play techniques.

Lead Author: Richard Treves

Additional authors:

Timetable: Thursday Session 6: 12:15-12:45, Outdoors

Description:

In this session I will showcase three physical, playful techniques I've developed in teaching about earthquakes at first year introductory level of Higher Education*. You, the audience, will play a student role so we can experience the techniques as a group. The session will end with a discussion about 'embodied learning'² the theory behind this form of playful learning.

In the first technique you, the audience, will participate in trying to cause an earthquake by jumping up and down as a group closer and further away. Will you manage to cause an earthquake?

In the second, I will use most of you, the audience, to role play being:

- an earthquake
- the ground it travels through
- the instruments that measure it

This is done to explore how earthquakes waves move in time and space and how to predict where earthquakes come from.

Finally, by use of a large 3D jigsaw, we will explore what causes earthquakes.

Key talking points in the discussion will be:

- How the activities can represent 'spark' the first of Gagne's nine events of instruction¹ (technique 1)
- The advantages and disadvantages of being physical compared with being cognitive in a playful learning situation (technique 2), comparing it to the theory of embodied cognition.
- The third technique, which is still in development.

My aim is that delegates will take away ideas about the use of embodied play in education and how it could be used in their own educational situations.

*Of the three, the first two are tried and tested so represent true demonstrations, the third is a playtest.

References, web links and other resources:

1) An outline of Gagne's 9 events. <https://tinyurl.com/3pu492xc>

2) Macedonia, M. (2019). Embodied learning: Why at school the mind needs the body. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2098.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02098>

3) A related method to technique 2 teaching about different types of earthquake wave <https://tinyurl.com/mxt3dhtz> (though it doesn't seem that the students are being encouraged to enjoy the experience!)

The feedback game

Lead Author: Liz Cable

Additional authors:

Timetable: , Wednesday Spotlight

Description:

It's a 10-20 minute game about how to give good feedback.* Intended to be useful for academics marking assessments and students involved in peer feedback. Play the game and give us your feedback. Wear a disguise if you want your feedback to be anonymous. Available in the in-between times, this game is 2 minutes to learn.

Players will contribute to the development of a new version of the game, decide if they'd like to use it in their practice, experience play-testing, the concept of "re-skinning" a game, and reflect on the experience.

*also, how to be nice.

References, web links and other resources:

Twine: Interactive stories that turn learning into a surprising adventure

Lead Author: Mahsa Samadi

Additional authors:

Timetable: Wednesday Session 3: 16:00-17:00, Gallery Room 2

Description:

Consolidation learning activities are a great excuse to be creative and surprise students with activities that have an exciting twist. What better way is there to test knowledge than 'locking' students in an online escape room environment?

In this session, I will show participants how to use Twine, an online tool for creating non-linear adventure stories. Participants will have a chance to experience an "educational theory and pedagogy" themed escape game for themselves. Once they enter the game, they will need to answer questions and solve puzzles to work their way through several online rooms before they can escape.

Following the activity, I will show the participants how the escape room was created by demonstrating how to use Twine. I will discuss how I use this software in my teaching practice in the BSc medical biosciences programme at Imperial. Whilst the software is free, there is a learning curve to using Twine as it requires the use of html code. To help overcome barriers to using it, I will share an html code 'cheat sheet' to help those unfamiliar with Twine to get started on making their own escape games.

References, web links and other resources:

Masks of Melancholy- Playfully UnMasked and Surprised by ?

Lead Author: Shirley Jenner

Additional authors:

Timetable: Thursday Session 5: 11:15-12:00, Terrace Room

Description:

This session offers participants the opportunity to engage with a playful yet safe approach to helping international students to explore issues related to their mental health and well-being. This is relevant to the conference theme because many students disguise their loneliness as they are surprised by the power of culture shock (Tran, 2011).

This session offers participants a taster of the "empathy journey experience" approach to helping students discuss feelings of homesickness or culture shock associated with moving away from home to study in an unfamiliar place (Altman, et al, 2018). This is an important field of concern as the well-being of students can be affected by difficulties settling in to a new environment, language and unfamiliar methods of teaching and learning or even making friends (Strubler et al, 2011). The method has wider application to many other student or client journeys (Roberts et al,2016; Gurjar and Elwood, 2024) . The approach uses a well-established loss and adjustment curve model and through group-activities converts this into a board game which 4-6 players can create and design themselves (Göncü and Perone, 2005)

The session will offer participants an opportunity to review key elements of a typical session plan for use in Higher Education settings. This will include an overview of the concepts of culture shock and cultural adjustment followed by a taster of the role-play elements. Conference participants can pretend/imagine themselves as a homesick student, asked to put themselves in the shoes of a peer experiencing social and or study adjustment difficulties (Berry, 1994) . This is the mask of melancholy (signified by wearing a badge where they can give themselves a made up name).

The playfulness element includes explaining how people at each stage might think, feel and behave in the imagined landscape (Farné,2005; Nørgård et al, 2017). They do this by answering questions for each step of the empathy journey from arrival and the onset of homesickness to better adjustment levels (Mezirow, 2009; Turner, 2014).

In real-play the full activity can be arranged in different ways – run across two shorter- sessions, or one longer (c 2 hrs group-work session).

The game ends with stories of how people have managed this challenging process drawing on their agency and resourcefulness

Conference delegates will be provided with information about the underlying research and illustrative session materials, so they can adapt and create the game/activities to their own contexts.

A proto type game board is currently in development and can be shared with interested parties after the conference.

References, web links and other resources:

References

- Altman, M., T. T. K. Huang, and J. Y. Breland. (2018) "Design Thinking in Health Care." *Preventing Chronic Disease* 15: E117
- Berry, J.W. (1994) Acculturation and psychological adaptation. In *Journeys into cross-cultural psychology*, ed. A.-M. Bouvy, F.J.R. van de Vijver, P. Boski, and P. Schmitz, 129–41. Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger.
- Engeström, Y. (1999) Activity theory and individual and social transformation. In: Engestrom, Y., Miettinen, R. and Punamäki, R-L. (eds.). *Perspectives on activity theory*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Farné, R. (2005) *Pedagogy of Play*, *Topoi*. Vol. 24: 169-181
- Göncü,A. and Perone, A.(2005) Pretend Play as a Life Span Activity, *Topoi*. Vol. 24: 137-147
- Gurjar,N. and Elwood,S. (2024) Equity-Based Empathy Mapping in Learning Experience Design in Schmidt,M. Earnshaw,Y. Exter,M. Tawfik,A. Hokanson,B. (Eds)(2024) *Transdisciplinary Learning Experience Design; Futures, Synergies, and Innovation*. The Association for Educational Communications and Technology. Springer Nature Switzerland. AG.
- Mezirow, J. (2009). Transformative learning theory. In J. Mezirow & E. W. Taylor (Eds.), *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education* (pp. 18–32). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Nørgård, R. T., Toft-Nielsen, C., & Whitton, N. (2017). Playful learning in higher education: developing a signature pedagogy. *International Journal of Play*, 6(3), 272–282
- Roberts, J. P., T. R. Fisher, M. J. Trowbridge, and C. Bent. (2016). "A Design Thinking Framework for Healthcare Management and Innovation." *Healthcare* 4 (1): 11–14
- Strubler,D. Park,S. and Agarwal, A. (2011) Revisiting Black, Mendehall and Oddou's (1991) Framework for International Adjustment Model: A Prescriptive Approach. *Journal of International Business Research*, Vol. 10. No. 2.
- Tran, L.T. (2011) Committed, face-value, hybrid or mutual adaptation? The experiences of international students in Australian higher education. *Educational Review*. 63(1): 79–94.
- Turner, N.K. (2014) Development of self-belief for employability in higher education: ability, efficacy and control in context. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 19 (6) 592–602.

