

Systems Games from the
Systems Thinking Playbook

Linda Booth-Sweeney

Dennis Meadows

for the Creative Learning Exchange

June 28, 2008

When I hear, I forget

When I see, I remember

When I do, I understand

The Impact of Games

Games have a positive educational influence that no one can appreciate who has not observed their effects. Children who are slow, dull, and lethargic; who observe but little of what goes on around them; who react slowly to external stimuli; who are, in short, slow to see, to hear, to observe, to think, and to do, may be completely transformed in these ways by the playing of games.

Jessie H. Bancroft, *Games for the Playground, Home, School, and Gymnasium*, The Macmillan Company, NY 1920.

The 7 Levels of Systems Understanding

Stories

Focus of
STP Games



Behavior Patterns

Simple Causal Links

Archetypes & Complex
Feedback Models

Adaptive Policies

Implementation Strategies

Paradigms, Culture, Norms, Ethics, & Values

Outline of the Presentation

- Examples of short games
- Functions of games
- History of the *Playbook*
- Components of the game experience
- The debriefing cycle
- Other issues
- Informal discussion

Examples of Short Games

- 1-2-3 GO! *
- Paper tear
- Frames *
- Avalanche *
- Living Loops
- Triangles
- Arms Crossed
- Circles in the Air
- Hands Down
- Paper Fold *
- Space for Living

Functions of Games

- Social & psychological goals - introduce the individuals, develop group goals, release physical energy, promote trust
- Illustrate important points about paradigms and structure
- Provide a shared vocabulary, shared metaphor
- Explain the past behaviors of a system
 - Metaphoric vs literal games
- Test the effects of alternative policies
- Predict future behaviors of a system

Experiential Learning

There is a world of difference between knowing that something is true, because one has been told it by some authority and knowing that it is true, because one has experienced it (albeit in a simulated situation) for oneself.

(Elgood, 1990, p.17)

I have learnt that it is only possible to use something I have read or heard, if that 'something' connects with my own experiencing. (Wylde, 1989, p.115)

History of the Playbook

- Linda Booth Sweeney did the first 10 games and asked me to comment
- Together we did Volumes II and III
- Now there is a two-hour video that complements the book
- Translated into Russian, Chinese, Spanish, Thai
- Distributed by Pegasus Communications & by Chelsea Green Publishing
 - http://www.chelseagreen.com/bookstore/item/the_systems_thinking_playbook/

Components of the Game Experience

- The expectations, experience, emotions, and other information brought in by participants.
- The frame provided by the operator
- The experience of the game
 - Mechanics, supervision, goals, materials, participants
- The logical and emotional structure of debriefing
- Generating commitment to change

The Debriefing Cycle

- What happened in the game?
- Do those features characterize real life?
- How did the characteristics of the game cause these features?
- Do you find those characteristics in real life?
- How could you change the game to achieve better results?
- What would be the counterpart to these changes in real life?
- Develop commitment to change.

Other Issues

- Suitability for different ages and cultures
- Responsibility of the operator – mastery and safety
- Literal versus metaphorical games
- Rule of 10
- Professional societies
- Sources of games
 - Games Trainers Play, Scannell and Newstrom