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From Edu to Indie

Teaching Students Self-Reliance

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GDC EDUCATION
SUMMIT





From Edu to Indie

Who Are We?

Paul Bellezza

- ③ The Odd Gentlemen - The Misadventures of P. B. Winterbottom
- ③ Riot Games - Producer
- ③ Univ. of Southern California - Interactive Media Division - MFA
- ③ Bishop Montgomery High School - Science Teacher

Jeremy Gibson

- ③ University of Southern California - Game Design Faculty
- ③ Carnegie Mellon Univ. - Entertainment Technology Center - MET
- ③ Digital Mercenaries, inc. - President



From Edu to Indie

What We're Talking About

**How do you prepare your students
to start their own studio?**

This is a talk for educators.



What We're Talking About

A Couple Caveats

- ⌘ This is our opinion
- ⌘ It may seem obvious
- ⌘ We **will** repeat important points
- ⌘ Your mileage may vary



What We're Talking About

Teaching Students Self-Reliance

- ③ **Entrepreneurship as a Goal**
- ③ **Changing Student Mindset**
- ③ **Three Points of Attack**
 - ③ Program Level
 - ③ Class Level
 - ③ Student Level
- ③ **What I Wish I'd Known Is...**



Entrepreneurship as a Goal



Entrepreneurship as a Goal

The Challenge

**What does the game industry look
like to graduating students?**

Competitive Job Market

IN CALIFORNIA



Entrepreneurship as a Goal

The Opportunity

Finding their own way

Ubiquity of development tools

Web-based distribution

Entrepreneurship is a Possibility

Their game can be their resume

But students need to be prepared



Entrepreneurship as a Goal

Preparing Students

How do students' mindsets need to change to properly prepare them for entrepreneurship?

What can you do in your curriculum, your classes, and your advice to students?



Changing Student Mindset



Changing Mindset – What needs to change?

Students need to understand:

- ③ Business
- ③ Teams
- ③ Scope
- ③ Professionalism
- ③ Product and Market



Changing Mindset – What needs to change?

Understanding Business – Part 1

- ③ Ain't nothing to be afraid of
- ③ Don't need an MBA, just need to have a goal
- ③ Just need to know the basics of how to operate
- ③ Leadership training is **critical**



Changing Mindset – What needs to change?

Understanding Business – Part 2

- ③ **Must** have a lawyer and an accountant
- ③ Someone has to care about money...it actually matters **A LOT!**
- ③ Have an Intellectual Property Agreement – figure out the “what if”
- ③ Know that failure is possible...be okay with that



Changing Mindset – What needs to change?

Understanding Teams

Working together with different kinds of people

- Learn to work with different personalities
- Acknowledge differences and find middle-ground ways to work together
- **End goal** is everything, organization is up to you



Changing Mindset – What needs to change?

Understanding Scope

- ③ You're not going to make Halo with a 2-person team
- ③ Find the core & **stick to it**
- ③ Figure out what you can do with what you have
- ③ AND DON'T BE AFRAID! BE **fearless** and **bold**.



Changing Mindset – What needs to change?

Understand Professionalism

- ③ This is a casual industry
- ③ However, you have to demonstrate you can pull things off
- ③ Be true to your word (deadlines matter)
- ③ Raise issues earlier rather than later
- ③ Build Bridges, don't burn them. **Ever.** (This is a small industry)



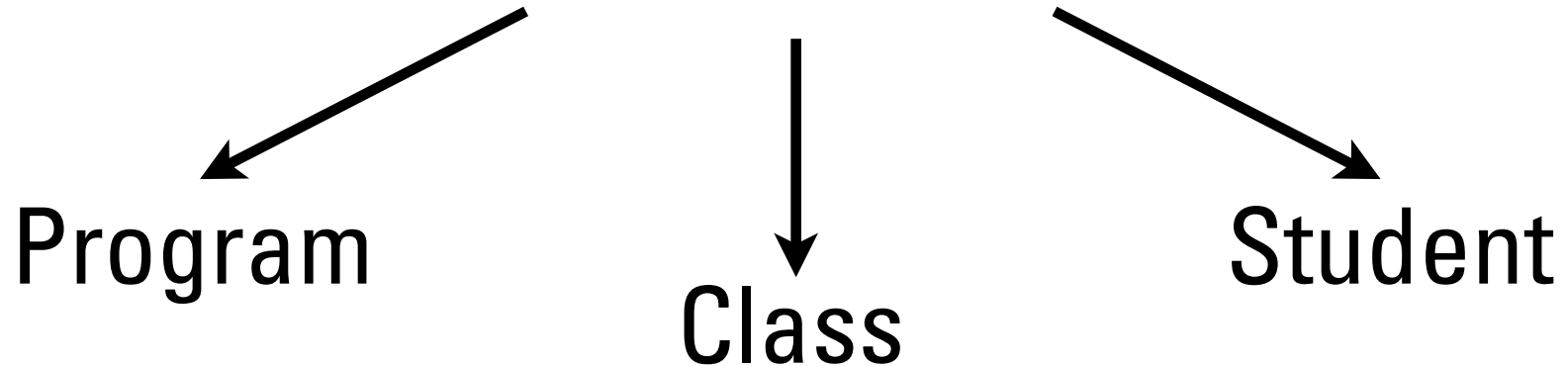
Changing Mindset – What needs to change?

