

# The Potential of Phenomenological Vignettes to Discover Play Experiences in a Game with Perspectives on Teacher Education and EduSpace Lernwerkstatt

## Il potenziale delle vignette fenomenologiche per scoprire esperienze ludiche in un gioco con prospettive sulla formazione degli insegnanti e su EduSpace Lernwerkstatt

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### ABSTRACT

In this article we inquire after the intersection of play and learning, drawing on philosophical and pedagogical foundations to explore the tension between play's inherent purposelessness and its application in educational contexts. Through a phenomenological study using phenomenological vignettes we delve into pupils' lived experiences with the board game *The Next Generation of Changemaker* (NGoCM) in a fourth-year secondary school setting in South Tyrol. These vignettes reveal the emergence of unique play spaces that extend beyond the game design or pedagogical intentions, calling for a reflective approach to game-based learning. The analysis highlights both the challenges, such as resistance to ludified learning and collaborative play, and the opportunities for fostering essential 21st-century skills. With the findings we aim to contribute to a discourse on the development of a reflective approach to game-based learning and the integration of gaming materials into teacher education within the framework of the EduSpace Lernwerkstatt.

In questo articolo indaghiamo sull'intersezione tra gioco e apprendimento, attingendo a fondamenti filosofici e pedagogici per esplorare la tensione tra l'intrinseca mancanza di scopo del gioco e la sua applicazione nei contesti educativi. Attraverso uno studio fenomenologico che utilizza vignette fenomenologiche, approfondiamo le esperienze vissute dagli studenti con il gioco da tavolo *The Next Generation of Changemaker* (NGoCM) in una scuola secondaria di quarto anno in Alto Adige. Queste vignette rivelano l'emergere di spazi di gioco unici che si estendono oltre la progettazione del gioco o le intenzioni pedagogiche, richiedendo un approccio riflessivo all'apprendimento basato sul gioco. L'analisi evidenzia sia le sfide, come la resistenza all'apprendimento ludico e al gioco collaborativo, sia le opportunità per promuovere competenze essenziali del XXI secolo. Con i risultati, intendiamo contribuire a un dibattito sullo sviluppo di un approccio riflessivo all'apprendimento basato sul gioco e sull'integrazione di materiali di gioco nella formazione degli insegnanti, nell'ambito dell'EduSpace Lernwerkstatt.

#### KEYWORDS

Play, Game-based Learning, Teacher Education, Phenomenological Vignettes  
Gioco, Apprendimento basato sul Gioco, Formazione degli Insegnanti, Vignette Fenomenologiche

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## 1. Introduction

Playing and learning have been intertwined for centuries (Farné, 2020). The recognition of play as a pedagogical method in the 17th century has ever since evolved into contemporary pedagogical concepts such as edutainment, game-based learning, and game applications like serious games and simulation games (Blötz, 2015), as well as the transfer of game mechanisms and elements into non-game contexts (gamification) (Deterding, 2011). These concepts are based on the structural linkage between learning and play processes (Einsiedler, 1982; Popp, 1990) and the recognition of the educational function both fulfill (Farné, 2020; Polito, 2000). However, the “ludification” (Weiß, 2024, p. 12) of pedagogy understood as making pedagogical activities playful or converting pedagogical actions into a game – which highlights the notion that pedagogy requires play – is critically viewed by educators as a hidden attempt of dominance, a camouflage of pedagogical practices, or a disguising tool for labor (Popp, 1990; Weiß, 2024). It is particularly emphasized that the potential of play is lost by pedagogization (Weiß, 2024). If, however, play or game is instrumentalized and limited to being an introduction or just integrated into culture in our case an intentionally driven learning culture the fact is ignored that the spaces opened by play can contain subversive moments and challenge creativity by which the understanding of the self and the world can be transformed (Weiß, 2020). And that in turn is an original goal of education, in the German terminology *Bildung* (Grassinger et al., 2022).

