

# **Performing Politics in the Classroom: How students enact scenario competence in an ICT-supported educational role-play**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, I present the concept “scenario competence” and analyse how it is enacted by students playing an ICT-supported educational role-play. My aim is to answer the following research question: *How can learning games be used in order to enact scenario competence?* The question is based on the assumption that learning games hold a considerable learning potential by letting students engage in various simplified aspects of professional practices that exists outside of the formal learning space of a school. The paper is divided into two parts. First, I define and discuss the concepts of “competence” and “scenario competence” and their relationship to learning games and simulated practices. In the second part, I describe four analytical themes from my empirical work on students’ participation in the ICT-supported role-play *The Power Game* on election processes and political communication. At the end of the paper, I will discuss how the students enacted scenario competence in different ways by participating in the game. *The Power Game* has been co-developed with The National Danish Broadcasting Company as a part of my Ph.D. project on “Design and Use of Learning Games”.

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# **Performing Politics in the Classroom: How students enact scenario competence in an ICT-supported educational role-play**

## **1. Game-based learning**

Game phenomena can be used to facilitate learning processes in many ways – whether the aim is to engage students in specific learning goals, develop communicative abilities or promote problem-oriented reflection through simulated practices. In spite of the fact that teachers have taught with games, role-plays and simulations for more than four decades, design and use of learning games is still a relatively scattered field of research compared to i.e. research on media education or young people's use of media (Buckingham, 2003; Sefton-Green, 2004). Following the technological “upgrade” of the educational sector and the booming computer game industry, there has been an increasing interest in the way that game formats can be based upon or supported by various new media and digital technologies in order to support learning processes<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, the recent years of game hype easily leads to seeing learning games as a new technological or pedagogical “fix” that can solve the problems of schooling, teaching and learning. Instead, we need realistic expectations and detailed descriptions on how different learning processes can be afforded or constrained by games. This is especially due to the practical barriers of using ICT-supported games in educational settings and integrating learning games with the demands of a curriculum.

In this paper, I will take a closer look at game-based learning by trying to answer the following research question: *How can learning games be used in order to enact scenario competence?* The question is based on the assumption that learning games have a rich learning potential by letting students engage in and perform various practices and discourses that go beyond the repertoire of a formal learning space. In order to answer the question, I will start by defining “scenario competence” as a key analytical concept for understanding game-based learning processes. Next, I will present the educational role of games, which can be seen as a dynamic alternative to the text book that still remains the dominant learning resource in Danish upper secondary schools. In the analysis, I will try to show how scenario competence is enacted through the use of *The Power Game*, which forms the empirical point of departure in my Ph.D. project on “Design and use of learning games”. *The Power Game* is an ICT-supported role-play on election

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<sup>1</sup> Research on game-based learning can be divided into 1) research on analogue or ICT-supported simulations and role-plays, and 2) educational use of computer games. The first type of research is well-represented in the *Journal of Simulation & Gaming*, while the educational potential of computer games has been researched in a number of recent publications and dissertations (Gee, 2003; Kirrimuir & McFarlane, 2003; Squire, 2004; Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2005).

processes and political communication developed for social science in Danish upper secondary education. My overall ambition with this paper is to contribute to further discussions on the ways game phenomena can be used – both as *a form of teaching* and as *a learning resource* – in order to develop scenario competence in educational contexts.

## 2. Scales of competence

In order to understand the meaning of “scenario competence” we need to step back and take a closer look at the concept of “competence”. What it means to “be competent” is tied to important discussions on educational goals, learning processes, teaching principles, evidence of learning outcomes etc. It is difficult to ignore the politicized role of competence as a “floating signifier” or buzzword in neo-liberal management discourses and educational policy documents (Hermann, 2003). At the same time, competence is a useful concept for providing analytical insight into learning processes that go beyond “facts” and fixed outcomes. To understand what it means to be competent, we need to consider the *who* that expects *somebody* to do *something* according to certain normative criteria. Consequently, competence can be defined from different perspectives. Here, I will compare definitions of competence aimed at a global, a national, and a local scale.

