DRESS FOR SUCCESS!
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INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

Some years ago whilst I was in high school, I used to volunteer during the school holidays at a disability not-for-profit organisation; assisting the staff and caregivers in supporting people with both acquired brain injuries, learning difficulties and intellectual disabilities. One thing I found most apparent during my time there was the significant difficulty a lot of the customers experienced when trying to grasp the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behaviours and linking this to everyday concepts like expectations of specific clothing in certain contexts. I attribute this to the fact that these problems stem from the intangible nature of the concept, for deciding what items of clothing or outfit(s) are appropriate for a situation is arguably a far more complex task in comparison to other more practical everyday experiences, such as making a cup of tea or washing the dishes.

While I haven't had the opportunity to volunteer and work with people with a disability for some time now, having gone to University and moved away from my hometown, the sentiment of helping people and making a difference remains one of my key motivations. As such, when the prospect of designing a tabletop game came along, I wanted to utilise the opportunity to challenge myself and push beyond my comfort zone by creating a game that gives players not only a worthwhile and rewarding gameplay experience but an experience that has practical implications and uses in the real world.

Enter the idea of ‘Dress For Success’, a game specifically designed for people with intellectual disabilities in mind to create learning and teaching moments to increase players’ knowledge of the relationship between clothing and the situation(s) in which certain types of clothing are appropriate by building up associative chains.

The following dossier is, therefore, a collection of my thoughts, research and work on Dress For Success to date, a justification of my design decisions and evidence of my thinking throughout the creative developmental process.
Dress For Success fits into the games as education genre as it explores the appropriateness of clothing in a rather practical and realistic sense to create teachable moments for participating players. As one can imagine and as Kornoely (2014) argues, games within the education genre are incredibly diverse given their specificity for existence and the niche audience they often cater to. However, as indicated in my initial game pitch, while Dress For Success falls into the educational genre, it also has clear links with other educational tools utilised in the disability industry and, as feedback from game designer Richard Hall suggests, it could also be part of the ‘games as meditative play’ sector.

Existing material that has played an influential role in the development and rationale of Dress For Success includes ‘Proloquo2Go’, a communications app that is used as a tool by speech pathologists working in the field of disabilities (Figure 1) and ‘Compics’, (communicative pictographs) a visual supporting aid in the disabilities sector which relies upon basic art forms to simplify and enable communication (Figure 2). Furthermore, research into the occupational therapy space in response to feedback from Dr Chris Moore indicated that acts of repetition are a fantastic element of the game to improve the development of player’s knowledge and contribute to associative chain building.

Also of interest to me during the consideration of the genre of Dress For Success was the meditative play genre, which includes activities such as puzzles, crosswords and Sudokus, and after looking at some examples of the design elements, I recognised the need for simplicity in game design to a) prioritise the purpose of the game (in this case, creating learning moments) and b) not over-complicate the experience of playing the game (given the nature of the target audience). As such, the insight gained from considering some of these simple games, as well as ‘Proloquo2Go’, ‘Compics’ and the education and occupation therapy spaces played a significant role in directing some of the decisions regarding mechanics and accessibility.

Considering the words of Castle (2020), who argues that “board games with no theme at all, or [when the theme offered] is so disconnected from the actual experience of playing that it might as well not be there [are considered as being abstract]”, I have concluded that Dress For Success falls into the ‘abstract’ game type category given that the game’s central theme is clothes, though the focus is not the clothes themselves, rather, the appropriateness of the clothes in various contexts.
As indicated previously in this dossier, the theme of Dress For Success is clothes, though not the clothes themselves, but their relative level of appropriateness in various contexts. The key philosophy engine of Dress For Success, that is, the core thing that the game communicates to players, is, therefore, the fact that there are not only favourable but unfavourable clothes to wear in certain situations. This core philosophy assumes that specific contexts inherently require particular types of clothes to be worn to be considered appropriate or adequately prepared within that society. While rationalising the philosophical basis of Dress For Success, I had originally pictured the game being played in an Australian context, but having considered some of the broader cultural flows and international publishing markets, I can see that the content of the game may have to be modified to reflect cultural and regional variations in acceptable forms of dress. To illustrate, while the presumption that, to prepare for a trip to the beach, one may don a swimming costume, sunglasses, a hat and thongs (flip flops) may transfer relatively well from an Australian context to an American context, given the strong cultural ties both nations share, the same could not be said if the game were to be played in (I don’t want to generalise, but for the sake of the example, I will) a Middle-Eastern country, a region with different clothing expectations and ideals. As such, an element of cultural specificity must be considered if Dress For Success were to be released internationally due to the immensely-varied and deeply-embedded cultural norms regarding acceptable clothing worldwide.