In play, as in educational history Kant (1790/2009) demonstrated, humans are without interest or, as Schiller (1795/2005) emphasized, they are indifferent and play itself is purposeless as Huizinga (1940/2023) and Caillois (1958/2001) highlighted. This raises the question of how play, characterized by its autotelic nature – being justified by itself and not serving another purpose and by its voluntary nature (Huizinga, 1940/2023) plus principle of pleasure (Farné, 2020), can be discussed for educational purposes, which are generally intentional (Trembl, 2000) and therefore mostly predetermining. One option to approach the discussion is the distinction between ludic activities – playful activities – and ludiform activities – game-like activities – that are supposed to attract and be pleasing but whose goals lie outside the game and are usually determined by the game inventor (Visalberghi, 1958; Staccioli, 2021). This would already allow games used in a school context to be classified as game-like activities. Another approach is to distinguish between play and game as different from educational games, in which the concepts of playing and learning are clearly outlined towards learning:

“Play(ing)’ in relation to the educational game mostly means engaging in rule-based parlour games, as this type of game serves as a template for the majority of educational game forms. In this case, ‘learning’ almost always means the acquisition and, much more frequently, the practice and consolidation of basic school subject-related knowledge, skills, and abilities that are relevant for school

performance assessment and ‘school success.’” (Popp, 1990, p. 306)<sup>1</sup>.

When a game is implemented in a manner that takes both seriously, its playful and educational dimensions, it can foster an individual play experience (Popp, 1990). To ensure this benefit, Gabriele Weiß, an educational scholar, frames it as a categorical imperative for play: “Never use it [play] merely as a means, but always also as an end in itself!” (Weiß, 2024, p. 19). This viewpoint induces to explore how games in the educational field navigate within the continuum between *paidia* and *ludus*, as it is conceptualized by Caillois (1958/2001). At one end of this continuum lies the structured essence of the game (*ludus*), while at the other end resides complete free improvisation and fictionality (*paidia*) (ibid.).

## 2. The research study

The presented phenomenological study is part of a three-strand study (see Morselli and Schumacher & Kansteiner in this volume) about the application of the board game *The Next Generation of Changemaker* (short *NGoCM*) and pupils’ experiences playing it. We display exemplarily to what opportunities and challenges can emerge from games used in an educational context.

The boardgame *NGoCM* is designed with the educational aim to foster 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. They are essential in a society in which information and communication technologies (ICT) permeate nearly all aspects of life – from work, consumption, and social interaction to collaborative innovation – while also playing a role in addressing global challenges such as poverty, health crises, and environmental degradation (Griffin et al., 2012). By playing the game pupils should develop the skills such as “to respond flexibly to complex problems, to communicate effectively, to manage information dynamically, to work and create solutions in teams, to use technology effectively, and to produce new knowledge, continuously” (ibid., p. V). These skills are largely in parallel with the eight lifelong learning competencies identified by the EU (2019), including literacy competence, personal, social and learning-to-learn competence, citizenship competence, as well as cultural awareness and expression competence. Among these eight competencies is entrepreneurship competence, to which the game is linked by its foundation in the principles of Sustainable Entrepreneurship Education (BMDW, 2020).

### 2.1 Initial point: Framework of the research – the EduSpace Lernwerkstatt

In kindergarten and school teaching games represent a larger share of learning material provided in both, teacher driven lessons and self-organized open learning settings (Forkel, 2009; see for critical reflection

<sup>1</sup> All quotations from non-English sources have been translated by the authors.

Peschel, 2002). Accordingly, in university EduSpaces for teacher education like the Lernwerkstatt at the Free University of Bozen, located at the Faculty of Education on the Brixen campus (<https://www.unibz.it/de/faculties/education/eduspace-lernwerkstatt/>), manifold games can be found and borrowed for teaching reasons. They mostly are presented as good practice examples for diversity-oriented educational settings. Overall, at the EduSpace Lernwerkstatt materials at offer range from analog materials inspired by the pedagogical ideas of Friedrich Froebel, Célestin Freinet, Loris Malaguzzi or Maria Montessori up to commercial games that can be didactically applied as well as digital learning materials. The EduSpace Lernwerkstatt also serves as an open learning environment within initial and further teacher education, and users gain the opportunity to reflect on pedagogical and didactical issues related to the materials.

