

What if Education... Podcast

Playful learning

Monika Theron - Host

Play stimulates Flow State, which is also known as being "*In the Zone*" and a mindset in which students take more risks, which is ideal for learning. This was in an article I recently read that one of my colleagues wrote, and it inspired me to do this podcast called Playful Learning. I hope you enjoy it.

I'm joined by my wonderful colleague and co-host from the Centre for Innovation, Tanja de Bie as well as Carlijn Bergwerff and Liudvikas Pikutis. Welcome everybody... And I'd like you to introduce yourselves individually first, but we'll start with Tanja, so she's going to be the one that sets the example, I reckon.

Tanja: "Oh, goodness" ... Monika: "there's no pressure, Tanja."

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Yeah... So, my name is Tanja de Bie. I work at the Centre for Innovation where I'm an expert on learning communities and platforms. And I play a lot of games. Role-Playing Games ... love them.

Carlijn Bergwerff

My name is Carlijn Bergwerff and I am Assistant Professor at Leiden University at the Child and Education Studies. I'm trained as a child psychologist. I also work as a psychologist and now I do a lot of teaching in the clinical courses for master's students, bachelors students and my research interests focus on virtual reality.

Liudvikas Pikutis

My name is Liudvikas. I'm a student here at Leiden University. I do a Master of Psychology and my specialisation is statistics and methodology, and I do play a lot of games as well.

Monika Theron - Host

Nice... All right. Well, why don't we just begin with the first question? What is playful learning to you? There's a lot of terms that come out. One is gamification, the other one is game based learning, the other one is playful learning. Is there a difference between them? What do you think? Carlijn, would you like to take this one first?

Carlijn Bergwerff

Yeah, I'm not an expert on education but what I think is that playful learning is quite a broad term in which you acquire new knowledge, new skills, in a playful way, so it adapts to your own intrinsic motivation, or it is fun. And serious gaming or gaming I think is part of playful learning. So, in gaming, you should always have some storyline or a goal or rewards or feedback. And I think playful learning can be quite broad. ... So, in ways that you have your own curiosity or your own interest and appeal too.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Yeah, gamification to me is really a limited form of playful learning because it focuses on the rewards and on leading boards and batches you can earn. So that's more of extrinsic motivation than intrinsic motivation. And playful learning is wider indeed. Simulation games come to mind where students can feel free to fail and experiment, and that sort of triggers their creativity and doesn't even have to be a simulation game. There are many ways where you can build little puzzles, you can do an escape room and really trigger the creativity of students. I think it's an excellent form.

Monika Theron - Host

And Liudvikas, what do you think?

Liudvikas Pikutis

Oh ... what do I think?

Well, for me, gamification and playful learning felt like the same thing. So just use games to ... or a game type of environment to learn new knowledge or about certain things. So, I don't really know there's much of a difference.

Monika Theron - Host

OK, well, that's a good point. Exactly. I wonder how many students do know the difference and if it's just another one of those scenarios where people just use different names for the same thing?

Liudvikas Pikutis

Yeah, I would say it's like playful learning is just a part of gamification because, well, my way of checking out what's what is just Googling it. And I couldn't find a Wikipedia article for playful learning. So I was like, What is this? So, I just kind of assumed maybe playful learning is like a smaller branch of gamification that focuses on maybe something. Something that's very similar to gamification, which is slightly altered.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Yeah, I would argue sort of the other way round. So playful learning is the wide banner which contained games, but also escape rooms and other forms of creative ... creative behaviour. And gamification is just a very small part of that.

So serious games do not belong to gamification. Serious games are simulation games where you pretend to have a business together and you earn points by solving a business case, for instance, or you have Moot Court, which is also a simulation game where you pretend to be a lawyer in an actual court and defending a case. So those are all part of playful learning and gamification, just a very small part, in my view anyway.

Carlijn Bergwerff

Yeah, I agree with that. And I also think that playful learning can be quite broad, also including small assignments within a course or within a lecture. Or some playful way how to introduce yourself instead of *"this is my name, and this is my background"*, but also other ways to get to know each other. And I think it depends on teachers, on what you can introduce. But I think you should always keep in mind what is the purpose of it. But I think it's important to, ... yeah, trigger the curiosity or creativity of students.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Yeah, and the learning outcomes are important.

