THE VALUE OF PLAY

IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A STUDY

ALISON JAMES PhD

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ALISON JAMES PhD

g

greetings

greetings

Hello!

Thank you for joining me.

This is the account of my study into the use and value of play in higher education, conducted September 2019- September 2022.

Its purpose is to share the thoughts, experiences and perceptions of those who have contributed; writers on play, educators who play, scholars and practitioners who play with play. And for people like me, who are a bit of all of those things.

I am Alison James, a UK National Teaching Fellow, Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (AdvanceHE) and Professor Emerita of the University of Winchester. I am a trained LEGO® Serious Play® facilitator. Throughout my career in higher education, I have been fascinated by creative, imaginative and playful approaches to learning. If you would like to find out more about me, please visit *https://engagingimagination.com*

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GRATITUDE

This study and its outcomes have been made possible by
the support of the Imagination Lab Foundation on
a not-for-profit basis.
Contributors and I have given time and energy freely.
Anything that I give back is equally free.
Possibly with slightly less energy.

GRATITUDE

I am indebted to Professor Johan Roos and the Imagination Lab Foundation for their generous support of this research, and for their understanding as to the difficulty of conducting this study during a pandemic. They allowed me an additional third year to be able to consolidate the work, fill in some of the gaps and disseminate outcomes for further feedback and refining. This has been invaluable.

I am also immensely grateful to everyone who has participated in, or supported, this study. I can't name you all but you have made your mark in so many ways. Through interviews, surveys, conversations, webinars, and events, your voices have been rich and illuminating. You have asked incisive questions, shared practices, ideas and materials and made insightful observations. You have been open in your praise for, and judgement of, aspects of contemporary higher education, as well as its relationship with play.

I have been welcomed into all kinds of spaces and events to talk about this study. This is testament to the growing levels of openmindedness and curiosity about play in higher education. This is cheering, given that there is resistance in some quarters to play in academia. *The Value of Play in HE* draws on many antecedents in my own work and that of others, to which I cannot fully give credit, although I do my best. Much of it - born of teaching, encounters, reading and experiences over the years - has become silted up in memory and become the stuff of habit.

Suffice to say that my own thoughts and suggestions are indelibly shaped by all the people I have met in my university career. These are further underpinned by the seminal work of many play theorists and writers, as well as by that of so many authors, thinkers and educators from other fields.

In writing this I have also benefited from the constructive input of several critical readers; thank you Jason TOGA Trew, Maarten Koeners, Maaike de Jong, Julia Reeve, Irina Cojuharenco, Laura Mitchell, Lisa Forbes and Rachel Stead for your time and thoughts. Your feedback on drafts of this account has helped make it much better than it was when you read it. Clare Lomas, thank you for your forensic skills in proof reading. Selin Soylu, thank you for translating a lumpy Word document into something more aesthetically pleasing and easier to read. Any flaws that remain are down to me.

I am grateful for all I have learned during the process of this study and hope it contributes something new to views of the complex phenomenon of play in higher education.

guidance

In which
I offer some suggestions for different ways of reading, and signposts for readers with different interests.

guidance

TO HELP YOU NAVIGATE THESE PAGES

Who is this for?

This is for you, if you are someone wanting to find out more about the use and value of play in higher education (HE). The clue really is in the title. I would just like to be clear, though, on what I mean by HE here. While I, and the contributors to this study, believe that play is valuable in all kinds of adult learning, higher education is formally organised in particular ways, with certain structures, strictures, levels and expectations. I leave the door wide open for institutions and providers that are equivalent to universities, but operate in different ways. While some participants fit this category most of them do work in universities. What I don't mean by higher education is other forms of adult learning, such as evening classes or informal encounters. These may well include playful learning, but they are not my focus of enquiry.

You will find I use the term 'educator' frequently and I do so in the loosest sense; meaning anyone in HE who is actively involved in developing the learning of students, colleagues or other audiences, including the general public. Academics of all levels are involved in play in higher education: those involved in research, learning support, instructional design, study skills, library and IT services and other areas. It may be for you if you are overseeing education, or in partnership with individuals or institutions in some way; perhaps as manager, administrator, director of learning and teaching, head of student affairs, or educational consultant. Participants in this study have held all of these roles and more. Finally, while it may mostly appeal to educators, if you are a student and want to know what this is all about then please read on. Your voice and experiences are directly and indirectly represented.

How to read this document

Any way you like, depending on your preferences, contexts, immediate interests or needs. Some of you might want to know about the turning cogs; how and why the study was designed, its theoretical content, the work that has gone before. In this case you will want to read Groundwork. Or perhaps you don't care much about that, but do want to know what other people have done - to get some ideas for yourself or convince someone that play has a place in HE. So go to Gallery. Consideration of Sutton-Smith's Rhetorics are interwoven throughout - these may be the reason you picked this study up (digitally

speaking), or the bit of it that you are going to skip over. Choose the bits that appeal. Perhaps also choose one that doesn't, to see what happens.

I learned writing this that the more I tried to separate things into clear and discrete categories the more the different elements seemed intertwined with each other. I tried to explain what it felt like, by drawing a spiral[1] (squiggle, really) of interconnections.

Figure G1. My spiral

It's messy and wobbly and the pen gets stuck in places and at times things cross over or don't know which direction they will go in next. Bits are missing. Bits are bigger than others. It has no symmetry, scale or fixed end. It represents some of the challenges of trying to write about play when it is slippery, contradictory, uncontainable. It's not static. It's fluid. If I were to draw another one, another time it would look different.

What about you?
What spiral would you draw?
Try it now, or at the end of your reading. Or both.

Note. I was inspired to draw a spiral by the great artist educator Lynda Barry (2014).

She suggests trying to draw spirals as a means of focussing the mind. First you draw a spiral, without anything in mind. Next you draw a spiral trying to keep the lines as close together as possible without touching. If they touch, you will be electrocuted. Try it. Did that focus your mind?

I digress.

Back to this study. You may find that there will be a little repetition in places, so that you do not have to constantly re-read bits in order to understand others. There is, however, potential for a linear trajectory through the text. This means that for the fullest possible grasp of its contents you start at the beginning and go all the way to the end. Including the notes and references in Granularities and the supporting documentation on my website if you are feeling really energetic.

This is food for thought, a point of departure; not a how-to manual

As you read on you will encounter all kinds of examples, observations, assertions, opinions, citations, options. You might have a range of responses to what you read - interest, inspiration, disagreement, confusion, scorn, surprise, thoughtfulness, resonance. Depending on how what the study's participants (its author, or others cited) have to say your reactions might range from "YES!" , "Really?" "Hmmm, my experience was not like that" to "Nonsense". Reading and experiences are personal. So is play. However you respond, I want to emphasise now that what you will encounter deals with people's perceptions of their own experience, not indisputable facts, or matters that can only be interpreted one way. I say more under Methodology and Ethos, and this is why I keep the participant voices in Gallery.

Our views about play in general, as well as play in HE, stem from all kinds of things, including our personalities, preferences and prior experiences. You may be a play expert yourself. If so, I hope this still contributes something to your understanding of play, particularly given its higher education focus. If you are new to play I hope you find this a useful place for a better understanding of the complexities of play in HE. I hope you will find inspiration to experiment in your context, as well as signposts to resources, reading and networks. I hope by the end of this you will agree that there is substantial evidence of the use and value of play in higher education (Wow. That's a lot of hope). You will also be left in no doubt as to some of the challenges playful education for adults can come up against.

Structure of this document

This document. What to call it? I'm open to suggestions. Story sounds like there is a tidy narrative. Report sounds businesslike and 'write-up' sounds like I have been to the theatre. It is divided into blocks, which each concentrate on an aspect of the study. These

are all named by a word starting with the letter G (a whimsy on my part) and contain:

- an In Which bit, giving the gist of the block
- contents
- and end with In Short and Reflection.

In Short tells you what I just told you, and the Reflection section (oh, the poetry) offers you a place to pause and ruminate on your reading

Generalities, as you will have worked out, replaces the traditional Contents page and introduces you to my I Spy game using the letter G. Just a way of me amusing myself with the conventions of the academic paper to see how else we could label things. Also a tiny means of bringing play into something which follows a reasonably familiar format.

As you will find, and as stated in my study objectives, *The Value of Play in HE* focuses on the use of play across the disciplines, with a special interest in play in management education in alignment with the focus of the Imagination Lab Foundation. References to play in management education are mostly threaded through the general discussion, apart from the dedicated section on types of play in this subject area.

If you just want the shortest, quickest read possible, then Gazillions of Pages in One is the place to go. There is also this:

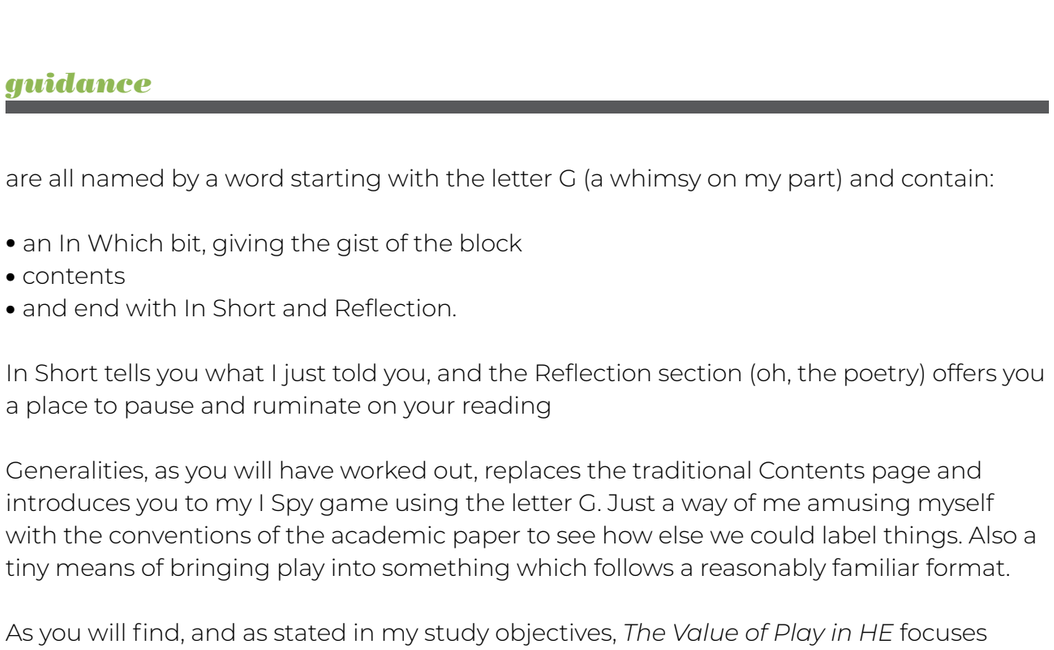


Figure G2. A visual shortcut to study contents, for linear or 'hop on, hop off' readers.

Otherwise the full account falls into three parts; the opening one runs from Greetings to Go! It explains how the study came about, the literature and definitions of play in general and in HE. If you are itching to get to the practical examples and vignettes of play, do please bear in mind that you will either have a wait, or need to skip on to the pages you want. Don't blame me if you miss something though.

The middle part focuses on Gallery, which offers hundreds[2] of examples and vignettes (mini stories describing different play experiences and ideas) of types of play; in general, across the disciplines, and in management education in particular. Fortify yourself for a big read, or fast forward. (I wouldn't though, as the inventiveness of contributors is inspiring).

The final part from Going Through to Gazing Out and Goodbye explores the many conceptions of value of play, the difficulties playful learning can encounter and offers some suggestions as to how to create a robust future for play in HE.

You will find Granularities offers all the nitty-gritty, follow-up, drilling-into-things information, including Notes, with additional observations, and the main bibliography, although there are a few in-text links as well.

A note of clarification; you will find I used mixed practice when giving a referent to a participation citation. In some cases you will find interviewees have TVOP IV XX (XX=their number) against their name; some survey respondents are also marked as such, with their subject and country. You will also find numerous times when there are citations with no attribution. I have reasons for this approach, including when I provide lists of quotes and don't want to make them more dense with endless referents. Sometimes I am trying to protect the anonymity of respondents. This may not be traditional practice, however I think I am consistent in my inconsistency.

Reasons not to read on (and why you should anyway)

At this point you might have seen the size of this thing and felt your heart sink. This may make you want to stop right here and not go any further[3] . Let us look at why you might be hesitating and see if we can change your mind.

1. "This is not proper research. I want to read something with a traditional structure and academic language". "Proper" research has a focus, a purpose, a spirit of enquiry, a methodology and transparently shared findings. They are all in this account too. I have just tried to resist the slippery slide into eduspeak to recount it to you. Don't get me wrong. I love words, even jargony ones. But I also love informal, as well as traditional ways, to explore weighty subjects. And play is weighty.

2. "I'm far too busy and it's far too long". I know the feeling. However, out of

respect to all participants, to whom I want to do justice, I want to provide as much information and detail as possible. This also supports my commitment to the Imagination Lab Foundation to make resources from the study freely available. I have tried, however, to make this lengthy document as readable and navigable as I can. Pick out the bits you want.

3. "I don't know much about play in higher education". This does not matter. I am writing for anyone who is interested, irrespective of their play pedigree. I try to provide explanations, pointers, examples and further readings, as well as introduce you to the subject. Incidentally, some of the survey respondents were also not sure if they knew much about play. Some of them were pleasantly surprised by how much they did know.

4. "I already know quite a bit about play in higher education". I thought I did too. There will no doubt be numerous points where you feel you have heard a similar observation, or about a particular kind of play before. However, I hope you, like me, will find your understanding amplified by the sheer variety of examples, as well as the perceptions of value and challenge that are articulated. Each of these I believe reinforces the visibility of play and its benefits, while sometimes making stringent critical observations as to how higher education is, and should be.

5. "You say you have a special interest in management education, that's not my area". This does not matter. The study pays special attention to management education but its prime messages and many - if not all - of its examples relate to all disciplines.

6. "Why are you focussing on management, and not geography, or ballet, or welding?" I have a special interest strand for management education in keeping with the focus of the Imagination Lab Foundation's activities:

> "Imagination Lab Foundation supports research and teaching of new business management concepts and models that are based on art and science as well as the theories of human imagination and play."
>
> https://imagilab.org/

7. "You say you are interested in other disciplines, but I'm a management educator - I want to read something that is particularly for management". You are in luck. There are dedicated sections and references to management education throughout, so you can cherry pick these from the report. However, as I say in (5), all the messages and examples in the other disciplines have relevance for management education too. Win Win.

8. "I'm not a play evangelist; I'm more critical. This is just going to be feelgood stories about why we should play". You can be an evangelist and critic all rolled into one. Yes, there are vignettes and suggestions which will be uplifting for individual readers. And yes, play can also be dark, and serious, and unnerving, as described in literature on games studies (Jørgensen, 2014). This is not something I dwell on, so don't expect a white knuckle read or play horror story. However, a defining feature of the literature referenced, commentary and voices from this study is that they all present a candid picture of how play in HE is viewed. No one understands the difficulties of playful learning better than the people who spend time doing it.

9. "You are someone with an interest in play, so this won't be objective research". Yes I am. No it isn't. How can it be when it is dealing with people's experiences? Every researcher has a position, and many will be researching something in which they believe. What I do my best to do in this account is let the participant voices speak for themselves and be clear on where views, opinions, and data are coming from. As you will find out, if you do not know already, views on play are extraordinarily varied, complicated and contradictory.

Gazillions

Gazillion: a made up number, mimicking billion and trillion, meaning really, really, really large. Also word starting with G.

In which
I try to summarise the whole of this study in one page.

Gazillions

The Artist formerly known as Prince[4]. The page formerly known as The Abstract.

This study explores the use and value of play in higher education; drawing data from primary sources (65 interview participants, 120 respondents from three surveys) and secondary sources (literature, empirical data, experiences, other materials and events). Its aims were to; extend knowledge of the ways in which play and playful learning are used in higher education across all disciplines; include a special focus on play in management education; and deepen and extend understanding of perceptions of value with regard to the adoption (or not) of play in different spheres.

Participants came from more than 20 countries, although the majority were from the UK. They provide extensive evidence of highly diverse and innovative ways to integrate play across all HE disciplines. Evidence indicates that playful learning is more widespread than recognised. They also suggest that familiar forms of play most associated with management education - games and simulations - are not the only kinds that can be, or are being, used. In addition, the study makes evident the permeability of boundaries between disciplines when it comes to play.

Sutton-Smith's Seven Rhetorics of Play are explored as a theoretical framework for considering how the value of play is expressed in HE. This sector is not something covered by Sutton-Smith in his original work. In addition, while all the Rhetorics are seen to relate to play in higher education in some form, this study identifies silences or gaps with regard to some of the forms, uses, and contexts of play in HE, which are also not mentioned by Sutton-Smith. As a result, I suggest that, while the Rhetorics provide a useful theoretical perspective on play in higher education, it is an incomplete one.

All participants agreed that play has value, although there were detailed and diverse views as to the form this takes. This divergence is reflected in the identification of what I term polarities of play. Play is seen to be extremely important as a means of teaching a subject, for myriad reasons. It is also seen as fundamental to creating good connections and relationships and for fostering a positive and conducive learning environment. These benefits notwithstanding, play in HE is sometimes tarnished by suspicions that it is frivolous, inappropriate for advanced study and undermines academic credibility. This study suggests that fear and negative perceptions about playful learning are its greatest obstacle. In closing, I make suggestions as to how to nurture a constructive culture for playful learning, summarise the headline messages of the study and propose eight principles to inform future thoughts in creating a framework for play in HE.

GO!

GO!

Is play the new buzzword?

It certainly seems to be popping up all over the place. It is in advertising and marketing materials, in all forms of news and social media, in the ways we communicate, write, how we dress ourselves, amuse ourselves, the interests we have and the teams we support. It surfaces in how we deal with difficulty and stress (through black humour) and the mundane and the collegial (office banter, in-jokes), celebrate, prepare for festivities and rituals in our calendars, family rituals and habits. Simple spaces and tools for communal play have sprung up everywhere, such as adult playgrounds (in parks and along motorways) or fixed chess tables.

Play may be everywhere, and most things may have the potential to become play, however, this does not mean that everything is, or should be, play. We will look into this more in the coming pages.

Play kept morale up during the first two years of the coronavirus pandemic and is repeatedly pointed to as a key factor in mental health and wellbeing. The negative effects of play deprivation are equally emphasised with regard to the development and socialisation of humans.

Play as game-based learning, role play and simulation has featured in post-compulsory education in the West for several decades now. What is newer is the adoption and creation of many more forms of playful learning. If play is everywhere, and is not new in higher education, then it should be universally accepted and valued, shouldn't it?

The answer is, it isn't. (You may have seen that coming). This study looks in detail at a great many examples of play-based learning in universities and equivalent-level establishments to understand why play is passionately advocated by some, and resisted by others. Make yourself comfortable and we will begin.

groundwork

In which
I go through all the underpinning stuff that you would want to see in proper scholarship, like the background to this study, how it took shape, what affected it. I present its aims and objectives, design methodology, and approach to data collection and analysis. I introduce a key theoretical touchpoint for the study; Brian Sutton-Smith's Seven Rhetorics of Play. In accompaniment, I also present a selection of Writings, Thinkings, Doings; including work on play as a general concept and within higher education.

groundwork

HOW THIS STUDY CAME TO BE

Preamble and Plan A

Prior to this study I had spent my university career working primarily in creative arts institutions and latterly in multidisciplinary ones to develop academic policy and practice[5]. My activities encompassed staff and educational development as well as teaching and curriculum design, with small scale pedagogic research studies conducted as well. My experience as an a trained LEGO® Serious Play® facilitator and designer of numerous LEGO®-based learning experiences meshed with my work to develop creative approaches to critical reflection on learning. Some of these appeared in the book *Engaging Imagination: helping students become creative and reflective thinkers* (2014), co-authored with Professor Stephen Brookfield.

This work amplified with time to become an interest in play-based and playful learning more widely, and led to numerous collaborations with Dr Chrissi Nerantzi, culminating in our international edited collection *The Power of Play in HE: Creativity in Tertiary Learning* (2019). This book brought together 64 educators in different countries who shared more than 40 different examples of playful learning, in disciplines ranging from the arts to zoology. As of February 2022 this had been downloaded over 37,000 times.

Producing that collection made me realise that all of us who are exploring play in higher education may only be scratching the surface of what is going on. Playful learning practices are, as this study confirms, often under the radar, or called by a more 'acceptable' name, so as to sound suitably intellectual and HE-like. I wanted to go on exploring, while also focussing on conceptions of value which are held at individual, departmental, institutional, and national level. These are huge aspirations for a small-ish study, and a bit overambitious. Nonetheless, it makes a start in highlighting influences such as cultural preferences, national educational systems and prevailing educational environments.

A pivotal moment in the study's genesis was a conversation with Professor Johan Roos, the Swedish organizational theorist and co-inventor of LEGO® Serious Play®. Finding we had a mutual interest in the work of Brian Sutton-Smith, I told him about my desire to explore play further. He suggested I put in a proposal to the Imagination Lab Foundation's scholarship fund. I just needed to ensure that my investigations would cater for their particular interest in the intersection between management education, the arts, science, imagination and play. My proposal was successful and funding awarded in May 2019. Given the not-for-profit nature of the Foundation, my funds were to make it possible

for me to carry the study's activities, although my own time was given freely. This was wonderful. I - for once in my career - had found a funding body prepared to support me to travel, attend conferences, host face-to-face events and undertake research, without the process being agonising, long and complex. I could not believe my luck.

Due to work commitments, I set a September start date for the research, with the intention to design and deliver a series of face-to-face workshops in which I, and participants could experience and consider playful practices in the context of higher education.

Needless to say, that is not what happened. By January 2020 concerns were increasing about the outbreak of a new virus. In early February I managed to visit Turin to conduct a day workshop on creativity and invite participation in this study. Already, as I left Italy, cases of illness were increasing and masks were being worn by cautious travellers on the aircraft. Within a few weeks the habits, practices and movements of our daily lives had changed immeasurably.

Plan B

Like everyone, I stopped and rethought. Instead, I launched a gateway survey in January 2020, hoping it would introduce me to new play proponents. I then started interviews in March, following up with some from the gateway survey, as well as with those I was encountering outside it.

Inevitably, as the bulk of the interviews were conducted during periods of lockdown or restriction, participation was affected by the constraints on movement and meeting. Initially, respondents were worrying about how they might still be able to use play in a remote teaching environment. Others were already experimenting in some form with distanced and/or digital play as a means of keeping alive the creativity and energy they had enjoyed in their previous teaching. Others still were overwhelmed, from the start of the pandemic or months in, by how difficult it was to maintain connection in what they felt were strained, unnatural, and sometimes chaotic teaching situations. Among them all were the success stories too; including from those who were already using digital play, and were comfortable with online teaching, able to translate old practices, adjust them for new contexts, or create new ones.

Due to the timing of primary data collection many of the play practices collected were face-to-face varieties. I have since added in examples of how educators have been playing remotely and have drawn on further diverse secondary sources.

In September 2021, I asked The Imagination Lab Foundation for an extra year in which to write up and disseminate what I had found. In December 2021 I also launched a student facing survey to invite direct student voices to round out the views expressed on their behalf by their educators.

COVID 19

I have already noted the impact that Covid 19 had on the way I ended up conducting this study. Unsurprisingly it was a repeated motif throughout interviews, events and conversations.

This study contains multiple examples of how educators have continued to play online, in spite of the pandemic. Several were conscious that moving everything online could not, and should not, mean trying to translate exactly what happened face to face. They also recognised that some of the easier ways to communicate information to teaching were not necessarily going to be motivating or effective.

> "We had the last session on Thursday 12th March and by the following week the uni had closed its doors. My first thought with this was that I'd actually done a module in learning and teaching online as part of my MA, so, straight away, I was like right I need to use this now, and I remember the biggest lesson I learned from that module was that there's no point trying to replicate what you do in the classroom in a digital space, it's just pointless.
>
> [At the time of Covid the] group had really bonded and were enjoying the module and 'cooking on gas'. I was like right, I don't wanna lose that, I don't wanna lose the playful aspect, there's no way that I'm just gonna do a narrated Powerpoint and give them a link to it, to me that's not teaching and learning online anyway (TVOP IV 24)."

> "We have shifted some programmes to the online teaching method just due to the situation now. And the feedback of the students is their voice. For example, voiceover Powerpoint is receiving very bad feedback. They don't want to have to just sit at home, listen to a Powerpoint you know...they want some experiential interactive learning experiences and the value of play is very well oriented to meet this requirement of the students (TVOP IV 41)."

Some of the positives of play during the pandemic included these two examples:

- an upsurge in online escape rooms and games as means of revision/concept acquisition
- the redesigning of a gameplay design summer school - purely online - using a whole new curriculum and curriculum structure

Academic developers noted that their role took on new meaning:

> "It's been quite interesting recently during lockdown and the university moving online, is that quite often people have come to us [an academic development unit] just for us to listen to their problems really and challenges. So we're trying to bring a

bit more light heartedness back into the university because that's [what] makes me interested and that is what I think people want actually (TVOP IV 52).

Participants also commented:

> There are really a lot of wonderful initiatives that's [sic] been growing out of a kind of resistance movement, or at least a movement of people insisting that even in these sort of more dire circumstances play remains important or becomes even more important (TVOP IV 37).

> Thank God for Covid, that's all I'm going to say. Up until five weeks ago the university believed that the best thing it could do would be a 1970s residential university minus the football team and the marching band. It was all about the 'on campus', those of us who were doing online were doing it by stealth; we were ducking and weaving trying not to get caught with our digital delivery, we were not actively supported (TVOP IV 51).

Others were pragmatic:

> Nowadays we have the new normal. We can talk about "what is the normal learning practice". I believe that now we have a new normal process, so maybe all of the people in the system, including the teachers of course need to adapt the strategy (TVOP IV 40).

Along with positive recognition came questions:

> If we dare to play we have to figure out what to do, because all of us have been sent home and we have to work from home. And of course we knew how to have meetings online. But what then? Do we know how to handle design processes that are often about tangible materials and touching and sort of giving shape to things? Do we know how to handle that? Not really, because, you know, we're usually in the same room, the materials and we figure out what we can do with our hands, so how do we learn about that? Well, the best approach in my mind, of course, is to play with it... try to imagine, try to play, what can we do? What do we have in our houses? What happens when, instead of having the same set of materials, we just build a narrative out of whatever we find?
>
> How can we play with what we've got? How can we play with each other without being in the same room? How can we use breakout rooms to do games or activities and I just still want the students to be able to get hands on because I'm really interested in play in an analogue way, you know, with LEGO® and clothes and with things they can get their hands on and I think they can still do that, absolutely and share things...but then how can we blend that with the digital? (TVOP IV 37)

Others still turned to a post Covid future to consider how play might feature and have value:

> This corona, this Covid 19 is separating people, well, what do we do when we come back? And I think that sitting down together and playing these games that are serious, right? It's about work, there's tons of learning that's going to come from these games but we are gonna have to get to know each other again, connect with each other again, and learn from each other and I think a game is a great way to do that, that's the campfire we can all come around together (TVOP IV 50).

Although there were many positives cited, participants still miss the immediacy, connection and energy that accompany face to face play experiences. They bewail the fact that technology, while invaluable, can be unreliable. Bandwidth and other issues still prevent some of them from being able to offer a robust online experience. Electronic systems do not speak to each other. Educators who are not supremely confident with online play are stressed by having constraints imposed on their ability to play in the way they would like. Playful educators still want to be able to have shared experiences in the same location where objects can be touched, shared, and players can move around each other.

A more jaundiced fear expressed by some was that Covid presented the ideal opportunity for institutions who were not in favour of creative or playful learning to batten down the hatches and concentrate on pre-recorded presentations and lectures and downloadable materials.

The need for connection through play was a significant motif of survey and interview responses, one which was shored up throughout 2020 and 2021 through other play activities and events which feed into this study.

STUDY DESIGN: THE VALUE OF PLAY IN HE

Puzzles as questions

Mason (1996) argues that qualitative researchers should aim to address an intellectual puzzle which is at the heart of their enquiry. Numerous such puzzles have found a home in the heart of this study, as you can see in this visual:

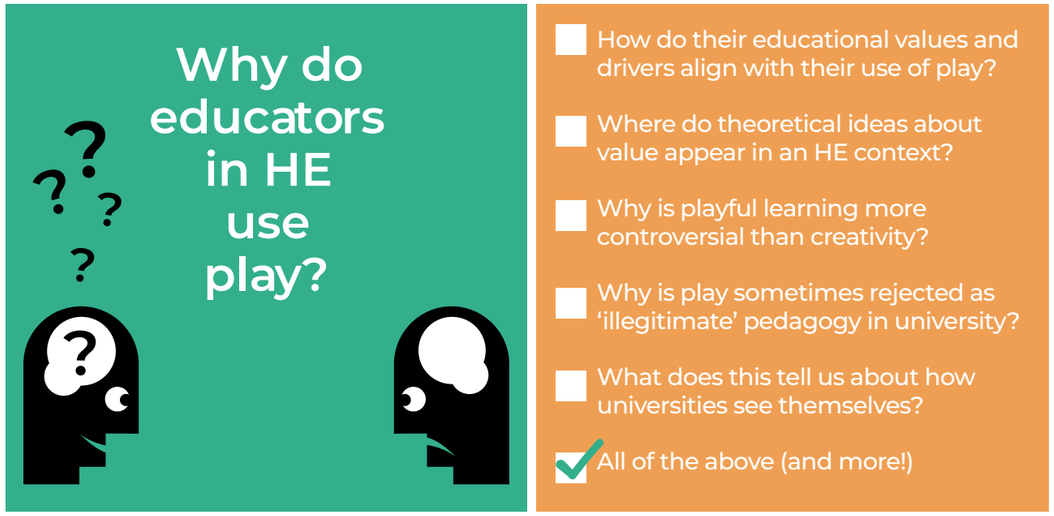


Figure G3. Some questions as to why educators use play

Aims and objectives

The aims of the study were to:

1. extend knowledge of the ways in which play and playful learning are used in higher education across all disciplines
2. include a special focus on business, management and leadership contexts in which management theories and concepts may be taught in play-based, playful or creative ways (or not)
3. deepen and extend understanding of perceptions of value with regard to the adoption (or not) of play in different spheres

Theoretical touchpoints

A key theoretical reference through which (3) is being explored is that of Sutton-Smith's

Seven Rhetorics, set out in *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997). In his text these ideological arguments about the value of play were distilled from play theory, and how theorists talk about play. Unlike Sutton-Smith, this study is interested in how people more generally experience, talk about and perceive the value of play in the play practices themselves. It also brings a new angle to consideration of his Rhetorics by situating them in the context of HE. While the Rhetorics are an important touchpoint for this study, many other play writers and proponents are also drawn on (including Brown, 2009; Bateson & Martin, 2013; Huizinga, 1938; Kane, 2004; Sicart, 2017; Sutton-Smith, 1997). In this account, I endeavour to present a picture of where these various theoretical positions come close to play experiences in higher education, and where they are more distant.

Researcher position

In a British Academy of Management seminar in December 2021, a speaker[6] from *The Conversation* suggested that academics have a tendency to write as activists, rather than researchers; getting caught up in what they would like to happen, or think should happen, rather than stand back from the subject of their enquiry.

I would argue that in qualitative enquiry these two positions are not necessarily separate. Rather, they are ones between which academics move as they explore a subject. Already they are likely to have experience and interest which pre-empts the enquiry. They will be aware of the need for truth in their reporting and also aware - to some extent at least - of the ways their own preferences and biases might lead them to interpret data. They will inevitably offer a reading of a situation which may be viewed differently by those who have alternative backgrounds, contexts and opinions.

My draft proposal at the outset of this project made clear that my desire to explore these matters was not entirely neutral. I had discovered, from years of experience, how the use of play could be warmly welcomed by some, and seen as contentious by others when compared with traditional modes of teaching at university. I had seen at first hand innumerable examples of inspiring and effective teaching using play. While joyous to behold, they sometimes seemed under threat from neoliberal and marketized models of education which have come to hold sway in many countries, not least the UK and USA.

Bowskill (2012) is one who notes the longstanding tension between liberalist and instrumentalist traditions in higher education. He differentiates them thus;

> "[...] in the liberalist tradition of encouraging education focused on promoting academic excellence in theoretical knowledge with pathways into university, and instrumentalist education, with the goal of educating students in context-specific vocational skills that will help provide industry with competent, skilled workers (2012:4)."

The problem is not that all instrumentalist education is bad. Rather, it is its increased prevalence compared to the liberalist model (which is in the camp of learning for learning's sake, rather than as a route to employability and social function) that is the issue. It has become an ideological premise upon which judgements as to the value or success of an educational experience are being made. It also can act as an excluder of certain pedagogical approaches if they do not directly serve its goals and have some kind of measurable benefit. Dominance and exclusion are the problems here.

Study expectations

At the outset of the research I framed a number of expectations for the research; things that my prior work and that of others suggested I would be likely to find.

They were that:

- there will not be a single, universal interpretation of play
- there will be mixed practice in terms of the use of play to teach management theories and concepts
- additional data on the use of play will consolidate and extend existing knowledge while also revealing practices, beliefs and values hitherto unknown
- the notion of play will be controversial for some participants
- new perspectives on play and its value in HE will be surprising for some participants
- new perspectives on play and its value in HE will be positively received/generated by some participants
- the perceived value of play will be highly variable and not all related to pedagogy, but rather to relaxation/social behaviours
- there will be ambiguity surrounding notions of value in terms of Sutton-Smith's Rhetorics as they relate to play
- the extent to which certain learning cultures adopt play and playful approaches may be impacted by disciplinary, sectorwide and national influences

These took the place of a research hypothesis. I was not seeking to prove certain matters as right or wrong, true or false, as the nature of my methodology will explain. I sought instead to bring together sufficient evidence which would amplify understanding of how and why play is used in higher education and the values that people ascribe to it. The weight of this evidence, I hoped, would serve in some way to critique and expand present views and debates on what is considered appropriate pedagogy and practice at university.

In addition to the expectations, I had come to a range of conclusions about reasons for resistance to play in HE. These were also shared at the outset of the research and were that:

- where play is derided or dismissed this is often because it has been misunderstood
- this misunderstanding may relate to narrow interpretations of play
- such narrowness overlooks that Play can be notably nuanced and variable in form, purpose and conception
- there is a lack of acceptance that Play is valid as part of adult learning
- the work-play dualism that pervades Western society relegates play to a subordinate position in our lives compared to work

The first two of these are observations I have drawn from my own experiences, the last three are ones which I share with many others studying play. All of these would be borne out by this study.

I had not realised when I framed the scope of the study that certain aspects to using play in HE would come across very strongly. These will also be discussed in greater detail in this study and include:

- the permeability of play practices and how they can cross all kinds of boundaries;
- what I term polarities of play, or the way that almost every view about play has its polar opposite;
- how these polarities of play, taken from play practice, would echo the Rhetorics of play as defined by Sutton-Smith
- and the way play could address the human and emotional needs heightened by the Covid 19 pandemic.

Design, re-design and organic evolution

As already noted, Covid 19 and ensuing lockdowns around the world forced a rapid redesign in terms of data gathering. As a result, the intent to investigate the topic through inventive and playful workshops was largely abandoned; although I did incorporate elements of play into online webinars, talks and conference presentations. The term organic evolution is a grand name for collecting information by whatever (appropriate) means possible. I was conscious of the project clock ticking, and concerned not to lose momentum in a time of great uncertainty. So, despite an esteemed educational expert (nameless) advising me that 'only mad people do surveys' I took the decision to run a staff-facing one, a student-facing one, and conduct interviews on Zoom.

I undertook this also fully conscious of the pressures that academic staff were under at this time. I was to discover that many of them were grateful to talk about their use of play as a release from some of these stresses. Our discussions were also a reminder of the importance of imaginative pedagogies at a time when institutions were largely preoccupied with how they could rapidly ensure consistent student access to materials and the logistics of emergency online delivery.

Methodology and ethos

The best way to express the ethos of this study is by using the words of an interview participant who was referring to their own way of working. They capture perfectly the spirit in which I explored the value of play in HE:

> My philosophy draws heavily from human-centred design: what we're trying to extract is qualitative evidence and so it's about users perceptions, their feelings, their emotions around a specific topic (TVOP IV 38).

The Value of Play in HE is a mixed-method perceptual study, concerned with beliefs, views and experiences. In *Water Logic* Edward de Bono makes a case for the importance of paying attention to perception as opposed to dealing with the 'truth' of reality (de Bono, 1993:xii). He writes that when he was considering titling a chapter 'Perception and Reality' he was setting up an unnatural and misleading binary:

> In the traditional way this would have suggested that there was reality 'somewhere out there' and then there was perception which was different from reality. But perception is just as real as anything else – in fact perception is more real for the person involved (de Bono, 1993:1).

His identification of the problem that people see perception as messy and truth as solid can be an issue for scholarly enquiry and the search (key bit of the word 'research' there) for accurate, reliable or valid outcomes. It is also an extremely important thing to bear in mind in what follows here; namely stories of play experiences and beliefs about value. They are entirely accurate, reliable and valid in the eyes of those telling them - my prime source of evidence.

The study is predominantly qualitative, although there are some quantitative references of a very basic kind. Mason defines qualitative research as being

> broadly 'interpretivist' in the sense that it is concerned how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced" (Mason, 1996:4).

That social world in this study is the one in which meanings are shaped through playful interactions between people and/or an activity in a certain environment. It is also one in which participants and the investigator both pose themselves and each other questions about value and values - theirs and those they encounter in their educational contexts.

While dealing with participant perceptions of their reality, the study also has a relativist ethos. This does not rule out the possibility of any constants or universals across what they said. It *does* mean that the qualifier "it depends" could be attached to a great many critical or preferential assertions made about play. We will see this most clearly in the differing perceptions of value and also in participant aversions to aspects of play and their negative experiences of it.

Even in qualitative studies it may be tempting to seek out some kind of cast iron *proof* that what you are arguing has some truth to it. I believe that the examples and views shared from this study are strong indicators of the value of play in HE. I curate and interpret them as representative of many truths. I allow their versions of experiences to stand alone. At times I may offer comparative positions, either from my own experience, other participants or from secondary data. It will be for you as reader to decide how you feel about all or any of these. They may spark questions such as:

- what aspects of these experiences resonate? What do not?
- what does this mean for how you teach/learn/research/manage?
- how does your environment affect your ability to do what you want/think is best?
- how do your values and beliefs sit well within the educational zeitgeist, and where do they conflict with it?

The study is also constructivist in nature (Dewey, 1938; Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1986; Biggs, 2003; Gagnon and Collay, 2001), with both students and educators constructing meaning through examining their own perspectives and interpreting their own experiences of the world. Bruner and Feldman, discussing the work of the philosopher Nelson Goodman, summarise this position thus:

> ...contrary to common sense there is no unique "real world" that pre-exists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language; [...] what we call the world is a product of some mind whose symbolic procedures construct the world (Bruner & Feldman, in Bruner, 1986:95).

It is important to stress the constructivist ethos early on in this study as it has major echoes in the multitude of ways play is engaged in and perceived.

Inviting participation: information, ethics and consent

In a time of social distancing and remote working I was reliant on social media, academic and professional contacts, and reaching out to participants by writing blog posts for organisations such as the Chartered Association of Business Schools (see bibliography for link) and others. My invitation to participate was entirely open; anyone could respond, including people who were opposed to play in higher education, however no one in the 'anti' camp did.

This invitation resulted in 112 staff survey responses and 65 interviews (Eight student survey responses were gathered later). All project information, including a description of the purpose and nature of the project, how it was funded and how it would work, an ethics and consent form, GDPR information and project timeline, was housed on my personal website *https://engagingimagination.com*. An undertaking was given to participants to hold their information securely and to anonymise their identity as far as possible, by a number of means. These include removing names and other potentially

identifying information, paraphrasing responses and/or collating them with others to form groups or themes[7] . Where names are used this is with the full agreement of participants.

Project participants were told they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and that their data would not be used. No participants have requested this to happen. 13 participants from the first survey who said they did not wish to be contacted further had their wishes respected. No whole group emails were sent which would have alerted other participants as to who was taking part in the project.

Management and other disciplines: common ground, fuzzy edges

All academic disciplines have their distinctive features. Part of what interested me in this study was whether or not the use of play would be different in management as opposed to other disciplines. The challenge I did not expect, but ended up facing, was the extent to which participants blurred the boundaries between practices that could be deemed definitive of management education and those which were entirely different. The situation was not as clear cut as I had assumed I might find it.

Not all respondents who comment on the use of play for management list management explicitly in their job roles or disciplinary areas. Of the 65 interviews, 35 respondents (54%) stated they were specifically from management education courses. While it was easy to identify through interview who was working in a dedicated management capacity, some respondents in the survey had generic titles which did not seem to suggest any involvement in management education per se. However, their responses showed that their activities clearly had relevance for management education.

This is because management thinking and activity is present in some form in many domains. To illustrate: one respondent who is teaching future primary school teachers on an undergraduate degree was herself a former deputy head of a school. Management for her appears in all kinds of guises; classroom, learning, institution, team, partnerships, of external influences and so on. Another example comes from sports coaching; in this field some of the most important aspects of management - apart from managing the self and the physical requirements of training - concern interpersonal relationships and realising that the coach-coachee relationship is fundamental to success.

As will become apparent in the findings on the use of particular play types, there is permeability and transferability between the disciplines with regard to these. For example, issues of insolvency and business rescue may feature in management programmes as well as in finance and law. The need for effective decision-making and the ability to deal swiftly with incomplete information to resolve an issue transcend all academic boundaries.

A consideration of the scope and range of management opens the section on play in management education.

Data gathering

I adopted an evidence-based approach in that data was gathered from multiple people and multiple sources; primary and secondary. These include academic literature, theoretical texts, empirical evidence, personal experiences, and examples from participants and other colleagues in the HE sector who are interested in play. Information was drawn from scholarly and theoretical readings, conference papers and workshops, conversations, webinars and other forms of interaction. The methods used, as already indicated, included online surveys[8] and Zoom-based semi-structured interviews. Questions were a mixture of focused and open; this was so that I did not impose my own views and experiences upon respondents; the expectations that I had drawn up notwithstanding[9].

While the survey was open and interviews were taking place I also attended and spoke at a range of events which allowed me to glean new examples of practice and also garner feedback on emerging findings.

Gateway survey structure

Background, consent, definitions

The survey opened with an explanation of the project and mandatory sections confirming that the project information had been read by participants and that they consented to participating.

The information provided an open statement about the nature of play. This was deliberately loose in order to allow participants to provide their own additions about the nature of play.