OECD’s research initiative DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies) has offered an interesting definition with *global* relevance: “competence is the ability to successfully meet complex demands in a particular context” (Rychen & Selganik, 2003: 43). According to DeSeCo, the internal structure of a competence is based on several aspects in terms of knowledge, cognitive skills, practical skills, attitudes, emotions, values/ethics, and motivation. All of these aspects come into play in certain competent ways according to the demand of a specific situation. Thus, a competence is not a fixed ability nor is it something that only exists in certain situations. The point is that competence always is “conceptualized in relation to demands” and can be “actualized by actions (which implies intentions, reasons, and goals) taken by individuals in a particular situation” (ibid.: 46ff). DeSeCo’s overall ambition is to define key competencies that are necessary for individuals to develop in order to live a successful life within a well-functioning society. Competence is seen as a holistic concept that apply to any educational and workplace context on a global scale. This universal ambition is both the strength and weakness of DeSeCo’s definition. We *do* need a well-worked through concept of competence in order to be able to talk of learning processes and outcomes at a general level. But DeSeCo’s definition is so generalised that it cannot be directly applied to a specific educational context, i.e. social science students playing a learning game in a Danish upper secondary classroom. Unfortunately, DeSeCo does not provide

much help with translating or discussing the analytical implications of “being competent” in the situated contexts, which their concept refers to on a theoretical level.

If we turn to a *national* scale, competence has been defined in relation to formal education from primary school to university level in a report on “Educations in the Future” published by The Danish Ministry of Education (Busch, Frydensbjerg Elf, *et. al* 2003). The authors use school subjects as the frame of reference for defining competence and claim that competence should be developed by “working with subject-related matter and knowledge in relevant situations and activities in order to inform actions” (ibid.: 18, my translation). This means that competence is understood as a subject-related potential that can be actualised through certain subject-related situations. Thus, competence, i.e. within social science as a subject, is defined as “a knowledge-based readiness to act accordingly in situations that pose certain types of challenges” related to social science (ibid., my translation). I have chosen this example because social science as a subject is the curricular context for my empirical studies of *The Power Game* in Danish upper secondary education. Compared to DeSeCo, the Danish curricular definition is much more specific. In fact the curricular definition is *too* specific for my purpose, because it is limited to the individual’s learning processes with singular school subjects as the parameter for understanding and evaluating competence. This leaves out important cross-disciplinary and cross-curricular competencies that form a central part of the new reform in Danish upper secondary education (“Gymnasireformen 2005”). Thus, the curricular definition is a narrow premise for understanding the wide array of competencies that can be developed through game-based learning.

There has probably always been a great divide between the noble intentions of educational policies formulated at global or national scales and the *local* teacher’s way of evaluating his or her students. The local and situated enactment of “being competent” has been described by Etienne Wenger as a mutual interplay between a social actor’s experience and competence (Wenger, 1998). For Wenger, a competence is socially defined by “the relationships of accountability to the practice by which a community defines forms of membership and by which engagement in the practice is experienced as legitimate membership” (Wenger, 2006: e-mail correspondence). From this perspective, a competence is defined and recognized according to the local “relationships of accountability”. This definition is very much in tune with the pragmatic or everyday way that teachers and students recognise certain practices as “being competent” in the socially defined context of a classroom. This includes the formal requirements or content of the school subject, but also different forms of teaching and learning, and ways of appropriating specific learning resources such as text books or websites. Thus, an experienced teacher will quickly be

able to tell whether the form, content or outcome of a learning game is relevant for the curriculum or not, and so will the students that have participated in the game. Of course, the situated recognition of somebody's actions or specific outcome as being more or less competent does not ensure whether the individual student has actually developed a new "level" of competence. Nevertheless, this is how teachers and student's evaluation of legitimate pedagogical practices unfolds every day in thousands of classrooms. This is simply how "school is done".

At this point, we can conclude that "competence" is a complex concept that can be defined at *global*, *national* and *local* scales. We must also recognize that competence relates to the complex interplay between *social* and *individual* dimensions of learning. Finally, development and evaluation of competence are tied to specific *learning resources*, *learning activities* and *learning scenarios* that can be defined in broad societal terms, curricular terms, or by situated contexts and practices. None of the three definitions listed above are "correct" or "wrong", but point to different analytical considerations for recognising and understanding competence in educational settings.

## **2. Scenario competence**

My primary interest in this paper is to describe how *The Power Game* has been used to enact students' *scenario competence* by analysing different aspects of a game session. I find scenario competence useful as my core analytical concept, because it encompasses some of the most significant meaning-making processes in game-based learning. So far, the concept has only been used by Bernard Eric Jensen, a Danish researcher of instructional principles for teaching history ("History Didactics"). According to Eric Jensen, scenario competence can be defined as "the ability to project, unfold and evaluate sociocultural scenarios" (Eric Jensen, 1996: 12, my translation). Within the subject of history, students can develop scenario competence by comparing relations between what was (the past), what is (the present), and what will be (the future). This could be done through reading and discussing historical novels or by teaching with contra-factual scenarios. An example could be: "What would Europe have looked like, if the Germans won The Second World War?" This raises a lot of questions and subject-related discussions on the outcomes of possible scenarios. History as subject is not only about what *has* already happened ("that is history"), but also about what *is* happening ("history is being made"). Furthermore, Eric Jensen relate scenario competence to students' everyday or phenomenological conception of history, which he defines as "consciousness of history". Students' consciousness of history is not only formed by the content presented in text books, but is very much based on their knowledge and their everyday experiences from the internet, historical films, museums, old photos in the family album, local history etc.