For the further development of the EduSpace Lernwerkstatt, the responsible team conducts empirical research to ensure the enhancement in an evidence-based manner and within a consistent connection between research, theory, and practice. Therefore, the usage, potential challenges and requirements or effects of available material is investigated –like the board game *NGoCM*. The findings will be reflected towards individual, group-based, and whole-class learning and will furthermore initiate research-based professionalization opportunities for student teachers and experienced teachers in in-service training.

## 2.2 Research design and methodology

Phenomenology, as a philosophy of experience, seeks to approach the world and various phenomena as they are given in experience. It is a tyle of thinking and an exploratory attitude that does not focus on what things are, but on how they appear to the human senses and in consciousness. (Merleau-Ponty, 2005) At the heart of most phenomenological approaches lies a descriptive orientation, in which description serves as a method for the intersubjective examination of experience (Brinkmann, 2019). In the present phenomenological study, we chose an empirical approach within phenomenological educational science – namely vignette research (Agostini et al., 2024) – to capture the experiences of fourth graders playing the board game *NGoGM* during a project week at a secondary school with an economics profile in South Tyrol.

The phenomenological vignette is a qualitative research instrument that is methodologically grounded in Husserl's (1973) descriptive phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty's (2005) phenomenology of the body, Waldenfels' (2024) responsive phenomenology, and more particularly approaches from phenomenological educational science (Lippitz, 2019; Meyer-Drawe, 2012). Vignettes are short and concise narratives characterized by an evocative and aesthetically attuned writing style (Schratz et al., 2012). The researcher records scenes or co-experienced moments as notes, or even early drafts of a so-called raw vignette, directly in the field. Subsequently, he/she, as soon as possible, shapes the raw vignette or initial draft and enriches it

in a multi-step process first individually, then in pairs or within a (research) group: The recorded co-experiential moment is linguistically condensed and validated intersubjectively, leading to further refinement of the vignette. Its intuitive clarity and the appropriateness of each word are continuously examined until it fulfills its aim to make the shared experience as tangible as possible for readers, (Agostini et al., 2023).

As *resonating bodies of sound* (Mian & Agostini, 2025) these vignettes not only preserve fleeting experiences by language, making them accessible for reflection, but also strive to resonate with the reader's own experience. By aiming to create resonance, they highlight the qualitative and pathic dimensions of experience, rendering them visible and tangible. This is achieved by capturing moods, subtle gestures, tonalities, and nuances that convey the co-experiential atmosphere, accessible primarily to the gaze involved, yet withdrawn from those partaking in the experience. Drawing on Lippitz (2019), the phenomenological claim of the vignettes is an attempt to reflexively engage with lived experience – conceived as a meaningful, largely pre-predicative, that is, pre-reflective event – in order to raise awareness of the operative structures of meaning that shape the human-world-relationship (Merleau-Ponty, 2005). By undermining the dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity, the vignettes express an understanding of human beings and the world as co-existent, in which the perception of the world and of things becomes visible as “a resumption, a reprise, in which the meaning of things, which they play to us through impression, is first of all made to appear” (Meyer-Drawe, 2012, p. 117). As an exemplary description (Lippitz, 2019), the vignette is

“an act of interpretation that must be communicatively validated and intersubjectively scrutinized, with its plausibility grounded in our concrete experiences. Thus, intuition and exemplary description are, in a sense, ‘on probation’. Phenomenological knowledge of essences does not represent the truth of ‘enlightened’ philosophers but rather offers suggestions for interpreting experiences in which we are always already involved. In this sense, phenomenology remains an ongoing interpretation of communicatively structured experiences” (p. 328).