Main survey questions

These focussed on:

- definitions of play
- participant awareness of play in HE, including the practices of others
- participant own use of play for the teaching of management concepts and theories
- participant own use of play for the teaching of other subjects
- the frequency with which participants use play
- participant views as to the value of play
- whether their use of play was informed by particular authors/theorists
- whether or not they used play in scholarship/research

At the end there was also a final opportunity to make any further comment that participants wished.

Survey results have been carved up and distributed throughout this document, as have responses from interviews. The precise survey and interview questions are available in supporting documentation available on the project pages of my website *https://engagingimagination.com*

Student views of play

Educator respondents were clear and detailed about the ways in which students view and engage with play. While their contributions are invaluable, following analysis of their data I felt it appropriate to try to garner student views directly. As a result, a second student-facing survey ran December 2021 to April 2022. Despite being disseminated through social media, teaching contacts and play networks this only garnered eight responses; four from a UK university and four from a Danish one. Comments from this survey are included in my consideration of value, values and value systems later.

Testing and distributing the gateway survey

A pilot version of the survey was tested in January 2020 with seven selected participants, from a mixture of disciplines; three from management education and four from other subject areas. Following their responses the wording was slightly tweaked and numbering of questions shifted slightly; however the content remained the same. The main survey was then launched at the end of January and remained open until September 2020. 105 people completed the main survey. Due to strong similarities between the two surveys I am grouping them here as two parts of one data set. The slight variation in wording and numbering means I have not been able to merge the two surveys, however.

Semi-structured interviews

The interviews were an opportunity to follow up on the gateway survey and also speak to participants identified through other channels as to their play practices. The set of questions used as a foundation for interview is available on my website. In addition to the 65 interviews conducted using this approach there were many other kinds of dialogue which contributed to the overall picture created. As these were outside the interview format they have not been included in this data set.

Relationship between the gateway survey and subsequent interviews

From the two elements of the gateway survey (pilot and main), of 112 respondents 42 went on to be interviewed further. 18 of these belonged to programmes overtly described as management and 24 to non-management programmes.

The basis on which participants were selected for interview was down to the kinds of comments and information they shared through the survey; the potential relevance of their activities to this study, and their own interest in the area of play in higher education. While the study has a special interest in management education I made it clear to all participants that examples and experiences from all disciplines were welcome.

The difference between the two activities - survey and interview - are summarised here:

Survey checks for...	Interviews explore...
Awareness of the use of play in HE	What brought the respondent to use play in HE
Use of play in HE	What kinds of play, where and how
Use of play in management education	Whether or not their use of play fits with how their subject is expected to be taught
Perceptions of value of play	Positives and negatives of play
Whether play is used in research	Whether they have any play preferences/aversions; kinds of play they would like to try but have not
Writers/theorists who have inspired practice	Whether or not they perceive their use of play to be unusual in their subject area
Willingness to participate further/follow progress of project	What their values are as educators and how play fits in with these

Figure G4. Table comparing purpose of gateway survey with that of interviews

Deciding how to approach data analysis

Under Methodology and Ethos I emphasised my focus on participant perceptions, rather than seek out any evidence of right or truth. I already had my questions from survey and interview which could provide a potential framework for grouping responses. However, the quest for meaning meant that I sought to pull out the themes, words and repeated motifs that appeared in these responses. I therefore searched through a range of 30 plus different ways of coding (Saldana, 2016) to identify which most chimed with the research aims.

As a result I adopted a plural coding approach, combining descriptive, in vivo and values coding to pull out key examples, themes and voices. In addition, a set of versus codes was organically generated as I compared opposing comments on the same topic. This last set of codes led to the creation of the polarities of play which I discuss later.

Descriptive coding, also known as topic coding was used to collect information about the kinds of play being used; this seemed the most obvious choice as it relates to gathering examples. It was applied to the survey results and to the interviews, as appropriate. Descriptive coding was seen as expedient to ensuring that all forms of play

referred to are captured, even at a superficial or generic level. It is a major form of coding in this study.

An example: "when I'm teaching students who don't have a lot of experience to hang the theories on, then what I like to do is give them some experience and I'll do that through play" (TVOP IV 5) was coded as play for experience.

Alongside this

In vivo coding was applied to free text survey comments and from transcribed interviews to ensure that the participants' voices are truly *re*-presented. This is important in a discussion about something which matters to the respondents, i.e. good teaching and learning, their personal identity and principles and how they see themselves as educators, which are expressed through the questions around value.

In vivo coding is not the principal form of coding, however it is being used to ensure that evocative or significant terms are used which make present the voices of those who have expressed their opinions and their practices. Saldana (2016:107) suggests being alert to specific words and phrases which stand out as salient. Examples of these are introduced in Defining, Naming and Recognising Play, where participants referred to bringing play in sidewise/through the back door and naming it with 'weasel words'. In the vignettes of play and respondent comments on their views about the value of play it is the power and colour of their own words which have the most impact and meaning.

Another example is the use of a familiar metaphor that has more colour and energy than simply saying something was hard: "trying to get colleagues to embrace some of those less traditional approaches was a little bit like moving mountains" (TVOP IV 14)

I also use

Values coding, to pull out what is most important and valuable about play in higher education to the respondents. This relates to value and values of many different kinds and is explored in conjunction with Sutton-Smith's Rhetorics. There are too many kinds of value to be exemplified here, but one can be "the importance of process, as opposed to complete focus on the outcome of the journey" (TVOP IV 56).

Versus coding

As Saldana puts it,

> "Versus Codes identify in dichotomous or binary terms the individuals, groups, social systems, organizations, phenomena, processes concepts etc in direct conflict with each other (2016:137)."

In simpler terms, in this study the versus codes were generated from people holding diametrically opposed views on a subject. For example, play must be voluntarily undertaken, otherwise it is not play, versus play can still be play, even if the player did not initially choose to engage in it. The versus bit is voluntary versus accepting (the section on the polarities of play goes into this in much more detail).

He later refers to versus coding as being appropriate for many things, including "… qualitative data sets that suggest strong conflicts, microagressions, or competing goals within, among and between participants" (Saldana, 2016: 137, referencing Handwerker, 2015).

There was little evidence of microagressions or competing goals between participants as a) they did not meet and b) by and large participants articulated a shared belief that they were doing the best job they could in enabling students to learn effectively. As is made clear in Polarities of Play, participants often had opposing views on a subject, even if they had a similar goal. However, there was considerable evidence of conflict, microagressions and competing goals presented between the participants and others in their educational environments. These might be embodied in individuals or in policies or in a sense of a skewed power dynamic within a hostile educational climate.

While I was aware that views about play are often opposing or contradictory, I was not aware of just how deeply these oppositions can run through conversations about play with different people. The versus codes presented themselves through readings of the interview scripts; I had not intended to seek them out.

Undertaking data analysis

While Saldana recommends coding transcriptions as soon as they become available this was not possible for a number of reasons. Among these, digital transcription proved to be unhelpful as the system could not cope with accents and some of the terminology used; resulting in semi-intelligible gobbledegook. Human transcription proved to be more successful, however there was often a delay in the turnaround between submission of interview recordings and the return of the transcription. Other factors due to the global situation then also intervened. Being able to keep a smooth conveyor belt of data analysis running might have been more helpful for stress levels. However, considering the scripts in chunks as they became available did not detract from the overall meanings and motifs gleaned from them[10].

There were multiple iterations of coding. The first took place halfway through the completion of the interviews and survey. This was conducted in two stages, treating the survey and interviews as separate data sets. It involved a reading and annotation of the scripts and responses by hand and on computer. A list of codes was generated and each code inscribed on a single card (old school style). The cards were then spread out and reviewed for patterns and themes. While they could be grouped according to the

questions asked, it was also clear that particular themes were starting to emerge across the questions. As an example, the motifs of emotion, humanness and of connection appeared in answers to multiple questions, as did motifs of thinking differently and honing decision-making. Such motifs also lent themselves in being grouped in one or more categories, such as qualities and skills.

Multiple iterations of reading, coding, grouping and regrouping ensued. There was also a sway to and fro between a lumping approach (gathering together different elements of data under a general title), to keep the number of codes manageable; and a splitting approach, which subdivides general titles into smaller fragments of data to ensure that as much subtlety and specificity is retained from the response as possible (see Saldana 2016:24 for a more detailed explanation).

Part of these readings were to enable me to group together the different kind of play types and consider the issues of distinctiveness/crossover between management and other disciplines already referred to. These readings also allowed me to disaggregate answers and then reaggregate them. To illustrate, one iteration of coding led to separate information sections being drafted which dealt with a number of interview questions. Once a reading of these sections had been completed, it became apparent that there was palpable repetition of themes and little reason to separate or duplicate. A rereading of the sections took place and the number of themes reduced, mapped against categories which were similarly shrunk. An example of such shrinkage is where participants in interview might talk about their play aversions and preferences, their sense of any negative aspect to play and whether or not play was ever unacceptable. These were all combined and presented in What Gets In The Way of Play.

Subsumed into the broad categories were a great many individual codes which were identified and listed and then proved too numerous to be manageable. For this reason I have not included them here. They were therefore regrouped under questions and topics. This felt at first like lost work, however it proved invaluable as a means of checking and rechecking their relevance.

As a final note on the coding process, while I have wanted to recognise repeated motifs visible in the primary data I have also wanted to acknowledge minority practices as well, particularly in the realm of the use of value of free or unstructured play, compared to rule bound and outcome focussed play. This is why some forms of play have a great many illustrations, while others have few. All are important facets of playful learning and tell complex stories about why we play in higher education and how that play is received.

Dissemination and Evaluation

Throughout the life of the study its findings have been shared at a variety of events, listed under Talks and Workshops on my website *https://engagingimagination.com* and in blogposts such as Playing in a Pandemic (James, 2020b). Interactions and connections

from different events have been subsumed into its contents. A period of evaluation before final publication was incorporated into the timeline to allow for discussion and feedback prior to producing a finished account. Part of this evaluation involved the sending out of a first draft to critical readers for feedback. Responses to their comments have been integrated into this final version.

Challenges and limitations

As has already been made clear, this study ended up being conducted in a way that had not originally been intended. As a result, while all its planned objectives were met, the number of contributors from non-Westernised countries and that of direct student voices were lower than anticipated.

In short

This study has a mixed-method structure, a perceptual focus and a constructivist mood. Iterative and plural coding approaches have been used to synthesise responses into groups.

Reflection

What are your thoughts on this approach to study design?
Do any parts resonate particularly with you?
Are any aspects to this approach problematic for you?
Has anything been left out that you feel is a significant omission?
What might have been done differently?
If you were to repeat/extend/conduct a similar study yourself how would you go about it?

THE VALUE OF PLAY IN HE AND SUTTON-SMITH'S SEVEN RHETORICS

In The Ambiguity of Play (1997) psychologist and play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith problematizes different kinds of perceptions of play, drawing on play theory over time and across countries. He identifies seven major Rhetorics, relating these to disciplinary, historical or cultural positions and beliefs. He sees these as being situated within broader cultural Rhetorics. His focus in outlining these Rhetorics is to distil the ways writers and theorists have come to talk about play and how they discuss its value. He distinguishes this way of talking from a focus on the play forms themselves, however, you cannot have one without the other; they are intertwined.

He observes that "we fall into silliness"(1997: 1) when we attempt to define the nature of play in any consensual way. His work provides deep insights into, and analysis of, the myriad reasons why this is impossible. Sutton-Smith's dense arguments about ambiguity and contradiction regarding play are echoed by writers on play and study participants in different ways.

In the following sections I outline the Seven Rhetorics[11] and the basis on which they were elaborated. I identify the key synergies and differences between Sutton-Smith's position and my purpose in using them as a reference point in this study. In so doing, what I offer is my reading and interpretation of the Rhetorics and their relationship with HE; you may come to, or already have, a different view.

What are the Rhetorics?

While the index of *The Ambiguity of Play* makes no references to value or values, and only one to validation of the Rhetorics, the text itself has many. These relate to how the Rhetorics express, or connect to, values, beliefs and value systems in all kinds of guises. This is why I have wanted to explore them in the context of this study. Sutton-Smith defined the Rhetorics as "narratives that have the intent to persuade because there is some kind of gain for those who are successful in their persuasion" (Sutton-Smith, 1997:16). The notions of intent and gain are important when we consider whether or not play has value and legitimacy in higher education.

Each Rhetoric sets out the dominant beliefs and value systems that underpin a reading of play by play theorists within, and across, different disciplines. While they have distinct features, they also intermingle and have common ground. Certain Rhetorics may have allegiances or connections with particular disciplinary positions, historic eras or schools of thought.

The Rhetorics are: Progress, Power, Fate, Identity, Self, The Imaginary, and Frivolity. Sutton-Smith dedicates entire chapters to exploration of their key features, including crossovers and contradictions with each other. Their natures are complex, with Sutton-Smith noting

that, although he describes each one in the singular, they each have so many variants they should be termed Rhetorics in the plural.

In what follows, I have condensed their descriptions to a few key words underneath each name below. I also suggest where each Rhetoric might be visible in higher education. In doing both I am being both reductive and selective in order to try and boil down their essential features (difficult) and make some preliminary suggestions about where the Rhetorics may be felt or articulated in HE. The Rhetorics can be more valuably explored through deeper conversation and contextualization than they are here.

Figure G5. The Seven Rhetorics

Progress
Development, imitation, innovation, mastery, rehearsal for future, biological significance e.g. developing adaptability, in order to survive.

The Progress Rhetoric is one which is associated closely with learning in a wide sense. Play is often described as evolutionary, developmental or about adaptability. It helps us extend boundaries, as illustrated by this study participant: "Play can convince the students that mathematics can be used in a very creative way, not only to solve equations", (TVOP IV 35), who added that this supported our ability to read the world around us and see play in it. Thus play takes learning beyond numbers into visual realms. Progress in academia may be about the grasp or generation of new knowledge, revised thinking and practices, social and scientific advances or adjustments in how we perceive the world. The Rhetoric of play as Progress is problematic however, as Sutton-Smith suggests that it is an exclusive one: "animals and children, not adults, adapt and develop through play" (Sutton-Smith, 1997:9). This exclusion of adults is completely countered by this study.

Power
Play as expression of power, contestive play or festivals. Instinctual. Dark. Rule-based and orderly or an indeterminate interaction of forces?

Some may say the Power Rhetoric is easily detected in academia. It can be felt in relationships between students and staff and across the different employment hierarchies of universities. It surfaces in how funding games are successfully played, or awards and plaudits and goals achieved. It infuses hegemonic thinking and practices that are celebrated and rewarded. Challenges to this status quo can be seen in efforts to redress power imbalances, such as in work to decolonize the curriculum or on gender and race discrimination. They can also be seen in efforts to empower students through a variety of approaches, for example curriculum design or research co-operation where the student is a partner in, not a recipient of, the decision-making. Examples of power-related play are games, contests and competitions (see also Huizinga, 1949), which are widely used in higher education, particularly for teamwork.

Fate
Our primitive desire to control the circumstances of life through magic and prayer; games of fate and fortune, luck, altered states of consciousness, being in the hands of the gods, dark and cruel play. Play as subversion. An inconstant, chaotic universe.

This Rhetoric is one which conjures the sense of being at the mercy of Fate, luck, supernatural or universal forces. Several respondents cited games of chance used in teaching and research that encourage adaptable thinking in the face of randomness or the ability to deal with unexpected change. An example is that of a game where medical science students have to pick two random cards - one with an art form and the other with a medical condition - and have to create the former to symbolize the latter.

Others include rolling dice in war games or picking options in digital gaming and then having to deal with the consequences. Other, more superstitious, evidence can be seen in reactions to health crises over centuries which see these as punishment from the gods; the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s was seen by certain extreme religious groups as a case in point. Covid 19 has been seen by some as Fate, or an angry universe, dealing roughly with humankind for its unsustainable behaviours. In railing against the pandemic subversive memes and jokes have abounded; some against government decisions, others mocking the antics of anti-social-distancing citizens.

Identity
Closely related to the Rhetoric of Power. Communal identity through contestive play, forms of bonding and belonging e.g., parades, festivals, enactments, cultures of play providing identity and solidarity.

Through this Rhetoric the value of play lies in fostering community and relationship building (both of which became key issues for play in the (virtual) Covid classroom). The

Rhetoric of Identity is often also expressed through group and teamwork, a sense of belonging to an academic or professional tribe, or by being in apprenticeship, en route to mastery. This Rhetoric may also be visible in some of the rituals associated with a subject or area of training: one respondent noted the points of commonality with military education and the use of rituals, as well as other carnivalesque or bacchanalian practices that are seen as a form of both bonding and letting off steam. Other forms of carnival shift away from the expected kinds of activity for the discipline e.g. from making robots in engineering to making and playing instruments around a fake camp fire at a 'festival'. On a far greater scale, the Identity Rhetoric speaks to radical change in the ways society is organized (see Kane, 2004).

Self
The relationship between self and play; the shift from communal play in historic narratives to individualized play in Western culture. Finding the meaning of play in the quality of the player's experience. A state of mind, a way of seeing and being. Deep, risky, ecstatic, wild play. Shares the common ground of freedom with the Imaginary.

Play in HE with regard to this Rhetoric focusses on certain kinds of play, rather than the deep and risky varieties Sutton-Smith and others enumerate. It has a fairly obvious self-orientation, i.e. in the way the value of play is measured by the quality and nature of the individual's experience. In its most instrumentalist forms its value might be found in activities relating to boosting student satisfaction. In pedagogic terms it may be found in creative and playful modes of reflective practice, critical self-evaluation, and metacognitive awareness, as well as personal self-esteem, self-knowledge and wellbeing. It also encompasses solitary and cerebral forms of play.

The Imaginary
The unreal, fanciful, imagined, visionary. Transformation is the key characteristic of this Rhetoric. Can also be about disorder and deconstruction of reality. Artists and creators, make believe, telling stories.

The Rhetoric of the Imaginary is the way writers and theorists evoke the power of play through exploring the world through artistic, creative, fictious, imagined lenses. Numerous respondents describe the use of play acting, dress-up or wearing masks and to explore scenarios. The LEGO® Serious Play® methodology is one of myriad examples which illustrate the Imaginary's presence in HE play; whereby a complex topic can be metaphorically embodied in brick models. Imaginatively interpreting these models and building stories related to them allow you to reinvent or take liberties with reality to 'try on' new scenarios and solutions for size (Nerantzi and James, 2018). The Imaginary allows for unbridled fancy; unfettered by dismissive thinking that instantly says 'but that won't work'. The goal of enabling transformation, e.g. through creativity, is a powerful repeated motif when educators talk about their responsibilities to students and/or mission. *The Journal*

of Imaginary Research encourages researchers to develop creative accounts of fictional projects as a means of honing writing skills.

Frivolity

Play as nonsense and inversion, escape and diversion, useless play. The festival as frivolity. Jokers, fools, comedians, often including those who speak truth to power. A Rhetoric to potentially undermine the others.

This Rhetoric reveals how play plays with norms, conventions, structures, practices, beliefs. Play forms use the surreal, unexpected, and out of place. Examples include using Punch and Judy to teach plagiarism; shock and attention-seeking play through the use of magic to teach wealth generation; disorienting play in which norms are reversed and familiarity upended. Through frivolity and disorder, in common with traditional research methods, we question accepted tropes and practices. Holly Gramazio's essay *The floor is made of lava* insists that her investigation of the lava game is not research. However, in sample size, questions and analysis, it has plenty in common with it, while being funny, playful and provocative.

If you are already familiar with Sutton-Smith's work, you may be nodding - or scratching - your head at this point, depending on how far my reading of the Rhetorics marries your own. Even if you have not come across these Rhetorics before, you have probably come across some of the examples of play (or similar) that are used here to illustrate how play may be talked about or written about. You might also be starting to think about whether or not you can detect similar kinds of 'persuasive discourses' or see how play is talked about in relation to one or more of these. Conversely, you may feel like this is all a bit new or strange. In either case you might be wondering what they have to do with this study, which is what we will turn to next.

What is the relationship between the Rhetorics and this study?

When I started scoping out *The Value of Play in HE,* I imagined that the fit between the Rhetorics and HE play would be a tight one. Sutton-Smith would have helpfully provided me with a rock solid framework and all I would need to do would be reveal (with a suitably dramatic flourish) the main points of connection. Needless to say, the more I looked, the more I started to realise that, while there were parallels, there were also gaps and points of departure between the Rhetorics as he defines them and discussions about the value of HE play.

So, a few quick clarifications before we go any further. I use his Rhetorics as a touchstone for shedding light on the theoretical undercurrents of play, and arguments for and against play, and for raising questions about play in higher education. I am not offering a close reading of *The Ambiguity of Play*, although, having finished the study, his title has never felt more appropriate. Rather, I have conducted a selective appraisal of where I believe his work has echoes in, or can amplify, understanding of play practices in higher education. With this in mind I don't spend time on his consideration of social or leisure play, child play or child phantasmagoria.

For brevity, I summarise key moments of agreement and variance regarding Sutton-Smith's discussion of the Rhetorics in the following list. In the supporting documentation on my website I offer a further comparison between his intentions with *The Ambiguity of Play* and my own to avoid - I hope - any misunderstanding over how I am considering his work in my context.

1. There are no references to the presence of the Rhetorics in, or their relevance for, university learning in *The Ambiguity of Play*, although he makes references to learning, academic disciplines or education.

2. He defines the purpose of his enquiry as follows:

> By seeing how the play descriptions and play theories can be tied in with such broad patterns of ideological value, one has greater hope of coming to understand the general character of play theory which is the ultimate objective here (Sutton-Smith 1997: 12).

As already emphasised, my objectives tie in closely with the first half of this sentence, and not the second. While Sutton-Smith's Rhetorics "are applied only to the specific subject of play theories" (Sutton-Smith, 1997:12), for me the relevance of the Rhetorics, their presence and significance, lies in relation to play practices in higher education. These maybe informed by play theories in a rich and substantial way, but such theories are likely to be lying under the surface of pedagogic activity.

Sutton-Smith makes some kind of allowance for future interpretations of his work by noting that the way in which the scholarly disciplines define the subject matter of play may, or may not, make sense in terms of the Rhetorics that are being proposed, and that this is open to investigation. This is relevant, as we shall see when we look at how participants try to define play. Among three kinds of play definitions he considers, his first one relates mostly closely to this study:

> a) The definitions by players of their own play experiences and functions. What do the players reckon to be the character of and the reason for their own participation? Obviously there is not much research to be referred to here, although there is a considerable amount of anecdotal opinion to be cited (1997:16).

For the most part, here, you need to substitute the word educators for players. Many of these will argue that they will join in the play with their students, thus becoming players as well. What they certainly do is express their thoughts on the character of, and reason for, the play they choose. Student respondents definitely fit this category.

While Sutton-Smith is primarily interested in the way play forms illustrate theoretical positions, I, and the many playful educators contributing here, are interested in both for different reasons. These educators are aware of, and drawing on, play theory as part of

their pedagogic labours, while largely thinking about how the use of play might benefit students, or positively serve their other academic activities. These may bring into play ideological beliefs related to their own values and value systems they encounter, or within which they operate, but may not stem from, or inform, play theory. Some of these will be consciously and explicitly identified, others will be hiding under their own radar, as seen in a) next.

Where we have shared interests and beliefs

a) Sutton-Smith defines rhetoric as "persuasive discourse":

> "...each is called a rhetoric because its ideological values are something that the holders like to persuade others to believe in and to live by. Much of the time such values do not even reach a level of conscious awareness. People simply take it for granted for example, that children develop as a result of their playing... (1997:11-12)"

While the second half of this sentence may still apply, there is evidence - in this study and other work - of the conscious efforts educators are making to understand where their feelings and beliefs about value and play are coming from.

Sutton-Smith goes on to assert that

b) the Rhetorics of play express the way play is placed in context within broader value systems.

This is something that I explore in conjunction with value, values and value systems later in this study. Nothing is in complete isolation.

Where we have different foci

Two questions in my mind at the start of designing this study were whether or not the Rhetorics that Sutton-Smith set out were a) all present in higher education and b) the extent to which they were significant in terms of how play is valued in higher education. A supplementary question was c) is there need for any additional Rhetorics relating to HE in order to fully reflect their presence and compensate for any absence?

Answering a) and b) was relatively straightforward; a) yes and b) to varying degrees, depending on context. However c) proved much more troublesome. This is because Sutton-Smith specifies particular criteria that need to be fulfilled for something to become a Rhetoric akin to those he has elaborated. These suggest that there will be affinities or correlations between certain types of play, player, discipline and Rhetoric, in various combinations.

In wrestling with this, I plotted some thoughts against these criteria which you can find in the supporting documentation at *https://engagingimagination.com*[12]. It offers a comparative commentary; considering each with regard to a focus on the substance and value of play in higher education. I concluded that it may be impossible to create a new Rhetoric which applies to HE as a distinct entity, given that it is so diverse in what it encompasses. Furthermore, as we shall see, trying to contain certain kinds of play within certain kinds of disciplinary boundaries is hard to do.

While they are of interest, the main conclusion I drew from the exercise was that his criteria are not entirely applicable to a higher education context and therefore I have put them to one side. This does not counter the relevance of his existing Rhetorics, but does make it difficult to add to them. It also reinforced for me that neither Sutton-Smith (nor anyone else I have come across yet) offers a universal model or framework that caters for play in HE. Should anyone feel such a thing is needed (I return to this at the end) it will fall to them or others to create it.

In short

The Seven Rhetorics have been introduced here, within this study's context of higher education, and not in their original theoretical context. I consider the Rhetorics in this study from the dual viewpoint of play forms and the ways in which these play forms are discussed, and their value perceived. Differences and points of synergy have been set out, together with questions as to how they might relate to HE.

Reflection

Whatever your play background/knowledge of the Seven Rhetorics,
what are your thoughts on this description of them?
What evidence of their presence can you detect in your higher education experience?
Do certain kinds of play dominate in your subject area?
Do you perceive any particular Rhetorics to be especially present in your subject area?
Are the forms of play you use, or come across, in your discipline influenced by its specific culture, practices, beliefs and ways of doing things?
Are any of the Seven missing, less visible or deliberately avoided?

And for bonus points[13] 🙂
Using the mapping activity looking at Sutton-Smith's criteria for something to be a Rhetoric - found in the supporting documentation at https://engagingimagination.com can you make play practices in your subject area fit his specifications?

WRITINGS, THINKINGS, DOINGS:
Play theory, literature and practice as a backdrop to this study

Welcome to my bookshelf, my laptop, my address book...

What you find here is a foray into a variety of publications and events related to the theory and practice of play. It is not a comprehensive one, for that would be an impossibility. It is also not the only place in this account in which mention is made of different writers, thinkers or doers. It will serve as a beginning, however, and set the scene for the following consideration of the use and value of play in higher education.

Note 1. If you are already very familiar with play literature you could do one of the following.

1. Skip this bit entirely and pick up again from a later point.
2. Read it anyway and play Author Bingo. Write down all the play writer names you can think of and make a grid. Check off each one as it appears. You either win when you get them all, or win because you got more names that weren't included than were mentioned.
3. Do something else entirely. Your call.

Note 2. If you are completely new to play literature you could also do any of the above.

Are we in an age of play?

> "...whatever may be the real science of the matter, the next generation is going to believe that our minds are always at play, regardless of whether there is any such vital play presence in our midst (Sutton-Smith 1997: 149)."

A few pages ago I asked if play had become the new buzzword (I can certainly feel its presence in the everyday; can you?). It is one thing to be a buzzword, however, and another for that word to be a badge for an entirely new spirit of the age. To think about that, let us pose the question all children on a long car journey want to ask; are we there yet?

The expectation of the arrival of a ludic era - that is to say, an age of play - is not new; it has been heralded for some decades. Frissen, de Mul and Raessens suggest the ludification of culture dates back to the 1960s and that "playfulness has increasingly become a mainstream characteristic of our culture" (2013:1). In *The Ambiguity of Play* Sutton-Smith suggests that there will be a "...ludic turn in Western culture, the shift in sensibility that makes it possible to see contemporary living through the lens of play" (Sutton-Smith, 1997 in Henricks, 2017:7). For Sicart, we are already living in an "era of playful expression, a time in which play has become a cultural, social and economic centerpiece" (Sicart, 2018:262). Neale (2020) draws on the work of several of the authors cited in this study to suggest we have already reached a golden age of play.

More and more terms are being coined to refer to play. Thibault and Heljakka invented "toyification" as a sign of the influence and prestige that toys have within cultures. They also cite other terms that have come into being to define the influence of play, such "ludicisation", a term introduced by Bonenfant and Genvo (2014)" (quote cited by Thibault and Heljakka, 2019:3). The older term, ludification, often associated with the Latin ludere (to play) also indicated deception or mockery in archaic language.

More recently references to the ludification of culture (e.g. Dippel and Fizek, 2016) have been used to denote the presence and significance of play, as in Deterding et al (2011) who map out the different kinds of game play that contribute to the ludification of culture. Mayra (ND) points to the ubiquity of play at different ages, in the workplace (however forced) and for leisure. He argues, citing McGonigal's view that networked players have the potential to engage in collective action, that play has the ability to fix reality. Zimmerman (2015) argued that games would be a defining feature of culture in the 21st century.

In the opening words of his keynote *Play Times* for the *Playposium: Welcome to the Playvolution*, Pat Kane (2021) supported Zimmerman's position with statistics illustrating the reach of global games culture.

- 2014: 1.82bn gamers. 2021: 2.9bn
- $175.8bn global market 2021
- Biggest entertainment industry

He quoted his own words, used in the exhibition *Century of the Child* (2012)

"Play will be to the 21st century what work was to the industrial age - our dominant way of knowing, doing and creating value". He then went on to question what dominant meant, and whether it had arrived yet. He argued that there are certain ages where it must be dominant, such as early years education. And other areas where you would not want it to be dominant. As many theoreticians also point out, whether play is dominant and if so, what kind, will vary from society to society, not just age to age. In this study the question is reframed from "are we in an age of play?" into "are we in an age of play in HE?". As Kane suggests, how we answer this question may be influenced by many factors. These will reveal themselves; for now, let us move to the literature and theory of play.

Play as a general concept

The literature on play as a general phenomenon is extensive, with many different disciplinary foci; anthropology, neuroscience, animal behaviour, sociology, psychology and others. Much of it relating to education concentrates on early years development, or the primary and secondary sectors. These aspects are not considered here as outside the scope of the study, although some of the texts cited may reference childhood development, education and learning.

What follows is deliberately selective; chosen to give an idea of the preoccupations and differences of the field. Some works are well known, others less so; all have relevance for this study. There is also, inevitably, some crossover with Defining, Naming, Recognising Play, as it is impossible to discuss aspects of writers' work without making some reference to their position on characteristics or definitions of play. This I hope will provide useful reminders, rather than dull repetition.

For readers new to play literature and theory there are all kinds of places to start. I suggest two which may be useful and short; one is Tanis's plain English overview of theories of adult play and playfulness (2012:40-60). The other is Henricks (2008) paper on the nature of play; signposting to the hefty work that has been done in this area. He observes that:

> "...most theories of human play associate play with the freedom of human beings to express themselves openly and to render creatively the conditions of their lives (2008: 159)."

The breadth and poetry of this statement provides an umbrella under which to stand before we drill into the complexity of play definition.

Henricks is an advocate of Sutton-Smith's work and provides an excellent introduction to the latter's posthumous publication *Play for Life: Play Theory and Play as Emotional Survival* (2017). Sutton-Smith's interest was in the phenomenon of play in childhood and also in adult life in all its forms, and his text *The Ambiguity of Play*, encountered just now, is a classic of play theory.

Culture, environment, background, conditioning, social mores and many other factors influence the kinds of play that are engaged in around the world. As well as Sutton-Smith, Peter Gray, in *Free to Learn*, while focussing on play for the learning of children and adolescents, also provides insights into how play is viewed differently in different cultures (2013). This study also touches on play and cultural difference later.

There are other play experts and theoreticians to whom proponents of play in higher education also turn frequently. They include Bateson and Martin (2013) for their features of play (among other things) in *Play, Playfulness, Creativity and Innovation*. While also not focussing on higher education in any detail, this text is incredibly useful for an elaboration of the value of play and playfulness. Key features are referred to in Defining, Naming Recognising Play. While animal behaviourists focus on the biological importance of play for evolution, rehearsal, mastery and survival, neuroscientists (Diamond, 2001; Portnoy, 2020), and psychologists (Brown, 2009), among others, address the ways in which play helps shape our brains and develop our synaptic connections through neuroplasticity. The brain feeds play but even more, play feeds the brain.

Miguel Sicart and Pat Kane address the universal and societal importance of play. Sicart (2017) writes of the value of play as a mode of being human, while Kane presents a radical social manifesto in his 2004 work *The Play Ethic*. In this he argues that play is the means

through which we can reappraise our priorities and drivers in society; changing from a Protestant work ethic to a play ethic.

Frequently cited also is one of the founding fathers of play theory in the 20th century, Johan Huizinga, whose *Homo Ludens* was first published in 1938. He argued that play and games pre-date culture and have a civilising and uplifting power- particularly with regard to contestive play. In *Man, Play and Games*, Caillois praises Huizinga for his conception of play, while also critiquing it for paying insufficient attention to the varied forms of play and their significance in different cultural contexts.

Huizinga defined play in these terms:

> "...we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside the "ordinary" as being "not serious" but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their different from the common world by disguise or other means (Huizinga, 1949:13)."

Henricks (2008) observes that Huizinga's central tenets of play still hold for many theorists, while finding it strange that Huizinga concerns himself with adult play (not strange for this study) and that he overlooks solo play (a concern I share). He also observes that there have been many opposing accounts which take issue with, or challenge, Huizinga's foci.

Sutton-Smith argues that how play is interpreted depends on who is doing it, in what context, to what end (or no end), and a litany of other factors. Dearybury and Jones (2020) echo this sentiment, suggesting that play will be different to people from different backgrounds and socioeconomic circumstances, governed also by cultural and societal norms. All of these variables give rise to, or affect, our conceptions of value, values and value systems which are considered later on.

To illustrate this, let us return to Huizinga's definition of play which we have just read, and to Caillois, who took issue with it. Caillois describes this definition as one in which all the words are meaningful and yet which as a whole is both too broad and too narrow. It covers important and frequently listed characteristics of play - immersive, free activity separated from the ordinary (even by a very thin film), with certain boundaries and a social aspect (although not always). It certainly has problematic bits when it comes to its application in higher education play. Intense and utter absorption may be experienced, however, the state of mind may vary e.g. in the extent to which it is light-hearted (if you think of the serious games/play movements). Play in a university context may indeed lack material interest; however, many educators see the purpose of play as having profit of some kind, whether in the form of knowledge, capability or many other things. As to secrecy and disguise for the players, they may appear as parts of play activities but won't

necessarily be defining features of higher education play.

In his own work, Caillois expresses his beliefs as to the immutable characteristics of play and their distinction from reality. He defines this distinction as being "...like the very image of life, yet an imaginary, ideal, ordered, separate and limited image" (2001:75).

The use of the words ideal and ordered have interesting implications for play in higher education. As we shall see from some of the examples shared, the worlds that are being navigated through play are often anything but ideal and ordered. In crisis management simulation, or as part of training for theatre surgery, the random, disastrous and unexpected turn up, and new information is suddenly produced, which overturns understanding.

This is just one illustration which suggests that interpretations, understandings and practices of play need their own definitions and parameters in a higher education context; ones which allow play to exist in slightly altered or circumscribed circumstances.

Caillois produces a typology of games with four categories- agôn (competitive), alea (chance-based), mimicry (illusory) and ilinx (vertiginous) - which, at times, mix references to games and play. He also describes two principal play moods - paidia (free and exuberant) and ludus (constrained and rule-bound) - which relate to how players engage with these different kinds of play. Like the Rhetorics, these can also intermingle. His typology speaks to both the different kinds of play we will see manifested in higher education play and to aspects of Sutton-Smith's Rhetorics. I outline how these two approaches map onto each other in the following diagramme:

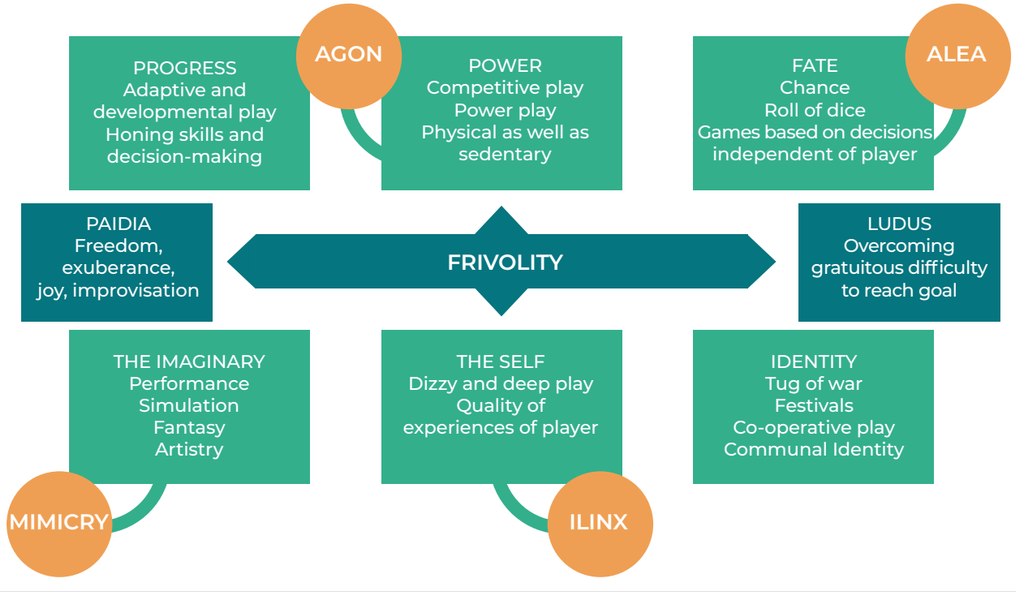


Figure G6. An overlay of Caillois' play types and Sutton-Smith's Rhetorics

Each category also offers what Barash, in his translation of *Man, Play and Games* (2001), calls "cultural clues". These cultural clues will be relevant for considerations of play and cultural difference, conflicting positions on play, and when there are barriers to play.

In terms of what it means to play, and to play well with others, De Koven's *The Well-Played Game* (2013) is a beautiful narration of, and reflection on, play behaviours. Suits' philosophical allegory *The Grasshopper* (2014), based on Aesop's fable, is another literary evocation of the centrality of play and games to human existence. He and the other authors listed above all address play (in some way) as an enriching means of living a good and/or meaningful human life. Bogost (2016) also does this through exploring the nature of fun and games as experienced within limitations and parameters. In *Free Play* (1990) and *The Art of Is* (2019) Stephen Nachmanovitch takes this into a different realm with his exploration of the concept of free play as improvisation in art and music, while extending his observations into other aspects of life. In 2019, in conjunction with the exhibition *Play Well* at the Wellcome Collection in London, Michael Rosen brought out his *Book of Play*, writing playfully and inviting readers to engage in a similar spirit.

Like play, playfulness has also been the subject of scrutiny for many decades (e.g. Lieberman, 1977). There are a significant body of articles and books on the subject, albeit mostly outside higher education. There is a supporting array of blogposts and media pieces on the subject, which express a spectrum of moods, including the exhortatory (Cohen, 2019) and the embarrassed (Hicks, 2016). Whatever the view of play as a rightful part of adult behaviour, it is garnering attention.

These, then, are but a few of the examples of works on play, playfulness and play theory which provide a prelude to, and inform consideration of, play in higher education. Each of them suggests a wide variety of the purposes and positives of play in general, all of which and more will be endorsed by participants in this study.

Play in Higher Education

The drive to differentiate play in adulthood and for adult learning from child's play is spiking growth in activity and publication. However, compared to research into play in general and play in the compulsory education sector, the study of play in higher education is a much newer and smaller field.

Those who are exploring play in higher education seek to create new understandings of play, make a case for its importance and identify its specificities within their context. Texts which address play in higher education do so from a multitude of perspectives. They make arguments for future developments in research and cases for the revision of dominant ideologies as to the right way to teach at university. Some of the approaches to play included here are illustrated by examples and vignettes of play later on. Different ways in which play has been considered in higher education are indicated under the following subheadings.

Note. What follows is, once again, selective. Not all activity regarding play in specific disciplines is visible through searches on and offline. Where there are platforms or associations for play in HE resources spring more readily to hand. However, there may be many other papers, presentations, posts and practices tucked within disciplinary or niche journals which stay hidden. From what I have found, and already noted, Westernised countries appear to be more attentive to play in higher education than others. However, I welcome evidence to the contrary.

Play across the disciplines

Some collections contain multiple examples of play across subject areas and contexts. Jackson, Nerantzi and James (2015) collaborated on an early, experimental online magazine as part of Jackson's Creative Academic venture. An early issue of Creative Academic, co-edited by the three, was entitled *Exploring Play in HE*. Its two volumes presented 37 examples of playful practice from educators internationally. Contributions included playful animation, play in science, playdoh fashion, a murder mystery, play to disrupt the status quo, and playful robots in cultural studies. While I remember the experience of bringing together these vibrant and inspiring examples, I had completely forgotten that I had written a conclusion suggesting some principles of play. These, to my relief, are ones that are still valid and persist into the discussions of play I have since been both holding and collating, during the present study. (A full list can be found in pp 46-48 Volume 2b. Worth a look, even if only to find my exhortation not to turn play into cabbage, and understand what it meant).

James and Nerantzi (2019) published a collection of 44 different examples of play in HE, contributed by educators internationally. *The Power of Play in HE: Creativity in Tertiary Learning* includes longer theoretical considerations of the nature and value of play in higher education, framed around examples and evaluations of practice, as well as shorter, practical sketches.

In their book *Playful Learning: Events and Activities to Engage Adults* (2019), Whitton and Moseley draw on their joint experience of creating activities and events which explore the potential of play in adulthood. The contributions include many examples from the annual Playful Learning Conference, held in the Midlands, UK. This is hosted by the *Playful Learning Association*, which began life as the ALT Games & Learning Special Interest group in 2010. A link to an account of what it was like to attend a Playful Learning Conference can be found in the bibliography (Reeve, 2019).

