

Sample 3: Staff Attitude Checklist

Name	Position	Attitude	Any change of attitude
Prof Ali Nasser	Prof of Chemistry		
Prof Ali	Dean of Arts		
Prof Parveen	Prof of Psychology		
Prof Anwar	Prof of Bengali		
Prof Rasheed	Prof of Geography		
Prof Shahidullah	Prof of Science		
Prof Nazmi	Prof of Economics		
Prof Chowdhury	Dean of Science		
Prof Islam	Prof of English		
Prof Shaffiuddin	Prof of Engineering		
Prof Zia	Vice-Chancellor		

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THE POTENTIAL OF GAMING AND SIMULATION IN REVISION

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Abstract: Revision for examinations is notoriously dull. Conventional methods of revision tend to exacerbate this by isolating students from each other and generally producing a poor educational climate. The suggestion of this article is that gaming and simulation are a more enjoyable and more effective way of revising. In particular they have the potential for removing learning blocks that may beset students, individually or in groups, during revision. This use of gaming and simulation may point to their applicability to other situations which demand a high level of both technical proficiency and personal involvement.

Revision has got a bad name. The very mention of the word brings back memories of late-night sweating, butterfly tummies and cold sweats. True, revision can also have its positive side: a sense of accomplishment, of 'things falling into place'; but more often the experience of revision is plainly an anxious and a lonely one. The object of this article is to point out the potential of gaming and simulation for reducing — though by no means eliminating — the unpleasantness of revision. I shall pursue this theme by first elaborating on the nature and impact of revision; contrasting it with the characteristics of gaming and simulation; and then setting out the potential of revision games and simulations. A final section comments on two more general issues that are raised by this approach.

Revision

Revision is essentially an instrumental activity; it is concerned with:

- (i) the repetition of past learning of facts, theories and so on; and
- (ii) preparation for a specific event in the future: the examination.

The repetitiveness may account for the dullness and excessive boredom of most revision; the preparation for future examinations may account for the associated anxiety and stress. The experience of revision is without doubt complicated by the prospect of possible failure and consequently the emotional investment that many students bring to it. Participants in revision are doing it primarily for the definite purpose of passing or attempting to pass the examination, but their whole identity may be under threat. The outcome is that many students revise in what can be described as a highly charged emotional atmosphere. It is hardly surprising that this pressure for individual achievement and personal realization means that many students may face learning blocks during revision. Learning thus becomes particularly difficult at the very time when learning is meant to be at its height.

The picture is further complicated in several ways. Conventional revision

methods patently fail to assist in alleviating learning blocks. They usually involve some form of individualized, fairly rigid procedure, such as learning by rote, mnemonics, trial essays and so on. If revision in general is likely to be a boring business, the lack of creativity and imagination of traditional methods ensures that it will be so.

A second sort of complication is when a whole cohort of students face examinations together. Here individual learning blocks may be accompanied or accentuated by blocks within the student group (Blake and Mouton, 1975). Unresolved tensions within the past experiences of the group may be brought back to the present through revision. The individual student may relive, consciously or unconsciously, not only the past course content, but also the past dynamics of the students' group. Similarly, the concern, even obsession, with future work to be done can lead to a parallel concern or obsession with the future life of the group, as experienced in the present or as fantasized. The most obvious way this may occur is through excessive competition within the group. It may, however, 'blossom' with the assertion of excessive group conformity, or even a rather suffocating sense of mutual welfare. Either way, the development of learning blocks within the group means that the business of study and revision becomes inextricably bound up with the dynamics of the student group. It may even be that romantic attraction and fantasy may increase during revision as at other times of stress (Dutton and Aron, 1974; Wilson and Nias, 1977: 72-3). These too may bring their own sense of elation and despair, irresponsibility and inadequacy, compounding all the other emotions present.

In summary, revision may be characterized by dullness, anxiety and learning blocks.

Gaming and simulation

The benefits of educational gaming and simulation are best appreciated within the context of experiential learning in general. Of all the various recommendations of such an approach to learning, these two seem to be most persistent:

- (i) the heightening of the sense of self-awareness and personal autonomy;
- (ii) the development of feelings of integration into the world through working off of tensions, affective feedback, the display of empathy and so on (eg Bligh, 1972: 152; Burgoyne and Stuart, 1977).

