

Let's play the “game of the goose”

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ABSTRACT

The game gives us an appropriate framework for teaching and fosters the generalization of new learning. The aim of this paper is the exposition of an interdisciplinary work carried out in concerted a Special Education center of the community of Madrid (Spain). From this area we use traditional games as didactics resources. Therefore, the so-called “The Game of the Goose” was proposed to globalize the work of different professionals who take care of their students and their respective areas (physic education, language, mathematics, social competences, etc.)

KEYWORDS: Game, Learning disabilities, Inclusion, Best practices

Introduction

Nowadays is beyond any doubt that the game develops the mind and inventiveness, improves the creativity, socialization and cooperation, self-esteem and, above all, the learning (Heras, 1996).

The aim of this paper is to describe a series of initiatives which give, in essence, a pedagogical idea: the combined used of childhood game with the different areas which are worked at the class.

The reader, most probably, may not recognize the game proposed in this paper (The Game of the Goose) but is well known all around Europe because it belongs to the wide popular and traditional repertoire of games of our childhood. In America exists other game with several coincidences which is called “Snakes and Ladders” and could be useful as a starting point to think about The Game of the Goose.

In our case, the game is closely bounded to the teaching activities. In this way, its mechanisms have to be adapted to the needs of these students, of their teachers and the teaching-learning environment.

Method: The Game

The game has been part of human life since the very beginning. It could also be considered as a cultural tool used to achieve the physic and intellectual maturity and, following this idea, the game could be described as a keystone in the development of everyone’s social life (Arráez, 2000)

Gaming is not only a child competence; adults and children have the free option to play. Of course, the rules and play schemes are quite different between those groups. At first, the game has a spontaneous character which, progressively, turns into a social purpose where rules are well defined and must to be followed.

The fun exercise contributes to the development of the human being. I has been said that the “Homo Ludens” (Huizinga, 1987) is the predecessor of the “Homo Sapiens” and, in fact, the fun stage is essential for a child in order to became a man, or a woman, and for the whole development of his, or her, personality (Martínez, 1983)

Having said that, we could say that the game is an inherent human activity and, therefore, very complex and changing due to its elements

In our occidental society, we used to talk about the sport when we may talk about the game. The sport is a game, that is for sure, but it is only one specific kind of game. Is quite common to use those terms, game and sport, as synonyms but both of them has their own differentiating characteristics and we should bear in mind that, considering the sport as a particular game, the last could be a good starting point to introduce lately the sport in itself (Narganes, 1993)

Etymologically speaking, the game is the action of playing. That means doing something as pleasure, as a funny exercise which is bounded to some rules. Meanwhile, the sport is a confusing term, it is a provencal (Deport) which implies a group of indoor

entertainments; a fun activity with fixed rules which is played as an individual or collective competition and which depends on skills such as moving, strength, and the others' abilities (Rüssell, 1970)

Keeping traditional games in our changing society is no easy but necessary if we want to keep our cultural luggage as well. Achieving this objective and adapting them to our didactic needs, inclusion as example (Arráez, 2000), seems to be a good complementation.

In order to be more specific we could say that in the practice of traditional games and sports teachers could find all the principles and structures of formal physic education: perceptions of our own body, floor supports, immediate environment, space and time, etc. When you play you have to use basic abilities and skills to move and manipulate the elements of the game. The fun activity requires the physic action.

When our students play they get involve with other students, and with themselves, because they have to achieve some situations in a collective form. That is why games and sports have such high educative value which can be involve within physic education and could also be attached with cultural values explicitly in the rules (Moreno, 1992)

The game could be used in a physic education session in many different ways (adapted from Devís y Piró, 1992):

- As a motivator element.
- As a relaxing element.
- As an inclusion element.
- As a unique activity during the whole session.

The game has a different importance in each cycle and, therefore, it should be focused from a different perspective depending on the age and the group characteristics. Following the ideas of Chateau (1973) and generally speaking, the use of the game as a didactic resource should:

- Be easy to learn and understand.

- Have simple but clear rules.
- Take account of what kind of behavior we would like to obtain as a result depending on our objectives.

The success or failure of this technique will also depend on what kind of possibilities do we have inside our educative context. We could:

- Create workshops where the students could research, learn and adapt traditional games and sports.
- Introduce those games and sports through didactics units, giving their cultural value through interdisciplinary and parallel activities in relation with other curricular areas.
- Develop “cultural weeks” where we could express extensively all possibilities.
- Organize activities out of the normal schedule where we could offer to our students the opportunity to continue learning.

In our case: The Game of the Goose

The so-called “The Game of the Goose” has a long story. It’s first version has four thousand years old, following some authors. Others say that it only is four hundred years old. There are some ideas about its origins:

- It could be a Greek invention which was created during the siege of Troy. This theory is based in the *Phaistos disc* (2.000 b.C) that could be seen as the first goose board game.
- Others say that it was born in the Florencia of the Médici and later it spread all over Europe. There is evidence that is was inscribed in the Stationer’s Hall of London the 16th of June in 1597.
- While others say that it was created by the Templars in the XI century and it was inspired by the so-called Way of St James.

