



On Learning Games

Project Documentation

W-Point_{e.U.}



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SOFIA UNIVERSITY
"ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI"



Latvijas
Sporta
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www.learninggames.eu

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The Project

‘LearningGames’ was an ‘Exchange of good practices’ of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. The project answered a need for a professional approach in the application of games for learning in adult education, lifelong learning and vocational training.

‘LearningGames’ researched relevant aspects of games and play from facilitating the communication and the integration of game on a social level (learning from each other, competitiveness), to creating bridges to other fields of interest (sports and playing), as well as in the evaluation and cultural barriers to game play (definitions of games).

It provided the participating teachers, trainers, facilitators with new insights in the cognitive potential of games and confidence in overcoming stereotypes for their use in adult education.

‘LearningGames’ negotiated the idea of integrating games in formal and non-formal training structures. The discussion process resulted in a collection of texts and evaluation-based data, observations and reflections of the experiences gained during the project.

Partnership Profile: The consortium consisted of 6 partners from 6 countries and included (small) companies, institutions, NGOs, and Universities. ‘LearningGames’ is rooted in the experience of the project promotor W-Point with non-formal learning frameworks in adult education and interest in researching the cognitive and educational value of games and their practical application. The other partners were:

VUC Holstebro-Struer from Denmark, the regional branch of a nationwide adult education institution;
ECG, an economic-cultural cooperative from Portugal;
Manchester Metropolitan University, Faculty of Education, UK;
Latvian Academy of Sports Education, Latvia;
University of Sofia, Bulgaria.

The team of experts ensured a smooth implementation of the project. Through their network, the participating institutions realised a comprehensive dissemination strategy at local, national, regional and international level.

Methodology & Implementation Activities:

We applied a methodology based on

- 1) the playing and the periodical interchange of the Master Games devised by each partner
- 2) the application of surveys
- 3) gathering of data, and
- 4) an extensive, systematic discussion process of the experiences gained.

The transnational partner meetings provided the structure and the timeline for the implementation of the project activities and the development of a thematic content.

The results highlight the importance and status of ludic, social and evaluation elements in learning games that can be considered as good practice guidelines for teachers, trainers and facilitators in adult education. The findings and results are documented on the project’s website. www.learninggames.eu

The project created conditions for further research and promoted a diverse pedagogic discussion in adult education.

The ‘Learning Games’ Discourse

By Gerardo Wolf Perez

‘Learning Games’ meant ‘Learning from Games’ as much as using ‘Games for Learning’. This was the project’s objective. The main interest of our partnership was to develop a framework in which we can discuss the issues around learning and playing in the adult education environment.

We projected our initial ideas into a flexible framework to better understand the playing activity, we ran the exchange of good practices on this base expanding and deepening the discourse on games for learning.

The discussion focused primarily on the practice of playing games and how to articulate the experience gained. The theoretical literature published on the topic was used as reference and support but did not play a significant role in our conversations and observations. Our concerns as teachers, trainers, and facilitators were motivation, participation, and measuring the impact. In this project, we understood Games as participatory live games, not computer-based games. Although the word games (particularly in education), has been hijacked by virtual games involving the use of devices to play them, bringing back the human-to-human factor was of paramount importance in the project ‘Learning Games’.

The following summary is an attempt to highlight discursive aspects of the project. It represents a micro-fractional part of an overall discourse on the topic of learning games.

The observations of each participant are related to their experience with the games played, during or parallel to the project, and to his particular area of expertise or interest.

Since the publication of “Homo Ludens” in 1938 by Johan Huizinga the very idea of playing and games has developed enormously, sharpening the field of activity but at the same time making the meaning of ‘playing’ even more nebulous.

Our project aim was ‘to open a new field of critical discourse and common practice’, and we gave our best in doing so.

During the 24 months of the duration of the project, we followed a simple method of interaction and research thus clarifying some of the structures rooted in our own sociocultural and psychological environments that affect the way we approach ‘playing games’ in general and cognitive games in particular.

Within our consortium, there is a general agreement that the project ‘Learning Games’ did an excellent job in setting a base of understanding the processes in adult education that will support the discussion about a shared future for adult education in Europe.

Playing vs Working. Understanding the concept of 'playing' in a cross-cultural environment. The multinational and multilingual character of the participating partners adds even more significance to the results. We may play the same games, but is the ultimate understanding of what we are doing equal, similar, or different from one culture to another, one individual to another?

In our consortium, six different languages were represented (even eight, counting people speaking languages other than their mother tongue).

From the beginning, the word 'play' was used as a common denominator. 'Playing' in the English language has numerous meanings and applications which is not the case in other languages. As practitioners, we have to concentrate more on the kind of activity we carried out than the name we give to it.

