SUSAN EL-SHAMY

TRAINING GAMES

GAMES

Everything You Need to Know About Using Games to Reinforce Learning

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Susan El-Shamy

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INTRODUCTION

Are you a player of games? I am. I've loved playing games as long as I can remember. Card games, board games, computer games—I've spent endless hours of my life enjoying them all. I noticed early on in life that I could tell a great deal about people by playing games with them. From siblings, to friends, to colleagues, to clients—there was a lot to be learned from playing games.

When I was a graduate student studying educational psychology and counseling and guidance, I discovered experiential learning games and they became a part of my game-playing repertoire. As a counselor, therapist, and educator, I used experiential games to help groups of people raise their awareness of issues and broaden their perspectives of the possibilities. I realized that careful reflection and skillful facilitation of game-playing behaviors was a powerful learning tool. I also used experiential games and activities to help individuals get in touch with their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. I saw the power of games to act as metaphors, to mirror attitudes and behaviors used in the outside world into the world of the game at hand.

Then, I changed careers from the academic world of teaching and counseling to the business world of training and development. And one of the first and most exciting discoveries I made in the business world was a whole new realm of games and simulations. I learned to use games to help departments find better and quicker processes, to assist groups in finding ways to work together more effectively, and to help individuals prepare for international work assignments. But I also continued to use games to help individuals reflect on their own thoughts,

feelings, and behaviors; to raise awareness and open up new possibilities. And that is both exciting and satisfying.

When the opportunity to write this book came along, I wanted to share my love of game playing and my interest in using games to facilitate learning along with my additional interest in watching the growth and development of training games within the training and development industry. So, I have tried to cover all three of these interests in this book, along with giving you as much practical, useful advice and steps-to-follow as I could.

Who is this book for? Anyone who uses or is considering the use of training games. If you are new to training games, this book will give you a good "lay of the land" and a detailed map for getting to and through your first facilitation of a training game. If you are a seasoned veteran, there is information inside on the classifying of training games, the new realm of e-games and various Web sites you might find useful. And wherever you lie on the continuum of new to seasoned trainer, there is an Ultimate Training Game Assessment form that you can use not only to assess games, but also to guide you in creating your own training games.

The book is divided into two basic parts. Part One looks at some of the bigger picture, theoretical aspects of training games: what is a training game, the benefits of using training games, how learning psychology supports the use of training games, and an overview of the most common types of training games. Part Two gives you practical, applicable information: how to choose and use, set up and conduct, debrief and assess training games. Part Two also provides examples and illustrations of designing and using training games, as well as guidelines for creating your own training games.

In the final chapter of Part Two, I've also included a resource list of commercially available games, books of games, books about training games, and my favorite game-related Web sites. With the rapid changes occurring in the realm of e-learning, I worry that many of my references to Web sites and e-learning games, and to the current trends in the training industry, will change before the book goes to press, but that is inevitable and should not affect content and references too drastically!

For those of you who like to read nonfiction the way I do—here and there and back again—the chapters are written so that they can be

randomly accessed. Each chapter begins with a short, personal anecdote and ends with an "In a Nutshell" section that summarizes the chapter.

As I will discuss throughout the book, there is something universal about playing a game, something that appeals to us all. There is pleasure in the playing of a game. The pleasure comes from the high level of involvement, the interaction with other players, the competition that continues throughout the game, the building of skills, and increasing of competencies over time. All of these factors work together to make the learning fun. And that's good. The pleasure in the playing attracts people to the learning, keeps people learning, and reinforces that learning.

Games are not the answer to all that ails our training endeavors, but games are an excellent tool, an almost miraculous medium, to engage the learner and reinforce the learning. So come with me into the land of training games and take a look around. I'm sure you'll enjoy the journey and the learning along the way.

CONTENTS

PART ONE

WHAT'S IN A GAME?