It could be argued that the setting of Dress For Success is perhaps a hypothetical changing-room, somewhere that a player must select the appropriate clothing for a particular situation waiting to meet them as they exit their proverbial changing room, however, as was discussed in my Beta pitch, there is intentionally no specified setting for the game. This is because the setting in this circumstance could be considered as secondary, if not unnecessary for gameplay and the subsequent learning moments and educational experiences it creates, especially considering the intended audience’s relatively short attention span and the simplicity of the game loop itself.
In both my initial game pitch and my Beta game pitch, I maintained that Dress For Success does not have a story or narrative on the basis that it is not important for the overall player experience, however, after feedback from Dr Chris Moore suggested that I am “thinking of [the narrative] in too complex or at least too traditionally textual terms”, I have since concluded that the game does have a story element.

With the story and narrative strongly connected to the theme and setting of a game, the story of Dress For Success, while very brief, puts players into the shoes of their mannequin (see what I did there?) as they consider the most appropriate clothing for a particular context or situation. The player’s little mannequin becomes a gamified representation of the player themselves and reflects how they would choose to prepare for a particular situation by dressing a certain way. As such, the narrative element of the game is rather abstract and serves to set the scene for players as opposed to driving the game forward, effectively matching the relatively short attention span of the intended player audience.

In a similarly abstract vein, it could be said that the act of dressing the mannequin also follows a story-esque pattern. This becomes perhaps most obvious when considering the fact that a ‘dressed’ person will typically be wearing (depending on the context, of course) footwear (for instance, socks and shoes), a form of lower-body covering (for example, pants or a skirt), a form of upper-body covering (to illustrate, a shirt or jacket) as well as various accessories (such as eyewear, headwear, jewellery, a timepiece, belt or bag). In this way, while there is not necessarily a common starting point for ‘dressing’ (starting completely naked or with underwear already on), nor is there a specific order in which one has to dress (someone can choose to put a shirt on before they put on pants or vice versa) there is always an endpoint to the progression of dressing. This, in a way, therefore follows the arc of a story in that the act of dressing is seemingly infinite in its possibilities and order of progression, but there is a clear and delineated ending where the mannequin has successfully finished dressing and is now, well, dressed, being effectively and appropriately prepared for a given situation.
As was indicated in both my initial game pitch and Beta game pitches, the objective of Dress For Success is for a player to appropriately dress a mannequin with clothing that is suitable for a given context or situation. The game is set up where each participating player is provided with a mannequin (Figure 3) in front of them in the middle of the play area so that it is visible to all players. In the centre of the play area are cards with items of clothing on one side and the corresponding name of the clothing on the reverse side, (for instance, if on one side of a card, there was a picture of a scarf, on the other side, the card would read ‘scarf’) laid out for all players to see (Figure 4).

Also in the middle of the play area is a deck of ‘modifier’ cards, which are to be shuffled randomly and placed face-down in an easily accessible position. The modifier cards are all blank on one side but on the other, feature a selective context (such as rainy, sunny or snowy weather, hot or cold temperatures, scenarios, like ‘going to the beach’ or ‘bedtime’ and even the clothing of certain occupations, such as police officers or firefighters) that prescribe the way that players are tasked with dressing their mannequin during gameplay. There is only one instance of each modifier card in the deck, meaning that no two players will have the same modifier card in a single game and, if adequately shuffled, the game will continue to be of value to players due to the variety of different situations experienced during gameplay. Before play commences, each player picks one modifier card from the deck at random and places the card face-up in front of them so that other players can see the card.

At the start of a game of Dress For Success, all players’ mannequins are bare, that is, they have no items of clothing yet, for players will need to incrementally ‘dress’ their mannequins throughout the game. The gameplay is turn-based, for example, player 1 adds one item of clothing to their mannequin, signalling that their turn is over, player 2 then adds an item of clothing to their own respective mannequin, followed by player 3 and so on, until each player has added an item of clothing, at which point, player 1’s next turn begins and the cycle repeats. Players take consecutive turns dressing their mannequin in accordance with the context prescribed to them on their unique modifier card, continuing until they are satisfied that their mannequin is appropriately dressed for their given situation dictated by their modifier card.

Dress For Success can be played with just one or multiple players but requires a moderator or supervisor (oftentimes, a caregiver, support worker, parent or another responsible figure) who will be able to adequately explain some of the intricacies of wearing clothes in certain contexts.