The Journal of Play in Adulthood (JPA) aims to provide a multidisciplinary open access forum dedicated to the discussion of play and playfulness in adults. Its publications are wide ranging and made available through open access to all. In December 2021, articles featured on the *The Journal of Play in Adulthood* (JPA) website discussed technology related play, including topics such video (Caspar, Whitton and Whitton), digital materiality (Marchetti), a framework for developing playfulness, experimentation and critical thinking

(Francis and Rasmusen) and game jams (Roine, Meriläinen and Kankainen). Two papers explicitly address the importance of the human side of education; Reeve writes about compassionate play and Linde discusses the wellbeing of play. These articles are all contained within different issues of the journal, where additional evidence of play within disciplines can be found. Two relating to health care include Dean and Parson's paper on integrating play-based approaches into nursing education and McKay et al's pun-tastic paper on professional practice entitled "Vets who horse around".

Particular kinds of play

I illustrate these kinds with examples from games, simulations, puzzles and mindful play. A note here: games-based learning is already a well-established field with its own extensive literature. I leave this out here as it is not possible to do it justice, although games-based learning features in responses to survey and interview and is discussed as part of play types. Simulations and roleplays in the area of business and management are similarly well-known and well-used forms of play. I do not take on the wealth of literature on these for the same reason.

Where all of these do feature is in the work of the AGame group at Aston University Business School; where educators share mutual interests in game-based learning. AGame was founded by Caroline Elliott who then co-edited, with Jon Guest and Elinor Vettraino, *Games, Simulations and Playful Learning in Business Education* (2021). Its contents include Koslovskaya's use of games to teach corporate social responsibility and sustainability, Koornhof's narrative-based game which can be used as an assessment tool in law teaching, and Kerridge and Evans' discussion of the value of simulations for mixed nationality/culture student cohorts.

Each of these examples touches on a significant issue: the major concerns that face us all; the challenge of finding effective and alternative modes of assessment, and the importance of finding culturally appropriate and inclusive modes of play with which all students can engage. Culture, as an influence on the choice of play and ability/desire to participate, as well as on the value ascribed to that play, or something that appears repeatedly in interview responses in this study. Other publications relating to game-based learning in HE, and in management education in particular, include Lopez et al on serious games (2021) and James (2020) on the value of play in management education.

Arnab, Morini and Clarke (2018) take a different angle to the consideration of game-based learning. They discuss an experimental module using co-created games to explore the relationship between games, play and technology with cross-faculty students at Coventry University.

Other texts focus on particular forms of play, such as Nicholson and Cable (2021), *Unlocking the Potential of Puzzle-based Learning*, focussing on the design of escape rooms. In contrast, Reeve (2021) and Payton (2020), are two writers who focus on how

creative and playful approaches to pedagogy combine with compassionate and mindful engagement (see also Gibbs, 2017).

LEGO® Serious Play®

While naturally linking to the previous examples, I have given LEGO® Serious Play® its own category. It has grown in visibility and popularity in higher education in recent years and several participants are using it in their teaching. Since its inception more than two decades ago, LEGO® Serious Play® as a method has successfully translated from the corporate sector into HE and is a growth area in terms of interest, practice and publication. Numerous texts which relate to the method outside higher education are not referred to here.

LEGO® Serious Play® features in numerous papers in different disciplinary contexts, such as Dann (2018), writing on its use in marketing education. Nerantzi and James (2019) present a compendium of the ways it is used in HE; including to inform educator training for postgraduate certificates and preparation for levels of Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy in the UK (now AdvanceHE). Nerantzi and James also co-edited a special issue of the *International Journal of Management and Applied Research* (IJMAR), on the use of LEGO® Serious Play®, with 15 different papers, including an introduction to the origins of the method by its founders; Professors Bart Victor and Johan Roos. James and Nerantzi have collaborated on numerous other articles and ventures using the method. James also discusses the adaptation of LEGO® Serious Play® for courses on personal and professional development and critical reflection at university in multiple papers. James and Brookfield include LEGO® Serious Play® and other playful approaches in their book *Engaging Imagination: helping students become creative and reflective thinkers* (2014).

In addition to its appearance in many texts and popular use in teaching, learning and educational development, LEGO® Serious Play® is also being used as a research tool. In its unpublished guise it features as a means of exploring doctoral research through workshops led by many educators, including me. In its published form the method is appearing in PhD theses where it has been used as a means of data collection (e.g. Ajibade and Hayes, 2020).

Play for particular audiences

Andrew Walsh, aka PlayBrarian, has written several publications which cover play and games for librarians (but not exclusively so). He uses Goffman's concept of frames[14] to explore play as political act and the need to have "permission to play" (Walsh, 2019); something which recurs in participant responses, as well as in play discussions more widely. In the context of aviator education, Trew (2016) considers the relationship

between playfulness and airmindedness (2019) and ponders what airmen can learn from academics through his reclamation of the story of Icarus.

The experience of play

We will shortly encounter no end of examples of uplifting, enjoyable play in this study, while many more can be found outside it. However, Deterding (2018) also uses Goffman's frames; this time to discuss embarrassment and adult play. While useful for considering how play is engaged in, with or without embarrassment, Deterding's paper also posits that various professional roles (including teachers) as well as personal ones (parents) "to play is to provide". That is to say that play is being put to the service of the wellbeing and education of others. His identification of the need for an excuse, reason or qualifier for play in order to maintain adult identity legitimacy is precisely one which many respondents in this study recognise.

> "Adult play presents the interesting case where accounting not just has to render play reasonable somehow but also in a way that neutralizes its tension with adult identity. Autotelic enjoyment is widely recognized as the prime motivation of leisurely play (Boyle, Connolly, Hainey, and Boyle, 2012).And yet "pure" autotelic enjoyment sits at odds with adult identity claims of responsibility, productivity and self-regulation. When held accountable for their play, adults are more likely to find themselves in need of an alibi (Deterding, 2018:268)."

Such alibis may be the very things that are symbols of value or evidence of benefit, and which may make play acceptable in the eyes of those resistant to it.

Play, politics and privilege

The political impact of play in higher education is something which is also explored. Lean in his PhD thesis (2019, unpublished) considers play and the concept of participation in higher education, with a view to widening access to HE for a larger demographic. The political aspect of the debate as to whether or not play forms are inclusive or exclusive appears in other contexts. For many years the importance of multisensory education as a means of catering for neurodiverse learners has been underscored (see also James, 2020c).

Playfulness in HE

We will look at definitions of playfulness as well as play shortly. For now, here are a few examples of articles and books on playfulness in higher education. Payton and Clughen (Eds. 2021) explore creative and playful 'ed-ventures' online during the Covid pandemic. Lubbert et al (2021) argue for playfulness as being part of sustainable educational

design. Cable (2019:58-70) offers examples of playful interludes for academic events and conferences as well as student classes, while Stein Greenberg suggests 'stokes' as a means of re-energising when resources might be running low (2021:166). The importance of playfulness as approached through design-based research is offered as an indication that the false dichotomy between playful and serious leads to blind spots in human thinking (de Jong, 2015). An argument for playful teaching in classroom practice across the ages, supported by Dr Stuart Brown, Director of the National Play Institute in the USA, is presented by Dearybury and Jones (2020).

Boundary crossing

Just as play literature from wider domains such as anthropology, sociology, psychology and childhood development has informed the thinking of educators using play in higher education, specific areas of interest also have points of crossover. To illustrate outside HE, Petelczyc et al note the way in which research into play in adulthood in general heavily influences thinking about play at work. To illustrate within HE, the work of Sturrock and Else (1998), King and Newstead (2021) and King and Sturrock (2019) explores the play cycle framework. While this emerges from, and is designed for, the area of playwork with children it has relevance for the university teaching of play principles for under/postgraduate students who will be future playworkers.

Play at work

In addition to papers on play in general and play in higher education there is also a body of work looking at play in the workplace. (There are also increasing numbers of ventures seeking to introduce play into work-based facilitation e.g. this example here) In some respects, as Petelczyc et al argue, playful practices at work are already embedded in prominent organisations such as Google, Facebook, LinkedIn and Zappos and have achieved a certain kind of legitimacy that those in higher education still attempt to acquire (2017:162). A similar acceptance can be seen in the uptake of the LEGO® Serious Play® method by major companies such the Red Cross, Formula One and Sony, among many more. Among the benefits cited are improved attitudes and motivation, focus, strategic thinking and outcomes.

Petelczyc and colleagues endorse the position articulated by many as to the variable and inconsistent basis on which to evaluate play:

> "Although insightful, research on play at work, which has focused disproportionately on the positive outcomes of play, is diffuse and has different theoretical bases, including cathartic, flow, and stimulus-seeking theories (ibid)."

The purpose of their research, furthermore is

> "...to persuade management researchers that more systematic research on play not only will yield new insights into how employees experience modern organizational life but also can provide managers with direction in terms of when and how play can be incorporated into the workplace of the 21st century to achieve desired outcomes (ibid)"

Such an aim is germane to the management interest present within this study. It also provides points of reference for universities and tertiary education establishments in terms of how they may benefit from greater engagement with, and appreciation of, play. From the point of view of play at work Petelczyc et al observe that while:

> "some research has explored the dysfunctional and negative outcomes of play, the literature has predominantly focused on the positive outcomes (2018: 163)."

Without further information it is hard to know exactly how the authors are separating out research and literature, although it is possible to guess. Their plea for balance in research is a wise one, however.

Research into play in higher education

The use of play in the teaching of research methods is something which is mentioned several times by study participants. King (2018) offers an evaluation of playful and non-playful methods in teaching research methods which shows how it is possible to discuss play in higher education using a solid and sound research basis.

Four years ago, Whitton (2018: 2) identified the field as lacking "underpinning theoretical and definitional work", while Van Vleet and Feeney (2015), writing from the perspective of social psychology, refer to "definitional issues, a lack of a theoretical framework and a dearth of standardized measures".[15]

With regard to any lack of a theoretical framework, I would suggest that work has been done since Van Vleet and Feeney's paper was published. To me it also depends on how one is defining framework. Several authors offer and discuss frameworks for play in higher education, even if these have been created for other contexts. We have already noted King and Sturrock's (2019) exploration of the play cycle which King teaches as part of his Masters course. Toft-Norgard, Toft-Nielsen and Whitton (2017) reappraise Shulman's concept of signature pedagogies and consider how playful learning in higher education, integrated into Shulman's framework, can provide a new perspective for the design of curriculum. Nerantzi creates a playground model for academic development which can support playful interactions in learning and teaching (Nerantzi, 2015, Nerantzi, 2019).

The number, therefore, of theoretical frameworks seems to be increasing. However none of them, either together or separately, seem to offer a universal model. It remains to be seen whether one is needed or possible. What does appear to be a constant concern

in play in HE is that, while it is fast evolving and has a growing body of research, there is scope for much more work.

Play in management education

Specific examples of play in business and management education in HE have appeared in some of these different categories e.g. game-based learning and LEGO® Serious Play®. Others are cited in the Gallery block devoted to management education. Other publications deal with simulations (e.g. Lean, Moizer and Warren, 2015, Fox, Pittaway and Uzuegbunam, 2018)

Others deal with escape rooms (e.g. this CABS blogpost, ND), play as arts installation (Holtham and Bech, 2019), and wargaming (e.g. Schwarz, 2013). Taha, Tej and Sirkova (2015) deal more broadly with play as part of a study of student perceptions of creativity enhancing activities, games and techniques. Experiential learning is something which may relate to play even though it does not expressly bear its name (e.g. Bevan and Kipka, 2012). This conflation of play and creativity and the tucking of play within experiential learning or other such categories will be revisited under Defining, Naming and Recognising Play.

Who (and what) are study participants reading?

One of the final questions in the gateway survey asked participants if any particular writers on, or theorists of, play informed their use of play. 63 out of 112 of them responded to this question. The vast majority use diverse critical, educational, theoretical and play related texts to inform their pedagogic/research activity. 75 individual names came up (some several times, such as Sicart, Brown, de Koven, Winnicott, Whitton and James). However, of these 75 authors only six (8% of the total names) could be said to be writing specifically about play in higher education/adult learning.

There will be all kinds of reasons for this. One may be simply that the texts in question are transferable to, or relevant for, the respondent in their particular context. It may be - as suggested in some responses - that the participant is not aware of the kinds of publications that exist on play in HE. A lack of time or little desire to consult play literature (whether in HE or not), a preference for other kinds of (play) texts, and the limited number of formal or refereed publications on play in HE currently available, may also be factors.

Certain responses noted that people and events were more influential than particular writers, while others named particular pedagogic approaches - constructivist, experiential, design-thinking-related, humanist- as being influential. Rather than reading books on play, some respondents preferred to engage with networks, associations and events. Examples of these mentioned were LEGO® Serious Play® facilitator trainers and community groups, conferences, play associations and Team Academy, Finland.

The writers and theorists[16] who were mentioned by name were:

> Diane Ackerman, Virginia Axline, Chris Athey, Gregory Bateson, Ian Bogost, Sharon Boller, Stephen Brookfield, Stuart Brown, Tim Brown, Jerome Bruner, Candida Brush, Roger Caillois, Robert Chia and Robin Holt (together), John Conway, Liz Chesworth, Carl von Clausewitz, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, John Dewey, Bernard de Koven, Elliot Eisner, Mary Flanagan, Gonzalo Frasca, Marilyn Fleer, Jon Guest, David Gauntlett, Erving Goffman, Helen Hedges, Charles Holt, Bob Hughes, Johan Huizinga, Norman Jackson, Alison James, Karl Kapp, Manu Kapur, David and Tom Kelley, Arthur Koestler, Ralph Koster, Ray Land, Garry Landreth, Patricia Leavy, Mirka Koro-Ljungberg, Oscar Mascarenas, Jane McGonigal, Alex Moseley, Thomas Malaby, Karl Maton, Stephen Nachmanovitch, Heidi Neck, Chrissi Nerantzi, Cathy Nutbrown, Seymour Papert, Paolo Pedercini, Jean Piaget, Robert Rasmussen, Johan Roos, Michael Rosen, Philip Sabin, Katie Salen, David Williamson Shaffer, Jesse Schell, Miguel Sicart, Paul Sloane, Bernard Suits, Gordon Sturrock & Perry Else, T L Taylor, Thiagi (Sivasailam Thiagarajan), Andrew Walsh, David Wells, D W Winnicott, Nicola Whitton, Elizabeth Wood, Ben Zweilbelson, and Eric Zimmerman.

I suggest that their answers are insightful for a number of reasons, not least the sheer variety of writers that they cite. Such a list may be useful for anyone wanting to expand their reading and research on play, however, I think it is illustrative and useful over and above this. The publications, like play preferences and practices, speak to the individual; their subject area and interests, their favoured author styles, the texts which most resonate with them. If the same question were asked of different educators using play around the world they are likely to generate different lists. A similar experience occurs when reading the index (assuming there is one) of any book on play practice and theory - there may be a sense of familiar names, there may also be a sense of overwhelm at how many books we have not yet read.

Some of the above names are obviously and readily recognisable as play proponents, while others contribute to the notion of play less directly. I suggest this can be illustrated by crudely grouping together the authors listed above as follows:

Form / aspect of / relevance to play	Form / aspect of / relevance to play
play theories/models/frameworks	Brown, S, Caillois, Sicart, Sturrock and Else, Sutton-Smith
writers cited for their affiliation with particular subject areas	Holt, C (classroom games in economics), Guest (economics) Wells (games and mathematics), Conway (numbers and games), Kapur (theory of productive failure as a means of learning mathematics
those cited for affiliation with certain kinds of play	Ackerman (deep, extreme, transcendental play), Mascarenas (disorienting play), Roos (LEGO® Serious Play® co-inventor with Bart Victor) Rasmussen (LSP trainer)
those involved in games, gamification, game design, theory and research (including relationship between fun and games)	Bogost, Boller, Flanagan, Frasca, Goffman, Kapp, Koster, McGonigal, Pedercini, Salen, Schell, Shaffer, Taylor, Thiagi, Zimmerman, Sabin (simulating wargames)

Figure G7. The authors study participants are reading

Form / aspect of / relevance to play	Form / aspect of / relevance to play
educational gurus and experts	Brookfield, Bruner, Dewey, Piaget, Papert, Rosen
active in the field of educational research design	Koro-Ljundberg, Leavy
those well known for particular aspects of pedagogy	Land (threshold concepts)
those working in the area of early years/compulsory education, playwork	Athey, Chesworth, Fleer, Hedges, Hughes, Nutbrown, Wood
those whose names we may associate more with imagination, creativity and innovation	Eisner, Gauntlett, Koestler (1964), Sloane
play with explicit relation to other fields	Bateson, G., and Malaby (anthropology), Brown, T., Kelley, D and T (design thinking), Nachmanovitch (music), Axline, Landreth, Winnicott (psychology and play therapy), Maton (sociology)
play with indirect links or presence to a field; entrepreneurship	Brush, Neck (strategy), Chia and Holt (entrepreneurship) von Clausewitz, Zeibelson (war)
play within HE	Jackson, James, Nerantzi, Moseley, Walsh, Whitton (various)

Figure G7. The authors study participants are reading

Clumping these writers together thus does not cater for the multiple domains within which some might work, or any overlaps between categories. Walsh and Whitton could both be included in the games category, or sit within a separate (unlisted) category on playfulness. Gauntlett could be listed as a subject specialist (sociology) as well as a thought leader in creativity. Winnicott could fit in the category of childhood development as well as that of psychology and play therapy. Ackerman and Mascarenas are both poets, while engaging in distinctive play activities not related to poetry. Mascarenas and Nachmanovitch are both musicians, who direct their play energies both (but differently) at a consideration of music and sound but also so many other things as well.

What clumping can reveal to us is the sheer variety of perspectives on play, the dominance of certain kinds of play thinking (e.g. games-related) and the extent to which our thinking about play is relating to, or coming out of, theories and concepts outside of play in HE. As an aside, it is interesting to note that no explicit reference was made by survey respondents to play in the area of management or business. However, omission does not necessarily indicate absence; it may simply mean that other writers sprang more readily to mind. What all of this does emphasise is the permeability of play and its connection with other subjects, concepts, theories and practices.

The clumps also reveal something else about influences on the use of play in HE. Out of the 112 survey participants seven respondents answered No to this question while one elaborated that they were not aware of any writers or theorists of play as they were just starting to explore the concept of play and learning. Four respondents did not answer at all. This means that 100 participants (89%) positively affirmed that their work is informed by play theory or literature that they associate with play. This statistic suggests that:

- educators using play are doing so in an informed way, substantiating their practice in literature and theory
- they are drawing on highly diverse conceptions of play

- they do so to suit subjective, purpose-related and contextual needs
- their use of diverse play and related texts goes some way in suggesting where their diverse and sometimes polar views about play are being supported

Finally, previous publications on play in HE already voice some of the reasons why play is good, fun or useful; these appear in this study also as perceptions of value. Rice (2009: 96), in the field of Architecture and Planning, shares research using Debord's concept of the 'dérive'; drifting through urban spaces to drink in the different elements of a site by playful means. He points to a variety of authors in listing various benefits; improved motivation, support for different learning styles through multisensory and kinaesthetic activity, stimulating critical thinking, reframing of how students view the stuff of their worlds. He, and others - not least study participants - see play as an important, viable alternative to traditional modes of teaching which allow for transformational change in student thinking, understanding and acting.

Playful communities and practices

Since this study began three years ago, interest in play in higher education has increased and comes from many quarters. Numerous universities have set up their own play events or clubs within the UK; one example being the Playful University Club at Exeter. Several networks have been established with international communities of practice, focussing specifically on play in HE and for adult learning. These networks bring together universities, tertiary institutions, colleges, specialist training establishments and others. There are also major events of longer standing, such as the international play festival Counterplay, organised by Matthias Poulsen in Denmark.

While not specifically catering for higher education, Counterplay does not exclude it and two publications evoking it make its relevance clear. Skovbjerg's account of the 2017 festival brings it alive for any reader new to the event, while *The Power of Play: Voices from the Play Community* (Eds Poulsen et al, 2019) offers an inspired, playful and poetic testimonial that speaks to play practitioners in any context. It also offers activities and perspectives which unite practice and research.

Like Counterplay, some ventures have had longer lives than others; the Playful Learning Association (PLA), already referred to, is one of them. It describes its reasons for being[17] as follows:

- to share research evidence and experiential practice in the area of play, games and learning
- to provide a forum for discussion and collaboration to support the development of outputs such as journal articles, practitioner guidance, seminars, and research proposals
- to create a supportive community for new practitioners and researchers in the field as well as those who are more established

The primary **areas of interest** of the Playful Learning Association are:
- the use of all types of games, digital and traditional, online and real world
- the practice, as well as the theory, of play and learning
- the use of playful approaches with adults, in formal and informal contexts

A newer network, the Playful University Platform (PUP), is based in Denmark but with an international board, membership and audience, like the Playful Learning Association (PLA). This network aims to increase intellectual engagement with the theory of, and research into, play - an aim that is also shared by the Playful Learning Association (PLA). Its website declares that:

> PUP is dedicated to make higher education and the university more playful. Both in relation to learning, teaching, research and everything else that goes on in higher education institutions.

In early 2022, PUP celebrated the launch of its multidisciplinary, multinational and multivocal book *Playful Higher Education: Voices, Activities and Co-Creations from the PUP Community*, to which I had the good fortune to contribute. It offered voices from the international play community, examples and ideas for the future of play.

The Professorsatplay.org network (P@P), based in the USA, was launched in the summer of 2020, and has reached almost 800 international members. In addition to two Playposia, hosted in the Autumns of 2020 and 2021, the cofounders Lisa Forbes and David Thomas are bringing out a book to stimulate engagement with, and recognition of, playful practices in higher education. Called *The Professors at Play PlayBook: Playful teaching techniques in higher education* it is being published by Carnegie Mellon in 2022, offering resources and ideas, focussing on practical application. The network also lends its name to a book club and series of Playful Pedagogy in HE seminars which have been attracting audiences of over 100 in Winter 2021-22. Other ventures to support educators in creating playful resources include the newly formed Playversity, an online community for game-based education.

In addition to events and communities specifically for play, many other events focussing on creativity have also been running which have communion with play. One such is the Masters of Creativity Seminar series run by the D. School at Stanford University in the USA. One of the organisers of this, Jeremy Utley, also sends out regular blogposts under the title Methods of the Masters, about ways to stimulate creativity. While I will point out in Defining, Naming, Recognising Play that creativity and play are not synonymous, several participants in the study remarked that design thinking is an eminently playful way to create and innovate.

Playful events to which this study has contributed

During the pandemic I have found numerous conferences and associations interested

in knowing more about this particular study, as part of an increasing openness to, and support for, the idea of playful learning in higher education. Details of events at which I have presented this study can be found at *https://engagingimagination.com*. They include keynotes at Educause, Professors at Play Playposia, Society for Research into Higher Education workshops/conference, workshops for the British Academy of Management conference 2021 and The Art of Organization and Management (AOMO) conference 2022. These and others give a clear indication of the synergy between many of this study's key messages and motifs and what has been preoccupying the wider world.

In short

Here I have set out a backdrop to the study by giving a selective overview of publications on play in general and play in higher education more widely. I've tried to cater for those of you who are already widely read on play, as well as for those of you who are starting out on your playful learning journey. While selective, this overview reveals the breadth and diversity of positions on - and interests in play - in HE and more widely. It reveals that playful educators are also interested in the theoretical and scholarly underpinnings of play in HE. I have deliberately not got into the detail of the literature on massive and established areas of play (such as game-based learning), or on specific interest areas (live action role plays, fan-based conventions such as *Star Trek*) or the use of play across every discipline in higher education. The reasons for this are probably obvious, but relate to time, scope and access to information; and the sheer impossibility of being able to justice to every play type happening everywhere with higher education. You will no doubt be able to do your own searches and find other forms of literature for your specific area.

Reflection

How do these different examples affect your own understanding about play in higher education?
Did any jump out as 'must read'?
Do they bring anything to your attention which is new?
Is anything missing?
Is there anything that does not fit with your understanding of play literature? Which bits specifically?
What changes or additions might you make here which would more accurately reflect the present state of affairs?
Are you tired?

getting to know

In which
I consider the complexities of trying to know what play is, by looking at how we define, name, recognise and talk about play. I introduce participants in this study, their programmes and countries of working and reasons why they have adopted play and playfulness in their higher education teaching.

DEFINING, NAMING, RECOGNISING PLAY

> Since I first began reflecting on the nature of play and games in 1942, I have authored or co-authored, edited or coedited, fifty books or so on these subjects. And during those sixty five (and some) years, I thought time and again I had at last discovered the meaning of play. But somehow, it always turned out otherwise; somehow there always seemed other questions to ask, other lines of inquiry to follow, all auguring answers more promising than those I thought I had in hand. Something about the nature of play itself frustrates fixed meaning (Sutton-Smith, 2017:21, ed. Phillips et al).

The difficulties of defining play

Having read through the previous section on the literature of play, you may feel you already have a strong sense of what play is. Combined with your own understanding and experience you may feel that any more defining is overdoing it. Equally, you might have felt you knew clearly what play was and now just feel a bit confused. In this case perhaps Sutton-Smith's frustrations are ones to which you, I, and many other explorers of play (among them Burghardt, 2006), can relate - although I cannot claim his depth or longevity of experience. Rice (2009) sums it up neatly:

> defining play or playful behaviour is difficult to do as it contains many transient, contradictory and context dependent qualities (2009:95).

A sensible person would probably just leave things there and walk quietly away. However, not attempting any overview of the challenges and possibilities of play would feel like unfinished business. As we also need some kind of foundation for what follows, here goes.

Many theorists, writers and scholars have attempted to define play over many decades, if not centuries, and there is still a great deal of debate and disagreement as to what play encompasses. Fagen (1981) states that there are too many types of play to name them all. Petelczyc et al have produced an illustrative table of features of play from various definitions (2018:167). Others, such as Forbes (2021, study in progress), are currently and stoically taking up the challenge to see if any consensus about play is achievable.

Producing the ultimate definition of play is thankfully not one of the aims of this study; although I later sketch out its essence in HE. Nor is it to provide a completely

comprehensive account of the disagreements and debates, which would be both impossible to do and probably mindboggling to read. Instead, I build on what we have seen already and discuss some general definitions of play and playfulness. I add in some comment as to their relevance for the matter of this study, and then look at the perceptions of study participants as to the meaning of play. I conclude with a general birds eye definition of play as a way to try and accommodate the many points of conflict that play seems to provoke. As already forewarned, there may be a few echoes from the previous chapter but hopefully only helpful ones.

Definitions of playfulness and play in the wider literature

Playfulness

In her published doctoral thesis, *The Paradox of Play,* de Jong (2015) explores playfulness in infinitely greater depth and detail than I will. I will also commit the heresy of suggesting that at a superficial level it might be easier to describe playfulness than play - although there are many scholars of playfulness who would disagree.

While playfulness and play are deeply intertwined they are not synonyms; it is quite possible to engage with something that is not play in a playful manner. Jørgensen (2014) suggests that playfulness is an ambiguous mindset, teetering on a border between lighthearted and serious, and a changeable subjective mood (drawing on Schechner, 2013). The following are further selected illustrations of what playfulness means to different writers:

Adult playfulness is defined as:

> the predisposition to frame (or reframe) a situation in such a way as to provide oneself (and possibly others) with amusement, humor, and/or entertainment (Barnett, 2007, cited in Proyer, 2012:1).

Proyer himself adjusts this definition in the following way:

> Playfulness...allows people to frame or reframe everyday situations in a way such that they experience them as entertaining, and/or intellectually stimulating, and/or personally interesting (Proyer, cited in Bernie de Koven's post of February 21, 2017 on A Playful Path).

de Koven (2017) then distils Proyer's adult model of playfulness into four aspects: suggesting that playfulness needs to be other-directed, lighthearted in spirit, intellectual (playing with ideas and thoughts), and whimsical (finding amusement in the everyday as well as the grotesque or strange).

Schwittay (2021) also lists playfulness as one of the more recurrent features of creativity that can be found across the literature. Playfulness perhaps is much easier to define and to attach transferably to all kinds of subjects and practices, as it suggests a mood, attitude, or spirit of lightheartedness and amusement.

Akin to playfulness, but not entirely the same, is Skovbjerg's conception of play mood:

> In the play mood you're tuned into the environment in a very particular way, to the things and people you're there with. Play moods are closely related to the practice of the play – that is to say what the play is about. The play moods relate to the production of meaning through practice, because it is through that which you do that you find a valuable way to be. The mood is connected with the framework of the play. Through the play moods some things are defined but there are also many things that aren't. Much can happen, but it isn't a free fall. There is an openness towards a possible future – openness towards what it will all become. In these moods you will do what you can in order to ensure that the play can carry on (Skovbjerg, 2017:17).

Skovbjerg's relation of mood to practice is an important element to emphasise here, as it underscores what is possible through playing, as well as using the word valuable to describe a way of being. It is not "just" enjoyable or distracting.

Sicart also sees play and playfulness as a way of being and of appropriating circumstances and the people and items within them. He notes how the word playful has become a term of praise in the 21st century; as seen in "emotional designs", "objects created with the intention of appealing to our senses and feelings" (2014:20). Perhaps his are the words which most neatly encapsulate the breadth of playfulness:

> Playfulness is a physical, psychological and emotional attitude towards things, people and situations. It is a way of engaging with the world derived from our capacity to play but lacking some of the characteristics of play" (Sicart, 2014:21).

Play

There are plenty of resources a mouse-click away which will cite the five most commonly cited features of play (these vary) or offer all kinds of play definition. They will be relevant to different people at different times, for different reasons. I cannot list all of them, so I offer a selection of definitions which show the sheer range of scale and interpretation; from a simple notion of doing things for fun, to ones with far greater implications concerning the nature of human existence.

- Play as being important in itself, while also being pleasurable and fun. Hand in hand with this it is "trial and error with no fear of failure"(Rosen, 2019:14-15)

- "Play is a way of being in the world that balances respect for others with self-expression. Play is spontaneous, play is consensual, play can be trouble, and play is joy and love." (Lemarchand, in Poulsen et al, 2017:40)[18]
- "Playing is a form of understanding what surrounds us and who we are, and a way of engaging with others. Play is a mode of being human" (Sicart, 2017:1)

Van Vleet and Feeney (2015) defined play in adulthood as an activity or behaviour that (a) is carried out with the goal of amusement and fun, (b) involves an enthusiastic and in-the-moment attitude or approach, and (c) is highly interactive among play partners or with the activity itself (2015: 640) . This has been amended by Koeners and Francis (2020, online) to:

> "Play is an activity or expression that is carried out with the goal of increasing joy with respect to oneself and their surroundings. It involves an enthusiastic and in-the-now attitude or approach and is highly interactive among players or with the activity itself."

Kane suggest that play is not about idleness or diversion but rather about "taking reality lightly" (Kane, 2004: 6, citing Friedrich von Schiller).

These all take an 'aerial' view of play, as they have to if they are going to manage to be universally relevant. However each can give rise to deep conversations about what they mean. How much joy? How can we measure interactivity? What is fun? When is play pleasurable? How do we define pleasure? Is quiet satisfaction enough, or does play have to involve exhilaration and laughing out loud or something quite different?

Responses to such questions will speak to the way play helps humans live out joy, satisfaction, euphoria, fulfilment. These are personal and subjective experiences. In higher education their variety is important when we encounter insistences that play must be voluntarily and freely undertaken and have no predetermined outcome. Some argue that such freedom and openendedness are unlikely when play is used in higher education, as the curriculum is largely constructed by educators (even with student feedback). Others (including me) suggest that you can still find the desire to play and independent agency within constraints - and perhaps even more so because of them. Perhaps, in the context of HE, therefore, speaking about intrinsic motivation rather than voluntariness is a way to get around the obstacle of free decision-making; students may still be minded to play, even if they had not originally chosen to do it.

Parallels between animal/human play and play in HE

Five defining features of play synthesised by Bateson and Martin (2013:12) are also ones which can relate to an engagement with play and playfulness in higher education. They are:

1. spontaneous and rewarding behaviour (regardless of whether or not the play was voluntarily chosen, the experience may engender this)
2. protection from consequences of normal or serious behaviour, and attenuated forms of the behaviour or particular signals which indicate that this is play, not real (many respondents cite the value of such safe spaces in which students can experiment, without dangerous outcomes)
3. novelty, perhaps in aspects or reversals of usual behaviour
4. repeated or exaggerated actions (some kinds of role or performative play, rules of play, parody etc)
5. freedom from illness or stress; an indicator of wellbeing (expanded on by respondents to include a sense of trust, safety, and other positive emotions)

Evidence of features 1-4 will be found or implied when we look at examples of play, while 5 is an essential for any play to take place. It is also points to the importance of play for connection and mental and physical welfare, as we see when we look at play for survival.

Defining play by what it is not

Sutton-Smith suggested at the start of *The Ambiguity of Play* that it is sometimes easier to define something by what it is not, rather than what it is - particularly when the subject is as tricky to pin down as play. If not easier, then it does at least help to narrow down what we mean. Times when play is no longer play include when hurt or the intent to harm are present, for example, when teasing becomes bullying and harassment. (Such examples are sometimes described as dark, or Machiavellian play, but this acceptance is not universal). Another example (Sutton-Smith, Huizinga and others) is when play becomes a form of work, as in professional sport, or (following Gray) when the play or game is no longer all about the experience, it is predominantly about victory.

A note here. In this study I reference writers who see meanspirited or hurtful forms of play still as play. Røsenberg (2014), writing of games studies, says it has long been accepted in this field that play can be dark, frightening, controversial, transgressive, unpleasant. Participants in this study warn against this kind of play or any kinds which create distress to the players. This study does not deal with such forms of play, concentrating rather on their examples of play with positive and constructive intentions.

Some educators feel the need to differentiate play from other forms of activity. This can be hard to do if they have elements in common or come together to form a kind of hybrid experience - perhaps with activity, play, imagination, creativity and innovation all bundled up together. I do not want to spend ages on this, however it is a useful discussion to have - even if ultimately it is one we park in order to concentrate on specific experiences without the semantics.

We can take the example of creativity, which has been described and defined in countless ways. Schwittay defines creativity as "a complex, contested and context-specific

phenomenon with intellectual, emotional, practical and ethical dimensions" (2021:10). It is a pithy statement, which could just as easily be applied to play, and yet the two things are distinct. One can play creatively, or end up with a creative outcome or item, or not. One may create playfully, or not. Play and creativity are neither synonymous nor interchangeable, although often used as such.

Robinson's notion that creativity involves "imaginative processes with outcomes that are original and of value (2001:118) points to a part of the distinctiveness; play, unlike creativity, does not need to result in any outcomes at all - although it might. And yet in higher education our forms of play are very likely to be introduced so that they can support the reaching of predetermined outcomes of one sort or another. In some subjects the originality of these will be important, in others their value will lie in things like reliability, accuracy, functionality and - in medical and animal sciences - not killing anyone or anything.

From all these different definitions of play perhaps it is helpful to bring in Gray here who attempts a reconciliation of them all in this manner:

> Play is not neatly defined in terms of any single characteristic; instead, it involves a constellation of characteristics, which have to do with the motives or mental framework underlying the observed behavior (2013b).

Play and other pedagogic approaches

Gray's words are useful for enabling us to thinking of play as something which may have its own distinctive features while also merging and marrying with approaches to learning.

Thinking about what is, and is not, play is relevant here for sifting out where playful learning might differ from other kinds. I am imagining at this point you might be thinking of any number of pedagogic approaches and saying to yourself "this is all very well, but aren't we just talking about creative/active/experiential/problem-based learning?" - or other ways of teaching that are different to the lecture-seminar-essay-exam models.

In response, I want to make clear that the key difference is likely to be in the design of, and engagement in, the learning experience. I have already flagged up differences between creativity and play, while recognising where they overlap. Examples in this study illustrate that too. If we take this guidance on active learning, it includes one minute papers, fish bowls, chain notes and paraphrasing alongside games, simulation and role play. We can see in their suggestions a spectrum of participation - at one end things which are not play, and at the other things which are. The same can be said for experiential and problem-based learning - two terms by which playful learning is sometimes referred to in this study.

In addition, I want to emphasise here that, in setting out play and playful learning as distinctive, I also recognise that creative, imaginative and active learning approaches have been around for ages. So have arguments for active learning, such as this article on four trends to shape the future of higher education (el Azar, 2022). There are numerous examples of inspiring and innovative teaching which belong in these categories across the disciplines. They may well have elements of play and playfulness couched within them, if not immediately visible. They are rightly accepted as worthy alternatives to more passive forms of teaching within the pedagogic repertoire. What I am intrigued by is why they are viewed as appropriate without any need for vetting or validation, while referring to play and playful learning can cause concern. We will see why in these following sections.

Defining play in the gateway survey

If defining play is not a simple matter, not defining it leaves the researcher with something of a dilemma. How can you discuss play practices and their perceived value with people if you can't say what they are? What IS play, and how do we know we are talking about play, rather than anything else? As we have seen, while play may be distinctive it may also have characteristics in common with other things. With all of these things in mind I thought it best to find out what participants in the project thought play was, rather than me tell them.

What did play mean to survey respondents?

In the gateway survey I offered an indication of what play might encompass and invited respondents to comment. In doing so I was torn between clarifying helpfully and not leading their answers unduly. I was keen not to constrain them by imposing my own definition without any knowledge of their own subjects, contexts and beliefs. I was also concerned that by insisting only certain kinds of play were relevant I would not discover any other ways participants were interpreting play in higher education. I offered the following two broad suggestions about what play and playfulness might involve, expressed thus:

> For this study, play is referred to as pleasurable activity, undertaken alone or with others which may take place within defined or special boundaries of time and space, including the digital. Common play types include games, role play, sport, physical activity, imaginative fantasy, enactments and simulations (e.g. in 'other worlds'), contests, festivals and celebrations (from the small to the large scale), theatre and dressing up and many other tasks, events or activities which are engaged in playfully. It may involve behaviours or acts which are unexpected, exaggerated, or unusual compared to those which are 'normal' or conventional in that context.

> Playfulness evokes an approach or attitude of fun and gaiety; a "mood of frolicsomeness, lightheartedness, and wit" (Sutton-Smith, 1997:147). It may occur in situations where play itself is not being engaged in *(The Value of Play in HE gateway survey)*.

In this way I offered examples of play as illustrations, along with some differentiation between play and playfulness.

Respondents were then given space to add anything they wished about their own definitions of play/playfulness. Two did so in the pilot survey and 34 did so from the main survey.[19]

Between them they came up with ten categories of definition or associations with play. These were that play:

1. transforms learning
2. is an immersive experience
3. is alternative and fun, sometimes involving surprise
4. is serious and challenging: it can be subversive, intellectual, political, and deeper than 'just' enjoyment
5. can be open ended and unpredictable
6. is a character trait or disposition, not only an external mode of engaging
7. provides a safe play to experiment; have a go, learn through trial and error
8. is freeing; providing liberation from the usual HE constraints, or conversely requiring the acceptance of rules and limits that give rise to a kind of freedom
9. is social and participatory
10. is therapeutic

In this list we find numerous positive and valuable assertions about play, all of which could reside under the first two umbrella terms of transformation and immersion. All of them also refer to features of play, rather than attempt to define it in a more focussed way. Perhaps that tells us a great deal about the challenge of nailing down what play is - and perhaps raises the question as to how important it is for us to do that nailing.

There were numerous other elaborations from survey respondents:

> In HE there may be a focus for the start of a possible line of travel but it can grow and move anywhere. Playful HE moves as a person chooses and can handle different people and things moving in many ways.

> One thing that I have found looking at fun is that successful play is rarely referred to as fun in the moment. Rather, we say - this will be fun, or that was fun. I think it's important that the act of play can be very serious and the feelings of fun can come later.

> Play is any activity that allows the learner to be free from potential learning inhibitors acquired in previous educational contexts.

This last suggestion is an interesting comment on the respondent's view of existing educational opportunities. It suggests that there was something wrong, or inadequate, in the preceding learning experiences. This is something that interview respondents return to frequently; the notion that they have been drawn to use play because the way something was taught before had been dull, or inspiring, or not been changed for some time. I hope it is obvious that this study is not saying all teaching is dull/inspiring/unchanged and play is the only solution. What the experiences of participants illustrate is that play helps students overcome any negative fallout from prior educational encounters.

> I think a key aspect that is very important is agency. I can be involved in all the activities you listed, but unless I can actively choose whether and how to go through them, the margin of playfulness decreases substantially. Similarly, I can be engaged in something very serious, but if I am left free to tackle it however I want, with no detriment or danger for anyone, I will probably engage with that activity in a much more playful way.

This statement is a first barb against the failings of some educational experiences which recurs in interviews and other arenas.

Although I did not ask interviewees to come up with definitions of play, they often referred to the meaning of play; here with regard to learning:

> Play is learning on multiple dimensions - asking your body to do things based on what you've learned, bringing more emotions into the learning process, laughter, abstracting an exercise into a form of play but you're actually learning the underlying message and you're learning it in a more applied way than if someone were just to tell you what a theory is (TVOP IV 38).

This quote foreshadows examples of embodied and physical forms of play, which we will see amongst the play types. It also underscores its importance as a multisensory experience.

Naming play

> When speaking of play as something known to all, and when trying to analyze or define the idea expressed in that word, we must always bear in mind that the idea as we know it is defined and perhaps limited by the word we use for it (Huizinga, 1949: 28).

Play has almost infinite forms, as indicated in Sutton-Smith's extensive lists of play phenomena set out in *The Ambiguity of Play*. However, there are also different ways of construing what is, and is not, play, as we have already seen. Sutton-Smith, in creating his own typologies of play, is one who stretches the boundaries which encircle play. (I struggle with his inclusion of babysitting in one of them; no doubt recalling my own teenage torture minding other people's children).

Respondents in this study also argue that forms of educational activity which can be deemed traditional modes or learning are play: "What is a case study if it's not playing?" (TVOP IV 11)

Even if we are clear about what play is, there are additional variances - particularly noticeable in higher education - in the use of terminology and recognition. Participants in the surveys and interviews for this study also experienced this sense of unease over the term play; something which is reflected in wider discussions with play proponents. Sutton-Smith, again, is explicit that the items he categorises are often "called by other names, such as entertainments, recreations, pastimes, and hobbies, as if it would be an embarrassment to admit that they can also be called play." (1997:4)

On the evolution of an arts-based business module, one respondent commented

> We invented, stole or evolved all sorts of what, loosely, we could call play-based methods... I would never have described them as that. I would use the term imagine, you know, there were geared around imagination (TVOP IV 9).

The choice made here may simply indicate that the respondent felt that was a more accurate term for what was being nurtured. However, it also underscores a sense that certain terms -imagination, creativity, innovation- are ones with which adult and university educators are much more comfortable, rather than the word play. They are deemed to be more acceptable and more mature than such a term. This may also apply to the terms we saw earlier; such as active or problem-based learning.

> We do a lot of things that the organisation publicly wouldn't call play, but I think would be in the general umbrella of play (TVOP IV 21).

