The Emotions Game: Educational Game Narrative.

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**Introduction**

“The Emotions Game” is a card game where children learn vocabulary in a fun and interactive way while expressing their own emotions freely in a safe environment.

**Target audience**

 The target audience of the game are children aged eight to fourteen that are learning English as a second language (francophones born in Quebec that do not speak English at home), or as a foreign language (children of immigrant that are born in or outside of Quebec and speak another language at home).

Initially, the target audience chosen for the game were English-speaking children aged six to ten that can read. The game’s purpose with the first intended audience was to teach children about emotions and help link these emotions to their personal life experience. After testing the game out, however, it was noted that some instructions and vocabulary used might be too complex for this age group. The game’s intended players were therefore shifted to an older age group that do not speak English as their native language. This game can therefore be useful in for teachers in francophone schools in the Quebec education system.

Children ages eight to fourteen are the target audience because language skills can vary enormously within this age group, especially if we consider immigrant children that arrive in the school setting and have little to no knowledge of the English language. Also, because of their potential lack of vocabulary, these children may experience difficulties in communicating feelings and developing strategies that would help them make sense of the world and navigate situations with more confidence. The game would help children to not only expand their vocabulary, but also to equip them with strategies to contextualize and apply these emotion-related words to talk about themselves, about others, engage into conversations with their peers and show empathy. Another important aspect to consider about this age group is that being a pre-teenager or a teenager is already a challenge on its own. When children lack basic language and social skills to express their emotions, they may also experience a sense of loneliness and not-belonging, which could lead to mental health issues.

While the adult facilitator, who is a teacher or parent, is not the intended target audience, they will also benefit from their participation in the game. Through their facilitation of The Emotions Game, the adult will learn more about how youth in society understand and conceptualize different foundational vocabulary related to emotions. As a result, the game promotes learning across generations. According to Patrício & Osório (2012),

non-formal learning opportunities by intergenerational activities can contribute to outcome measures of wellbeing, to help assess life experiences and skills, increase comprehension between generations and have an impact positively on intergenerational relationships. (p.6)

**Description of the game: its purpose and strategy**

The Emotions Game has several objectives:

* to teach foundational vocabulary related to emotions through association with pictures, mimics, antonyms, and contextualization;
* to enable children to build knowledge together as they make sense of the words through different strategies;
* to teach children emotional intelligence; and
* to make children feel more comfortable talking about their own feelings.

According to Tominey, O’Bryon, Rivers & Shapses (2017), “children with higher emotional intelligence are better able to pay attention, are more engaged in school, have more positive relationships, and are more empathic”.

 The cards are visual aids for the players, where they make associations between images and words. The use of emojis makes it ludic for children and relates to something that most likely is part of their lives, since children that age either use emojis in their communication with peers or are aware of what emojis are and what the faces mean. The use of flashcards in teaching vocabulary to language students can help them learn new material quickly and act as an effective memory-aid (Lewis, n.d.). Another advantage of the emoji cards is that a teacher can use them in different ways to create their own activities, and not only play the game.

There are three different tasks to score points in the game. For each of these three tasks, the other player can earn points by guessing the emotion.

The first way to earn points is to play mime with a task called “ACT IT OUT.” The player needs to mime the emotion on the card they draw. There are benefits of using body movements in learning, especially for children and young adults. Kinesthetic activities can not only enhance vocabulary retention but can also help children develop emotional intelligence and social skills, which is another objective of the game. According to Grønbæk, Iversen, Kortbek, Nielsen & Aagaard (2007):

Body movement is a central learning area for children, but the body is not limited to being a basis for movement activities or an instrument to impact on the surrounding environment. Body and movement stimulate the sensory system, which gives the individual experience and knowledge of her/his own identity as well as the physical and social outside world. This sense perception makes a basis for reflection and abstraction - this way body movement also relates to cognition. The role and significance of the body movement in children’s learning processes is crucial, especially in the pre-school age, not only concerning health and exercise questions, but also sensuality, aesthetic, social and personal learning. (p. 364)

 The second way is called “SHARE IT,” and its main goal is for players to associate words to real-life situations. Successful completion of this task earns players more points because it is the more challenging for second and foreign language learners than “ACT IT OUT”, since they need to use several different strategies to convey meaning when they lack linguistic resources. The strategies they can potentially develop are paraphrasing, approximation, word coinage, and appeal for assistance (Kárpáti, 2017) All of them are allowed and players can ask the facilitator for clarification at any time, but children may not use French or any other native language to convey meaning so that they develop the other strategies mentioned above. Also, children will contextualize the words and use their own personal experiences to build language schemas, which improves the likelihood of knowledge transfer.

