PAL

ENLIGHTENED EDUCATION: USING PLAY AND GAMES FOR FACILITATING OF DIFFICULT TOPICS

"Fighting discrimination and anti-Gypsyism in education and employment in EU" (PAL)

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Key words

education   **lecturing**   **entertainment**

play and education   **learning**   **pedagogy**

Starting questions

1) Can be education fun?

2) How to integrate education and games/play?

3) What are the obstacles in using games and play in education?

4) What are the main benefits of using games in education?

5) Which topics are most suited for the facilitation through games and play?

Definitions of terms:

Game – A activity involving skill, chance, or endurance on the part of one or more persons who play according to a set of rules, usually for their own amusement or for that of spectators.

Play - Exercise or activity for amusement or recreation.

RPG - Role-playing game – Game where the participants are representing different person.

Interactivity - The extent to which something is acting one upon or with the other.

Games and playing goals in education

Games can be easily used during education regardless of the topic and they are suitable for every age category. Of course, every age category will be open to different games and it is necessary to change the format of the game to make it appropriate for the maturity level and mental capacity of the participants.

Despite of regular education or lecture here is significantly bigger amount of effort invested into the entertainment value and overall format. It is necessary for success of these methods to reach high level of interactivity between every participant and lecturer. Even the inactivity of the participant should lead to results which are clear from the game structure and particular rules. To be clear, not playing the game should not be structured as a punishment but perceived and interacted as a variation of the play.

If we use games during the lesson, we are usually aiming at reaching several results at the same time. Basic goal is to secure the presentation of new topic to the participants. This goal is often misunderstood. Amount of the information which is presented is usually compared to the other formats smaller which is one of the reasons why it is sometimes perceived as not as sufficient and overall negatively accepted among teachers. The context in which the information is presented to learners is very important especially when using games. If we want to create relation to the information we need to achieve students' emotional reaction and in this area game is able to provide important tools to help during educational transfer of soft skills.

There are many topics which are already strongly influenced by emotions and where it is necessary to work with emotional reactions of the students and implement emotional education with the pedagogical approach.

As an example we can use the education and motivation for advanced studying. In the form of lecture we will have information about possible fields of study and available schools where it is possible to apply this after finishing school, what is the utilization of this education on the job market and what are the requirements laid on the applicant in this field. If the lecturer is enlightened enough, he/she will provide information about the way the everyday work of the people in these fields looks like.

One of many possible ways of the topic transformation to the game is a form of storytelling. Participants in the game are divided into groups. In the groups of three they have a goal to prepare story of a person who is involved in the follow-up study, how the study went and how it looks like when it is finished. Looking for work after university, first day in the new work position and regular day after that. Important in the game is to use imagination and try to prepare it as a story with problems, complications and maybe some conflicts. Task of the lecturer is to enter the storytelling and challenge the students to elaborate to expand the story in the parts which are missing. For example to make the story interesting, there should be problems and worries based on reality. Obstacles which will be needed to overcome. If there is any information in conflict with reality it is appropriate to correct them.

Amount of information which are students exposed to is smaller than in the form of classic lecture but they are more pulled into the thinking about the topic. Also it supports consideration about long term consequences of education. Admittedly there might arise another problem in education in the form of the game. In this approach different groups of students will have different exposure to

information. Basis in present education is equality in the presented information. So it is always important to avoid this problem to combine lecture or other classical educational methods with games.

Another goal which we are trying to achieve is group cohesiveness. If we work with the group by the form of interactive game, the interpersonal contacts is more frequent and allows to support development of relation within the members of the group. This element is applicable especially in the new collective or the groups that do not have good relations and supporting the development of these relations in the group is important. This element is easily supported by simple small changes in the games which lead to increase the interactions. For example, in the last case we could ask the participants to make the story of the other one in the group based on his plans and not their own.

Disagreements and confrontations between participants are much more manageable if they occur during the game than in the common lecture. Also the participant are more likely to feel that their opinion is relevant. In the case of good game management and support of expressing opinions we can work with opinions which are against perceived conformity. If the openness reaches this level, we can work with these opinions and while not excluding people with opinions with conflict to our goal. For example, if we are presenting the benefits of higher education, we should give enough space to people who are openly against it. It is of course relevant to present counterarguments. But firstly we should give enough space to the participants to present their own view of counterarguments. The goal is to support interaction and their ability to create their own opinion. If the goal of our effort is well founded majority of the participants reach similar conclusion as us during the discussion. We, of course, never reach the interest for higher education with everybody. However we can achieve reflection on the topic with everybody.