Vignettes function as a form of initial reflection like leaning back into pre-linguistic experience (Mian & Zadra, 2024) and open up further reflective access through successive interpretations. This can happen by their phenomenological analysis, the so-called phenomenological *vignette-readings* (Schratz et al., 2012). While vignettes attempt to give form to the co-experiential moments – to wrest a certain meaning from the excess of meaning that is in a situation – the opposite happens reading them: The meaning that was tamed by language is released. Different possible ways of experiencing the experiences of those involved in the captured situation are explored, thereby revealing the richness and complexity of the experience. A plurality of meanings arises in this process in relation to the position of the readers, their interests, and contexts, as well as in alignment with spatial-temporal, intersubjective, and (im)material structures (Brinkmann, [ca. 2023]). Accordingly, vignette readings

are not concerned with reconstructing a single truth, but with indicating contingent moments of experience. It is a matter of “pointing to” (Finlay, 2009, p. 11) – and thus of directing one’s gaze or attention “in a particular direction – into an open space that can be filled out in different ways” (Gadamer, 1967, pp. 10–11). This can pave the way for more openness, sensitivity, and sensibility, and fosters a reflexive stance, based on which habits of perception and perceptions are scrutinized (Agostini et al., 2023; Mian & Zadra, 2024).

In the following, we present two exemplary vignettes from a larger corpus (8) of collected and processed vignettes, which were created during the above-mentioned project week along with their corresponding readings. Although readings refrain from reductive explanations and do not aim to provide definitive interpretations or claim to objectivity, yet they reveal a reflective generality rooted in concrete enactment and something general can be discovered within the particular (Lippitz, 2019). Thus, they can serve as a starting point for discussions among (future) practitioners about possible implications for practice (Agostini et al., 2024). In this sense, the vignettes and their readings presented below appear as examples of how to reflect on the didactical potentials and challenges of using educational games in schools.

### 3 Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1 Two phenomenological vignettes and their readings – (potential) play spaces

##### 3.1.1. Vignette 1: Samuel, a team name and the red die

*Project week in Year 4 at an economic oriented secondary school – Samuel sits behind his half of the table with his legs crossed and an expressionless face. He leans back in his chair with his arms crossed in front of his chest and his feet tapping lightly. His eyes follow the researcher Mrs. Alba who is pacing back and forth in front of the digital board explaining the board game ‘The Next Generation of Changemaker’. “And give yourselves a team name,” she calls out to the room at the end of her presentation. Instantly, Samuel rolls his eyes. A barely audible “Tss” escapes him. Almost simultaneously, he stretches out his arm and quickly grabs the game that Mr. Moser, the economics teacher, hands in his direction. He swiftly opens the box and pulls out the board game. Without giving it a second glance, he puts it aside. A red dice peeks out from underneath. With one swift motion, he grabs it and begins to roll it – a smile plays at the corners of his lips. (written by Stephanie Mian, 2024)*

##### Vignette reading:

In the fourth year of a secondary school specializing in economics, the project week offers an opportunity to engage in the game *The Next Generation of Changemaker* designed “with the aim of developing innovative ideas and business models” (Lindner et al., 2020, p. 6), taking “the environment and society into

consideration as well as feasibility” (ibid.). It thereby aligns with Sustainable Entrepreneurship Education (BMDW, 2020), which has been identified by the European Commission (2019) as one of the eight key competences for lifelong learning and as such in parallel with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Samuel sits with his legs crossed, leaning back in his chair at his side of the table. His posture seems relaxed and yet something seems to be moving him: He is constantly tapping his foot lightly. Is it a sign of tension, excitement, expectation, or nervousness? His face is expressionless, his arms crossed. Is he bored or annoyed? Leaning back in his chair arms crossed, foot tapping, with his eyes he follows the researcher. Samuel seems to be waiting, distanced from what is happening at the front of the digital board. He observes what is happening from a distance. However, there is a contact, a connection: His gaze follows the researcher, Mrs. Alba, as she is pacing back and forth in front of the digital board explaining the board game. What can he expect today during the school project week?