One long rainy summer of my Indiana childhood, my brother, sister, and I spent hours in our garage playing "office." With three enormous Indianapolis phone books set up on TV tables, two of us would play workers, while the other played boss giving us names to look up in the phone books. Poking our heads down into the phone books, turning pages rapidly, we would run our fingers down the rows of names until one of us would jump up shouting, "I got it! I got it!" The worker who was first to find five names got to play boss until someone else found five names. On and on we played, forgetting to see if it was still raining.

I

LET'S PLAY A GAME

HISTORY AND DEFINITIONS OF GAMES

Remember when you were a child looking for something to do on a long, boring afternoon? And some friend or sibling would make the suggestion, "I know, let's play a game!" If you were anything like I was, you would suddenly perk up, begin to inventory the possibilities, and feel reenergized by the fun and challenge that lay ahead. There is something about playing a game that appeals to us all, something universal that reaches across time and place and calls to the child within.

Everyone played games as a child. You did, didn't you? What were your favorite games? Outdoor games like *Hide and Seek, Kickball,* and *King of the Hill?* Rainy-day indoor games like *Sorry, Monopoly,*

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Parcheesi, Clue, Chutes and Ladders? Or maybe you liked strategy games like *Connect Four, Battleship,* and *Mastermind?* What about video games? Did you ever play *Pac Man, Space Invaders, Qbert?* Which ones were you hooked on? Which ones carried your initials? Can you remember the day you got your first Nintendo, your first Gameboy?

The playing of games is not just a part of childhood; it's a part of life. What games do you still play? *Scrabble? Sequence? Pictionary?* How about *Touch Football, Horse,* or *Softball?* What about computer games? I'm not just talking *Myst* or *The Legend of Zelda,* what about *Solitaire* or *Free Cell?* Most of us play games, and watch games being played, throughout our lives, across cultures, and throughout time.

Ancient Egyptians enjoyed games. Pictures of games and game playing can still be seen on the walls of tombs and temples that are thousands of years old. The earliest known game board, measuring about 7 by 3 inches and dating from 4000 to 3500 B.C., was found in a predynastic cemetery in El-Mehasna, Egypt.[1] It appears to be similar to *Senet,* a backgammon-style game based on the underworld that was played in ancient Egypt for more than a thousand years.[2] One of the most enchanting treasures found in King Tut's tomb was an ivory and jewel-encrusted game board.

Variants of the popular African strategy game of *Mancala,* which uses a carved wooden game board and involves the moving of dried beans from pocket to pocket, have been found in East and West Africa, southern India, and Sri Lanka.[3] The game board used in *Chess* today is a descendant of a game board that originated in India some five thousand years ago.[4]

North American Indian tribes played games of chance and games of dexterity. Such games were for adults and sometimes young men and women, but never children. Children had many amusements, but games were serious endeavors usually played at fixed times for special occasions such as festivals and religious ceremonies.[5]

Although many ancient games were used in connection with religious rituals and celebrations, like those of the North American Indians, the majority of games played in Europe and North America up until the late eighteenth century was strictly for recreational purposes. Certain games, especially more physical, sporting-type games, may

have helped to develop agility and dexterity useful to some occupations, but on the whole, games were not used as a means of instruction until the nineteenth century.

It was in the nineteenth century that popular European board games began to make their way across the Atlantic Ocean. Many Americans of this time period perceived games as superficial and time wasting at best, and as licentious works of the Devil at worst. Thus, when European recreational board games began arriving, they had to be modified into games of moral and educational instruction in order to appeal to the more puritanical tastes of the Americans. These became the first examples of what might be defined as "educational games" in America.