Yahtzee: dice games for learning

Lead Author: Roger Saunders

Additional authors:

Timetable: , Thursday Spotlight

Description:

We've all used dice at some point, now play some dice based games, from simple story telling to complex strategy games. From 6 sided to 20 sided dice, from numbered dice to blank dice. Dice as counters and dice as random output generators. This session allows participants to explore games, learn some principles of mechanics and at the end you'll get a set of blank dice to take away.

References, web links and other resources:

The feedback game

Lead Author: Liz Cable

Additional authors:

Timetable: , Wednesday Spotlight

Description:

It's a 10-20 minute game about how to give good feedback.* Intended to be useful for academics marking assessments and students involved in peer feedback. Play the game and give us your feedback. Wear a disguise if you want your feedback to be anonymous. Available in the in-between times, this game is 2 minutes to learn.

Players will contribute to the development of a new version of the game, decide if they'd like to use it in their practice, experience play-testing, the concept of "re-skinning" a game, and reflect on the experience.

*also, how to be nice.

References, web links and other resources:

How a Froggle Woggle can teach employees about Creativity, Empathy, Storytelling and more

Lead Author: Karen Winter

Additional authors:

Timetable: Thursday Session 6: 12:15-12:45, Terrace Room

Description:

What if a simple lump of Play-Doh could unlock creative breakthroughs, strengthen team connections, and refine storytelling skills? This session explores how a playful academic experiment, first developed in Karen Winter's psychology research, has evolved into a practical but playful corporate approach to creativity, emotional intelligence, and communication. Inspired by Karen's master's thesis, "Stimulating Adult Creativity Through Touch-Based Play" (2023, Anglia Ruskin), this approach challenges traditional ways of thinking and demonstrates how hands-on, sensory play can unlock fresh ideas and better educational outcomes.

Touch is a powerful but often overlooked tool in problem-solving. Psychological research shows that working with our hands stimulates neural pathways linked to learning, memory, and ideation. This makes abstract ideas more accessible, encouraging participants to think in new ways. In this session, participants will use Play-Doh to shape and explore their own Froggle Woggle, externalising thoughts in a way that encourages new perspectives, strengthens emotional awareness, and builds a more intuitive understanding of storytelling.

Unlike conventional corporate training, which often relies on passive learning, this session is designed to be immersive, hands-on, and fun. The playful setting, grounded in academic research, inspires curiosity, encourages experimentation, and supports ongoing learning.

References, web links and other resources:

<http://www.thejoyofcreativity.co.uk>

Clowning with Compassion: Disrupting structures and inspiring creative approaches as modern jesters

Lead Author: Rosie Jones

Additional authors: Suzanne Faulkner and Karen Grayburn

Timetable: Thursday Session 6: 12:15-12:45, Gallery Room 2

Description:

As recently trained 'Clowning for Transformation workshop' facilitators we are eager to share the surprise ... and disguise we experienced through this training.

Adapting clowning for Higher Education, this session offers the "opportunity to revisit the dynamics of the classroom through the recognition of the important role that the clown can play in society." (McCusker, 2023)

Traditional entry and exit points into clowning can often be challenging; for example in the consideration of accessibility, assumptions regarding confidence and expectations of energy levels. Our desired outcome is to create an environment to ensure that clowning provides a safe space for all.

We will share the principles of modern-day clowning and the opportunities this affords for improvisation and experimentation. You will be invited to find your clown persona through play and use this to design solutions to real world problems.

Participants will:

- Understand the principles of clowning and clowning practice through playing games.
- Apply clowning principles to a real-world problem.
- Explore the challenges of clowning strategies and collaborate to improve the inclusiveness of clowning approaches.
- Clown Around to reflect on methods and practices to enhance the dynamics of the classroom.

What not to expect:

- No face wipes required as face paints will not be used.
- No oversized shoes are required.
- No need to bring your driving license for your tiny car.

– No protective goggles required from any squirty flower incidents.

Further reading

McCusker, S. (2023). Clowning and Creative Teaching: How to Be a Clown-Teacher. In *Pedagogy of the Clown: Clowning Principles in Education* (pp. 113-124). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

References, web links and other resources:

McCusker, S. (2023). Clowning and Creative Teaching: How to Be a Clown-Teacher. In *Pedagogy of the Clown: Clowning Principles in Education* (pp. 113-124). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Guinness world record attempt: 'The shortest organised game jam'.

Lead Author: Joe Macleod-Iredale

Additional authors: None

Timetable: Thursday Session 7: 15:00-15:45, Gallery Room 1

Description:

In groups, participants will be faced with a pile of analogue game components, boards, pens, etc and asked to just start playing. Rules will emerge and evolve, players will compete and collaborate, and by the end of the session, they will (hopefully) have developed something resembling a playable game.

This approach is a deliberate counterpoint to the six game jams (55 participants) run as part of the facilitator's PhD (in-progress), investigating the uses of analogue game-making as a teaching tool for creative students. It is hoped that elements of the experience may prove useful when it is impractical to spend the usual two-day on a game jam.

No experience of game making is required, just a willingness to dive in at the deep end and get stuck in. Participants will experience a collaborative creative maelstrom and get a taste of how engaging game-making can be, and how it might be applied to their teaching practice.

References, web links and other resources:

The record: <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/397795-shortest-organized-game-jam>

A report on the first three game jams: <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3697789.3697791>

The biggest game jam organisation: <https://globalgamejam.org/>

More to follow, including a list of components and a prompt for prior consideration.

MicrobEscape Room: do-it-yourself escape room!

Lead Author: Isabel Murillo

Additional authors: Lydia Mason, Emma Stevenson and Laura Wright

Timetable: Wednesday Session 2: 14:45-15:30, Terrace Room

Description:

This session will be dedicated to showing how we developed MicrobEscape Room, an escape room created as a revision tool for students in higher education. MicrobEscape room game was co-created and used by first year undergraduate students. Playing this game with small groups within a large group has proved to be a fantastic pedagogic approach that helps create an inclusive and playful learning space. The game is used to revise microbiology but can be adapted to any other discipline and any level of knowledge. Its versatility stretches the imagination!

What will you be doing in this session:

Participants will have the opportunity to try out our MicrobEscape Room game and to develop their own escape room. A starting tool kit will be provided so participants can make their first attempt at creating an escape room in small groups. Each group will contribute one element of the game to a larger escape room game. We will also discuss how this game can be adapted to the different participants' disciplines.

References, web links and other resources:

Julia Morris. Escape Rooms in Education. A practical guide. 2020. ISBN: 8550449660, 9788550449661, 9798550449660
Escape Rooms in Education Showcase 2025, <https://lta.hw.ac.uk/escape-rooms-in-education-showcase/>

“Wish you were here”: Building a Playful Learning Community

Lead Author: Suzanne Faulkner

Additional authors: Claire Timmins, Simon Grey

Timetable: ,

Description:

Building and sustaining a playful learning community is no easy feat, but it can be an incredibly rewarding experience for all involved. This session is designed to provide conference attendees with the opportunity to share their practices and make connections.

The session will begin with a quick introduction to playful learning communities, showcasing examples of successful practices from different institutions. From there, participants will engage in hands-on discussions, sharing their own experiences, and brainstorming ways to cultivate sustainable playful learning communities. Participants will then be asked to consider who they would like to connect playfully with. This could be:

- # Someone else they have met at the conference.
- # Someone playful who you know at your institution.
- # Another playful person you don't know?.
- # Someone from the playful learning community
- # Your past or future self.

Participants will receive blank “Wish You Were Here” postcards to send to their chosen recipient(s). They will be encouraged to come up with playful ideas they'd love to share with these lucky recipients, fostering new connections and contributing to a vibrant, playful community. Or simply use it as a way to connect with someone from the conference

We hope that writing these postcards will encourage participants to connect with others, making for a delightful and meaningful surprise for the recipients!