So, at Centre for Innovation, we always say, you know, *"design with the end in mind"*. So what do you want out of it? And then you can fit the entire design around it? Yeah, and it's the same with playful learning.

You really want to make sure that the students actually learn something ... But they learn by exploring new things. So, it's in an active way and also immerse yourself in the setting. And then they come, you know, ... you come really into the zone. We call that the flow state.

If it happens to you, you can be really, really intense and then new ideas are born.

Carlijn Bergwerff

I think that's also the best way to learn new things if you're really immersed in it. Because if you're just sitting in the lecture hall and waiting for the knowledge to come in or to be presented verbally, then you're not involved. And then it's harder to make it to your own knowledge or your own skills.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Yeah, it's a totally different mindset. ... It's not some passive consumption of knowledge. ... You go out there and you experiment. Because it's a game more or less, it's OK if you fail, you can do it again, you can even test stretch *"how does it work when I do that? What happens when I push the red button"*, right? Everybody wants to push the red button. [laughter]

Monika Theron - Host

And would you say this flow happens in VR? Or have you experienced it?

Carlijn Bergwerff

Yeah ... So, my research focuses on virtual reality, but I also applied VR in the education of students. And our students needed to learn how to have clinical conversations with patients. So, with a difficult teenager who is not willing to engage in a clinical conversation. And then students had found difficult to learn on how to react to that. But if you put on a VR headset and you are really immersed in the situation, then you're, ... yeah, ... it feels real and students feel like they acquired new skills, actually.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

I think the fun element and then really getting into the flow, I think that's irrelevant which kind of media you use.

Carlijn Bergwerff

But I think it depends, depends on your personality or on your capabilities. So, there's also what I see when I work as a child psychologist that some children find it quite hard to metalize or to be involved in in a book or to rethink of what happened yesterday. Whereas others can be really drowned in a book. And you cannot call them, and they do not see or hear anything except when you say, "who wants candy?" But yeah. ... [laughter]

So, I think it really depends on the person. I think that's also something important to keep in mind for us as teachers that we try out various media.

So, for some people or for some students, role play can be quite challenging or realistic, whereas for others the action needs to be in the VR headset just to have no distractions and be really immersed in it.

Monika Theron - Host

All right. Now, moving on to the second question, which is personal.

When did you start becoming interested in playful learning and isn't it usually applied in primary schools rather than higher education? Who wants to take this one?

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

I think playing is something for adults, not necessarily just for children.

So, we tend to think that, oh, it's playing is for kids and then we focused on primary education. But I think it's very suitable to teach adults, especially because of its creativeness, applying theory to practice and being able to fail while doing so ... it creates a very safe environment to fail, and I think

that's very suitable for a for a higher education, actually it's not something that doesn't belong into the whole university atmosphere.

And for me personally, I became involved with gaming just as a student while I was, I was studying history. And I've always used it as a hobby.

But when I came to work at Centre for Innovation, I immediately saw what the applications could be in everything that we're designing. And of course, we have all kinds of ... we have media people at the Centre of Innovation, we have instructional designers, some of whom have done digital media as their background. So, yeah, we really came together and discovered also that it was being used all over the university already. So Moot Court is not a new principle.

And you have ... Crisis Security Management uses a simulation game where they basically let students react to a disaster scenario. So that could be a terrorist attack on Schiphol, or it could be a laboratory that explodes. But then they learn how to react to that as professionals.

You are now the mayor. What would the mayor do? And it's incredibly good for skill building. So, there are many applications already in higher education. It's just that as a field, we're now sort of starting to formulate it better and find new applications, but already it's there are many best practices.

Monika Theron - Host

... But you would say that you were older when you started thinking about the concept of playful learning ... not at a younger age?

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

As a student, I started role-playing. And yeah, ... I was a good deal older than the students ... [laughter] ... But when I started at the Centre for Innovation, I suddenly saw, hey, you know, my hobby, ... I can actually apply it at work.

Monika Theron - Host

And for you Carlijn, did you have a “hey, learning can be playful.” ...

