

# COMPETITION OPENS UP CLASSROOM LEARNING

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## Game Design Competition for Years 7-13 runs through Terms 1 & 2. Teachers see strong classroom potential as students collaborate on game designs about road safety.



John Creighton

The Game Design Competition allows students to experience a realistic decision-making process in the classroom, says an experienced technology teacher.

John Creighton is head of faculty, technology at Burnside High School, Christchurch. He's also on the PPTA ICT Advisory

Committee and is past president of the New Zealand Association for Computing, Digital and Information Technology Teachers.

'Students entering the competition will look at options, evaluate them, and then develop an outcome based on their investigations and research,' he says.

'It will allow students to present their ideas to a real authority, rather than just responding to a made-up context. The learning is brought out into the open.'

John says real-world assessment combined with a possible multi-curricular approach will allow students to harness existing skill-sets, and encourage them to develop new ones.

'Communication, managing self, relating to others, planning, conceptual development, presentation skills - all of these so called 'soft-skills' are what employers are desperately wanting.'

He sees potential for the competition to work as a group project to extend motivated or enthusiastic learners.

'Gaming regardless of context is inherently interesting, and any opportunity to engage with kids is great for everyone involved.'

He says designing a game for social good can bring curriculum areas together, and teachers have freedom as to how they embed the competition into their plans for the year.

### COMPETITION TAPS STUDENT INTERESTS

'The competition enables students to use their creative flare to design a game for themselves and their peers,' says Catherine Hunter, who teaches at Mission Heights Junior College, Auckland.

'The gaming element of the competition gives quite a lot of flexibility to teachers and students.

Students could create a safe driving or cycling game in PE or develop a computer game about speeding or being a new driver in a technology class,' she says.

'The core messages can be developed in those classes or have buy-in from other areas like social studies or science.'



Catherine Hunter

Game design competition guides and entry forms are online: [education.nzta.govt.nz/gamecompetition](http://education.nzta.govt.nz/gamecompetition)

# Gamer and academic

## BEN TUHOE KENOBI

Ben is full of ideas, knows heaps of people in the NZ game development scene and he's always looking for ways to use games in new and meaningful ways.



Ben Tuhoe Kenobi has carefully crafted his own career, taking his fascination with games as a starting point for working with students, researchers and game developers.

Ben teaches creative technology at Auckland University of Technology,

where he runs the PIGsty Play & Games Lab which brings researchers and game developers together on projects.

He's also a judge for the NZ Transport Agency's Game Design Competition. And when he's not at a board meeting of the NZ Game Developers Association, you'll find him at game dev meetups or at home playing with his daughter or breaking out a board game with friends.

'Games are more a fabric of my being than a career,' he says.

**I try to play as much as I can. I play sport, I play board games, and I design games for my friends and family. I'll be in the backyard and I'll say 'hey we can make this into a game' and it might just be throwing a Frisbee into a bucket.**

**BEN TUHOE KENOBI**



### TEENAGE YEARS

Ben is 35, grew up in Northland and went to Whangarei Boys High School. His middle name hints at his whakapapa, and yes, he chose his own last name partly because he identified with a certain Stars Wars hero. He traces his interest in games back to busy teenage years.

'When I was young I did everything. All the computer games I used to play in those years took a long time to load so I would have to go outside and play. I did sports, speeches, drama and multicultural groups.'

He went down to Auckland to study architecture at university and found it drew on all his skills and interests. But after a couple of years he was in a bit of a slump. He was still looking for a purpose for his creativity.

'I loved playing games, but up until that point the thought had never come to me that someone must make the games. They just came from somewhere.'

'So, I was walking along and I realised that if someone makes these things I enjoy, could that be me? From then on, working with games was going to be my focus. I locked that in. But I wasn't going to do anything stupid and drop out. I made the most of architecture school.'

### NEXT STEPS AFTER UNIVERSITY

He worked as a tutor in computer-aided design before teaching game design at AUT and then completing a master's degree in game narratives. He was very close to having an OE in Canada when he landed a job as a game designer at Gameloft, a multinational company new to Auckland.

Ben knew a career in the industry was not him but wanted to experience it for himself. He returned to AUT with ideas for collaborative game-based projects, now bubbling away as PIGsty. His work is diverse and includes teaching, organising workshops and designing games for things like diabetes awareness, paramedic training and brain injury rehabilitation.

'I want to be in an environment where I can focus on innovation and expand what we think of as games.'

