The Web-Supported Negotiation Game “Surfing Global Change”: Rules, History and Experiences

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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”. This paper presents the rules of the game as a case study of a rule-based online learning tool, used over two dozen times at Austrian universities. The outlay of SGC aims at weighing out competition vs. consensus, self-study vs. team work, sharpening one’s own standpoint vs. readiness to compromise, differentiation into details vs. integration into a whole, and hence, seeks to mirror professional realities. In this spirit, the architecture of SGC provides a framework for “game-based learning” along five interactive game levels. SGC’s rules trigger two distinct processes: social dynamics among peer students in the class and their individual striving for good grades. These two targets provide useful tension during game play.

Keywords: Competitive Discussion, Consensus, Constructivism, Debate, Negotiation Game, Peer Review, Web-Based Learning

1. 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, 2004a).

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);

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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 Section 6) 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” (Section 2); this historic genesis is reported in detail in 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 3):

- Anonymous surveys for debriefing and feedback (level 0);
- Structured content for voluminous fact-based information as starting kit (level 1);
- Quizzes for monitoring students’ cognitive performance (level 1);
- Discussion forums for stepwise review and update of standpoints (level 2);
- Quizzes for voting procedures that would define the winning team (level 3-4);
- Quizzes when substantiating own decisions for a winning team (level 3-4);
- Postings in discussion forums including global analyses (level 5).

Figure 1. Roots & shoots of SGC: starting out from content; the social processes along five levels aim at training self-organized responsibility