Carlijn Bergwerff

Yeah, it was when I first was teaching conversation skills with bachelor students, then ... yeah, the whole course involves teaching new skills. And then I thought, yeah, you need some way to engage students and to make it interactive. And what we had then was that students could watch videos of other psychologists talking to children, or they could do a role play, but then the others needed to play a four-year-old child. And then I saw it was quite hard for students to actually learn new skills on how to structure a conversation or how to deal with rebellion or aggression. And then I thought yeah, we need to find other ways. And then I thought, Oh, why won't we just use the methods we used when we were younger just to practice it yourself so... and I think it was quite new to me because I thought that yeah, when we're in a university, it's quite academic and we need to give the

student new knowledge. But I actually found out that the students should be engaged in it themselves. And that's also something I experienced quite recently when I was following a course myself. And then it was only three hours of listening to a teacher giving information and I was so bored. [laughter]

Yeah, also for adults or when acquiring new knowledge, it's important to find some playful ways to keep people interested and engaged.

Monika Theron - Host

Maybe there's a shift as well in attention in general of people. I mean, if you think about how much we used to be able to concentrate and sit down and read or listen versus now. ... I mean, if an email comes past or whatever and it's more than two pages long, then I'm sorry, I just don't have the time for it. Maybe it's the time. Maybe it's I don't know what it is? ...

Liudvikas Pikutis

I think it's the way we're getting information nowadays. It's like you just read, for instance, a newspaper, you just read the title or a lot of ... Online a lot of videos have become short to the point. Quick, fast material you can just suck it up and then you forget it in an hour. So maybe it is a bit of a shift of how we work as people.

Monika Theron - Host

And maybe playful learning is the way now. But again, we don't know. Maybe that might be also just a five-year thing, and then they have to figure out a new way. ...

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

I like the variation of it and ... and the way that it provides focus. Because when you are in the zone and you're immersed, you're totally dealing only with that issue and forgetting the world around you, basically.

So I think it really helps to provide focused. Which is what we need. With all the persuasive design of our telephones and our laptops, et cetera, and all the software like Facebook pushing notifications. Twitter ... there's a lot of distractions out there, and if you're in the zone you're focused.

Carlijn Bergwerff

I believe that in order to learn new things you need to make it part of yourself. So have your own ideas on it. So the reflection, I think, is a major part of it.

Monika Theron - Host

Thinking of an example of either a playful learning experience you had or created yourself, what was the most memorable? Did you have a moment where you're like, *"Wow, this is ... I'm learning something by playing?"*

Liudvikas Pikutis

Huh ... this was the question that I was a bit like ... afraid of. [laughter]

For me, it's a bit ... it's a bit weird because I never looked at it as playful learning. In university I was trying ... I had to study for exams, as all students have to do that. But I realize I just can't.

I really don't want to read this book. I really don't want to do this. And I thought, OK, let's change our approach here. So I decided to make it kind of like a game. And in a game, there are many different, I guess rewards that you get when you play a game that make you feel better about yourself ... or stuff like that. And I thought, OK, what if I read a chapter. I gained some imaginary points and then if I get enough points, I level up or something. So I may have made it kind of like a game. It didn't work ... [laughter]

Because after a while I was like, OK, what are these points? What am I doing here? But I had a question like: *"Why am I doing this? Why do I have to make a game for myself to learn something?"*

Yesterday, I watched the TEDTalk about playful learning, and this person she was talking about ... she was talking about the benefits of playful learning. And she said ... she named a bunch of benefits, and the last benefit was, *"it's fun!"*

And I thought... Wait, so school is not supposed to be fun, it's just ... set in stone. Let's make it fun by using playful learning. It really made me doubt the education system as a student would do because instead of studying for an exam you can doubt the education system, which makes you feel better because then if you fail in exam, you can blame it on the education system. [laughter]

So, OK, I'm talking about complete nonsense here...

Carlijn Bergwerff

No, I think you have a good point ... because you say it should be fun. But I think ... it's quite a term for an intrinsic motivation. And if you look at the intrinsic motivation from the self-determination theory, it should have some level of capability. I think that should be the same with education so that you have the feeling that you become more knowledgeable or have more skills.

And also other aspects of the self-determination theory are autonomy. So that you have your own choice. In education there is often no choice ... because you have ... just need to read this book or you need to sit down and listen to the teacher.

Especially for the Western society it's hard that you ... it's my choice. I want to decide, or I want to have influence on things. And I think we should increase that as teachers. That we give students choices on how to learn things.