References, web links and other resources:

Playing with the Difference Machine

Lead Author: John Lean

Additional authors:

Timetable: Friday Session 10: 10:30-11:00, Gallery Room 1

Description:

Why can't any of us agree on a definition of play? Sure, we all love the collaborative vibe at Playful Learning, but if you drill down under the happy surface into some theory you'll find play scholars at each other's throats about the role of competition, or toys, or rules, or any number of things. Is play the same as games? Is adult play fundamentally different to child's play? Is play the domain of introverts or extroverts? And why-o-why can't any of us start a book without referring to the ancient Egyptian game senet?

Definitions are really important in an era of mistruth and distrust. But they're also less static and more malleable than we might think – playful even! If we could find a way to map out the process of defining and redefining, it would help us to identify what really matters to us in playful learning.

Though I work as a lecturer in education, I'm a philosopher at heart, and many of my teaching and learning techniques playfully provoke philosophical conversation about big concepts. In this session I want us to explore our different definitions of play by playtesting a new activity.

In my shed, I have been building a machine that makes productive use of definitional difference, and we're going to plug it in and use it to throw our definitions of play at each other. The machine can help us to explore our different definitions of play, offering activities that help us to reconcile them, but also to justify any unbridgeable gaps and find productive, collaborative space within them. The machine is creative, holding a toolkit for discussion of definitions, but also ways of developing new ones.

(I am also worried that the machine is sentient and sees me as its Daddy, but let's not think too much about that.)

By the end of the session, you'll have engaged with some theory of play (though you don't have to have any prior knowledge of this), pulled at some difficult tensions, had a good think about your own personal definition of play (even if you don't already have one), and discussed why definitions matter in the first place. The machine itself is also a good way of provoking discussion around difference, so hopefully you'll also be able to take away a blueprint for a machine you can use with your students.

Join me and the machine for a provocative playtest!

References, web links and other resources:

Will follow later...

Copyright © 2025 Playful Learning Association - Playful Learning Association

Unlock the Fun: Design your own educational escape room adventure

Lead Author: David Anderson

Additional authors: Davina Bird

Timetable: Wednesday Session 1: 13:45-14:30, Gallery Room 2

Description:

Love escape rooms? Want to use them in your teaching? Don't know where to start?

Join us for an interactive session where you'll work with resources and specially designed puzzle templates to create your own prototype escape room. The workshop was designed as part of a teaching and learning project aimed at sharing innovative teaching practices and is perfect for teachers who want to incorporate educational escape rooms into their classrooms but are unsure how to begin.

During the session, you'll collaborate with fellow educators to design and build your own escape room puzzles, making use of creative resources to jumpstart your ideas. Guided by our insights, you'll explore the design process behind various escape room puzzles and develop the skills and confidence to create your own.

By the end of this session, you'll have a clearer understanding of how to design engaging and educational escape room experiences for your students. Get ready to unlock the fun and transform your teaching methods!

References, web links and other resources:

Morris, J. (2020) Escape Rooms in Education: A Practical Guide

[The DICE Café blog](#), with the downloadable templates for creating your own escape room.

From Story to Strategy: Transforming Lectures with Interactive Storytelling and Mentimeter

Lead Author: Claire Robertson

Additional authors:

Timetable: Thursday Session 8: 16:15-17:00, Gallery Room 2

Description:

Popular culture meets tech in this engaging session on transforming traditional lectures into engaging, interactive experiences that combine storytelling with digital tools like Mentimeter. Drawing inspiration from the BBC Radio 4 comedy show *It's a Fair Cop* and *Choose Your Own Adventure* books, I will showcase how a storytelling approach can immerse students in real-world problem-solving.

Attendees will experience a practical example, taking on the role of consultants tasked with creating a marketing strategy for a family-run farm shop. You'll assume the role of marketers, making decisions at key points, as I lead you through the 'story' of this challenge. Each decision shapes the narrative and culminates in the creation of a collaborative marketing asset.

The approach fosters critical thinking, teamwork, and practical application of marketing concepts while providing students with a sense of achievement. The session will emphasize how storytelling and technology can transform lectures into memorable, student-centered learning experiences.

Key Takeaways for Conference Attendees:

- Learn how to design interactive lectures through Mentimeter to enhance engagement and collaboration.
- Gain a ready-to-use example of a marketing challenge scenario adaptable to various disciplines.
- Discuss ways to enhance and adapt the technique for different purposes and topics.
- This session is ideal for educators looking to energize their teaching with innovative, student-focused techniques.

References, web links and other resources:

BBC Radio 4's *It's a Fair Cop*: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b060fj66>

From game-based learning to co-creation: getting reluctant students to love logic!

Lead Author: Karl Egerton

Additional authors:

Timetable: Thursday Session 5: 11:15-12:00, Gallery Room 1

Description:

In this workshop, I will outline and provide the initial results of the introduction of an innovative form of game-based learning within a compulsory first-year undergraduate philosophy module. Game-based learning represents a tempting opportunity to promote student engagement, but this outcome has often been elusive in practice. This may be due to many teachers' reliance on 'basic gamification', which uses points, trophies etc. to generate incentives but risks ineffectiveness when these lose their novelty. I will present the early results of an attempt to introduce deeper game-based learning to a compulsory first-year formal logic module on an undergraduate philosophy programme. This builds on the previous successful introduction of game-based learning to an optional third-year philosophy module, with the new setting introducing additional challenges: lower expected engagement on a compulsory module, less preparation for innovative learning on a first-year module, and the widely acknowledged fact that philosophy students find formal logic hopelessly hard and hopelessly boring!

The intervention aims to exploit some of the benefits of typical game-based learning while subverting expectations by becoming genuinely playful. Students are presented with logic exercises as 'puzzle games', where winning the game requires students to demonstrate key logical skills. These exercises are distinctive in two ways: first, they are narrative-driven, taking place within a fictional sci-fi universe and presented as 'whodunnit' murder mysteries; second, some exercises are made available via Downpour, a free app which makes it possible for anyone to create simple point-and-click games. The first feature aims to give students reason to invest more fully in their attempts to solve the problems; the second feature crucially allows students to create variants of these games after completing them, thus taking students from engagement into co-creation.

The aim of the intervention is to foster engagement that goes beyond simpler measures like improved attendance, and instead manifests in increased desire, and ability, to apply learning from this module in their further studies. Formal logic is widely acknowledged by philosophers to be important in developing philosophical skills, but students routinely struggle to see its relevance to their overall programme. Success in achieving this complex aim is difficult to measure (and measurable only over a longer time-frame), so for this workshop impact will be measured by (1) a mid-module survey of students which will ask engagement-related questions, (2) reports from seminar leaders, and (3)

student attainment (data on this may not yet be available at the time of the conference). While of particular interest to philosophy teachers, there are lessons to be learned more widely about the possibilities for game-based learning and about ways to promote active involvement from students studying compulsory modules.

After covering the theoretical backdrop and an overview of the format of the innovation (5 minutes), we will devote the main portion of the session to trying out examples of the logic games, building up to the opportunity to create a small game (30 minutes) before returning to summarise initial results alongside questions and discussion (10 minutes).

References, web links and other resources:

Downpour website: <https://downpour.games/>

Example of logic game: <https://downpour.games/~crow23/logic-seminar-1-the-mine-explosion-boom/>

Paper on prior game-based learning introduction establishing principles for this project: <https://doi.org/10.48783/gameviron.v19i19.218>

Game-making as business as usual

Lead Author: Liz Cable

Additional authors:

Timetable: Friday Session 9: 09:30-10:15, Terrace Room

Description:

Using three case studies: a three-act investigative game to recruit students to policing and criminology degrees, a mega-game for an interprofessional education day to bring 7 faculties of undergraduates together, and an escape game to teach immunology, this session will cover the process of game-design working with subject matter experts. What exactly are the processes (and the pitfalls) of collaborating across departments? going from scoping to prototyping, play-testing to classroom you'll gain insights into the life-cycle of collaborative game-design. Including some top tips for tools, documentation and recording experiences.

Bring along an idea for a game you want to work on, and leave with an action plan, a play-list and plenty of inspiration for getting started.

References, web links and other resources:

They're hiding amongst you and they aren't comfortable. Neurodivergents, masking, and play preferences.