However, the mechanic of this game is very simple: two or more players have a meeple and throw one dice (two in some versions) and move forwards as many squares as the

result of the dice until they reach the last square. The first to reach this 63th square wins. But there are some tricky squares which forces you to move backwards, jump to some specific squares, or get you stuck without moving during one turn or even more.

The Game of the Goose belong to that kind of fun which are a metaphor of live in society and the communication through stories: it has a beginning and an end; animals and nature are presents; hindrances are all along the way (danger of getting stuck, luck and disgrace) and, above all, it represents the labyrinthine journey of existence with its unpredictable variants (Elkonin, 1980)

All this opportunities give us a perfect framework for adapting some squares and turn them into didactic challenges which put into the test the learning of our students at the same time that foster the acquisition of specific social competences which are essential for an integral education which fosters equity between students; one of the keystones of an inclusive education (Arráez, 2000).

Results expected and obtained: A Globalize approach

When children reach this institution, they have very different backgrounds in terms of gaming experiences, skills and abilities with everyday objects, interaction with the environment and their pairs. In consequence, we started this initiative giving those experiences that could have been worked –or not, but according to their psychomotor development- in the familiar context.

The game should be adapted to the students' normal experiences if we want them to be an active part of the initiative. The content learned through this kind of activity will modify and enrich the vision of natural actions; walk, run, jump, listen, sing, obey rules, etc. (Ferrándiz y Orden, 2003)

Through this and other games we establish multiple relations, by no means arbitrary, between their experiences and knowledge, not only within the physic education context but also between other areas as language and mathematics. With these globalizations we

want to foster the significant acquisition of scholar learning and its generalization to other fields.

This globalizing approach implies an interdisciplinary work between the different professionals who work in this centre. Then, it is essential to count with an environment which fosters group working and facilitates the coordination between all the departments of the centre. According to this philosophy, in this centre we have a weekly meeting in which all professionals can discuss and express their concerns and proposals in a globalized way. Moreover, those meetings are a perfect framework to coordinate all these type of initiatives (Ferrándiz, 2004)

This initiative, The Game of the Goose, was born within the physic education department in one of those interdepartmental weekly meetings and it spread quickly through other departments. To turn the idea into reality, all departments proposed a weekly session only for games as an attractive way to globalize and relate different contents from the physic education, mathematics, language, etc. using an active group activity.

The mentioned game of the goose was selected as keystone of the initiative and, after that, we thought about the adaptations needed to make it possible. A fluid and efficient coordination was found to be essential.

In this way, the teachers are committed to organize traditional sessions of The Game of the Goose as a board game in order to make it familiar to all the students; use of the dice (mathematic competence), respect the turn (social competence), etc. Moreover, they also created which kind of questions were supposed to appeared all along the game, of course, depending on what kind of knowledge they were dealing in that moment (animal taxonomies, geography, history, etc.)

We should also press attention to the need of coordination between teachers and other support professionals as pedagogues, psicopedagogues, psicologists, among others, because they could guide our actions in order to foster not only the interrelation between

areas but also the motivation, self-esteem and the collaborative work. Therefore we established a series of slogans that could be used during the development of the game (in class or in the gymnasium). All these slogans were encouraging phrases, positive reinforcements and some kind of short, middle and long-term prizes for each of the participants and for the groups.

Finally, we asked our vocational teachers for help to make some of the needed materials of the game more attractive; the squares, dice, jigsaws, etc.

The Game of the Goose appeared to be turn into a “great ball of snow” rolling down the hill in which the whole centre was committed: teachers, departments and, among all of them, the students.

Having said that, we would like to press an special attention in the fact that an spontaneous idea that was born in one department, in this case the physic education department, can grow and get a high socialization and cooperation value, not only for students but also for us as professional educators.

To continue, we are going to expose how The Game of the Goose was organize and we will describe, as an example, which kind of modifications were adopted in relation with the physic education.

How to play: the rules of the game

In the adapted version for the area of physic education, the board game was enlarged and a huge new board game was created, almost filling the whole gymnasium. Then, in every macro-square, each participant had to deal with a; knowledge, physic or group challenge.

The initiative starts with the preparation of the challenges, as we have mentioned before, in collaboration with other departments and with the support area. Therefore, we finally obtained:

- 16 questions (red squares) about knowledge of other areas.
- 16 physic challenges (black squares), influenced by the curricular objectives and in coherence with the different developmental stages of our students.

- 16 group challenges (blue squares) with a socialization purpose in which cooperation and communication competences are essential.