Arriving at the end of her presentation, Mrs. Alba calls out into the room “And give yourselves a team name”. Samuel rolls his eyes and a barely audible “Tss” escapes him. Doesn’t he want to work in a team? Did he have a bad experience with group work at school? Or does he just not feel like choosing a team name? Does he consider this to be superfluous? Does the rolling of the eyes and the barely audible “Tss” express a confirmed expectation? Did Samuel discover that the opportunity to play the board game during the project week was a “‘disguised’ work assignment” (Popp, 1990, p. 307)? Did Samuel already suspect a pedagogical manipulation being ‘invited’ to play the boardgame, the camouflage of didactic intentions in the project week (Weiß, 2024)? If the child notices this, the teacher becomes a spoilsport. In any case, Samuel obviously does not want to express his displeasure loudly – or does he know that this is undesirable in the context of school and might even be sanctioned? The “Tss” is barely audible and yet it has escaped him.

But almost simultaneously, Samuel reaches out for the game: It appeals to him, he wants it and beats the others to it in his grasp. The quick grasp, the swift opening of the box expresses a desire, an attraction that the game seems to exert on him. He pulls out the game board, but it doesn’t appeal to him, it doesn’t entice him to look at it any further. After the first glance he puts it aside and doesn’t even give it a second. What is the goal of his single-minded action? What is Samuel hoping to find in this board game? It is a red dice in which Samuel seems to have found what he is looking for. The un-covered dice, Samuel begins to play with, captures him and releases the tension built up by the rapid movements. Speaking with Caillois (1958/2001), we see a first expression of *paidia*, the “spontaneous manifestations of the play instinct” (p. 28), which articulates itself as a “principle of entertainment, of turbulence, of free improvisation and carefree development, through which a certain uncontrolled fantasy is expressed” (Caillois, 1958, p. 84)? Is it the throwing of the dice, the playful movement, the activity that appeals to Samuel and means for him “an impulsive and easy recreation” (Caillois, 1958/2001, p. 28)? As Stieve (2008) states, things appeal to us: They challenge us, invite us to act, and have the

power to evoke emotions. What, then, does the dice offer to Samuel? What meaning does he gain from it? Does Samuel attempt to roll a specific number, thereby developing a taste for the arbitrary effort that characterizes the gameplay of *ludus* in contrast to that of *paidia* (Caillois, 1958)? Does a subversive element flash up here (Weiß, 2020), one in which Samuel not merely mimetically repeats his situational, institutionally bound relation to self and world, but rather evokes a form of creativity by which he transforms both, himself and the school environment, experiencing them anew and in another way? Or does he perhaps remember his childhood and the games he used to play and tries to rekindle that familiar feeling through his interaction with the dice?

In any case, Samuel, in his response to the dice, has created his own space: a playful space set apart from everything else including the game which expresses itself as a perceived play space in Martin's smile.

### 3.1.2. Vignette 2: Tea, herbs, engraved boxes – “Oh shit”

*It is project week in the fourth grade of a secondary school with economic profile. Tina, Martin, Daniel, and Tom are sitting around the board game “The Next Generation of Changemaker” developing their start-up idea: an organic farm with a delivery service.*

*Nicki, the only one standing next to the table, shares her vision: “...that would be in the summer, and in the winter, we make –” She pauses artfully, then continues more softly, a gentle smile on her lips, “tea,” accentuating the word with a gentle gesture of her hand in the air. “With our own home-grown herbs”, Tina blurts out. They catch each other's eye across the table and grin at each other. Tom, who as Chief Documentation Officer is busily taking notes, writes without pause, his head bent over his notepad. He pushes his chin slightly forwards and back again and says with an affirmative nod of his head and an approving tone of voice: “These are ideas.” Meanwhile, Tina, the Chief Process Officer, moves the token to one space, draws the next card, and reads out loud: “How would an artist change the idea?” All eyes are on the card. Silence. No movement. Suddenly, Martin looks up – and says with hatching hand movements: “She engraves the boxes and then there's a deposit”. Tom grins, shoots a quick glance at Martin and with saying “Oh shit” jots the idea down quickly. Nicki straightens up, stretches her arms behind her back, and waves her chin-length hair back with a blowing head movement and a broad smile. (written by Stephanie Mian, 2024)*

