#nofilter - an interactive play on life online and offline through the lens of gamification

Matilda Ståhl (1), Hannah Kaihovirta (2), Nina Dahl-Tallgren (3)

1. Corresponding author: Åbo Akademi University, Finland  
   matstahl@abo.fi
2. University of Helsinki, Finland  
3. Wasa Teater, Finland

Keywords  

gamification, interactive play, identity construction

Abstract

The Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education urges educators to use the possibilities provided by games and gamification (Finnish National Agency of Education, 2014) yet gamification is not defined nor discussed. In the studies leading up to this (Ståhl, Kaihovirta & Rimpilä, 2019a; Ståhl, Kaihovirta & Rimpilä, 2019b) we analysed an interactive play as an aesthetic process from teacher and student perspectives and noted five levels of gamification: structural, narrative, semiotic, interactive and environmental. In this study, we implement this framework on an interactive play on identities and social relations online and offline.

Aesthetic processes within education can entail learning about and through art. An aesthetic process can further be understood as regenerative; a multimodal response on experience and knowledge. Burman (2014) describes a mimetic view on aesthetics processes and learning as a reflection or transformation as a mirrored view of our reality. This reflection is worthy on its own beyond its connection to reality and all forms of art, including games, can be considered reflections (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Games as well as plays, can be considered non-mimetic as they do not reflect everyday life with its non-linear narrative, yet the participant can accept that as a requisite to create a “successful play space” (Upton, 2015, s.254).

Gamification, coined in 2008, is often seen as a motivational design by using game mechanics (Deterding et al, 2011: Rapp et al, 2018). Previous gamification research has focused on specific software with varying implementations of PBL (Rapp et al, 2018) with education as a key research field (Kasurinen and Knutas, 2018). Koivisto and Hamari (2019) state that the three key elements of gamification are affordances, psychological outcomes and behavioural outcomes. Affordance refers to the game mechanic used, psychological outcome refers to participants experiences and behavioural outcomes refer to the activity encouraged by the gamification design. Empirical studies on gamification have focused on points as affordance and behavioural outcomes such as performance in relation to time.

There is a need for empirical studies on gamification that is based on varying game mechanical affordances and forms of implementation (Kasurinen and Knutas, 2018; Rapp et al.,2018) with a focus beyond PBL (Nacke and Deterding, 2017) as well as a need for discussing potential negative effects of gamification. Gamification should be seen “as organizational and individual practices reminiscent of those which may be observed in games” (Koivisto and Hamari, 2019, p. 205). There are studies on aesthetic processes and game-based learning, yet combining aesthetic processes and game mechanical affordances as gamification is rare. This study is part of a longitudinal research collaboration on aesthetic processes and gamification within the arts in primary education with a focus on other affordances than PBL (Ståhl, Kaihovirta and Rimpilä, 2017; 2018; 2019a; 2019b).
The current study is based on #nofilter, an interactive play, planned and implemented in collaboration between a primary school and the local theatre in Finland. The play is formed through the collaboration and will be offered to other schools as TiE, Theatre in Education (Jackson, 1993; Heathcote, 1984). In TiE, professional actors explore certain phenomena together with teachers and students and common themes are empathy, reflection and communication (Heathcote, 1984). The interactive play focuses on digital competencies with a narrative exploring identities and relationships online as well as offline. The collaboration involves theatre educators, actors, the director as well as teachers and students in year 7 and 8 (13-15 year-old).

Methods

The play #nofilter revolves around a 17-year-old Alexandra, more commonly known as the Youtuber AleXis. While she endeavors to share her life with her followers in an authentic manner as possible, with no filters, in private she battles insecurities and feels invisible. She shares these feelings with Brighteyes, her friend with whom she plays online games but has not shared her offline identity with. As a shopping centre is set on fire and the group responsible claims to be inspired by AleXis, the negative publicity is too much for her to handle so she reveals her Youtuber identity to Brighteyes. The play reaches its climax during an event for social media where Alexandra is torn between her manager who regards all publicity as good publicity and Brighteyes, who turns out to be a young man named Colin who encourages Alexandra to quit as influencer as there are more important things in life than followers. The students participate in the play as followers of AleXis through social media events during the play and are asked to offer their opinion on certain events, including Alexandra’s final decision on whether or not to continue as an influencer. The video data will be collected by the use of a camera following a focus student with an external microphone. Further, interviews with the students, including the focus students, will be conducted.

Theatre educators, teachers and researchers have been part of the preparatory work, planning and the implementation of the interactive play. Through PAR, (Genat, 2009), with one educator as an active agent* (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015) made sure that the analysis will be relevant from an educator’s perspective. The PAR approach entailed an ethnically complex research situation with the close proximity to the context (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2007; Doyle, 2007), and a need for clear communication between the different parties, including the internal work distribution within in the research papers: as the participatory researcher, Ståhl has the main responsibility for the paper, with theoretical and analytic support from Kaihovirta. In different stages of the analysis, the theatre educator, Dahl-Tallgren*, has been advised to ensure the relevance of the researched context.

Conclusion

Based on reflections from the previous play and the analysis of that (Ståhl, Kaihovirta and Rimpilä, 2019a; 2019b), changes were made, both in terms of theatre praxis as well as methodological changes. One of the main critiques from previous reviewers was the limited involvement from the researchers in terms of developing the play, especially in relation to the PAR framework. Accordingly, the researchers have now been more involved in shaping the manuscript, for example through dialogue with the playwright and by sharing transcripts with the theatre staff during the development of the play.

As the previous play was the first interactive play the theatre produced, the theatre was faced with new challenges as well. While working with students when developing different stages of the play felt worthwhile, they noted that a group should only experience the play as a whole one time. In the previous play, one of the groups experienced the opening three times and the entire play twice. As the students then knew what to expect, the theatre staff interpreted the student’s reactions as
unnatural and constructed.

During 2019, the playwright has been working on the script for the play together with the actors, the theatre educator as well as the researchers, whereas developing and implementing the play to other schools will happen in the spring of 2020. Accordingly, there is currently no data beyond internal communication between the researchers and the playwright. However, according to the timeline, during the ECER conference in August the authors will be able to offer preliminary insights into the analysis. The format of a poster presentation offers the researchers to discuss the ongoing project and the early stage of analysis with the educational research field.

References