Masking and hiding play

Sharp (2012) in writing of games in the K12 curriculum refers to the benefit of learning by stealth:

> Stealth learning is when an instructor uses clever, disguised ways to introduce learning objectives through non-traditional tools, such as games, to encourage students to have fun and learn (Sharp, 2012:42).

This is almost the opposite of what some educators describe when using play in higher education. In Sharp's context, play is the shopwindow through which learning is smuggled in. In HE, play is often smuggled in through terms that disguise its presence. With regard to mandatory professional development in HE an interviewee noted that

> ...we actually have to hide the play in order for them to actually do it and not have an initial reaction to it (TVOP IV 28).

A second warned that telling students they are going to be playing may cause them to switch off. A third offered similar disclaimers while also pointing up the positives of play:

> ...the way that you kind of talk about it makes a big difference. I think if you look at the features of lots of the things that are good practice in HE, allowing voice and choice, freedom, allowing that sense of ownership of what's going on, allowing exploratory non-linear routes through activities. That's all playful stuff, but I wouldn't necessarily call it play to anyone I was talking to. So, for instance, our VC [...]knows that that's my background and is up for me talking, so, whenever I'm in a meeting with her, I'll quite happily talk about how this is a playful approach we're taking, but I wouldn't necessarily use those words. I'd talk about participation and democracy (TVOP IV 22).

Others alluded to the dressing up of play with different referents:

> Calling them games, like the word play, seems to suggest this is just childish and you're not getting any benefit. So, I preferred outdoor activities or exercises (TVOP IV 13).

> ...they were all just business games. So, they were often talk, cool things like simulations, and team building exercises and you know, all sorts of weasel words to hide behind, but they were games. They were completely and utterly games (TVOP IV 2).

Outside this study a member of military personnel observed to me[20] "in the military we play all the time". When I ran this observation past TVOP IV 50 I received the reply "Yes

but we don't use the word play, we call it training, right? Or we use the word war in front of gaming".

Two interviewees used the stealth approach as a means of getting people to play and then realise it was not a big deal:

> Maybe playfulness is in the background and we can kind of slip it in through the back door to show, hey, what you've been doing is playful, this is not a big change, it's just a different framing (TVOP IV 21).

> But, if you give them the, sort of, challenges, and the mini tasks, that are sneakily playful, they're much more likely to engage in them, in my experience (TVOP IV 22).

So, despite a dedication to play itself, some participants still exercise caution in whether or not they call play play.

Recognising play

In other cases, neither staff nor students always recognise that they have played or are playing, even if they are well disposed towards the idea. One participant attended a group interview and said they did not use play, but by the end of the session realised that they used lots of play forms, they just had not considered them to be play.

Alternatively, they may not single out the times when they play because these have become so embedded in the day to day it is hard to extricate them. Several respondents described play as either "being everywhere" or with the potential to be everywhere "because you can introduce play in everything you do".

This notwithstanding, some students do not always recognise what they are doing as play. One respondent was told by his students that they did not play at all, but when they were asked what they did in their free time they listed all kinds of play activities, such as sports and videogames. They did not see them as play because they had become normalised into a weekly routine.

This extract shows that even though the examples listed relate to play outside higher education, they may be categorised in the player's mind, wittingly or otherwise, as sport and gaming, not play. While it may be easiest to ask people about their play practices by using types of play as illustrations, this may also restrict how they are able to respond.

> Many lecturers think they are the only ones doing play...but this is just that they don't know, or don't call it play, or won't admit to it... (TVOP IV 19).

Games and Play

Just as with play, or creativity, asking people to differentiate between games and play results in all kinds of suggestions. Some align, some conflict. While respondents distinguish between games and play, several of them also conflate the terms. De Koven suggests that the difference between the two is as follows:

> Play is the enactment of anything that is not for real. [...]Even though we are involved in a game, we are not always playing. Sometimes we're negotiating, sometimes arguing, sometimes struggling – for real. Even though we are playing we are not always involved in a a game. Sometimes we have no goal at all, sometimes we are merely fascinated, sometimes silly sometimes chaotic (2013:xxiv).

In interviews respondents elaborated on their distinctions in various ways. Rules featured as a distinction in several responses, and not always consensually across them:

> Games are seated, you know, there are loads of rules and you need to follow them. I think in play you can invent your own rules... there's no right or wrong you can just go for it (TVOP 1V 8).

This response seems to focus on particular types of games, rather than those requiring physical mobility and movement. The notion of unchangeable rules was countered by other participants who talked about everyone having 'house rules' for traditional and familiar leisure games, such as Scrabble and Monopoly.

> The main difference for me between play and games is rules. And the rules of mechanics. And play can have rules, but they tend to evolve organically as part of play, whereas games have a[...] rule set (TVOP IV 11).

> I think that if you're playing a game or playing in general then you're empowered to change the rules as you go along, even if you're playing a game of very kind of strict rules, often it's about the relationship between you and the rules and the other players (TVOP IV 22).

> Something can be a game and the way you use it, the way you present it and the way you talk people through it, it loses all of the play you know, even the sort of highly structured play that should be inherent in it (TVOP IV 2).

A sense emerged from their answers that games sit down the structured and rule based end of a spectrum, while completely free play sits at the opposite end of the same spectrum. However, it is possible to have rule-based play as well. At least one participant saw games as interchangeable with play for much of the time.

This respondent distinguished between play and games in terms of their enabling function:

> I tend to see play as an activity that encourages participants to be more relaxed and develop a more conducive atmosphere to learning or open discussion, where games are often used to test assumptions or theories about people's behaviour (TVOP 1V 6).

This respondent pointed out that it is possible to lose the play from a game:

> I'll talk about play a lot more if I'm talking about the free, imaginative, creative type play. Whereas if I'm talking about something very rule based, I think that's still play but it's different type of play. So, I might be much more likely to talk about games and I also think you can have games that aren't at all playful or play in their own right. Something, something can be a game and the way, the way you use it, and the way you present it and the way you talk people through it, it loses all of the play, you know, the even the sort of highly structured play that should be inherent in it (TVOP IV 2).

Making things Serious

According to Wilkinson (2016), the name Serious Games was coined by Carl Abt in 1970 to differentiate games for serious purposes from those which are primarily for amusement. In higher education Schwittay suggests that:

> Serious educational games combine student research about particular concepts, frameworks or events with designing and playing games to enact learning in experiential ways (2021:102).

The following is from a respondent who is also interested in serious games.

Serious games

Most people, when you say serious games, or game-based learning, they're thinking of digital games, they're thinking of school kids doing maths games on the computer by themselves. Or they're thinking of these highly developed serious games, where they have all the analytics behind it, they're tracking your reaction time to everything. They're giving you branching narratives, and quizzes, and all this kind of thing. That's what most people in the field still think of serious games and game-based learning to be about, they think it's about video games.

If you read the literature on serious games, quite a lot of the time, they actually put it in the definition of a serious game that it has to be digital. It is a digital game that does blah, blah, blah, whereas I don't think it is. It's any game that does that.
(TVOP IV 11)

In designing LEGO® Serious Play®, Roos and Victor came up with a specific interpretation of serious play:

> ...a mode of activity that draws on the imagination, integrates cognitive, social and emotional dimensions of experience and intentionally brings the emergent benefits of play to bear on the organisational challenges (LEGO® Serious Play® training materials).

The use of the term "serious" in these examples is entirely valid as referring to a particular kind of play. However, I find myself wondering whether play is referred to in wider contexts as serious in order to give it a credibility or gravitas that it is deemed to lack on its own. We do not add the epithet serious to terms like innovation/creativity/entrepreneurship/blue skies thinking/humour. Perhaps this is an indication that play has yet to achieve mature recognition in certain circles, which suggests that it can be appreciated without having to be explained or differentiated in this way.

Do we even know how to play?

As already noted, de Koven describes the interactions, intentions and behaviours of playing with others in *The Well Played Game* (2013), first published in 1978. However, several respondents in the study suggest that children and adults have either not learned how to play, or have lost touch with their ability to do so. A participant in a workshop exploring study findings remarked "Adults box themselves in as they grow up". Gray (2013) and Brown (2009) echo these observations.

Not knowing how to play will, of course, lead to difficulties in recognising what play is or why we do it, at any age.

> If you don't know how to play it's very difficult to facilitate other people's play... [My daughter's friends] don't understand the idea of pretend this, pretend that. They don't even necessarily understand the idea of free flow, like okay, you move from one idea to the other and you keep moving and moving and moving and combining things (TVOP 1V 1).

Sutton-Smith cites Erikson's (1956) suggestion "that while the child goes forward in his play the adult goes sideways" (1997:47). If we consider the value of play as being developmental, as part of the Progress Rhetoric, this begs all kinds of questions as to what going sideways even means? It seems inaccurate to read this as meaning there is no forward development for adults through play as they go through life - even if this is related to learning a new hobby or taking on interests that have a play or playful element. I also shared these words at a play workshop where participants felt positive about such a sideways move. One said adults need to go sideways for mental refreshment, another that they can go in all directions - "sideways, backwards, forwards and outside the box". So while one comment suggests adults stay within self-created boxes with age, another

contradicts this. Although only two comments, they suggest that whether adults have lost sight of how to play is a matter of opinion.

Other respondents emphasise that you need to be able to play authentically. This is to say, believe in and be committed to the play and genuinely participate - not attempt to do it while unconvinced it has value, and probably while cringeing.

> "The teacher must be involved and enjoy play. If you don't like to play it is better that you don't play with students because that is not good for them" (TVOP IV 34).

Impasse or truce? A final word on defining play in higher education

Having considered multiple different definitions and aspects of play and playfulness I want to conclude by going back to Caillois and Sutton-Smith and two perspectives on key universal features of play. I consider each of these in the light of play and playfulness in higher education before offering a position of my own.

Caillois (2001:9-10) makes six stipulations about play which I annotate here with smileys to preface where I think this is achievable and where it is less so. He says play must be

1	**free** (not obligatory)
2	**separate** (within a designated place and time, such as a play arena or magic circle)
3	**uncertain** (the course and result cannot be predetermined)
4	**unproductive** (creating neither goods nor wealth, and with players ending in a situation identical to the one they were in at the start of the game)
5	**governed by rules**
6	**make believe**

Figure G8. Caillois' principles of play as relating to HE

I expect you can work out already from the above where a response is likely to start with "Hmmmm…"

I have already identified some of the ways in which three of his stipulations are problematic in HE, while three are not. In case my smileys need translating, here are some further thoughts.

1) Play may be free to a point, but the expectation of play will have been directed to some extent by the educator e.g. class activity, simulation, etc
2) Play within separate confines is achievable, even if this is 'only' by using the imagination, rather than a real or virtual space
3) Play as uncertain is also mostly achievable. However, there are some cases where there is likely to be a certain outcome (in the mind of the educator) which is precisely underpinning the point of play. An immediate example that springs to mind is the rolled up paper game (coming up in Gallery), where the intent is to lower the paper to the ground, but where inevitably most of the time the paper will be raised
4) Play must be unproductive. This is also problematic; most participants in this study want play to be productive in some way, but not in financial or material terms. Certainly educators want their students to be in a different situation by the end of the play - in mindset terms at least
5) Play must be governed by rules. This mostly applies to the kinds of play engaged in in HE, so is not problematic, except for any case in which it makes free play impossible
6) Play will involve make believe. This is widely used in some guise or other

So 1) 3) and 4) are points where Caillois' stipulation of play features may need to be attenuated for higher education play to be considered as play.

Sutton-Smith takes the work of psychologists Rubin, Fein and Vanderberg (Sutton-Smith, 1997:189) and critiques each of their summarised features of play from research into child play. Throughout he notes the influence of their methodological interests (phenomenological) as well as that of their discipline to suggest that both will have a bearing on what they perceive these prime features to be. I summarise his responses with some additions from the perspective of this study.

- **Intrinsically motivated and fun.** Sutton-Smith suggests that historically the decision to play would have been dictated by other drivers, such as village requirements. He points to the origins of play which have very different purposes to the ones we see today
- **Attention to means rather than ends.** Most participants have focused on the opposite in this study - that play is a means of getting to an end, although several have talked of the importance of play for understanding process, and a few about its importance in and of itself
- **Play is guided by organism-dominated questions.** Coming from their psychological roots, Sutton-Smith sees this attempt to distinguish play from exploration as untenable
- **Play behaviours are not instrumental.** For Sutton-Smith this dates back to attempts to distinguish play and work, suggesting that "play has its own instrumental behaviours and its consequences are quite real and consequential to the players" (1997:189). His final objection to instrumentality is that it is too

narrowly conceived. In this study certainly the play designs and enactments of participants have often been instrumental, with very good intentions

- **Freedom from externally imposed rules is necessary.** This is also rejected by Sutton-Smith who argues that children (and in our case, adults) have external rules imposed upon them all the time. He concludes by referring to Gadamer's statement that the game plays us, we don't play the game
- **Players are actively engaged in their activity.** He challenges this by saying it omits what he calls vicarious play (perceptual engagement, daydreams, musings, ruminations). For me it also rules out the possibility of solo play

I find both of these positions useful in terms of helping to start to focus on what a statement about play in HE might look like, which could work for multiple constituents in all their diversity.

Having gone through the preceding pages and my own trawling and re-trawling through study data, I found once more Sutton-Smith's concluding reflections on achieving any kind of shared resolution. The first three of these points (1997: 218) seem still to hold the key to this:

> **1.** that play's definition must be broad rather than narrow, including passive or vicarious forms as well as the active participant forms. Including daydreams as well as sports and festivals
>
> **2.** that it should apply to animals as well as humans, and children as well as adults
>
> **3.** that it should not be defined only in terms of the restricted modern Western values that say it is nonproductive, rational, voluntary and fun. These are not concepts that can prevail as universals, given the larger historical and anthropological evidence to the contrary

I welcome the idea of broad inclusion from (1), as much of play literature and theory seems to see 'true' play as involving interaction. In *Man, Play and Games* Caillois does at least allow for interaction with the "obstacle" as the focus of conflict, as opposed to people, however he, and others, seem to focus more on group, rather than solo play.

With regard to (2) this may seem less of an issue for higher education. However, this study confirms that play can transfer across all ages and educational sectors and we have much to learn from each and every group and discipline. So perhaps it is entirely right that we share a conception of adult play with that of children and animals (allowing for distinctions as well) so we can learn from them.

(3) is extremely important when attempting to understand what play forms might be used in tertiary education around the world. I am conscious that the majority of my examples in this study are rooted in Western pedagogical practice. My original aspiration was for a more multicultural selection; my hope is that you, as readers, wherever you are, will be able to use the examples as illustrations and points of comparison, consideration, and challenge.

In the light of play definitions from the literature and from study participants I concluded that the following universal statements can be made about play. It:

- is something that people enjoy doing in their way
- can be diversely interpreted
- is defined by and for the context in which people are playing
- is chosen for a range of different reasons, not all of them all at once
- may be shaped by disciplinary foci

While these may be statements that hold truth, I am not sure how useful they are due to their breadth and blandness. They do not really tell us anything about the play itself, but perhaps that is not possible or necessary. Having tried my hand at universalising I later found it echoed Henricks, who took a similarly 'helicopter height' position, observing these four shared qualities:

> - play is an experience
> - It has intrinsic rather than extrinsic motives
> - the process is more important that the outcome
> - it involves some level of active engagement
>
> (Henricks, 1999 summarised in Rice, 2009:95)

I find these four helpful, although not unproblematic, in a higher education context. I like the way he neatly sidesteps any notion of freedom with his reference to motives and also welcome the recognition of process. This I believe is consonant with why educators introduce play and what they hope to get out of it with their students. However, outcomes are still of importance to many and there is also the expectation that value will need to be measurable. Finally, the notion of active engagement I also welcome, as long as it includes room for solo engagement, as well as with two or more people.

A portrait of play in HE

Having stated in Study Design that I was not concerned with producing a definition of play, I have nonetheless, and somewhat rashly, continued to ruminate on what one might be. In the light of everything that I have written up to this point it seems I should at least put on the table some kind of position, even if it is every bit as flawed or partial as any already shared.

Here, then, is my attempt to capture what play and playful learning are like in higher education:

> Play is an absorbing activity which brings satisfaction and learning at some point and of some kind. It has potentially limitless forms and can conjure infinite play moods. It may be internal or external, solo or with others. In higher education,

> play as part of the curriculum can be introduced by the educator, co-created with students or designed by them. Play can be both autonomous and guided; allowing some flexibility for students to engage as they choose. Playful behaviours are also often visible outside play-based activity. Attitudes to play may be shaped by the experiences and subjective preferences of players and those observing the play. For some players, feeling able to play may benefit from a sense of permission, trust and an encouraging atmosphere.

Despite my concerns about blandness I found myself wanting to at least attempt a description of play in HE, based on everything we have covered so far. I don't pretend it is a definition as it is a paragraph. Nor does it allow for the detail and nuance of play that has been indicated so far. I offer it nonetheless as a conclusion to these pages, before introducing you to the study participants and their practices. See it as a point of roundup and pause.

In short

In this part of my account of *The Value of Play in HE* I have spent some time going through different definitions of play and playfulness. I have included comments and perspectives from study participants as to their understandings of play. In doing this I have recognised the difficulties inherent in defining play and the reticence that is sometimes demonstrated in calling play play. Along with Writings, Thinkings, and Doings and Study Design the purpose has been to provide plenty of scene setting before bringing in participants and play types in the following pages.

Reflection

How important are debates around defining and naming play to you?
Is the ambiguity and complexity around play definition an issue?
Do we need a single definition of play?
How much does the complex, varied and contrary nature of definition bother you? Is the elusive nature of play part of its charm? Is it better to stick to defining play in a range of contexts?
Were there any quotes from participants that resonated with you?
With regard to my statement about play in HE, how well does this work as a snapshot description?
What would you do to improve it ?(yes, deleting it and starting again is an option)
Is there anything missing from these pages that you would have liked to be here?

WHO, WHERE AND WHY?
Playful participants in this study

Broad titles, multiple roles

The sheer variety of job titles used by participants in the survey and interviews for this study reveals how difficult it is to group playful educators in narrow categories.

They define themselves as lecturers, senior lecturers, assistant/full professors, managers, directors, researchers, librarians, administrators, alumni, professional staff or industry practitioners new to education, consultants.

They were often performing multiple roles; in one or several institutions, with diverse responsibilities and sometimes complex portfolios.

Their routes into higher education have also been diverse; many of them having had industry or non-educational careers beforehand and some running their educational and professional activities in tandem. While the vast majority of respondents taught directly, a small number oversaw the teaching of others rather than doing it themselves.

The variety in titles can be seen in this wordcloud:

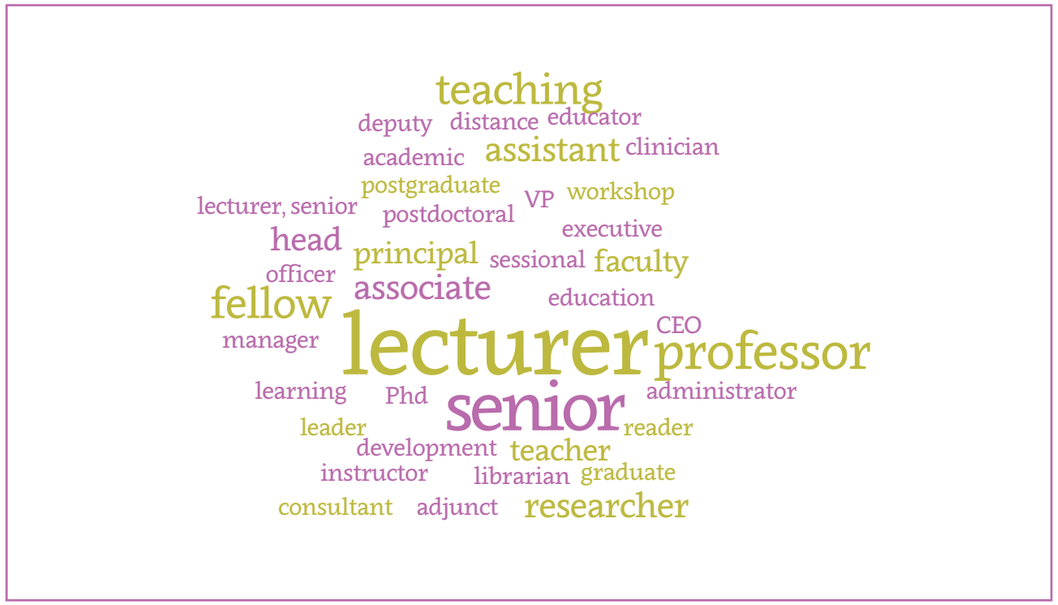


Figure G9. Wordcloud showing participant roles

Subjects galore

Having provided information about their roles, participants were also asked about the programmes on which they taught, or with whom they worked.

The table below illustrates the sheer spread of subjects and also the subfields of different disciplines. The number to the side of each subject name indicates the number of respondents who listed it under their areas of teaching. The subjects are arranged in order from the greatest to lowest number of listings.

Programme/Subject	No	Programme/Subject	No
Business and Management	21	Architecture	2
Learning & Teaching Development	10	Events Management	2
Marketing	8	Art	2
Primary/Early Years Education	6	Finance & Accounting	2
Entrepreneurship	6	Fashion	2
Engineering	5	Strategy	2
Paramedic/Nursing	5	Mathematics	2
Computing/Digital Design	4	MBA	2
Design	4	Games Design	1
Media, Culture, Communication	3	Physiotherapy	1
Coaching	3	Games studies	1
Innovation	3	Organizational Behaviour	1
Organizational psychology	3	Organizational Leadership	1
Sport and Health Sciences	3	Occupational Psychology	1
Statistics	2	Fashion Management	1
Economics	2	Cosmetic Science	1
Journalism	2	Chemistry	1
Writing	2	Forensics	1
English Literature	2	Biology	1
English for Academic Purposes	2	Zoology	1
Leadership	2	Human biology	1
Law	2	Music	1
Military Education	2	Research Methods	1
HR	2	Physiotherapy	1
Biomedical Health/Research/Science	2	Developmental and Therapeutic Play	1
Unspecified Postgraduate Teaching	2	Genetics and Histology	1
Tourism and Hospitality	2	Leadership in Health Care	1
Psychology	2	Health and Social Care	1
Librarian (listed as subject)	2	Chemistry/ Sciences	1
Counselling	2	Film and Video	1
Medical Humanities	1	Community Development	1
History	1	Museums and Archaeology	1
Photography	1	Early Career Research (unspecified)	1
Social Sciences	1	Social Work	1
Dance	1	Clinician Education	1

Figure G10. Participant disciplines

Professional portfolios: it's complicated

This table provides a clear picture of the sheer variety of respondents in terms of their subject areas and interests. It goes some way in identifying those working management education compared to elsewhere. In working out how many participants belong to management education and how many do not, I have mostly gone for explicit indicators (actually referring to management and business), with a bit of interpretation/guesswork thrown in. However there were various complications in doing this, a few of which I list here.

1. Many respondents are working in several different subject areas. One participant lists their working subject areas as fashion, professional communication, robotics engineering, film, digital media, IT, software engineering and languages. Many respondents are polymaths, working across the disciplines.

2. While some areas may be related, such as different branches of science or engineering, others are not. The table does not show all the interminglings of subjects.

3. Some of these interminglings reveal interesting combinations of subjects, in one case working in the dual fields of mechanical and aerospatial engineering and music.

4. This makes it difficult in some cases to know whether to relate an academic subject to management or keep it separate, without any contextualising information.

5. While some subjects may seem to be obviously related to management education, in other cases the presence of management theory and practice as a component of another discipline is masked. Should things like economics, statistics and even military leadership be listed under management as they have strong links to management and financial subjects? Or kept separate? What about subjects which seem different but are taught as part of a management degree? Counting up who is working in management education and who is not is therefore not a straightforward task.

6. Grouping by name alone does not allow for the blurry lines between subject boundaries e.g. psychology and organizational psychology. An expert belonging to either of those areas may, of course, rightly argue that they are distinct. It does beg questions concerning overlap.

7. Respondents also listed their involvement in what can be termed generic activity, which is not confined to one programme but applies across several or many. This included: international programme development, executive development, adult learning, playbased consultancy, university wide programme innovation, elearning , wargaming and gaming, LEGO® Serious Play® and managerial activity across an entire business school, degree apprenticeships (10 individual listings).

This genericity does not make clear which disciplines are participating in these cross-programme, institution-wide or client-oriented activities. This is an issue for this study, with its special interest strand in management education. Trying to make a surgical divide between activities in management and elsewhere, while also retaining a true reflection of the potential scope and focus of play for management, is tricky. Is wargaming to be listed within management or non-management subjects, as it is used in both? What about postgraduate teacher education? In the UK, for example, many postgraduate certificates in learning and teaching at university will encourage their participants to engage with pedagogic theory and practice *in the context of their own disciplines*. Therefore one may argue that there will be multiple points of contact with management and business with staff who are undertaking such programmes from these contexts.

The main message to take from this rumination is this: when we are considering the value of play in management HE we can certainly be guided by, or look to, programmes which specifically bear the name business or management. However we should also look more widely to other related and seemingly more diverse disciplines to see what lessons can be learned from them too.

Where are participants working?

Participants in this study were working in more than 20 different countries/geographic locations. The exact figure is hard to specify as some describe themselves as working globally.

Of 112 educator survey participants 68.75% were working in the UK, 4.4% in Australia, 4.4% in the USA, 3.57% in Canada and the rest in China, Saudi Arabia, New Zealand, Denmark, Vietnam, Singapore, Hong Kong, Italy, Austria and Portugal.

Of 65 educator interviews 66.15% were from the UK, 7.69% were from the USA, 6.15% were from Australia and the rest were from Canada, Estonia, Vietnam, Switzerland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Italy, Denmark, Portugal and Israel.

Of 8 student survey participants, 50% were from the UK and 50% from Denmark.

Outside these data sets there were also communications with educators in other countries, including Pakistan.

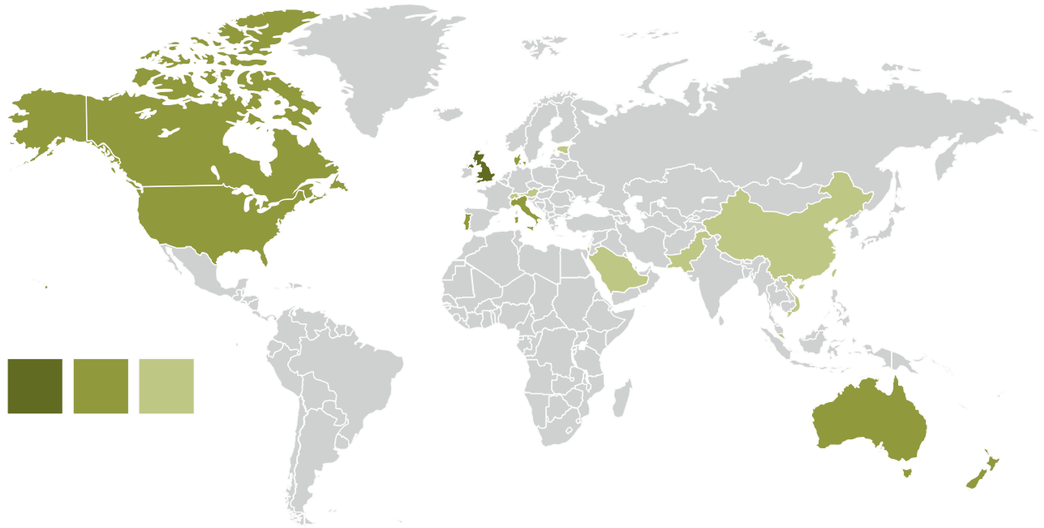
Information about participants also came from a variety of other communications and conversations, in addition to these formal data collection tools.

A total of 193 individual responses were made in surveys and interviews, however, of these, 42 educator survey participants also contributed to the interviews. If we exclude dual

contributors (to survey and interview) it means a total of 143 individuals contributed their views and practices as part of the generation of primary data.

Another note: The predominance of respondents from the UK can be seen as reflecting the level of interest there concerning playful learning. While this is true to an extent, I think it is more reflective of who the study was able to reach during pandemic-related lockdowns, and the difficulties of making new contacts in such circumstances.

Map to show location of participants in The Value of Play in HE



Colour intensity indicates highest number of contributors.

Figure G11. Map to show location of study contributors

WHAT HAS BROUGHT THEM TO PLAY?

Educators are using play in higher education for many different reasons. Some of these are shared across the participants in terms of why they want to use play, regardless of their country location.

Accident, instinct, intuition

Several respondents said that they had not realised they were using play until engaging with this study, others said it happened organically or by accident, others were much more intentional. Several were also keen to point out that what they were doing was intuitive and informal, rather than something they had been trained in.

> "I've sort of seen opportunities through things and then adopted them rather than sat back, thought, right, what can I introduce? So I've built my playfulness incrementally based on observations, rather than sort of sitting down saying, right, I want to introduce play, how can I do it? (TVOP IV 10)."

Prior experiences

In some cases, it was their own prior experiences of play which they wanted to bring into their teaching. One had been a Pearson faculty advisor on simulation based learning in the past. Another drew on incorporating their passion for gaming into their educational practice. A third described

> "A deep spiritual connection to play that LEGO® formed in my life… [Participant then described getting out] your old box of LEGO® and suddenly you get these strong feelings come back (TVOP IV 3)."

Identity and role

There is a strong sense of identity bound up in notions of role and educational practice. A repeated motif across responses was that playing is about being true to yourself and who you are.

> "If I stay close to the person I am, I cannot ignore play because it is part of me (TVOP IV 33)."

> "It's part of who I am (TVOP IV 8)."

One observed that they were chosen for their present role "because of the way I teach and the way that I am with people, rather than what I know" (TVOP IV 3).

While this respondent is no doubt being modest as to their reasons for being appointed, they make an important point about manner and interpersonal skills. Both of these things have been identified as essential during a time of remote education due to Covid. Being approachable and humanising the lecturer were complementary attributes of play; being authentic and being real. For some respondents this was about being someone who does not take life excessively seriously, or who maintains a sense of wonder[21] .

Their preferred ways of learning

For some it was a strong sense of how they themselves learn which directed them to use play. Many of them commented that they are much more engaged when doing things and being hands on, rather than sitting through three hour lectures. One observed

> "These aren't rules I learned, just things I've done along the way…I've got no rules because I have no preconceived conditioning (TVOP IV 58)."

This was from someone who had come to education after a career in industry, and the sentiment was echoed by others in the same position. While most of them express a heady respect for the heritage of academia they also had the sense that it could fossilise practices and beliefs.

> "We have to be strong and flexible like bamboo, not rock solid like concrete (ibid)."

Frustration and Nonconformism

Several participants self-identified as unconventional or nonconformist; seeing their playful ways of teaching as falling outside the familiar modes of 'proper education'. They were mindful of what had engaged them at school and what had not; leading to the desire to try things that were different.

> "I'm generating the future coaches and teachers, I want them to perpetuate that philosophy that I've got in terms of free thinking, non-conformist, engaging, ground-breaking, rule-breaking teachers who will get results (TVOP IV 47)."

> "I call myself a radical adult educator in the sense that my job is to empower people to be better than they are now. To empower them to live their best lives and provide for others" (TVOP IV 50)."

In keeping with TVOP IV 58's comment about preconceived conditioning, these participants saw themselves as having come from, and being, outside the system in some way. As noted, this was expressed by educators who had spent the largest part of their career outside higher education. Another example is this self-view as a 'pracademic'- someone who is a

practitioner and professional, as well as an academic.

> My goal is to create action, challenge and inspire...the last thing I want to do is stuff which just entertains other academics (TVOP IV 49).

Running through interviews was a sense of the frustration that participants felt towards current educational systems and practices. These were felt to be stifling the connection and passion which are both central to learning and also often missing.

> So the things that really drive people are you gotta connect with who they are, what's the strong voice in their life...if you can connect with one thing in their life that they're passionate about you can release a whole group of other things. My experience in the UK education system within the UK it's a lot about meeting standards rather than releasing passion (TVOP IV 3).

There was a felt need to give permission to use free thinking approaches after the straitjackets of A level learning[22]. The sense that play and creativity have been "kicked out of students" at school was voiced by at least two participants (TVOP IV 17, TVOP IV 51).

The loss of play in the course of adolescence was also lamented:

> After the age of 11 we seem to weed play out of our lives, you know, or unless we dress it up as going to the gym or buying a £600 Xbox. The real essence of play gets weeded out and I think it's the greatest informal education model that we have not tapped into formally (TVOP IV 3).

Another participant appreciated Bloom's taxonomy for positioning creativity as the pinnacle of higher order thinking and expressed dismay that this had become hugely neglected in education.

Several educators described themselves as rebelling against tired preconceptions and practices. References to fighting the formula came up several times with regard to student expectations, assumptions about what constitutes appropriate university learning, the best way to assess and so forth.

> ...I want students to go and experience things for themselves, to learn for themselves, to learn how to learn and they find that really, really difficult because they're academically gifted and we 've spent so long training them into this formula, this process to get you here but they don't think about the wider picture about why am I doing that how do I apply that where can I use that and I think play is the only tool
>
> if you approach it from a very kind of, formal education model, this is what you must do and you know x+ y = z you end up working on the wrong end of the equation.

> So, people focus on x+y and I say no, you need to be focussing on z, which is the experience (TVOP IV 3).

A stance against mediocre teaching

There was also a profound sense of commitment to their students and to their teaching craft. Numerous respondents cited their experiences of inheriting a module from another teacher and finding it dry and tedious. Some of the tedium is associated with teaching that has been unchanged for some time, emanating from those described by TVOP IV 47 as "fairly do-over lecturers".

> I thought I can't teach those slides. Not my slides, not my song. So I went into town and I bought blank monopoly and spent four days creating sports fundingopoly.You create your own places, get grants, invest money in sports facilities, go to jail if your athletes test positive for drugs etc (TVOP IV 47).

> You don't remember the lectures that were hundreds of Powerpoint slides, you remember the ones where you did something totally different (TVOP IV 52).

> So, play in and of itself to me is a way, a mode of learning that is in my experience far more effective than what you call standard lecturing and I think I never do that (laughter) I think I have not done that for a very long time. But there are people that still compare to that standard lecturing, right? Where you end up speaking most of the time and people end up dying in 3 hours (TVOP IV 18).

> I think we have a responsibility to make it fun and enjoyable, you know, not boring and tedious (TVOP IV 25).

> I think it's very, very dry what a lot of people are doing (TVOP IV 30).

> Some of the things I've taken over are obviously, you know, subjects people have been teaching for a long time[and] haven't been adjusted...I thought this is a really dry session...[getting] nearly 300 people engaged is going to be difficult (TVOP IV 31).

> For me the possibility of education is not seeing it as a kind of bucket that needs filling but just seeing it as a bucket that, if you keep filling it, it keeps spilling over and you might get new stuff (TVOP IV 3).

The responsibility to make it fun is not always a view shared outside the play community. An educator once put it to me their "mission is to educate, not entertain" and they did not know how to reconcile the two. The idea that advanced learning can also be fun is not always readily accepted by established institutions. As an Australian respondent noted:

> We are very research driven, high intellectual, high science, work must be dull (TVOP IV 51).

While there is an element of wry wit in this there is also a point being made by the respondent. This may partly be due to the creation of terms such as 'edutainment' in recent years. While this can have a variety of interpretations, in HE it is often used disparagingly to denote teaching which, by being entertaining, is deemed to be dumbing down the subject in some manner.

Suspicion about this is often voiced to me along the lines of 'serious, deep learning is difficult and painful and therefore play-based learning can't support it'. However, this assumes that all playbased learning is a happy experience, rather than one that will engender a range of different emotions. Also, as one participant notes elsewhere, something may be fun after the event, rather than during.

The concept of fun is also a complex construct, akin to play in the multiple ways it is defined and differences in what is perceived to be fun[23]. This is something that greater focus on and research into the value of play can help with, as it reduces some of the binary thinking that surrounds deep and serious engagement, of the 'no pain no gain' ilk. How to go about making it fun is, like the tension between education and entertainment, something that playful educators disagree on. For some, playful activities such as "if you were an animal what would you be are?" amusing, while for others they are an embarrassment.

> I don't know how many workshops I've been to when I've been asked to describe myself as a car or as an animal...you know what kind of bumblebee would you be? It's supposed to be fun but I'm like, oh really? (TVOP IV 25)

Being a role model

Other respondents raised the matter of 'passing the baton' or being able to provide experiences through play that their students could then pass on in some form. One saw their role as an educator for people within their institution and felt that if they could influence them they would create a ripple effect extending to their students and beyond.

All their reasons for play are infused by their perceptions of value, educator values and passionately held beliefs about the best way to teach and inspire students. They also offer a glimpse of what educators face when their beliefs and practices clash with those of others in their environment.

A final observation here. It may also be tempting to assume that, being playful educators in some form, respondents were ready to embrace all kinds of play. As is made clear later in What Gets In the Way of Play and Polarities of Play, this is not the case. Respondents have their own play aversions. They may use certain kinds of play because they believe them to

be valuable to students, but this does not mean that they find it easy to do. This is not the same as being inauthentic. The belief in the value of play is there, but putting themselves out of their comfort zones and taking risks is often stressful. Part of this stress is down to the fear of judgement by students and their peers and, should the play not come off as planned, the risk of being seen as incompetent and lacking in gravitas or credibility.

In short

Participants in this study hold diverse and complex roles across multiple areas. It is not always easy to separate out management educators from those working with related management topics in other fields. They have come to play for multiple reasons, rooted deeply in a commitment to good learning and teaching and often out of a frustration with things in their present contexts. Their passion for play may not, however, extend to all forms of play, always.

Reflection

What stood out for you in participant comments on why they play?
What, in their reasons for turning to play, resonates with you?
Were there any surprises?
How important is it for you to distinguish between subject disciplines or notice any blurry boundaries between them?
If you are working in management education do you accept this notion of blurry boundaries, or do you feel there is a different way to look at this?

g

gallery

In which
I present a significant number of different examples of play, as provided by participants and as sourced from literature, events, connections, and experiences (including my own).

These are divided into the following four sections:
Types of play in HE
Types of play across the different disciplines
Types of play in management education
Types of play in research

gallery

TYPES OF PLAY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Figure G12. Types of play in higher education (1)

The diagramme above shows 17 general categories of play being engaged in as part of higher education learning. The following sections in the Gallery block group different vignettes (mini stories, anecdotes, or accounts) of play under each of the cloud headings in this diagramme. Although this is my attempt to keep things tidy there are some things to bear in mind as you read on:

1. 17 is a spurious number, as each category contains further possibilities and variations. However, it serves to show the breadth and variety of play in HE.
2. There are blurry boundaries between each of the categories; trying to make surgical divisions between them is unnatural.
3. Some play forms will combine several others: wordless play might be occurring in teamplay, which is taking place in a special space, perhaps as part of imaginative fantasy. Parody and satire may flow through deconstructing play. Stories are told through all kinds of play. It can be difficult to separate them, and unnecessary.
4. This is not the only way to group play - there are shorter, longer, more specific or contextually based ones. You will no doubt come up with your own.

In addition to these categories it should be remembered that play can be

- internal (i.e. within the mind of the individual playing, such as with playfulness, puzzles and playful tests, memory games etc) or external (involving activity, embodiment, other players)
- solo as well as partner/group/team
- collaborative and co-operative (mutually supportive for the achievement of common or individual goals) or competitive (against others in order to win or lose in some way)
- in special places or not - magic circles, dedicated or delineated spaces, specific arenas or territories, (real, virtual or imagined), indoor, outdoor...

A glossary of play types

Before we open the floodgates of play examples, I thought it would be helpful to provide the following chart. It gives a quick explanation as to how each cluster of play is understood in this study. Some things will be obvious and self-explanatory, others perhaps less so at a first glance. I'm keeping the descriptions short on purpose, however many of you may already be aware that many forms of play have their own literature, debates and resources, as already noted regarding game-based learning.

Playfulness	An attitude,mindset or behaviour which brings a playful spirit into something which is not necessarily, in itself, play. This may involve jokes, humour, teasing, lightheartedness, in unexpected situations
Games and gameplay; Gamification	Often using cards, boards, video. Physical and digital structures or other mechanisms. Obeying a set of rules in order to achieve an outcome. Online, offline, the physical and tangible, imagined and cerebral Where elements of gameplay are taken and incorporated into another activity to boost interest and engagement e.g. point scoring, competition with others, prizes, leaderboards
Quests, challenges, tasks, missions	These might be treasure hunts or educational adventures in order to have experiences, visit places, find items, test the self, reach a destination of some kind
Escape rooms, games, puzzles and quizzes	Escape rooms and games usually involve being 'locked' in a room or space and having to solve a number of clues or answer questions correctly in order to be able to get out of that space. They are often team-based and against the clock. While puzzles and quizzes may not have the spatial aspect they also involve solving riddles and answering questions or all kinds in order to succeed or progress

Figure G13. A glossary of play types

Creative, making, building play	This is a very diverse category of play involving arts, collages, drawing, craft, constructing or making of some kind. Not necessarily about aesthetics.
Physical, active, embodied play	This may be all kinds of sporting play, running, dance, movement or gestural play e.g. assuming a pose
Solo, internal, cerebral	Any play alone. This might involve play in your head, or mental puzzles/activities, inner playfulness, solitary pursuits. Solo elements to joint play activities.
Improvisation	This may be theatrical or musical, as well as involving a number of other categories of play. It involves trying out and experimenting with a situation without having any fixed structure or set of goals to follow- something that is created spontaneously and without preparation
Objects, toys, props	Any use of these items which creates, or is a key part of, the play
Simulations, roleplay	Scenarios or set-ups in which participants take on the tasks and personae of characters e.g. in a business transaction, medical emergency, crisis management, court of law
Performance, theatre, drama	These may have some crossover with the previous kind of play as well as others. However in these examples the performative and dramatic elements will be stronger than mimicry
Fantasy, imagination and pretence	Kinds of play which may involve the imagining of that which does not exist or imaginary worlds. May also link to performance and improvisation
Word-based/wordless play, story	Linguistic play of all kinds, as well as use of silence in play; the creation and depiction of narratives. Story.
Magic and illusion	The use of magic tricks, sleight of hand, and other deceptions to surprise and intrigue
Digital play; augmented/virtual reality	All kinds of online play and interactions, apps, not included under gameplay. Digitally based virtual worlds or the creation of experiences beyond the present grasp e.g. lunching on Mars, time travel, meeting a dinosaur
Deconstructing and disorienting play	Play which encourages participants to step away from their comfort zones, or preconceptions/norms; which challenges 'how things have always been done or understood'. What if play which turns usual conceptions of ways of being on their head. Including parody, satire, nonsense
Free play	Play with no predetermined goal, structure or designated behaviours - where participants can choose what they will do, how and with what materials. Play for play's sake

Figure G13. A glossary of play types

In what follows I first use variations of the cloud diagramme which opened this section to indicate play examples from multiple disciplines. These are in one colour. Then I do the same thing with a different colour to indicate examples specifically from business and management. Confusing? It will make sense in a minute.