It should be noted that there is a deliberate crossover between some of the items of clothing inherently required by the context detailed on the modifier cards, for instance, the modifier cards
'hot weather’ and ‘sunny’ may both motivate a player to dress their mannequin in a sun hat, whereas the modifier cards ‘the beach’ and ‘the pool’ may see the common addition of a swimming costume on player’s mannequins. This is specifically designed to create dialogue regarding some of the commonalities of clothing and situations and offer a more rewarding educational experience for the players involved. As a result, while the modifier cards are unique, there are several duplicate copies of each of the clothing cards to allow for multiple players to successfully finish dressing their mannequins.

The core mechanics of Dress For Success are card drawing, turn-taking and the fact that there intentionally aren’t any penalties involved with mistakes during gameplay, the latter of which is particularly important given the audience. The gameplay experience is about learning through positive reinforcement and creating open dialogue and discussion as opposed to penalising errors, as a negative focus may instead undermine players’ confidence and discourage or deter them from engaging in the game again in the future. In this way, unlike other tabletop and board games, there are no winners or losers in Dress For Success.

It could be said that the conceptual rules of Dress For Success are more behaviour-oriented as opposed to being gameplay-centric as the nature of the game loop and mechanics lend themselves to the overall simplicity of the player experience:

**Rules & Guidelines:**

It’s okay to ask questions!
You have to wait until it’s your turn to take a clothing card to dress your mannequin.
Do not touch another player’s mannequin or take their clothing cards away.
Disagreements are okay, disrespect is not okay.
Treat others as you would like to be treated.
At the end of the day, it’s just a game.
PLAYER EXPERIENCE & THE 3-ACT STRUCTURE

It could be argued that the player experience and emergent story of Dress For Success sees players take on a caregiving, responsible role for their mannequin by dressing them to be best prepared for their particular context or situation. As such, these actions could be seen as the self-actualisation of players as they (in the suspended world of the game) graduate from the role of the cared to the carer. This may validate players and, equipped with increased knowledge and understanding of the relationship between the appropriateness of clothing and various contexts, give them a greater sense of accomplishment not only whilst playing Dress For Success, but also in their everyday lives as their skills and associative chain networks continue to develop.

The typical three-act structure, in this case, is a little bit different to other games that rely heavily upon narrative as a game-driver as the first and second act of gameplay in Dress For Success are in many ways combined. During these acts, gameplay progresses incrementally until the players involved are satisfied that they have dressed their mannequins appropriately given their specific modifier card. Anticipatory tension has been building up to this point and while there may have been learning moments along the way if a players’ actions sparked discussion or a question was raised, the third-act is perhaps the most valuable component of the overall experience of Dress For Success as it puts the preceding gameplay and decisions made during the game into context. The dialogue and learning that takes place in the third-act (differentiated from the previous acts thanks to each players’ completion of mannequin dressing) acts as a pay-off for player engagement throughout the game and validates their involvement and learning throughout.
As was discussed in my Beta game pitch, unfortunately, due to the current circumstances, I was unable in good conscience to playtest Dress For Success with its intended audience of people with a disability. Because of this, I looked for other ways to continue to develop my game, albeit through less conventional means.

I reached out to Kylie Joselin, a support manager from Aruma Disability Services, who proved to be an invaluable source of information and sounding board for me to continue to conceptualise Dress For Success without necessarily playtesting it with its target audience. The feedback I gathered from our email and phone conversations validated my background research, with Joselin indicating that “the game could indeed have a place in the field of people with autism or intellectual disabilities”. Other feedback regarding the clothing card design (with the clothing items on one side of the card and the name of the corresponding clothing items on the other) and no penalties for incorrect player choices to promote skill-building through positive reinforcement were directly integrated into my game design and served to bolster the overall player experience of Dress For Success.

I also had a meeting with Richard Hall, a talented game designer and developer, via Discord to further develop Dress For Success despite the inability to playtest it with the desired audience. Hall suggested that I consider meditative play as a comparable game genre (feedback which I integrated into my justification for the theme and genre of Dress For Success) and reaffirmed my efforts, dispelling some of my fears that I hadn't been able to playtest my game given that I had instead reached out to Kylie Joselin for further background and supporting research.

