

***What Makes a Game Fun?***  
***A Fresh Take on Using Games to Engage Students in the Law Classroom***  
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***Introduction***

Recently, several faculty members from our school spent an evening together playing a board game. We played *Passing the Bar*, a board game created to help students study for the bar exam. Most faculty at game night had not taken a bar exam in the past decade, and some admitted they were nervous about revealing a lack of knowledge in areas (inside and) outside of their expertise.

The evening turned out to be a fun learning experience for all of us. Faculty members who rarely have the opportunity to interact were bonding over difficult questions; teams debated the nuances of complicated doctrine; we discussed the bar exam structure and what made the questions difficult to answer; and we reflected on different ways to interpret and answer multiple choice questions. In the end, we all learned something new.

The next day, we caught ourselves thinking about the many ways we might share the experience with our students. Could game night be as engaging for them as it was for us? What makes games fun, and could that kind of fun improve student learning?

We discovered that, while a few articles have been written about using games in the classroom,<sup>1</sup> games are still rarely used in legal education, particularly in doctrinal courses.<sup>2</sup> Yet, doctrinal courses may be the best platforms for games. While students sometimes fall into a comfort zone in a doctrinal course, where lecture and Socratic dialog are still preferred methods of delivery, introducing a game can break them out of that comfort zone and encourage them to think about the course objectives from a new perspective and engage more creatively with the

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Jennifer Rosato, *All I Ever Needed to Know About Law School I Learned in Kindergarten: Introducing Gaming Techniques Into the Law School Classroom*, 45 J. Legal Educ. 568 (1995); Karin Mika, *Games in the Law School Classroom: Enhancing the Learning Experience*, 18 Perspectives 1 (Fall 2009).

<sup>2</sup> See Mika, *supra* n. 1, at 3 (noting that “traditionalists” in legal education “might look at using games to teach legal concepts as an inappropriate coddling of an immature generation”).

subject. To the extent that a game can help a student internalize doctrine in an unexpected, even fun way, it might also help that student retain more information for longer, a goal in any law course. Whether your objective is to help students memorize black letter rules, understand the various strategic decisions a practitioner may have to make in an area of the law, or synthesize cases into a set of rules for a legal issue, you can likely accomplish that objective by adapting a popular game to your course materials in a simple, accessible, and inexpensive format.

### ***Creating Games to Engage Students in and out of Your Classroom***

Step 1: Think about the objective(s) you want to accomplish with the game.

Step 2: Review descriptions of popular games to get your ideas flowing, and identify one that fits with your course or lesson objective(s).

Step 3: Learn about how the game is played and make a list of the materials you need to play the game.

Step 4: Adapt the game pieces/materials to your course content.

Step 5: Test the game with a small group of people, giving them a brief quiz after playing to see how well the game accomplished your objective(s).

Step 6: Implement the game, following up with a debriefing and feedback session to reiterate content.

The first step in developing a game for your class is to identify the objectives you hope to accomplish with a particular lesson plan or group of lesson plans. Although some authors suggest narrowing your focus at this early stage to a particular set of objectives,<sup>3</sup> we recommend that you keep an open mind until you complete the next step.

We've found that reviewing descriptions of popular games, watching one of them in action, or even playing a few popular games can inspire creativity and lead to that "light bulb" moment where we see how a game could help accomplish one of

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<sup>3</sup> Rosato, *supra* n. 1.

our course objectives.<sup>4</sup> Below, we've included a list of descriptions for a few popular board games to get you started. A quick trip to the websites below or to your local game shop will probably reveal many more possibilities.

When you've identified a game you would like to use, modify the procedure and game pieces/materials using your course content. Once you've developed the game, test it with a small group of people. Playing the game with the group will help you understand what works and if you need to modify the instructions or materials to better achieve your objective. A brief follow-up quiz can also show whether the game helped the participants retain the content you intended to teach.

Use the same steps above as a small group assignment for your students. By including the requirements that they identify, match, and test the course objectives, you would encourage students to truly think about and engage with your course objectives.

Participants in this session will see how we've used the above process to develop games for our classrooms, play the games for themselves, and leave with some ideas for games in their own classrooms.