Focusing on the playing event, we found some aspects that let us find a common feature for almost every language represented in the group: The only antonym of the word 'playing' in the English language is 'working', and that is, at least in feeling, familiar for every other language. In other words: by deconstructing the word 'play' we arrived at a common understanding of the activity we are practising: not work, but an activity, characterized by the joy of doing, driven by instinctual rather than rational forces, outside chronological time measures.

Competitive or non-competitive learning? Deep learning vs developing skills

Our research was a direct one, i.e. based on observations in the field trying to avoid any ideological form of discourse. We did not follow a theoretical approach and used other references only if necessary.

During the discussions, some issues emerged whose interpretation divided us but enriched the possibilities to understand 'The Games' not as an abstraction, (as I would say was the case of Huizinga and others) but as the games we play.

The issue of competition vs non-competition was one of them. Manuel Moura took the position that playing games imply a quest for winning a) as an act of supremacy or search for succeeding, and b) as an act of overcoming a barrier or achieving a goal. In both cases, the results can imply different cognitive processes with varying results of learning.

Mona Blaabjerg Nielson dismissed the idea of competition in learning games and defended the idea of a team approach and peer-to-peer learning.

These ideas led to heated debates in the consortium. The moderator suggested, that a game constructed to create "winners" will benefit anyone looking for skills and a game played on a non-competitive basis will boost the cognitive qualities for a deeper learning process. This suggestion was discussed but would need more comprehensive research to be validated. The proposal of a non-competitive framework succeeding through cooperation left us with the feeling that this was possible only within a bigger conceptual context of education, and where the emphasis is on community rather than individuality, as it is proposed by the educational system in Denmark, based on the concepts of N. F. S. Grundtvig.

A 'Game' is a step towards framing the act of playing in a structure that limits the time, defines the actions (doing), and rationalises the objectives (motivation).

Inside this framework, there is always a learning process, and the idea proposed by Moura, that every form of playing game results in a learning experience, is valid, although it was not shared by everybody. However, there is another factor: the primary objective of a learning game is to facilitate focused learning.

The game 'Circle of Knowledge', proposed by Mona Blaabjerg Nielson, was the most popular and most frequently played game within our consortium. It challenges the player to set the correct links, helping them to understand how a language or mathematical equation work. By maintaining the core characteristics of joy, motivation, and time perception, it remains a playful action.

The professional understanding of playing and games

Another fascinating aspect of the use of games for learning comes from the observations of Ieva Rudynzka concerning the conception of games in sports. She takes a critical stance towards the notion of sports as a game, for instance, the failure of sports to establish a creative culture of play. In the education of professional sportspeople, the essential qualities of playing are lost, due to the excessive training at an early age.

Traditionally, sports provided the ideal picture of a game. A classical author on games, Brian Sutton-Smith, considers sports as 'the rhetoric of Play as Power', a proposal that can help us to understand better the position of sports in the 21st century. Two questions are relevant to us: Can a game, used for developing abilities to make a living of, be considered a 'game for learning'? Even if some of the aspects of 'playing' are non-existent?

A different approach to games in education and learning. The didactics.

In her definitions of Games, Ilka Birova mentions authors that have a significant influence in the Eastern European Educational System. Vygotsky is a good example, as an author, he provided the background of many of the developments in Eastern Europe previous to the fall of the Iron Curtain, and of the many attempts to modernise the educational system there. One of the main features of that psychology was the relative value of the individual in a social context. Champions and winners were considered heroes but always part of and belonging to the collective.

The "Westerners" tended to dismiss these aspects very light-heartedly as ideology. However, if we admit that it was an ideology, we must also question our pursuit for individual personal success. Are we not replacing the 'ideology of heroes' with an ideology of winners and losers? In both cases, we are dealing with ideological values rather than proven facts. The interest in the book that Ilka Birova wrote about using learning games in the teaching of Russian as a second language shows that there is a fertile ground for change and using games for educational purposes.

Going from experience to facts: Evaluation is the keyword.

In our framework, we used a simple tool for evaluation. The subject of evaluation came up as a theme again and again in our meetings. 'EduScape' was a game developed by MMU, based on Escape Rooms, a well-known social game mainly for adults. For the project Learning Games, it provided a critical understanding of modern games including the development of computer-based training: Evaluation and Diagnosis.





EduScape at VUC Holstebro

Learning From Each Other

By Mona Blaabjerg Nielsen

Education plays a crucial role in Danish society and is very much influenced by the ideas of N. F. S. Grundtvig. The educational system considers the learning process as a central issue, rather than the immediate application of knowledge (or skills). In this sense, the understanding of the educative process is not based on competition but on cooperation and the success of the community of learners.

The work of VUC within the framework of 'Learning Games' was a showcase for the project, as this institution, dedicated to adult education, has set its goals in both, dealing with the challenges of the present society, and embedding it in the educational process itself. In that environment games for learning found the perfect place as a tool for developing creativity, motivational and participative qualities.

