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LIFE TWO

Learning Interculturality from Religions towards Outreach Activities



Learning
Interculturality
From Religion 2

WP3 Piloting the Method

D3.3 LIFE TWO Role play game

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction - Overview of LIFE TWO Project – Background and Objectives	3
2. Role-playing gaming (RPGing) in Education	4
3. The LIFE TWO Role Play Game: Fifty answers - A game (about discussing) (on) religious pluralism	8
4. Design strategy of the Game	9
5. The concept of the “Fifty answers” Game.....	10

1. Introduction - Overview of LIFE TWO Project – Background and Objectives

The LIFE 2 project aims to enhance tolerance among young people in eight countries through the implementation of an innovative new methodology utilizing an inquiry-based teaching approach (including a newly designed role play). The project uses a “learning from religion” approach to combat misinformation, fake news and extremism.

LIFE TWO Overview of Project Objectives

- Learning from religion (c.t. confessional / about religion)
- Combat misinformation, fake news, extremism
- Improve tolerance, non-discrimination, respect and understanding, increased positive pro-social outcomes – tolerance, moral reasoning, resilience
- Mutual understanding, social dialogue, tolerance
- Develop, among students, positive perceptions of diversity, cooperation and increase of empathy, mutual respect, intervening to help others, learning/applying conflict resolution skills
- School level: tolerance and school climate, exclusions, number of incidences of violence

2. Role-playing gaming (RPGing) in Education

Role-playing gaming (RPGing) is a cooperative recreational activity with many variants. There was a considerable amount of negative press in the 1980's about specific fantasy role-playing games (RPG). This controversy created a stigma that contributed in part to significantly slowing the adoption, acceptance, and growth of the role-playing games (RPGs) by the general public.

Despite this stigma there is slowly increasing use of RPGs in educational and also therapeutic settings.

There are strong indications from dozens of scientific studies that role-playing gaming can benefit many, if not most, population groups from children to elderly, from learning disabled to physically disabled, and even for help with some forms of mental illness.

Role-playing games are cooperative, improvisational, structured, and free form "interactive stories" that take place in the participants' imagination, usually seated around a table and using paper and pencil to keep track of events and personal note.

Typically one of the participants is chosen to act as the narrator, or referee, of this non-competitive recreational experience, known variously as the Game Master (GM) or Dungeon Master (DM). The GM creates or modifies the settings in which the other participants, the Player Characters (PCs), will interact with each other and various Non-Player Characters (NPCs) under the control of the GM.

The group of participants then dynamically unfold a series of social interactions and events for an improvisational-theater-like experience, but generally, except in the case of live action role-playing (LARP), without physically acting out any of the activities of their characters.

Unlike most social games that are frequently competitive in nature, most role-playing gaming is cooperative, with no clearly defined winners or losers and potentially no defined end to the game.

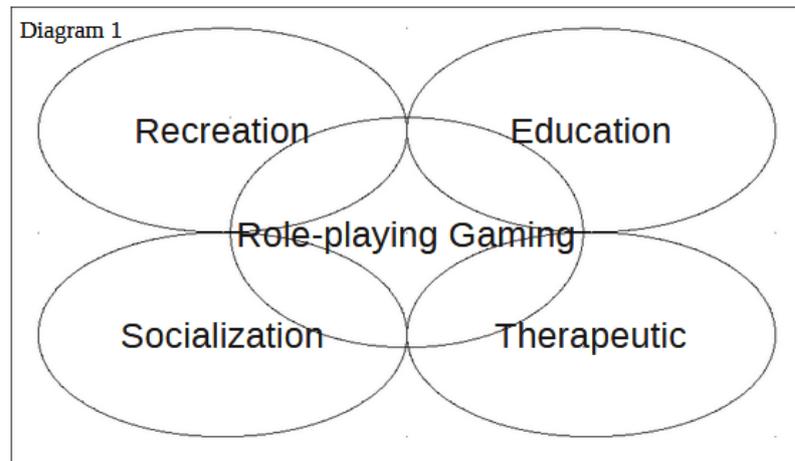
Instead the goal is for a mutually rewarding experience for as long as the participants wish.

Just as it is very difficult for anyone to really understand the experience of performing in a live theater, concert, skydiving, or racing, without having participated in the activities, many people find it difficult to understand exactly what role-playing gaming is like without experiencing it firsthand.

However a small taste of the experience can be hinted at by taking the time to illustrate a sample game session. In his unpublished psychological study *Looking Through the Glass: An Exploration of the Interplay Between Player and Character Selves in Role-Playing Games*, Nicholas Yee phrased the overall feeling of RPG participants very aptly when he stated that "RPG's are not just a game; they are an experience."

It is already well established within the therapeutic and psychological industries that role-playing, sans the gaming aspect, can be a very powerful therapeutic tool (Tietel). There are already a variety of well established therapeutic role-playing-related modalities including Gestalt (Perls) and psychodrama (Bell). The Therapeutic Recreation industry, represented by organizations such as the American Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA), has established for decades that recreational activities, and specifically games, have very strong therapeutic benefits (Austin and Crawford 203-204).

There is a steadily growing movement in recent years to use non-RPG games for education. Indeed RPGing overlaps with a number of other domains' benefits, specifically recreation, education, therapeutic, and socialization, as illustrated in the Venn diagram below:



In spite of the aforementioned stigma, there does at least appear to be some traction gaining in some educational settings using role-playing games to enhance the learning experience in classroom settings.

This started with a handful of instructors and schools trying “alternative” approaches to teaching a class here and there using role-playing games to enhance a particular subject such as social studies (Haddad).

In recent years role-playing gaming as a part of the curriculum has grown to be more widely accepted in more main stream academic settings for all ages from elementary and middle-to-high school through college level (Haddad; Cruz; McClain; Phillips).