Monika Theron - Host

Going back to the question. From the playful learning experience that you either had or created, is there one that was really memorable to you Carlijn?

Carlijn Bergwerff

Yeah, I thought of one. When I was studying psychology, I needed to apply behavioural therapy to two toddlers and the whole course was teaching me about behavioural therapy or conditioning, or how do human brain and behaviour work? And it was quite abstract. But then when I needed to teach toddlers how to play with others or how to put on your jacket and tie up your zipper... And then I needed to reflect on it, and then I actually found out what is actually behaviour training and how does it work if you give rewards or how can you teach children?

And then the way to experience it myself, that was so helpful. ... And then the theory ... yeah, was more clear to me. So there's something I really liked.

Liudvikas Pikutis

So you felt like when you did the ... when you actually worked with the toddlers you gained more knowledge instead of when you did it in theory right?

Carlijn: "Right".

OK.

Monika Theron - Host

And for you, Tanja, did you have any of those?

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Well, ehm I was thinking about when I was part of the emergency crew. So BHW ... Every big company, including a university, has groups in every building that are in charge of rescuing people if there is a fire or dealing with emergencies. And they train their people with scenarios at least once a year and preferably more often. And the purpose of that is to make it really smooth when there is an actual emergency so that you almost react on muscle memory.

You don't have much time to think you just do. That's really ... a really helpful way of training a very diverse group, because that's everything from the concierge to, you know, a fellow academic that has decided to become part of the emergency crew.

And they are all trained in this way. And it's very helpful. And there were a couple of real emergencies and that was very helpful for me to have gone through this training because I immediately knew when to call 911, when to run up the building, to check a ...

Monika Theron - Host

911, you say? [laughter]

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Yeah, that's American expression. ... I watch too much American TV. This is a problem. [laughter]
But you know ... we had a fire alert in a building and I've never gone up the stairs so fast. [laughter]
It turned out it was a failure of the system. There was not a real fire.
But so, you know ... it has a good ending this story.

Liudvikas Pikutis

When you did the practicals. Did it feel like an actual real fire? Was it in the same building?

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

It wasn't the same building, and there were people helping with the scenarios. So there were fake victims that you have to find and there are different departments that also help ... the fire department for instance help sometimes helps with these exercises to make sure that every building in Leiden or in The Hague has experienced emergency crews. So that's basically, you know, how it's organised in the Netherlands. But it's very helpful. That there are very realistic scenario and that you've dealt with them before so that in the moment of crisis, you don't have to think ... you just know what to do and you go for it.

Carlijn Bergwerff

And was it the same for the whole crew? Because, well, we learned that you have capability to imagine that you're actually ...

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Some academics struggle because they want to discuss, instead of do. So, they want to discuss what the best scenario is going forward, and I was like, "*Hello, our patient is dying!*" [laughter]
Yeah... So when there was a real emergency that became an issue.
So it's actually the MBO trained people that were much faster going into the action, then the academics.

Monika Theron - Host

So, thinking again of the experience of playful learning, have you ever experienced a bad one?

Liudvikas: *"That's a nice question"*. Tanja: *"Yeah."*

Yeah...doesn't mean that everything is always going to have a good ending, right? But you don't have to have one, but maybe there's something that comes to mind. Where you are like: *"nahhh ... this did not work out."*

Liudvikas Pikutis

No playful learning is the best thing. ... [laughter] ... It only has good consequences.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

I experienced an escape room or two that were somewhat boring.

... There was a commercial escape room that had historical mistakes in it and I was playing together with a history professor and both of us were going: *"This is not true. I want to speak to the manager."* ... you know.

So yeah. So that broke my immersiveness because I was detecting ... they were saying that Scheveningen was always part of The Hague. And I'm like ... Look, I was born in Scheveningen, it was never, always part of The Hague.

This is just ...

Monika Theron - Host

Maybe that was ... maybe that was the way to teach you, actually, because you remember that part very well, because it was incorrect. [laughter]

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

No, ... it wasn't a commercial game. It was, it was just wrong. But so we spent an hour talking to the manager and then we decided to have a round of beers and forget about the rest of the game.

[laughter] So that was a really bad experience.

If you're a designer, you can be sort of put outside the experience by seeing the flaws in the design and you're like, you know, hypercritical. Is that a word?

