

THE BASIC CONCEPT: An Innovative Pedagogy

In most college classes students learn by receiving ideas and information from instructors and texts, or by discussing such materials in seminars. "Reacting to the Past" takes a different approach. Students learn by taking on roles, informed by classic texts, in elaborate games set in the past; they learn skills—speaking, writing, critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, and teamwork—and apply them to complicated situations. The games typically consist of hundreds of pages of instructions, rules and roles, and take place over a month or more. They plunge students into complex worlds and oblige them to defend unfamiliar texts and ideas.

Students may take on widely divergent roles depending upon the game: oligarchs in ancient Athens debating the merits of direct democracy; high-level bureaucrats in Ming China determining whether Confucianism promotes authoritarian or humanistic sensibilities; members of the Royal Society in London arguing whether Darwin's *Origin of Species* was inspired guesswork or true science; and so on.

"Reacting to the Past" was honored with the 2004 Theodore Hesburgh Award (TIAA-CREF) for outstanding innovation in higher education. The initiative has received support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation, Fund for the Improvement of Post-secondary Education, National Science Foundation, Spencer Foundation, and Teagle Foundation. It has also been featured in *Change*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Chronicle Review*, *New York Times*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and elsewhere.

To see videos of classes in action, visit reacting.barnard.edu/video.

THE CURRICULUM: Games that "React to the Past"

Charles Darwin, the Copley Medal, and the Rise of Naturalism, 1861-1864

Confucianism and the Succession Crisis of the Wanli Emperor, 1587

Defining a Nation: India on the Eve of Independence, 1945

Greenwich Village, 1913: Suffrage, Labor, and the New Woman

Henry VIII and the Reformation Parliament

Patriots, Loyalists, and Revolution in New York City, 1775-76

Rousseau, Burke, and Revolution in France, 1791

The Threshold of Democracy: Athens in 403 B.C.

The Trial of Anne Hutchinson: Liberty, Law, and Intolerance in Puritan New England

The Trial of Galileo: Aristotelianism, the "New Cosmology," and the Catholic Church, 1616-1633

For descriptions of games in the published series and under review, visit reacting.barnard.edu/curriculum.

THE CONSORTIUM: A Catalyst for Change

Pioneered by Mark C. Carnes, Professor of History at Barnard College, "Reacting to the Past" has been implemented by faculty at over 300 colleges and universities in the United States and abroad since dissemination began in 2001.

The "Reacting to the Past" initiative is sustained by the Reacting Consortium, an alliance of colleges and universities established in 2012-2013.

The mission of the Reacting Consortium is to promote imagination, inquiry, and engagement as foundational features of teaching and student learning in higher education through the development and dissemination of "Reacting to the Past" role playing games.

The Consortium seeks to:

- empower students to be active in their own education;
- create a community of practice to support game development and implementation;
- support individual faculty; and
- assist member organizations in faculty and curriculum development.

The Consortium provides faculty with opportunities to learn about this highly interactive pedagogy and to join a community of practice in support of undergraduate teaching and learning. It also provides institutions with faculty development programs and tools for innovation in curriculum design and implementation.

To learn more about upcoming workshops and instructor resources, visit reacting.barnard.edu/instructors or email reacting@barnard.edu.



INSTRUCTOR RESOURCES UPCOMING WORKSHOPS

Game Development Conference at Central Michigan University

Mount Pleasant, MI | July 13-16, 2016

Our annual conference includes play testing for games in development, as well as presentations on gaming theory and pedagogy.

We are currently scheduling events for the 2016-2017 academic year. If you're interested in a campus event or regional workshop, please contact Jenn Worth at jworth@barnard.edu or at 212-851-2112 for rates and other considerations.

As events are contracted, information will be made available at:
<https://reacting.barnard.edu/conferences-events>

ONLINE RESOURCES

RTTP Game Library

The restricted-access instructor site where affiliated faculty can download materials for published games and those under review.

RTTP Social Media

Stay up to date on RTTP community news by liking us on Facebook! Interested faculty can also request to join the Faculty Lounge, a restricted group for instructors and game authors. You can also follow us @ReactingTTPast.