# GAMES THAT DO GOOD

We talked to Rachel Bolstad and Dan Milward about the future of games that aim to make a positive impact on people's lives.

Rachel Bolstad is a senior researcher at NZCER. She leads the Games for Learning research project, and is on the judging panel for the Game Design Competition 2016. Dan Milward is the creator of Gamefroot, a game design engine. They collaborate in projects related to games and learning.



Rachel and Dan



## You both see potential for young people to get more involved in making games for social good. Why?



**DAN** A young person who steps up to the challenge of game design is really taking a first step towards being part of a field that is moving and growing and changing. They could even help to shape this field - innovation in games can come from students as well as experienced designers.

## Tell us about the global trend of games for social good, and their educational potential.



**DAN** We attended the **Games for Change Festival** in New York last year. There's a big range of people already working on educational and social impact games. It's increasing all the time. We've seen games designed to sustain indigenous culture and language, explore a carbon-based economy, empower girls or support physical and mental health.



**RACHEL** It's useful for novice game designers to 'start with what you know'. I'd suggest students can pick apart a familiar game and discuss what makes it tick. You could do this with the idea of education and social impact in mind.



**DAN** Monopoly is a social impact game! Not everyone realises this, but Monopoly was originally designed to educate people, by highlighting the dark sides of income inequality and rampant capitalism.



**RACHEL** Yeah, it's interesting that the social impact roots of the game have been largely forgotten - this could be a really interesting conversation-starter for teachers and students. Perhaps there are other games people know with educational or social impact goals.

## Any advice for young people designing games for social good?



**RACHEL** It's important that young people have opportunities to really explore the complex issues their games are about. Even if they have some basic game design skills, we educators can't assume they have thought about a social issue from all the angles and perspectives. That's where teachers can play a crucial role. It might be that the best game idea is not the first idea, but the third, fifth, or tenth idea that comes up as students move through a learning process.



**DAN** Something we've learned is how people need to learn from each other in order to make powerful social impact games. Game developers need to really listen and work with people who know things they don't know. This could be scientists, or indigenous communities, or people who work in development or social justice. The need to listen applies in reverse too. It takes time and a really open mind to work collaboratively.



**RACHEL** We think the same thing applies in a school setting. Teachers and students who take on a game design challenge will have a lot to learn from each other.



**DAN** And don't keep your project inside the walls of the classroom. Where possible, students can seek ideas, input, and play-testing feedback from other people who might have a different 'take' on a social issue than they do.



## CURRICULUM-ALIGNED RESOURCES

The NZ Transport Agency web portal has curriculum resources for teachers to freely download, modify and use in the classroom.  
[education.nzta.govt.nz/gamecompetition/teacher-guide](http://education.nzta.govt.nz/gamecompetition/teacher-guide)

# TEST WITH FRIENDS, AND THINK ABOUT THE END USER



Martin Langhoff  
Freelance software architect and programmer

Martin Langhoff says his work as a freelance software architect and programmer involves 'complex challenges and impossible deadlines.'

He has lived in Argentina, New Zealand and the United States of America, and develops software packages for large companies. He's also a judge for the Game Design Competition 2016.

In New Zealand, he led a team that made a big contribution to the Moodle learning management system. His career is built around complicated stuff. But he says learning about computer programming starts with small steps - and it is the same with game design.

Martin says having a computer, curiosity, and a close friend was all it took for him to start learning to make games at a young age.

'When I was nine years old, my dad brought home a computer - and I discovered that the best game was in fact to write new games, along with my best friend. To this day, I have never studied computer science in school. I wish I'd had a modern digital technology course to study, but at that time, I had to scrape one together myself.'

Martin, who is 39, studied sociology and media at university. He picked up programming skills in his own time, and got involved in open source software development back when the World Wide Web was a new thing.

The best way of learning - and the most fun - is to show something to your friends. You end up learning the most about something when you help someone else to understand it.

**MARTIN LANGHOFF**  
GAME DESIGN  
COMPETITION JUDGE

## MARTIN'S TIPS ON GAME DESIGN

Build your game with friends. Split the tasks, dig deep into the technical topics, learn it all, but remember to come up for air.

Use version control so you don't lose your work; and so you can return to an older version of your code if you break things while trying a new improvement. Being able to undo the damage lets you go forward with confidence.

Involve some more friends to be your testers. Work in short sprints and demo your game to your tester friends every couple of days.

For those passionate about computers, making an engaging game is an amazing challenge - you have to combine understanding of computers and of computer users. The computer is the easy part!



In the end, it is about the users and how they experience your game.