In Short
In short, there is no In Short. It is too short.

Reflection

1. Hover for a moment over this generic list and reflect on how it relates to your experiences of play in HE
(or play in general, if you have not encountered any play in HE yet)

2. Does it make sense to you? What springs to mind as you look at the different kinds of play, as well as the list itself? What would you add?

3. For bonus points you could even give some thought as to whether or not one or more of Sutton-Smith's Rhetorics might relate to these categories. To help you do this you could use the following table and make your own notes. You can use your own examples and understandings of play if you prefer. Reflect on how easy you find that to do.

Play category	Possible associated Rhetorics
Playfulness	
Games, gameplay, gamification	
Quests, challenges, tasks, missions	
Escape rooms, games, puzzles, quizzes	
Creative, making, building play	
Physical, active, embodied play	
Solo, internal, cerebral	
Improvisation	
Objects, toys, props	
Simulations, roleplay	
Performance, theatre, drama	
Fantasy, imagination, and pretence	
Word-based/wordless play	
Magic and illusion	
Digital play: augmented/virtual reality	
Deconstructing and disorienting play	
Free play	

Figure G14. A template for connecting play types and the Seven Rhetorics

TYPES OF PLAY ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Figure G15. Types of play in higher education (2)

Here I illustrate these broad categories of play with vignettes[24] of play in different subject areas. As much as possible they are verbatim accounts, designed to retain the participant's voice. They are not meant to be blueprints or templates for how to play - although some fit the bill quite nicely - but rather illustrations and inspirations. In the main, these have come from participants in the study, and are rounded out in places with bullet points offering additional links and information. As well as illustrating the practicalities of play here, they also give a sense of the value play brings to learning.

Let's start with a story which illustrates my earlier point about the ways in which play and playfulness often combine in an activity. What kinds of play can you identify here?

Building a sustainable hotel complex: blended play
I have worked with other colleagues in Tourism Management and again, this has been mainly LEGO® stuff that we've done. So one person who did their PG Cert at XXX ...wanted to explore how she might build a game using LEGO® and we did that a couple of months ago... it was a really, really cool game actually. It was different stakeholders building a sustainable tourist hotel complex in new places, and then each of the students had to play a different stakeholder, and they had to bring to

> the table their model of their concerns or the challenges they saw in putting a new hotel or a new complex in this particular area. So, we had the environmentalists and we had the local government and we had the residents... they were all first-year students, and they did really, really well. So, they had to present their model as part of a business meeting, and pitch their ideas, pitch the problems they would have, and the challenges they see, but also the things that they would insist on having as a stake holder, you know; if you want to build a hotel here, then this is what you're going to have to do to meet our requirements. So, ...it was LEGO® plus... we had scenario cards and identity cards
> TVOP IV 46

I would suggest that you can at least find object-based play, game and card play, role-play and simulation; and you may have found other kinds. What is less visible in reading these words, but which may have been present were dynamics and influences related to the Rhetorics; Progress as the students develop their understanding of the different issues to juggle; the Power play that may exist in pitching and negotiation; any Frivolity or rule-bending which may feature through the meta-play - or how the students slip in and out of role; being the character they are portraying at one point and then themselves laughing at what they are doing or taking liberties with the rules. There may have been banter, humour, teasing, gentle (or not so gentle) competitiveness and other playful features and behaviours.

Let's leave all of that for now though, and take a stroll through the inventiveness of others...

Playfulness

Playfulness is potentially infinite in possibility. It can be seen as an attitude or mindset, or, as Sicart suggests, as appropriation; happening "in its pure form, taking over a situation to perceive it differently, letting play be the interpretive power of that context." (2017:27).

Educators appropriate situations through playful interactions, movements, song, dance, gestures, expressions, jokes, comments, and dress. They invite students to answer questions or fulfil tasks through playful invitations, visual or otherwise. They may bring familiar forms of study into playful, unfamiliar spaces and locations. They may juxtapose and/or combine two seemingly unrelated elements to a learning experience which add a light-hearted or amusing dimension to bringing home a deeper point. Some of the facilities in online rooms or through digital play can be harnessed so that educators and students can adopt avatars, wear glitter, change their hair or create playful or semi-fantastical images of themselves.

On his webpage at University of Exeter Maarten Koeners describes his use of play and playfulness as integrating insights into the physiology of play and playful learning into his academic practice. He has established the Playful University Club and, with Adam Lusby, the Playful Lab, to form global connections on the creation of holistic pedagogic practices for students, educators and innovators - enabling individual and institutional play and playfulness to foster a culture that supports joyous, authentic transition to the co-creation of knowledge and skills, while counteracting a number of barriers to innovation and wellbeing.

Playfulness in these two vignettes are at the heart of student engagement and also of staff collegiality:

> **Allowing playfulness**
> I certainly have a broad sense of play I'm very, very interested in. Well, actually, I can't imagine not teaching in a very playful way. I encourage them to approach hard academic topics with a very playful disposition. I encourage them to think about different ideas, as one might think about juggling balls in the air, like how does this one intersect with this one? We like to play with language, we like to play with scenarios. So for me, I think one of the best things we can do as educators is to let our students know right from the start, that you want them to be playful, it allows them to make mistakes.
> TVOP IV 15

> **Playful collegiality**
> *(on helping a colleague with a challenge)*
> ...my way of cheering her up was to play in my own right, and to give her something playful and joyful and so I, I made her a notebook with a few bits and pieces in it that associated with a very silly thing that she likes. So, I took a playful approach towards making something in my own right, and playful in my own head, that then went out to somebody else to deliver a little playful object. So, we weren't playing together, really, in terms of being in the same place, but we were both engaged in the play activity, really.
> TVOP IV 2

Playfulness as takeover can be seen in the creation of gamejams (explanation coming up, if needed) on waterfronts, the housing of creative play circus-style in big canvas tents (James, 2019), the invention of mystery spaces, such as The Dark Would (Fisher and Gaydon, 2019), the conversion of woodland into an outdoor seminar space, with the play on words in its name; Quercus Genius[25]. A collaboration at Cass Business School, co-curated with an artist in residence, explored through art installations "how playful interactive spaces can help organisations innovate" (Holtham and Bech, 2019).

Games and gameplay

As already emphasised, games are a huge area of play in higher education. Some of the best known board games are now commonly redesigned as teaching tools (e.g. Monopoly, Snakes and Ladders). An example from the University of York is the conservation game Catastrophic (another example features in the vignettes for this section). One way in which to play games like Catastrophic is through online arenas such as Tabletopia.

While the focus in this study is on play for adult learning it is nonetheless tempting to turn to some of the many forms of educational games for children (such as many kinds of STEM games, available online) and redesign them for adults.

Just as we have already seen that different play types may combine in a particular experience, so Day's examples of immersive experiences (2019) bring together a mixture of performance, game, live action roleplay, quest and puzzle cracking.

After falling into games 'accidentally', one respondent noted that "the games aren't the important bit, it's the play that's happening around those games, and the games were just a vehicle'" (TVOP IV 2).

Another respondent noted the value of game design as being an exciting and often completely project-based way of 'learning on the job.

This point is made in a number of other contexts, including the importance of student involvement in designing play and also in the example of game jams and hackathons.

Other examples of gameplay include:

- making games and play, public engagement with games
- the use of game-based learning in youthwork education and as part of civic engagement e.g. the Gamechangers Festival, organised by the Shokkin Group, Estonia
- online print and play games e.g. the EVE card game for evaluating volunteering experiences here, or Ökofuzzi, an environmental quiz
- market Place game for teaching marketing theory
- academic game jams and hackathons
- setting up a games library (on and offline) for educators to use at university
- online or offline Pictionary
- co-creating games with students to teach research skills

- Of Course board game for curriculum design available online here.

Explaining game jams and hackathons
using the 4 stage model of discover-define-develop-deliver
Game Jam is often like a 24 to 48 hours, quite intense experience. And you have a theme... I'm trying to think about something really academic. So the theme could be archaeology, and you get to make games that work with the essence of the academic practice of archaeology, or the professional practice of archaeology. So that's kind of the Discovery phase. Phase two discovers something of importance in relation to the theme, like theory texts on archaeology or archaeological practice. But also in discovering an idea, or technological potential, or design potential and trying to integrate those things. And that's the Define phase. So what are we actually going to do? If we have this concept that archaeology is actually just as much about storytelling as it is about objects, how are we going to convey that in a game and define that as a concept that is an exciting experience through gameplay? And then the Develop phase for the kind of making prototypes and then the Deliver phase where they often end up doing an exhibition, a public exhibition to invite people to come and talk about archaeology.

Hackathon is pretty much the same, but without the game elements. So you have someone posing a problem or having a wicked problem. It could be like, I don't know, sustainability or gender equality and then you

try to hack that problem. It can also be way more company oriented. And I think many play activities are always positioned as extracurricular activities, fun and motivating activities are some activities that make you connect with companies or societies. And I really want to kind of substantiate them as academic practices. And as an academic way of thinking and doing, and not just fun and motivating or stuff like that.
TVOP IV 49

(In write up phase this example of how the Bristol Institute for Learning & Teaching are using hackathons for engaging students as partners also crossed my radar, with a link to the use of hackathons in engineering)

Example of gamejam game design
I take this text on this theoretical text on critical pedagogy and try to come up with a design that is faced with this concept that makes people play in education, but in a way that is academically sound.
TVOP IV 49

For readers new to the concept of gamejam there are numerous videos on Youtube to explain this, as well as educational events built around the jam idea, such as *https://edujam.co.uk/*. Gamejams bring together different contributors and stakeholders to create a game in a time-constrained period which focusses on a particular topic, brief, or problem. Like other forms of playful learning, their popularity and visibility has greatly increased recently, perhaps because

> They are seen as activities for developing technical skills needed for digital game development, developing so-called soft skills such as collaboration and communication skills and as a way to teach and learn science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics (STEAM) skills (Merilainen et al, 2020).

Card Games as inclusive starting points
I'm quite a fan of simple card games because I can shove em in me pocket and carry them across campus. So, they're very easy and they're very structured and it's quite interesting when I see other people use those games as well. So, we might play a game to raise questions in people's minds and get them discussing but I'll use that very much as a starting point to set the idea that they, the students in the room, have a voice that can be heard, that they're allowed to change the rules as they see fit, to suit themselves, the way that they want to learn, to give them things to disagree with
TVOP IV 2

Art and Action cards in medical humanities
My art cards have been very successful. So just in terms of inspiring students, because the whole medical humanities enterprise is really very much about encouraging creativity, and the students say, "oh well you know I can't draw!" but I have a lovely set of art cards which features student work on them, in maybe 30 different media. So, everything from songs, to cartoons to little films they've made, to memes, to text conversations, to what have you. And then I have another set of cards with conditions on them. And they're a little bit simplistic, but basically, they get a condition like alopecia, and a card saying mobile, and then you have to come up with an idea how you might represent the treatment or the symptoms of alopecia in a mobile....so that's just a fun way of having students come up with ideas on the spot and just using the cards [with] an element of randomness. You put the cards face down on the table and you've gotta pick two cards and work with what you have, you know?
TVOP IV 16

Creating hybrid games, digital opportunities
We are quite fortunate today...while there are loads of challenges with the digital, there are actually loads of benefits and the digital can extend the opportunities for play on different platforms, in different spaces, and I think creating opportunity where that is seamlessly done is really nice and brings more people in. So, I created a game which I have played for a number of years, now over 12/13 years ago or so, and I have evolved that game but it's played in a physical location, it combines problem solving, collaborative problem solving where people can take pictures with their digital devices, share them, use them for reflection, create videos etc. So, in a way, they use their devices not just to make a phone call or communicate, but also it creates a bridge
TVOP IV 8

COLOUR BLIND
Using Colour Blind, an off the shelf game, by RSVPdesign. (https://rsvpdesign.co.uk/catalogsearch/result/?q=colour+blind)

The idea of this is, you have between six and ten people all with blindfolds on and then there are a whole bunch of different shapes... six different shapes in five different colours. Anyway, the argument is you would distribute them amongst the group with their blindfolds on and you take two of the pieces away, and then the group has got twenty minutes to discover the shape and colour of the two missing pieces with the

blindfolds on, and the only thing they can do is, hold up a piece and ask you what colour is this? And I will answer that question every time. So, for me, it's a wonderful example of people thinking and working in different ways and needing each other, I often use it as an example of Myers Briggs: are you an extrovert or an introvert? Are you someone who describes these things in terms of "it's a triangle with a hole in", or is it "the Star Trek symbol"? So, that's why I would use an exercise like that, just trying to get people to realise there's different perspectives here, there's different ways of looking, there's not just your way of doing it. So, I think that's one of my themes that goes through all my training, is trying to help people accept who they are, but also accept who other people are, and recognise those differences are important and valid and the basis of team working, and leadership.
TVOP IV 12

Card exchange game (flexible content and disciplines)
I've got a card exchange game which is a mechanism that works well with any kind of content, where you have statements written on lots of cards, and you hand out seven cards to everybody in the class, and then each of them rank those statements in order of affirmation, so that the ones they agree with most are at the bottom and the ones they agree with least are at the top. So, they're kind of, yep, all drawn from the course, things that there are no easy answers to and then they try and swap...
This I've used most successfully with teaching science communication...it would be bits about the philosophy of sciences and the nature of science models and so on, communication models. Things like, "statistics are the best way to communicate information to the public".

it's a good way of also just gauging where your students are at, is what kind of cards they pick...and it's like speed dating. They get up, and they swap cards and they negotiate over cards and they try and end up with a set that they like and then they aggregate into pairs and then teams and then they defend their choice of cards. I love that because the students all talk to each other and they really get into it and then it's also very nice at the end to be able to see where they are at and what misconceptions have persisted, in spite of your doing your level best to present counter points of view and so on.
TVOP IV 16

Parklife
Parklife was generated for a level six module on wildlife conservation. So even though I'm in the School of Forensic Science I just offered to do

a session on wildlife crime and wildlife forensics, because any breach in terms of wildlife crime obviously relates to conservation. And so it was just to give them that kind of aspect of learning all about conservation. And when we put it into the module timetable, I got sent through my session, and I looked at it and I thought, it just looks odd and out of place. It just said, wildlife friends. So I thought, how can I get them to bring all of this together to see how it all works together. it how affects all these other things. Because with wildlife crime, wildlife forensics, if you have ecotourism that stops people hunting, they do wildlife tours instead. So you can link something to every session. And so to do that, I just thought the best way to do this is to build up that kind of information, the resources via a game. So I was thinking about - if you know the game Settlers of Catan, and things like that - the way you build up these kind of resources.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catan

we'll have ecotourism that you can build or buy into, but then we've got the threat of poachers. And then you've got your land that you need to purchase to build the nature reserve. And then when you have your breeding pairs, you have to build up your genetic studbook for that as well. So it had all the aspects of the module, essentially, it is a revision tool. So it wasn't meant to be, you know, purely an educational game, it was for the students to go right, you've learned all these different things. Here you go, build a nature reserve, using all the information you have, how are you going to be successful? How are you going to have a decent stock? you know, genetically diverse? have money in the bank? and use those skills and just try and bring it all together that way.

So that's how that got developed, again, by me going this doesn't look right within the module. We need something else here to bring them in. So yeah, so now I do the session on wildlife forensics. And then for the last half of it, we play the game, and it always kind of coincides with when the dissertation is due in. So a lot of students have said it's a nice light relief. They just get to have a little bit of a break and kind of revise without actually being here a revision session and just bring it all together.
TVOP IV 31

Gamification

Hartt and Hosseini (2019) support Sutton-Smith's position that certain forms of play have affiliations with particular subjects. They observe that planning and computer science education lend themselves particularly well to game-based learning. For them, planning and gamification have natural ties, in promoting deep learning and developing interpersonal and problem solving skills (2019:267). Some examples of gamification offered by participants in this study were:

- organising modules around themes or titles e.g. a "Gruesome Blood" third year Health Sciences course, where everything is seen through the lens of blood. Or a project with blood as featuring in pop songs and how this can be connected to science
- using websites which can gamify multiple choice questions
- using app based learning to instil concepts
- an online resource for building confidence and capability in mathematics: https://ima.org.uk/855/maths-arcade/
- play used to support education of scene management (e.g. an emergency, crime, incident) within the practice of programme, although this is not necessarily considered as traditional management skills

> **Protocols for doctors**
> Doctors need to learn to do a lot of elearning to make sure they're up to date with new protocols for for their practice. But the elearning can be boring and long, etc. So what I did was use a platform where any content can be put into multiple choice questions that you can answer in three seconds, and are mobile friendly. So you get them on the mobile, the buttons for the answers are in your email. And if you know it, and you answer or update today, with the protocol, you get points, because you press the right answer. If it's wrong, then you also see, you always see the little description why which answer was right. But you also can compete

> between like the cardiology department versus nephrology department. So there's a little bit of a playful element in there. And they are linked to the protocols they need to learn. So if they if they see Oh, I have got it wrong, they can click on the hyperlink to the actual protocol.
>
> if you have a practical about cardiovascular disease, or whatever, and you want them to interact with the virtual learning environment before that practical, then, using a platform you can automate sending these emails with specific questions that are related to that topic so they don't get overwhelmed with information. It's just a simple email, but then it specifically directs them to the specific point in a virtual learning environment they want to be and there's a little bit of a game because you get points and you have groups and so we're now starting to use that wider in the university and we've got the ethics approved to also research it so we really can we can analyse the footprint the student has on the platform. So how much do they use it? Do they also go there?
> TVOP IV 33

Quests, challenges, tasks, missions

I suggest that this category illustrates what I hamfistedly coin as 'overplay' - a combination of the words overlap and play - as several of its examples could also feature under games, or puzzles, and escape rooms. They are here, however, to indicate going on some kind of expedition - mentally, physically, around a room, campus, location or just on a laptop. At the time of writing I am also creating a hybrid quest-escape-puzzle game to share aspects of this study, rather than only disseminate it in a conventional fashion. Other examples include:

- games for educational conferences with expedition kits on website, coded messages, clues on registration

- live action quests around a range of physical locations
- quest cards to encourage networking and interaction: have your photograph taken with somebody from a different continent, collect specified things or information, present evidence and trade card for next one (can also link to gamification with stickers, reward mechanisms, performance tables)
- secret mission cards

Here play combines a puzzle, a quest, a roleplay (even of the one person variety):

Play to deal with incomplete information (in research methods)
one of the problems [uses] a transcription from a newspaper, The Times, from 1922. So the story is that, you know, their research assistant went to the library, transcribed the newspaper, brought it back to them. And they've got evidence there, which is supposedly a secondary source. But actually, you know, one of the words has been mistranscribed. And it's the word describing the place name. And so what they have to do is to have to go back to The Times 1922, which is available digitally now and look for the article and find that the place name is different.
TVOP IV 59

In this one, a mission has been inspired from film; for those of you who like a spot of cultural cross-referencing:

Micropipetting in labwork à la *Die Hard*[26]
Micro pipetting is just transferring solution from one thing to another. So whether it's from your stock solution for your experiment, or between any containers that you have bought, it is very small amounts.. ..it can be down to - you know - not even a drop of solution that you need to transfer especially when you're working with DNA. And so yeah, this very, very tiny amount, but students just think oh, it's just a drop of solution. You don't know. If that's off even slightly, you know, the whole thing would go wrong.

I needed to make this more engaging more interesting for students so that they can get the hook of it without having to sit there and go "this is calibration and this is the importance of calibration". They can see it visually in the lab.

[So] my first journey into playful learning was through [thinking], How can I make this a little bit more engaging, that they can understand how you make a small difference that has a massive effect in terms of when you're working with a single drop of solution. And so after a few ideas,

thinking back and forth, I thought back to the scene in *Die Hard* with a Vengeance. And with the water jug problem. So you've got the three gallon and the five gallon jug, and you've got to put exactly four gallons of water onto the scale, otherwise, the bomb will detonate. So I just took that down to a smaller scale and gave them three different tubes with differing amounts of solution. So work the problem out, first of all, and then you've got to have your set amounts that are in these three tubes, we weigh them, you've got your very small kind of error rates. And if you go beyond that, we detonate a bomb in the lab - we had like a briefcase with playdough and things in it hooked up to a scale, as just a side effect. And so we have to solve the problem in a group and then if you're inaccurate then the bomb will go off in the lab. And the effect that had was students engaged with that problem. So your understanding of the accuracy came through playing this game and by not detonating the bomb. And what happened is even I was putting all the results on the board, which would normally be students going, Oh, no, you know, mine is wrong. It had the reverse effects of people going who got the worst result? And then those groups going, can we try again, rather than going I failed? I don't want to do anymore. They just said Can I have another set of tubes. And we'll just try again.
TVOP IV 31

Escape rooms/games, puzzles and quizzes

Perhaps even more than gamejams, escape rooms have seen an explosion in popularity over recent years. Mills and King argue that the beauty of escape rooms is that they encourage participants to "investigate different approaches and possibilities as they manipulate knowledge to arrive at new understanding" (Mills and King, 2019:33). They

translated well to online delivery during the pandemic and come in multiple guises. Karageorgiou et al (ND) discuss the value of creating escape rooms to teach STEAM at a Vocational School in Greece, while this study in Spain focuses on how they improve motivation and learning.

Among the examples cited in this study were:

- escape rooms in a bag
- escape games that teach intercultural tolerance
- collaborative escape rooms to get out of an Egyptian tomb
- escape rooms as failure based learning

Escape box for healthcare
My colleagues designed a large-scale escape box activity and that was for a decision-making module. It was level 6, so higher level, multi-disciplinary; we had all the paramedics, midwives, child nurses, mental health nurses and adult nurses, all mixed up, and it was happening across the campus. I think they said there were 400 students doing it at the same time, in many different rooms, and they were all trying to escape the box. It was a series of challenges that had been set, working out problems; things like working out quantities of medicines, thinking about key safety issues that you would have to think about as a health care professional, solving all the clues that they were given in puzzles. And so, I was helping in one room and we were literally going around the different groups. They had to discuss all these things in an interdisciplinary way because they couldn't solve all the clues as individuals ,because each of those key people would have a piece of the puzzle. As a midwife you would know something, and as a paramedic, you might know something else, and you had to all work together. So, they really had to be a multi-disciplinary team around an escape box which was so fabulous and then they had to solve the clues , and as they solved the clues, we would then go up and we would deliver them the next puzzle.
TVOP IV 46

Zombie apocalypse escape room in physiotherapy
Simulation is really all about playing and using the equipment and we were looking at how we could make it less threatening for them and a few of us went on an escape room as a physio awayday and it was really, really good. It was a zombie apocalypse type escape room, and there were lots of things in there that were very medical and so, we were like, we could do this; we've got a room and we can try and use it.
TVOP IV 27

Revising sepsis with an escape room
The students have all got exams after Easter and so, the revision session tomorrow was going to be in our simulation room and it's an escape room idea of sorts, I guess, but it's all around sepsis, all around infection and it brings in elements of anatomy and physiology and exercise as well. So, in the three modules that they're learning this year all the revision is combined in this one, twenty-minute escape room.

We use it for revision, which we've found over the last couple of years, in terms of their assessment, has really helped because, normally, revision would be just going through case studies and that sort of thing. So this is a different way, it helps the students that don't necessarily learn through repetitive reading, and the one thing that we've really found is that the really quiet students - which is unusual for physio because normally we're quite a gobby lot - the really quiet students often find that, in that small environment, where there may be two or three people working out these puzzles and trying to work out what's wrong with the patient in the bed who's in shock, they can often have a bit more of a voice, rather than in a large classroom environment where there's thirty, quite loud people, and we're maybe doing a quiz and asking questions, they don't say anything. When there's only two or three people, they come out of their shell a lot more.
TVOP IV 27

Escape quests as intro to literary genre
https://escaperoomsasheville.com/2017/10/30/escape-quest-rooms-vs-escape-rooms/

Escape quests. I do one where it's a murder mystery to introduce Sherlock Holmes and the Golden Age of detective fiction. And we actually have four tables in the room, all representing different suspects. And the students have 20 minutes on each table to go around. So there's a mini escape game on each table, and then if they actually open the final box, they get a clue to the murder mystery. And then at the end, they all gather around and read it out.

And it's just the most amazing thing for stimulating deep discussion, and engagement with the plot and understanding that when an author writes detective fiction, what they are doing is playing a game with the reader... it's a wonderful introduction to the to the genre, and it works really well. We actually moved it from halfway through the term to the start of term. Because it's such a conversation starter, saying to the group, while we're in the middle of this buzzing conversation, this is what academic discourse looks like. And so next time, when the source material isn't quite so exciting, you know, and they've read a

chapter or they've read a journal article, we're still expecting that level of engagement and that level of buzz in the room. And that did seem to work we think. So where that's what we'll be doing again next year.
TVOP IV 30

Creative, 'Making' and Building play

• the use of LEGO® appears repeatedly in different higher education contexts and belongs in this category of play as well as under Objects, Toys and Props. One example related to using LEGO® to explain how the principles of seven different military functions and how they interact with each other
• numerous examples of the use of LEGO® Serious Play® can be found through simple searches, including for academic writing skills on a music and education course
• food play e.g. using pizza games where a pizza is sliced into different segments to denote different roles/activities; processes illustrated through food analogies
• events with playful and creative activities e.g. festivals and conferences, such as this one at the University of Winchester (2017-19)
• old favourites such as the egg drop challenge and making towers with marshmallows etc but doing it online - getting students to source their own materials
• visualising research projects using icons and hand drawn infographics
• reframing; a form of visual mind mapping using concentric rectangles with the topic in the centre
• rich pictures, an explanation for which can be found here
• teaching geometry through origami; with 3D paper students can touch lines and planes, and see geometrical objects

• describing geometrical functions e.g. of a bridge/curvature of a mountain/ national buildings, using the free graphing calculator Geogebra
• using diverse materials to teach abstract concepts
• creating a jigsaw to teach cell structure
• creating flowers to teach the structure of a flower
• collage/swollage for reflecting on learning and personal development
• inviting first year teaching students to construct their identity as emerging teachers using Geomag; a construction toy made up of lots of magnetic balls and bars which cling together

Food play to teach physiological concepts
We use Malteasers, in relation to the ventilators and we have lots of competitions and quizzes. My background, originally, was paediatrics, so you have to use a lot of games when you're treating children and that fed through into the teaching because how would you get a child to take deep breaths? You can't just sit there and say "take deep breaths" to a five-year-old.
So, a lot of our treatments use games and that is then fed into the teaching of how we get the students to understand how they would do these. A lot of our physiological concepts are quite complicated, so trying to break them down into smaller, more understandable steps, really helps the students,...we use a lot of food... so, teaching the liver we use different cakes and things like that. So, to show them how different things work.

Cakemaking to show liver function
We make a cake into the shape of a kidney or a liver and for the kidney we run tea through it, and you can see how the liquid gets absorbed or doesn't get absorbed. For the liver, we look at sugar and how alcohol has the effect on the liver. So, we don't actually use alcohol, because we're not allowed to anymore, but soaking the liver in it, and how it gets fatty; I've got a really, really good technical instructor, who does a lot of the set up for me, but it allows the students to actually see in real time the effects of these things on the body.
TVOP IV 27

Moving Malteasers with straws for teaching functional residual capacity
Functional residual capacity is about lung volume and if your functional residual capacity drops, then your alveoli, the little air sacs in your lungs, can collapse and that causes lots and lots of problems and that's kind of how coronavirus is working at the moment. So, one of the things that physio tries to do is open up these air sacs so you can get like, oxygen transfer, carbon dioxide, so the patients aren't going to have respiratory failure, basically. So, what we do first of all, is we get students to use a straw, and as I say, Malteasers or sweets, and they have to use the straw to move

the Malteasers from plate to plate and we have a competition to see who can hold the Malteaser the longest and who can move it the quickest.

So, that's kind of the starting point of it, and we have a ranking system; the physio students are very competitive by nature, so it works really well for the guys, for the male students who maybe haven't seen themselves working in our area of physiotherapy, they maybe see themselves working in sports. So, by having the competition it gets them on board with it a little bit.

So, once we're happy with that, we move onto the more complicated concepts around how a ventilator works and how we can induce a big deep breath in a patient who's on a ventilator by using something called manual hyperinflation and that, again is about taking a big deep breath, but the patient is doing it and that's much more, sort of, complicated. [We also look at] how a ventilator works, how we can manipulate a ventilator and we look at all the, kind of, the different effects that physiotherapy has on that one, tiny alveolus.

So, it starts really small, gets them engaged and then we, kind of, ramp it up, within the session really, it may be over a couple of sessions but it's building on the knowledge, so that they don't get too overwhelmed too quickly.
TVOP IV 27

What does it mean to live well?
I did a whole day workshop with a group of multi-disciplinary PhD students and we were looking at sustainable living and sustainable futures, through all these different lenses. So, we had economists and psychologists and sociologists and business people... environmentalists; so, many different disciplines all represented and they all had to answer one question in LEGO®. It was a whole day and it was the most wonderful thing because we had so much time, and it was so relaxed, and it was all about what it meant to live well through their eyes. It was amazing, absolutely amazing it was one of the best things I think I've ever done.

We sat them all in very mixed groups ...everybody was from different countries but they were also looking at it from a different set of lenses and then we brought all of these together into an agreed way of thinking, that everyone could buy into. You know, all of these different perspectives need to be bought into and there was a lot of discussion, not arguing at all, everyone was very, very positive, ...working towards the idea that we need a more sustainable, more equitable way of living, that can sustain our planet, sustain our people because we can't keep growing the way we're growing.
TVOP IV 46

Foam body parts to teach physiological concepts
We do a lot of using foam body parts as well... trying to break things down and start simple, and then build up the concepts to more complicated ideas. It works really well for them, 'cos a lot of the students struggle with physiology. Anatomy is very easy, it's just geography, it's learning this and that and it's facts. But physiology is all about understanding concepts and we found that a lot of the first year, certainly, struggle with that 'cos they've had to learn facts for exams, but for us, anybody can know what the heart rate is, or what a normal heart rate is, but if you don't know what that actually means for our practice, it's pointless, do you know what I mean?
TVOP IV 27

Student-led Tohei exhibition, Vietnam
We ran the first one last year in Hanoi. And we had a lot of playful activities. We had a Tohei exhibition. Tohei is a traditional form of toy making using rice dough. So we had an exhibition and we had a Tohei master running workshops. We had screenprinting, we had regenerating clothes, we had kirigami workshops, we had lots of hands on, and I would say very playful, ways of introducing people to creativity through fun activities...[...] And this year, we're planning to have it in three cities. And we've extended it to dance and performance and things like that as well.

What was nice about the exhibition is they started with all the traditional figures from the mythology and the traditional whistles that they used to make, like chickens and things and then it goes right through to the modern day cartoon character. So the imagery that they use, it has kept pace with the times. But the technique is still very much what it was like, I don't know, maybe hundreds of years ago. The Tohei exhibition was actually organised by students, by a student club called current media. And it was their idea and their inspiration, it was actually the most successful thing that we did and got the most visitors and most press and most media coverage.
TVOP IV 25

Expressing research projects through artefacts
One of the things that our students do as part of their research project is to create an artwork and our idea of that is that it is a method of thinking through making. So that you come to a different view of things through the making of an object that's associated with your research and students write that up as part of their method. So that's one of the ways in which we do that that work. Quite a lot of students design board games around the whole process of trying to negotiate access to health care in prisons, say, or people trying to make their way around the hospital system or the health care system.
TVOP IV 16

Puppets and plagiarism
In support of a colleague who hadn't produced online training materials before:

...instead of saying do this training material and we'll work through it together, and we'll do something very serious, we ended up having a quite a playful discussion and at the end of that bouncing of playful ideas off each other, I set her a task of a plagiarism tutorial, video tutorial, using Punch and Judy puppets.

So, she had Punch and Judy in her hands doing a little skit and things and I could imagine somebody else looking from the outside thinking, "that's an absolutely awful use of work time, there's no way you should be doing that, how dare you!" you know, out on your ear, sort of thing. But because we took a playful approach to it, she played with the idea of making a video, she learnt all the skills she then needed to then produce serious videos afterwards. So, lots of different types of play that might not be seen as acceptable by other people, but as long as they're acceptable to the people that's playing, I think that's spot on.
TVOP IV 2

Swollage* as creative reflection
I've been inspired by Julia Reeve to do swollaging as well, using collage, very reflective, got my students doing it, ...there was a little bit of reticence there from some students. But I told the students just relax, chill, enjoy, we're having a morning off the intense, anatomy and physiology learning, or the writing, and we're just going to be doing something very creative and expressive.

The most incredible thing was the conversations that went round the room; what we found was that students were having very different conversations than normal. So, the conversations that they usually had, all revolved around what they were wearing to the Student's Union that night, or you know, plans for holidays, or, but actually what they started talking about was really, really digging a little bit deeper down into each other. We had a conversation going around the table about all the different languages that people spoke, and then it went into a cultural conversation about who had grown up where, and different cultural ways of doing things and it was just lovely because they realised it as well, by the end of the session, that they really started talking on a deeper level and a more meaningful level, while they were doing what they were doing.

And what they produced, some of them produced amazingly gorgeous

artistic things and they really enjoyed it, some of them just produced you know, just a collagey thing, but they had such a nice time doing it, and lots and lots of really interesting discussions came out of it. So, if nothing else, that was just a really lovely morning of well-being, to get them to think about their own strengths and weaknesses and goals and things like that
TVOP IV 46

*Reeve describes her use of swollage in this blogpost on swollage and mindful reflection

Wallpaper and walking
...one of the activities I do when I'm teaching gait, teaching the students about the intricacies of walking, is I get the students to paint the soles of their feet and we roll out wallpaper lining and get the students to walk up and down on that and then they measure things like step length, stride length, all the different aspects that are involved in gait. And that's with our first-year students and they just think what? That's quite early on in the course.
TVOP IV 53

Building the university of the future with staff and students
So, you've got an intergenerational thing and quite a flat hierarchy in terms of all the participants working collaboratively together. So, [they start by] rolling newspapers into long, very, quite firm rods. So, you've got the students and staff working together, using rods of paper to construct an aspect of what they feel to be really important, really pertinent, in how we may consider building a university of the future. What are the themes? What are the values? What are the pillars?

So, the activity generates almost a language for the importance of the themes that really underpin it. Things like foundation, structure, even as people are embellishing and finding different ways to move beyond the structures of the rods of paper because some quite interesting structures appear.

What is useful is that play element that foregrounds a looseness in, dialogue and laughter and understanding, just sharing an understanding of what these structures may mean and the affordances that are evident in the minds of the people who are working together to construct these: what's really important when you're thinking about what our university of the future will look like and what it needs to look like?

There's this element of want or need, desire, purpose, meaning, and a lot of debate. Whilst the physical construction is going on there's also that

sense of, okay, let's now stand back from this. Does this suggest what we thought it might, when we were building this? Are there nuances? Are there questions that this now raises? Because actually that doesn't look very stable and that, for me, was meant to represent the importance of hope, actually. Oh, my goodness. Hope has now just disintegrated and fallen on the floor. And then there is a lot of laughter around those sorts of ideas and themes disintegrating.

You could use masking tape to connect but what you couldn't do is use masking tape to connect to the floor. So, we couldn't tape our structures to the floor and again, that raises questions about the importance of foundation and strength. Bottom up, rather than top down. So, you know, there's some quite interesting conversations that ended up kind of metaphorically linking with the importance of having good foundations for anything that's important.
TVOP IV 56

Using LEGO® to build perceptions of compassionate leadership in healthcare
We took a workshop that I had done with the business school, with MBA students and postgraduate students, and we adapted it to a postgraduate healthcare programme. So, one of my colleagues in health science asked me if we could look at leadership from a healthcare perspective, and specifically, she's very interested in getting students to conceptualise compassionate leadership. So, we use LEGO® for this, getting the students to start very simply; we use a whole load of mini figures and accessories and we ask the students to build what a leader means to them. So, what does it look like? And we try to get them to think about things like values, attitudes, behaviours, characteristics, all those kind of things, and they build their conceptualisation of a leader. We don't specify at the moment that it has to be health care, but obviously because they're health care students they're probably thinking along those lines and what we then do is we draw out of them some of the things they've modelled, some of the accessories and what they might mean in a healthcare setting, and we start mapping some of the things that they're saying to the NMC (Nursing and Midwifery Council) code of practice and the HCPC (Health & Care Professionals Council) code of practice. But also, things like the six C's of nursing? They're sort of core values that underpin nursing.

commitment, courage, care, compassion, communication and competency

those things come out really nicely, when you start mapping their models of leaders

We start very much from the individual perspective, thinking about a leader, and then we start thinking about a really good leader, and then we move on from there and we start getting the students to start think about leadership as a concept itself, as opposed to just a leader and everything that's involved in leadership. So, we would then move on to getting them to do a bigger build on their own to start with, that they would build a model which encompasses all of those things that we've been talking about and from their perspective, what does leadership look like in health care? and then we move on, through the stages of a LEGO® Serious Play® workshop.

It was almost like a story they built, 'cos we brought all the models together, we combined them all and we had different sections within the model that looked at compassionate leadership, thinking about it from the patient's perspective, thinking about it from the professional's perspective, thinking about it from the perspective of all the pressures that come into health care, the political pressures, the economic pressures, and it was just fascinating. We had this enormous model...

We have actually also adapted this to use with our brand new Foundation[27] students and we didn't make it as complex but we did get them to build a professional because we were introducing the concept of professionalism to them, because our students are pretty young, some of them were 17, mostly 18, very young, out of school and the concept of professionalism, I think, was quite a difficult one for them to get their head around, because I think they all think, you know, oh well a professional, they wear a suit and they're very important and they do this and they do that. But thinking about professionalism, from a healthcare, from a nursing perspective; what does it mean to be a nursing professional and what's really important? So, we were trying to get their heads around their codes of practice, their codes of professionalism, and again we used LEGO®, for this introductory workshop, again, getting them to think about all those things that they think are really important and then we matched them to their code of practice, so they could start linking to their code of practice because they have to know these things really, really well. So in their first year, in level 4, they feel much more comfortable and confident talking about the code because it, it's such a key document to their studies

Physical/Active/Embodied Play

This category can encompass all kinds of play which involve some kind of physical movement. The biological and physiological benefits of play (Koeners and Francis, 2020), in addition to its value in neuroscientific terms for brain development, are major positives frequently cited. Physical play may involve organised group or team activity, with plenty of interplay between participants, and/or solo movement. An example of a movement activity, in which participants may be both together but apart, is that of labyrinth walking (Sewell, Sellers & Williams, 2012; Sellers and Moss, 2016), whereby participants trace the curves of a labyrinth shape with their steps. Labyrinths are used as modes of contemplation, not as forms of play as such. However, the way in which some have engaged with the labyrinth has indeed been playful, through dancing, skipping and so on. Finger labyrinths can also be used which are held in the hand and the grooves of the labyrinth shape traced with the fingers (James, 2014).

Other examples from this study include:

- walking through history; physically moving through the different stages of a historic period and events and talking about what happened at each one
- using walking for remembering things and landmarks and embedding information in a more embodied way

> “So, inspired by that, my group of students came up with a walk around XXX Park that would teach about the regions of the brain. So they had a walk and a story...they then made a film version where they actually cycle around the park (TVOP IV 16).”

FLEX

F L E X; field, leadership, exercise. Yes, but it’s dodgeball and we also do a lot of small group puzzles, with different challenges, and even sometimes we layer on physical challenges with those. Some of them are clearly just logic puzzles that have different constraints and some of them are logic puzzles but the team has to complete them while running, they have to be in motion. Also they have to end up at a certain spot at a certain time and you know, the rules are ambiguous enough that at some point, some of them will realise that running altogether isn’t effective for communicating and then they’ll realise if they just continue to run, which follows the rules, but jog in a circle, they can talk to each other and stuff like that. So, having to perform while being active adds another stress to it. TVOP IV 21

PROJECT X[28]

It’s probably one of the highest rated things that we do for our students, and they’ve seen it before. If not all of them have done it in their commissioning course, or whatever training they got in the air force, but they do it again with us. It’s a series, an obstacle course with individual tasks, you don’t run through the whole thing, you just do one task at a time with your team, but it is not just a physical challenge, it’s much more of a mental challenge.

It was created - this is a great example of creative constraints - it was created by the Germans after World War One, when the Versailles Treaty prevented them from having robust military equipment to train and to do actual high fidelity simulations. And so, instead they used a very low fidelity simulation where, for instance, the challenges are fifteen minutes long; maybe we’ll walk the students there, with them looking away, and then we’ll give them a card and say ok fifteen minutes go and they’ll turn around and there’ll be a brick wall, and the instructions will say something like you must cross over the wall, carrying the equipment with you. You’re not allowed to talk, you know, the guards will be here in fifteen minutes, you must cross and then so, and the other side there’ll be a pool of water. And so they’ll have to think and communicate, there’s things that they can’t do and can’t do, and what I love, is sometimes to figure out what they can and can’t do, they’ll just start doing things and then we’ll call them for a penalty and they’ll go oh, now we know we can’t do that. Which is great, kind of, probing the edges, and then we debrief that and we get a lot of feedback, a lot of learning happens, in the why did you do that? What did you think? Did you communicate what you saw to other people? But not only is it an example of creative constraints, I think it’s playful, because there’s multiple ways to solve the problem. It’s a

kinaesthetic experience and it's a challenge, it's a game in a way, but it's a finite game.

to score or not to score: a reflection

My messaging was all wrong at the start of my command, because students were taking this very seriously and if they didn't complete the task, they didn't get as many points towards graduation, and so, one of the first things I was able to do, was just, kill that; this is not for points, this is learning...cos you could fail the task, and learn more, than if you had stumbled upon success, or one person dominated and they were able to succeed. So, we got rid of the points and then it swung the other way, I was like "don't worry about it so much" and people were like, "well, I'm not gonna worry, we're just here to have fun" I was like ohhh that's not what I wanted either.
TVOP IV 21

Clapping game
One was when I was doing my PG cert, somebody was talking about how we assess students and criteria. And then we all had to sit in a room and they took three people outside. And they were just told to come in and clap. And we were given a list of criteria for the clapping. And so those three people came in and clapped, and they all clapped in different ways. And we all said ah right, [that's] where you get the highest score. And, and it was accidental, because they didn't [know], they just happened to hit on what the criteria were. So it was you know, good, playful, and it's stuck in my brain. All these years that stuck in my brain that if you don't tell the person what kind of clapping you're looking for, how are they going to know how to clap?
TVOP 1V 25

Penguin game for leadership
...the guy started it off, and we had [the course] all marked out and it had all these obstacles on it. And people were divided into penguins and guides. And the penguins were blindfolded. And the guides tried to steer them through the minefield, without knocking anything over, to get to the other side. And we had very limited time to do this. And what was really interesting, and the guy kept saying, only penguins can enter the minefield. And we were still [thinking] what's he going on about? And what he was trying to say was, once the penguins have got to the end, they can come back into the minefield, and they're not blindfolded.
TVOP IV 25

Mr Balloon Guy
Mr. Balloon Guy is simply two people facing each other trying to catch a deflating balloon. You partially inflate a balloon and when you let go, the other person has to catch it, and because its flight path is very, very unpredictable so your movements [have to be] very quick, agile, to try to catch it, people don't catch it. It's a simple game, if you break down that game, if you took a video of it and turn the volume off, the interaction, the behavioural interaction and facial expressions, they're real, what I call, persistence and eagerness. They're real tenacity and body movement, they show the opposite of apathy the opposite of not engaged, they're fully engaged in it.
TVOP IV 47

Human noughts and crosses
Human noughts and crosses, where we have two teams of six facing across a five metre grid where they have to form a line, three at a time, and that is a really powerful game. A very powerful game, because there's so many things that spin off it.