So that's sometimes a hindrance that you can be really, you know, too much about it.

Monika Theron - Host

Yeah. And for any of you two, did you have a bad experience that you can think of?

Carlijn Bergwerff

Well, it was not a bad experience, but when I was doing a bachelor and I had to play a serious game. But there were some technical issues and that was really ... yeah, putting me off.

And then, yeah, the goal was to make it more motivating, and then ... the computer crashed and then I thought, OK, leave it, I'm done with it.

And I think also the tolerance for imperfections can be quite low. Just like you said, if you're hypercritical or ... yeah, if someone tries to make something more fun than it should be fun and it should be easy and accessible to everyone....

Monika Theron - Host

That's a good point. The easy part ... because I myself have developed a few escape rooms and I have a tendency to make it really complicated because I think it's too easy in my mind. And then you suffer the risk of actually losing the audience because it's just too complicated.

Liudvikas Pikutis

That's a very interesting point, because ... yeah coming back to the TEDTalk, the person ... she was mentioning the complete opposite. It needs to be challenging. Because if it's challenging, then it's fun. We're excited to solve it. We want to figure out ... you know, we spent enough time.

But if it's too easy, we feel like I didn't do anything here. There was no point in me being here because it was just so simple.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

But it needs to be scaffolding. So, you know, levelling up slowly where you learn ... learning a skill. So if you start it at the highest level, then you know, then it's an unsolvable task. And then it's just frustrating. You know, I don't I don't have the skills to do this. ... What must I do with it?

Monika Theron - Host

I think the trick is also to figure out who your audience is. And that's always a really hard one, because if you're designing something for an audience you don't know, then it could go any which way.

Liudvikas Pikutis

Yeah, yeah, that's ... that's very important to begin. ...

Carlijn Bergwerff

I think it's quite individual, like everyone has his own capability level. So if it's too easy, then you're bored and you're not doing it and you're not challenge to learn. But if it's too hard, you're also put off. But if you make it a bit harder, then you're just outside your zone of comfort... This is known as the zone of proximal development. It's something you can learn with a little bit of help, so then the little bit of help should be available so that you feel that you can learn.

OK, well, this kind of brings me to the important things you should consider when you ... you know, create a playful learning either game or environment.

What to you are best practices or important elements to keep in mind?

Carlijn Bergwerff

Well, I think that's an important thing that it has a good level of capability or that you're able to do it for everyone. Also that you have some backup plan.

So for instance, when we use a VR and we see that some students find it too scary or they feel nauseous, you need to have some backup plan so that they can still practice it only using a different method.

I think also it's important to be clear about the goal and also to have a goal. So we're not just playing just because we want to entertain you ... we're not day-care. But we want to teach students something.

So for instance, also when you want to give them a test just at the beginning of the course, then you should mention it's OK to feel or it is important that you make this test, so that you know what you don't know yet, so that you can have a more targeted approach in studying for instance.

So I think you should communicate about your goals. I think these are a couple of important things.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Yes, yes ... The why is very important also in the way you communicate. That really engage people and then they will understand the how ... you know.

So ... no I agree with those steps and I also see it's very important that they're able to explore so that they can explore different strategies so that they have a bit of autonomy. I think those are important design elements.

Liudvikas Pikutis

Yeah. And I would also add, I think it's actually very important to do it as a group.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Yeah, you would learn extra skills. Also, collaborating, leadership... Yeah.

Carlijn Bergwerff

Or sometimes you have just an element of competition because... Now a lot of people use the app [Ommetje](#). That is an app that stimulates people to make a walk of 10-20 minutes each day. And then there's the ranking and then well... I see it, my own family. Many people are just walking because then they say, "*Yeah, I'm going up in the ranks*", ... or my brother can see that I got ten points or a medal. And I think that stimulates people to do stuff that ...

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Yuh ... we actually played it at the office ... about a year ago, I think Monika?
But yeah, we played it at the office. But then a funny thing happened that there were a couple of sort of people taking the leaderboard and they were, you know, they could no longer be beaten. And then people lost interest. So when the competition was really done and then the field had spread itself, then people lost interest. So it went well for about a month and then it sort of levelled off. And also because you can no longer see your own impact to a group.

Liudvikas Pikutis

I think a month is pretty good though. Like I would expect it to last a week at most. I feel like if I did it with my classmates, it would be a week and ...

