



AN ANALYSIS OF THE LEARNING POTENTIALS OF EDUTAINMENT BOARD GAMES

An alternative for the Soul Buddyz campaign

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How can a board game be designed as an alternative educational material to supplement strategic health communication? Soul Buddyz -in South Africa- is based on an edutainment strategy and uses different popular media channels to address different health issues. Within this framework, the authors explore how a board game can be used as a dialogical media tool to promote behaviour change and change social norms. Preliminary findings conclude that the following elements should be present in the design of a board game: easy understandable rules, the right balance between entertainment and education, promotion of dialogue, motivational space for constructivist learning, both self and collective efficacy, and motivation based on self-improvement.

INTRODUCTION

“Ah, it’s a mess!” says Hamilton, one of the Buddyz, after having shot himself in the foot thus illustrating the danger of weapons to the *Soul Buddyz* (SB) TV audience.

The SB campaign is part of the Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication (SC), a South African organisation working for social change. The main element of the campaign is a TV series named Soul Buddyz. The educational materials and life skills booklets of the campaign are based on the social, educational and health related messages from the TV series. However, the SB educational materials are dependent upon traditional learning principles and could benefit from more dialogical and constructivist learning principles. The introduction of a board game as a dialogical tool to supplement the traditional educational materials could be relevant in creating a space where pupils actively can participate in the fictional ‘world of the game’ dialectically linked to the ‘real world’.

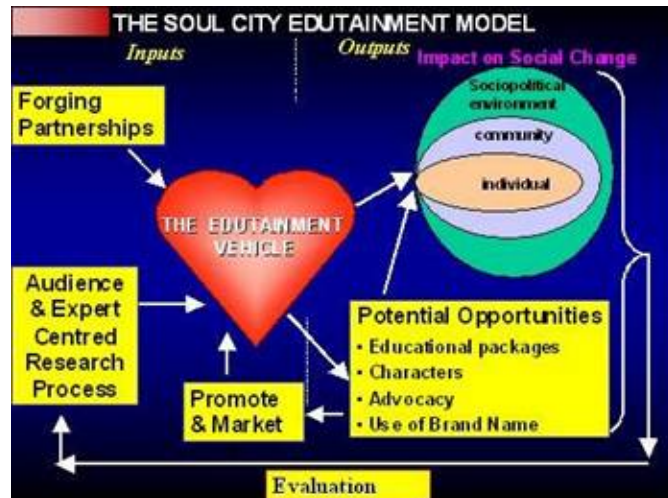
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Our research question is: how can a board game be designed in accordance with the Soul City Edutainment Vehicle framework in order to supplement the strategic health communication in the existing Soul Buddyz campaign?

In order to discuss this question, we will first review the principles of SC. Secondly, we will turn to the examination of the structural elements of a board game and investigate this media's compatibility with the SC edutainment strategy. Thirdly, we will analyse the learning potentials of a board game as a dialogical and social tool. Finally, considering our empirical and theoretical founded reflections, we will list our preliminary findings and principles for the design of the board game.

THE SOUL CITY PRINCIPLES AND EDUTAINMENT STRATEGY

In 1992, doctors Garth Japhet and Shereen Usdin founded the South African organisation SC. Its purpose is to “develop an on-going vehicle that could promote social change” (Tuft, 2005) through education and training. SC addresses several health and social issues relevant to the South African context such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, domestic violence, children’s rights and gender equality, etc. SC produces several communication products all based on an edutainment strategy. A cyclic model called “the Soul City Edutainment Model” illustrates the strategy.



The Soul City Edutainment Model (Goldstein et. al., 2001)

The model emphasises a participatory production process, which includes formative and summative

research. The outcome of the strategy is change in norms, perceptions and knowledge, as well as development of potential opportunities –for example, educational packages. The unit of change is not only the individual but the broader society as well.