During these dialogs and discussions emotional abreaction occurs which is another goal of the games and plays during education. Students experience a lot of emotional distress which sometimes participates in development of extremists and antisocial behaviour. Games and plays provide possibility to channel this emotions and reach increase in ability to do responsible decisions. But it is necessary to work successfully with these emotions to discuss honest opinions of the participants. It is common, that as the result of experience from the school, there is a level of self-censorship which is adaptive strategy in many situations but also creates communication barrier which limits openness to the new information.

In the context of our example it is likely that some of the participants will show opinions on education or fields of study and they are not aware of why they have these opinions. In this case it is appropriate to ask questions and support their thinking about sources of these opinions. But we can't forget that every opinion is real, even if we strongly disagree. If the opinion is strongly against our values we can present that we disagree providing students with the explanation why and show a respect to him/her as to a person even if we cannot agree with the opinion.

Education through games and plays is also about setting the topic and creating a relation to the topic as a whole or the institutions which is represented by the game. For example, in the case of setting the topic thinking about future usually benefits the person in the long-term scale regardless of the conclusions. A mental representation of the world and the topic as is grasped by the participant is also connected to previous note. If the explanation structure is burdened with prejudices and emotional distortion then even if the presented information are same the conclusions can differ. If we manage to work in the form of opinion creation and we are working with the structure rather than the content during the game we have opportunity to influence participants in different way than in the case of simple transfer of information. Simultaneously if there is a conflict between opinions of other people in the group and not just with the lecturer it leads to more effective ability to revaluate their own opinions and development. But it comes with risk and it is necessary to prevent the situation where one is against everyone in the group. In these situation there can be ideal situation when we reach everyone against everyone – everybody for themselves. This situation supports the most the development of critical thinking. It creates big demand on the lector as it is necessary to support this atmosphere and keep a friendly approach even to the people with opinions with deep conflict to their own.

Gamified education also works as a tool for capturing psychopathological problems soon. This is especially relevant for school education, where is possible to work with the children with follow-up care. Psychopathology which appear is not threated during the game directly but the experience can support of development of coping strategies. In the case of revelation of the problem is appropriate to talk with the children directly about the topic individually after the work with the group. In case of past example, we can during the game gain suspicion for pathologically lowered self-confidence, when the student express opinion that he will never pursue higher education because he is useless and even after the encouragement for creating of fantasy about higher education he is still unable to play it is high probability for problem, which should be addressed.

During the lecture same or similar problem would express itself less clearly and would by probably in the form loss of interest and attention, which could mean a lot of different things.

Limits and risks of games and play in education

As it was said before, lower amount and uneven distribution of gained information share elements of games and plays in education. To avoid the transformation this risk into a problem it is good practice to keep it in mind and combine it with conventional methods. Dependent on the topic and used techniques it is beneficial to include classic educational techniques in front, behind or in-between the interactive ones. Behind the game we put classic technique, if we used game to create motivation. In front if we used the game to strengthen instillation of information. Between if we want to combine the effects or if the design of our games is in a way that it allows immediate use of the information.

Size of the Group

With gaming technique the size of the group is very important limiting factor. Most of the gaming and play methods are suited for the group consisted of no more than 15 members. With the increasing number of participant the efficiency diminishes. With the group of 15 members we need to consider using two lecturers for the work to reduce this effect and to limitate misunderstanding.

Noise level

While working with children and during the use of methods utilizing the interactivity, negotiations or physical activity noise level is higher which is common consequence but also a tool which we can work with. We are, of course, always limited by the area in which we work. If the area is for example common classroom and in the next room there is another lesson taking place we should expect limitations on the noise level and it is necessary to choose from the methods which are not too loud. Higher level of noise can be used to induce involvement, "awakening" of the group and restoring energy in the group. These methods work especially well as complementary while working with younger kids.

Preparedness for the topic

Even thou the amount of the information which is transferred during the game is in conclusion usually smaller than during the lecture, the amount of information which the lecturer has to prepare

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is higher. During the game there are different parts and areas of the topic opened and it is necessary to adapt the process to the participants. Also it is very beneficial for the lecturer to have good knowledge of his/her own opinions, attitudes and emotional triggers (prejudices, traumatic experiences, etc.) with the topic. Education in the form of the game and play should never be about assertion of one's opinion. Activity is supported by the lecturer but it has to originally come out from the participants. With many techniques it is also necessary to have prepared the resources for the games.

Trust between the group and the lector

For the educational form of the play it is necessary to have good or at least neutral relations between the members and towards the lecturer within the group. In the case of complicated relations the amount of useful games is very limited and it is on the lecturer to strongly secure order and cooperation between members of the group. In the case of pathological retaliations it is not recommended to use some of the time which is available for the game to work on improving the relations first and after that working on the topic. In that case it is possible to fail completely in transferring the information and all overall goals.