My point is that scenario competence is an important competence that goes beyond history as a subject. In everyday terms, “scenario” basically refer to “a projected course of action, events or situations” (Wikipedia, 2006), which means that it has broader reference than questions of historicity or conceptions of time. A scenario represents a dynamic tension or difference between a situated problem and a possible or imagined outcome. Thus, I believe that scenario competence can be developed in *all* subjects and across subjects. Based on this, I will define scenario competence in an educational context as *the ability to project, enact, and reflect on the possible outcomes of subject-related scenarios*.

In a curricular context, a “scenario” refers to a course of events that is possible or imagined as seen from the epistemologies of different subjects (Dewey, 1916). In many teaching situations the scenario is so familiar or limited that neither students nor teachers perceive it as a scenario. It could be teaching French as a foreign language, where the students must learn the dialogue related to the scenario of “shopping”: “Bon jours. Je voudrais acheter...” For most students, the shopping-scenario is so *implicit* or taken-for-granted that they do not consider all the implied cultural norms, rituals, and intentions, which are related to shopping in a foreign language. This explains why scenario competence is more relevant as an analytical concept, when it comes to understanding teaching and learning with *explicit* scenarios. An example could be mother-tongue education, where students are asked to perform a play in front of their classmates. Even though the dramatic text is about “shopping”, the result and context will be entirely different than in the example given above. The scenario in the play will become present through the students’ interpretations and performative expressions based upon the values and possible actions, which are motivated by the fictive story. Explicit scenarios are also part of math and science teaching, i.e. when students perform risk assessments of the amount of radioactivity people are exposed to on an everyday level. In order to make the risk assessment, the students must be able to project and reflect on possible scenarios for where, when, and how much humans are exposed to radioactive sources in different contexts.

The above examples share a focus on situations, where students must project, act, and reflect on the outcome of possible scenarios. Of course, there are important differences between the specific subject-related competencies, which the students must use in the different situations and different subjects. My point here is simply to point out that we should recognize how students develop scenario competence in all subjects – and across subjects. Being “scenario competent” means being able to meet the demands of a scenario-based context, which is both tied to the conceptualisation of a range of possible outcomes and to the situation in which the scenario is

actualised. The students in upper secondary school will need to be scenario competent in order to meet many demands in their life through higher education and/or later in their work life (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Gee, 2004). In both areas they will be forced to make a series of subject-related and personal choices according to changing scenarios. In order to further understand the meaning of scenario competence, I will go on to describe it through empirical analysis. But first I will define learning games, which is my primary research object, and discuss how games can be used to develop scenario competence.

#### **4. Learning games and simulated practices**

Game phenomena are useful as tools for learning because they allow students to engage in conflict-based scenarios with specific roles and learning goals. Furthermore, game worlds are characterised by rules that shape the participants' actions and interpretive framework (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003). When speaking of games it is important to differentiate between leisure games and games that are used to reach specific learning goals. Seen from an educational perspective game phenomena are not primarily interesting as immersive worlds or media of their own, but more as interactive learning tools that imply certain forms of teaching. Thus, I will define learning games as *any game phenomena designed with explicit learning goals that can be used to support specific learning processes*. The term "game phenomena" include a wide range of different resources and activities such as play, board games, mobile games, simulations, role-play, and computer games. All of these phenomena are able to create dynamic scenarios, which can be used by teachers to engage students in imagined *and* situated learning environments. In addition to this, learning games are based on interactive and explicit scenarios, which makes them a qualified learning resource for developing scenario competence.

My research project is based upon design and educational use of ICT-supported role-play as a specific game phenomena. In this paper, I wish to concentrate on how students have participated in *The Power Game*. The game scenario is designed to last for half a day and divides the students in a class into four or six political groups (A, B, C, D, E, F), which are given the opportunity to play politicians, journalists, and spin doctors. Furthermore, all students must vote out-of-character at the beginning and at the end of the game. During the game the students put politics into play by finding key political issues on the websites of the real political parties, which they then present, discuss and negotiate in the class. The winner of the game is the party, who can deliver the most persuasive arguments according to the classical forms of appeal: ethos (ethics), logos (rationality), and pathos (feelings). The learning goal of the game is to provide the students

with insight into political ideologies, decision-making processes and ways of arguing and communicating in an election process.