So six a side, I call three numbers out, they run out, so one, two and three from both teams will come out and make a line. They can't share the space, so if two people from opposing teams arrive at the same space, they've both got to move, which means everyone has to move and it's the first team to form a line [who wins]. So, I said now how would you have changed this? And they said well, if we were teaching maths at school, we would shout one number, like nine, and then the children would have to think, which three numbers added together come to nine and then those are the three that we'll send out, and therefore the first team that can think of that, is the first team that more likely to make a nine. Now, this fertile ground of learning is one where they feel very free to contribute to a session that they, that we have started. So, games make games, and that playfulness becomes quite infectious.
TVOP IV 47

Musical chairs without chairs
We didn't want a game where people were excluded. Musical chairs is always about the winners and people who are left out, so we wanted to make sure that everybody could be included. And then when you say to people, there's no chairs, you're about to sit on an imaginary chair, it's amazing how people suddenly get into that, that imaginary space, use their imagination.
TVOP IV 47

Make believe and the military
[in the] marine corps specifically, we have this idea of tactical decision games and their what if scenarios; you get in a scenario on the map, now make a decision and hopefully using some sort of skill. The US army calls them tactical decision exercises, right? they take the idea of game out of it, but any time we're not in conflict, at war, or doing a military operation, other than work right, we're in a pandemic now and doing something. So, any time we're not doing a military mission, even if it's delivering food and supplies, and medicine, we're training for it and they're all hypothetical and in recruit training, in the very beginning, you're doing these fire and movement exercises with no ammunition, so nothing's going bang, and if you are it's blank, or it's a simulation, so it's like a paintball, right? So, it's play. Kids use this play, it's imagination, we're pretending there's somebody over there, we're pretending that target is something that we need to occupy. So, it's all games, it's all pretend.
TVOP IV 50

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Whacky walking (not respondent's title)
I allow space for the students in their teams to walk up and down, discussing the ideas with each other. Not writing them down, but just walking up and down, whilst holding a flower pot or a feather and it's doing something that's different, it's engaging the neural, the frontal lobe by walking and it also doesn't feel so awkward if you don't have an idea. So, they will often, when the ideas don't come, you have to keep reminding them, just walk up and down, without saying anything, just be with each other; it's awkward, it's difficult but then just keep doing it, and allow that space. So, a lot of people say they get great ideas in the shower or when they're just getting into bed, or when they go for a walk or those sorts of things and that's again, that, switching off that frontal lobe, its relaxing yourself and it's allowing time and space for those ideas. Because if you're focussing your subconscious mind on other things, it won't be working on this thing, so, if you just walk and allow time for it and maybe the idea will come now, or maybe it won't.
TVOP IV 55

Solo, internal, cerebral play

We can make the case here that all play will have a solo, internal or cerebral element to it, simply by dint of how our decisions and instincts are enabling us to play. Sometimes we may play alone but come together to celebrate that play, or weave between solo and collective moments, like beads on a necklace. Quizzes, puzzles and quests where players engage alone are but a few examples. LEGO® Serious Play® activities, which start with an individual response to the invitation to build may be another. Other forms of creating and making play where the focus is not on producing things collectively but being together while playing individually can be another example. Voyages of the imagination through scenarios, stories, simulations are others. For all the presence of solo play, it would appear to be less explicitly referred to in HE, compared to group play. And yet several educators made a point of saying they prefer it.

Improvisation

Several participants mentioned musical improvisation, the creation of choirs, or playful, flashmob[29] improvisations such as street duels or creating gifts for strangers. There is an element of improvisation across numerous play types - as in roleplay or simulations when participants have to think on their feet, or in crisis management scenarios or performances; when suddenly the rules or basis on which choices have been made change.

Like play, musical improvisation reminds us that experimentation is invaluable in its own right. Discussing play, connection and education with Stephen Nachmanovitch over Zoom[30] he praised improvisation as one of the great art forms of our time. He also used it to offer this warning: "As soon as you say 'the case for play' [apologies if I do this anywhere] it becomes very easy to get into an argument of conscious purpose - play is good because it makes kids smart...[that is] good, but it's not why we do it." He like many others (e.g. Sutton-Smith, Gray, Kane) also warns that if we only value play for what it does for us we subsume it under the category of work.

This makes improvisation an interesting and potentially under-recognised element of play within higher education. It also offers a counterpoint or complement to views about play which are end-oriented; proposing that play is only justified if a purpose and outcome are marked out. We will come back to this under Polarities of Play.

Improvisation is important for teachers, not only students, and is something which we engage in regularly as we adjust our content and styles to enable students to engage to the full.

> Coaching jazz
> The stuff I did in Scotland with the [XXXX] that was completely spontaneous. I travelled up with a carry-on bag, tennis balls and tennis tubes, that's all I could take and I thought, "Well, I've got no idea what I'm gonna do but I think something will happen". Ad-libbing, you know, that kind of coaching jazz as I call it, where I make it up as I go along. Students rushed into the cupboard, I said get three things out and I'll coach you based on whatever you bring out. That's a good challenge for me, that ability to be free, but also to be receptive. TVOP IV 47

Objects, toys & props

Object-based learning is widely used in many contexts, including for the teaching of material culture, visual communication and as a means of drawing on the contents of archives for educational purposes.

In therapeutic settings, toys can act as intermediaries to discuss difficult experiences and memories, while most disciplines can cite an occasion when these three kinds of items have lent themselves to explanation and demonstration. Pelletier and Kneebone(2019) describe the use of inflatable dummies in surgical education, while Wassif and Zakher (2019) reveal their use of culture shoeboxes (akin to the Wunderkammer of days gone by) to teach ethics to postgraduate dental students and cultural communication to undergraduate business management students.

Some of the use of props and toys appears in other categories such as making play and in improvisation.

Here are some other examples:

- having science based puzzles in a backpack (see also escape games)
- using LEGO® to teach foreign language grammar construction
- using LEGO® to teach threshold concepts
- using LEGO® to recreate iconic scenes from film on an arts and culture module
- using LEGO® to build different risk stratification and triage systems for patients with diabetes
- building models of the vocal system in speech and language therapy
- using the ELMO doll

ELMO
But just recently I learned about Elmo, the Sesame Street character, plush doll, but it stands for Enough Let's Move On, so anybody can grab this toy when they're feeling they've had enough and maybe they're uncomfortable with the tension in the room..... people think you're being infantilised by taking these toys; Elmo, oh that's absurd, you're gonna offend people with it, but it's kind of fun and it feel safe for me to grab an Elmo, safer to grab an Elmo than, say, hey we need to shut up, I don't wanna say everybody, tell my boss to be quiet but I can hold up an Elmo doll, right? And people are gonna laugh at that, and not be offended because someone's holding the doll.
TVOP IV 50

Objects and creativity techniques e.g. SCAMPER
I give them sort of three objects and say, okay, and give me ten different uses for that object? How do we rethink it and rework it? So it might be an umbrella, it might be a plastic bottle. And then in groups, they have to think about, well, what could we do with this? And it's amazing what they come up with. Some of them are obvious, but sometimes it's like, Wow, really? So it gets divergent thinking going, but also, I do use that process. But when we have a problem, so let's say, you know, we've got too many students, not enough staff to teach this, this and this. Let's, let's use the SCAMPER process to kind of re-engineer the problem in a committed way.
TVOP IV 25

[SCAMPER is a technique using a set of questions to address a challenge or rethink/adjust present practice. Its letters stand for a series of questions, formulated by Alex Osborn and turned into a mnemonic by Bob Eberle. Substitute? Combine? Adapt? Modify/Magnify? Put to Other Uses? Eliminate or Minify? Reverse/Rearrange? From Michalko (1991), who dedicates a whole chapter to SCAMPER.]

You can test this yourselves by finding any familiar object around you - like the kettle in the kitchen - and applying these stages to a reconsideration of its design and use. What do you come up with?

Prompts and permission
I'll put things on tables for them to play with. So, things like playdough, and bits of LEGO® or bubbles or those sort of things that people might associate with their own childhood or with their children, when they think they're allowed to do these things, in the hope that then gives them permission to act in a playful way.
TVOP IV 2

Simulations, roleplay

These, along with games, are probably among the best known and most established forms of educational play in HE. A rapid web search reveals numerous resources readily available to explain roleplay (if needed), such as this one from Sheffield Hallam University in the UK or this one from Northern Illinois University. Roleplay, along with icebreakers and competitive play, is something which features in the Polarities of Play we discuss later; where a form or aspect of play can generate strongly held opposing views. Roleplay as LARP (live action role play) can feature under physical or performative play, as well as in simulations, as grouped here. Examples from this study include:

- scholarly roleplay - e.g. students having to become an educational theorist
- joint roleplays which include educators taking parts
- live action role play where stories are written around a particular event, using the props that participants have brought with them

Simulation in physiotherapy
We do a lot of simulation in physiotherapy and my background is intensive care, which is a really hard area to teach, because it's quite serious, and it can be quite scary for the students. So, we do a lot of simulation to get them ready for what it's going to be like working in intensive care so they can take risks in an environment where it's gonna be safe and they're not actually going to, and this sounds really, really, grim but they're not actually gonna kill anybody. They can fail miserably, and it's fine.
TVOP IV 27

Roleplay in forensic science
In an educational setting, like in forensic science, you go to a crime scene, you're the photographer, you're this [role]. So they're kind of acting out those roles, but that's more of the roleplay environment. The role playing side of it works in education, because you have to have these roles in the kind of course that we have. So you get them doing this. I had a student this year who used Dungeons and Dragons to create a mock crime scene. So because obviously it's a really time intensive thing to do for the students to use the crime scene [I wanted to] think of something we could do in the classroom that you could get everyone doing at the same time. Use the knowledge to make the sessions and kind of have one person lead in that session, see if they can you solve the crime. So [my colleague] created this session, did it with forensic students as well, and led them through this crime scene, you know, you found a finger mark on a wooden surface, how do you take that finger mark? and then given them character sheets up front for while you're the fingermark expert, you're the trace evidence expert. And then they have to use the module skills to bring it forward. So in that environment, you know, it works really well for the roleplay.
TVOP IV 31

Diagnostic role play in medical science
If I've got a big class, I have them paired so they have to find the person who's got the same question as them and then they work on presenting an answer back to the class.

One of the most successful little twists we've done is where we were working in a dermatology class, where students were developing their description skills. So, we had this scenario where you come across a rash or some horrible skin condition that you're not familiar with and you need to describe it to somebody else, and somebody else was then trying to draw based on the description. And, at first, we just had them sitting back to back and then suddenly I had this idea where well why don't we just make this a bit more realistic? All of the students had their phones on them, we

work in a big lab, send the consultants to the back of the room and then have the juniors' phone them and describe this skin rash, and immediately it just transformed the whole session. So, it's so easy to just peek, look over your shoulder and make sure somebody's doing what they you think they should be doing, whereas this just worked far more effectively and we just loved the play acting that came into it, you know? Immediately the consultants would say "what? you've phoned me at 3am in the morning for this?!" You know?
TVOP IV 16

Performance, theatre, drama

These kinds of play extend their tentacles into many other forms of play, not least those in the previous category. In separating them I was partly differentiating between play which includes outreach to, or is for, an audience, whereas fantasy, imagination and pretence may well do these things but do not have to. They may have close ties with solo and internal play, as much as with others.

- physically embodying concepts. e.g. an educational theory in a pose or a photograph
- using body in a gesture to demonstrate a concept e.g. imagination
- singing a theory
- dancing a concept/theory/thesis
- Using actors e.g. as patients in medical education or to embody concepts - extinction in natural sciences (dressed as a tortoise)
- festival
- some forms of dress up; embodying characters, or having a dress code for class

Festival and instruments in engineering

In the first year I teach the students making instruments; the manufacturing of musical instruments as a way to apply your engineering knowledge and science to something that you haven't really thought of before. So, it's got to be creative, and one of the things that we try and teach them is how do you envisage who the customer is, because actually that's the most important thing. You could design this amazing engineering thing but if there's no customer or no market for it then you'll go out of business, nobody will use it, it's a completely pointless task. So, always think about who the customer is and I always get somebody to stand in for me, for the first ten minutes and just say, you know, it's for a festival environment that we're designing the instruments and they, they say I'm really sorry, [your lecturer's] got held up coming back from a festival so, he's asked me to cover this lecture for you. Umm meanwhile, I'm waiting outside, dressed up in like festival gear, welly boots, I've got a hand pan instrument as a rucksack, with a blue wig and things on... they 've done the first introduction, and said today's lecture is all about imagining who the customer is, so it's really, really important that you picture who the customer is. At that point, I try and slam the lecture door open and say "oh I'm really sorry I'm late everybody!" and come down and everybody jumps and laughs but it spikes their attention, captures their attention and imagination to do that. And some lecturers are willing to get involved in those sorts of things and some are like oh no I could never do that! (laughter)
TVOP IV 55

Large scale live action role play (LARPs)

[Live action role plays are] halfway between playing dungeons and dragons and historical re-enactment...There's a huge kind of fictional culture that is very complex, and it has its own economy ...And so, you go to a field in England, and you play it, and there's about 2300 players...a lot of people enjoy it because of immersion. I wouldn't say that's why I like it. I enjoy it. Because I, I find the what's the word for it? The emotional engagement of the story is increased by my body being in you know, I'm doing the thing. [embodied, physical play] I'm actually out fighting a monster. So I find that that enhances the fiction for me. So I like physicality and games, I'd very much like games where you have to run about or act things out, or do a Silly Song or two or something. I don't know, I like that kind of social game. And, and for me, it's because the, the physicality enhances the cognitive outcome.
[While LARPS may not necessarily be engaged in by these students as part of the HE curriculum they inspired in the educator the integration of aspects of these games into teaching for the reasons given]
TVOP IV 11

Playful performance in lifestyle journalism: some examples

- hosting a digital red carpet premiere, via Zoom
- having a weekly dress code:

For the week when [they should have been] going to the V&A to see a kimono exhibition students paid tribute to Japan online: one student wore a Uniglo t shirt that was like a Japanese cherry blossom design, one of the students wore his mum's dressing gown, somebody did have a [real] kimono

- in food journalism week watching videos on contemporary food content and telling students " right you've got half an hour to go into your kitchens and create something" - one student did a jokey film of a self-isolation chicken salad like a comedy video

Fantasy, imagination, pretence

(At the risk of sounding like a stuck record, these kinds of play can also be associated with others. In this particular study, participants from across the disciplines made little specific mention of fantasy play as an aim or distinctive play type, although there are examples in play in management education. From outside the study, the mysterious reflective other-space, The Dark Would was referred to under playfulness; Clarke and Witt (2019) describe their appropriation of the outdoors and creation of elf houses and imaginary spaces as part of teacher training.

Wordbased/wordless play/story

> People are made up of stories rather than just molecules. It involves narrative, embodied learning, phenomenology, philosophy, ethics, all of those things that we're so keen on exposing students to. All of those come into the way one designs and makes space for play in higher education (TVOP IV 16).

This study participant found a lovely way to conjure the importance of story in play. All of us can relate to stories, although how we structure, tell and respond to them will vary. We are all familiar with the absence or presence of words to drive home a point.

Popular forms of play in HE have been activities where players sit back to back and one gives instructions to the other to make something, without any visual or physical help. In other examples, it's the absence of words which enhances the play. Roberts (2019:55) describes his use of Pryor's Training Game as an almost wordless guessing game in behavioural psychology (Try it. It's a real challenge, but makes you feel so good when you actually managed to achieve your goal).

In my own teaching I have taken Stephen Brookfield's Chalk Talk exercise (Brookfield, 2015:94-95) and renamed it Silent Discussion. In it participants start by responding wordlessly to a topic on a shared whiteboard, through writing and drawing. It is fascinating watching not only the 'discussion' unfold as they contribute and comment on each other's additions, but also the body language: how participants silently dance around each other, with the occasional mime (stepping forward, handing over a pen). They can then stand back and draw out the story of their discussion and what they have noticed about it and the physical experience. Depending on who you do this with it can be a solemn and thoughtful, quiet activity, or borderline pantomime.

In the course of this study I also took part in a collective act of poetry writing, which is described here by INviteMEOnline. While this account is of face to face poetry encounters

ours was conducted using Zoomchat. It proved to be an excellent example of the best kind of play - surprising, enjoyable, illuminating and with its real potency creeping up on you.

Some of the examples shared through this study include:

- playful presentation: rolling up lines of poetry and hiding them in capsules which are then handed out as prompt questions related to specified texts
- introducing yourself through a character from stories e.g. as daemons from a Philip Pullman novel
- bingo (another stalwart of games/play which is often adjusted and remade for different contexts)
- language as play: the play of literature and poetry and "how language plays with us" (TVOP IV 49)
- silent discussion
- collective storytelling over Zoom - one person starts the story, adding in effects, and then the group finishes in the chat function. Can end up with a multitude of different finishes to the story depending on how many people contribute; creative, funny, entertaining contributions.
- using story telling modes inspired by different cultural approaches
- using songlines to learn anatomy
- "the way I try to make sense of this world is usually through the hero's adventure, Joseph Campbell's metaphor of answering the call, facing the trials and returning with honour" (TVOP IV 21)

Word play also comes up in digital play which is used as a precursor to more elaborate activities such as escape games/rooms, e.g. using puzzles about synonyms to teach students to use synonyms when researching online. They come up with five synonyms, the first letters of each creating a five letter word which is the answer.(TVOP IV 30)

Bingo to teach vocabulary
- both competitive and collaborative
I have a session that's got a lot of new vocabulary in it, and just you can go online, create five bingo sheets, and put all those terms in hand about the start of the class, and just have [the link and] them highlighted on the slide. So you do your normal lecture. But then as I go along, they're taking off their bingo sheets, then someone can show obviously, that they've won. And that means that people who don't really want to be shouting in front of a group of people can just pretend they've not won. And the people who obviously want to be involved can give a shout out. And then you can always add a layer to that of going "Okay, you've won - so the person next to you gets to pick one of these words, and you have to explain what it means." So just giving an extra layer of engagement into the class in a bit more of a fun and creative way.
TVOP IV 31

Bingo is a game which lends itself to myriad uses, some of them instructive and others simply frivolous. An example of the latter, which will no doubt be frowned upon by responsible professionals, is Committee Catchphrase Bingo. In tedious or irrelevant meetings players quietly write down all the jargon phrases, clichés, buzzwords and latest hot policy items and tick them off as they come up. You could make a sheet in advance of the meeting, if you wanted to be either a) truly unprofessional or b) entertained while still focussing on the business in hand. I do not recommend playing if you are chairing the meeting.

Aviators and storytelling

My intro to play first came because I was in a programme for strategists and we had to write a thesis and my thesis started off with the power of storytelling and specifically the use of fiction for educating military officers. A lot of times when people engage with fiction it's just a different way to convey the same message that they want, and I tried to approach it more that it was a playground for your mind to grapple with things. You could read Homer's *Iliad* and think force is the way to solve problems and then turn around and read *Odyssey* and think that guile and intelligence is the way. So, it wasn't that there was a one set message, it was the act of engaging with it, with your imagination that I thought was interesting.

Once I realised the power of storytelling I then realised this is how we are raised as fighter pilots, actually, we tell lots of stories and it's the running joke that the stories only have to be 10% true … the first chapter of my dissertation was about the social lives of World War One aviators, you know, what did they do when they weren't flying? And, then how was that in any way related to the mechanical device that they were learning to master and they told a lot of stories, because there was no radio communication. So, anything they wanted to learn afterwards, for instance, was told in story form and we still, obviously, we have radios, we can record everything, we can see everything that happened, we still tell a lot of stories about what happened.
TVOP IV 21

Transmedia and story

A transmedia story world requires effort on the part of the reader or the audience to piece together the story themselves. So although you might read a graphic novel, or you might play a game or whatever, whether that's on your phone or on your PlayStation, you'll get part of the story. But in order to understand the whole world, there are several storylines, several characters that go across. It's not multimedia, because multimedia is where you might have a game that's the same as the book that's an adaptation of the film. Whereas transmedia is where you can only get the whole story if you go across different platforms. So there's a South Korean band called BTS, who inspires me a lot. And they put puzzles in

all of their music videos. And they also have a webcomic. And they have this whole story world that sits behind all of their songs. And you can only understand it if you watch all of their videos, and go to their concerts or see the concerts perform because they have films, and they even have things written on their back and things like that in the concerts which are clues to the story world. So that's transmedia where the whole story is put together by the audience, often acting together as well.

… students are challenged in groups to create these transmedia story worlds. And it includes offline so or it might have live video or live telephone calls. You go to a website and you apply for a job. The next minute, you're being talked to by a robot on your phone that says, Oh, yes, you've passed, you now need to go to this link. So you go to that link. And while you're on it, someone interrupts you, you get another phone call from so it ties in with the Internet of Things as well. It's very playful. It's a crossover between theatrical performance computer gaming, interactive video. So it's where those all come together.
TVOP IV 30

Magic and illusion

Caillois (2001:73) did not include magic within the realm of play - or certainly not within the realm of chance-related play - as he saw its objective as a means of coercing destiny. This notwithstanding, magic is included here as part of playful illusion, and not as part of trying to change the course of Fate.

While no participants in these disciplines gave examples of the use of magic, you may argue that illusion is a natural part of other kinds of play. Many examples of magic play in higher education exist, however. One of the most frequent references to magic with

regard to play is in the term ‘magic circle’; the special space within which play and games happen. Budd (2019) integrated magic into his maths teaching, while Bagienski and Kuhn (2018) explored the use of magic tricks within different environments, including the classroom, to enhance wellbeing. Schott (2010) describes an earlier project to include magic to teach optics in a higher education engineering project.

Digital play, augmented & virtual reality

During the periods of enforced remote teaching, educators have turned to digital tools to enliven engagement and build connection. These include simple online gadgets (often free) such as interactive dice, virtual playing cards, and spinning wheels for decision-making. Others have integrated features on platforms such as Zoom which allow participants to decorate their appearance with hats, halos, false moustaches and the like, while adding in filters to mask their backgrounds, or send emoji reactions to each other. In Creative Edventures Payton, Clughen and contributors provide many ideas of simple online digital play. Johanna Payton describes her creative and playful e-learning place, Janet Taylor shares creative thinking habits to boost student online creativity, Glenda Cooper helps students perform their final projects online in a theatrical zoom-based event(tying in with Performance)and Elodie Wakerley offers a poster explaining how students create online avatars to enhance a sense of belonging. In a riposte to those who believe play is only possible face to face and in small groups, Tina Seelig shares approach to an online creativity MOOC with 44,000 participants.

These are just a few examples. Others have turned to more involved opportunities, such as learning how to design an online escape room or take part in one. Some forms of digital game from the leisure sector, such as *Chronicles of Crime*, have developed open source, community-based activities whereby participants use templates provided by the designer to create new crimes to be solved and share them freely. *Chronicles of Crime* is an example of a hybridised game which takes place on the physical board and via clues

and materials through a digital app. David Sicurel, the designer of *Chronicles of Crime* is one who is also moving into the educational use of games, as opposed to for leisure[31].

More elaborate forms of digital play which similarly incorporate the real and virtual can be found in transmedia activities, as just illustrated, which tell stories and engage participants over multiple platforms. There have also been digital activities, such as Mythic Quest, where participants in different locations endeavour to make a seamless performance in the achievement of a goal, as though they were all in the same space,.

Outside the work of participants in this study AI and VR are growth areas which combine aspects of play with engaging in virtual worlds for educational purposes. This guide from the UK’s AdvanceHE gives a flavour of some of the activities that have been taking place. *https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/augmented-reality*.

Deconstructing and disorienting play: parody, satire, nonsense

As we will see in other parts of this account, these forms of play seem to be less visible in higher education, compared to some of the more goal-oriented or structured ones. The example we see in the box below stood out in the study precisely for its difference and also for its daring, on the part of the educator leading it.

This is not to suggest that disruptive or disorienting encounters are never used - they are. Disruptions to thinking as a means of moving away from safety and norms and old solutions are prized in creative arts contexts. Blue skies thinking and reversal techniques are two examples: in the first, there are no limits to the possibilities and in the second, the problem is approached from a completely different direction. One example of such reversal is to go for the opposite outcome you desire e.g. how to make sure this building falls down in architecture - not through demolition -, or how to fail your PhD. Maha Bali brought TRIZ to my attention as a technique for conducting just such a reversal e.g. how

can you ensure you come up with the most unfair assessment possible? Through playing with the drastic opposites participants can identify what it is they need to do/understand. However, the nature of the disruption is not always as alien as this may appear.

Where the disruption is alien can be seen in the following example; a lengthy one, recounted from a text by its originator and also from an interview with a proponent. I have included it in detail as an unusual example of play in higher education, and also because I don't think I understand it fully enough to do it justice in my own words. However, in the spirit of norm challenging and a rare appearance of the Rhetoric of Frivolity I welcome, and am intrigued by, The Class of Nothing.

The Class of Nothing

In the abstract to his paper Mascarenas offers the following challenge and purpose to A Class of Nothing.

Imagine a class with no syllabus, no teacher, no instruction, no method, no homework, no assessments, no grades, no 'classroom'. What could that be? 'A Class of Nothing' is a radical pedagogical concept that stems from the need to create space. Physical space. Mental space. Space in time. Through the idea of nothing as a starting point, and no-instruction as a pedagogical tool, 'teacher' and 'student' immerse in a space of waiting, of disconnection from the outside world, and eventually, of discovery and making. In the space of 'A Class of Nothing' to educate means no more to teach, give, or exemplify: to lead out; but to inhabit, to experience: to let in. The concepts of teacher and student become blurred, and it is no longer possible to understand them in the traditional sense. Responses from students to various 'classes of nothing', reveal that this kind of experience is new, intriguing, mind boggling, unusual, surprising, interesting, strange; it places them in a different space: physically, mentally and in time. This paper introduces the notion of 'A Class of Nothing', and provides the reader with a number of examples where this concept and approach have been applied.

TVOP IV 55 describes his experience of running The Class of Nothing with engineering students in this vignette:

Perhaps if I start off talking a little bit about what I do first, cos it's a bit bizarre and then talk about some of the theory that goes along with that. So, it's a lot about creating an atmosphere… the context is students are all first/second year students, they're are all academically brilliant, we've got quite high entry grades to come in, they're very good at understanding the methods and theories but they aren't so good at knowing where to apply them and when to apply them. So, it's kind of a little bit parrot fashion.

Point: start thinking for yourself

The thing that I'm trying to get them to do is to explore how you can use these things yourself to start thinking for yourself, to start thinking where these things can be applied and that helps you, not just in becoming a better engineer, but it helps you understand the problems as they're going along and you see their usefulness.

Set up for Class of Nothing

if I can, I get a room and I go into the room and I clear everything out of it, which, you know, like, a room for two hundred students is a big room, it feels really, really empty. I try and get spaces where there aren't enough chairs for everybody so that it generates this awkward [feeling of I] don't know what to do. I then ask the students to come in, so that's my ideal case, I've not always been able to do that, sometimes I've had to be in the room before, but I try and minimise the contact between them and me to begin with. Generally I'm quite friendly and approachable and the students often come and talk to me, but in this case, I try and separate myself from them and keep a bit of isolation. So, they come in, I usually have some slides up on the screen, so that I've got a quote from Einstein saying, "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them".

You've got to do it soon enough after they come in [so] that they're not distracted, and they go and start doing something else, but not straight away because I think you need to feel that slight awkwardness to begin with.

What happens

I've tried sitting on a chair or sitting on the floor or carrying a chair into a middle of the group of them and just sitting down…what you need to try and do is, without speaking, kind of gather their attention. So, sometimes if you walk into the middle of the group and sit on the floor, they all sit down as well, and there's this like ripple out effect of them just gaining their attention, and then that's your moment to hit them with the rules, if you like. So, I read out "This class is about undoing, its purpose is not the destination, but who you become along the way. If you have any questions, don't ask unless you already know. I'm not here to answer questions, like you, I'm here to formulate them, and try them out. To take part, all you need is to be present; carefully and continuously listen and observe, awareness is key. Be patient, have no expectations, contribute if you wish, communicate but do not speak, unless it is about nothing. Don't waste time. Nothing is the space of infinite possibilities". So, I usually read that through twice, and they're just as confused at the end of it, by at the start, and they've all been asking me, what are we doing? What're we supposed to do? And I just say that I will tell you in a minute. So I read that out, and then I just get on with doing stuff. So, like I often make some origami stuff,

or I write some things on paper and they just observe me being busy and so, the preparation before this is that I've taught them about different tools for creativity and different ways of being creative and things that promote creativity, things that kill creativity but they don't really know it or get it. Then they come into this session and there's usually, well it, it varies very, very much, sometimes you get ten minutes where they all just sit and watch you doing something, in silence, it's, oh I hate running the sessions, it's so awkward, and difficult and I hate that awkwardness that's just totally against my nature. One time, I read this out and they all just started applauding and, burst out into talking and I thought, "I've blown it!" you know it's, it's not at all what I expected and then they went and started doing stuff and there's always then this moment, somebody will do something and that, like, all of that awkward, pent up, arghhh what am I doing energy, suddenly explodes into this creativity energy. So, people were throwing messages across the room to each other on bits of paper, you know, I leave bits of paper and other odds and ends around the room for people to use. People making aeroplanes, people creating origami things, people writing messages, all sorts of things just creating, playing, exploring, and then I go and just get involved in what people are doing, but without talking, but still communicating.

AJ overlap: and are they, are they still remembering not to talk at this point?
Interviewee: Generally, that's the bit that falls, that falls down. They tend to start talking, but then it always usually ends up being talking about what they're doing

How it ends, how they feel
Oscar walks out of the room and he doesn't have an ending because he had been talking, philosophically [with one of his colleagues], cos that's kind of how Oscar is, about different things and they said, what, we always like closure to things, so what if there is no closure? So, let's not say goodbye to each other, and then then they just walked away with, with no goodbye, no ending, just midway through conversation they just walked away and then umm he said like three hours later, he got a call from his friend like, "are you still buzzing from this?" and he's like "Yeh, yeh I am! This is just this this crazy energy!" So, he tries to utilise that. You do tend to get some people [who] leave at the beginning. They're like, this is a waste of my time, I've got nothing to learn from this and just go; what I find immediately afterwards, those people are really, really negative. So, I ask for lots of feedback on this afterwards and those people are very vocally negative about it, and then you ask "Did you stay?" and they mostly say "no I didn't stay" and "what's happening? what was that about? You know, like a university lecturer is doing this, like, there's got to be something important, it's in a classroom session, there's, it's, got to be something important about this, and I don't get it and I feel awkward, and I left but

then I'm kind of kicking myself that I did leave because I didn't get that experience". That really, really winds them up and that's kind of, part of the experience as well, because they still learn the lesson from it then, because they investigate what was this about? What's this creativity thing about?

That first bit goes on, and then after about 45 minutes I then bring in "so, let's use this creative energy that we have just built up, and apply that to your project". So, people often say you can't force creativity, but equally, if you don't ever give it time, then you're not gonna be creative, just as with any life skill, if you don't ever give it any time, you won't learn. So, I then split them, so they're always working in groups, so I get them to go and there's four work stations that we're experimenting with. So, they all just go to one of the four, it doesn't matter which order they do in; one of them is brain storming, the other one is you have some LEGO® out on the table, and you're not to build with the LEGO®, you just have to sort it into colours for two minutes and then, or sort it into shapes, or something that is like a boring mindless task, cos actually boring, mindless tasks promote creativity. TVOP IV 55

Something that this account of the Class of Nothing reinforces for me is how adrift teachers and students can feel when all the familiar structures are taken away. Ostensibly the scene is set here for free play, but as it has taken participants by surprise they are uncomfortable and unsure about what to do and whether it is allowed, or even why.

Free play

Despite Nachmanovitch's hymn to free play in his book of the same name, and arguments expressed by participants in the study, free play is not widely publicised across the disciplines. When it is used, this may be as a free element within more

structured play, or as a liberation within a kind of play e.g. allowing players to change or make up the rules as they go along, rather than follow instructions. It may also be called by other names, such as experimentation, or may not be recognised as free play. An invitation to engage in free play may be extended through the kinds of events that we have seen in Writings, Thinkings, Doings.

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At this point we have come to the end of the first big chunk of vignettes and stories about play, and it is probably time for a breather. Go right ahead and reward yourself for getting this far in whatever way you think fit. And then - or at some point - you might like to take stock of your thoughts regarding these examples. You can do this your way, or skip over to the ideas in Reflection.

In Short

This first block in the Gallery contains many vignettes of play across the disciplines, excluding those in management education. These come next. Some have numerous examples in their category, others have fewer. Some vignettes are long, others short; it's just the way it is. This unevenness is a reflection of what I unearthed in the period of data collection and what participants shared.

Reflection

Which kinds of play have you come across or tried yourself from the examples already shared?
Which were new?
Which were completely alien to you and you can't imagine them having a place in your educational practice?

Something else you might like to try is to return to the table in Figure G14 which you could use to see where Sutton-Smith's Rhetorics might relate to different categories of play type.
What did you come up with?
What kinds of questions arose for you as you did this?

In Sutton-Smith's definition of each Rhetoric he suggests each is aligned with particular kinds of play, in particular kinds of context. We might see examples as being roleplays in Law, simulations in business, performative play in Drama, making play in the Arts and Design.

Did you find this kind of alignment in your own examples?
Was anything challenging in trying to see where there might be connections?
How far did context affect your decisions?

Another thing you might like to try is to take a single example of play from these vignettes (or one from your own experience if you prefer) and think about this same potential relationship.

Here's one I made earlier, using the Class of Nothing as an example.

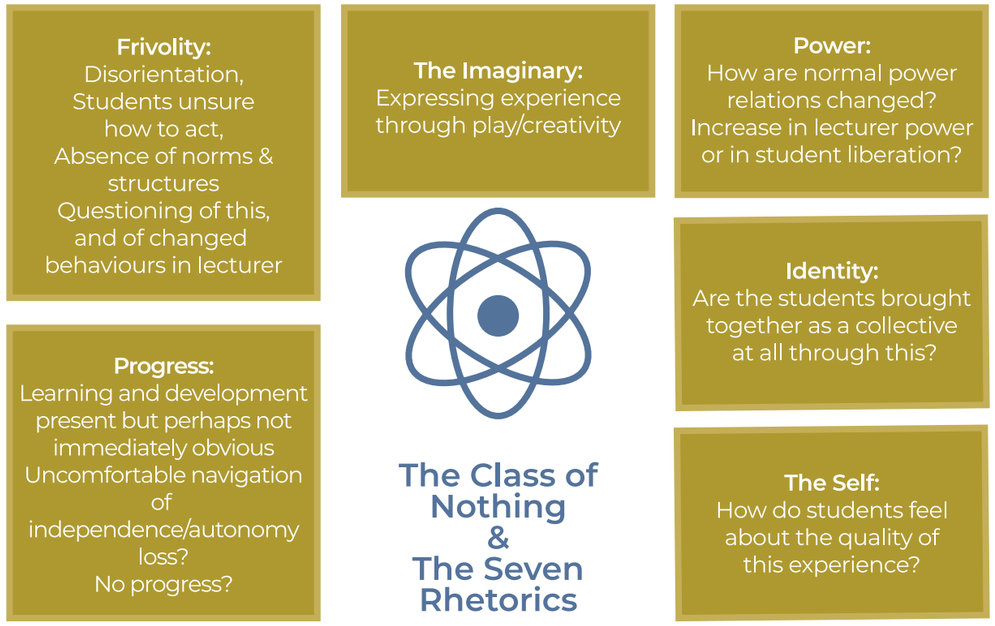


Figure G16. The Class of Nothing and the Seven Rhetorics

I need to emphasise here this is an experiment; I have never experienced The Class of Nothing. Rather, these are the interested musings of someone on the outside, looking in, wondering what kinds of rhetorical conversations - about what was going on, and what it was for- might be sparked by it. The facilitator, of course, might see this very differently.

In doing this, especially if I wonder whether more than one Rhetoric might be present, I am running against Sutton-Smith's specification that the Rhetorics tend to be more siloed. (He sees them as being associated with specific kinds of play, context and player). The facilitator or someone else may argue that one Rhetoric was, in fact, dominant. My reason for using it as an illustration is to both point to the Rhetorics and also raise questions about the extent to which, in higher education play, there is the same alignment with, and containment within, a discipline that Sutton-Smith finds in scrutinising theories of play.

In the next example I am taking the digital game Wordle[32] and applying the same kind of reflection to it. If you are not familiar with Wordle it is very simple. Each day you have 6 possible attempts to guess a five letter words. There are no accompanying clues, other than if you get a letter right the square turns green. If you get the right letter in the wrong place, it turns orange. If you are completely wrong, the square is grey. Once you have guessed the word (or not) you have to wait until the next day to have another word to guess.

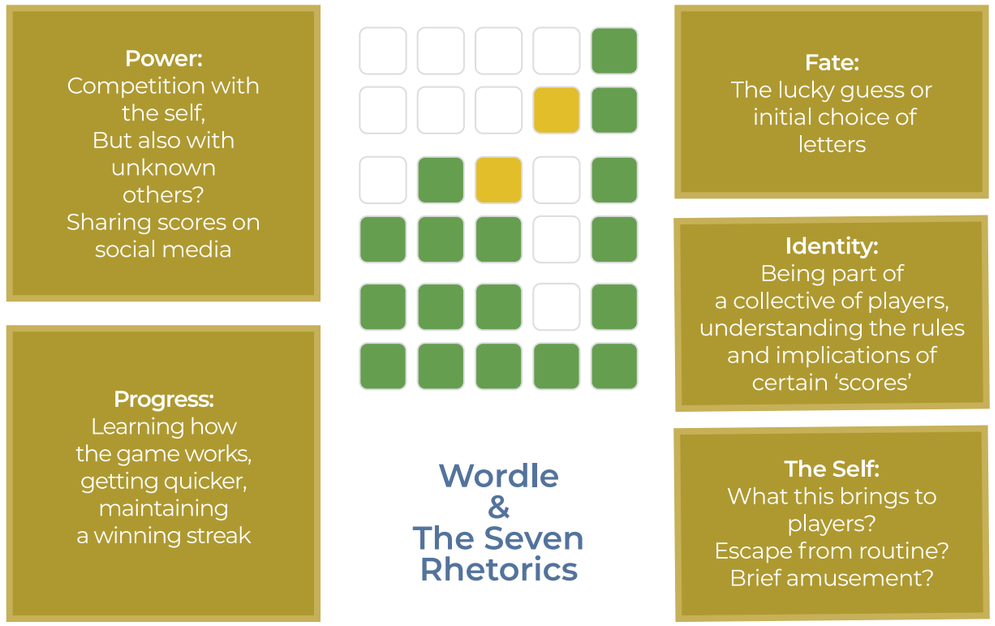


Figure G17. Wordle and the Seven Rhetorics

For bonus points:
Do you notice anything about these two diagrammes, relating to the Rhetorics?
The answer is in this note[33]

PLAY IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

Blurry boundaries

This section prefaces another block of vignettes of play, this time taken from management education contexts. As I have observed already, separating out management from other disciplines is both useful in providing a specific focus, but also, to an extent, artificial. If you are working in this area and have leafed through all the examples in the previous pages, I suspect you will have found several which would work in, or relate to, your own activities. In addition, you, like me, may have had many conversations with play-interested colleagues who tell me that something they have taken from another subject is working perfectly well in their own. As teachers, consultants, managers we are also magpies; if we come across something that appeals or looks useful we will help ourselves to it.

What is meant by management in this study?

Readers with backgrounds in management education will no doubt have their own preferences and interests in terms of how to define the subject. It is vast and varied and I cannot go into this in any detail. Instead, I set out some broad parameters around the concept of management, referencing lecturers in the field, the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement (2019)[34] and citing resources from management education to illustrate its potential links with play. In so doing, what I really want to emphasise is that play, in its myriad forms, can relate to all aspects of management education. What kind of play is used, how frequently and to what end will vary. Play for some management educators may be novel or unusual (a view endorsed by many participants), largely confined to games and simulations, or much more broadly experienced. Cultural differences may also affect the kinds of play that staff and students in management education will want to get involved in or find most successful/enjoyable.

Bill Davis, business educator at the University of Arizona, defines the five key functions of great management as: planning, organizing, staffing, leading and controlling (Davis, 2021). Pretty much, then, the things which everyone will have to do, in some way, every day, at whatever age or level. This is not to demean the weight or seriousness of management education, but rather to emphasise that management has relevance for us all.

For Dr Irina Cojuharenco, Reader and Founding Director of the University of Surrey's Business and Economic Experiments Laboratory, management education is a horizontal discipline. It permeates everything we do, while being focussed on the co-ordination of value-creating pursuits. She wrote:

> My personal definition is that management as a discipline is a body of knowledge for how to help people solve coordination problems they encounter when engaged in value creation. Today, we regard leadership of a particular type, technology, particular types of structure, understanding of human motivation, as specific ways of helping people solve such coordination problems, but the tools may change in the future (Cojuharenco, 2022)[35].

For Dr Laura Mitchell, Lecturer in Management at the University of York, it starts with introducing the concept of rational, legitimate coordination and control of work. This focus on rationality and legitimacy at the core of management she feels might link to why there is a greater focus on games than on play.