The communication products include two TV series ^[1], *Soul City* and *Soul Buddyz*, as well as radio programs, education materials and different competitions (Goldstein et. al., 2001). Launched in 2000, the SB campaigns targets 8-12 year olds. It contains a TV series, a radio magazine

programme, educational material, a parent handbook and Soul Buddyz Clubs with 42,000 members nationwide ^[ii]. The SB campaign addresses issues such as sexuality, HIV/AIDS and child abuse and tries to “motivate and mobilize communities to support the health of South Africa’s children” (Goldstein et. al., 2001). The SB educational material is distributed to all 7th grade pupils in South Africa and reaches 2/3 of the 18 million South African children between the age of 8 and 13 years old across diverse demographic groups ^[iii].

In order to explore the SC principles further, the edutainment strategy is viewed in relation to general entertainment-education theory. Edutainment derives from the abbreviation of Education-Entertainment and can be defined as: “The use of entertainment as a communicative practice crafted to strategically communicate about development issues in a manner and with a purpose that can range from the more narrowly defined social marketing of individual behaviours to the liberating and citizen-driven articulation of social change agendas” (Tufté, 2005).

SC can be placed in between the two opposite development communication paradigms of diffusion approaches and social change agendas, as the organisation focuses on individual behaviour change as well as addresses social norms and perceptions. Most edutainment strategies have evolved away from the traditional diffusion model with a pervasive focus on behaviour change as a linear process to involve a perception of behaviour change as a complex process. The individual is now perceived as both an object of change and an agent of her own change, a principle that is also pivotal in the SB campaign. The purpose of general edutainment strategies is “to contribute to the process of directed social change, which can occur at the individual, community or societal level” (Singhal and Rogers, 2003).

Before the SC development, health campaigns in South Africa were limited to a simplistic top-down approach narrowly confined to only transmitting one message related to either health or social issues, and lack of information was considered the root problem. This perception has changed in development communication theories and is seen with SC, where participation on both an individual and societal level is prioritised (Tufté, 2005). This implies that the target audience in SB is included in planning and research, and thereby made part of the development of the SB communication products. This participatory approach used in SB originates from the theories of Paulo Freire’s liberating pedagogy, where communication processes should take place in an equal relationship between free subjects (Bandura, 2004). The participatory approach enables SC to make use of local languages and develop the radio and TV series in a local context in order to minimise cultural and linguistic

impediments to social change. The participatory approach emphasises that culture is not an obstacle to change, recognising the potentials of drawing on different cultures to promote a change in norms and perceptions (Singhal and Rogers, 2003).

In recent years, a focus on structural issues in edutainment strategies has evolved in development communication, which has also influenced SC (Tufté, 2005). Central issues such as development, society and culture are being discussed and redefined. The focus is increasingly on the collective, in recognition of the limitations the individual human being has to deal with in the face of social and structural inequalities surrounding her. The SC edutainment strategy is still predominantly grounded in a more traditional perception of edutainment, as they continue to prioritise strategies on individual behaviour change instead of addressing structural inequalities. However, with the strengthening of the legislative advocacy programmes, SC is beginning to address more structural questions, as can be seen in the edutainment vehicle outputs.

CHALLENGES IN HEALTH COMMUNICATION AND EDUTAINMENT

The communication researchers Piotrow and de Fossard have identified seven major challenges that should be considered in developing health communication products within an edutainment framework. The first two challenges focus on the importance of a reasonable balance between education and entertainment in order to secure that educational messages do not get lost in drama, and vice versa. The third challenge is the importance of ensuring that the entertainment is of good quality; otherwise, it might not appeal to the audience. The fourth challenge is to resolve the problems of communicating a health problem that does not have an immediate effect -for instance, smoking or sexual behaviour- and still make people change their immediate actions. This requires a skilfully developed script or strategy. The fifth challenge is to add a touch of drama to everyday situations, to stress the significance of eating vegetables on a daily basis or taking your vitamin pills. The sixth challenge concerns securing an immediate personal relevance for the audience. If you do not consider yourself as being in any immediate danger, chances are that you will ignore simple health messages. The seventh and last challenge is that culture and tradition must be taken into consideration. This applies in the case of health communication, where several issues can be surrounded by taboos not easily addressed. Hence, the producer has to be cultural sensitive and choose her communication channels from within the local community (Piotrow and de Fossard, 2004).