While I wasn’t able to playtest Dress For Success with its intended audience, I was lucky enough to be able to go home and see my family over one weekend for a couple of days, during which time I tested out some of the conceptual ideas of the game with my younger stepsister (Figure 5). Ever the fan of rapid prototyping, I utilised LEGO as a rather rudimentary tool for playtesting Dress For Success by separating all the heads, headwear, torsos and legs of the minifigures I had left at home to act as the clothing cards (Figure 6). My stepsister and I found it quite entertaining to play and while it should be said that neither of us is the target audience, we played the ‘dress a person to suit a particular
situation chosen at random game’ for hours on end. This experience was significant for three main reasons; firstly, because it proved that the game was enjoyable and we both wanted to play again each time, secondly, by playing the game utilising a different medium (a physical plastic person that was being dressed as opposed to a two-dimensional mannequin that had clothing cards laid on top of its body) it granted the game an interesting and tactile element that I hadn’t yet considered integrating and thirdly, it demonstrated that another intended audience group for Dress For Success could be that of young children. From this playtesting and prototyping exercise, I identified some possible future avenues for the continued development of Dress For Success which I will detail in the ‘Future Directions’ section of this dossier.

Furthermore, while it didn’t necessarily add to my game design project directly, providing feedback to several other students in the BCM 300: Game Experience Design subject meant that I had a better idea of how to pitch a game concept. I feel as though there is a danger with working on a project so intimately that you perhaps forget that others aren’t as aware of the minutiae of the design as you are; so when you inevitably go on to explain it to others, there may be areas that you omit or miss in externalising the concept(s). As such, by not only engaging with but providing feedback on, my peer’s game designs, I was able to gain a greater understanding of the typical expected format and detail that creates a better appraisal experience for the audience, in turn improving my game design whilst simultaneously benefiting my peers! For reference, I provided feedback for Bodhi Todd’s ‘Find an Animal’, Jasmyn Connell’s ‘Tartarus’ and Sophie Leathers’ ‘Bodyboarding Card Game’, all of which is included below in screenshot form in Figures 7, 8 and 9 respectively.

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**Figure 7: Feedback I provided to Bodhi Todd in response to his preschool-oriented game ‘Find an Animal’.”**

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<td>Feedback:</td>
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<td>- Really cool idea, I definitely think that this could have a place not only as an activity in kid’s zoo exhibits, but also in an educational forum! To that end, perhaps have a look at the educational curriculum utilised in preschools and the early years of primary schools, as some of the learning outcomes might give you an idea of how to publish your game or future directions you might want to take!</td>
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<td>- Given the visual nature of your game, have you considered modifications for people with colour blindness who might find it hard to discern shapes and colours in the animal finder? Just something to keep in mind going forward as combatting this could increase the overall scope of your audience that can play this game.</td>
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<td>- I think one of the key strengths of your game here is its simplicity, you have really streamlined the player experience and prioritised the educational value of finding each animal, which is fantastic to see, well done!</td>
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Student Name: Josh Crawley

Feedback: Wow, the level of detail here is amazing! I particularly like the designs for the cards, they are beautiful!

A couple of points:

- Perhaps you could consider adding a tactics overview that provides an overview of various play styles in the ‘Strategies/Tactics’ page in the handbook; people may want to utilise the cards collectively to support a particular method of play. For example, a ‘tempo’ player could mean that they are trying to control the speed of the game (i.e. they may aggressively try to win early rounds to be victorious, or they may opt for the long-game and gradually build up the caliber of the cards in their hand), whereas a ‘control’ player may instead try to limit the agency of the other players by targeting their stronger cards or eliminating characters with special abilities to restrict their opponent’s options. This is, of course, if you want to include the ‘Strategies/Tactics’ page in the final version of your handbook, because I feel that there is value in letting players develop tactics and strategies of their own as opposed to adopting the ones specified by the game.

- I think that the Tartarus card strategy is probably a little overpowered and would benefit from being nerfed in some way as it may, in its current form, mean that gameplay could come to an abrupt end, particularly during intense stand-offs or when the gameplay is really flowing. Perhaps you could introduce another character with the ability to ‘block’ the Tartarus-win-strategy, or even create a character who can ‘steal’ one of another players’ Tartarus cards to balance out the gameplay.

- A relatively minor piece of feedback, but maybe chuck the handbook through grammarly or spell check as there are a couple of spelling mistakes here and there that can be easily addressed.

Overall, a super cool design and a great mix of story and gameplay! I’m super impressed and can’t wait to see the finished product; thanks for sharing! :)

Figure 8: Feedback I provided to Jasmyn Connell in response to her PNP game ‘Tartarus’.
Student name: **Josh Crawley**

Feedback:

- This is super cool, Sophie, I really like the concept of a bodyboarding card game and am constantly amazed how you are able to create bodyboarding-centric projects, your passion certainly shines through!