In the UK the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Subject Benchmark Statement for Business and Management (2019: 7-8) sets out various expectations of graduates in the subjects. These include the kinds of knowledge, skills and attributes that such graduates should possess by the end of their degree.

Section 3.1 of the Statement states that degree courses should offer "broad, analytical and highly integrated study of business and management". Management is described as encompassing

> ...the various processes, procedures and practices for effective management of organisations. It includes theories, models, frameworks, tasks and roles of management, including the management of people and corporate social responsibility, together with rational analysis and other processes of decision-making within different organisations (Section 3.6).

There is synergy between the Benchmark Statement, Davis and Boddy. Four of Davis' principles, listed a few sentences ago, are used as section headings in the contents pages of Boddy's educational compendium *Management: An Introduction*, (2008, 4th edition). Each one is segmented into additional areas which also relate to the roles and interests of many in my study who teach management or a related subject. As Boddy writes, one of the aims of his book is "to show that ideas on management apply to most areas of human activity, not just to commercial enterprises" (xiii). Management is seen "as an integrating activity relating to the organisation as a whole, rather than as something confined to any one disciplinary or functional perspective" (ibid). This breadth was endorsed by TVOP IV 38 who observed that management covers many different areas as well as relating to all-encompassing challenges, such as leading in change and managing in a global context.

Boddy's text lists a variety of subjects to be covered, many of which are echoed in the Subject Benchmark Statement, Section 3.7. This set outs the topics about which students should have acquired knowledge. I have taken a selection of these from Boddy's list and illustrated each one with examples of play. In this way I hope to consolidate my point

about the potential ubiquity and applicability of play. One may even argue that it would have been simpler and quicker to say that all forms of play can apply to these different aspects of management.

Aspect of Management from Boddy	
Managing in organisations	LEGO® Serious Play®, rich pictures, identity exploration, role play, simulation, performance, creative play
Models of management	LSP, playdough, objects and toys
Organisational cultures and contexts	This article on play in organisational life All forms
Managing marketing	This article about why marketers should play more See examples
Decision-making	All forms of play
Human resources	LSP, creative play, role play, visualising, improvisation, roleplay, simulation, games, virtual worlds, any play involving human interaction, stressing connection; collaborative/cooperative playand triumphs; digital play during the pandemic, online communities
IT	Play which involves process, system, trials and triumphs; digital play during the pandemic, online communitiesopportunities, free play, deconstructing play
Change and innovation	Play which frees up ideas, helps spot new opportunities, free play, deconstructing play
Influence and power	Any play which deals with power dynamics
Motivation	Taking part in and reflecting in what is motivating play (or not), what the impact of motivation is, flow state
Communication	All kinds of play
Teams	Many familiar games, including outdoor play with team challenges, building and making, physical play, competitions
Financial aspects	Simulations, scenarios, crisis management, play with financial or material implications, accountancy games
Quality management	Games involving process e.g. supply chain Jenga, AI

Figure G18. Comparison of Boddy's management topics and generic types of play

Although I have not included topics such as strategy, human resource management, corporate responsibility and many more, all lend themselves to one or more play forms. Examples appear in the vignettes which follow, such as play for teaching ethical behaviours or play for relationship building and strategic thinking.

How do study respondents from management education view play?

> "In terms of my own life at the moment, running a business is one of the massive play areas of my life. I have no idea how to run a business. I'm learning so much, my accountant is so patient...I'm playing at life really (TVOP IV 3)."

TVOP IV 3 is being both playful and modest here. I include their words not to poke fun at their achievements (although their self-deprecation is funny), but perhaps because it is more usual to hear someone describe their professional activity and wider life in more earnest terms than those of play.

The next section offers participant comments on their awareness of play in management education; compiled from responses in the survey and interviews. It provides a prelude to the vignettes, although they can also be read without it.

Awareness of play in management education

In the gateway survey respondents were invited to complete the sentence "I am aware that play and/or playful learning are being used in higher education to teach management theories and concepts..." by rating various end phrases.

No	End phrase	Pilot survey	Main survey
1a	on my programme	57.1% strongly agree 28.6% agree 14.3% neutral **TOTAL AGREE 85.7%**	30.7% strongly agree 17.8% agree 29.7% neutral 17.8% disagree 4% strongly disagree **TOTAL AGREE 48.5%**
2a	elsewhere in my department	28.6% strongly agree 57.1% agree 14.3% neutral **TOTAL AGREE 85.7%**	17.2% strongly agree 22.2% agree 36.4% neutral 17.2% disagree **TOTAL AGREE 39.4%**
3a	elsewhere in my institution	28.6% strongly agree 28.6% agree 42.9% neutral **TOTAL AGREE 57.2%**	14.1% strongly agree 38.4% agree 36.4% neutral 7.1% disagree 4% strongly disagree **TOTAL AGREE 52.5%**
4a	In my subject area more widely	85.7% agree 14.3% neutral **TOTAL AGREE 85.7%**	16.5% strongly agree 17.5% agree 41.2% neutral 19.6% disagree 5.2% strongly disagree **TOTAL AGREE 34%**
5a	in higher education more widely	42.9% agree 42.9% neutral 14.3% disagree **TOTAL AGREE 42.9%**	24.5% strongly agree 33.7% agree 31.6% neutral 8.2% disagree 2% strongly disagree **TOTAL AGREE 58.2%**

Note: if a category of response did not feature in any answer e.g. strongly agree it was left out

Figure G19. Participant responses from gateway survey regarding awareness of play

This table is presented to show the distribution of responses, not to make comparisons between the two columns. However, what it does reveal is that levels of awareness of play in management education, expressed by study participants, are variable. Of course, not being aware it is used, does not mean it is NOT being used. (Apologies for the triple negative.) There may be many more types of play being used that have not come to the attention of this enquiry, or of mainstream management education.
Nonetheless, the level of uncertainty is interesting. If we take the main survey (105 respondents) as an illustration, it is only in 3a 'elsewhere in my institution" that the number of positive answers breaks the 50% mark. For each answer category there is a sizeable number of neutral answers, suggesting that respondents either don't know or don't feel they can comment. The lowest number of positive answers relates to 2a and 4a: "my department and my subject area more widely". This is echoed later when interview participants describe the use of play as unusual in their context.

In interviews the following points were also made regarding the presence of play in management education. These hark back to our recognition of the way the terms used to describe activities may mask play. They include:

- not being aware that play was being used, due to not really understanding what might count as play

- seeing an increase in the use of play in the institution, but only in limited ways in management related contexts
- being sure that playfulness is being used to teach management in their institution but seeing the university requirements for compliance as being at odds with playfulness
- not thinking play has been defined or used in the institution's Management Development Center
- feeling there was a dearth of activity, support and resources for play in management and wanting more

Is game-based learning dominant?

The briefest answer to this question is that participant opinions are mixed. I have already emphasised that some forms of play in management education, such as simulation, role play and games, are frequently used. In addition to texts mentioned in Writings, Thinkings, Doings, we see evidence of this in the following:

- an article by Keys and Wolfe (1990) on the role of management games for education and research
- this resource from the London School of Economics introduces the benefits and challenges of using them
- this article from the Financial Times, pointing to other forms of play such as escape rooms, which are well established in business and management schools
- Elliott et al (2021) their recent book on games, simulation and play, drawing on the work of the University of Aston A Game group
- these examples of simulations[36] conducted at the London School of Economics; one for policy advice to government, Government - Simulating the production of Social Research for Policy Advice and Health Policy; a second on dealing with a worldwide pandemic (in advance of Covid 19, but chillingly prophetic) Vaca Virus simulation on HP412 Global Health Security; and a third on using Twitter for a simulation about diplomatic negotiations. (The blog about using Twitter is here.)

Divided views about management education pedagogy

> "The business school, and its approach to both teaching and research has been critiqued as not fit for purpose, despite its fundamental economic position as a 'cash cow' supporting many other disciplines of the contemporary university (Starkey, Hatchuel & Tempest 2004; Parker 2018). With this in mind, these critiques often point to a need for more liberal approaches to education but also instrumentally call for an approach that more reliably produces 'imaginators' instead of managers (Minocha, Reynolds & Hristov 2017). I suspect play offers a great answer from either perspective (Mitchell, 2022)[37] ."

The inclusion of so many innovative approaches to teaching management in this study suggests that programme managers are open to alternatives. (This, or the playful educators are flying low under the radar). While management participants in this study recognise the types of play as present in their area, they also (along with participants from other disciplines) describe their play practices as unusual. In describing their reasons for using play they also express divergent opinions on how far different pedagogic approaches are used in management education.

Several respondents felt that management pedagogy is still dominated by the lecture and seminar, case study/essay and exam. Two felt that it is behind the curve compared to other disciplines in this regard. Another observed that business education has been designed heavily to fit a rational model of theory and research, predicated on being able to know the future. Such a model is well suited to didactic transmission and the forms of teaching indicated earlier.

Opinions expressed by this respondent and others emphasised the need not to 'teach the right way to manage', but to develop the qualities and skills that would be needed to survive in business in the 21st century.

> "A lot of the management thinking is still anchored in a time where the economy and the markets work very differently...you need to find completely different ways to tap into the consumer. Our teaching is at least 50 years old, the material we use...I think for me it's not much important whether they can recite after four years Porter's five forces perfectly, but that they have an understanding of, in my case, management and leadership and our critical minds, you know, and their limitations[38] (TVOP IV 34)."

While respondents did make a few references to the use of play to teach a particular discrete framework, theory, concept or model, most management educators were much more interested in play for broader goals, such as the development of particular skills, vision and mindset. This to them was a more effective reason to play, than the memorisation or grasp of smaller elements of the management curriculum, although it did not rule these out[39].

Differing views were also recognised in terms of management topics which are easy or hard to teach; these particularly related to what management educators believe to be the assumptions of others. For example, one assumption might be that strategy is considered to be the hardest subject to teach, as it combines all other subdisciplines of management together. An opposing assumption might be that academics perceive it to be the easiest, as the most flexible and open to context and interpretation. Either way, the richness and variety of play combined with the breadth of strategy as a subject make them a pliable and rewarding partnership.

Play to understand what management is

Play is also seen as a means to help students from around the world understand what management is. On an MsC in engineering with industrial management the respondent observed that students

> "don't really know what management is and they certainly don't know what it is in the way I teach it. You know, they might be able to draw an organisational structure but I'm interested in helping them make decisions about what they want to do in the future, about making them see engineering in a much broader context, so that they can see the role they can play as citizens and engineers and managers (TVOP IV 4)."

Numerous respondents saw the value of play as a means of group decision-making in tasks, games or challenges. This they felt made apparent the value of making good group - as opposed to individual - decision-making.

Another respondent pointed out the differences in nature between management and other disciplines:

> "The research school of management is within the larger school of business and economics and management is much different than statistics, accounting, economics, finance and actuarial studies...it's much squishier (TVOP IV 38)."

As a result students from these less 'squishy' programmes can find play deeply uncomfortable as they are used to a different style of learning. According to this participant this involves writing down whatever is on the projector and memorising formulae. Management is about complex systems and situations where many things could have different answers and it is not as objective "but that makes people's blood run cold" (TVOP IV 38)

> "People may not necessarily understand that what they're doing is play and that it might be helping them to think about the concepts that have already been talked about, or maybe experiences within the business just to tease little things out (TVOP IV 44)."

TYPES OF PLAY IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

Figure G20. Types of play in higher education (3)

I open with a commentary from an interview participant from management education who brings together several of the reasons why educators have turned to play. These include entering higher education from a career in another field; noticing how people learn best, wanting not to perpetuate old and familiar approaches to teaching which had perhaps run their course.

Learning by doing

You know, coming in to the lecturing after 20 years working with small businesses and innovators and not having a formal educational background as it were, I found that, to get the most out of the class, just doing an old fashioned chalk and talk, standing at the front and getting bored of my own jokes and my own voice, it wasn't very satisfying. So, there was some selfishness about it really, but also the other side of it, working with people and business and others, is that - and with observing the students- that nothing really went in until they were actually using something.

So, you didn't really embed any knowledge, it didn't become real until you were physically trying to do something and I realised, you know, on PowerPoint that sounds really easy. I often use the analogy, if I give

a presentation on how to change a tyre on a car, everybody would look at me and say, well that's a doddle. But then if I went to the car park and said, right, change that tyre, then reality would kick in; rusty, bolts, freezing weather and where the hell do I put the jack and all these kinds of things and my God, the wheel's heavy. You would go back to the slides and learning would really stick a lot more, because you have that practical view of how difficult it is in reality, and how easy it might look on a slide. The basic premise is to try and have some sort of, laboratory practical side, to teaching business, cos it's so natural to teach, and so easy to slip into teaching a business type subject by PowerPoint and talk.
TVOP IV 23

Playfulness in management education

Numerous previous references to playfulness thus far show the extent to which playful behaviours can be infinite and apply in any context. Playful teaching and facilitation can also take any forms. Angela Sparks (2019) at Cranfield University gives some examples of her experience of attending the Playful Learning Conference that year in Leicester. Given the endless possibilities for playfulness I limit myself to one further example here, although participants came up with many more.

Arikan (2021) sees teaching while entertaining as being at the heart of playful learning, and situates discussion of this within accounting education. She describes her use of several different kinds of play, one of which fits neatly here and relates also to a universal preoccupation of academics - attendance. She reads a funny but serious poem to her students at the beginning of term, written by a colleague who was fed up of students asking what they had missed by not turning up to class. As with other forms of play, such an example of play can feature elsewhere, however, in its use of humour to make a serious point and in perhaps its unexpectedness for students (how many saw that coming I wonder) I include it here.

Games and gameplay

"I'm often told that the business and management lot aren't particularly playful. But my first degree was half engineering and half management. Which, you know, people wouldn't think either of those was particularly playful, but the very first week of my degree we spent playing games"
TVOP IV 2

Games of all kinds came up in this study and for all sorts of reasons. One proponent of game-based learning stated that it was a means of enabling students to cross a liminal space with more confidence and less fear. That liminal space may take many forms, among them mastery of skills, grasping of complex issues, 'penny drop' moments, and increase in self-belief. Other examples include:

- designing games using LEGO® to stimulate student learning about product design and rapid prototyping. The aim was to enable them to differentiate between radical and incremental innovation e.g. by designing a car which also helped embed the theories they had been studying. These included exploration versus exploitation, how to cost innovation, centre versus market led innovation and how to put together a business plan and a pitch
- creating a game using LEGO® to teach supply chain management and learning about transport logistics. While the aim was ostensibly to win by making the most profit, that was described as 'the excuse'. The learning objectives were about understanding the importance of communication, having clear literacy, clear streamlined approaches, and making sure they have the right people in the right place

- using play and games in human centred design and entrepreneurship for building empathy and identifying stakeholders.
- serious games and leadership
- creating massive multiplayer realtime online strategy games, forming and managing business alliances. The game provided the platform, however, the players themselves defined how the game was played.
- designing flexible games, which could accommodate any kind of content, including formative and summative assessments
- game-based environments which allow designers/players to take the elements of a game and create their own version and develop their own understanding of the game
- this notion of player agency was seen in other examples of allowing students to choose what and how they would learn e.g. by taking the elements of a game and making it all theirs.
- using digital and hybrid games for collaborative problem solving, to learn research skills, boost engagement
- playing simple card games to enable students to think creatively
- using Guess Who to teach the impact of open and closed questions
- reinventing Snakes and Ladders to teach the duties of a director. Snakes and Ladders is one name for a well-known, longstanding game of dice rolling and moving pieces around a board. Depending on how the dice falls the player may land on a ladder, which will take you up the board and towards the final destination, or slither down a snake which will be a setback of some description. It is a game which has been much adapted in education at different levels.
- adapting other well-known games, such as Monopoly, to fit content and goals, using downloadable blank templates for the board, or by making a bespoke version of the board and pieces.
- wargames. Depending on who is defining a war game they are diversely described as follows:
  - consisting of a board and players/characters which are moved around resources;
  - including combat and civil defence situations;
  - in some crossover with spatial and simulated play they may take place within 'war rooms' in which decisions are made under pressure and with incomplete, changing and uncertain information;
  - there may also be additional props, such as chairs in which participants sit, which further mimic the notion of a real war room or strategic hub.

One respondent cited Peter Perla's initial definition of wargaming as "humans making decisions and dealing with the consequences", later amended to include conflict

and activity in a synthetic environment. The respondent further defined wargaming as "nothing more than taking some options and trying to run them through to see where the problems are going to come up and where your assumptions are going to start failing" (TVOP IV 28). While wargaming may seem to be a step removed from management education the crossovers in terms of strategic thinking, planning and decision-making are noticeable.

Games for expanding thinking

Management theory regarding systems, dynamics, leadership, communication is directly related to conflict, competition, and other gaming like attributes. Games/simulations are directly related to problem based learning, and are more realistic because of the chance aspect to gaming. Otherwise we're directing learners to the right answer, which only reinforces more of the same type of thinking instead of the creativity, problem solving or criticality we want.
TVOP IV 50, in gateway survey

A variation of snakes and ladders to teach Director's duties

You know, everyone remembers the first time they played Monopoly and how long it took them to try and work out what was going on. So, what I developed for this year that I'm looking to further develop is a twist on Snakes and Ladders. So, when I teach directors duties, it is set out on a statutory footing, with a lot of the details around the application and the interpretation of that statutory footing. So, I created a game, which is based on Snakes and Ladders, so I took my son's board game, we put it on the visualizer in the classroom, OHP, I suppose, in old money and we used a virtual dice but I think in the future I want to get one of these large sort of soft dice that you used to use at primary school for the students to actually roll. I divided the students into teams or companies, boards of directors, and they had a chairman or a captain for each team who would sort of present the answer, and essentially the team would roll the dice and every time they land, they went past a Snake or a Ladder, they had to stop on top of that. So, if they were four spaces from a Snake and they rolled a six, typically in Snakes and Ladders, you'd go pass the Snake. But because I wanted to make sure that they were engaging in the issues, I made them stop at that Snake or Ladder and at that point they'd be presented with a question and they had to provide an answer and if they got the answer right, they would either climb the ladder or not descend the Snake. If they got it wrong, they would not climb the Ladder or would descend the Snake, and it would be a situational type problem, question relatively short, where they said, you are the director of X company, this is the situation, what do you do?
TVOP IV 10

Business rescue versus business demise - in Duplo
So, traditionally we just have liquidation, which sees a business broken up and the assets sold off piecemeal and trying to make students realize that actually there's a value to keeping everything together[...]So, again, I use my son's Duplo to try and illustrate it; he has a pizzeria Duplo set and you can illustrate a number of different ways. So, you've got the different components. You've got the staff, the customers, the fixtures and fittings, the pizza oven, you've got the motorbike, you've got the bin and the mobile phones. You can say that there are contracts associated with the provision of services, as well as the ownership of assets, you can illustrate perhaps the fact that the pizza oven's there, but they don't own that because they've just bought a new one; it's on lease hire.
They own the freehold to the restaurants -there's value there- but you can also describe the breakup and say, well, actually, if we liquidate this, we start taking it apart and you can physically dismantle the business and just have a pile of bricks and then, sort of, talk about the fact that there may be a demand for a pizzeria in that local area. So, if this one has to be liquidated and someone else wants to come in and, and deliver the same service, they need to build from the ground up again, and there's going to be a delay and there's going to be a period where no one's making any money, the landlord's not getting any rent. The staff are being trained, but they're not actually getting any income, so how are you paying their wages for the training? Whereas actually, if you can come in and say right, there's a fundamentally sound business there, I'll take it on as a going concern, some will pay more for that than they would on the breakup basis. And so, it helps illustrate those facts to the students. So, it's not really engaging the students in the game itself, it's using the game to show a concept to the student that makes sense. I'd like to move on to a point where we could get students building it and actually seeing the frustration of building from scratch. But that requires quite a few sets of Duplo or LEGO®. So, I haven't quite got there yet.
TVOP IV 10

Organisational systems game with rolled up paper
(or how when you aim to achieve one thing you might get the opposite result)
I'm introducing the idea of ,organizational systems and organizational culture and we play a game where we have a very light weight rolled up paper, it's a very long stick. It's around eight feet long and it's just made of paper and I say, okay, everybody, I want eight people to come out to the front of the class and we work together. We're a really close team. We're a really great team and we get involved in everything. So, then I get everybody to put two fingers out and they're in a row facing each other. So, four people on each side and they put their fingers out and then I lay the piece of stick across the top of the fingers and I say the rules are, everybody

must always be touching the magic stick with both of their fingers and the goal is to lower the stick down to the floor and that's it. The rules, everybody must always be touching it and the goal is to lower the stick to the floor and then I show them, look, it's really easy, we just lower the stick to the floor. But what happens is when you've got eight people, somebody lifts the stick a little bit. So, somebody tries to catch it and it floats away [upwards].
TVOP IV 5

Shoe selling communication game
"[It] is very simple and [is about how] different people communicate in different ways. So, I get people to self-select themselves into different groups and talk about how great their way of communicating is. So there are four different types of communication style. Some people are very direct, some people want to be more friendly, some people want more information and less emotional content, these sorts of things.
So, then I divide them into their groups and they talk about how their communication style is better than the others and come up with reasons why, and I'm trying to get them to be competing with each other. And then the game is they have to come up with strategies of how to sell a pair of shoes to people in the group. So, one group gets pitched to in three different ways that aren't the way they like to communicate and they have to talk about what they liked about it. So, that's just fun and people just get really creative in what they're doing as well. So, it's a bit more direct. It's not so much of the pure play, because we're still talking about a theory and exploring the theory, but the way we do it, I just find it a lot of fun and people have a lot of laughs.
TVOP IV 5

Edison Idea cards for creativity training and product development
Edison Idea cards are 150 cards that can be used as prompts to help you generate ideas, think laterally, innovate to solve problems.
They come up early in the semester and it's literally, it's ten prompts, everyday objects that need to be redesigned. The cards are designed so you do this individually, it's a creativity training exercise. Now, I'd deal the cards out, give them to a group and it's embedded in terms of the theory that week. So I would do this on new product development, I would say, "I want you to come up with a bunch of different ideas for how we're going to do stuff, here's some seed warm up thoughts". No judgement in the play-based rehearsal of the practice I want them to engage in that later in the class, but being able to hook it back into my theory to be able to say, in marketing [there is] this particular frame work, this new product development, here's ten ideas, you want to create slightly better versions of your product, this is your theory, this is your practice, this is why we did that.
TVOP IV 51

Red/Blue Game
This was cited by interviewee TVOP IV 54 and is described thus on the rational games website:
While the specific gameplay varies with context and time, the fundamental dynamics are always the same: two teams are sent to two separate rooms where they do not see or hear each other and must, over ten rounds, independently make a decision to “Play Red” or “Play Blue”. A small matrix awards points for these decisions, rewarding cooperation and punishing undue competition, while at the same time offering temptation to defect. Participants can meet twice (one on one) during the play and are free to come up with creative solutions on how to maximize the payout for both. *https://www.rationalgames.com/the-red-blue-game/*

While many participants emphasise the need to have established a purpose or reason for using a kind of play before planning a class, one respondent noted that sometimes it is a matter of finding a form of play that you really want to use and then working out how to do it:

Play first, reason after
An extract from an interview with TVOP IV 51
Interviewee “I brought video games into the services marketing class last year… I got the technology then I had to reverse engineer a way of getting it into my classroom…
Interviewer: All roads lead to Rome?
Interviewee: This one happened to be with Rome in the rear view mirror

Gamification

Preceding pages have already referred to the concept and practice of gamification; here the comments and examples come from management educators.

Gamification is perceived to play on the fact that many people behave in predictable ways. Defenders of gamification perceive it to be an incentivising way of learning and one which encourages engagement. Examples of gamification include:

- game-based assessment using gamified learning platforms.

- university employability/skills passports which have gamified elements and different rankings to allow students/educators to evaluate the performance of students on various dimensions

The topic of gamification garnered several negative responses alongside the positive ones:

> “Gamification makes me nervous because there’s an element of manipulation there. The sense that…it treats people like biological robots almost…there’s a sort of almost a positivist approach to a lot of the gamified systems, even from people who claim that they are interpreters…I think a game-based learning is more interesting. I think it’s more flexible, a bit freer and doesn’t have these assumptions (TVOP IV 1).”

Quests, challenges, tasks, missions

One participant (below) shared an example of these during this study, however it does not mean that they do not feature more widely within management education. Wyland et al (2021) describe using the scavenger hunt model as a means of teaching academic literacy in management education. In some cases management students may take part in playful activities as part of interdisciplinary study e.g. through elective programmes or shared units such as contextual and cultural studies, value studies, minor subjects as part of a programme of study and so on. Some aspects of these forms of play may also be embedded within other encompassing forms, such as crisis management scenarios.

> **Surprise treasure hunts**
> For some time now, I've replaced "surprise quizzes" with "surprise treasure hunts", such that after individuals answer to quiz questions on their own, they form groups, discuss answers and make sure they find substantiation to their answers using direct quotes from required readings (that's the treasure hunt part). When ready, groups explain to the class their answers, including where this answer is found, and should another group call them on some kind of mistake of understanding/ inaccuracy, the challenger group gets to finish the task if they are right. This makes any quiz fun, formative, and everyone pays attention to what goes on in the classroom.
> TVOP IV 18 *(in follow up email)*

Escape rooms/games, puzzles and quizzes

Particular examples of escape rooms for management from outside the study include these table top escape rooms for change management or this paper on disaster preparedness through escape rooms.

Participants within the study offered their use of:

- Kahoot, Mentimeter and other digital quiz tools; using an array of voting tools
- collaborative online puzzle solving
- having physical puzzles, but withholding some of the pieces, or allocating them to others to prompt student negotiation

Creative, 'making' and building play

I am trying to involve my students in the learning process by providing them with opportunities to teach me and express their opinions (often in a creative way), like collages, zines, posters.
TVOP IV 57

Examples of these include:

- using LEGO®, Playdoh and other materials; e.g. to explore what leadership is; being given a secret card with a concept to build and having to guess the creations made by others (the spoiler is that everyone has the same concept and all create vastly different interpretations. Depending on the group some may guess the 'trick', others may struggle to work out the concept from the creations)
- the use of images to depict leaders/managers in craft based activities
- using crochet as part of craft play
- creating brand logos in LEGO®
- using craft materials to create store installations
- teaching students to understand how to add perceived added value to something through creating pots of scents and materials. The facilitator impregnates cotton wool with different products and gets students to smell and rank the products, work out how much they like them and what actually adds the value. This reveals how much this is a matter of perception - lemon suggests freshness, therefore cleanliness, therefore hygiene/efficacy
- redesigning a magnetic decision maker on a rational decision-making module on a business course
- building towers using marshmallow chunks and pea sticks, or pipe cleaners
- engineering tools for the 'egg drop'; working out how to prevent an egg from breaking when you drop it using a selection of basic materials to carry out the task
- creating collages for reflection on learning
- imaginative play using particular materials to emphasise the effect when people are moving into different roles or ways of working: Are you a jigsaw? Are you a quilt? (see vignettes)
- visualising research through drawing
- creating hand drawn infographics
- drawing the shield of leadership
- using 3D pens to create a topic in the round
- running an MBA entirely through arts-based methods
- creating the university of the future with newspaper
- using play to teach exploration of ethical theory with playdough, popsicle sticks, storyboards (also interpretive dance and song)
- Using Ketso (a two dimensional felt-based 'workshop in a bag', described here *https://ketso.com/why-ketso/) for project management and exploring major topics such as sustainability*

Designing a rollercoaster
There's one that I use for the event students, which was called a rollercoaster check in, and the Event students work at Alton Towers, which is a theme park around here. I had the first lesson with them in their second year, in teaching block two. And I got them for the first half an hour to talk me through making a rollercoaster and I had two big flip charts stuck together on a wall. So we started with the bit that you go off, and then we had a little drop, and then it went up again. And then we had a drop. Then we went round, we had a bit of a corkscrew. And then it came all the way around and started again. We had a queue out the front and some bushes and stuff like that. And they loved it. They were so interesting, like they knew loads more details and technical details than I did.
And I cut out those little people [from Playmobil Pro scenes] and put them on a desk and the students chose one that represented them. And then I asked them to put themselves on the rollercoaster; how they were feeling, for the course and the module. And, you know what? We had such deep conversations. So there was one student that put themself on the bit that goes off, first of all, and they said that they were feeling that they would be scared about the journey that they were about to go on with the module because it was finance and they don't really do finance. Some others put themselves on the drop coming down. And it was like, you know, I feel as though I can't stop anything, the momentum's there and I've got to carry on. So people put themselves on the bit going around like, okay, I feel quite calm at the moment. What I'm wondering whether I'm about to go on another awkward journey. And this was with level seven, postgraduate, on the apprenticeship degree. And then some people put themselves on the queue outside, which I thought was really interesting, as they didn't really feel part of the course yet. Because they

were just coming back after Christmas. And they were still waiting to get on that journey as such. And it felt as though we had a much deeper understanding after that about their mental health, what they were looking forward to, what they were scared of, than if I just said to them, and how you feeling? absolutely brilliant. And I think because it was very specific to them. And it was just lovely. And still one of the highlights.
TVOP IV 60

Egg drop
If I'm going to use it for research methods, then I'll get an egg. I'll give the students some straws. And give them like 20 minutes, and they need to be able to design something that will cushion the egg from a one metre drop. And if some students come in late, they still have up to that 20 minute mark, they don't have any extra time

So when they drop the egg, from a metre high, then the egg will either smash or the egg will stay whole. And from that, I can start to ask them questions that are pertinent to research. So I can ask them whether they actually did any research, first of all, to see what was the best way of cushioning the egg, or whether they looked around the room and saw other people's designs and that started to affect theirs. But also to point out to the whole teams that there's lots of different designs there. And that's how it is with research, we can do lots of different designs, and we'll maybe get slightly different results back, I can then talk them through things, like, if the egg's survived, or the eggs haven't survived. If the eggs have survived, because we had a really good design, then you can start to analyse and look at the egg and look around it and study it much more. Whereas if your design maybe wasn't right, you can still analyse the ugly, it's really messy, it's, it's in a mess on the floor, you can't really see it and analyse it as well as you could if your design was right. And also from that, we can then start to talk through the importance of design, and the importance of research the importance of staying on track. So if you were late, you still have the same amount of time to research things.
TVOP IV 60

A creativity module in the business school
I ran a creativity module at the business school, which was exploring individual and team creativity. So, when I was developing that module, I was looking at systems thinking, soft systems methods, rich pictures, ways of using artifacts for metaphors and storytelling in, strategic development and self-development and it grew from there...when we're building models or we're drawing rich pictures we don't really know how it's going to end up until we tell the story and I think that is really, really powerful
TVOP IV 54

How you added perceived value
I have a load of these little pots that used to contain glitter. And they're all washed out. And they contain a little bit of cotton wool. And the cotton wool is then impregnated with a number of different products; things like washing up liquid and shampoo and then one of them will actually be a perfume. And I get them all in their groups and they sniff them and I say, on a scale of one to 10 to like them, can you rank them in order? What do you think the products are? What makes you think that those are the products and invariably, either the worst smelling or close to being the worst smelling one is the perfume? They like the smells that go in particular shampoos, [these] seem to be quite popular. And when you say to somebody, okay, great. Shampoo cleans your hair, the smell is irrelevant. The smell is added in to add a perceived value and that's when they start thinking, Oh, yeah, yeah, suppose there's lots of things, you know...the great one, because it's been around for so long, is the idea that washing up liquid should smell of lemon because lemon has to do with cleaning now. But there is actually a connection to that because you can use citrus juice, lemon in particular, for cleaning things.

I'm sure it has lots of good physical qualities but then it becomes an abstract idea of lemon means fresh water...lemon in washing up liquid is a very obvious thing as long as you don't mind all of your plates smelling of lemon. I personally love the smell of lemon, lemon is one of my favourite additions. I tend to use lemon instead of vinegar on various things. But then of course, you've got people who are going, Yeah, but I don't want lemon. So then you have apple and Jasmine and jojoba and you know, these really obscure things and all the time you're saying to people but it doesn't actually make any difference to the thing that it does. So again...it's the physical, tangible, tactile.
TVOP IV 63

The importance of tactility in games
I play some games online. And it's very different to the physical feel of a tile, or a piece or, or even money. And I think it perhaps is a bit like the difference between saying to students, you have X amount of money to spend, pick the things you're going to spend it on, make those decisions, and physically giving them a wad of [pretend money]; I've used Monopoly money in the past. And all of a sudden, they've got this thing that they're holding on to and actually physically having to give that up, I think for them that is a different experience. And I guess it's the difference between having cash in your wallet and physically seeing that cash reduce as you spend it on stuff, and just having a card where you can just [think] Yeah, I'll buy that. And you know, it's a distance thing. So it's much easier to not think about it maybe quite so seriously. There's a physical pleasure in being able to touch things and physically move things around. That was one of the things

about the card games... one of the things I teach is about retail location. So the simplest way of doing it, I actually create a map based loosely on Bournemouth. So it's got a number of different areas. And then they've got eight different types of retail outlet, and they're on post it notes, and they have to physically [place them]. I could have just put something up on the on the whiteboard or on the PowerPoint and asked them where would you put it, but actually physically picking them out meant that they could change their minds and move things around. For me, it's more involving, it's more engaging.
TVOP IV 63

Teaching ethical theory through play in business school
You get an ethical question or you get a question, should I lie to my boss about being late to work? Instead of giving me the answer and saying it or writing it, I [tell them] I need you to create a model of the answer using a normative ethical theory. So, I should be able to look at whatever you make out of playdough, popsicle sticks, storyboards, whatever, if you wanted to make a song or an interpretive dance, all good. But whatever you did had to be through the lens of a normative ethical theory and so I should be able to look at it and go, Oh, clearly Mills utilitarianism. ...

And the thought process behind that was writing is very hard, especially when you have first generation students, English might not be their first language, English might not be the language spoken at home if even if it is their first language. [....]So, by doing it through play, by doing it through creative art projects, they know that I'm not judging their brains. They know I'm not judging their intelligence and they've seen some of the past ones [examples]. So, they know I'm not judging their art project, it's their ability to actually answer the question.

The other one I do is I make them wear sunglasses, I have different coloured sunglasses and if you're wearing like a pink ones, you have to make your argument from a utilitarian perspective.

Play as an alternative means to give critical feedback:
I think it's really important to take that power away from being able to speak really well and say actually, what your thoughts are is just as important as what you're able to put into words.

it gives us an opportunity to let students criticise each other or go Oh, I think that's, I think you're using Mills utilitarianism, and they go, No, I was using virtue ethics, and we're like, oh, that didn't come across. Okay, great.

Why didn't it come across?....

What part's missing? What part misled you into thinking that? But you didn't get it wrong, it's just that what didn't come across in your piece of

art? And they're much more comfortable saying I drew a picture, fine, criticise me, like it's okay, as opposed to well, that's not what you said.

I'm trying to say, whatever works for you, don't be limited by anything, and I think that's the part that I want to get across to them that like, learning doesn't have to be within the confines of this, of this structure, of this tool; learning can be on your own terms, in your own way. Just go do what you got to do, kind of thing.
TVOP IV 29

Magnetic decision makers
I've always struggled to find something fun to do for my class on rational decision-making. For example, where, as a framework, you teach people that what's important is that, before making a decision, you make sure that you consider all the possible risks, beliefs about consequences and only mapping out everything that's available and how risks may modify that. You may have introduced criteria by which you will assess all the outcomes and pick alternatives that provide the highest expected sort of value, of utility for you and other terminology. And it's very difficult for something like that, for me it was difficult, to find some fun exercises, until I found this wonderful product. So, this is a magnetic decision maker, it's sold in Poundland and makes your life very easy because you sway the magnetic hand and it either lands on no, don't do it, or yes go ahead.

Out of this came an activity where, after I explain the principles of rational decision-making and I draw a decision tree, I then ask them how that framework could help them create a better product than this and they develop their own dial that is based on the theory of rational decision-making. So if you sway this magnetic hand and it lands some place, it now has a label that is far more useful than one of those [original ones]. [So they bring in] their own device and this device now asks you questions; can you get advice? are there different ways of framing this decision? What are the alternatives? What is your worst-case scenario? What does your gut tell you? Can you create a decision tree?

I do it with 100 students in the classroom by breaking them up into small groups.
TVOP IV 18

Are you a jigsaw are you a quilt?
I run a kind of game that comes from research, where people build jigsaws into themes and others make quilts. By pulling them apart and swapping people around and putting them in different roles this [is a way to make] you naturally think where you are, where you think in more analytical terms, or you're thinking in more creative terms and understanding where

your natural role and enjoyment is. So, it's quite funny to watch, cos some people cannot leave the jigsaws alone. You know, you take them off them, and you'll see them, when you're doing the kind of wash up at the end and getting feedback, some people are still putting jigsaw pieces in.

You'll also see the people that don't really do well in a jigsaw environment and yet you give them this open ended [activity], you know, make me a quilt; here's some rags, here's some cut outs from magazines, here's a pair of scissors, and they kind of [thrive]. We need some artwork for a new hotel and so, here's a picture we're going to put together, or make a picture and some people really get into that - liberated, I can do anything? Oh great! And then they start telling stories, and they put pieces in and say, "oh well that's, that's a chicken, or a rabbit and the rabbit does this", and you are watching people's faces like, well where did all that come from, where did all that back story come from? And it's more about them saying, there's no right or wrong here but you need to understand yourself, but also as a manager, particularly for the MBA, you need to understand your team in raw elements; is your team more towards the jigsaw end, or some members more towards the quilt end?
TVOP IV 23

House building activity to teach models of leadership
[This activity is on an] Introduction to Management Leadership [module] and one of the theories we use is around different styles of management. So, particular associations, Lewin, laisser faire management, where you allow people to do what they want to do, or autocratic management where you instruct people what to do and democratic management where you involve people in decision-making. So, I thought this would be quite a useful way of explaining the theory. So, what we did, there's a group of about 40/45 students in the seminar session, was to give them a briefing paper to say your task within 20 minutes/25 minutes is to build a house. How you build it, or what you do, is entirely up to you, but unknown to them, what I gave them, there was actually three different groups, so the instructions were slightly different. So, for one group, each group had a leader so, but the instructions were slightly different, they didn't know that they weren't allowed to talk to other groups. But one of the groups' [instructions] was that you would not get involved, you just go on your phone, just allow people to do what they do. Another group was you involve people in decisions about how to construct the house and the third group was you are all autocratic, you tell them what to do, you instruct them what to do, in order to build a house. So, the idea was that at the end of it, we would go back and talk about how they got on, on the team, and how they felt the process went, why they built the sort of house they had built, and then [in] the great reveal I would say, aha, but you know, you had three different sets of instructions. So, and then, in my ideal world, you know, the

houses would have been built completely differently, and there'd be such an obvious thing that the all autocratic house would be different from the others, but of course it didn't work out like that.
TVOP IV 43

Physical/active/embodied play

Often in groups or teams, these forms of play have numerous aspects to them beyond the physical engagement. They include what it means to play with others, to play well with others and what can be learned by playing with others.

Examples include:

- physical play - students standing in a circle and throwing a ball of string (with one end tied to the first person's wrist) to indicate which person has helped them with their development. Then that second person throws, creating a tangible, visible network between the students
- arm wrestling to teach negotiation, power dynamics
- making a human conveyor belt to teach production line concepts
- movement, e.g. students walking around a room to demonstrate decision-making

Moving eggs with LEGO® machines
One of the great things about LEGO® is it's quite square. So I gave them all a boiled egg. I didn't tell them I boiled them. So they thought they were raw eggs. And they had to construct the machine [made of LEGO® bricks] to move the egg as far as possible. And that was quite good in terms of socialisation, if you're dealing with new groups and using it as part of induction, and in terms of something like teamwork.
TVOP IV 63

The rope exercise
Well it is something that XXX uses a lot and usually around team dynamics, communication and leadership. A group of four or five are blindfolded, they are handed a rope about 20m in length with lots of knots in it. The task is to remove the knots and then lay out the rope in an equal triangle with one of the corners aimed in a particular direction. This is then filmed so that the debrief can highlight issues of 'working in the dark', seeing who - if anyone - takes a lead, if all get involved and how they communicate with each other. Engineers are a group that usually do very well at this exercise as they tend to use their process and logic skills to look at the brief, identify a plan and then work as a team to carry out the task. Other groups can be chaotic, in some one individual does it all on their own and some just stand there quietly and do not get involved at all.
TVOP IV 44

Exploring issues with Ketso

(Find out what Ketso is here)

if you're using the main Ketso kit, it's a bit like developing a mind map, where you have your central idea, you then have your different branches and then you start to ask your questions. So, you could start off for example, by saying, so, what are the challenges with education within this environment? So, you'd use one leaf to start to develop [thoughts]; everyone would write down on their leaves without talking, first of all, what their key ideas are, and then you would start to put them around the Ketso. So, it's a bit like affinity mapping and you would then decide what are the core themes for the branches for your Ketso and you start to build up these pictures and then you ask another question. So, you could say, okay, so what are the enablers for education within this particular scenario? And you might use a silver leaf for that, but then you place it on the central Ketso felt so where it relates to the challenges or all the different themes. So, once you've gone through the four different leaves, you have quite an amazing map; it's sort of a knowledge map of people's views. So, you can start to see what the correlations are, you can start to see what their actual view of it is, what the landscape is and then you can take photographs. So, you've got a picture of that and they've got a picture of that as well
TVOP IV 54

Performing emotions in organisational behaviour modules
We were talking about different emotions and how we detect emotion. And so, I said, okay, let's have a group of people come out the front and express anger for me. And then I said to the class, okay, now let's notice

what's happening in the hands, notice what's happening in the feet, notice what's happening in the eyes and then I have different people come up. Now, you guys express sadness and now notice the different ways that we can express sadness and what are the feet doing and what are the hands doing? And what's the spine doing? ...rather than just telling...
TVOP IV 5

Solo, internal, cerebral play

Playing with ideas came up several times in responses: "I don't want to say I'm playing with the students but I'm playing with their imagination and their thinking during the class"; using provocative statements to challenge thinking and have creative and reflective minds (TVOP IV 34). TVOP IV 18 shared these two suggestions:

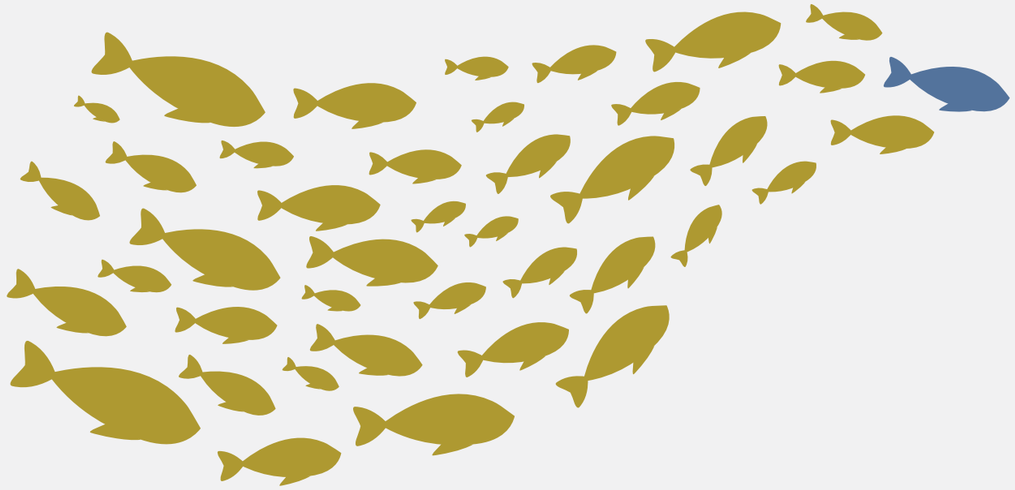
1) Using the analogy of a fishbowl with red fish and a single green one ahead of the crowd as a reflection exercise on leadership (see below).