Conflict or antipathy to a lecturer

Conflicts with the lecturer have many forms and different amount of intensity. It is natural part of relaxation of atmosphere and in that case it is always opportunity to question authority. If there is no questioning of authority it could mean that there is failure in creating nonthreatening and playful atmosphere. Another point of view of the extreme is a loss of the authority altogether which leads to a loss of rules of communication and fails in creating effective communication. It is always useful to have different sources of authority than just the natural one. For example, if we are working in the school with a class it is good to have also set up cooperation with teacher to have available some of the penalty from school rules. Although most common in these cases attempts to be putting knowledge and skills of the lecturer into questions. It is appropriate to support these attempts. Present the fact that every lecturer is also a human being and he/she also has limited knowledge and it is reason why the opinion of the participant is needed. Because his/her opinion or the approach could be better.

Possibility of a method failure

Every method and game has its risks and limitations. Every time it is possible that the game will be refused by the participants. In these cases it is necessary to stop the game sooner than later. For this situation it is necessary to be prepared with different game. Even if this game is refused by the participants than it is time to open discussion about if they want to work or participate altogether and what is their expectation. Challenge them to come forward with their own ideas how to discuss the topic.

Unsuitable method

Methods are not always universal and not every topic is compatible with every topic. It is always on your consideration about the way method contributes to the fulfilment of the goals for the topic. The overall atmosphere in the group is another feature that must be considered and according to it and the methods which serve different sub-goals should be accustomized to it. For example, activation methods if the group is tired. For the case of tension in the group have ready games for relaxation and for the case of relaxed and activated group have an available method which is more challenging for avoiding the loss of attention.

Working with group and making of the rules

The work with the group should start in the spirit of preparation for playful atmosphere. It is necessary to openly and honestly express the reasons why the activity is taking place and what are the goals of this activity from the perspective of lecturers. If goals could not be accepted by the group, it is not a reason to embellish or conceal them. This is one of the problems which are to be seen with the unexperienced lecturers who are starting with gaming methods. These methods are based on mutual respect and hidden goals will unavoidable harm these efforts. But unacceptable goals by the target group tell us something important about our goal and maybe it is the time for us to think and change the goals. In the case of negative response from the participants we have a better start than in the case of neutral reaction. If we support this negative reaction, we can manage to persuade participants to present why they do not like our goals and we can work with that. Games should be designed in a way that there is a place for rebellion, resistance and expressing disapproval in the context of the game. Because if the disapproval is presented in the game we are able to work with it and discuss it with the participant. During the beginning of the work we should also discuss with participants what do they expect, what are their hopes and efforts. Part of this start is also presentation of the lecturers, if the group is not familiar with them, and distribution of

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stickers with names/nicknames. If we work with children we should respect nicknames they chose, even if it is weird. Next step is setting the rules.

Setting the rules

At the start of cooperation with participants is time to set up the rules of the overall activities like discussion, general behaviour and other which will be important for the participants. It is important to not mistaken them with the rules of the games itself, which are fully in the hands of the lecturers. During this process it is necessary for participants to strongly participate on creation of these rules. There should be voting about which rules will apply and which will not. It is also appropriate to suggest generally used rules like avoiding of foul words, interruptions, etc. The role of the lector is to help form these rules. In the case that there are some needed rules it should be suggested but rarely is it really necessary. If the group suggests rules which are too complicated or they are absurd in some way it is a good think to follow them till it is clear that they are not practical and suggest change after it is clear to everyone. Goal of lectors is to support of elaboration of rules, which will lead to equal involvement of members of the group and which limit peer pressure and support willingness to present own opinion. It is possible to set up rules limiting the talking about what happened and what was said during the games out of the context of the group. It is also important to make clear that the rules apply to the lecturers as well. There is no real need for lecturers to be relieved from the rules. It could cause interruptions in development of the trust.

Even the rules will be present sometimes it is needed to limitate expressions of the participants, especially while working with kids. There is also appropriate to remind them some other rules which are part of polite behaviour apply too. In the case of admonition, it should be accompanied with support. For example: "now you are too loud" is more appropriate than "you are too loud". These little differences add up and could lead to difference between interest in the work and passivity. Even if the one which are too loud do not fully realize that, some sensitive people from the group could be affected by it.

Conflicts between members of the group are desired situation as long as it is conflict on the level of opinions and not on personal level. When the arguments ad hominem appear it is time to calm it down. Education through the form of games and plays supports expression of opinions and experience which will be naturally different between people. It is healthy to have different opinions

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and doubt opinions of others but it is problematic when there are attacks on people which follow these opinions. On the other hand there is other extreme when many lecturers have tendency to avoid it by relativizing and expressing philosophy, that every opinion has the same validation and same cons as any other and that every opinion is correct. Which is dishonest. It is natural to think that our own opinions are the best. If there are opinions which are exuding to each other, only one or neither can be valid. But biggest problem is that this philosophy strongly limitates the interest in dialog and devoid the discussion of meaning.