Lead Author: Andrew Walsh

Additional authors:

Timetable: Thursday Session 4: 10:00-10:45, Gallery Room 2

Description:

Neurodivergent people often spend their lives in disguise, trying to hide amongst the neurotypicals, masks always at hand. But (surprise!) they often have different needs and different preferences for play compared to many neurotypicals. Definitions of play and playfulness tend to neglect these needs and are normally heavily neurotypical coded, particularly clashes with Autistic and Dyspraxic tendencies.

In this session we'll each make a disguise that represents how neurodivergent people may try to mask each day to cope with the demands of social learning and particularly playful learning approaches. We'll reflect on comments from neurodivergent people about their experiences of play from a series of recent (late 2024) interviews to inform this activity as well as previous research and the lived experiences of the facilitator.

After making the disguises, we'll reflect on how we might make it easier for neurodivergent people to start to remove or deconstruct their own everyday masks, how we might adapt our playful interventions (that may suit ourselves), to approaches that enable more people to fully engage in them without fear and to genuinely start playing.

Participants should leave with a deeper understanding of neurodivergent play (particularly Autistic and Dyspraxic) and an emerging sense of how they can make their own playful interventions more inclusive to these groups. Current research tends to focus on neurodivergent children and play, rather than adults, often with a "deficit" model and suggesting ways of changing their play behaviours to make them more acceptable to neurotypical norms. This session takes a different approach, focussing on adults and enabling their preferred play behaviours.

References, web links and other resources:

Not written up my interviews yet and much research focusses on children and "fixing them", but:

Davis, R., & Crompton, C. J. (2021). What Do New Findings About Social Interaction in Autistic Adults Mean for Neurodevelopmental Research? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(3), 649-653. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620958010>

Fein, E. (2015). Making Meaningful Worlds: Role-Playing Subcultures and the Autism Spectrum. *Cult Med Psychiatry* 39, 299-321. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11013-015-9443-x>

Jaswal, V. K., & Akhtar, N. (2019). Being versus appearing socially uninterested: Challenging assumptions about social motivation in autism. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 42, e82. doi:10.1017/S0140525X18001826

Jordan, R. (2003). Social Play and Autistic Spectrum Disorders: A Perspective on Theory, Implications and Educational Approaches. *Autism*, 7(4), 347-360. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361303007004002>

Pritchard-Rowe, E., de Lemos, C., Howard, K., & Gibson, J. (2024). Diversity in Autistic Play: Autistic Adults' Experiences. *Autism in Adulthood*, 6(2), 218-228.

Copyright © 2025 Playful Learning Association - Playful Learning Association

Unlock the Fun: Design your own educational escape room adventure

Lead Author: David Anderson

Additional authors: Davina Bird

Timetable: Wednesday Session 1: 13:45-14:30, Gallery Room 2

Description:

Love escape rooms? Want to use them in your teaching? Don't know where to start?

Join us for an interactive session where you'll work with resources and specially designed puzzle templates to create your own prototype escape room. The workshop was designed as part of a teaching and learning project aimed at sharing innovative teaching practices and is perfect for teachers who want to incorporate educational escape rooms into their classrooms but are unsure how to begin.

During the session, you'll collaborate with fellow educators to design and build your own escape room puzzles, making use of creative resources to jumpstart your ideas. Guided by our insights, you'll explore the design process behind various escape room puzzles and develop the skills and confidence to create your own.

By the end of this session, you'll have a clearer understanding of how to design engaging and educational escape room experiences for your students. Get ready to unlock the fun and transform your teaching methods!

References, web links and other resources:

Morris, J. (2020) *Escape Rooms in Education: A Practical Guide*

[The DICE Café blog](#), with the downloadable templates for creating your own escape room.

Remove your mask : A 'play'ful approach to building authenticity and trust

Lead Author: Becky Hartnup

Additional authors: Carina Buckley

Timetable: Thursday Session 7: 15:00-15:45, Outdoors

Description:

A session that will consider surprises and disguises – and make you laugh.
It will support you in co-creation, opening up to new ideas and making bolder choices.
And you will get your own actual masks to take home...

Trustful relationships are at the heart of successful collaboration and knowledge sharing; the ability to trust and be vulnerable with others is central to playful learning as it encourages risk-taking and promotes openness to new ideas (Heard-Lauréote and Buckley, 2025). However, trust is contingent. Relationships are shaped and located within 'spaces, places, contexts and environments' that are shared with other 'objects, bodies and materialities' (Gravett et al., 2021). For these to interact positively and meaningfully requires the connection, authenticity, and responsiveness of relational pedagogies. These allow for reciprocal learning and the recognition that everyone in a learning environment brings something of value. However, we often adopt roles and personas in a professional context that, whether through a fear of vulnerability or to fit in with social norms, can inhibit authentic engagement with colleagues and students by reducing the power of our authentic selves to question and be curious, to make bolder freer choices, and to inspire others.

In this session, we will invite delegates to remove their masks and discover different versions of themselves as they play their way through a variety of theatre games, improvisation and clowning activities and reflect on their experiences. These are designed to support delegates in questioning norms, treading on the cracks and drawing outside the lines, and in doing so explore the value of authenticity in building trust and the importance of retaining a learner perspective.

The session is adapted from workshops developed to support amateur actors performing in Nassim Soleimanpour's 'sort of play', White Rabbit, Red Rabbit. It is a play without rehearsals or directors. The performer discovers the content alongside the audience as they both participate in a 'theatrical experiment'. Themes of the play include social expectations, trust and identity and how they impact on our relationships with others. The workshop will not be covering the content of the play.

Delegates will have the opportunity to play, to observe, to reflect, and ultimately to discover different versions of themselves in games that

explore:

- Your own kaleidoscope of identities
- Celebrating failure and vulnerability
- Co-creation through clowning
- Understanding yourself and surprising yourself

No theatrical experience is necessary – this will be fun and playful!

References, web links and other resources:

- Gravett, K., Taylor, C. A., & Fairchild, N. (2021). Pedagogies of mattering: re-conceptualising relational pedagogies in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 29(2), 388–403. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1989580>
- Heard-Lauréote, K. and Buckley, C. (2025) "Building trustful relationships through intrapreneurship in Academic Development", *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, (33). doi: 10.47408/jldhe.vi33.1177
- Liu, J., Burkhardt, J.-M., & Lubart, T. (2023). Boosting Creativity through Users' Avatars and Contexts in Virtual Environments—A Systematic Review of Recent Research. *Journal of Intelligence*, 11(7), 144. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jintelligence11070144>
- Kendrick, L. (2011). A paidic aesthetic: an analysis of games in the ludic pedagogy of Philippe Gaulier. *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 2(1), 72–85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19443927.2010.543918>
- Soleimanpour, Nassim. (2017) *White Rabbit Red Rabbit & BLANK*. London: Oberon.
<https://markaspen.com/2024/10/30/white-red-rabbit/>

Assessment Timepocalypse

Lead Author: Roger Saunders

Additional authors:

Timetable: Friday Session 10: 10:30-11:00, Gallery Room 2

Description:

Following the session run by Emma Gillaspay and Jim Thompson at last year's PLA conference, here's what my table came up with: a game about time management based on the mechanics of Cards Against Humanity. Come and play the game, see how it works, and think about whether you could use this with your own students. Suggest ideas for expansion packs or to improve the experience. Think about other topics that would work using this mechanic. Above all, have fun.

References, web links and other resources:

A Framework for Inclusive Playful Learning : The Detective's Playground

Lead Author: Elliott Spaeth

Additional authors: Rosie Jones and Jane Mooney

Timetable: , Thursday Spotlight

Description:

By the end of the Playful Learning Conference we aim to have created a framework that will sustain and grow the Playful Learning Conference approach to inclusivity as well as one you can use in your own practice. We want to ensure this does not rely on individuals but that a wider section of the playful learning community can get involved in this approach encouraging its continual development throughout the year and an annual updated resource.