The *Mansion of Happiness,* the first board game produced in the United States, had the pedagogical purpose of teaching children the difference between good and bad.[6] *The Checkered Game of Life* had a moral motif involving happy old age versus a life of ruin.[7] Milton Bradley, the manufacturer, claimed that *The Checkered Game of Life* "inaugurated the introduction of moral and instructive games . . . and served to break down an unjust prejudice against all home amusements."[8] During this time, heavily didactic games on nature, literature, and scripture appeared and came into common use. To reassure wary parents who bought these games, many included literature and verses exhorting children to be good.[9]

The use of games for the training of adults was relatively unknown until the mid-nineteenth century when European military forces began using war games such as elaborate sandboxes with model soldiers and war exercises were carried out in the field.[10] Over time, war games and simulations became a common feature of military training; and, after World War II, business education programs in the United States began using similar simulations.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the human relations training movement and the growth and popularity of encounter groups brought an assortment of structured learning experiences and experiential exercises into various adult learning arenas.[11] Along with these experiential activities came a variety of games and some of the early "classic" simulations like *BaFá BaFá,* the timeless cross-cultural simulation designed by Garry Shirts.[12]

The 1980s brought a great increase in corporate training programs and training books; materials and games poured into the marketplace. *Games Trainers Play*[13] and *More Games Trainers Play*[14] appeared in the early 1980s, as did various other volumes of exercises, energizers, and training games. A great interest in work teams, particularly "self-directed," "high-performance" work teams, arose in the mid-1980s and a multitude of books and materials appeared to help working America build teams. Team-building games and activities staked out a large territory of the training and development marketplace and still hold their ground today.

The 1990s saw the birth of "corporate universities" and global corporate training programs. Business simulations prospered. *Still More Games Trainers Play* appeared in 1991[15] and corporate university bookstores filled their shelves with books, videos, CDROMs, and training games. Adventure training, outdoor learning, and other experiential group games and activities became popular. Computer-based training programs arrived on the scene and, gradually, they began to get used, particularly to teach computer skills. Simple games and quizzes were utilized in many of these early CDROM training packages, mostly to test and practice skills.

As the 1990s moved along, the prospect of "e-learning" grew, and pioneers of training and development explored new territories and wrote home of vast new regions of possibilities. But, it took the New Millennium to bring an explosion of "e-learning." Training programs went online and so did training games. Corporate universities meshed or melted into corporate "e-training" and new types of training games began to emerge—e-mail games and E-Sims. Then, Marc Prensky introduced *The Monkey Wrench Conspiracy*,[16] complete with Agent Moldy, and "digital game-based learning" took off. We'll look at all of these e-learning developments in Chapter 4; but right now, let's talk about games in general and why games have been such an integral part of the history of training and development and why they are carving out a significant portion of the present and future of e-learning.

What Is a Game?

What is there about playing a game that appeals to so many of us? Why have games proliferated throughout time and been a part of every

world culture? Why do we love playing games? What keeps us going back for another round, another attempt at winning? Every game, from *Chess* to *Hide and Seek,* from *Old Maid* to *Grim Fandango,* from *BaFá BaFá* to *The Monkey Wrench Conspiracy,* is played in the context of an imaginary, closed world that is defined by given boundaries and nonnegotiable rules, where we all begin as equal players on an even playing field, with the same amount of time and resources to accomplish the mission, or achieve the goal and win. And that makes for exciting stuff!

Part of what makes a game so absorbing is that sense of being set apart from the rest of the given environment—being in "The Zone" as heavy-duty game players say. One of the definitions given by the *Random House Dictionary* for a game is "a competitive activity involving skill, chance, or endurance played according to rules."[17] The competitive nature of a game and the elements that involve skill, chance, or endurance are key to making a game a game; and they contribute greatly to that total absorption that can be experienced in playing a game. They also contribute to the appeal of playing again and again. Competition in a game can be among players and/or between the player(s) and the game. The perfecting of a skill, the increasing of your own competence, can be very motivating and very rewarding.