Examples of games appropriate for different topics RPG games

RPG games have huge potential for venting emotional tension and can be used in different intensity of involvement of participant. The more we have empathy for the character and the more we make it closer to ourselve the more we work with emotions.

Most personal approach is to pretend that we are characters altogether and to talk as the character. If we apply the approach on the example mentioned before, we can make a game based on the our own thinking about carrier. Choose one of the participant and other participants question him about what he does for a living and what his regular day looks like. The one playing his future-self has prepared a story as if he will be visiting the school - which is talking about his job in front of the class.

If we use future tense "after my college studies my day will look like …" we are putting more distance between the person and his role which leads to smaller emotional investment for the game. If we talk about the character in the form "hi wakes up every morning at …" we create even bigger distance and we can limit emotion to minimum. It is sometimes better to add pictures of faces which allows bigger relation to the topic. Why use formats of the game which have limited emotional involvement? Appropriate form depends on maturity of the group. In the case of emotional problems within participants or problems in relations is often needed less emotional form especially when we talk about more emotional topic – participants could refuse if it is too intensive.

Activating games – motion games

Activity games are used especially when we have group which has been already sitting in a class for a long time and there is a need to awaken them a little. The less demanding form is expression of

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opinions through the body motion and not words. For example, everybody who wants to go to high school will stand on the left side of the room, everyone who does not want to go will stand on the right and the ones which do not now will stand in the middle. Others will stand in front. Category others is added as a joke and for the rebels which want to have some attention or want to rebel a little. If there are no rebels in the group who will use this option, it usually is accepted as a joke. If there are any we can give them space to express themselves. This method is good because it is moving with the participants and at the same time it provides a tool for expression of opinions which they could have problem otherwise express.

Another example could be games involving competition. Example could be school class where everyone is sitting at the desk. Everyone will prepare ten crumpled papers with names written in them. Afterwards there will be contest in throwing papers in the container in front of the class from the desk. Afterwards there will be winner presented and it could open discussion about injustice in this competition, because the ones in front have a much easier task. Participants, especially the one which are more competitive, will be very activated by this and it also involves using hands and overall activation. It could be used as model of society where not everyone has the same start or have some limitation. And that with the use of effort and skill someone in the not so good position could be more successful that someone with benefits of sitting more in front.

Motivational games – asking questions

Motivational activates serve the purpose of creation longing for answers. Good tool in this case are games including mysteries, questions and unfinished topics. If, for example, we place in front of participant's tasks and ask them for solutions while they need more information to finish them we support the need for knowing more. For example, the game „helpdesk" when the participants are divided into the groups and they are entrusted with the task to take a role of councillors in the citizen's advice bureau and help solve problems of people facing the discrimination or choosing of the school. In these small groups they have task to elaborate the answers for concrete stories of the persons asking for help. They should create one solution for the team. If in the class, there is big resistance from the participants we could let them elaborate one really good advice and one really bad one. After the work they present the answers to the other groups and they are trying to explain why they chose this advice and interact with the feedback from others. If we want to make the

experience stronger we should use real cases and life stories. That it is real life story and what happened in the reality is said to the participants afterwards.

Understanding – the creation of mental representation of the world

Games aimed at the development of understanding and insight the problems have a goal of training work with information and creation of mental representation of the world as it is. Example could be starting of the personal story of a person or a group and the task of the participants is to finish the story as they expect it unfolds. Again in this case it is ideal if the story is real and we know how it ended. This increases the emotional effect but it is not necessary. These stories should be choose in a way that it makes the group work with the questions which is the topic of the group work about. After they finish the story, they are supported to suggest alternative endings and options which the characters had and why they did not chose these alternatives. And if they were in their place would they do solve differently and why. This game allows development of empathy and work with future, which is key for steps towards self-development and planning of own life.

Another game from this category is more abstract and more complicated. It is a creation of rules for a simple board game which is aimed at the discussed topic. Participants are challenged to start working on the preparation of the game which represent the problem in a way that it includes obstacles and danger which corresponds with the reality but also the lucky events which could occur. They should set up in which situations the player wins and what is the goal. The mechanism of the game could be prepared for the participants and they could only prepare narrative to these mechanisms. This allows them to project their own concepts and ideas to the game and to think about them in their consequences. This thinking is great base for the dialog after the process of creating the games is finished and it opens possibility to talk about the topic.

Questions for thinking

What games did you learn most from?

What education did you enjoyed?

How would look like ideal form of education according to you?