Chapter 6

Socio–Drama in the Web–Supported Negotiation Game “Surfing Global Change”

Gilbert Ahamer
Austrian Academy of Sciences, Austria

ABSTRACT

The negotiation-oriented and partly Web-based game “Surfing Global Change” (SGC, © Gilbert Ahamer) was originally invented and implemented by the author and copyright holder for use in advanced interdisciplinary university courses in the spirit of “blended learning.” Didactics of SGC is grounded in “active, self-organized learning,” training of “competence to act,” and responsibility for both practicable and sustainable solutions for the future society, hence constructionist “creation of meaning.” In section 2, this chapter presents the rules of the game as a case study of a software-based online learning tool, used over three-dozen times at Austrian universities. Sections 3 through 6 contain implementation analyses, especially graphical representations of the socio-drama. The outlay of SGC aims at weighing competition vs. consensus, self-study vs. teamwork, sharpening one’s own standpoint vs. readiness to compromise, differentiation into details vs. integration into a whole and seeks to mirror professional realities. In this spirit, the architecture of SGC provides a framework for “game-based learning” along five interactive game levels: (1) learn content and pass quizzes; (2) write and reflect about a personal standpoint; (3) win with a team in a competitive discussion; (4) negotiate a complex consensus between teams; and (5) integrate views when recognizing and analyzing global long-term trends. The set of game rules frames the expected processes of social self-organization. SGC’s rules provide useful tension during game play by triggering two distinct processes: social dynamics among peer students in the class and their individual strife for good grades.

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THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF THE GAME SURFING GLOBAL CHANGE

The didactic goal and pedagogical strategy of this game is to train students to adopt a proactive and responsible professional role in building a sustainable global society. Didactic and pedagogic foundations are extensively described and reflected in published literature (Ahamer, 2004, 2012a, 2013a). The learning goal of the entire 5-level game (logo above right in Figure 1) “Surfing Global Change” is to master the procedures of consensus building as practiced and demanded in many developed societies.

In more detail this means (Figure 2):

- Create and organize a team (social self-organization).
- Find and report scientific, technical and political information (academic research).
- Identify and weigh the principal effects of a professional project (assessment).
- Prepare the team’s standpoint on the basis of collected material (argumentation).
- Defend the team’s standpoint in a discussion (implementation).
- Try to create consensus between several actors based on arguments.

Students’ motivation differs widely in university classes (just passing exams vs. being motivated by an intrinsic interest in attaining education), separating students into idealists and pragmatists. Nonetheless, the present game sets out to integrate all of these diverse actors and reach the overall target, namely to foster skills for creating well-founded consensus at the workplace. The principal hope is that this way more students can be motivated and finally better training results can be achieved for an entire class than without the game. This procedural finding (compare chapter 5) is valid independent of the course content.

The history of SGC is characterized by representing the third of three “functional generations of web-based teaching” (Ahamer, 2010). An emerging new target for the author is: how to steer students’ academic progress?

For the several dozen practical implementations of Surfing Global Change until now, both synchronous and asynchronous web-based communication was employed for usage in class as well as outside of the classroom (USW, 2010). Among others, the following functionalities of a web platform were used (see also levels in Figure 2):