

COOPERATIVE GAMES

1. Social and pedagogical background

Playing is an important aspect of a person's life; humans play during the whole life, either to pass time or for hobby. Games are often more connected to the ability of reasoning than to the victory in itself. There are games with specific rules, where it is not possible to win by chance: chesses or checkers are among the most popular examples. Many games use a (chess)board as a basis to play: the chessboard is a metaphor of the physical space, with its limits and its winding roads, where aspects of the daily life can be simulated.

In 2002, the Psycho-pedagogy Department of the University of San Paulo (Brazil) promoted the use of games for educational purposes¹. The method was initially used with children and adults, but in 2007 it was also experimented to train the staff of big companies. Nowadays, the use of games for educational and training purposes is widely spread in Brazil.

COOSS has started using these games for social purposes, for example to empower migrants in their integration process, to develop soft skills in minors at risk of exclusion, to enhance relational and communication skills both in children and adults.

2. How the “collaborative games” method works

Games involve emotions, personal relations and the opportunity to have fun: they activate both cognitive and emotional aspects. A wide range of games exist, which can be adapted to the different educational settings they are used on and to the objectives they aim to meet.

In the ATTEMPT project, the learning objective consists in increasing communication and relational skills of teachers and parents, to help them to develop coping and empowering strategies to better face bullying situations involving their children and students.

Two games were selected for the ATTEMPT project purposes:

2.1. CILADA (TRAP)

It is said that, during the Franco-Prussian war, a huge snowfall forced the armies to stop fighting for quite a long period. To pass time, the French soldiers invented a game where 1 officer and 3 soldiers were involved. A particular chessboard was designed for this purpose, with circles / squares that players have to reach through lines linking them. The officer can move freely backward and forward, while the soldiers can only move forward. To win:

¹ Prof.. Lino de Macedo – coordinator of the experimental project;
Dr. Fernando Marcelino - educator and trainer, designer of many of the proposed games

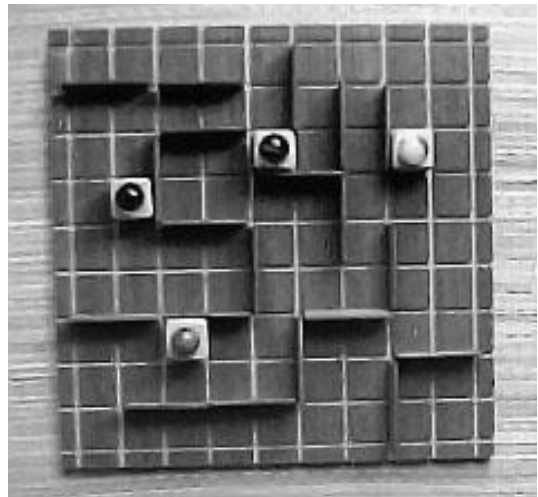
- a) the officer has to reach the extreme side of the chessboard without being surrounded by the soldiers;
- b) the soldiers have to corner the officer to prevent his progress to the victory.

The game caught the attention of the famous mathematician John Nash², who analysed it and showed that the rules governing this game are the same governing the whole economy: companies can achieve their goals only when they use the right strategy.

In ATTEMPT, the game is adapted to the following setting: parents and teachers (the soldiers) have to fight against the bullying (the officer). At the beginning of the game parents and teachers can neither communicate nor look at each other. Each of them tries to obstacle bullying with individual initiatives, but without success: bullying always wins. In a second step, participants are allowed to communicate: they can discuss and agree strategies which will finally allow them to win.

2.2. QUORIDOR

Quoridor³ is a game requiring a square board with cells. Each team has a colored pawn, which starts from a side of the board and has to reach the opposite side to win. Each team can use five "obstacles", which can be inserted horizontally or vertically between the cells either to hinder the others' passage (obstacles cannot be jumped, but only bypassed), or to build ones' own way to victory.



3. Educational implications

CILADA clearly demonstrates that participants can win whatever problem only when they learn to communicate and collaborate to find effective strategies. Identifying responsibilities is not enough: to win, players have to understand each other and to collaborate in finding the right thing to do.

QUORIDOR aims to underline the importance of using the available resources to affirm oneself more than to prevent and obstacle the others' progress.

Games can help the participants to develop planning and reasoning skills, to anticipate and properly face problematic situations, to adopt proper actions and strategies in concrete situations. Games are able to underline participants' strengths and weaknesses and to promote change and teamwork: sharing the same goals, participants tend to create a constructive communication, where weaknesses can be identified and overcome.

² John Nash – Nobel Prize for Economics in 1994

³ Designed by Mirko Marchesi, it was published in Italy by Epta under the name "Pinko Pallino". In 1997, it was published by Gigamic.

4. References

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