Fun and Games in Nursing Staff Development
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ABSTRACT
Games can make learning fun and stimulating. This learning strategy is particularly useful in providing factual information to orientees. This article describes a game developed to orient staff nurses and unit clerks at the Calgary General Hospital in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, to agency policies and procedures.

The use of gaming in nursing staff development has a brief history. Nursing education has largely relied on traditional methods of instruction such as lecture, independent reading, audiovisual presentations, or self-paced individualized instruction. Games, however, have been used as a teaching and learning strategy for centuries. A review of the history of gaming as an instructional approach provides an example as early as the 1600s, when the game of chess was used as an abstraction of war to teach battle tactics (McLean, 1978; Ullione, 1983). In today’s world, computer-based and other games, available to most disciplines, have found a distinct niche as an instructional approach.

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POLICIES AND PROCEDURES: FUN AND GAMES?
At the Calgary General Hospital, a game modeled after the television show Jeopardy! was developed to review key policies and procedures. To play the game, orientation participants are divided into three or more teams depending upon the size of the group. Teams are given a list of the various policies and procedures that they could be asked about during the game. Direction as to the use of policy and procedure manuals and how to locate the information is provided. The learners are then instructed to review all of the information in any manner they see fit over a one-hour period.

The game involves six question categories. Each category contains five questions with values ranging from 10 to 50 points; more difficult questions have the higher point values. Questions are taken directly from the policies and procedures covered in that particular category. Each team selects a category and point value in turn. As facilitator, the orientation leader asks the questions. The team has one minute, using all resources available to them (notes, manuals, etc.) to provide a correct response. The facilitator monitors the time. If the team is not able to correctly answer the question in one minute, the question is opened to other teams. If no team is able to respond, the points are forfeited. The actual game takes about one hour. A small prize is awarded to the winning team members. Black pens have been the most frequently used prize as all charting on the patient’s record must be completed with black ink. This helps to reinforce the information that is learned during the game.

The game provides an interesting and fun way for new staff to become familiar with important information, policy and procedure manual format and content, and each other. When games are carefully developed and constructed, they are valuable educational tools.
GAME DEVELOPMENT

Games are generally defined as a contest among players operating under rules for an objective (Cooper, 1979; Walljasper, 1982; Walts, 1982). Games used in education are designed to achieve desired learning outcomes. The flowchart in Figure 1 outlines a logical sequence of events in game design.

As with any instructional strategy, gaming begins with the identification of a problem or learning need. During orientation at the Calgary General Hospital, key policies and procedures are immediately pertinent for new staff nurses and unit clerks. Reading numerous policies and procedures is tedious and does not inspire interest or motivate new staff members to learn the information. The content and the self-directed nature of the exercise do little to encourage retention of important information.

After clearly identifying the problem, it is essential to develop the objectives. At the Calgary General Hospital, the following objectives were determined:

- Learners will be able to state the nursing policies and procedures for dress and grooming regulations, illness and leave-of-absence procedures, smoking policy, consent policy, documentation protocols, and support services at the hospital.
- Learners will identify where the policies and procedures may be found for review in the hospital.
- Learners will interact in a group situation with other orientees.

Having clarified objectives, the next step is to decide if a game is the most appropriate instructional strategy. No single teaching method presents an answer to meeting all learning objectives in the most effective and efficient manner. For example, if the information can be presented thoroughly and efficiently in an interesting manner using a combination of lecture, discussion and audiovisuals, the time investment needed for game development may not be warranted. As such, alternatives should be selected. Advantages and disadvantages of using gaming as a teaching strategy should be considered (Figure 2).

If a gaming strategy is deemed to be appropriate for the content area and objectives, choosing a game format is the next decision. Games may take many forms. For example, are the objectives primarily cognitive or affective? If the objectives are affective in nature, focusing on feelings and attitudes, then simulations are likely most appropriate because they make certain social processes explicit that may be implicit in our everyday lives (Ullone, 1983). Trivia games or crossword puzzles may be most useful if the goal is to review material. If the objective is solely for learners to become acquainted with one another, an ice-breaker type of introduction may be employed.