### ***Popular Games to Inspire your Creative Process***

*The Settlers of Catan*: "Guide the settlers to victory by clever trading and cunning development." Players use resource combinations—grain, wool, ore, brick, and lumber—to buy development cards and build roads, settlements, and cities. Players must negotiate and trade to gain resources they lack and strategize to avoid allowing other players to steal gains or buy a monopoly of one resource.

<http://www.catan.com/catan-games/boardgame/basic-game.html>

*Pandemic*: Players are highly-skilled members of a disease-fighting team waging a battle against four deadly diseases. The team travels across the globe, stemming the tide of infection and developing resources they need to discover the cures. The players must work together using individual strengths to destroy the diseases. The clock is ticking as outbreaks and epidemics accelerate the spread of the plague.

<http://www.zmangames.com/boardgames/pandemic.htm>

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<sup>4</sup> Karin Mika described how she was inspired to develop the *Legal Apples to Apples* when she watched her daughter play the original *Apples to Apples* game with friends. Mika, *supra* n. 1, at 4.

*Cranium*: “Cranium is the award-winning board game that brings out surprising talents in people and gives everyone the chance to shine.” The game involves several different kinds of cards. Data Head Cards test knowledge and deduction. Star Performer Cards require a player to act, hum, or sing to help teammates solve a problem. Word Worm Cards test a player’s spelling, puzzle-solving ability, and ability to define words. Creative Cat Cards require a player to sketch, sculpt, or draw to get teammates to solve a problem. [http://www.hasbro.com/cranium/en\\_US/](http://www.hasbro.com/cranium/en_US/)

*Tribond*: “The quick-thinking, addictive game of common bonds.” Players race across the board, solving the following question: “What do these 3 things have in common?” Example: money-making plant, pristine condition, culinary herb. (Answer: mint). Other ways to play include “Clue Me In” where players make up 3 of their own clues and have other players guess the common thread, “Cryptic” where players try to solve the riddle using only 2 of the 3 clues, and “Misfit” where players get 4 clues and have to guess which 1 of the 4 does not belong. <http://www.theplaymakers.com/Playthings/TRIBOND.html>

*Smart Ass*: One player reads from a list of facts. Other players jump in at any time to name what the facts are describing. If you jump in too early, you are the “dumb ass.” The cards cover three different categories: (1) Who am I? (2) Where am I? and (3) What am I? “Hard Ass” cards ask straight questions. <http://www.areyougame.com/interact/item.asp?itemno=01360>

### ***More Resources***

*The Game Group: Fun with a Purpose* (available online at <http://www.thegamegroup.com/article1.htm>). This group, started by Steve Sugar, has worked for fifteen years to develop training games and resources for educators to create games for classroom and training sessions. You will find a short article covering a variety of reasons to use games to train and educate, as well as adaptable games and books about creating classroom games.

Steve Sugar & Jennifer Whitcomb, *TRAINING GAMES* (ASTD 2006). This book (available to preview on Google books) provides a more extensive step-by-step guide to creating games for adult learners in training settings.

Rita Kumar & Robin Lightner, *Games as Interactive Classroom Technique: Perceptions of Corporate Trainers, College Instructors & Students*, 19 Int'l J. of Teaching & Learning in Higher Educ. 53 (2007) (available online at <http://www.isetl.org/ijtlhe/pdf/IJTLHE157.pdf>). Kumar and Lightner studied the classroom approaches of trainers and college professors, comparing their uses of interactive games. This article reviews the benefits of using instructional games, including memory, performance, and social benefits.

Stephen Gareau & Ruth Guo, *"All Work and No Play" Reconsidered: The Use of Games to Promote Motivation and Engagement in Instruction*, 3 Int'l J. Scholarship of Teaching & Learning 1 (Jan. 2009) (available online at [http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/ijstl/v3n1/articles/PDFs/Article\\_GareauGuo.pdf](http://academics.georgiasouthern.edu/ijstl/v3n1/articles/PDFs/Article_GareauGuo.pdf)). This article describes a study examining the role of instructional games in graduate-level education, as well as an assignment requiring graduate students to design instructional games. The study focuses on using technology to create games.