Enter our spotlight activity, a drop-in affair where the evidence and clues you gathered on day 1 from our foyer detective poster will be scrutinized. We'll dig deeper into these clues, uncovering more about how to foster inclusivity. On day 3, the final pieces of our puzzle will come together, and we'll crack the case wide open to inform our framework.

References, web links and other resources:

The Power of Pairs

Lead Author: Ruth Torr

Additional authors:

Timetable: Wednesday Session 3: 16:00-17:00, Outdoors

Description:

This interactive workshop explores playfulness in pairs through both physical and verbal exercises. Designed to encourage experimentation, collaboration, and presence, the session is part of a broader study on intrinsic motivation in undergraduate students—specifically, the autotelic nature of play.

Over forty-five minutes, participants will explore the dynamics of connection, focusing on collaboration and the ability to let go of predetermined outcomes. This skill—being fully present without fixating on a result—is transferable to various collaborative settings, such as committee meetings, conference planning, and group assessments. Staley’s *Institute of Advanced Play* (2019, pp. 161-175) presents a similar concept: an alternative university where experimentation and failure are embraced, and learning is not driven by predefined objectives but by the openness to “unlearning.” This workshop immerses participants in that same space of open-ended, collaborative play. The session begins with playful language and movement exercises, such as improvised conversations where dialogue starts with sequential letters of the alphabet, mirrored movements, and movement-based games. Alternating between verbal and physical activities is intentional, as previous iterations and participant feedback suggest that individuals often have distinct preferences.

Throughout the workshop, participants will continually switch partners, exploring new exercises with different people. The session builds toward a final activity where one partner describes or dictates the other’s actions, with leadership fluidly shifting between them—or breaking down and needing to be re-established. The key takeaway is learning to be present in partnership rather than fixating on outcomes.

My PhD research focuses on playfulness, particularly its link to intrinsic motivation in higher education. Scholars such as Piaget, Sicart, and Watton discuss the autotelic nature of play—if the player doesn’t choose to play, it isn’t play. I believe intrinsic motivation is essential for transforming university culture. If students engage in learning voluntarily, rather than as part of a transactional system (“I pay tuition, you certify my skills”—Staley, 2019, p.11), they will be more likely to explore their interests, develop curiosity, and embrace experimentation and failure.

This workshop serves as action research, recreating a mini “community of practice” (Lave and Wenger, 1991) where participants experience the joy of being present without a predetermined outcome. At the end of the session, participants will be encouraged to reflect on their experience. With their consent, these reflections may be included in my phenomenographic research, a methodology well-suited to capturing the diverse reactions elicited by this light-hearted yet insightful workshop.

Space needed: An open area where participants can slowly walk about, such as a section of a seminar room where chairs can be set to one

side.

Accessibility: The activities can be easily and quickly adapted if standing and walking is not preferred.

Attire: Normal clothes can be worn.

Participants are not required to touch each other or be physically close.

Consent for harvesting the reflections will be captured from participants via a physical handout at the end.

References, web links and other resources:

Piaget, J (1962) *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood* Norton Library New York

Sicart, M (2014) *Play Matters* Massachusetts Institute of Technology USA

Staley DJ (2019) *Alternative Universities* John Hopkins University Press USA

Wattton, N (2022) *Play and Learning in Adulthood: Reimagining Pedagogy and the Politics of Education* Palgrave Macmillan

Why So Serious? Engaging PhD Students in Playful Learning

Lead Author: Dr Abbie Edgar

Additional authors: Dr Fabiana Fausto McCracken

Timetable: Thursday Session 7: 15:00-15:45, Gallery Room 2

Description:

As discussed by Kollars and Rosen (2017), research skills courses are the 'double trouble' of academia – loathed by both educators and students. Yet, let's be real, mastering research skills is like unlocking a secret level in the game of life, crucial for both academic success and career growth. The real challenge? Sparking enthusiasm in students to tackle research skills training (Earley, 2014). Abbott (2020; 2019) has pointed out that postgraduates have it even tougher. They're expected to deftly avoid snakes while trying to climb the ladder by mastering applied research skills while balancing their independent projects.

As Smith (2019: 67) highlighted, "play is too important not to be taken seriously by Higher Education." We believe that a dash of playfulness can work wonders, and we argue that it has a crucial role in motivating PhD students to develop their skills in a non-intimidating environment. In this session, we will highlight some of the creative and playful methods we have used to design our Postgraduate Research Development Programme.

Format of the session and activities:

The session will be interactive throughout, with time allocated for group discussion and individual reflection.

Agenda:

1. Introduction (5 minutes total)

Facilitators will kick things off with a warm welcome and a dash of excitement.

2. Preparing PhD Students for Key Milestones (15 minutes total)

- Visual Stimuli and Individual Reflection

Review two activities in groups and let your creativity shine (10 minutes)

- Group 1 & 2: Review Activity 1
- Group 3 & 4: Review Activity 2
- Reflective Feedback Worksheet

Discuss your reflections and recommendations with a touch of imagination (5 minutes)

3. Developing PhD Students' Presentation Planning Skills (20 minutes total)

- Group Task: Using LEGO to Discuss the '7 Steps of Presentations' (5 minutes)

The facilitator will introduce this creative task.

- Hands-On Task (10 minutes)

Dive into the world of LEGO and construct your presentation plans.

- Feedback Session (5 minutes)

Display your LEGO creations and share your insights on the applicability to your own context.

4. Discussion and Close (5 minutes total)

Reflective Questions:

- What challenges have you faced when designing playful activities for a traditionally "serious" learning environment, e.g. doctoral training?
- How do you balance academic rigour and a sense of play in your activities?
- What metrics do you use to measure the impact of playful activities on your students' progress?
- How can you foster an environment where postgraduate students feel comfortable engaging in playful activities?

Wrap up with some thought-provoking questions and a lively discussion.

The goals of this session are for you to:

- Master your creativity through playful skill 'levels' to generate ideas for your own context
- Challenge your critical thinking about the magic of playfulness within higher education

References, web links and other resources:

Abbott, D. (2019) 'Game-based learning for postgraduates: An empirical study of an educational game to teach research skills', *Higher Education Pedagogies*, 4(1).

Abbott, D. (2020) 'Beyond Vicarious Learning: Embedding Dialogic Learning into Educational Games', in Fotaris, P. (ed.) *Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Game Based Learning*. Brighton: Academic Conferences, pp. 1–10.

Kollars, N. and Rosen, A. M. (2017) 'Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Methods? Methodological Games and Role Play', *Journal of Political Science Education*, 13(3), pp. 333–345.

Smith, S. (2019) "Exploration: Play in Practice – Innovation Through Play in the Postgraduate Curriculum". In: James, A.; Nerantzi, C. *The Power of Play in Higher Education: Creativity in Tertiary Learning*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 57-67.

ENIGMA: Playing for clarity over certainty

Lead Author: Gary Worgan – Beyond the Skills

Additional authors:

Timetable: Wednesday Session 2: 14:45-15:30, Gallery Room 1

Description:

Come and play ENIGMA with Jess and Gary!

A Curiously Ambiguous Team Challenge.

Designed for the pandemic...before the pandemic.

Teams of 5-8 people are thrown into uncertainty and ambiguity. The only way out is to move towards clarity, not certainty.

Stay Curious

References, web links and other resources:

<https://www.beyondtheskills.com/products>

Here Be Dragons

Lead Author: Pen Holland

Additional authors:

Timetable: Wednesday Session 3: 16:00-17:00, Terrace Room

Description:

At the edges of the tea-stained, crumpled map, in the uncharted territory beyond the known world, a shaky, spider-black font creeps over the page: "HERE BE DRAGONS." But how can you be sure that dragons don't lurk in the cave up the hill, or under your garden hedge, or perhaps even behind the bins at work? And if they did, what would be their challenges, needs and stories? In this interactive workshop we will explore the creative power of learning through imagination, as well as information, for critical thinking and information synthesis.

