

Chapter 7

Facilitation of Trust in Gaming Situations

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ABSTRACT

Games are inherently engaging and, when crafted to do so, provide an experiential, mediated learning space that is effective and fun. This chapter explores game-based learning and the role of the facilitator in optimizing learning. As referees, they make sure games proceed in a fair and orderly manner. As teachers, they look for teachable moments to ‘scaffold’ learning. As mentors, they debrief what happened to enhance learning and ensure psychological safety. The author reviews the literature and her practice as an educational psychologist to examine therapeutic board games and socio-emotional learning. The Life-Space Interview and Emotional First Aid are put forward as effective debriefing tools. An argument is made for the importance of face-to-face games and attention is drawn to concerns about excessive screen time.

INTRODUCTION

Children of the new millennium grow up in a world of accelerating technology, full of smartphones, laptops, iPods, and a seemingly endless stream of information on the Internet. It is not unusual for tech-savvy kids to multi-task their homework, social media and music. The com-

ment is often made that screen-based media have created a cohort of learners not easily engaged by traditional methods and teachers are looking for new ways to engage students. Young people are looking for meaningful ways of relating to what they are learning, no longer content with traditional ‘book learning.’ Experience-based learning strategies are finding a place in modern classrooms as teachers use multimedia presenta-

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tions, role-plays, games, drama, group work, and interactive technologies. Schools are not alone in embracing these approaches. Simulations and games are making an impact on how business, ecology, society, and dental technology, for example, are taught (Castella, et al., 2003; Tsuchiya, 2005; Vahed, 2008). Games have been integral to human culture throughout history as evidenced by ancient philosophies and archeological finds. Essentially, games are a social experience and can be used to teach just about anything and when facilitators guide the learning, a sense of connectedness and trust develops. Games provide a semi-naturalistic space where players can rehearse new skills in a safe environment and facilitators are well placed to monitor the psychological safety of players. Unpredictable learning contexts arise and skilled facilitators use these opportunities to mediate the learning experience. Social competence and emotional resilience are critical in a changing world that relies increasingly on collaborative approaches to learning and the workplace. Children who lack these skills need a safe and engaging forum in which to learn. Establishing rapport can be tricky if young clients are oppositional and do not want the extra attention being provided however playing a game together quickly disarms resistance, especially if they are playing with a small group of peers. Before they know it, they are having fun, talking about the issues, and learning new skills. Therapeutic board games are specifically designed to teach social and emotional skills like anger management, friendships, resilience, helpful thinking, and social problem solving.

The purpose of this chapter is to consider board games as a tool for teaching socio-emotional skills to children and young people and to outline the ways in which facilitation can enhance this process. It looks at the advantages of experience-based learning and how a skilled facilitator can influence outcomes for players within the 'zone of proximal learning.' It also examines the skills, attitudes, and values of effective facilitators with a focus on debriefing emotional crises. While

the focus is on face-to-face board games, other experience-based learning strategies should also benefit from effective facilitation. In this emerging age of the 'e-world,' accessed largely through screens, it is becoming increasingly important for facilitators to alert players to the potential dangers of excessive screen-time. The chapter closes by impressing on players and facilitators the importance of monitoring their physical, psychological, and social wellbeing and not neglect face-to-face social contact.

BACKGROUND

2.1 Experience-Based Learning: A New Paradigm

Until the late 1960s the dominant paradigm for teaching and learning involved information transfer from experts to learners using instructional technologies like books, lectures, and articles, with success most often measured by written examination. While these methods are common in educational settings today, pedagogy has moved on to broader understandings of the teaching and learning process. Cognitive theorists like Vygotsky (1978), Gardner (1999), and Goleman (1996) discuss the social and emotional environment and its impact on learning. Intelligence is now seen as a multi-faceted concept with emotional intelligence emerging as a pivotal factor. This diverse view calls for more complex approaches such as those provided by 'experience-based learning.' Rubens (1999) sees experience-based learning as having potential to address the limitations of traditional paradigms. According to Rubens, the fundamentals of experience-based learning are found in the writings and practices of Aristotle, Socrates, Dewey (1938), Mead (1934), Lewin (1951), and Kolb (1984). Experience-based learning is interactive and relational and uses instruction technologies like simulations, games, role-plays, case studies, scenarios, multi-media presenta-

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