It is most important that the chosen format lend itself to achieving the stated objectives. A game format was chosen to review key policies and procedures during the Calgary General Hospital orientation pro-

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**Figure 1.** Flow chart for game design and implementation.
FIGURE 2
Advantages and Disadvantages of Gaming

- **Advantages**
  - Useful method to introduce a topic
  - Stimulates learner involvement
  - Aids in factual knowledge acquisition and retention
  - May simulate real work problems
  - Encourages summarization and synthesis of information
  - Increases interaction between learners
  - Stimulates interest in learning
  - Useful to evaluate learner synthesis of information
  - Provides a change of pace in a long program
  - May provide an opportunity for learners to learn from each other

- **Disadvantages**
  - May not suit all learning styles
  - Learners may find competitive aspects personally threatening
  - Requires a significant investment of time
  - May be costly to purchase or develop
  - Identical game may not be appropriate for reuse with the same group of participants since the content of the game would become familiar
  - May not be able to evaluate synthesis of information for all learners if game involves team effort

FIGURE 3
Game Suitability Check List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can the game be completed in the time available?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the placement of the game appropriate in relation to the program?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the physical space conducive to game playing?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does experience with the learner population indicate receptivity to gaming?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the anticipated group size suitable for the game format chosen?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is time available to locate, adapt, or develop the game?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the game require supplies, are they available and are they affordable?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the game reusable?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the game require preparatory and cleanup time?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Lewis, Saydak, Mierzwia & Robinson, 1989)

gram because it could accommodate a variable number of participants. A game also provides opportunity for interaction and can be developed so as to require hands-on use of policy and procedure manuals. This allows learners to become familiar with the format and content of the manuals.

Having selected an appropriate gaming format, availability of resources influences future action. The Suitability Check List in Figure 3 may be useful in this regard (Lewis, Saydak, Mierzwia, & Robinson, 1989). If resources are lacking, it may be necessary to reconsider the game format or to select an alternate teaching strategy.

Provided the game format fits with the resources available, educators must consider whether the game requires prerequisite knowledge. If so, it will be necessary to incorporate a teaching component to provide the necessary information. In the case of the Jeopardy! game, it was apparent that the learners would need to have prerequisite knowledge of hospital policies and procedures before they could effectively play the game. As a result, a one-hour self-directed review period was provided.

Game construction varies in complexity depending on the nature of the game. Construction of board games may require carpentry assistance. Alternatively, a mere blackboard and chalk may suffice. Several items were required to construct our game. A list of policies and procedures to be reviewed was typed and copied for each participant. Laminated and color-coded category titles and point indicators were produced in the hospital reprographics department. Ten copies of each of the manuals to be reviewed were acquired.

Implementation of a newly developed game requires attention to several points, for example, ensuring that the physical environment is fully prepared. The most facilitative approach is to imagine the game being played and to arrange the room accordingly. This can take a surprising amount of time. Small considerations such as preparing individual player packages cut down on time requirements. A dry run of the game using volunteers or anticipated game facilitators can assist in “debugging” the game prior to actual use. For our game, about 10 minutes were needed to set up the board and the room. The same amount of time is required for cleanup.

It is the facilitator’s responsibility to ensure that the game runs smoothly. Setting the scene for success by conveying enthusiasm and a positive attitude as the purpose, objectives, and rules of the game are briefly introduced is crucial. It is also important to observe
TABLE
Game Evaluation Questionnaire Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy games as a method of learning</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The game covered key policies and procedures</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing a game is a comfortable and nonthreatening way to learn</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to see more games used to promote learning</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n = 40

closely players' reactions and behaviors during the game. These observations may lead to an intervention such as clarifying rules or a debriefing discussion. The facilitator should also regulate the pace of the game, slowing it or speeding it, or even ending the game. In our game, discussion often occurs surrounding individual game questions. A few key points should be remembered:

- Let the learners make mistakes because sometimes more can be learned from mistakes than from correct responses.
- Answer questions briefly because play will stop while you are talking.
- Focus on regulating the rhythm, observing, and listening (Joos, 1984; Walljasper, 1982).

A debriefing period in which the information and the experience are analyzed is essential to game playing. Skill as a discussion leader is useful during debriefing. Valuable evaluation occurs during debriefing if questions like the following are posed: What would you change in the game? What did you like most and least about the game? What other uses might there be for this game?

The evaluation conducted at Calgary General Hospital involved debriefing and short questionnaires. The results of a simple questionnaire are presented in Table 1. Responses were consistently positive. A small percentage of respondents felt that gaming was a somewhat threatening teaching method. The evaluations highlighted the need for the facilitator to be sensitive in this regard through close observation and by encouraging team members to support one another.

In reviewing the effectiveness of meeting the objectives, one additional modification was made to the Jeopardy! game. Originally, the list of policies and procedures to be reviewed included exact directions on where the information could be found in the manuals. One of the objectives of the learning session is that learners will be able to state where the policies and procedures may be found for review, so it seemed reasonable that they be given practice finding such information. Thus, exact information on locating the policies and procedures was deleted to enhance meeting this objective.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the challenge to educators is to develop a wider repertoire of teaching methods. It is important to reexamine content that may be amenable to gaming strategies. Games may provide a fresh approach to learning content that was previously found to be boring or tedious. Games can be used to attain various learning objectives. They must, however, be carefully planned.

REFERENCES