The third way to earn points is to associate emotion words to their antonyms in a task called “FLIP IT.” One player gets a card and says the antonym of the word. If the facilitator determines the answer is correct, the player gets a point. By associating words with pictures and their antonyms, children expand vocabulary and organize words in schemas that make sense for the individuals (Artino, 2008).

 As well, for all three tasks above, the player who did not draw the emotion card can earn points through “GUESS IT.” To earn points, this player must guess which emotion is being acted out, shared, or flipped. This ensures their active participation during the game, even when it is not their turn to draw a card.

 The game draws from concepts of behaviorism, cognitivism and social learning. The use of cards (stimuli) and assigning points to a correct response (consequences) reinforces the role of the learner as “being reactive to conditions in the environment” (Ertmer & Newby, 1993). This point is also reinforced by the “ACT IT OUT” activity, as players make associations between words and visual cues, in this case the emoji illustration and the mimic other players will perform. However, as mentioned in Ertmer & Newby (1993), behavioral principles are not enough to explain and guarantee language development. Although flashcards are widely used in language acquisition, and they work, knowing words and their meanings does not mean that children understand the social-interactive contexts these words should be used, nor guarantees that they will feel comfortable to speak about their emotions. Using behaviorist strategies ensures that the players know the meanings of the words and their antonyms, but it is only the first step to reach the final goal which is children know how speak about themselves and feel safe while doing so.

As a result, the game goes beyond a behaviourist approach; the core of the game relies on social learning and cognitivism. Learning a new language entails some social mediation (Salomon & Perkins, 1998), therefore the game is conceived to be highly interactive. Children are expected to engage with the content, their peers and the facilitator during the whole activity. The facilitator is there not only to organize the game and assist with questions, but also to make sure all players are actively participating and to provide a safe environment, because to talk about oneself in a language that they do not dominate can be a daunting task. Moreover, the game was created to “facilitate group dialogue that explores an element of the domain with the purpose of leading to the creation and shared understanding of a topic” (Richardson, 2003). That is, players are sharing and listening to their peers’ experiences and building meaning from this collaborative process. Players will have the opportunity to build knowledge together by making agreements to what each emotion means to them, while being exposed to a variety of situations where these emotions can be used. They contribute with their previous knowledge and learn from other players different ways to express the same emotions, thus promoting a deeper encoding of the material and a greater retention of the words’ meanings and their real-life applications. According to Richardson (2003):

“the development of meaning may take place within a social group that affords its individual members the opportunity to share and provide warrant for these meanings. If the individuals within the group come to an agreement about the nature and warrant of a description of a phenomenon or its relationship to others, these meanings become formal knowledge.” (p. 1625)

**Why is The Emotions Game unique.**

The Emotions Game is unique because it is not just a set of flashcards that children use as a reference tool to learn vocabulary. It is a complex and intentional cognitive-social learning experience, where players interact and learn through association of visuals and words, observation of peers, kinesthesis, and co-relation of card the content to their own experiences. By using all these different strategies, the aim is to ensure not only to improve vocabulary retention, but also to help children feel confident sharing their emotions whenever they need to in a new language.

Furthermore, The Emotions Game draws from principles from multiple learning theories, including behaviourism, cognitivism, and social learning, rather than just one learning theory. As such, The Emotions Game was designed intentionally in recognition that elements from different learning theories can be drawn and incorporated to produce meaningful, deep-rooted learning experiences for those who play. The Emotions Game also helps build bridges across generational and linguistic boundaries. As a result, this game helps to fulfill a larger social purpose.

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