In *The Power Game* students are allowed to play the roles and simulate the practices of being politicians, journalists, spin doctors and voters during an election process. The process of “simulating a practice” refer to the way that Donald Schön define a practicum:

“... a setting designed for the task of learning a practice. In a context that approximates a practice world, students learn by doing, although their doing usually falls short of real-world work. They learn by undertaking projects that simulate and simplify practice; or they take on real-world projects under close supervision.” (Schön, 1987: 37)

Even though a learning game is different from a practicum in terms of duration, realism and self-investment, there are still important similarities. When students simulate practices in a game environment a lot of their actions differ from familiar “pedagogical practices” that are oriented toward subject-related content in a traditional teaching situation, i.e. “raising a hand in order to answer the teacher’s question” or “finding the right passage in the textbook.” In this way students’ actions and expressions in *The Power Game* go beyond the repertoire of pedagogical practices, which most teachers and students take for granted in their “naturalised” everyday context. An obvious example is the way the “politicians” simulated right-wing opinions and rhetorics about immigrants. The students performed attitudes or practices that differ markedly from their own and this marks a “frame clash” with the interpretive frameworks, norms and communicative orders of classroom teaching (Goffman, 1974; Green & Dixon, 1994). Of course, the simulated practices in *The Power Game* are also far away from the real politicians’ professional practice outside school. Thus, the simulated practices in a learning game can be described as a hybrid or a third form of practice that combine elements from pedagogical practice and professional practice outside the formal learning space. In this way, learning games continuously create their own context as an interplay between a curricular space, a fictional space, and the students’ own lifeworld.

Educational game-based practices can be analysed from many learning perspectives. My theoretical framework combine pragmatist theories on learning with neo-Vygotskyian or sociocultural learning theory (Dewey, 1916; Mead, 1934; Schön, 1987; Wertsch, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Dysthe, 2003). The two perspectives are able to complement each other as they both see learning from a practice-oriented perspective. However, there still important differences (Glassman, 2001). The pragmatist point of view highlights game-based learning as an interest-



experience-, and reflection-based way of exploring and experimenting within a game environment as seen from the individual's perspective. Whereas sociocultural learning theory put more emphasis on the way that language, artefacts and other mediating tools shape the participants meaning-making processes seen from a social, historical and cultural perspective. Together, the two strands of theory are able to analyse many important aspects of what it means to simulate practice and develop scenario competence within a learning game.

#### **4. Methodological considerations**

In my Ph.D. project, I try to analyse learning games from two methodological perspectives by focusing on both *design* and *use* of learning games. I explore the first perspective through Design-based Research (DBR), which is an interventionist approach to design and use of learning resources in order to explore and build learning theories (Brown, 1992; Barab & Squire, 2004). The role of the researcher is to provide contextualised accounts of the interplay between students, learning resources, and learning processes by experimenting with different “designs”. A design can be everything from the teacher's design of the curriculum, the organisation of a classroom, a text book, software, or, in my case, *The Power Game*. An important part of DBR is the integration of research and design through an iterative process. In order to orchestrate this process, the researcher often collaborate with teachers and/or external designers in order to develop teaching materials and instructional principles that can be used and re-designed through repeated design experiments in order to explore a specific research hypothesis. The two overall goals are 1) development or refinement of theories that describe the relation between learning resources and learning processes, and 2) design of new types of learning resources, which may be diffused and used by other students, educators and researchers.

Whereas DBR takes a design perspective on learning resources, my second methodological approach is grounded in a student or user perspective. For this purpose, I have chosen Mediated Discourse Analysis (MDA) as my overall analytical framework, because it provides concepts and strategies that are useful for mapping students' meaning-making processes, practices and reflections in response to participating in *The Power Game*. MDA is a trans-disciplinary methodology primarily based upon sociocultural learning theory, semiotics, and ethnography of communication (Scollon & Scollon 2004). The main assumption of MDA is that any action is socially mediated through different forms of language, signs, and tools (Wertsch, 1991). The aim of MDA is to analyse “mediated actions” by tracing the relations between the involved social actor(s), the interaction order (Goffman, 1983), the historical body/habitus (Nishida,

1959; Bourdieu, 1977), and the situated appropriation of artefacts, signs, and discourses (Scollon & Scollon, 2003). Mediated actions can be analysed as intersecting and recognisable practices that unfold in time and space as a “site of engagement” (Scollon, 2001). When analysing *The Power Game*, the classroom is the obvious site of engagement, but the students’ practices also encompass the use of websites or activities taking place outside of the classroom, and, in one case, even outside the school. I use MDA to trace the temporary links between the students’ various game-based practices as a “nexus of practice”, i.e. the way that the students move back and forth between groups and perform different aspects of their roles. A nexus of practice can be mapped by following the trajectories of the social actors through a “nexus analysis” (Scollon & Scollon, 2004).