These courses cover a broad range of disciplines, ranging across the spectrum including language arts, mathematics and statistics (Walton), social studies (Haddad), history (Cruz), and English as a second language.

“Because RPGs are language-centered communication games, they have a definite positive effect on student socialization skills which are central to RPGs “(Phillips).

Another benefit for those who participate in role playing gaming, is that they are often inspired to learn to research in specific areas of knowledge such as history, language, politics, demographics, craftsmanship,

geography, sciences, literature, and many other aspects that they feel will enhance their experience in future game sessions.

Most, though not all, role-playing games typically use dice as a means of representing the uncontrollable randomness of circumstances in determining whether a player's character succeeds in various actions. This constant use of variables means participants will frequently be immersed in mathematics, statistical analysis, and algebraic calculations.

Despite the negative clichés to the contrary, RPGs are inherently a social, and social skills developing, activity. Participants frequently develop life long friendships, and others learn to work with people they normally would have nothing else in common with.

The LIFE II Role play game will be the first, as soon as we know, that will have the religions as a core concept.

The ROLE PLAY GAME "Fifty ANSWERS" (50A) about religions and traditions is a game with the aim of promoting the intercultural and interreligious debate.

50A is a digital card game that proposes a cognitive approach in teaching religion that is neither ideological nor limited to taking into consideration only the historical and social aspects. The presentation in schools of the main rites and beliefs of the most widespread religions in Europe in 50A aims at promoting social inclusion in education by showing how religions, which are always answers to great human questions, are an element of union rather than division between different cultures.

3. The LIFE TWO Role Play Game: Fifty answers - A game (about discussing) (on) religious pluralism

The **General objectives** of the Game are:

- suggesting a cognitive approach in the teaching of religion that is neither ideological nor limited to just considerations about historical and societal aspects
- promoting cross-cultural dialogue on religion and spirituality

The **Specific objectives** are

- Promoting learning of primary beliefs, rites and historical/societal aspects of the most widespread European religions
- Promoting integration by showing how religions are always an element of unity across different cultures

The main elements that we take into consideration are:

Fun activity: we want to bring together the educational purpose with a recreational activity that is actually fun

Scrupulous approach: we want to respect the theme, avoiding ironic representations and shallow interpretations

Formative effectiveness: we want to elicit real interest in the subject

Educational effectiveness: we want the debate about the interpretations of the subject to be a structural element of the game

Accessibility: we want the game to be easy to distribute and use in schools



4. Design strategy of the Game

Fifty Answers has the following characteristics related to its design strategy:

Party game: we designed a game that can be played in a classroom, thus suitable for a great number of players in the same room.

Active role: The interpretation of the contents of the game is up to the player, making this part the focus of the problem solving process.

Empathy and openness: Rewarding players that show their ability to understand different points of view.

Digital: Designing a board game that needs nothing but a smartphone app.

5. The concept of the “Fifty answers” Game

Fifty Answers is a party game in which players learn that every religion is an answer to universal questions and needs.

Fifty answers is a digital card game in which players try to link rites and beliefs, belonging to different religions, to existential questions and personal or common needs. The rightness of the question/answer link is not established by the game, but by the players themselves: the winning links are going to be the ones most players agree with.



6. Gameplay - Phases of play

The same question cards and answer cards are shown to all players.

Secretly, every player chooses a link between a question and an answer (or two answers).

The links are shown, from the least popular (no points) up to the most popular (1 point for every player who has the same link, 3 points for every player in the event of a link with two shared answers).

The main mechanic of the game is the interpretation of the answer cards and their link to the questions.

Question cards are vague and they could be:

Existential questions (es. Why does suffering exist? Are my wishes going to come true?)

Personal needs (es. Getting help in a difficult situation, Having faith in the future)

Social needs (es. Introducing a new person in the group, Creating bonds between community members).

Answer cards are specific, they belong to a defined religion and they could be:

Beliefs (es. The original sin, Being children of God)

Rites (es. Jewish fast, Baptism)

Festivities (es. Easter, Ramadan's end)

7. Core mechanic and Content design

Question cards are vague, created to be linked to more than one answer card. In the design phase, there won't be an attempt to create questions with a respective answer, but just to create evocative question cards.

On the contrary, answer cards are encyclopaedic and compel the player to "study" them to create a reasonable, therefore a more probable, link.

On the front of answer cards there is a title (es. Baptism), a subheading (es. The sacrament of becoming a member of the Christian community) and a picture. On the back (accessible by tapping on the card) there is a short text that can include historical facts, description of the rite, main meanings.



8. Conflict and skills

The game pushes the players to deeply understand its contents and show sensitivity and open-mindedness:

To score points, players have to delve into the contents, stopping to reflect on the cards' meaning in terms of philosophy, symbolism and society.

To win, players need to ask themselves which links the other players will see, assume a different point of view and change their way of thinking on issues that can be deeply personal and rooted in their culture (think of players with different religious backgrounds).



Playtesting the first prototype

9. Aesthetics

Like all party games, Fifty Answers is fun because of the interaction between players.

Even if it isn't a competitive game, the most important emotions are generated by socializing, because the memorable moments are the ones where players find similarities between their way of thinking.

As a matter of fact, the most vivid moment of the matches is the debate that follows the revelation of the links; every player wants to explain the reasoning behind their link, confirm a shared point of view ("I think so too!") or defend a less popular line of thinking ("How can you not agree with this?").

Fifty Answers tries to speak of religion as an important, humanistic theme beyond the outcome.

Players are led to analyse and debate on the spiritual and philosophical meaning of beliefs both near and far from their own culture.

But mostly, while creating meaning themselves, players will learn that, despite different tales and rituals, all religions are deeply united in a shared purpose of personal achievement and peaceful coexistence.