#### Vignette reading:

It is project week: Tina, Martin, Daniel, and Tom are gathered around the board game *NGoCM*, developing their start-up idea. In the way they are grouping around the table, they look like a team, that has not come together at random but focused to jointly work out something. Nicki is the only one standing and shares her idea with the others speaking from the exposed position. Does she have a prominent role, ex-

pressed in her standing position? Is she perhaps the team spokesperson, or, to put it in terms of the roles assigned by the game, the *Chief Executive Officer*? Although she looks down and speaks to the others from her standing position, her manner of speaking to the others shows no sign of superiority. She *shares* her idea with the team members, pausing artfully, modulating her voice more softly, with a gentle smile on her lips. Is she putting herself in the spotlight? Her idea? She creates an arc of suspense by pausing before the last and central word “tea”, pronouncing it more softly, emphasising it with a gentle gesture. The smile on her lips, the way in which she presents her idea, seems to proof her own commitment to her idea. Does she want to win the others over – for her idea, or for herself as a person?

Nicki is ‘contagious’: The movement she initiated continues, her idea catches fire, and the spark spreads to Tina, who blurts out, “With our own home-grown herbs.” What moves both – their intertwining ideas – allows the two girls to connect in a special way: They meet with a glance across the table or, as the phenomenologist Lipps (1941) expresses, “I am encountered in my gaze” (p. 35). Did they consciously seek this (eye) contact? They seem to share something by eye contact, and in their shared grin. What is this something? Perhaps their ideas, that have merged into one? Pride or joy? Regardless of what it is, in this idea that now moves and captivates both of them, they seem to have found something in it that suits them. For what?

“I can see from the other person's gaze what and how they see. Above all, however, their gaze reflects the way I look at them. Gazes thus respond to something that I am, but do not have” (Meyer-Drawe, 2016, p. 38f).

What does Nicki become for Tina in her answering gaze and vice versa? Does their shared grin express a (new) complicity? Do they get to know each other in a new way?

Tom documents the ideas in accordance with his role. He seems diligent and committed, as if he doesn't want to miss a word. He not only records key points but also expresses his enthusiasm for the ideas, not just in words, but also through bodily articulations: moving his chin, nodding his head and appreciatively modulating his tone of voice. He confirms Tina and Nicki, expresses more than just approval, and is part of the responsive event (Waldenfels, 2024), involved in the space of (play)experience. The fact that *Chief Process Officer* Tina moves the figure forward and takes a new card indicates that they have accomplished a task or challenge – and that Nicki and Tina's ideas have been approved.

But there is already another task to be mastered: “How would an artist change the idea?” It becomes apparent that this is a challenge, a task that puts the team members to the test: All eyes are on the card. Silence. No movement. A rigidity, an introversion, an immersion, an inner movement that cannot (yet) be shared? Everyone is thinking for themselves, seemingly immersed in the task at hand, so that glances – which might open one's own thinking space to the others – cannot (yet) be exchanged. Then suddenly,

Martin moves: He lifts his gaze and expresses his ideas in words and gestures. An idea, that meets open minds among the others, a movement immediately picked up and carried forward. Tom grins, shoots a quick glance at Martin, and with an “Oh shit” jots the idea down quickly. Is this an expression of admiration, admiration for the ideas that have been developed together? Tom records it quickly; there seems to be only time for a swift glance to make sure nothing gets lost. Does Tom’s bodily articulation show that he is not merely performing a role, but has embodied this responsibility?