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

You are talking about some pretty fanatic people here. [laughing]

Liudvikas Pikutis

Yeah ... but you could always reset the ranking.

I think that can be really helpful ... to say OK ... in competitive multiplayer games that's always the thing. They have a ranking system and after a certain time, they reset the rankings system.

Monika Theron - Host

I think that's a great system. ... I really do.

Liudvikas Pikutis

Also, then you can try again and try again and try again, because sometimes, yeah, if you see that OK ... I have to now walk 100 kilometres to reach the second place and not even the first and then the first one is another 100 kilometres; you're going to be like ... "No, no, no, I'm not. ... I'm done here!"

Carlijn Bergwerff

Yeah, it's the same thing of the capability. Then, you know, I'm not capable to ever come up to the second or first place. So, yeah, I think that theory of self-determination applies to many aspects of playful learning.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Yeah, I agree. And it's really interesting to see what really motivates people and beating people close to you, not just because they're in the office together, but also close in the ranking is engaging, whereas something that is out of your reach is ... yeah, you sign off.

Monika Theron - Host

So Question four is: When you're designing playful learning or a game in playful learning, and since Leiden University is quite an international university, do you consider cultures ... different cultures? Because I mean ... you know, sense of humour, for instance, doesn't apply to everybody? How does one then go about designing a playful learning environment or experience, taking all those different cultures into that design?

Carlijn Bergwerff

Yeah, I think that's a really important thing to consider. Because, for instance, if you want to stimulate creativity or developing your own thoughts or thinking of different approaches.

Yeah ... some cultures it's not thought or not respectful to have different ideas.

So I think it's really important to be aware of the potential differences.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Very Western ... the way that we just talked about it for the last hour.

Carlijn Bergwerff

Yeah. And yeah, maybe not even only restricted to different cultures, but also different personalities. If you do some aspects of playful learning within a course, you always need to have a safe environment that students feel comfortable. But I think yeah ... main priority for all teaching ... but it's a prerequisite for applying novel strategies or playful aspects.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Yeah. And there are different player types, right? So there's a famous quadrant which says that you have the people that are real competitors that they really want to win the game. Then you have people that are more like socialisers. They're in it for the social context and the conversation. You have people that like to create stuff and they may not be big talkers, but they create wonderful things that contribute to the entire game environment. And then you have the explorers that want to see every bit of the world find all the Easter eggs, you know.

And those are different types. So you can translate that also to a learning environment. This is the gaming ... the biology of ... [whispers] forgot his name, sorry. [laughter]

But it's an important ... but you can tweak that you know, to your learners.

And we've actually in MOOC development looked at. Are there enough engagement points for each of the learners based on their competitiveness or creativeness or the fact that they want to socialise? So that's why you have discussion forums, your massive open online courses so that people can learn together and be social, and then you have a lot of material for the Explorers that want to go through everything. So you can tweak it to a learning environment.

Monika Theron - Host

Yeah, and I quite like the idea of the community platform that is attached to it. So even if you've created a playful environment, the conversations that come out of it afterwards are probably more valuable, and you'll probably learn more from them than in the actual gaming environment.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Yeah, the reflection again, is very important, and that's why it is interesting to have either a chat or a discussion forum or some way to communicate with each other. It can take many different forms, but then it's not just for in-character actions, but also afterwards to reflect together with ... you know, *"what just happened?"* You know, *"this was a cool session"* or *"this was not a cool session ... I was totally board game master do better"*, you know. But the reflection is important.

Monika Theron - Host

Right, here's my favourite part of the show, which is the future scenario. Say you have been hired to create a course at a newly funded, very high tech and forward-thinking university that wants to incorporate playful learning in every course that they offer. What would be your first steps? What tools, games would you consider using? And what would your approach be to setting this up? Tanja?

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

Hah ... ehm ... Well, that would not be an easy task. First of all, I would make sure that there is technology, digital technology, available so that people can play it A-synchronously and ... good communication software. So they should have a chat. They should have good discussion forums that do not look like teams. And yeah, I would invest in that and convince my university to invest in that. And I know from personal experience that can be a trial, but ... After that, I would really start to think about what is it, what I want to teach, you know, what outcomes do I want to reach and what is suited for that?