BOARD GAMES IN SOUL CITY'S EDUTAINMENT VEHICLE

The SB campaign is based on the principles in the Soul City Edutainment Vehicle. Strategic communication should be designed to both entertain

and educate, while the audience is the agent of change and the broad society is the unit of change. In order to see whether a board game would be an appropriate media for the educational material in the SB campaign, games in general are reviewed in relation to these principles. The educational material of the SB campaign is based on the Soul Buddyz TV-series. In order to convert the health communication from the mass mediated TV-series to a board game, the possibility to draw on the social modelling used in the Soul Buddyz TV-series is explored.

Structural elements of games

When designing a board game, it is essential to consider the structural elements of the media. The theoretical game designer Marc Prensky has identified six structural elements of a game that the production of our board game will be based on. According to Prensky, not all games include all six elements, but most games include at least some of them.

- 1) Rules make a game a game; otherwise, it would be free play (Prensky, 2001).
- 2) Goals or objectives, something has to be obtained when playing the game. Objectives have an essential function since “In a game, achieving your goals is a big piece of what motivates you” (Prensky, 2001).
- 3) Outcome and feedback; the players need to know immediately if their actions are bringing them any closer to the objective and thus to winning the game. This happens through outcome and feedback mechanisms. In a board game, this could be rewards in form of a second turn or punishments such as having to wait a turn.
- 4) Conflict/competition/challenge/opposition are “the problems in a game you are trying to solve [...] and solving the problem is playing the game” (Prensky, 2001). Throughout the game, players must be challenged by situations that try to hinder their objective obtaining. This structural element will be referred to as challenges in what follows.
- 5) Interaction between players is an important element of games, and thus emphasises how games are social tools.
- 6) Representation or story that is the content of the game (Prensky, 2001). Representation adds credibility to the objective, and links the objective and the challenges together.

Games as edutainment

Marc Prensky explores the entertaining aspect of games in his analysis of why video games are so engaging. His main point is that players of the game find enjoyment, passionate involvement and ego gratification from winning (Prensky, 2001). Games are entertaining because they create a fictional space wherein the player can let himself be engrossed (the representation). In this space, the player faces different challenges to overcome (goals), and the consequences of these challenges (the feedback

and outcome) only affect the fictional character. Hence, games can be seen as an “activity standing quite consciously outside of “ordinary” life as being “not serious” [...] and has elements of make-believe and unreality” (Prensky, 2001).

Play is the main form of social interaction in children’s daily life. In this way, games offer a recognisable and entertaining narrative for children. The main function of the game is to create a motivational space for learning.

In a classroom, play is generally discouraged and seen as the opposite of education. However, it “has a deep biological, evolutionary important, function which has to do specifically with learning” (Prensky, 2001). In order to win a game, one needs to have knowledge and skills. What kind of knowledge is determined by the content/representation of the game, and thus some games are more appropriate for education than others. Board games combine play and learning and thus fulfil the twofold principle of edutainment to both entertain and educate. They organise play in a format appropriate for the classroom.

The third principle in the Soul City Edutainment Vehicle framework is that the audience is seen as the agent of change. In the game situation, the game itself works as a catalyst for communication, while the participating players control the communication. However, the rules of the game do impose some limitations. Players become active participants and not passive receivers who, within the framework of the game, are able to shape their own processes of change. While discussing the rules of the game and the strategy to follow, children indirectly discuss the rules of life and the social norms that constitute the boundaries of society. In this sense, the unit of change transcends the individual and becomes the broader society. A board game is an appropriate media for the Soul City Edutainment Vehicle, since games are both entertaining and educational and include interaction among players

THE LEARNING POTENTIALS OF OUR BOARD GAMES

The existing SB educational materials are founded on traditional learning principles that focus on outcomes rather than perceiving learning as a social process stressing active participation. We believe that a board game as a supplement to the existing traditional learning materials could spark off debate and interactive dialogue among 7th graders in South Africa, thus contributing to behaviour change and changing social norms.

Social modelling

The board game actively uses the Soul Buddyz TV-series as a point of

reference and draws upon situations and themes from the series. One of the most prominent measures used in the SB campaign is the use of social modelling. Every week in the TV-series, the Buddyz^[iv] find themselves in difficult situations where friends have to assess their own circumstances and perceptions in order to get out of the situations. When in season 1 Siya is unfairly punished by his teacher, the Buddyz have to question the unlimited authority of a teacher and seek out information on children's rights and the law.