- The concept of this game really reminds me of a game I used to play back in primary school called ‘Top Trumps’, which are essentially character cards with 5 sets of numerical stats on them. Generally speaking, when playing that game, each player would get dealt an equal hand and turn their cards over simultaneously, with whichever player’s stats were the highest winning the round and so on and so forth. Perhaps introducing some numbers, rankings or stats on the cards could mean that the winner of each round is objectively more obvious? Or having a key skill that each player has unique to them match a certain wave card so that players have some definitive way of beating their opponents potentially?

- I love the board design for the cards, the material nature of play would be an interesting extra element that adds to the overall player experience. If this game were to be published, however, perhaps the cards could be made of recycled neoprene/foam composite so as to be sustainable for the planet and so that the cards would float, meaning that you play in the pool or on a day when the sets are lazy...

- Anyway, awesome game concept and I’m really keen to see what else you come up with and the future directions you might take for this project.

*Figure 9: Feedback I provided to Sophie Jayne Leathers in response to her card game ‘Bodyboarding Card Game’.*
FUTURE DIRECTIONS

If *Dress For Success* were to be published and assuming the educational value of the game is proven via third-party independent appraisal, individual players may be eligible to utilise their funding under the NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme) in conjunction with therapies to purchase a copy of the game to improve their cognitive and fine-motor skills in a social game forum. *Dress For Success* would probably be marketed online due to the lower costs involved with such a medium, however, it most likely wouldn’t experience the levels of success in crowdfunding or Kickstarter campaigns required to fund the entire project given the specificity of the audience and the experience the game offers. This means that external investments would almost certainly be required to print and make *Dress For Success* available for public purchase.

A possible future direction for *Dress For Success* could be a digital version of the game being made available online. This could be a downloadable app developed for use on iPads and tablets to retain some sense of tactile affect for players whilst increasing the overall accessibility of the game. Research into the domestic app-development market suggests that the creation of a mobile app costs upwards of AUD$10,000, however, despite the initial costs involved with production, it could be argued that ‘going digital’ could optimise the speed and efficiency of future iterations, updates and modifications for *Dress For Success*, potentially enhancing the user experience. Furthermore, the sale of a digital version of the game is scalable and not impacted by physical space limitations or transport and logistical costs as physical tabletop games may be.

As was alluded to in an earlier section of this dossier, another potential future direction of *Dress For Success* could be the utilisation of plastic, three-dimensional mannequins and rubber/polymer clothing with which players dress their mannequins to add a tactile and physical element to the game. This additional material component, —as indicated in the prototype playtesting with my younger stepsister detailed previously— could increase the appeal of *Dress For Success* for children and potentially open up another audience demographic that the game can be marketed towards. To that end, if *Dress For Success* were to diversify and modify the physical elements to better suit child players in the future, my game could be of interest to existing doll manufacturers such as Mattel (the producers of *Barbie* and *Polly Pocket*) or MGA Entertainment (the creators of *Bratz*) as these companies already have the established means to manufacture dolls and their associated products on a mass scale.
Wow, this semester has been quite the ride! I must confess when enrolling in *BCM 300: Game Experience Design*, I was sceptical as to the value of such a subject, particularly given that it focused on board games, of all things.

However, as the semester began and I engaged with the lectures, readings and seminars, I can see now that my initial expectations and thoughts were ill-informed. Moreover, I think that I initially misinterpreted the purpose of the subject; sure, it involved researching and designing tabletop games, but for the underlying purpose of engineering player experiences.

When I realised this, it was like a switch had flicked in my mind and it was only then that I was able to comprehend how worthwhile the subject was. When an audience engages with, well, anything, the inevitable result of such an interaction is an experience. Every artefact, every presentation and every design is encountered experientially, and, more importantly, by considering the design of such things, one can in effect elicit a desired experience in a responding audience. By looking at this as an opportunity to examine tabletop games as a vehicle through which I could create a player experience as opposed to simply researching and examining board games themselves, I found that experience design is an incredibly transferable skill. When the time came to do a presentation or make videos for other classes, instead of engaging in research and subsequently slapping it together however I saw fit, I carefully considered the desirable audience experience and reaction to my content and constructed my projects accordingly, to great success.

As such, as this dossier and indeed this subject comes to an end, I'm thankful for the opportunity to have engaged in something that was out of my immediate comfort zone, but perhaps more so, I am grateful for the new perspective that I have been granted through my engagement with this semester’s coursework and the discussions that followed. I have thoroughly enjoyed being able to further hone and develop my research, creative and analytical skills in this setting and am excited to put my newfound ideas and abilities to use in the future.

Thank you all for a great semester and thank you for reading,

Josh 😊