These characteristics are in turn rooted in the present-centredness of experiential learning. Boydell (1976: 25) has elaborated on this point as follows:

In a here-and-now problem . . . all the relevant data is generated within and by the learning group. The actual situation is here, we can see, feel, interact with, be part of, the problem. Hence here-and-now learning much more readily allows affective and conative learnings to take place, as well as cognitions.

In this way, gaming and simulation may contribute significantly to the development of a creative and collective educational climate. These various

positive features can now be counterposed to the negative features of revision, and especially conventional revision, described above.

Characteristics	Negative features of revision	Positive features of gaming and simulation
Temporality	(1) dullness of repetition (2) anxiety of anticipation centred in past and future	(1) increased self-awareness (2) increased integration into the world present-centred
Educational implications	(1) development of learning blocks (2) usually individualized (3) lacking in creativity	(1) removal of learning blocks (2) usually collective (3) possibility of creativity

Table 1. Major features of revision and gaming

Potential

The first feature of revision noted, its dullness, can certainly be usefully countered by gaming, and, in particular, gaming can increase self-awareness. The oppressive repetition and boredom of revision; not to mention the sense of pedantry and pointlessness, can hardly fail to be jolted by the enlivened sense of the present provided by games. Similarly, feelings of integration into the world may help to reduce anxiety. The isolation experienced with traditional revision methods is removed as students realize they are not the only ones having revision problems. Above all, gaming may help to remind students of the social support they can obtain from each other rather than succumbing to the impersonality of the examination procedure.

For example, one very simple game is that of FACT GRUBBING, which centres on a systematic and democratic sharing of information on revision in small groups. Another game, BLOBS AND LINES, asks students to explain to each other their images of the major interrelationships within a particular field of study, using spatial concepts (Hearn, forthcoming). Such games can swiftly change revision from a source of mutual recrimination to a topic of group interest and even fun.

Whereas the pressures of revision may frequently mean that the revising student lives in the present, in the past and the future, rather than just in the present, gaming may help to reconnect the experiences of the past, present and future to each other. As Cohn (1975) puts it:

Experientialism connects experience of the here-and-now with meaning of the there-and-then . . . To be aware that the here-and-now contains all the there-and-then, of past and future.

It is this feature of experiential learning and of gaming that provides the opportunity for the removal of learning blocks. Gaming may help students to return to or construct the scenes of past or future learning blocks. Games can be designed which will not only provide a forum for removing specific blocks, for example, around the issue of competition, but will

also demystify the very business of examinations. They range from narrowly focused games around the problem of setting 'good' examination questions to more ambitious attempts to simulate the whole examination process, including marking and the examination board itself (Hearn, forthcoming). This can include a mock examination or the use of papers completed by previous students.

Needless to say, there are risks in gaming of this sort, and it is possible that without care, certain learning blocks might be reinforced through scapegoating or some other group process. The need for the teacher or tutor to be aware of such difficulties during revision exemplifies the nature of structure in what may appear 'unstructured' exercises.

Though revision may be thought of as an inherently unpleasant experience, gaming can at least make the agony bearable, and occasionally a source of interest and excitement.

Two further issues

The potential of gaming and simulation in revision is partly a matter of increasing the effectiveness of study at a time of stress, but it is also an issue of more general interest.

Firstly, such methods are one way of breaking down the segmentation of education into 'course', 'revision', 'examination'. Gaming and simulation link together the experience of the segments to the benefit of each.

Secondly, this particular use of gaming and simulation may highlight their wider application to other, similar situations. In particular, the use of gaming and simulation as training for situations involving a high level of both technical proficiency and personal involvement — emergency duties, working under pressure, crisis management and so on — deserves much fuller attention and exploration.

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Jeff Hearn has been a lecturer in public and social policy at the University of Bradford since 1974, following studies at the Universities of Oxford and Leeds, and Oxford Polytechnic. His initial interest in gaming and simulation arose from postgraduate work in the simulation of urban political processes. More recently he has been concerned with the development of games to aid the teaching of organizational and group dynamics. One example which he devised jointly with P Hitch (THE CUTS GAME) was published in *Simulation/Games for Learning* under its previous title (*SAGSET Journal* 7 1: 3-8). He has also published in the fields of sociology and social policy.