OnCreate

Teaching Method

Silent Game

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Abstract

The Silent Game method aims to improve students' interpretational flexibility in creative collaboration by replacing normal oral or written communication with an artificial ad-hoc language based on LEGO bricks.

Description of method

When students collaborate on a creative problem they are confronted in two ways with uncertainty. One concerns the open-endedness of the problem solution since creative problems are characterized by not having one correct solution. The other uncertainty is produced by the learning process: The aim of the learning activity is in very general terms that students should try to do what they not yet master. This produces uncertainties in the student about the right choice of strategy for problem framing and problem solving, as well as the right choice of resources (knowledge and collaboration partners) and actions.

When we add the element of online-mediated collaboration we increase these uncertainties since the communication channel is less 'rich' than face-to-face communication. This calls for training that prepares student on this situation of increased uncertainty. Whenever a communication channel is 'poor' it is needed that communicators are aware of the limited communication. This can lead to two strategies: A higher redundancy can be embedded in the message or a higher interpretational freedom can be allowed.

The Silent Game is a training method to increase participants awareness of the second strategy - the allowance of higher interpretational freedom.

This is prioritized over higher redundancy as we assume that creative processes, particularly in the early 'fuzzy-end' stages, depend on a high level of interpretational freedom among partners. To train students in collaborative solving of creative problems, it is thus important to train their interpretational flexibility.

Method tasks / challenges

The Silent Game is a communication exercise that forces users to use an extremely reduced and abstract vocabulary to establish a shared manifestation of an idea. The abstract vocabulary is constituted by LEGO bricks and the communication emerges as two participants - players - position LEGO bricks on a LEGO plate, taking turns. The two participants are not allowed to exchange any words during the game.

Implementation of the method
into collaborative course

A Silent Game session can be conducted at the beginning of a course as part of the team-build and ideation processes. Optimally, participants try different roles in the game: As player 'one' who initiates and ends a game, as player 'two' who responds to the ideas of player 'one', and as an observer documenting and analysing the communication among the players. Additionally, as rules may be modified by participants this trigger important reflections for the participants. Before the game sessions, participants are shortly informed about the background for the game. After the end of all gaming session, participants are invited to a shared discussion about the Silent Game.

In the context of OnCreate it has been used as:
- Warm-up exercise at Cross-Media programme at University of Applied Sciences Magdeburg-Stendal in 2015;
- Team-building exercises at Aalborg University (computer engineering BSc. and MSc. programs ITCOM and ICTE) in autumn 2015 and 2016;

· Presentation at Cross-Media Conference, Magdeburg, 2016.

Experience Report

Experiences are extensively described and evaluated in Sørensen (2016 and forthcoming).

Literature

Sørensen, J. K. (2016): Silent game as Model for Examining Student Online Creativity - Preliminary Results from an Experiment. In *Think CROSS — Change MEDIA 2016*. Magdeburg
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Sørensen, J. K. (forthcoming): Exploring Constrained Creative Communication: Silent Game as Model for Online Collaboration. In *International Journal of E-Services and Mobile Applications*