



JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Newsgames as a method of teaching journalistic storytelling

Panu Uotila, University of Jyväskylä, Finland



FROM THE NEWSGAMES PROJECT COURSE TO AN ARTICLE

1) The interdisciplinary course: *Newsgames project*



2) **The article:** Siitonen, M., Uotila, P., Uskali, T., Varsaluoma, J., & Välisalo, T. (2019). A Pilot Study on Developing Newsgames in Collaboration between Journalism and Computer Science Students. *Nordicom Review*, 40(2), 143-155. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2019-0038>



COURSE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

- The course Newsgames Project was designed and executed in a cooperative teaching initiative between the Department of Language and Communication Studies and the Department of Mathematical Information Technology at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland.
- The departments partnered with the regional newspaper Keski-suomalainen, which agreed to publish the finished newsgames if they reached their publication standards.
- Students were enrolled from both departments through a separate application process that included submitting a letter of motivation and an academic transcript.



COURSE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

- The teachers divided the participants into three interdisciplinary teams based on their interests and previous experience. Each team member was assigned a specific role (e.g., project manager, programmer, content producer and graphic designer).
- The 15 weeks course began with lectures introducing the participants to the concept of newsgames and how it relates to current trends in journalism. The students were also introduced to the basics of journalism, game design, project work and project management.
- The participants of each course produced three newsgames.



PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING, CO-LEARNING AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

- **Problem-based learning:** The course included elements of problem-based learning, where students solved real-life problems and teachers facilitated the action rather than teaching in a traditional sense.
- **Experiential learning:** The learning was distinguished from typical problem-based learning by the goal of creating a concrete artefact – an end product.
- **Co-learning:** Learning happens at all possible levels, between teachers, among teachers and students and in collaboration with outside partners. Mixing journalism and computer science students in the same team enhances communication skills and mutual understanding between different cultures (humanistic and technical engineering culture).



RESEARCH DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

- The data collected for the study included the games and their accompanying news stories and other written documents, project documentation from different project stages (e.g., project plans, game design documents, progress reports, reports of working hours by each individual participant, students' self- and team-level assessments and student feedback concerning the course) and observations of teachers throughout the project.
- The data analysis followed the overall outline of qualitative content analysis, where the aim is to identify patterns and themes in the data to draw meaningful interpretations. Students' self- and team-level assessments and feedback were first anonymised and then analysed by categorising them based on their content. While parts of the initial analysis were carried out individually, the final key findings were the product of group discussions among the authors.



CONCLUSIONS

- The students reached an understanding of newsgames as a method for elucidating and illustrating difficult topics as well as making them more interesting for different audiences, even those not typically interested in journalism.
- The journalistic process often comes down to making sense of a complex and chaotic world, finding ways to present this understanding to diverse audiences. The process of designing games and simulations can be similar, but the level of simplification necessary for short, easy-topick-up online games is even more drastic than when writing a journalistic piece.
- The students expressed difficulties in finding a strong journalistic point of view that was able to fit well with a playful approach. The interpretations of games and interpretations of news are challenging to combine.



CONCLUSIONS

- Multidisciplinary and project-based cooperation may benefit journalism education. The starting point for these types of courses does not lie in learning about or practicing established conventions, but rather in supporting participants in trying out flexible, emergent and creative project working skills.
- Findings highlight the importance of learning about team dynamics and team leadership communication as well as the challenges and benefits of working in a team with diverse expertise.



Thank you!

Panu Uotila

panu.uotila@jyu.fi