Mona Blaabjerg Nielsen is a senior educator at Holstebro-Struer branch of VUC. In the following text, based on the experience of playing Circle of Knowledge, she gives an insight in her know-how she manages to combine curricular demands with the development of the cognitive and learning potentials of the students. The starting sentence can be read as 'considering teaching as a way of learning' which represents an essential attitude for the role of a facilitator, a trainer, or a teacher in the using games of learning.
Learning From Each Other

Different studies and statistics show that you learn more from what you teach than from what you hear from the teacher and that is a very good reason for letting students learn from each other. From my experience, I have also concluded that 'learning from each other' is an excellent tool to use in the classroom. Not the only tool but one among many others. 'Learning from each other' works well, for instance when you have presented students to a new grammar problem. You as a teacher, present the problem and its facts and rules. You also make sure that everyone knows where to find out about the problem if they have forgotten it after the presentation, which someone always does!

The 'Circle of knowledge'

When it is time for students to learn from each other and embed new knowledge, it could be ideal to try the game Circle of Knowledge. The rules of the game are that the group has completed the task when all the paper-slips are placed and form a circle. Every time a slip is placed, the person who placed it must explain to the group why he/she thinks it is the right place for it. If anyone disagrees he/she must explain why, and if the group does not agree 100 percent on a solution they must try to find the answer by further discussion and/or look up in a grammar book, or ask the teacher for the answer. If they cannot make a circle from the slips they must go through it all once again and be more critical about the explanations.

I have used Circle of Knowledge many times in this way on different topics and even Maths teachers I know have used it as well, adjusting the game to fit their subject.

Embedding knowledge is, in my opinion, the essence of learning: more important than being directly taught, people have always learned and cemented knowledge through all times and ages by learning from each other. It is not much good learning facts if you do not know what you can use these facts for. It is when you use the facts you deepen your knowledge.

Teaching is diversity

Therefore it is important as a teacher to start activities, different kinds of activities because we are all different in our way of learning, where the knowledge the teacher can give to the students will be embedded and therefore remembered as something useful and not just words or phrases learned by heart. These activities come in many forms, but I think the value of 'learning from each other' is high in this connection if you as a teacher have prepared the activity carefully. It is your responsibility that the students have been carefully guided/informed before they start so that they do not work with incorrect information. It is also within 'learning from each other' that if someone says something wrong, others can correct them and therefore a discussion might start and really deepen everyone's understanding!

When I do lesson evaluations in class, I use games and other activities where 'learning from each other' is mentioned as important, activities where students feel they learn and understand. When asked why, they say it is because they must think carefully about what they say because I, the teacher, am not always there to correct them if it is wrong because I am walking around in class from group to group.

'Learning from each other' has more advantages that I find important and also necessary to fulfill the intentions of the Danish school curriculum for my classes. I work with adults who have either had problems in school when they were young and therefore need basic qualifications to get a job or pursue further education, or they are foreigners who have come to live in Denmark. In both groups, there is a large number of students who do not believe very much in themselves and therefore often find it more secure to speak and explain concepts in a small group rather than in front of the whole class. This way each student gets much more time to talk and form questions, which, in traditional teaching, unfortunately, is mostly what the teacher does.

Using 'learning from each other' activities I always make up the groups, because I do not want the same kinds of student learners. If I want them to improve on their skills to create an article on a theme decided by me for instance, it is important that the group has students who know their grammar, students who know about the theme and students who are creative. Together they can come up with an interesting, catchy and well-written article. In other situations, I might make groups where students are more equal or groups where they can support each other in learning social skills (they do not always know that it is what I am doing!).

Playing/gaming and learning/teaching are often closely connected and if you do both you will improve the cooperation between the two halves of your brain. Letting the students work in groups with a game like Circle of Knowledge, they get to have small breaks where the focus changes, they laugh because someone says something funny, the wind takes the paper-slips for instance and that is good, as lots of studies show that a person needs a short break every 7 minutes to have an optimal learning situation. They can also decide to play the game in different ways, sitting at the table, on the floor, walking around, in the classroom, in the canteen drinking a cup of coffee. They must take responsibility for their own learning which I as a teacher control much more the first times we use the game than when I do when they have done it several times.

I also try to provide a short break every 7 minutes. It does not feel like a break but I just, for example, drop my pencil, tap my fingers on the desk or move to another position. I do believe it keeps the students concentrated because every time I do something "unexpected" their concentration is back on me.

'Learning from each other' is good, but as a teacher, you must always remember to ask yourself the question: When is the right time to use "Learning from each other"? In my opinion, the right time is when there is something to learn, and students are capable of teaching the knowledge presented! That means when you as a teacher have prepared the students for it, given the necessary information, set the activity carefully and made clear guidelines for the work. If that is not the case, it probably will not work.