## **5. Analysis of a game session**

The analytical aim of this paper is to explore how students’ scenario competence is enacted in a *Power Game* session. The empirical basis for my analysis of game-based learning processes consists of observations, field notes, and video and sound recordings of teachers and students participation in *The Power Game*. Due to practical limitations, I have chosen to concentrate on four analytical themes in one out of the five game sessions that I have observed and documented: 1) the role of the teacher, 2) performance and role-playing, 3) tactical aspects, and 4) students’ reflections on the game experience and learning outcome. The game session was conducted by a social science teacher in a “top-level” (3. g) social science class at a “progressive” upper secondary suburban school. After presenting the four analytical themes, I will discuss how scenario competence was enacted during the game session. Please remember that these are preliminary findings that needs to be further analysed in a larger context, which include my own role as a co-designer and researcher of the educational design interventions that I have “staged” as a part of my Ph.D. project.

### **I. The role of the teacher**

Teachers play a crucial role in “managing” and deciding how a learning ressource is introduced to and used by students in a classroom. This is also the case with an ICT-supported role-play such as *The Power Game*. The social science teacher in the following game session was not at ease with the format of ICT-supported role-playing. This was due to several reasons: the game instructions were not fully designed and the fixed progression of the scenario, as well as the unpredictable outcome, clearly differed from the teacher’s traditional way of teaching. The teacher was also not familiar with the use of ICT and decided to discard the game website that consisted of selected video clips from the Danish parliamentary election 2005, which could support the students’ initial research on

their roles in the game. When preparing for the game session, the teacher compared the game structure with “programmed instruction”. The teacher also referred to me as “the puppet master”, because she assumed that I – as the primary developer of the material – had more control or knowledge of the correct way to teach through the game. But after the game session, the teacher was very pleased with the result, even though it had been a challenge to “find her feet” as she shifted between introducing the game, coaching groups, tracking time, counting votes, and lead the formation of a new government. In the end, it was primarily a matter of “jumping into it” and then solve the problems “as they showed up”.

These short quotations illustrate some of the barriers connected with designing and disseminating learning games to teachers. There exists a wide array of different game formats, which can all be difficult to get an overview of until they have been tried out by a teacher by teaching with the actual game. Furthermore, structured game scenarios force teachers to change their traditional form of teaching. According to the teacher cited above, the learning material was much more complex and unstable compared to a traditional text book. The game session demanded more preparation time and there was less control with the outcome of the game-based learning process than with traditional Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) teaching (Hicks, 1995).

## **II. Performance and role-playing**

There was a remarkable difference between the way that teacher and students conceived of and participated in the game session. Seen from a student perspective, the introduction of the role-play was a welcome break from the use of text books and teacher-centered learning, which are the dominant pedagogical practices in upper secondary school. The most striking pattern in my observations was the way that almost all the students playing *The Power Game* were actively engaged in the learning situation. After the teacher had introduced the game session, the students were divided into four political parties (A, B, D, F) and each student had to pick a role as either politician, journalist, spin doctor or stakeholder. Once the students had distributed the roles, they started to search intensively for information on the web sites of the “real” political parties as well as discussing and writing down key political issues on computers or by using pen and paper.

The participants in the role-play continuously shifted between different approaches to embracing and distancing themselves to their roles (Goffman, 1961; Waskul & Lust, 2004). There was a frequent shift between the students’ “strong” and “weak” appropriation of the roles. The roles were especially weak in the initial research phase, as there was on-going collaboration in the groups with overlaps between the different roles. But when the deadline for presenting the political issues

moved closer, the student playing politicians had to step into character as a more well-defined role. Another example of a “strong” role was the way the journalists started interviewing different groups on their key political issues at an early stage in the game. This task had not been described by the teacher or in the game instructions. But when one of the students began interviewing groups for tactical reasons, the other journalists simply followed his example. This is just a small example of how unexpected practices emerge by performing roles in a game session (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003).