So in some cases you might go for simulation. In other cases, you might just build an escape room or you build something else entirely.

I don't think ... if you implement playful learning in an entire university, you're going to come up with a cookie cutter system or whatever. You need to have some tools, obviously, but then it will still look very diversified and different, just like the university looks very diversified, different right now.

So I think it will have all kinds of different ways of playful learning.

Monika Theron - Host

And Carlijn, how would this university look like for you?

Carlijn Bergwerff

Yeah, I hope that it's not quite futuristic and abstract, but quite easy to implement in our own university.

Because with some colleagues we're trying to make a new program on how to teach students their reflective skills ... Because now often students only learn how to write a reflection report, which can be perceived as quite boring or as a more verbal task.

And I think it's very interesting to find out how can we teach them throughout the whole bachelor but using the playful element. And I think I'm quite inspired by all the things that were said today that we need to adapt to different learning styles or to different needs. But yeah, there are so many options.

So it's for me not the goal to implement digital aspect, but I think it can help to have a simulation game so that you learn to reflect on yourself or that you have some task that is quite stimulating creativity on ... Who are you and who are you as a psychologist or as a professional or?

Yeah. So I hope that we can implement this quite soon.

Monika Theron - Host

And as a student voice thinking about applying to this future university, what would be the most important criteria for you to decide to study there based on what the two of them just said?

Liudvikas Pikutis

That's a very tough question, because it's ... I heard a lot about the type of education, but I didn't really hear much about what the main goals in these types of universities.

What is the main thing that you're trying to achieve? And I think that's very important for me as a student to know what should I expect? I might expect certain types of different learning, but if it's still, you know ... I go into a virtual reality and I see a lecturer just talking to ... just presenting a lecture, it's still going to be just as boring as any other thing.

So it's very tough to say for me. And of course, the two universities that you both just mentioned, they sound very similar to me, but I think I would really prefer the digitalized version.

I would look for some things that are out of the ordinary because then it tells me that maybe this person is trying ... the people in this university are trying to create something new, something different, something they have probably realised certain problems in our current education and trying to change it instead of just going with the same same same same same same same.

You know, *"this university we have lectures from all around the world ... this university we also have lectures all around the world"*, and it's the same for everybody.

So I think my main point is to look for something that's out of the ordinary because it's still very difficult to judge a university by what they have, what they write. I would really need to be in it and experience it.

Maybe a trial lesson would be very interesting. To have a sort of like ... to experience it myself. But yeah, I think it's just the way I am personally.

Carlijn Bergwerff

Yeah, but how can you know that universities are doing things differently? I think one way is what you said is just to have some trial lesson. I think it's also good to look at the teaching staff in the way ... what their ideas are on education.

So for instance, in the past few years, a couple of teachers, including myself, got a grant from Comenius and it was for teaching innovation. And I think that's also a sign that the teachers are lecturers are thinking of how can we adapt our modern education and also make it new? And then it's not necessarily using digital media from ... in my situation, it was with using VR, but I think there are also examples of teachers who are using non-digital innovative approaches just to make it more appealing to students to learn.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

And let me just briefly mentioned the Leiden Teachers Academy, which is also, you know, full of people that are taking an innovative approach to education. So a university that that invests in education has initiatives like in deed the Comenius, which is from, I think it's from SURF or ... NWO right, something at the national level anyway. And a local initiative to promote innovation in education is a good sign that you're working with an open and creative university.

Monika Theron - Host

So the one thing that none of you said, which is interesting is ...Would you have every single lesson in a playful learning way? Would you actually imagine a university, where every single lesson that you get there, every course is done in a playful way? Is that maybe something that could

Liudvikas Pikutis

Yes, for sure. ... I think ...

Monika Theron - Host

Like ... could it backfire?

Carlijn Bergwerff

I think at least one element of playful learning because ... the situation of sitting for two hours or three hours, sitting and listening to a lecture, I think that's, it's a history.

Because now we know it's not adapting to student's needs. So there should be at least one element to trigger students attention or motivation or curiosity. And then it shouldn't be too much of a hassle if there are some nice ideas that all teachers could apply.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

And that's all about active learning and being in the zone and, you know, having this focus, which doesn't immediately make it gamified. I mean, it doesn't all have to be leader boards, et cetera. So that's not that's not what playful learning is about. It's more about sort of the broader issues.