Dragons (the kind that can fly, breathe fire or ice, and may or may not have a hoard of gold under the mountain) provide us with an engaging and playful tool for examining, synthesising and critically evaluating knowledge and evidence while removing the pressure to be right. For example, how does a dragon breathe fire? This would require a set of physiological traits and chemical processes to come together, from the dragon having a fuel source (likely to be flammable gas or liquid), spark creation (tooth-based friction or lower down in the dragon), and thick protection on the mouth parts to avoid burns. However, cooked meat is much easier to digest than raw, so there are clear evolutionary advantages to the first dragons fortunate enough to experience these mutations simultaneously. LOOK! You just learned some biology by thinking about dragons!

In the first half of this session, participants will get to grips with dragon biology and reflect on how creative prompts about mythical creatures can stimulate seriously useful and engaging student-led research and learning, that even come with justifications and an evidence base despite not being real (probably). Participants will then collaboratively extend these dragon-based challenges, behaviours and historical narratives to discover useful creatures of legend across subject areas from science to arts and humanities. We will start to compile questions, prompts and resources for harnessing dragons for education, and discuss how to implement these in a classroom setting, from small group teaching to large lectures. What does a philosophical dragon think about? Did King Alfred really burn his own cakes? If the Vikings had had dragons, could they have reached further round the world than they did using boats? Participants will reflect on their own imaginary educational practice and start to write a short case study relevant to their interests and disciplines, and there will be an opportunity to contribute to a dragon toolkit for publication after the conference.

References, web links and other resources:

Dragons on wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dragon>

Eidinow E (2016), Telling stories: Exploring the relationship between myths and ecological wisdom. *Landscape and Urban Planning* 155, 47-52.

Holmes G, Smith TA, Ward C (2018). Fantastic beasts and why to conserve them: animals, magic and biodiversity conservation. *Oryx*, 52(2):231-239.

Copyright © 2025 Playful Learning Association - Playful Learning Association

The Playful Pause: Using Micro-Play to Build Community and develop Joyful approaches in Adult Learning.

Lead Author: Fey Cole

Additional authors:

Timetable: Friday Session 9: 09:30-10:15, Outdoors

Description:

This session encourages micro-play as an evidence-based strategy to develop joy, build community, and enhance engagement in adult learning. Grounded in Fredrickson's (2001) broaden-and-build theory and Brown's (2009) work on the importance of play in adult development, the session explores how brief, low-stakes play activities can create meaningful connections and energise learning environments.

During the session, participants will experience "The Collaborative Doodle," a playful intervention that combines free form drawing with collective storytelling to encourage laughter, teamwork, and shared experiences. The activity unfolds in three stages:

Setting the Stage: Participants form small groups and receive large sheets of paper and markers. A playful prompt will guide the initial doodling.

Weaving the Story: As the doodle grows, participants will co-create a story, embracing their creative thinking. The playful narrative will build naturally as the team interact and playfully expand on each other's ideas.

Reflection and Connection: Groups share their completed doodles and stories with others, celebrating the shared playfulness that has emerged. A facilitated reflection will explore how the activity can be used in the adult learning environment to build trust, reduce inhibitions, and create a sense of community. There will be reflection as to how the storytelling can be linked to curriculum and explore challenging conversations in a trusting environment.

This adaptable strategy requires minimal preparation and resources, making it ideal for diverse learning environments. The session will also address common challenges, such as initial resistance to play, and provide tips for creating psychologically safe spaces for adult learners. Play is a powerful tool for adult learning, supporting positive emotional responses that strengthen social bonds and promote engagement (Fredrickson, 2001). Collaborative play activities like "The Collaborative Doodle" enable participants to connect in ways that reduce social anxiety and encourage spontaneous interaction. Storytelling amplifies these effects by tapping into the innate human need for shared

narratives, developing empathy and group cohesion (Harari et al., 2018). Everyone's voice and engagement are important and the doodling will provide time to have fun, whilst recognising the importance of welcoming, playful, and enjoyable learning spaces.

Participants will gain practical strategies to use with the adult learners they work with and a space to reflect on how playful pauses can benefit the learning environment. Doodling allows for self-expression and communication, and there is no expectation for you to be an artist! We hope that participants will feel at ease and enjoy the time being led by their imagination.

References, web links and other resources:

linktr.ee/Fey_Cole

www.playboard.org

<https://www.routledge.com/An-Educators-Guide-to-Project-Based-Learning-Turning-Theory-into-Practice/Cole/p/book/9781032543284>

Copyright © 2025 Playful Learning Association - Playful Learning Association

The Playful Sensory Lab: Where Experimentation Leads to Discovery

Lead Author: Mâir Bull

Additional authors: Kirsteen Aubrey

Timetable: Thursday Session 5: 11:15-12:00, Gallery Room 2

Description:

Step into a world where learning is an adventure for the senses! In a landscape dominated by structured and rigorous educational frameworks, this workshop invites you to break free and embrace the playful, sensory nature of learning.

Participants will gain a toolkit of practical strategies to integrate sensory learning into various educational settings. Participants will discover how sensory learning can transform and enrich their experience, making learning more engaging and effective. Additionally, they will benefit from the collective insights and experiences of fellow educators, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

What Participants Will Do:

- Engage in Tactile Games: Participants will explore various tactile activities designed to stimulate touch and enhance learning through physical interaction.
- Immerse in Auditory Soundscapes: Experience the power of sound in learning by engaging in activities that utilise immersive auditory environments.
- Participate in Embodied Practices: Through movement and physical engagement, participants will discover how embodied practices can deepen understanding and retention.
- Creative Brainstorming: Collaborate with peers in creative brainstorming to generate innovative ideas for incorporating sensory learning into educational practices.
- Playful Reflection Exercises: Reflect on the sensory experiences and their impact on learning through guided playful reflection activities.

Participants will leave with a treasure trove of creative and practical ideas to implement in their own practice, enhancing the overall student experience. Join us for an interactive session filled with sensory explorations, creative brainstorming, and playful reflection exercises. Experience firsthand how sensory learning can transform the educational experience and enrich both participants and presenters. This workshop offers a wealth of practical and creative ideas to take back to your own practice.

References, web links and other resources:

Aubrey, K., 2019. Undisciplinarity, Teaching and Learning in Action, 1/2019.

Ashwin, P., & Clarke, C. (2024). What are we educating for? (BERA Bites Issue 9). British Educational Research Association. <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/berabites-issue-9-what-are-we-educating-for>

Beard, C., Wilson, J.P. (2018) (4th ed) Experiential Learning: A Practical Guide for training, coaching and education. UK and USA: Kogan Page Limited

Berger, J(2008). Ways of Seeing. UK: BBC and Penguin Books.

Bolt, B. (2019). The Magic is in Handling. In Barrett, E, Bolt, B (2019) Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry. Great Britain: Bloomsbury pp.27-45

Culshaw, S. (n.d.). My Love of Collage: personal reflections on using an arts-based research method (the-sra.org.uk)

Dewey, J. (1910). How we think. Boston: Dover Publications.

Dudley, S.H. (2010). Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagement, Interpretation. Oxon: Routledge.

Ingold, T. (2013). Making; Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture. Oxon: Routledge.

Kolb, D. (2015). Experiential Learning. (2nd ed.) New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

Korn, P. (2015) Why we make things and why it matters. USA: Square Peg.

Leader, D. (2016) Hands. UK: Penguin Books.

Orr, S., Shreeve, A. (2018) Art and Design Pedagogy in Higher Education. Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Pagliano, P (2012). The Multisensory Handbook. New York: Routledge.

Polanyi, M (1983). The Tacit Dimension. Gloucester, MA : Peter Smith.

Pye, E. (2007). The Power of Touch. California:Left Coast Press, Inc.

Rubin, R (2023). The Creative Act: A Way of Being. Edinburgh. Canongate Books.