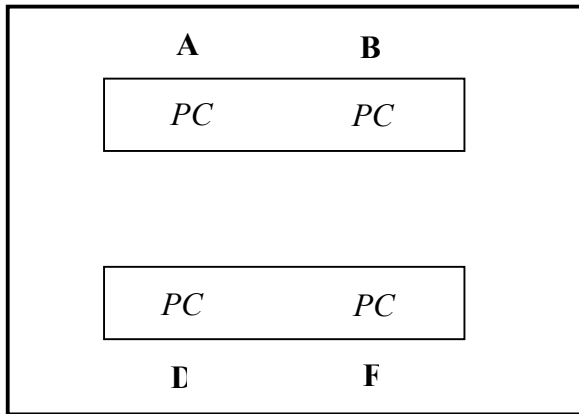
In contrast to traditional teaching or project work, there were only few students, who were “hiding” during the role-play. “Michael”, a student playing the political leader of The Social Democratic Party, expressed it like this, when I interviewed him two weeks after the game session:

”Like everybody was into it all the time, like there wasn’t anybody, who sat you know.... and didn’t do something at anytime, so I felt more like that people were into it all the time, because they knew that had to gain something from it, so they had to do something all the time, you know. And I think it was, there was more immersion for most of us compared to what you usually see in those lessons we have, you know, where there might be five to six persons maybe, that speaks all the time. So then I think, that maybe it was better this way, because people knew that they had something... to win, you know... in the end.”

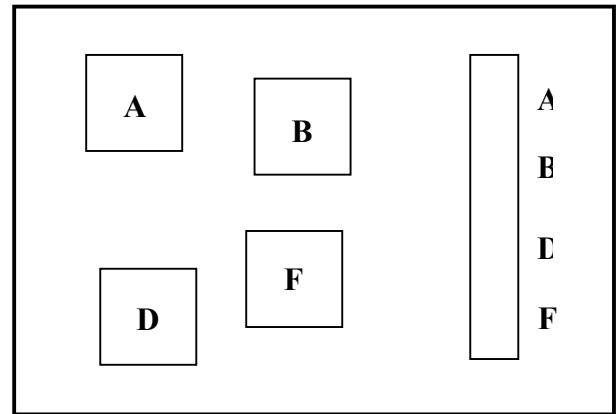
During the game the students were able to act in response to the goal-oriented rationality and tools that were given to them via the role descriptions. The exception was the role of the stakeholder, which nearly all the students found difficult to comprehend. This meant that the stakeholders slipped into the background or concentrated upon making the election posters for their political party. Still, the overall impression was that all the students were engaged by the overall goal of winning the election.

Playing a politician was more demanding than the other roles, as the politicians’ presentations formed the basis for the election votes according to logos, ethos, and pathos-arguments. The four politicians representing the ideologies of A, B, D and F in the game session had widely different ways of *positioning* themselves as a response to their role descriptions in the context of the formal learning setting (Harré & van Langenhorne, 1999). By positioning I mean the complex way in which the students continuously interpreted and enacted their roles in response to their own attitudes, the presence of the teacher and their classmates, the represented parties’ ideologies, tactical considerations, contemporary political discourses in the public debate etc. The “politicians” active positioning became the centre of the attention, when they presented their

political key issues in front of the class. The politicians were placed at a long table at the back of the classroom as shown on the illustration:



**Phase 1: Groups preparing**



**Phase 2: Politicians presenting**

The classroom was re-organised from the preparation phase, where the politicians were “back stage”, into a panel debate where the students could present their politics “front stage” to their audience (Goffman, 1959). During the presentations, teacher and students paid close attention to each presenter’s body language, political opinions, use of rhetorical expressions etc. Jens (A) had an ironic approach to the game and started to laugh nervously a number of times, when he read his socialist manifesto aloud in front of the class. His strategy was to incorporate as many political catchphrases as possible, but they became empty clichés, as he read with a muffled voice and failed to make eye contact with his audience. Michael (B) had a more serious approach to his role as a social democrat and formulated a detailed political program, although he did not manage to “perform” as a politician. In this regard, his political presentation was quite similar to the way that the students would normally present in their social science class.

The Turkish-Danish girl Güven representing D tried to make her liberalist politics come across as objective and convincing without sounding too strict on immigrant issues. In the following questioning time Güven was asked by another bi-lingual girl, who played a social democratic journalist, about immigration policies. The journalist wanted to know, what she could do in response to a liberalist law proposal that prohibited her boyfriend from Turkey immigration rights to Denmark until she turned 24 years old. Güven’s straightforward answer was: “Then you must wait until you are old enough!” The reply was followed by a large smile and made the whole class laugh, as Güven’s performed statement was clearly far from her own political opinion.

Nevertheless, Güven succeeded in presenting in a convincing manner in tune with the political viewpoints of The Liberalist Party. Christopher (F) lived up to the role as a nationalistic politician by putting forth statements such as: “During the former social democratic government the land was filled with immigrants”. At the same time, Christopher’s strategy was to turn The National Party into a centre party, so their political messages would have broader appeal in the class. He made long and improvised contributions to the ensuing political debates, where he appealed to the moral responsibility of dealing with the high unemployment rate among immigrants. In doing this, Christopher was able to incorporate his political experience as an active member of Conservative Youth with political speech genres and ways of addressing an audience in a political setting.