SUGGESTED ARTICLES

Burney, John, Richard Gid Powers, & Mark Carnes. "Reacting to the Past: A New Approach to Student Engagement and to Enhancing General Education." White Paper Report to the Teagle Foundation, 2010.

Carnes, Mark C. "From Plato to Erikson: How the War on 'Bad Play' Has Impoverished Higher Education." *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, November 21, 2014

Olwell, Russell and Azibo Stevens. "I had to double check my thoughts': How the Reacting to the Past Methodology Impacts First-Year College Student Engagement, Retention, and Historical Thinking" in *The History Teacher* 48, No. 3 (May 2015), pp 561-572.

Lang, James. "How Students Learn from Games: In the Second of a Three-Part Series, a Professor Looks at the Use of Simulation Games in the Classroom." (Part 2) *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 25, 2014.

FORMAL ASSESSMENT

FIPSE STUDENT EVALUATION

The most sophisticated analysis of student learning in "Reacting to the Past" has been the study directed by Steven Stroessner under the auspices of Barnard College from 1999 to 2006, with support from two grants from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE), U.S. Department of Education.

Stroessner's team had an advantage not often found in research on student learning: the ability to measure the impact of the pedagogy against a control group, initially Barnard students who participated in Reacting and non-Reacting sections of the first-year seminar program; and in the second phase, students from Barnard, Smith, and Trinity Colleges. Stroessner's comparative research supports the claim that Reacting has a significant positive effect on several attitudes and skills associated with learning. In the FIPSE evaluation, Reacting students demonstrated:

- Higher self-esteem (both relative to non-Reacting students and higher self-esteem at the end of a Reacting semester).
- An increase in empathy – compared to a decrease for students in the control sections.
- More external locus of control, i.e., level of belief that outcomes often are determined by forces that are external to self.
- Greater endorsement of the belief that human beings are malleable, contributing to a belief in the possibility of incremental change, that people can change over time and across contexts.
- Enhanced verbal and rhetorical skills – Reacting students demonstrated a greater ability to make an oral argument pedagogy and faculty experience with the games in their classrooms.
- An equal achievement in extemporaneous writing skills as compared with students enrolled in traditional seminars.

For the full study, please see Stroessner et al., "All the World's a Stage? Consequences of a Role-Playing Pedagogy on Psychological Factors and Writing and Rhetorical Skill in College Undergraduates," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 101 (2009), 605–620.

FACULTY RESPONSE

INSTRUCTOR SURVEY (N=102)

In 2013, the Reacting Consortium conducted a survey to identify the learning resources that were deemed most useful to affiliated faculty, and to obtain comparative data on the effectiveness of RTTP games in a variety of educational settings.

Curriculum areas using RTTP:

54	First year seminar
43	Gen Ed beyond FYS
40	Advanced Disciplinary courses
36	Honors programs and courses
25	Introductory Disciplinary courses
15	Misc. Interdisciplinary programs
10	Experiential Learning courses

RTTP Student Learning Effectiveness:

96%	Overall Effectiveness Producing Student Learning
74%	Highly Effective Pedagogy
22%	Effective Pedagogy
4%	Fair Pedagogy
0%	Poor Pedagogy

RTTP Meets AAC&U LEAP Objectives:

78%	Fostering Ethical Learning
79%	Teaching the Art of Innovation
82%	Fostering Intercultural Learning
85%	Fostering Civic Learning
91%	Teaching the Art of Inquiry
91%	Developing Students' Ability to Apply Learning...
96%	Connecting Knowledge with Choice and Actions
96%	Engaging with "Big" Questions
97%	Providing Academic Challenge

FACULTY COMMENTS

"This is the best educational experience I have ever delivered to our students."

"Rigorous, transformative, surprising, and fun!"

"Surprisingly, incredibly effective at seducing students into deep meditation on--and creative explication of--primary sources."

"It's the most rewarding teaching you can do, because students will take ownership of their learning."

"The best way to get motivated, engaged, and excited students."



REACTING CONSORTIUM