Nicki straightens up, stretches her arms behind her back, and waves her chin-length hair back with a blowing head movement and a broad smile. What is expressed in Nicki’s bodily articulations? Self-confidence? Joy, pride in the collective achievement, the accomplishment of the task? A sense of group identity? Being part of a group, sharing ideas? In any case, the group seems to be borne by a movement, a common sensation, whereby everyone not only completes their task, but is absorbed in it as a group. The pupils seem united by a common dedication to the cause, to their startup idea. Are they getting to know new sides of each other and of themselves? Do they discover themselves and their team members differently than in the usual school context – as creative, competent, affirmed, as a sensed part of a community? Of further interest is why Daniel has not been caught in the vignette writer’s gaze. However, he also seems to have been perceived as part of the group, as he does not appear to have fallen out of picture illustrated in the vignette.

### 3.2 The didactic turn of the gaze: from gameplay experiences to didactic challenges and opportunities

The experiences that emerged playing the board game *NGoCM*, captured by vignette-writing, and outlined by the readings for possible ways of understanding it, allows to position the game within Caillois’ (1958/2001) continuum of two modes of play, *paidia* and *ludus*, inherent in every game. It allows to reflect the tension between improvisation and rule-bound structure or the antagonism of purposelessness and purposefulness, particularly as it results from applying it in an institutional educational context. In the case of the first vignette, a seemingly subversive space for play and aimless experience became visible, which became possible because the pupil was supposed to play a rule-governed board game in school in the first place. This subversive moment lies in the pupil’s subtle act of resistance: He found a way to bypass the intended use of the game while still engaging with it – embracing an unintended possibility by responding to what the game hiddenly offered, casting the dice with a smile on his face. The emerging playing space did not eliminate the initial distance to the ‘project week game’ but perhaps allowed Samuel to find a new approach to the board game. A playing space that the pupil created for himself in his response through the appeal of the dice.

In the second vignette, gameplay experiences became visible, which show a pleasurable game in the

implementation of the rules, roles, and tasks: “The pleasure of the game is not in the simple (necessary) respect of the rules, but in interpreting/playing the rules themselves” (Farné, 2016, p. 43). The board game became a meaningful game for the pupils, as it is the target of a successful game design (Salen and Zimmerman (2004). However, their definition of meaningful play should be expanded based on the experiential spaces that became visible in the vignettes and readings. In this sense, meaningful play in a game emerges not only, as they state, “from the relationship between player action and system outcome” (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004, p. 37) but also enfolds among the players themselves. It has become apparent that the players’ meanings were not only formed by the system’s response (ibid.) but also by the linguistic and bodily articulations of the other players, arising between the players in their (bodily) responses.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, it became apparent that the game, as a bearer of instances of change that claims to ‘put back into play’ the data of reality (Bertolini 1982; Farné, 2016), was able to put the pupils in motion. This became visible in their bodily articulations, their linguistically expressed thoughts and it finally became a joined one. Together, by building on each other’s ideas and expanding them further, they developed a solution. This not only generated a network of ideas to fulfill tasks, but also one of relationships that allowed them to experience themselves and each other as particular members of the group. Along with the different tasks the game gave them, they formed a multi-part whole that could initiate new experiences.

Shifting the focus from the differentiation of gameplay experiences to the insights they offer for the didactic application of board games as a ludiform activity (Visalberghi, 1958), challenges and potentials come into view. The experiences reported in the first vignette suggest general didactic considerations regarding the contextualization of the game when applied in school, the way it is introduced, and the requirement of team building among pupils that pre-influence the actual share of play-expectations. Also, it would be worth considering how to address the tension that could arise in the pedagogical use of the game or the ludification of learning. Like Samuel, pupils might withdraw from the game or respond with reluctance for multi-layered reasons, and it should be considered how this could be averted for learning purposes. It can be expected that the introduction into the gaming phase has an impact on the initial attitude and response of pupils to the game. An engaging and inviting introduction, in which learners can, for instance, help shape the game or act spontaneously, might increase interest. The vignette shows that Samuel either reacts negatively to the expectations named in the introduction, the request to form

2 This constitution of meaning could be compared to what Eugen Fink (2023) describes as the external meaning of the game – namely, the meaning that arises for those who decide to play and intend to play the game. He distinguishes this external meaning from the internal one, which consists in the context of meaning of the things, actions, and relationships being played, as well as the rules and structures through which a game takes shape and, according to Salen and Zimmermann (2004), is connected to its outcomes.