Both teacher and students had complex ways of positioning themselves in relation to the game. During shifts between the game phases the teacher often read directly from the game instructions. In an interview conducted a short while after the game session, the teacher commented on her own approach: “I could easily hear, when I used the words on my own, I mean, it’s something to do with owning the words. It’s not my words.” Here, the teacher pointed to a central aspect of teaching with and participating in a role-play: the ability to *own the words*. In a similar way, the teacher was very absorbed with the student’s ability to present as politicians. The performance of Jens, who played a socialist politician, was described by the teacher in this way:

Teacher: I mean, with Jens, who reads something aloud, which he has copied and hasn’t understood and, you know, made an effort into presenting. That’s something I can really use.

Interviewer: How?

Teacher: I mean, that you should go into it and express yourself in your own language instead of just reading aloud, I mean, he should make a summary out of it... an adaptation of it.

In this way, *The Power Game* is not just about presenting and evaluating political arguments, which is part and parcel of social science as a subject. The game can also be used to develop the students’ general abilities for verbal presentations, which is related to class presentations, verbal exams or self-presentations in other contexts. *The Power Game* unfolds as a political performance, where the individual student shifts between presenting him- or herself and presenting a “political persona” that represents more or less fictive political points of view. This sociocultural relationship between self-presentation and “ownership of words” in the context of educational role-play needs to be elaborated further (Bakhtin, 1986; Dysthe, 1997, 2003).

### **III. The tactical game**

Apart from engaging in and presenting themselves through political arguments, the students also spent a lot of game time on planning tactics and negotiating political agreements. The game mechanics for negotiating and voting in *The Power Game* are built upon two conflicting areas of interests, which tend to overlap. First of all, the role-play is based on a *conflict of attitude* between the political opinions of the real political parties and the students' tactical interpretation of the political ideologies, which are chosen in order to win the votes of their classmates. But there is also a *conflict of loyalty* between voting on the students' own political party in order to gain influence and voting according to their sincere judgement of the different parties' actual presentations. The students were often divided in the question on whom they should vote, although the ability to "present persuasive arguments" or "be eloquent" were frequently noted as reasons on the voting ballots.

In this *Power Game* session, the initial "exit poll" gave no votes to The National Party (F), which meant that Christopher's group were faced with a difficult task if they were to win any votes at all. The tactic of the group was to avoid core political areas such as health policies and older people's interests, because none of these areas would be interesting for their classmates(!). Instead, F decided to focus on crime, immigrants and membership of the European Union. It was especially important to prepare statements on immigrant policies as the group was sure to be "slaughtered" for its controversial opinions in this area. In the end, the game result was determined by a "secret agreement" between the left-wing politician Jens (A) and the right-wing politician Christopher (F). Jens and Christopher were good friends and the deal was primarily arranged so that they could avoid losing the game. A should convince B that the two parties should vote on each other, and F should do the same with D. The underlying idea was for A and F only to vote on their own parties and then share the political power by "stealing" the votes of B and D.

The teacher and many of the students were quite surprised as A and F received most of the votes and was able to constitute a new government. It seemed very unlikely with a government consisting of a left and right wing party in the current Danish political landscape. Still, Jens and Christopher had no difficulties with persuading their group members into the scheme. In spite of some confusion, the improbable result formed an interesting starting point for the following debriefing session guided by the teacher. Among other things, the discussions and reflections covered the meaning of friendship in politics across ideologies, Danish historical precedents to the collaboration between left and right wing parties, and to what degree politics is simply a matter of appealing to core voters by "selling the message".

#### **IV. Reflections on the game**

One of my presumptions is that participation in *The Power Game* can provide a deeper understanding of a parliamentary election and political ideologies by making the students participate and reflect on the content from different perspectives. In order to examine variation in the students' game-based reflections I conducted a group interview with the students playing The Social Democrats (B) and The National Party (F) two weeks after the game session. The students' overall experience and evaluation of the game was very positive. The game was "fun", "different", and made the students "go into" politics by "being able to argue". For some of the students, it was a problem that the game session took up six of their lessons compared to the "content" that counted at their school exam. Furthermore, it was clear that the stakeholder-role was too passive, which is why the role has since been removed from the game design. Cristopher (F) made this evaluation of the learning outcome of the game, which in many ways summarizes the students' view of the game:

"Like, you didn't get so much, you know, hard, hard outcome, you didn't get so much like pure content. What we did you could have read in a text book in maybe half an hour, but the thing with the soft outcome, what you got by discussing and arguing... I mean all those different things and to talk with each other about the political opinions and stuff like that. I think that, I think that gave a huge outcome eh... So, I mean, it can't stand on its own, because then you would get a very very stupid year group of social science students, which could do very little social science, but are enormously good at arguing. But I think that it is an enormously good supplement to social science, because social science also, I think, is more than just being able to mention the Danish political parties, but precisely also that thing about arguing for what you believe in and things like that and you get... I mean, you get a really good grip on that by... through this game."