Another example: Creative writing

Students often find it difficult to write, to get started, to write enough, to have a good idea and an angle for the text. Attempting to counter for that I always introduce Creative Writing in my classes.

I play some calming quiet music. The students are told that they must write just what comes into their mind and write for 7 minutes without a break. If they do not know what to write they just write blab la blab la, but they cannot stop writing. Then I set the clock and they write for 7 minutes. Afterwards, they read their text a couple of times and put the paper away. Then we do the same again and again. After the third or fourth text, they all have something with a kind of storyline and content. Now they swap texts and give each other comments on the other person's text. After that, they should work with their texts again. This time with the comments in mind, they can start looking at language and grammar and let another student read it again and comment on it, and as a final point finish their text. But the fact is that most of the students now have a readable text within a timeframe which sometimes would not even have gotten started.

Almost every time the students are told to write something they sit in groups – chosen by me – and I invite them to help each other both on content and form, and most of them follow the invitation.

I always get very positive feedback on this exercise although in the beginning students are often very skeptical and think it is a silly exercise. It is an eye-opener to an alternative way of getting into writing, and then it is also 'learning from each other'.





Guest speaker Ines Araujo at 'Learning Games' conference in Braga, Portugal

Games in the Socio-Cultural Context

By Manuel Moura

The different cultural approaches to playing games were part of the lively discussions we had in the partner consortium of 'Learning Games', especially about the motivation to play. The question, whether playing must imply competing or not came up frequently in the partner meetings.

To explore this position further Manuel Moura proposed a version of the popular television game "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" using questions related to his teaching at the Senior University of Braga, for example the understanding of the basic elements of security in the use of computers. At the same time the structure of rewards was maintained.

The position of some of the participants in the project was, that education should not be competitive and therefore games used for learning, should not be either. Manuel relates the educational character to basic social, cultural, national or regional characteristics. He argues that, in fact, the playing of games that are not designed specifically for learning purposes represent an informal input to the educational process which, in his view, is particularly important in adult education. To dismiss the discussion about the strategies to win a football match in popular culture means neglecting elements one can use to construct useful learning games in adult education.

Manuel Moura participated in some of the workshops organized by W-Point in which methods of (learning) games were used (Pimp my Europe, Literacy Games). He is a co-founder of communal initiatives (Solidary Economy, Senior Universities) coming to light during and after the economic crises of Portugal. During our partner meeting in Braga, Portugal, Manuel and his co-operative ECG organised a public conference for disseminating the idea of learning games in adult education linking different institutions interested in this topic in Portugal.

- Learning games are defined by the context
- Games for learning are something specific (specific mission, specific organisation ...)
- Learning games are an important educational activity
- Rewards could be extra motivation, recognition but depend on the country.

What did we learn during the project 'Learning Games'? What was the process, what were the goals? How can we motivate people to 'play a game'? How can we convince people to leave their comfort zone and enter the dark tunnel into the unknown world of a game? When motivating a group, the 'herd' effect can give a helping hand, as well as having prior knowledge about the game itself and its associated rules. But what, if the prize, the reward and gain are not sufficiently appealing? Will players take the initiative to volunteer or will they have to be engaged to play?

After conducting the research and using the games proposed by the 'Learning Games' consortium, I can conclude that there are differences between 'the truth of what a learning game is' from a person belonging to one social structure or group in one context to another person from a similar social structure or group playing the same game in another context. The rewards

given can work very well in one country, for example in Portugal, but can be a source of unbalance, friction and even obstruction for a learning process when carried out in another country. Let me consider the case of the game developed and presented during the project 'Learning Games' based on the television program 'Who Wants to be a Millionaire?'. In Portugal, it is a common perception that the most 'important thing' is to come first! To win! In many scenarios regardless of what happens to the other players. It is even important that the person coming second is a good distance from the first place, denoting an unquestionable superiority for the champion. In Portugal, it is even acceptable, for the potential champion, to use some less orthodox tricks with the justification, that the supreme goal for absolute victory is driving this behaviour.

This behaviour, from what I have been able to realize in conversation with colleagues from other countries, would not be acceptable to players of the same game, e.g. in Denmark, as it would denote an obvious lack of team and the absence of the expected positive and community-minded interaction. In Denmark, the main leitmotiv for any game - especially when applied in the didactic field in that country, is about fairness and community, not a win-at-all-costs attitude.

We can therefore conclude that the motivational elements that represent prizes and rewards for educational games can be very different from country to country, from community to community or even between individuals.