Social modelling is the use of role models to promote behaviour change. According to Albert Bandura, the leading proponent of social cognitive theory, social modelling is the second best way to develop self-efficacy^[v] (Bandura, 2004). Self-efficacy is "belief[s] in one's efficacy to exercise control over one's functioning and events that affect one's life" (Bandura, 2004). A sense of self-efficacy is essential in processes of change, since "It is one thing to learn new styles of behaviour. It is another to put them into practice" (Bandura, 2004). The focus group interviews from the SB audience research revealed how the traditional education succeeds in as far as teaching children nutritional expressions, but the children were not able to relate their knowledge to healthy food choices. Excuses were made, based on assumptions that healthy food is expensive and less accessible. This indicates a lack of self-efficacy when it comes to controlling one's own health. Without a sense of self-efficacy, behaviour change is not possible, since encountered difficulties cannot be overcome "unless people believe they can produce desired effects by their own actions" (Bandura, 2004). Bandura also points out how it is more effective to "measure success by self-improvement rather than by triumphs over others" (Bandura, 2004). Thus, a board game that aims at enhancing a sense of self-efficacy should have the objective of reaching a goal, such as succeeding in a specific amount of challenges, rather than to beat the other participants. The SB strategies do not focus solely on self-efficacy but also on collective efficacy. Collective efficacy is "People's shared believe in their collective power to realize the futures they seek" (Bandura, 2004).

Social modelling has four functions in learning processes: instructive, motivational, social prompting and social construction (Bandura, 2004). It is instructive in the way that role models transmit knowledge, values, skills and types of behaviour through their modelled behaviour.

Role models can also have a motivating function when it comes to changing behaviour. The example where Siya, with a little help from his friends, stands up for his rights, seeks to motivate the audience by making them expect a positive outcome from such proactive behaviour. Seeing how Siya gains from his actions motivates the audience to adopt the same type of behaviour. Modelling, however, can promote negative outcome

expectancies as well, where punishment and unpleasant consequences follow certain behaviour (Bandura, 2004). An example hereof is Hamilton, a black upper middle class kid who literally shoots himself in the foot with his father's gun trying to frighten off a bully. Trying to solve conflicts with violence is modelled to have negative consequences for oneself, hopefully resulting in the audience expecting a negative outcome from violent behaviour and thus abstaining from it. This motivational function of social modelling in Soul Buddyz can be enhanced in our game where situations from the show are recalled in order to succeed in the challenges. Behaviour patterns are modelled throughout the game: bad health choices are bad game choices that impede the participants in completing the challenges of the game.

Furthermore, social modelling can serve as social prompting. The audience is prompted to adopt the modelled type of behaviour if such behaviour is perceived as the social norm (Bandura, 2004). By making the players recall the modelled behaviour of the Buddyz in the TV-series, social prompting is enhanced. This leads to the last function of social modelling, which is the social construction that takes place through the media. Role models in the media contribute to "people's social constructions of reality" (Bandura, 2004). The game can build upon and enhance the social construction function of social modelling by creating an environment that is supportive of the modelled behaviour through promoting the values in the SB messages.

Constructivist learning

So far, we have only explored the possibilities in the existing edutainment strategy. But what can a board game offer to the SB campaign as an alternative educational material? To answer this question, it is essential to explore the learning potentials of the board game.

Our board game uses an interpersonal form of communication, where the players sit face to face and discuss different serious health and development issues raised through the game. In contrast, the audience passively receives the series educational messages of the Soul Buddyz TV series. This structural element of interaction offers a unique opportunity to get the children involved in an active learning process. Thus, they learn in social interaction with others and reflect, interpret, analyse and exchange experiences and knowledge with the other players, reconsidering their prior beliefs and understandings. The board game gets the children involved in an active learning process where "learning is at its best when it is deadly serious and very playful at the same time" ^[vi], and play and learning are not two separate things. This form of serious gaming (Lightfoot, 1988) is an effective way of creating a motivational constructivist learning space in which children can construct their own knowledge and new ideas based on their own personal, social and

academic experiences, and they are responsible for their own learning process (Prinds, 1999). Constructivist learning is opposed to instructivist learning, where the teacher is the expert who transmits knowledge to the pupils. Constructivist learning focuses on participation and empowerment of the children, whereas instructivist learning diffuses information to the children. While playing the board game, children make their own decisions on specific situations and dilemmas, which they can relate to their own world. The board game creates a space wherein the real world meets and interacts with the fictive world.