Understanding Product & Market

- ③ Games are art
- ③ But they are also entertainment
- ③ How does your game add value to a player?
- ③ And how will you ensure satisfaction? From a player perspective and a customer perspective
- ③ Even if it's free, people pay with their time
- ③ You're not making the game for you!
- ③ Where is the market going?



Three Points of Attack





Program Level



Program Level

Several Types of Classes Will Help:

- ④ Project-Based Classes
- ④ Business/Entrepreneurship Classes
- ④ Improv Classes
- ④ Required Internships
- ④ Corporate & Research Projects



Program Level

Project-Based Classes

Students work in teams to complete projects
throughout the semester

There are several great examples of this



Program Level – Project-Based Classes

Building Virtual Worlds - CMU / ETC

Students work in teams of 4 to create a full virtual-reality experience in two weeks.

- Randomly-selected teams
- Each student has a specific role
- Gold Spike after 1 week
- Show at the end of the semester



Program Level – Project-Based Classes

Final Games Class - USC / IMD

Students work in teams of up to 30 over the course of two semesters to develop a full game

- Cross disciplinary: Cinema & Comp Sci
- Collaborating with other schools
- Real team-management and IP issues
- Presented in both Winter and Spring shows



Program Level – Project-Based Classes

Intro to Game Development - USC / IMD

Half of the semester is tutorials and lecture,
while the second half is all projects.

- Introduction to programming
- Lecture & Tutorials teach the basics
- Classic Games Project
- Final Game Project



Program Level – Business / Entrepreneurship Classes

Business for Games

Understanding business from both the
publisher and developer sides

- Business plans
- Intellectual property
- Pitching your ideas
- Pitching within constraints



Program Level – Business / Entrepreneurship Classes

Sociology of Entrepreneurship - U. Texas

Exploration of the culture of entrepreneurship

- Ethnic entrepreneurship
- The mentality of entrepreneurship
- Fulfilled a sociology credit!



Program Level

Improv Classes - CMU / ETC

Improv acting teaches students how
to interact positively with others

- Understanding of body language
- Knowledge of how you're being perceived
- "Yes and"



Program Level

Required Internships

Internships are the best way to give students
real-world development experience

- Companies want to get your best students early
- However, they are not free for companies



Program Level

Corporate & Research Projects

Students work on **real projects** with
real clients and **real deadlines**

- Even terrible projects teach something
- Can learn about funding, billing, and grants
- Client management is **key**



Class Level



Class Level

What can you do in your classes?

- ③ Iteration!
- ③ Team-Based Projects
- ③ Simulate Company Formation
- ③ Corporate Guests
- ③ Business Lecture



Class Level

~~Iteraton?~~ ~~Iteretion.~~ Iteration!

Iteration is the most important aspect
to learn as an individual designer.

- Design iteration
- Business iteration

Most successful businesses don't
use their first business plan



Class Level

Team-Based Projects

While it's good for students to find their individual design voice, it's often more important for them to understand how to work with others

(Especially people they **don't** like)

- Board Game Design Projects
- Game Pitch Project



Class Level

Simulate Company Formation

Include company formation into your pitch project

- Company Prospectus
- Development Budget
 - Salaries
 - Rent
 - Taxes
 - Contingencies



Class Level

Corporate Guests

Bring in corporate guests to judge student projects

- Judge panel for pitch project
- Faux clients for projects
- Guest Lecturers



Class Level – Corporate Guests



from <http://www.gameindustrymap.com/map.php>



Class Level

Corporate Guests

You can bring in guests over Skype

Many developers are honored
to speak to your students



Class Level

Business Lecture

Covers just the basics of business in the industry

- Intellectual property agreements
- Publisher / developer relationship and deal structure
- Entrepreneurship information
 - 85% of businesses fail in the first year
 - You **must** budget for contingencies
- Great opportunity for a guest lecture



Student Level



Student Level

What advice can you give students?

- ④ Take Business Classes, Seek Internships, etc.
- ④ Encourage and Support Student Groups



Student Level

What advice can you give students?

- ③ Game Jams
- ③ Game Festival Submissions
 - ③ IGF Student Showcase
 - ③ Indiecade
 - ③ Tokyo Sense of Wonder Night
 - ③ ...and these are just a few



Student Level

What advice can you give students?

- ③ Meet Indie Developers and Solicit Feedback
- ③ Find Mentors



What I wish I'd known is...



What I Wish I'd Known is...

- ③ Polish is **important!**
 - ③ Pitch
 - ③ Game...all aspects!
 - ③ Playtesting
 - ③ Contracts
- ③ They need someone on the team to love and understand business as much as they love and understand game development
- ③ Team dynamics and leadership



Q & A