In the *Oxford History of Board Games,* David Parlett writes that a formal game has a twofold structure based on ends and means: "Ends. It is a contest to achieve an objective. . . . Only one of the contenders, be they individuals or teams, can achieve it, since achieving it ends the game. . . . Means. It has an agreed set of equipment and of procedural 'rules' by which the equipment is manipulated to produce a winning situation."[18]

So, according to Parlett, to be a game there must be an ends—an objective achieved through a contest—and there must be a means to do so—a playing context of equipment and rules.

It's interesting to note that in his book, Parlett attempts to draw a distinction between games and sports but finds it almost impossible to do. Indoor versus outdoors doesn't work, nor does physical versus nonphysical, although it begins to separate the two. There are not many games that are very physical, and most sports are fairly physical, but then what is billiards or pool? Many sports have professional ranks

as well as amateur, but then there are professional chess players, even professional miniature golf players. However, for the most part, in this book, we will be looking at training games and there is yet to be a professional versus amateur distinction among the players of training games! Although with some of the new e-games and digital game-based learning, that could just be a matter of time.

If we combine the definitions from the dictionary and David Parlett, we have the following: a competitive activity involving skill, chance, or endurance between individuals or teams to achieve an objective within a given context of equipment and rules. Not a bad definition, but not quite there yet.

What are the factors that make a game a game and not just an activity or a pastime? An activity is anything we do that occupies our time. A pastime is anything we do that makes the time pass agreeably. A game, however, does much more than just occupy our time or make time pass by agreeably. A really good game almost seems to transcend time and place by absorbing us completely. The phenomenon of total absorption that can give the quality of "other worldliness" to a game is missing from the definition. Although the word "context" means the circumstances that surround an event and certainly the circumstances that surround any game include rules, equipment, time factors, even a story line or fantasy element.

Maybe it is the combination of the components of a game working together that brings about the sense of "being in another world." And it is the unique combination of "meeting a challenge" in an "imaginary world" that strikes our fancy and makes games so appealing. Let's hold off on a final definition of "game" until we explore the world of training games and see if we can gain further insight there.

What Is a Training Game?

Training games fall within a broad category of learning techniques commonly labeled "interactive learning activities." These are activities in which "participants interact with one another for the purpose of learning something."[19] This category of interactive learning techniques includes such things as discussions, activities, exercises, role-plays, games, and simulations.

Today, the number of interactive learning approaches being used and marketed in the field of adult education and training is growing at an unprecedented rate. Along with this growth has come a problem of terminology that has become more and more muddled as products proliferate. The term "game" is often used interchangeably with activity, or the two are used together, as in "team development games and activities."

One of the problems in defining the phrase "training game" is the inconsistent use of many of these interactive learning terms, particularly the terms "activity," "game," and "simulation." These three words are sometimes used interchangeably, plus there is a category of games that is called "simulation-games," which adds even more to the confusion. Therefore, much of what you read in the training and development literature and in books on training games is not specifically directed toward games per se, but toward games and activities in general, and, in an even broader sense, toward interactive learning approaches.

This can be disconcerting to the person shopping for an interactive training game. Some experts in the field suggest that the "mislabeling" is caused by categorizing activities according to surface characteristics; others attribute mislabeling to the packaging and marketing of learning products with what will sell foremost in mind. It's interesting to note that in the original 1980 edition of *Games Trainers Play*,[20] a book that is often considered the first real book of training games, many of the games were not games at all in the strict sense of defining a game.

You may also find the word "experiential" used in the same way as the word "interactive." In general, when it comes to nonelectronic training games, "Interactive learning can be regarded as a wide range of activities in which participants in an event interact with each other for the purposes of education and training."[21] Experiential learning is often used to indicate that the major learning has occurred from the learner's physical experiencing of something, rather than the learner's interaction with content material. At times you will find the two terms used interchangeably, and, sometimes, they will appear together as in "interactive, experiential training." Suffice it to warn those new to the world of training games, that it is a bit messy out there!

I will not even go into the various definitions of training vs. learning vs. professional development. For the most part, I will be using the