Christopher furthermore describes his fascination with being able to enter another role. As a politician for The National Party he felt forced to present himself as "the stupid racist". The role made Christopher able to see the election process "from the outside", where he could "look toward The Social Democrats and The Liberal Party, and how they really see things." Playing a politician with different opinions than his own was a challenge – in a positive sense:

"... the thing about that you are being crammed into into a box and then how to try to get so much space in there as possible, you know. I think it was fun, and it was very different... Ehh, that you could like come into a game in a different role and then look at it from the outside, because I think that was what you did."

#### **6. Scenario competence – where, when, how?**



So, how was scenario competence enacted by the students participating in *The Power Game*? Instead of trying to find a simplified answer to the question, I will go back to the three different definitions of competence that I presented at the outset of this paper. The DeSeCo definition focuses on competence as a global and universal way of meeting complex demands in specific situations that can provide individuals with well-being and a successful life. This perspective is far broader than the institutional level of upper secondary school and points to the importance of developing competences that can be useful beyond the formal learning context. Returning to the analytical themes presented above, we can trace how the students were able to project, enact, and reflect on possible outcomes of the political scenario that could prove useful in various practices outside school. An example could be the journalist that was able to improvise and develop his role for tactical reasons, or the politician that was able to fulfill the unpopular role as “the nationalist”, while still being able to appeal to the rationality and ethics of his classmates. These are both examples of scenario competent practices that are demanded in society beyond the educational context.

The second definition of competence is based upon curriculum and the goals of school subjects. The subject-related aspect of scenario competence was also enacted in different ways by the students participating in *The Power Game*. Especially the tactics and mechanics of the election process as well as the practical aspects of researching and performing political ideologies in order to present and evaluate political communication. By taking part in, building upon, and reflecting on the election scenario, the students were allowed to develop a more competent understanding of subject-related processes that can be difficult to learn through traditional teaching supported by text books.

Finally, the students also enacted scenario competence as it was recognised at the local level of the classroom. An interesting example is the way the two politicians from F and A managed to fool their allied parties and change their own somewhat hopeless situation into a new government. The teacher was not particularly pleased with this result, while most of the students were quite excited with the unexpected outcome. The two politicians knew that their scheme was unrealistic compared to real-world politics but still chose to realise it, because it was possible within the rules of the game. This points to an interesting difference between playing *The Power Game* according to the goals of the game or the goals of education. In many ways, “going to school” is itself a game, where the outcome is determined locally by teachers and classmates. Whether the two students were seen as scenario competent when they made their political scam depends on *who* is looking and *what* is looked for.

## 6. Discussion

The analytical themes described above show different aspects of how students brought politics into play through *The Power Game*. The students that participated in the game were scenario competent in different ways through the progressive phases of the election: preparation, presentation, discussions, negotiations, tactical considerations and final reflections. By positioning themselves actively in relation to the roles, goals, scenarios and rules of the game, the students could form an experience-based understanding of the dynamics and communicative forms involved in an election. Compared to a standard social science text book, I will argue that *The Power Game* is able to facilitate a wider range of practice-oriented reflections on the complex issue of political decision-making. Learning games deserve to be taken serious as a valuable supplement to traditional teaching because they are able to engage students and afford them with the opportunity to develop their knowledge and worldviews through experimental and subject-related scenarios. Especially in the light of the current reform in Danish upper secondary schools, which emphasizes cross-disciplinarity, broader student competencies and the integration of digital learning resources.

Having said this, I can only agree with the student Christopher that we should not replace all traditional teaching with role-play. My aim is not to “underplay” the importance of school subjects, but to integrate games sufficiently into the curriculum. Anyone who has actually tried to bring a learning game into school will know that there are several instructional, cultural, and technological barriers that must be crossed. This is why game developers, educators and researchers need to put learning games into a broader instructional perspective in order to develop and qualify games as a learning resource and as a teaching method. Any type of learning resource imply different constraints and affordances for learning, which is why we need further research on the complex interplay between *learning resources*, *learning activities*, and *learning scenarios*.

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