Consider the four elements always present in any game:

- Players
- Rules
- Strategies
- Expected payoffs or outcomes

For the proper structuring of a game and with regard to the expected payoffs or outcomes, it is essential to take into consideration that:

1. The game, regardless of its final outcome, should always guarantee players the possibility of perceiving/obtaining their interim goals, allowing them to fulfill certain steps that will guide them towards the final goal (receiving payoffs or even recognition or awards for achieving partial steps). In a way, the ultimate goal (on its own) actually does not exist, since it is also a partial component of a chain that will drive the player in one form or another.
2. Earnings, rewards, prizes, medals, awards, certificates, diplomas, greetings, etc. (call them what you want) are different elements of the same group of motivators that we must use to trigger an effect in the player, that is, mainly, the desire to play that game!

Is Football a game for the classroom?

Of course, the objectives, the rules of any game that we present and implement must be:

- Concrete
- Ambitious
- Realistic
- Assumed within a defined time or period

But the rewards will certainly play a role in the motivation to play.

There is no doubt that organized play is an important educational activity but, at the same time, we have to consider the informal aspects of the learning game process. In fact, they are already an integral and effective part of modern educational activity, and particularly in adult education. Even when we are not playing physically with a ball within the participative learning activity, we informally design elaborate theoretical scenarios about the strategies or tactics to be followed by our favourite football club in order to win the next match. Such attitudes, passion, communication, abstraction, humour, have to be considered when thinking in the reward to offer.

Sports and Games

By Ieva Rudzinska

Ieva Rudzinska's text is a summary of the discussion issues during the project with regard to the conceptual approach to games in the context of sports. She first looks at 'Game Definitions and the Example of Sports', then explores the link between 'Sports and Games' with reference to the work done at LASE. In a further chapter, Ieva provides an analysis and evaluation of 'Blind Travel', the master game she had proposed for the Learning Games project.

Ieva Rudzinska teaches at the Latvian Academy of Sport Education (LASE). Her contribution to the project Learning Games provided a closer view of the role of play in the Latvian education process. Another aspect of her participation focused on concepts of sports as a game, as a profession and as a tool for education.

Ieva takes a critical stance towards the notion of sports as a game, for instance, the failure of sports to establish a creative culture of play. The focus tends to be on global mega-events such as the Olympics, World Championships etc. rather than on participation. In another instance, she highlights that in the education of professional sportspeople the essential qualities of playing are lost, due to the excessive training at an early age. These topics are central to any discursive pedagogical idea of the use of games for learning as they focus on individual motivation at every step of the game conception.

1. Game definitions and the example of sports

A definition of play by Huizinga from 1949 says: 'Play is an activity occurring within certain limits of space, time and meaning, according to fixed rules. However, for an activity to be called a play, more is needed than limitations and rules.

A game is time-bound, it has no contact with any reality outside itself, and its performance is its own end. Further, it is sustained by the consciousness of being a pleasurable, even mirthful, relaxation from the strains of ordinary life. Contrary to science, the rules of a game cannot be altered without spoiling the game itself.'

In the sphere of sport, with the increasing systematisation and regimentation in the 18th century in England, something of the pure play-quality was inevitably lost. This can be seen very clearly in the official distinction between amateurs and professionals (or 'gentlemen and players'). The spirit of the professional is no longer the true play-spirit; it is lacking in spontaneity and carefreeness. This affects the amateur too, who begins to suffer from an inferiority complex. Between them, they push sport further and further away from the play-sphere.

In modern social life, sport occupies a place alongside and apart from the cultural process. The great competitions in archaic cultures had always formed part of the sacred festivals and were indispensable as health and happiness-bringing activities. This ritual tie has now been wholly severed; the sport has become profane, 'unholy' It is probably significant that we no longer speak of "games" but of 'sport'. The all-important point is that sport has become a business, or, to put it bluntly, a commercial racket.

Homo Ludens has no organic connection whatever with the structure of society, least of all when prescribed by the government. The ability of modern social techniques to stage mass

demonstrations with the maximum of an outward show in the field of athletics does not alter the fact that neither the Olympiads nor the organized sports of American Universities nor the loudly trumpeted international contests have, in the smallest degree, raised sport to the level of a culture-creating activity. However important it may be for the players or spectators, it remains sterile. The old play-factor has undergone almost complete atrophy.

Really to play, a man must play like a child. Can we assert that this is so in the case of such an ingenious game as Bridge? If not, the virtue has gone out of the game. The aim of true play is in itself, and its familiar spirit is a happy inspiration.

Chris Crawford defines a game as 'a closed formal system that subjectively represents a subset of reality'. In addition to the definition, the element of conflict is deemed an intrinsic element of games but with a safety barrier. Comparing games to other forms of representations of reality, Crawford stresses interaction. Games provide this interactive element, and it is a crucial factor in their appeal.

Costikyan defines games as '[an] interactive structure of endogenous (derived or originating internally) meaning that requires players to struggle toward a goal'. The use of endogenous meaning contributes to the observation that a game "creates its own meanings". The objects used in a game receive a meaning (regardless of if they had it before) by the role they play within the context of the game activity.