teams, or to think of a team name, but responds positively to the concrete action (throwing the dice). Samuel's immediately and non-verbally expressed resistance to the 'team name' implies that team building cannot be taken for granted but must be regarded as a requirement that should be guided if unintended side effects shall be avoided. In addition, Samuel's approach to the overall assignment displays that pupils might not respond promptly as expected but may engage with the planned activity if they are given time to adjust. Nonetheless, the pupil was able to derive meaning from the game, albeit not necessarily the one originally intended by the game designers.

The second vignette reveals the board game as a learning space as was expected and gives testimony that new meanings emerge between the game and the players, transforming pupils' understanding of themselves, others, and subject-related knowledge. In the vignette and its reading, the didactical potential for the development of 21st-century skills becomes evident, as five of the ten competencies – namely *creativity and innovation, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making*, as well as *communication, collaboration and personal and social responsibility* (Binkley et al., 2012) – are manifested in the pupils' performance: In this sense, the game's instructions (e.g., "How would an artist change the idea?") challenge innovative and creative thinking and encourage the further development of upcoming ideas (e.g., producing tea), the inclusion of new aspects (e.g., engraving boxes, deposit system), and their integration into the coherent overall concept of an organic farm with a delivery service. The guiding question of an artist's point of view fosters divergence, reflection, and transfer. Communication forms another essential core of the game, as it involves articulating thoughts and exchanging ideas, as Nicki has artfully done in her own way. The pupils exchange ideas physically and (non)verbally and further develop their concepts, transforming their self-image and relationships with each other. In this board game study, collaboration manifests as a shared practice (Reckwitz, 2017), in which an idea is developed effectively in shared responsibility and mutual respect. Along with it, playful moments come alive, as the game in this team's interaction appears as a

"voluntary activity or occupation, executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension and joy and an awareness of being 'different' from 'ordinary life'" (Huizinga, 1940/2023, p. 28).

The educational philosopher Dewey (1933) once explained that people learn to navigate within a system of shared rules and values, often without realizing it, thereby developing fundamental social skills. Discovering that by vignette-based data collection we can give proof to the expectation that gaming NGoCM holds the option for pupils to have it balanced with qualities of playing.

#### 4. Conclusions

The vignettes and their readings exemplify that games designed for educational purposes and situated within the context of school make very different experiential spaces possible. These spaces are not solely determined by game instructions or pedagogical intentions, but they crucially depend on pupils' responses and emerge along the process of actual gameplay. These insights call for a reflective didactic approach to game-based materials, even if a game is already offered as a comprehensive product to apply in school (or kindergarten).

Within EduSpaces like the Lernwerkstatt, where games alongside other materials are offered for exploration and borrowing for teaching practice, professional development support should be extended from the provision of material in the media library to enrichments such as learning nuggets or even workshop-based facilitation. In such a workshop the participants could collect didactic expectations and assumptions about the usage and effects of the game when applying it in their teaching and contrast them with the experiences captured in the vignettes. These then serve as the basis for collective, discursive readings – following the procedure outlined in the previous two chapters but carried out in the group settings.

Moreover, the use of vignettes offers opportunities for (prospective) professional pedagogues to reflect on how to integrate games didactically within diverse discourses of game-based learning, and thus to develop a reflective attitude. This could be realized for example in professional learning communities in which the learning culture basis on inquiry and reflection (Kansteiner et al., 2023; Theurl et al., 2024). Overall, we support the idea that teaching which aims to keep learning at its center must begin with pupils' learning experiences (Agostini et al., 2018), acknowledging the ambiguity and ambivalence of such experiences, approaching them reflectively, and engaging with them productively. Finally, our empirical exploration allows us to illustrate that the acquisition of skills can take on a playful character without "the path disappearing in the result and becoming something incidental" (Buck, 1967/2019, p. 145).

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