This work is continuously adapted since it starts for a better approach to our students' competences. After this more technical work, we started the practical task of making the squares (vinyl rectangles or even plastic cards) in four colors:

- *Whites*: corresponding with the geoses. 14 similar squares with the following numbers: 1, 5, 9, 14, 18, 23, 27, 32, 36, 41, 45, 50, 54, 59 and a great final 63 square which acts as the end of the game.
- *Reds*: the questions, all of them with the same size and with the numbers: 2, 6, 10, 13, 17, 21, 25, 29, 33, 37, 40, 44, 48, 52, 56 and 60.
- *Blacks*: representing physic and individual challenges, all of them with the same size and with the numbers: 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 22, 26, 30, 34, 38, 42, 46, 49, 53, 57 and 61.
- *Blues*: they imply collective group challenges, all of them with the same size and the following numbers: 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28, 31, 35, 39, 43, 47, 51, 55, 59 and 62.

We also created a huge dice which was made of foam and had two versions: classical numbers from one to six, one in each face, and other for early children or students with special needs which showed, in each face, the drawing of a hand with one, two, three, four, five or six fingers.

From that moment, we could organize those weekly sessions, mentioned before, and depending on the number of students we decided how many sessions were needed to achieve the objectives. We also proposed one big "final session" to close the game and with the captains of each group as delegates. In this way, all students could participate actively in the game, some of them as members of a team (dealing with those group challenges) and others as singular players (dealing with questions and individual physic challenges)

Development of the game: our adaptation

First of all, we should form the groups with five components in each one (but also depending on the ratio), trying to make every group as heterogenic as it could be within themselves and as homogeneous as possible between groups in order to balance opportunities and foster inclusion.

Each group has to select a captain (they can receive the help of teachers) and a color (green team, read team, and so on) which has to be shown somehow (with t-shirts, stickers, ribbons, etc.)

All players are situated in front of the first square, square number one, and the other squares are situated in a spiral by number, ending with the square sixty three which is in the center of the huge board game. He or she will throw the dice and the chance will decide his or her luck. The student should advance forwards as many squares as the dice shows and deal with the hidden challenge of the square in which he or she stops as follows:

- If the student ends in a red square: the student has to answer a question in a limited given time. If the student replies correctly the group gain one point, if not, they get nothing.
- If the student ends in a black square: the student has to achieve an individual physic challenge. If the student make it correctly the group gain one point, if not, they get nothing.
- If the student ends in a blue square: all the components of the team have to deal with the challenge of the square (resolving a jigsaw, achieving five or six passes with a ball, etc.) If they make it correctly the group gain one point, if not, they get nothing.
- If the student ends in a white square: the student has to say out loud “from goose to goose and I throw because it’s my turn”, then advance automatically until the next white square and throw the dice again.

The game ends when any player reaches the square number 63. In that moment it is time for count points and our students should resolve the final score. We should add some additional points for having completed the board game (4 for the first player, 3 for the second and so on) then we have the real final score.

Every student takes points with each challenge (short-term prizes), in the end of the game the team get a global score (middle-term prize) and, finally, the sum of all weekly sessions shows which teams will play that great “final sessions” (long-term prize). If the groups are quite homogeneous it is normal to find that some teams are tied, then the competitiveness of the game is less important and the initiative could be more motivating and could improve even more the self-esteem.

Discussion

After having completed this educative experience, we would like to mention some conclusions we have obtained in terms of gains; for us but, above all, for our students.

In Spain, currently, the law known as LOE (Organic Law 2/2006) has added the acquisition of basic competences to the curriculum. Understanding those competences as: “Body of knowledge, skills and attitudes which are needed for the realization and the personal development and which have to be obtained through the curriculum” (DOCM 22th of June, 2007; chapter II, article 6)

The former statement could be translated into a bet for helping the students to develop not only the competence for achieving knowledge but also the capability to *use* that knowledge, which means knowing how to integrate and interrelate all their knowledge and achieve what it is called as “knowing how” and “knowing to be”. This idea requires that the student should be able to integrate every knowledge obtained all along his or her life (formal and informal) and transfer them, in other words, generalize them to other environments and contexts.

Within this framework of thinking, the first benefit from playing “The Game of the Goose” has a double effect. On the one hand for us, teachers: we had to integrate and coordinate all the different contents of each subject for a common goal. Therefore, we have given to our students the opportunity to generalize and transfer what they have learnt in language, mathematics, etc. to a complete new situation for them: completing the challenge of the corresponding square. This, undoubtedly, has been the key in the acquisition of the basic competences which, as we have shown, are bounded to the curriculum. Let’s see some examples:

- Artistic and cultural competence: when you create your own game you are improving your creativity and imagination.
- Emotional competence: achieving the challenges, individually or collectively, the student feels his or her “competence”, his or her usefulness and fosters the self-esteem, establishing affective bounds between students as well.
- Social and citizen competence: the game has rules, learning to respect them is learning to live in society.
- Knowledge and interaction with the environment competence: to complete some of the challenges our students needed to rely on their prior knowledge (rivers, geometric formulas, etc.)
- Linguistic and communicational competence: the expression of emotions, rules as well as the need of communication between equals to work in group.

For all those things, we can state that “The Game of the Goose” was a springboard for all the stakeholders of this initiative, an smile that has helped us to remember and revalue the educative potential that the game has in life and how “competent” we are when we really work altogether.

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