Educational researchers Kolodner and Guzdial operate with the term *deep learning* in opposition to *shattered learning*, which is the more superficial way of learning that takes place in the traditional formal educational system. Deep learning makes the children able to move knowledge from one context to another for instance from a gaming context to 'the real world' (Prinds, 1999). The ability to move knowledge from one context to another is of great importance in order to generate social change. With the board game, we want to bridge these two contexts and promote deep learning in order to make the children move knowledge from the classroom to everyday practice.

Teamwork is essential in our board game and focuses on creating common understandings through dialogue. The board game gives the children an opportunity to reflect, discuss, name and act on the issues represented in the game. This social process gives meaning to behaviour and actions. According to the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, dialogue is a human encounter, in which people name the world. "It [dialogue] imposes itself as a human commitment for liberation in which they become aware of their human nature of world creators and re-creators, determined to engage in the common task of changing the world" (Navarro, 2005). Dialogue is maintained between equal partners who share and exchange meanings and views, based on their relation to the world. Dialogue is built and shared, and emerging themes will become "objects of reflection and subsequently objects of action, transforming action" (Navarro, 2005). Hence, children can name the world while playing, thus creating meanings, reflections and actions. Freire's liberation education, based on dialogue as problem posing, can also be produced by the board game. The objective of liberation education is to present the significant dimensions of an individual's context and help people acquire knowledge about the limit-situations that prevent them from achieving liberation (Navarro, 2005). From this perspective, the board game's use of dilemma situations can promote critical thinking and reflection, and children can acknowledge the problems themselves and create solutions together. They exchange knowledge and learn through dialogue and interaction.

In *Dialogic Learning, Teaching and Instruction*, Peter D. Renshaw also

explores the learning potentials in a dialogic educational material. He argues that dialogue can be understood in different contexts, as conversation and inquiry. Through dialogue, children can share information and experiences and create consensus and a sense of community. Dialogue can be used to explore “a specific question or dilemma that requires the attention of the participants, and although none of the participants may be an expert, the process of inquiry itself guides them to a solution” (Gee, n/d). Hence, dilemmas and questions, that must be explored as a team, can be applied to the board game in order to create new knowledge, reflections and actions.

In sum, the learning potentials of our board game are as follows:

- 1) Children construct knowledge on their own personal, social and academic experiences, and knowledge is constructed in the motivational space of a game.
- 2) The game enables children to move knowledge from the board games fictional context to their everyday practices.
- 3) Learning is an active social process that creates dialogue and deep learning.
- 4) Dialogue creates meaning, reflections and actions and the game can help the children change negative behaviour patterns.
- 5) Dialogue is explorative and can be used to solve dilemmas and problems. Children can use these skills in both the gaming situation as well as their everyday practices.

CONCLUSION

Preliminary design principles and guidelines

Seven principles and guidelines for the design of our board game can be identified: 1) easy to understand and operationalize, 2) balance between entertainment and education, 3) promote dialogue, 4) motivational space for constructivist learning 5) self- and community efficacy, 6) self-improvement. These principles and guidelines can be implemented in a concrete board game design. The board game should offer a space where the children can exchange and construct knowledge on personal, social and academic experiences.

Easy to understand and operationalize

The rules of the game have to be easy to understand and operationalize in the game situation in order to minimize confusion and thus setting up obstacles for the use of the game. For example, that children can not play the board game without help from an adult. On the contrary, the rules must not be too simplistic. Children have to feel challenged in order to maintain interest and motivation.