Games (Staffan Björk, Jussi Holopainen), unlike many other activities, are designed and as such should be able to be treated as an objective material that can be shaped by the designer. Parlett differentiates between informal (played by children), and formal games, which have explicit ends and means. Games are a contest based around the completion of an end 'and to achieve that objective is to win' and 'a formal game, by definition, has a winner'.

2. Sports and games

Sports have been part of our culture since ancient times with the Ancient Olympic Games and Knights tournaments being two examples where sport combined with arts festivals and events striving for grace, beauty, courage, and peace. Village played against another village in games like football, and it was about wider participation from the whole community.

Does sport, now a professional activity, still hold the same truth? As part of my work at the Latvian Academy of Sports Education, we study Olympic Athletes and ask them about whether professional sport aims for grace, beauty, and courage like in former times. Most say that nothing remains from ancient times and that it is about money and politics. Even though the Olympic Games is the only promising event that truly brings the world together, it is still a political, money orientated event.

The Latvian Academy of Sports Education educates adult (former) sportsmen to become future sports specialists and sports teachers, as well as coaches. The philosophy is that teachers should teach kids to enjoy sports – playing them as a game with their positive features. Not everyone will be a professional athlete, but everyone needs health and has to learn to be a team member. Sports teachers have to play a lot of games with their students so we emphasize this.

We would like to use the same philosophy in our work with coaches as well. In reality though, in order to participate in sport at a professional level, you have to start very early. This now means children are often taken out of their families, brought up in a special boarding school outside of their native home. What kind of childhood does this leave people with? Where is the carefreeness and joy that playing games provide? Not every young athlete will make it to the top, so we need to help our Coaches include play and help promote a healthy lifestyle and the team spirit.

50 years ago people played sports to connect, establish friendships and make lifelong friends. For example, in the novel 'Ghost Legs' by Nicholas Weinstock, we read about a white student (Ghost Legs) at an African University and how he waited for the possibility to play basketball. During the first game he first heard his name mentioned, and it turned out that the other Afri-

can players could speak English as well. This is how he made friends with the other students. Now many young people prefer just to be fans in sports arenas, watch sports events on TV and the Internet and not to play sports themselves. The interaction has changed. Has the meaning of sport changed as well?

3. The experience of playing the game “Blind travel”

3.1. The need for more preparation, the choice of real objects and presentation themes

As part of the Learning Games project, the game ‘Blind Travel’ was played by the partner consortium and staff members of LASE. The representatives from Bulgaria, Portugal and Denmark, designed and developed the game content which was aimed at presenting concise, corresponding realia from their countries in order to have others detect and determine which countries the objects came from. Examples of realia included small flags, whistles, coasters, computer mice pads, national ornaments, symbols, characteristic minerals and examples of flora/fauna as well as ingredients of national dishes. Unfortunately one country only brought pictures, which limited the effect of the game, as it was easy to guess the country. In order to better facilitate the game, a finding is that the choice of realia be limited to 3 themes, to make the game more realistic:

- 1) national symbols, traditions
- 2) national geography, flora, fauna
- 3) national dishes.

3.2. Solving an adult education problem – no one to leave the children with during adult education activities

One of the problems with adult education is that it is not always family friendly, as many parents would like to complete more courses and education, but often have difficulty finding babysitting and child-minding arrangements. In Latvia, children who are left alone can be taken away by police. In these terms, continuing to educate yourself can be viewed as a luxury. Long working hours to make even regular earnings is another problem.

In the ‘Blind Travel’ game, we faced a situation where one of the teachers brought her 6-year old son but it turned out to be fun and a unique situation. The 6-year knew some English and understood the concept of the game. When he tired of the presentations he was able to retreat to his own activities which also allowed the mother to play the game the entire time. Having the child in the activity reminded us of the idea of game theorists to ‘play like a child’, as his presence brought joy, a sense of carefreeness and intrigue, which are good characteristics of all true games.



Definitions of Games and of Learning Games

By Ilka Birova

For many generations, in the Eastern and Western parts of Europe, the development of educational concepts ran parallel without finding common ground. The later encounter, as some of the countries joined the European Union, has seen in many ways a superficial attempt to address the roots of the differences in style, practices, methods, and philosophy that keep somehow moving those parallel realities. Ilka Birova, Professor for Russian as a Second Language at the Sofia University, was one of the educationalists who was inspired to work with alternative systems in education for a long time.

In the discussion progress during the project, Ilka gave us perspectives and insight about sources that have remained unknown in western educational circles but play an essential role in advancing educational progress during periods in which there was very little or no contact between East and West, particularly concerning education. Due to the complexity, the issue remains ignored, and the obvious different approaches are said to be related to economic circumstances rather than to socio-cultural and ideological differences.