By Students for Students: Game Design as Social Pedagogy for Language Learning

Lead Author: Sebastien Dubreil

Additional authors: Stephan Caspar

Timetable: Thursday Session 8: 16:15-17:00, Terrace Room

Description:

Abstract:

Games play an important role in human cultures and, as such, offer complex and nuanced insights into the values of a society. Yet, they are rarely envisioned as legitimate cultural objects in the foreign language (L2) classroom (unlike literature or cinema). In a multi-level French course entitled “jeux de culture et culture du jeu,” intermediate- and advanced-level students used commercially available French boardgames as windows into the French language and culture and as springboard for their language studies. I chose games that were (1) designed by French studio, (2) often had won award, and (3) are popular in France. The idea was to have games that both had been recognized as good games by the industry and spoke to French people so as to be relevant for our discussions. In the course, students first explored several game genres (party games, escape games, and roll & write games) and analyzed them for (1) language and cultural content, (2) game mechanics, and (3) affordances for language and culture learning. Students then created their own games in these specific genres with an intentional focus on designing games that could be used for educational purposes in (or outside of) language courses to facilitate language and culture learning. These efforts included the creation of pedagogical guides at the attention of teachers and the creation of print-and-play files housed on an online, publicly available archive. In other words, from the outset, students are forced to envision their learning as inscribed in a trajectory that takes into account (1) real-world problem (in this case, language learning) and (2) a real audience (L2 teachers and learners). This approach purposefully positions students as authors of understanding rather than recipients of information (Salen et al., 2011). In this presentation, we will replicate the students’ trajectory in the class by playing some of the student-designed games, discuss their potential for L2 learning, evaluate their positionality as cultural objects, and envision the benefits of designing such learning environments that dovetail play/playful learning (Whitton, 2018), (transformational) game design (Culyba, 2018; Schell, 2019), social pedagogies (Bass & Elmendorf, 2011; Dubreil & Thorne, 2017), multimodal L2 pedagogy (New London Group, 1996; Walsh, 2010), and maker culture (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014) especially as it related to L2 learning (Lord & Dubreil, 2021). I will also present the ongoing efforts to curate and project these games via an online archive entitled “Games for French” (<https://bit.ly/G4French>)

Program description:

In a mixed-proficiency-level French course, students were tasked with designing board games (and accompanying pedagogical materials) for

French learning. In this presentation, we will examine student-designed games, evaluate their potential for classroom use, and discuss the development of social pedagogical learning environment centered on playful approaches and maker culture (including in domains outside of second language education).

References, web links and other resources:

- Bass, R., & Elmendorf, H. (2012). Designing for difficulty: Social pedagogies as a framework for course design. Retrieved from <https://blogs.commonsgeorgetown.edu/bassr/social-pedagogies/>
- Culyba, S. H. (2018). *The Transformational Framework: A Process Tool for the Development of Transformational Games*. ETC Press.
- Dubreil, S. (2020). Using Games for Language Learning in the Age of Social Distancing. *Foreign Language Annals*, 53(2), 250-259.
- Dubreil, S. & Choi, E. (in progress). Games for French. Available online at <https://bit.ly/G4French>
- Dubreil, S. & Thorne, S. L. (Eds.) (2017). *Engaging the World: Social Pedagogies and Language Learning*. Cengage.
- Halverson, E. R. & Sheridan, K. M. (2014). The Maker Movement in Education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(4), 495-504.
- Lord, G., & Dubreil, S. (Eds.) (2021). *Innovation & Creation: The Maker Movement*. CALICO Journal, 38(1).
- New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66, 60-92.
- Salen, K., Torres, R., Wolozin, L., Rufo-Tepper, R., and Shapiro, A. (2011). *Quest to learn: Developing the school for digital kids*. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Reports on Digital Media and Learning. Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press.
- Walsh, M. (2010). Multimodal Literacy: What Does It Mean for Classroom Practice? *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 33, 211-239.
- Whitton, N. (2018). Playful Learning: Tools, Techniques, and Tactics. *Research in Learning Technology*, 26.

Pixar-Pitch Perfection: Crafting Study Snippets with Storytelling Magic

Lead Author: Erin Wilkie

Additional authors: Ann Marie Raos

Timetable: Thursday Session 8: 16:15-17:00, Outdoors

Description:

Before coming to the session (or if you can't make it!), take some time to interact with [this digital resource](#).

 BOOK CREATOR



Playful Learning 2025
Erin Wilkie

Ever find yourself on either side of “less-than-engaging assignment”? When students are unengaged in the assignment, effort is impacted, and the evaluation becomes more challenging as well. Transform learning experiences with some playful tweaks and create a more engaging way to present and evaluate content that is typically assessed through reflections, presentations, or even research dissemination.

The Pixar Pitch is a term adopted from the successful film company (Pixar Animation Studios) that explains a formula to organize a story using brief prompts. While more routinely used in the communications field, Ford-Baxter & Faulkner (2023) explored the effectiveness of an adapted approach within higher education to support students with synthesizing and communicating complex information about their research. Ford-Baxter & Faulkner (2023) studied the tool of storytelling using the Pixar Pitch to assist students with developing clear and concise scholarly communication skills to become more effective communicators, develop collaboration skills, summarize key ideas through an improvisational technique, and engage with their playful self – an aspect of our youthful personalities that often gets left behind when

moving further through adulthood.

Grab your popcorn because we are going to put on a show as we transform colleague reflections with the Pixar Pitch technique!

What will participants be doing:

– In our session participants will have the opportunity to learn about the Pixar Pitch and how it can be used to summarize learning material into nano learning formats. This six-prompt technique (Once upon a time..., Every day..., One day..., Because of that..., Because of that..., and Until finally...) sets the stage for a playful way to share larger pieces of information in a condensed storyline format. As social interaction and peer learning are valued aspects of the Playful Learning Conference, our nano learning experience will be live, not digital, but the foundations of the knowledge can certainly be transferred to digital mediums, like fast-paced social media platforms, to meet engagement preferences of a generation that learns more from short videos than traditional lesson formats.

– After getting a grasp on the instructional strategy through a facilitated exemplar, participants will work in small groups to discuss a common educational topic, discover shared experiences and strategies, and develop a collaborative reflection into a six-prompt storyline. To turn up the fun and spark elements of surprise and disguise, participant groups will collaboratively perform their nano reflections using a fast-paced narrated storytelling activity –costume props encouraged!

– Following the group storytelling pitches, the larger group will reconvene to discuss the usefulness of a Pixar Pitch style learning strategy in their work and life spaces. If group members consent, the group exemplars can be videoed as artifacts for demonstrating the technique and provided to participants for use and advocacy for playful learning among their colleagues and learning communities.

References, web links and other resources:

Reference

Ford–Baxter, T., & Faulkner, K. (2023). Teaching undergraduates to develop concise and compelling scholarly communication through storytelling. *Reference Services Review*, 51(1), 3-12. 10.1108/RSR-08-2022-0030

Resource for Pixar Pitch Method: <https://www.charlesleon.uk/blog/the-pixar-pitch-and-the-22-rules-of-storytelling7102019>

Table 1: Sample of Pixar Pitch connected to higher education and a research paper

1. Once upon a time ... playfulness in adult education was frowned upon, stigmatized as a lesser form of scholarly knowledge acquisition (Introduction)
2. Every day ... teachers struggled with student engagement in traditional style lectures and educational approaches (Research Problem)
3. One day ... a graduate student explored the existing literature connected to playful learning to uncover evidence to support its use in higher education (Literature Review)
4. Because of that ... a rationale for a playful pedagogical practice and framework was formed (Research Rationale)
5. Because of that ... the graduate student was able to present the pedagogy to higher education colleagues and support them with trialing the approach in their classrooms (Dissemination of Results)
6. Until finally ... higher education colleagues were equally inspired by the degree of student engagement and success that playful learning has contributed to their classrooms, prompting them to further the research (Conclusion and Opportunities for Future Research)

Rum Bites and Cat Whippers

Lead Author: Sarah Pavey

Additional authors:

Timetable: Friday Session 10: 10:30-11:00, Terrace Room

Description:

This practical and fun presentation is about understanding mis and disinformation and the gentle art of scamming stemming from the 18th Century – no small furry animals are harmed! It is in keeping with the conference themes of disguise (disguising the facts) and surprise (some totally useless factual information will be gained but with a surprising twist! – all will be revealed).

