

SENIOR FELLOWS AND FRIENDS

Alert. Relaxed. Collegial.



Recap of 11/9/23 session with Sue Bohle, Founder and Director, Serious Play Conference

Dear Senior Fellows and Friends,

Every so often, a “passion project” has an impact far beyond the norm. We looked at one of these in last week’s conversation with Sue Bohle, founder and director of the annual Serious Play Conference, which has been hosted by a succession of universities in the U.S. and Canada since 2008. This recap is intended to tell you a little bit about the conversation we had and to encourage you to communicate with Sue about a potential successor – she would like to retire, although she’s willing to continue in an advisory capacity. You may know someone, or you may be that person.

Beginnings

Sue began by talking about her career path, which didn’t necessarily follow from her major in Journalism at Medill. Her opening remarks were a session in themselves. To see her trajectory, take a look at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/suebohle/>. She was there in the early days of Silicon Valley and was referred to Atari by one of her public relations clients. What she noticed was that some games (e.g., that teach math) could change things.

Why This Matters

The realization that games could be used to help people learn important things faster and well is the genesis of the Serious Play Conference, which was aimed at teachers and game inventors and was hosted by DigiPen Institute of Technology in Redmond, WA. (The Princeton Review has recognized DigiPen as one of the top five game design schools in North America and abroad for the past 14 years.) That first year, 150 people came. Educators were joined by UNICEF representatives, military designers, prison staff, and healthcare professionals.

Since then, education offerings have expanded to include social & emotional learning; the conference has added other tracks and has evolved to include the simulation of

situations or processes; an international awards program has been implemented; and sessions have been recorded so that the videos can be rented or purchased at cost. Everything is available for exploration at <https://www.seriousplayconf.com/>.

Some speakers have returned for 18 years and others are new, like 2023 MITRE presenters Peter Leveille & Josh LeFevre, who demonstrated a game prototype designed to *“educate players about logical fallacies and loaded words when employed against them through a fun interactive storyline. Players learn techniques to identify and respond to manipulation through a hands-on competitive multiplayer experience.”*

Since the DigiPen days, venues have ranged from USC, Carnegie Mellon, University of North Carolina, and University of Central Florida to – this year – Toronto Metropolitan University. No big surprise there; a session I attended by Zoom during the pandemic featured a delightful collaborative project by Canadian educators. Sue mentioned that Duke University would like to host the conference, not own it, which brings us to the “ask” in paragraph one.

Can you help?

Sue’s experience, including conversations with past and potential university hosts, leads her to believe that the Serious Play Conference is most likely to be continued by transferring ownership to a person (a director who replaces her) rather than an institution. If you want to propose a different solution or discuss what it would take to do this yourself, please contact her at sue@seriousplayconf.com soon.

What else was said

Our conversation included a variety of serious game applications, while the instructional designer who participated from Hawaii reminded us of fundamentals. We considered the following:

- Roleplaying how to present to an international group in a high-stakes situation
- Resolving trust issues and tension among practitioners across disciplines
- Using toys to show others one’s leadership vision
- Shareware programs that helped a 2-year-old with speech problems learn, and demonstrate his intelligence
- Potential applicability of serious games to training on electrical hazards, laser safety, loud noise, and infectious diseases

Participant affiliations

ASPA National Capital Area Chapter

Bonner Enterprises

Prior: OPM Associate Director, Human Resources Solutions

Charlestown, RI Town Council, retired

Prior: Federal budget officer

Department of Education, retired

Independent Contractor in Instructional Design

PhD student, University of the District of Columbia

*Prior: Instructor/researcher, NDU College of Information and Cyberspace
PhD student, Old Dominion University*

*Prior: Federal HR director
Serious Play Conference
U.S. Navy, retired*

Prior: Head of safety and occupational health there

Our network coalesced from Florida, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Colorado, and the Washington, DC Metro Area.

Each time, we begin with a round of introductions to warm up the space. Afterward, participants are sent a "Who was in the room" message to facilitate ongoing connection. Please consider joining us in the future.

Sincerely,
Kitty Wooley