However, some of these approaches provide valuable information for building bridges that may allow us to find a common ground in education, especially in adult education. In the following text, Ilka presents a variety of definitions and characterisations of games, using sources such as those by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, as well as her own reflections about learning games and playing. She is convinced that: 'A game ... transforms education into live communication. The game is not an addition but a necessary component of learning systems for adults, an important element of present innovative educational technologies'

During the project, Ilka published a book for the promotion of the use of games in the teaching of Russian as a second language, with special mention of the Erasmus+ project Learning Games as an inspirational and motivational force for her work.

The concept of a Game has multiple aspects. There are many different definitions of games and their features (especially in the sphere of education of adults) which include:

- a kind of human activity
- a means of education and learning about different subjects
- a means of a social (language, psychological, intercultural) adaptation
- a situational exercise (in training for instance)
- 'an activity or sport in which people compete with each other according to agreed rules' (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 1995, p.581)
- a human activity of dual character: on the one hand – the player does a real activity through real actions, and on the other hand, this activity has conditional character, there is some distance between real live situation and game situation. This duality of the game defines its developing character. (Dictionary of Psychology, L.Dessev, 1990, Sofia)
- an instruments for teaching and education (R. Steiner; L.Vigotsky; D.Elkonin; New dictionary of methodological concepts E. Azimov, D. Shukin, Moscow, 2009). Vygotsky and Elkonin give a classification of games: subjective, creative and games with rules.

- a basis for holistic education and not a partially used techniques or exercises (G. Lozanov, Suggestology and Outlines of Suggestopedia; Gordon and Breach, New York, London, Paris, 1978)

Gamification is one of the main trends in present educational processes. I explored games as an educational activity of great importance in second language learning.

The definition of a game for language learning in adults (Ilka Birova) is:

A Game is an essential educational activity in the process of language learning. It is one of the forms of a teaching process organisation which transforms education into live communication. The game is not an addition, but a necessary component of learning systems for adults, an important element of present innovative educational technologies. In a teaching process, the game is realised through game technologies, educational games, playful exercises, techniques and specific organisation of lessons. Games develop language, communicative, cognitive and creative skills of the students. Games involve diversity in a teaching process and support students' motivation.

Distinctions between learning games and other didactic activities

The advantages of learning games (Ilka Birova):

- 1) Information gap – usually there is an unknown element for a participant(s) in a game activity
- 2) Rules and time limits for each activity are obligatory
- 3) Emotional and intellectual challenges, positive emotional atmosphere, appropriate intellectual tension
- 4) Live interaction and communication
- 5) Games support student's motivation in the learning process
- 6) Partnership and competitive character (competition is not obligatory)
- 7) The equal position of all participants, learning from each other
- 8) Creative character of game activities, the combination of language and other activities (drawing, singing, pantomime, gestures, etc.)
- 9) The combination between an individual input of each partner and group activity (discussion, exchanging of opinions, expressing points of view)
- 10) Freedom of expressing in-game activities, a choice is available

The educational value of learning games (Ilka Birova):

Through games we can develop many different skills in the education of adults, such as

- oral and written skills about first/second/third language
- communicative skills and social communication
- cognitive skills and common knowledge
- cultural background and intercultural competence
- memory and concentration
- physical skills
- art skills

Learning games have a strong motivating effect on adult learners. In formal education (e.g. at a secondary and a high school) it is necessary to use learning games in combination with traditional learning methods and activities such as observation, discussion, explanation, and training exercises. In my teaching practice, I often use discussion games, role plays, simulative and didactic language games with the base of Russian as a second language for Bulgarian

students at the University. The reactions of my students are predominantly positive.
Psychological aspects of games

1) L.Vygotsky (Russian psychologists, XX century) on learning, 1934: Thought and Language [or Thinking and Speech]

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): Gap between what a learner can accomplish independently (the Zone of Current Development, ZCD) and what they can accomplish with assistance from a 'more knowledgeable other' (MKO) • "...what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow.' This is an interactive process: The ZCD and ZPD change over time; Independent practice is required to close the loop.

Vygotsky on Play and Learning: '...play creates a zone of proximal development of the child. In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behaviour; in play, it is as though he were a head taller than himself.'

2) D. Elkonin presents the idea of the importance of games for the psychological development of children in preschool age. He underlines not the biological but the social character of the game and its features like variability, imitation adult models, dynamics, pleasure, role as the main point in game activities. The dual character of games – on the one hand, an imaginary situation and on the other hand, a real play activity of the child. Games support the development of abstract thinking and social adaptation of children.