Delegates will be divided into small teams and each given a sheet with background information on a product linked to cats or alcohol or indeed both. They will discuss the document and then change the content by removing context, exaggerating numbers, adding emotional language and dropping crucial caveats etc and then “sell” with their new marketing campaign to the other groups. During the process they will consider the reasons behind the action taken and how that impacts on recipients of the information and this will provide for a feedback discussion at the end and how to ensure academic integrity is made clear.

Learning outcomes

Understand why people can get easily duped by scams, mis and dis information

Be able to identify techniques used to change information to an advantage

Learn the importance of making academic integrity explicit

Gain a knowledge of a fun way to present and engage adults in understanding how to glean information that is accurate in the digital world

Know some archaic scamming devices from centuries ago and gain a deeper understanding of cats and alcoholic beverages

References, web links and other resources:

Explanation of the title found at: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Blackguardiana-dictionary-pickpockets-shoplifters-illustrated/dp/1170190162> which is also available for free in Google Books

Surprise and Disguise: Total Playful Failure in Higher Education (2 parts: Session 1 and Session 2)

Lead Author: Vici Daphne Händel

Additional authors: Jakob Hedegaard

Timetable: Wednesday Session 1: 13:45-14:30, Outdoors

Description:

This session is from 13:45 – 15:30 with a 15 min break

Playful learning in higher education often conjures images of lively student engagement, creative exploration, and boundless curiosity. Yet, what happens when these playful approaches go utterly wrong? In this interactive workshop—humorously titled Surprise and Disguise: Total Playful Failure in Higher Education—we will delve into precisely those moments when well-intentioned “play” in learning situations misfires. By exploring these failures and their underlying causes, participants will gain a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics that shape playful learning environments and discover innovative ways to salvage and reinvent such methods when they falter.

The workshop is divided into two distinct parts. The first part offers a deep dive into failures and dilemmas in playful learning. Participants encounter a series of scenarios scattered across campus in which playful activities have run aground. In small groups, participants reflect on their own experiences of playful approaches gone awry and discuss how factors such as context, facilitation style, student expectations, and institutional constraints may have contributed to these failures. A new dilemma is unveiled after each discussion, prompting continuous surprise and comparison among various scenarios.

In the second part, participants collaborate to co-create an Exploratorium, using their collective insights into how playful learning fails—and what can be learned from those failures. They work from the premise that by learning from mistakes, one can uncover the potential inherent in playful approaches to learning. The culminating artifact will be a collaboratively created Exploratorium, designed to spark reflection on how failures can reveal new possibilities for playful teaching and learning. It aims to nurture ‘fail-ability’ and encourage those who experience the Exploratorium afterward to consider how failures can shed light on playful strategies in higher education.

This workshop aims to provoke and delight, while also challenging participants to look beyond simplistic notions of play. By grappling with the very moments of failure that we often seek to hide, we invite a transformative rethinking of what playful learning in higher education can achieve. In doing so, we hope to discover new strategies to turn those failures into catalysts for deeper, more meaningful learning—and

ultimately expand our sense of what is possible when we dare to play, fail, and learn.

References, web links and other resources:

Copyright © 2025 Playful Learning Association - Playful Learning Association

Explorers wanted: Unveiling the new playful learning community library

Lead Author: Emma Gillaspy

Additional authors: Jim Thompson, Katie Piatt, Andy Walsh, Liz Cable

Timetable: , Friday Spotlight

Description:

Welcome, intrepid voyagers! Pack your curiosity and join us on a journey to the newly discovered Playful Activities Library—a hidden gem now nestled within the Playful Learning Association website.

As we know in the land of playful practitioners, playful learning approaches boost spirits, reduce the fear of failure, and enhance critical thinking and creativity—essential souvenirs for future graduates. But beware, many educators find themselves lost in the wilderness of design, struggling to create high-quality, evidence-based playful activities. Fear not, for our trusty guide, the Playful Activities Library, is here to rescue you!

Designing effective playful learning is often shrouded in mystery. However, our new library is built on key elements of the Playful Learning Tour Guide (Gillaspy & Thompson 2024a; Gillaspy & Thompson 2024b; Gillaspy & Thompson 2024c), where you can search for activities using game mechanics families and heutagogy learner behaviours, decoding your own secret map to crafting engaging learning experiences through play. In our treasure trove of playful practice, you'll have all the tools you need to navigate the tricky terrain of learning design with ease.

Join us in this session to explore the new library, contribute your own activities, and uncover the secrets to creating more playful learning experiences. Prepare to be surprised and delighted as we navigate the world of playful learning together!

References, web links and other resources:

Gillaspy, E., & Thompson, J. (2024a). The playful learning tour guide: A self-coaching educational framework to help you develop playful learning activities. National Teaching Repository. <https://doi.org/10.25416/NTR.25145456.v1>

Gillaspy, E., & Thompson, J. (2024b). Playful learning tour guide: Card game edition. National Teaching Repository. <https://doi.org/10.25416/NTR.26190803.v1>

Gillaspy, E., & Thompson, J. (2024c). Interactive content: Playful learning game jam. <https://view.genially.com/6683fd2bb387d1001487d4d7/interactive-content-playful-learning-game-jam>

Case Closed? Investigating Research Misconduct Through 'Unsolved' Case Files

Lead Author: Emily Harper

Additional authors:

Timetable: Thursday Session 8: 16:15-17:00, Gallery Room 1

Description:

Research ethics might not be the usual setting for sleuthing and surprises, but Case Closed? reimagines ethics education as a playful mystery to be solved. Inspired by Unsolved Case Files, this interactive session invites delegates to take part in a playtest of a narrative-driven game that transforms real-world research misconduct scandals into engaging and educational experiences.

Participants will become detectives, working in teams to sift through evidence from fictionalised case files, uncover unethical practices, and decide who's to blame and what the consequences should be. The session will culminate in a dramatic reveal, where delegates discover the real-life scandals that inspired the cases they solved. To add to the fun, detective props will immerse participants in the role-playing experience.

As a playtest, the session emphasises interactivity and feedback. Delegates will be invited to reflect on the game mechanics, narrative structure, and how effectively the activity promotes engagement with ethical concepts. Their insights will shape the final iteration of the game and its use in teaching research ethics to Biosciences students.

By experiencing Case Closed?, delegates will explore how gamification and storytelling can enrich their own teaching practices. Through collaborative discussion, the session will offer a space to consider how similar approaches could be adapted to different disciplines and teaching contexts, while also gathering valuable ideas for refining and expanding the activity.

References, web links and other resources:

Brighton Rocks: designing conference games for engagement (with a murder)

Lead Author: Alex Moseley

Additional authors:

Timetable: Friday Session 9: 09:30-10:15, Gallery Room 1

Description:

Ever wondered what makes a good conference game? Ever wanted to design one? Or just like a good story with intrigue and shady dealings?

In this workshop I will share what I've learned from running 10+ conference/event games with varying levels of engagement; and will present a design framework. I'll invite others with experiences of designing or playing event games to develop and nuance the framework.

Then, as a group, we'll take on the challenge of creating the game for Playful Learning 2026. Using Graham Greene's classic story of intrigue and dirty dealings in Brighton, we'll design a game around it using the framework, and present it to the PL committee for next year.

In small groups, you will get a number of tools, props and other materials to encourage random and creative design, and then we'll all play and critique each other's ideas to create one mega game.

You don't need any experience of designing games, attending conferences or reading books, but if you've done any of these your expertise will be valued in the session; and we will all leave with our collective shared knowledge.

References, web links and other resources:

Whitton, N. & Moseley, A. eds. (2019) Playful Learning: Events and Activities to Engage Adults. Routledge.
Greene, Graham (1938) Brighton Rock.