Balance between entertainment and education

The board game has to express the appropriate balance between entertainment and education in order to ensure motivation and learning. Entertainment is assured through the form of a game, while education is secured through the content of the game. To avoid that the game becomes moralising and preaching, all its educational elements must have a game function. In this way, the player will be motivated to use knowledge and skills on complicated matters in order to win the game. This emphasises the importance of the competitive element. An example: a challenge that includes creating a report on HIV/AIDS that does not increase or limit the possibility to win the game will tip the balance in favour of education, while ways to win the game based only on fan knowledge of which actor plays which character will tip the balance in favour of entertainment.

Promoting dialogue

The board game should promote dialogue in order to address social norms. This is prioritised because dialogue gives children opportunity to reflect and act. They can discuss and name the issues they themselves experience and thus give meaning to their actions. Challenges have to be designed in such a way that discussion is necessary in order to win the challenge. For this purpose, dilemma situations are useful. For example: a challenge could be to discuss how HIV transmits based on a situation from the TV-series Soul Buddyz.

Motivational space for constructivist learning

The board game should create a motivational learning space in which the children can construct their own knowledge through social interaction. Using the characters from the TV-series will motivate children to play the game. In the game context, children can exchange their individual, social and academic knowledge, and thereby move their knowledge from one context to another. The different questions asked in the game are put into discussion and should enhance the children's potentials of solving health related problems in their everyday context. For example, a dilemma or question concerning a taboo issue could be discussed, and the children can construct knowledge together. Later they can apply this new knowledge to their private practices if they encounter a similar problem.

Self- and collective efficacy

The board game should develop a sense of self-efficacy through social modelling, in order to implement learned knowledge into changes in behaviour. The board game will draw on the existing social modelling in the Soul Buddyz TV-series. When the Buddyz overcome a challenge, it results in certain outcome. The audience sees how the Buddyz handled the situation and thereby realises that they can do the same. For example,

players are given a dilemma based on the TV series and they have to explain what the Buddy did. Then they recall the situation and modelled behaviour, and discuss whether this behaviour is appropriate. The board game should develop a sense of collective efficacy as well. The board game supports a sense of collective efficacy by creating a forum in which the children work as teams, and players hereby experience the benefits of collective actions. For example, players are divided into teams, and the challenge is to describe or draw an object/topic/concept/issue, which the other team members have to guess.

Self-improvement

The objective of the game should focus on self improvement rather than defeating the other teams. Self and collective efficacy are best promoted through experiences of reaching ones goals, while doing better than the other teams mainly functions as motivation. Thus the objective of the game is relative in the sense that the team has to do better than the other teams but also absolute since the objective can only be reached by a specific effort that is not determined by the efforts of the other teams. In addition focus on self-improvement also secures the balance between entertainment and education since the game is about more than just competition. Example: The objective of the game is to succeed in five challenges first. In this way the team has to focus on “us” getting through the challenges while still observing whether or not the other teams are getting through their challenges quicker or slower. The challenges of the game will focus on life skills the same way that the other educational materials of the SB campaign do.

The rules of the game should be based on a framework such that focus is on rewarding rather than punishing, thus creating positive outcome expectancy with the players. That means focusing on the ‘right’ behaviour and norms rather than the behaviour and norms that the strategic health communication of the SC is seeking to prevent. For example, social changes squares where positive events occur that affects the environment of the game, graduation day where all teams move two squares forward. Any negative events that use punishment should be balanced out by another element. For instance, a measles epidemic square where the team must wait a turn can be set out of function if a team lands on the vaccination square.

These theoretically and empirically founded design principles and guidelines have resulted in the psychological development of our board game. In accordance to SB’ formative research process, we have developed a prototype of the game, which will need to be pre-tested and produced by SC in the proper social context before being used as a supplement to the existing SB educational materials in South African.

[i] SC produces the television series in cooperation with the South African Broadcasting Company.

[ii] E-mail correspondence with Brand Manager, Soul Buddyz Busiswa Gqangeni (2006).

[iii] <http://www.soulcity.org.za/01.01.asp>

[iv] The Buddyz refer to the characters in the TV-series Soul Buddyz.

[v] The best way is mastering experience, where one faces challenging situations and succeeds.

[vi] <http://www.socialimpactgames.com>

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