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Play and its role in the Mental Development of the Child (a paper)

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D.Elkonin: The Psychology of Play

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Evaluation is the Keyword

Evaluation is the keyword at every step of the learning process. This short, very clear insight looks into different evaluative tools that can be used for games for learning and, by extension, for every other educational process. The text is representative of the contribution that Nicola Whitton and Manchester Metropolitan University brought to the project Learning Games in Adult Education: the perspective of researchers and creators. The EduScape game is an Escape Room with a pedagogical aim without losing the entertainment value of the original. It was developed by high school students in the framework of 'Learning Games', was played and tested by the partnership and successfully modified by VUC of Denmark, who created a simplified, adaptable, version using IT devices. This shows how a well-designed game for learning can trigger a series of related events that are in themselves a learning process.

By Nicola Whitton

There are a wide variety of ways in which to evaluate the effectiveness of a game for learning. This document gives an overview of the different approaches available. The first section looks at ways to evaluate the design of the game itself as a learning tool during development, and the second looks at ways of evaluating the player experience and learning that has taken place.

Developmental evaluation

Diagnostic evaluation focuses on techniques for carrying out evaluations during the game development process. Three areas of game design are particularly relevant: playability (how well the game works and whether it is fun), functionality (what the player can do in the game) and usability (how the player interacts with the game pieces or interface). The latter two aspects are particularly relevant to digital games, but also worthy of consideration for traditional games.

Types of developmental evaluation include:

- Paper prototyping to get player feedback early on by using paper prototypes or mock-ups of the actual game.
- Wizard-of-Oz prototyping is used in video game development and involves simulating the behaviour of the game, often manually, in a way that is not apparent to the user – from his or her point of view the game is fully functional.
- Scenarios allow students to comment on scenarios of use, descriptions of the game and how it might be used and the types of activities that would occur in it can help you gain insights early on.
- Expert walkthroughs involve someone who has a background and expertise in game design providing feedback from the point of view of an expert.
- Think-aloud walkthroughs involve asking players to play the game and talk through their thought processes.
- Observations such as simply watching people play a game and seeing how they interact with the game and each other.
- Interviews or focus groups that involve talking to individuals or groups about their experiences using the game.

- Piloting such as running through the whole game with a small number of users to identify and address any final issues with the game design.
- Diagnostic evaluation of accessibility and usability of video games, such as working through a checklist or checking against guidelines.

Evaluating learner experience

Evaluation of the effectiveness of games for learning is problematic for several reasons. First, games that are used in formal learning situations are typically small-scale interventions, often used for a small number of hours only in total. This means that any effects that could be shown from the use of the game might be minimal and short-lasting, as no small-scale learning intervention is likely to have a significant impact on learning overall. Second, much evaluation of games and learning is carried out by those with a vested interest in its success; such as the teacher who created the game. Third, evaluating learning is difficult in itself, particularly over time and in relation to transfer to other contexts. Timing of evaluation is also an important factor to consider; evaluating immediately after a game allows for fresh responses but will not provide any evidence of long-term benefits.

Student learning is most commonly evaluated through the development of measurable and observable performance indicators or learning outcomes; the degree to which a student can evidence these learning outcomes (through an exam, essay or other assessment is then evaluated to indicate whether learning has taken place). However, meaningful evaluation is not always possible in the case of games for learning simply because learning from the game forms a small part of a much larger set of learning objectives or because the game isn't explicitly assessed as part of a formal course. A second issue of using formal assessment to evaluate learning is that it does not take into account the unintended learning from game play, such as problem-solving, teamwork or negotiation.

Experimental research designs are common studies on games and learning, where students are separated into groups that undergo different treatments and the differences in outcomes are compared, using tests before and after the game. However, there are drawbacks to this approach in that any learning beyond simple memorisation is difficult to evaluate with a test and the real potential of learning games is engaging the higher level learning outcomes. It may be difficult to persuade students to give up the extra time to complete additional tests, and there are also ethical implications of such an evaluation design.

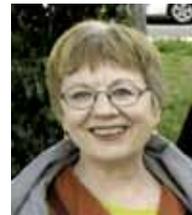
Alternate ways of evaluating learner experience include:

- Student self-evaluation of learning is notoriously inaccurate but does at least allow data gathering as to whether students think they have learned something.
- Questionnaires for student evaluation of their playing experiences, looking at aspects such as enjoyment, affect, motivation, or engagement with the game.
- Quantitative indicators can be used to evaluate engagement with digital games, such as time spent playing the game, points accrued, or levels reached.
- Interview/focus groups can be used to explore players qualitative experiences when playing the game.
- Observations can be used to explore how behavioural indications can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the processes of learning that are taking place during a game.

Using a mixed-methods approach, of large-scale quantitative experimental research coupled with deep qualitative research to explore the nuances of the learning experiences, provides one way to support robust evaluation. Looking at the depth as well as the breadth of evidence enables researchers to gather insights into the potential of games for learning and the factors and contexts that make it more effective as an educational paradigm.



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