Monika Theron - Host

Yeah. Yeah, I didn't. I didn't mean it like that. There's a board ... game board and scoring necessarily. But I'm just wondering, you know, if you had a university and everything is gamified ... you know, in a slight way or something like that, would that novelty sort of run out and then would people maybe miss? ... the old ways.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

But it's just an old way of thinking. Yeah. And there will always be people that sort of prefer the old ways. ... they like to be the performer in front of a crowd, et cetera.

Monika Theron - Host

Exactly... and you wouldn't apply to this university then, if it doesn't fit you either, I suppose.

Carlijn Bergwerff

But also, you need to keep innovating because, well, when you find out, oh, [Mentimeter](#) is very cool and the students are active, and then you do this for five lectures and then students are bored.

"Come on, we did it all the time. All right. I'll get my phone".

So then you need to find something else. So I think that is one of the downsides that is asked of the teachers, well to prepare something to, to engage students, but also to, yeah, improve or ...

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

And change their approach. So it means that you can't teach for ten years the same ... from the same lecture notes. It means that each year you have to sort of update your material and think about the

outcomes and how you're going to reach them. And is the target audience still the same? And if the target audience is changing, then your approach should change with it.

Carlijn Bergwerff

Yeah. And yeah, it's also for some teachers that ... it's quite hard, but also well, the work pressure is often quite high in academia so that's of course one thing to keep in mind.

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

That's an important point. I think this fantasy university that has only playful learning also has a staff that is not overworked that gets enough time to design their course every year again and again. Enough training enough, you know, professional support. It has a fantastic team of technologists that are very important to keep everything up in the air. So that asks a lot of investment in this university, not just of the platform, but of all the elements around it.

Liudvikas Pikutis

Yeah, I wanted to ... when you asked the question, I thought the first thing that came into my mind was actually to have no teacher at all ... The group, they have ... Of course, there is a teacher that says, OK, *“your guys are going to work on this, this is your assignment”* or something like that. And the students just work themselves as a group. So in this way, we can maybe lower the workloads of the teacher during class. Or maybe they can be a bit more relaxed, focused on maybe preparing the next class and just kind of overlook the students. But I thought maybe it would be interesting to have the students work it out themselves.

Carlijn Bergwerff

Yeah, I think that's an interesting approach, and I think that's also used in some universities. Problem director education... the English term. I think it is a quite interesting approach, but also that requires the training of teachers how to do that ...

Tanja de Bie – Co-host

And it also means that the university has to reward teachers in a different way. So it's all about, you know, not just awarding the best researcher, but also making sure that teaching is a viable career where you can score points.

So it really asks a lot from a change in approach and a change in investment.

Liudvikas Pikutis

I think that's why this question is very futuristic, like because we're thinking about playful learning while applying ideas that were from a very long time ago. And we're thinking. These don't match.

Monika Theron - Host

Yes. And also, the staff ... the staff that will be at that university need to learn the futuristic way of teaching now so that they can accommodate the students of that future.

Carlijn Bergwerff

Yeah, and I think the pandemic was, in that sense, quite interesting that in the past two years, we as teachers needed to be flexible and to adapt to new strategies and to get a lot of support from technical staff and I think that is a promising part.

I saw a lot of beautiful new initiatives and also, yeah, qualities of teachers that they showed or had. It was nice. But yeah, the downside is it costs a lot and not everyone is open to that or has capabilities for that.

Liudvikas Pikutis

Yeah. If we just completely get rid of our idea of what a student is and think up at the ideal student that we would like to have. And it's not a type of student that reads all the books or listens to the lectures, raises their hand. But maybe we should get rid of all of that and focus on a different way. A student that is not stressed, they're having fun. And maybe that way we can then develop a new type of learning, a new type of university that focus on that type of student. But maybe this type of student will be perfect for playful learning environments.

Monika Theron - Host

So perhaps now you feel inspired to look into playful learning. If you haven't already. Well, maybe you at least have a better understanding of what playful learning is and how it can be used. Either way, I want to thank my guest speakers for their inputs and of course, you the listeners for joining.

If you have any questions or comments, you would like to forward to me or the guest speakers today, or if you would like to join me on the Next What if Education podcast.

Please send us an email at c4i@sea.leidenuniv.nl and let's make it happen.