2) Suggesting that students work through an object metaphor protocol to explore their "inner" madman (following the madman/architect/carpenter/judge model of writing by Betty Flowers (1981). This study skills guide from the University of Nottingham introduces Flowers' model.

TVOP IV 18 also observed that with the boom of on-demand resources post-pandemic, many internal/cerebral exercises may be included as part of independent learning tasks. This may well be the case, and some may argue that they already were pre-pandemic. However, the question for this study is whether or not such exercises are playful or play-related.

Activity 1

Who is the leader?



Take a look at the above school of fish and try to infer which fish is the leader - the reflection questions below help you gain perspective on the boundaries of solo leadership and the shared nature of leadership in collective.

Questions for reflection

Q1: What considerations could help justify the position that the leader is the blue fish?

Q2: What considerations could help justify the position that the leader is the fish middle of the back row?

Q3: What considerations could help justify the position that the leader is the fish in the middle of the school, protected from all sides by the other fish?

Q4: So, what does take to be a leader? Can leadership be exercised by multiple individuals at the same time? Would this be consistent with the definition of leadership in Week 1?

Figure G21. Participant example of fishbowl leadership activity

Improvisation

In different corners of management and business education improvisation can take on various forms. It may blend with other types of play, such as games and simulations, or be a part of performative, on-the-spot play. An example of improvisation in the following vignettes refers to a British tv comedy programme, first launched in 1988, *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* which subsequently became an American television show. It takes the format of theatresports, where dramatized improvisational activity is part of a competition. A summary by Mark Longmuir on the IMDB website gives the following illustration of how it might work:

> A British show in which actors and comedians improvise sketches in various "theatre-sports" - type games, based on audience suggestions. The games might include singing a Hoedown about Tory Politicians, acting out a soap opera as hamsters, becoming bizarre super-heroes, or making up a musical about the life of an audience member.

Other examples are:

> **But wait there's more!**
> One respondent used a variation of the board game 'But Wait there's more' to teach services marketing. It originated on Kickstarter as a party game to play and this website provides the following description of how to play:
>
> "Have you ever wanted a glass that stops messy accidents before they happen, or pants that provide relief at the touch of a button? In ***But Wait, There's More!***, players pitch wacky products to each other for fun and profit. At the start of the game, each player receives three "Feature" cards. Each round starts with one Product card being revealed from the deck, e.g., guitar. Each player in turn has thirty seconds to play one of their Feature cards - say, "Helps you fall asleep and stay asleep" - and pitch their own

version of a guitar. At some point during these thirty seconds, this player must say, “But wait, there’s more!”, then reveal the top Feature card from the deck - say, “great for parties” - and incorporate that Feature into their product. Once all players have pitched their unique version of a guitar, everyone votes simultaneously for which pitches they liked the best. The top vote getter after three rounds wins the game!”

As the respondent observed “It’s silliness, but it’s silliness with a really strong marketing band so people are willing to initially engage so we can start scaffolding other educational aspects around it. But you need that first step of “I’m going to ask you to give me ten solutions for a problem”
TVOP IV 51

Prompt and pitch
I used to do an improv thing with advertising; throw me a prompt and I will pitch. I would do a product pitch and then I would get my students to give me prompts and I would go and create an advert, whilst teaching advertising. I would come back the next week with an advert based on their prompt. So I was modelling it, then I learned to get the students to model it.
TVOP IV 51

Objects, toys & props

“I like using props to tell stories. I’m always looking for props to tell stories, to illustrate things, because, you know, talking about it is fine, but can people see it and hold it? TVOP IV 48”

I have already stated (possibly too many times) that there can be crossovers between different forms of play. This particular section is a case in point; although it specifies the use of brand name toys and other objects for certain purposes these can also be used in roleplay, storytelling, imagination and fantasy, performance and other categories.

Examples include:

- using LEGO®, Sticklebricks, Jenga to teach supply chain management.
- using LEGO® to visualise and symbolise concepts like market segmentation; getting students to build a model which represents different segments of a market and explain why and how their model embodies the theories and principles behind this
- using props to teach organisational behaviour
- using LEGO® to apply a LEAN process, as set out here
- using LEGO® Serious Play® to explain Lewin’s theories of management
- using LEGO® Serious Play® to enable all stakeholders implicated in an issue to understand all aspects and contribute to its resolution. Examples include futures and operational management, leadership, problem solving, blue skies exploration, product development, process, challenges.
- using the DUPLO pizzeria to teach business breakup and rescue and why the latter is preferable to the former (business law, seen in earlier vignette)
- M&Ms to be used for inventory and capacity planning (eating surplus stock is a bonus)
- creating balloon animals to think about design and process
- carrying a prop bag for improvisation in lectures, e.g. with big glasses to see issues differently with, koala bears to tell stories
- using Playmobil for roleplay to create some distance and comfort (not having to enact the role directly)
- the toilet paper challenge: an introductory activity whereby students are invited to take as many pieces of paper as they would like. They usually assume that they will need to build something and so take many sheets. Then the tutor says they need to provide as many pieces of information on X as the pieces of toilet paper they have, and then the discussion is built on what they come up with

Essential oils and inventory management
for my inventory management, I bring out my essential oils and I send them around the room, because you have a top note, a base note and a middle note and some of the oils are like Rose, Frankincense, Jasmine, really expensive. So, you can start to talk about inventory and how you manage your inventory and all your citrus oils, for example, they lose their efficacy after about six months. So, it talks about stock rotate

and all of these types of things, because they know that and put them together. It's really quite nice because they remember it and I've got MBA students from 2002, who I'm in contact with now, who still remember my inventory management check, because I brought my oils out.
TVOP IV 54

LEGO® and Lean thinking
[An example is] using the LEGO® to set up a flow line, making various things, putting them in a cup, putting the lid on, and then we get people to explore how they can simplify the process, make it more effective, change layouts by doing that and that works really well because people experience it then. They really experience how it works.
TVOP IV 54

Using LEGO® to teach supply chain management
The postgraduate course, they were doing transport logistics, supply chain management, and I used LEGO® as a material. Then I would form competing teams and they had to buy these materials from the supplier, build the LEGO® and sell it to a buyer. So, whoever made more profit in this process would win the game, if you like. So… that was the excuse, but through that, they would learn about the importance of communication, the importance of having very clear literacy, very clear, streamlined approaches, making sure that they have the right people in the right places. So, they let us know these things while they were doing the activity, [but] they were not aware of that. So, usually in the debrief all these things will come out. And from that you can pull an awful lot of thinking and reflective comments as people exchange ideas, and of course a couple of people do get quite anxious and then you play on that and say well, why is that person so anxious? Why is this causing so much stress? Do you see that at work when you ask somebody to do something different, when you put them on a different job? Or, you know, ask them to work from home? You know, some people are desperate to work from home, some people are absolutely terrified by it.
TVOP IV 1

Simulations, role play

A simulation is play. You know, you're looking at an unreal, a realistic but unreal situation and experimenting with it.
TVOP IV 9

They use [the term] simulation because they can't use play with management people, cos management people are very serious.
TVOP IV 39

Along with games, roleplay and simulation are the most often cited forms of play by management educators.

Several respondents who have used simulations extensively commented on how these have evolved in the last four decades or so of their educational use. Initially they tended to be small scale paper based activities, around simple scenarios or preparing for emergencies. In the 1970s, it was suggested, simulations were most likely to be around financially focused pieces of hard data.

In contemporary higher education simulations are seen to be

> "Much more graphical, qualitative, so you can build in jeopardy and decision-making… 'should we go into China and what are the qualitative decision-making processes behind that?'…so for me that becomes much more play (TVOP IV 20)."

One simulation might be around how resources should be allocated within a particular scenario for a particular purpose. Another might be around what to do in a crisis; medical emergency, terrorism, natural disaster. Their use is perceived thus:

> Business simulations elements in modules as part of the learning process of the students encourage them to understand better how the different aspects of the business interact in the context of a simulated, but still very realistic, business environment (TVOP IV 41).

One well-known activity is centred on a potential Mars/Moon crash landing. In these simulations students have to prioritize what equipment they need to take as they travel 300 kilometres across the lunar surface. They can choose between 15 items, including an oxygen tank, a pistol, some food and a compass. They make the initial selection on their own, developing their priorities. Then they come together in small groups and choose again with their group members. After they have made their choices they get to see what NASA says, with oxygen is number one priority and a box of matches is number 15.

Other examples include:

- teaching business strategy through simulation, such as being owners of a consulting firm, or airline management. The latter was based on game theory; understanding that you have to predict the opponent's game before making a decision
- using commercial platforms. Educators set up teams and the difficulty levels of the challenge but the simulation is run by a third party organisation. Topics include executive training and automotive simulation
- teaching Porter's Five Forces and how they apply in the car industry.
- giving incomplete or varying information so that players can address simulation goals from different perspectives - adopting a systems perspective, or a theatrical perspective to deal with the interpersonal behaviours that may accompany a situation - while dealing with the unknown and the unknowable
- coaching triads, as part of coaching training, whereby a dialogue takes place between coach and coachee, with a third party observer. At the end each has the opportunity to feedback and debrief on the experience
- creating simulated spaces for play: mock board rooms, business premises, specialist environments

The climbing Everest simulation

...is an online simulation, a Harvard simulation is here. The link gives a tour to give you some idea. Basically the simulation uses the context of a Mount Everest expedition to reinforce student learning in group dynamics and leadership. Students play one of five roles in a team of climbers attempting to summit the mountain. During each round of play they must collectively discuss whether to attempt the next camp en route to the summit. Ultimately, teams must climb through five camps

in six simulated days totalling approximately one and a half actual hours of seat time [class or teaching time]. Team members analyse information on weather, health conditions, supplies, goals, and hiking speed, and determine how much of that information to communicate to their teammates. Along the journey, the team must also make decisions in response to three hidden challenges which affect their ascent, hiking speed, health, and overall success. We use this with MBA students, and it is something they enjoy and learn a lot from.
TVOP IV 44

Play and simulation when work experience is limited

The work experience level of undergraduates in a business school is often very limited, in my experience. Prestigious universities, especially, set very high admissions criteria which rely on an intensive academic focus, though these students have often had the benefit of proximity to family connections or short placements in professional work. Some students have front line retail or hospitality experience they gain during their studies. Very occasionally I have encountered students with business experience, including through participation in family companies, their own retailing start-ups, working as a sole trader in landscaping, or in one memorable incident I learned my student had worked several years very profitably in the illegal drug trade. However, in any class of 300 or so, such students were in the minority, and even they had patchy experience of different business functions. Consequently, it is routinely difficult to develop any learning activity reliant on experience and using simulation gaming offers an alternative. I suppose this may be different on newer apprenticeship programmes, programmes attracting mature students, or where business teaching is embedded in other disciplines
(Mitchell, 2022, via email)

I teach using what I coined Play-as-You-Grow methodology. Typically, students engage in role-play, and then we co-create play that teaches similar lessons but in a different context. I know of many colleagues that do role-plays, games, simulations, and institutions where some people specialize in delivering a particular type of play over and over again
Survey respondent, Management and Business UK

Play allows you to play out the consequences of implementing/applying management theory & tools. It further allows you to play important roles such as that of the leader/follower, the guru and the researcher, the customer/business etc etc.
Survey respondent, Business Management and Strategy UK

Business pods as simulation spaces
A business pod was this area that was designed to imitate an office space. So the Business School of the University wasn't a very big building. It was a bit off the side of the main building. And we had, I think, three or four business parts, one at each level. So I think we were around 120 students who were all in their first year of business studies. My major was marketing, but then we had people studying advertising, accounting or finance, business administration. And they divided us into pods of, I guess, around 40 or 30 people, so we were also with different majors. We had a meeting room imitating a normal business environment and board of directors room with one big table, we had a brainstorming room that had like a multimedia board and some toys and beanbags and fluffy floor to sit and lay down and whatever. We had a little computer room also, where you could go in, because yeah, it was 2007, so Wi Fi wasn't that available. So there was this room for us to use and a little coffee area. And then a bigger area imitating an open office. And that's where we would gather all the time. And each pod had two mentors, two leaders, who were also different professors, someone is majoring in marketing someone might be as well in accounting.
TVOP IV 62, business school alumnus

Some forms of experiential learning activity are cited as quasi-simulations which are where MBA students engage in real life challenges that companies bring to the programme. And then students obviously produce research and documents on that particular case on a particular issue.

Simulation: Christmas gifts and the perils of innovation
...one person in a team acts as a customer, and either one or the rest act as designers, and they've got to find a gift for Christmas, and the person's got three pounds to spend. ...they want an experience, they don't just want something physical. So you've only got about 30-40 minutes to tease out what sort of experiences person might want and it's from ground zero. So it's all about learning, observation and thinking skills and working together as designers, and think - what do they want?

So on the laptop, [during remote teaching] I had to act as the customer, with the group being all the designers. And it is really good for sharing ideas, because people can write complex ideas [in the chat function] while I was actually answering the questions, and we shared across the piece. And I didn't make it easy on them. I said, you ask me what you're like, I might not answer. And the candidates [tried] pushing things at me that I didn't want. That they were in love with. And when they started listening to me, it was Oh, yeah, he's not going to want that. Because he's already said he doesn't like a health spa weekend. And so there was a good bit

of reflection of well, why are you pushing something [that the client won't want]? "I think it's brilliant". [But] the whole point of this exercise is to [understand that to] make something you love is no guarantee your customers will feel the same about it. So that's why a lot of innovation fails is that it's because you think you're right, because you love it."
TVOP IV 23

Consulting firm
This involved a peer learning element with first and second year students.

...we had a massive room. We created little marquees and the students had to pretend they are the owners of this fictional company, where they would recruit the first years coming through the door. The first years had to be recorded because [it was] part of the assessment...the business process was quite a good example of that, because the second years helped, to take the position of an owner and the first years had help in the position of the employee. So, when it came to working together and how they managed their team mates and all that, very often, I would point out things that they would do, as a collective load, I wouldn't point out particular individuals; things that they should consider when they manage the company. And what are the consequences, if you manage the company in a particular way, in a different way? ... and what is the consequence of not handling the client very well or, you know, stuff like that.
TVOP IV 1

Supply chain simulation board game
In the past, I used to teach a module related to supply chain management; to introduce the students to the concept of the supply chain of the different relations between the suppliers and the consumers in a supply chain. We used to run this board game whereby the rules and the goal of play was to minimise the number of units of stock that were not sold, also minimise the orders that were not fulfilled to the customers. So, we had to count the number of orders that came from the customers from the demand side, and we had to count the backlog; so, the orders that were unfulfilled. So, the students knew that they had to fulfil most of the orders, even though that was impossible, but at least they knew that in the end, the winning team would be the one that would have fulfilled more orders. Therefore, the backlog was reduced, compared to the other teams. There's a play element because they get to play role playing games to make decisions and, in the end, there was a prize. So that's the play thing. I encourage them to challenge each other and to achieve a better result as a consequence of the of the of the activity.
TVOP IV 41

Decision-making and strategy in running a company
So you make a decision based on other people's decisions and that process of decision-making is the hardest thing for students to understand. Not just positioning your company so it is sustainable in terms of profit, turnover and survival, but recognising that understanding the opponent it is not just enough to analyse the current environment, you have to understand where they are moving in the future.
TVOP IV 1

Peer learning and business simulation
So, there's a business simulation, you may have five different groups, in effect, running the same organisation but five different ways, and people can not only see the benefits of the decisions - well, not always benefits- the outcomes of the decisions that they make, they also see the outcomes of the decisions that similar people make and so the learning is magnified, cos you don't just learn from your own group's decisions and outcomes, there are multiple decisions and outcomes being made around the groups and you learn from each other. So, it's an extremely powerful way of learning and in my experience, you remember it more. If you are taught, and you're asked a question as in an exam, you may well remember what was taught in that session, you answer the question and you move on. But if you're doing it in a game, it's something that becomes embedded.
TVOP IV 44

Finance and decision-making
You know, people will come into finance believing obviously it's a very dry subject, that yes, it's important, but maybe they don't really need to know about it, because there's a finance director who does all of that stuff. What they don't always understand, and what people don't understand, is that finance is actually part of every decision that you have to make, whatever role you have in an organisation. It doesn't matter how small the decision is, if it's based around the business and delivering to the requirements of the customer, then it's part of every decision. The way that the simulation makes people realise that is that, understanding finance and how it can affect the outcome of their decisions is very, very important. They're not accountants, they don't need to be accountants, all they need to be aware of is that every decision they make has a financial implication and if they're not fully sure of what that financial implication is, they know they can, at least, ask a question.
TVOP IV 44

The philosophical importance of simulation: what are truth and knowledge?
First of all, on knowledge, there are no facts, really. Everyone treats financial information as a fact, I mean, really, they aren't the actual reality. They're a model of reality, they're often incorrect and they're sometimes deliberately incorrect. So, understanding what knowledge is; not just for finance, but for any leader, you've got to be deeply sceptical about anything that is brought in front of you claiming to be facts. You have to have a sophisticated understanding of what truth is, or indeed, whether there is such a thing as truth. So, I find that useful. Then of course, moral philosophy. All the time you're under pressure to distort figures, bend them, support either unethical or illegal activities; of course you have to resist it. So, I'm just mentioning this in passing, where this is really painting the picture of what a leader has to contend with, which is not really addressed in management education... how do you move forward, taking people with you in a deeply uncertain world?
TVOP IV 9

Value of simulation
I'm thinking of one course where we had a three hour lecture and in one hour we needed to read this prompt, come up with a plan to solve the issue, each group was coming up with a different issue and then we had to figure out a presentation, in just a very short amount of time. `It not only taught us about the dynamics of that case but also working with people who we don't know, working through group dynamics, who's gonna do what, when you don't have strong relationships with these people and everyone has different backgrounds and comforts and discomforts and each group is competing and then it's coming from a different perspective too. So that to me that is so much more valuable when you put someone through a simulation or some sort of experience that can be a myriad of emotions [rather]than just telling someone what it's like.
TVOP IV 38

Performance, theatre, drama

> I sometimes tease that, in a way, maybe you know, academics and teachers are just failed actors...I think the performance is also important. You know, it's about innovating in terms of the way we present things
> TVOP IV 48

Examples include:

- dress up as part of teaching students complex theories of organisational behaviour
- lecturing with different masks/hats to teach different perspectives/ approaches
- choirs, music and singing
- creating physical tableaux to reflect what is going on in a situation/relationship/ dilemma/problem. These can also be created through
- freeze frames - enacting a situation and then freezing into immobility at a given moment. Observers and players can then analyse what is going on and how it is represented, and what needs to happen/what outcomes might occur
- performative play to teach leadership styles, organisational behaviour, communication styles

> **Being eight (again)**
> Everyone has to imagine they are eight years old and there are specific instructions each has to follow. One of which is trying to change the game that is being played to another game for one play and playing the same game with another, trying to speak for more than 50% of the time
> TVOP IV V

Fantasy, imagination and pretence

The example from participants which comes closest to fitting this category, while also straying into digital and roleplay realms, is creating a fictitious island upon which students live and work in some capacity. One respondent in this study used this approach, while Roz Sunley (2015) created her virtual and imagined island of Laputare to teach responsible management and sustainable value. A third island features in the 4 Headed Monkey Game which encourages players to explore their values and those of others, as illustrated in the teaser video here.

Wordbased/wordless, story

Storytelling threads through many forms of play, including through game narratives, role-plays, and simulations which are often seen to be the most dominant modes of play in management education.

Examples include:

• using fiction to teach strategy and leadership

• the use of parables:
The orange parable (sometimes called the Ugli Fruit or Ugli Orange story) is well-known and concerns two sisters arguing over an orange. Barkai (1996) explores it in detail and it is often used to illustrate negotiation.

> The use of parables in management education is quite broad and definitely not limited to the orange parable (there are parables of leadership, parable of the Sadhu, etc.). I've also used the anonymous story of the Demotivated Mr. Ant to encourage students to create their own story of how to demotivate someone in a particular job (should be alLEGO®ry but needs to build on theories of motivation) TVOP IV 18 (in follow up email)

• storytelling in other forms of play such as LEGO® Serious Play®

• combining storytelling with collage

• using personal stories in playful check in/check out at the start and finish of a class - for connection

• using stories (in this case a nursery rhyme) as a playful means of helping students develop their construct written arguments

Bingo in PhD review
I've used Bingo for review classes. A case in point is a PhD level contemporary topics in Organisational Behaviour. Bingo boards would be a 3x4 classification of a particular body of literature (by nature of dependent variables, and type of justice, for example), then we'd draw titles of articles from the required readings, and whoever could situate a particular article in the table most quickly would get to place pins onto their board, being able to eventually call Bingo. Alternatively, the board can be author names and topic names, and we would draw titles of academic papers and news stories that can be associated to these. Everyone's board would show a different placement of authors and topics, so there is an element of chance in who gets to call Bingo. TVOP IV 18 (in follow up email)

Digital play, augmented & virtual reality

> Virtual reality is where you're fully immersed in a digital environment. So you basically put a headset on, and you lose sight of everything around you. Augmented is where you look through something. So you can still see your world so it could be [using special] glasses or your iPad or you could put a headset on. When you can still see the world through it (TVOP IV 23).

The respondent above is based in a business school is trialling freely available apps for students and staff to experiment and see what relevance these might have for learning. Questions to explore this include "How could we use this in our teaching, how could we use this in university? Does it have a purpose? Is it just a gimmick? Or is this the start of something really different, and obviously, where we are now, it looks a lot more valid".

Current apps being trialled by this participant do not necessarily have anything to do with management, but include swimming with whales, going for a walk around the international space station, attending an anatomy session in a lab, land on Mars, virtual tours of environments. The next step will be moving into educational apps and creating their own lecture room and materials, own modules, and meeting in virtual reality; wearing headsets linked to a tablet and sharing images on the tablet so that others in the group can watch. Other possibilities include joining up with other software e.g. Sketchfab - through which students can create 3D assets; using avatars; integrating with other platforms e.g. being able to watch *The Martian* movie on Mars.

Waterfalls for digital question and answer sessions
Waterfalls are where you are online. And they you ask the [students] a question, something quite open. And they type in an answer. But they don't press send, they just have that answer typed. And you leave it three

or four minutes for them to dwell over what they've written. And then you do them a countdown, and they all press send at that moment. And so suddenly the chat constantly fills up with comments; then I'll scroll back through the comments. What we can also do is have the students go back and look through those discussions, and put a thumbs up for the ones that they really like or comment back as well. And then it aids the thought processes of the students. So you can say, Oh, actually look at these, we've got a common thread here, a common thought process here. What about this? And what about that? and instead of students occasionally commenting it suddenly throws up lots of comments. And what I find is after that students are much more likely to comment as well, I think because they get used to typing. And so I quite like things like that again, for me, it's just a bit of fun.
TVOP IV 60

Magic and illusion

Using magic was described as a means of making learning memorable and pushing the boundaries a little. This can be risky depending on how groups respond to the tricks; money changing illusions, turning silk handkerchiefs into items of clothing, teaching supply chain risk with a book that bursts into flames. It was described by a participant as:

"playing at the edge of what is acceptable to find something that is useful but novel for the organisation that they might not have thought of previously". (TVOP IV 48)

Deconstructing and disorienting play

A common technique for deconstructing play is that of reversal, seen earlier. Others relate to the reversal of norms and expectations, including that of having a pre-set goal or outcome.

Play for discovery
Play for play's sake is the one thing that I think we struggle with in HE which actually, when you think about it, is what should be happening because that's where the gold might come in. TVOP IV 3

How to make a building fail
I'll ask them about, for instance, the new building that was going up, and say right, how could we use this? How could we use this to make sure the university is successful, and you know, what should it have? what should be in there? And so that gives them the kind of backdrop. But then I also use the flipped approach which they typically enjoy a lot, which is well, ok, you're now the enemy, how would you make sure, using the same brain storming techniques, that that building is an absolute failure. What would you do? and then because it's a silly question, we're much more creative and much more free. And I see that in every session, that the vast majority of teams are quicker to come up with ideas, are laughing a lot more, there's much more engagement, there's a lot more noise in the room and I push them to be as silly and as stupid and as horrible as possible. You know, and then we have to work hard to flip the negative to a positive and we'll say things like board up the windows; what does that mean? Well, light's important, and yeh I think the worst one was a fashion student came up with, we should patrol the grounds with clowns with machetes. [And then of course you flip that to bring up] the positives of good security and good lighting and you don't want nefarious characters wandering around.
TVOP IV 23

Free play

No participants from management education gave examples of free play.

In short

In these sections on play types in HE I have grouped them by categories; a) to show the different kinds of play identified in this study and b) in order to allow subtle and specific features to be visible in each. There are many other ways in which to configure play types, however.

The dedicated section on play in management education shows that management, just like other disciplines, is already home to many different kinds of play; and not just the ones that are often associated with it. In company with the previous section on play types across the disciplines, this suggests that the range and scope of play types is far greater than sometimes recognised. While this comes as no surprise to colleagues who are actively using and researching play themselves, it is still something that others are less aware of. The examples included here should be seen as illustrative of the kinds of play to be found in HE, but not comprehensive.

Furthermore, while this study has more information about some forms of play than others, this does not mean unusual or unique kinds of play are not being used. They simply have not surfaced through this, or perhaps other, enquiries. As play is masked by different names and titles and there is reticence about admitting to play in some circles, much more may be happening that has not made it into publication or visible fora.

Reflection

What thoughts do you have, having read through
a) these examples of play in management education
b) these examples in both sections of play types in HE

Having now read both sections
does anything surprise you or occur to you which you had not thought of before?
Are there any examples of play in management education that should be included that are not?
What kinds of ideas do these examples spark in you?
How might you use or adjust any of these ideas in your own context?
How does the brief evocation of management education relate to your own conception of it?
What might you add or take away if you were doing this study?
Do you agree that some (at least) of the boundaries between management education and other disciplines are blurry or permeable?
If not, why is this? (There is no aggressive defensiveness intended here, in case your eyes/ears were wondering)

Does anything leave you puzzled or with unanswered questions?

Would you like a cup of tea?

PLAY AND RESEARCH

The focus in this study is predominantly on learning and teaching. However, I wanted to understand how far the use of play extended to all aspects of an educator's academic practice. By this I was thinking in very broad terms ranging from the use of literature, theory and reflection on practice to improve teaching; action research to explore questions about teaching and learning; the use of research based models of curriculum design (e.g. Jenkins and Healey, 2012, or Fung, 2017); scholarship of learning and teaching and formally structured research projects. As I imagined, the way respondents interpreted research and scholarly activity in answering questions about their use of play was equally broad.

The following list combines answers about participant use of play in research from the gateway survey.

In teaching-focussed exploration and reflection

- using play and movement in all coaching workshops
- as an introduction to research for students:
  e.g. in class guided research activity, using a live webchat projected with Padlet; students can comment on and rank each other's research pieces, vote on which piece had the most depth or taught them something they did not know.

The examples below also focus on the development of student research skills, rather than as a means of conducting research:

- teaching focussed experimentation, co-creating with students
- to explore Shakespeare
- through a playful video diary of action research around play
- using digital quizzes and platforms (2)
- using story and narrative through play
- through playful approaches to module subjects
- through humour, togetherness, music and sounds
- in student engagement
- using visualisation and narrative with students to help them create image-based depictions of their research projects, to become clearer on what they need to do
- thinking through making: students creating an object that is associated with their research e.g. board games focussed on the issues of negotiating access to health care in prisons or trying to navigate health care of a hospital system

In subject research (including play types)

- research into games and gamification (2)
- making and using games (8)
- investigating escape rooms

- in lab experiments; finding scientific research playful (2)
- trialling virtual reality

In constructing, conducting and disseminating research

- "as a way into participatory qualitative research"
- "when gathering qualitative evidence for my research I always begin interviews and workshops with play to create safety and conviviality"
- in research symposia on methods and researcher role; to develop research skills and address challenges e.g. writers block
- writing about play in academic journals and presenting at conferences (3)
- developing interdisciplinary research bids through playful workshops or multiple day long sandpits
- using play in evidence based approaches to address organisational challenges "...using a methodology to gather evidence from multiple different sources, including academic scientific literature, stakeholder input, personal expertise, professional expertise and organisational data"

As part of data collection

- collecting research data through play e.g. LEGO® Serious Play® (4)
- in outreach activities and partnerships with schools using art and play
- play as methodology, "using visual embodied and fluid new materialist lenses" (Education, UK)
- for doctoral study e.g. use of drawing in doctoral studies to aid "participation and openendedness", playfulness as means of data collection
- through play consultancy on projects where play has been used a central framing for the enquiry

An example brought to my attention was the use of play as methodology in management projects around enhancing the authority of participants to communicate, contribute data and to interpret it through storytelling alongside the researcher rather than deferring to their expertise. One such initiative was:

- followed by The Connected Communities project, which unearthed stories about collaboration and community responses to crisis. A cultural animation methodology was used whereby participants engaged in creative workshops in the UK and Japan, around metaphors of a boat journey and the tree of life (Kelemen & Mangan 2013)

As part of internal thinking[40]; playing with process

- playing with thoughts (3): "I play with my thoughts and make games to compare and contrast research perspectives. It helps me focus and challenges my thinking in an enjoyable way"
- "playing with theories, thoughts and thinking in my research both as a way of doing research (methods) and writing up research (formats)
- using what ifs, metaphor and analogy

In addition to these examples participants also made observations about

- the unconventional nature of playful research and how it does not seem to be included in the repertoire of research approaches
- the challenge in one research area of bringing together individual creativities and making people believe in their creativity (through play)
- the possibilities afforded by large scale playful events or festivals which are held in regional or national communities. These can generate data on engagement with play which is relevant for higher education, even if the manner in which that data is produced is not very formalised. Examples of such events include the international play festival, Counterplay, already mentioned, and hosted biennially in Denmark, which exists to reawaken the 'kaleidoscopic vitality' of play (so called and described in this post by its founder, Matthias Poulsen) in society. In 2014 the Emporium of Dangerous Ideas was hosted in Scotland to awaken passion, inspiration and possibility in education for change (introduced in this piece by its curator, Karen Lawson)

Hunches

This respondent focused on the importance of play as a means of understanding what is at work in research and of the balance between analysis and intuition:

> I try to make them understand that there are two sides [in research]that are important. One is factual analytics and the other one is your intuition. And that the big leaps, the big ideas in research always come from intuition…and this is where it is fascinating to watch students be extremely scared about it…scared they haven't got it, scared they won't know how to listen to it, wanting so much to cling on to the fact that it's going to prove how they do things…anchoring these things in a storyline…and they make sense…there might be a trillion other possibilities surely. But that might be a very valid one. And there was a reason why you came up with this intuition (TVOP IV 34).

Stranger Danger

This respondent used play at the start of gathering data in research to help participants relax and settle into the process to overcome "stranger danger".

> In qualitative research where people don't know each other. Sometimes the participants know each other sometimes they don't and most often the facilitator doesn't know the participants, so right from the start there's a little bit of stranger danger or a closed feeling, or a lack of trust because people don't know each other. So I always start with ummm I don't like the word ice breaker because I think it has a negative [connotation]… (TVOP IV 38)

A need for new

While Kara (2020) points to new approaches in research, others voice the view that not enough is being done. In his presentation to GamechangersFest21 Nuno da Silva asked what it meant to be human in a VUCA[41] world. He observed that we are still carrying on with solutions that generate similar results and suit no-one. Things like regeneration and sustainability are new challenges which are being processed with old thinking.

This was echoed by one participant who noted that research needs to keep pace with new developments and topics. Trying to design, conduct and evaluate fresh departures with old tools and tactics is likely to be ineffective. On the matter of embodied play in research for example:

> How do you capture that? of course you have video, you have all kinds of things, you know, stuff that represents the experience. But I'm still not completely convinced and I still believe that we really need to work with the methods here. What kind of research methods actually meaningfully captivate[sic] an experience that can almost never be captured accurately in words alone? I don't really have the answer, but I think it's extremely important that you don't allow the currently available methods and research approaches to dictate what you can researc (TVOP IV 37).

In short

The use of play in research was not a main area of enquiry in this study. Nonetheless, as part of the broad repertoire of educator practice, I wanted to ask participants whether or not they used play for research and scholarship. This also tied in with my question about their reading interests, as both indicate informed application and enquiry. They interpreted the question diversely, as is shown. Their answers reveal that play has found its way, in different forms and for varying purposes, into research activity at university. Examples particularly related to the use of play to engage students in research methods; not always the most popular of topics for the undergraduate. Examples regarding research using play, and into play in higher education/adult learning, suggest this is gathering mass. However, conflicting perceptions exist as to how to consider the examples of research and what constitutes 'proper' research, in the same way that there is conflict over what constitutes 'proper' pedagogy (James 2021b).

Reflection

How are playful approaches to research considered, in your experience?
What does this section on play in research say to you?
Is there anything missing from these examples that you know of and that should be included?
What questions do you have about play in research?
What else needs to be considered with regard to using play in research?

GOING DEEPER

In which
I explore different aspects of value, values and value systems, in response to the question “what is play worth?”. In so doing I also touch on how cultural difference may affect perceptions of value with regard to play experiences. I look at the ways in which educators believe play adds value to higher education learning. I also look at when different perceptions of value align to enhance the academic experiences of students and staff, and what happens when these perceptions clash. Then I consider where the Rhetorics and expressions of value come together or stand apart. Finally, I pay special attention to play for emotional survival and wellbeing.

WHAT IS PLAY WORTH?

The interrelationship between value, values and value systems

The terms value, values, and value systems have obvious commonalities, while also being subtly distinct. Their similarities, distinctions and interplays also come across when educators talk about the value of play, their educator values and the value systems with which they come into contact.

Before we go any further, I’ll clarify what I mean by these three terms in this study here.

Value is the importance, worth or usefulness of something to someone. This can take all kinds of forms, including human, visceral and emotional kinds, as well as matters of material and practical worth, efficacy and expediency.

Values (individual and institutional) are the codes by which a person, or collective of persons, lives and works. They incorporate beliefs and guiding principles for what is right, just, appropriate, desirable, and most important.

It is common practice for organisations to set out their statements of values, aligned to their mission and strategies. Where these are lived out in practice they are a powerful torchlight and identity marker. While individual universities have their own statements, the Magna Charta Observatory has sought to bring universities together to refocus on core values, such as autonomy, integrity and accountability (Myklebust, 2019). Outside the university sector, in a piece online for the *Harvard Business Review*, Lencioni (2002) is blunt about when organisational values fall short:

> “Most values statements are bland, toothless, or just plain dishonest. And far from being harmless, as some executives assume, they’re often highly destructive. Empty values statements create cynical and dispirited employees, alienate customers, and undermine managerial credibility.”

In a similar vein, educators can feel isolated or unsupported if the values of their collective (to use the loosest term I can think of) run counter to their own. We will return to this later.

Finally, value systems are defined by Merriam Webster as “the system of established values, norms or goals existing in a society”.

They are particularly relevant when we consider higher education as a microcosm of society. Such value systems will include assumptions about right/wrong ways to teach

and be a university and there will be synergies and conflicts between the many different versions of them in the sector and around the world.

In analysing educator perceptions of these three manifestations of value I have divided them into different categories here. I've done this to avoid crossover/duplication I but it's a clumsy activity, wielding a harsh and unnatural axe upon things which are hard to separate. Do bear this mind as you read on.

Play, cultural difference and value

> "...it is clear that there are marked individual differences in playfulness, among children and adults, and that environmental and cultural factors may, at least in part, be responsible for these variations (Whitebread and Basilio ND)."

When we come to judging whether or not something has value, the culture permeating our environment, with its benchmarks, beliefs and habits, is highly influential. Many different factors inform the shaping of these, some of which we will see in the following pages.

Play can have a different value accorded to it by different societies (and their subgroups) around the world. As this study focuses on play in academic contexts, it excludes play that might relate to the pageantry, pomp and performances of university traditions and rituals. Formal examples of these include inductions, special events, graduation, doctoral inauguration and other milestone markers.

Stepping outside university life for a moment, Sutton-Smith (1997), Grey (2013), Huizinga, (1938) and Caillois (2001) are among those who discuss the relationship between play and culture. In *Man, Play and Games*, first issued in 1958, Caillois outlines what he calls both a sociology of games and also a sociology derived from games. That is to say, he attempts to determine the extent to which the choice of a culture's play and games affects how they thrive and grow, or not. He illustrates the interrelationship between value and values in an intricate way, showing how items and practices which were once serious and sacred, may become, later in the life of a culture, playthings or toys. He notes that "every culture has and plays a large number of games of different kinds" (Caillois, 2001:66). Some games are distinct within one cultural setting, while variants of other forms of play and games are shared by many. He intimates that with particular analysis it may be possible to understand the extent to which play and games reinforce or challenge the established values (and by implication here, value systems) of a culture.

There are other parallels from studies of children and childhood development. Gaskins et al (2007) argue that, as play varies so extensively across different cultures, it cannot be seen to predict universal outcomes. A follow on from this position might be to think of the manifestly different ways in which adults have been shaped by their play experiences when younger. Both of these examples give us a sense of how background and culture can inform how we feel about play.

Li, writing of factors affecting immigrant children's play offers an insight into cultural value systems and play:

> "Play can be an effective and natural way for immigrant children learn to socialize with children in their new country. On the other hand, differences in context, language, social norms and parental perceptions of play may create social conflicts among children in cross-cultural contexts (Li, 2017)."

Although Li writes of children here, similar differences may also be visible in terms of how play is viewed by different educational stakeholders; educators, students, managers and the parents of those studying. In higher education, different cultures may assume different positions with regard to the involvement of family in a student's university life. In China, for example, it may be normal for parents and university teachers to have contact to discuss a student's progress, whereas in UK universities a distance is established between the two.

Studies of culturally diverse forms of play exist, such Pang and Proyer's comparison of adult playfulness in Germany and China (2018). The authors make the same observation as I am minded to do in this study, which is that play and playfulness for adults seem largely to have been researched in Western cultures, and far less so in Eastern ones. Their conclusion that "societal rules and cultural factors may impact expressions of playfulness in a society" (ibid) can be reworded in this study to replace references to society with those to play in higher education.

Appreciating, and being responsive to, cultural differences stemming from influences including personal and sociocultural histories, has received much attention in contemporary Westernised universities. There have been successes and failures in this regard. The richness of opportunity that a culturally diverse classroom presents in bringing in new perspectives and experiences against which students can consider their own is one of its benefits. Among the causes, and symptoms, of problems have been the segregation of nationality groups, a clash of expectations, a sense of alienation and/or lack of comprehension with regard to unfamiliar behaviours and beliefs. In this study, participants both report instances of cultural difference which have capsized play experiences, as well as those which have built bridges and connection across cultural divides.

Differing educational cultures and playful pedagogy

Choice of pedagogy is also affected by national educational systems, structures and philosophies. Educators may feel that expectations of national government policy or their professional bodies curb the ability to teach and assess playfully. In some countries, such as Greece, tertiary institutions and colleges may have their assessment forms dictated by the state and therefore many teaching methods cater for examination. In other countries such as Pakistan[42], academics report that the focus of higher education policy in their area is on content, not on engagement or delivery. One correspondent based in Lahore wrote:

> I think I can safely report that there are individuals who employ playful learning techniques but there are very few. Usually limited to elitist institutions (could be that I have heard back from them more). Today I met a history teacher who makes her students make clay jewelry based on the historical Mughal motifs. Spoke to another who plays a song in every class and the rest of the discussion is based around that. I have already shared there are some who ask their students to make memes. Have spoken to people in law departments, they do engage in role playing exercises but they are not meant for creating fun. In retrospect, students might think of these as fun learning experiences. However, these are individuals who try to make their courses engaging and enjoyable for their students. They are very few. At the policy level, any such discourse is absent.

A seemingly low presence of playful pedagogies can be detected in other cultural contexts. I use the word 'seemingly' on purpose, given the following examples from East Asia. Xu (2021) observes that

> East Asia is never fully Westernised, cultural differences make it impossible to fully assimilate each other…East Asian higher education systems are resilient and are increasingly active in shaping their own agendas, working with not only global benchmarks but also national cultural models, e.g. pushbacks from academics, institutions and governments against the reproduction of Western supremacy.

This is not, she argues, to defend and persist with a polarisation of Western-centrism and East Asian-centrism, but to seek equal dialogue between them.

An interview with Tab Betts

I was interested to find out more about the experience of UK educators working in East Asian and non-Westernised countries to obtain their perspective on the presence of play in HE. I therefore raised the subject of play and cultural difference with Tab Betts, a Lecturer in Higher Education Pedagogy at the University of Sussex and a learning technology consultant. An educator who has worked extensively abroad in countries such as China, Cambodia and Nigeria, Tab also co-founded the Active Learning Network: a global community for revolutionising learning, with satellite groups in the UK, Ireland, Greece, Romania, Cambodia, Nigeria and China. His experience of play in Chinese universities which helps counterbalance commonly held assumptions about what certain kinds of students will and won't do; some of them well founded, others less so.

In Tab's experience, educators outside the UK express very different perspectives on its higher education. Some perceive a level of arrogance in the way members of UK universities see themselves as the gatekeepers and standard bearers for a 'superior' form of tertiary education. This includes their advocacy of certain approaches to pedagogy. With regard to play, he noted that while it may not be part of the accepted educational narrative in certain countries, it is much more present than credited; particularly in humour and playful behaviour. His view was that Chinese culture has play deeply embedded into it and that in keeping with some other non-Western cultures, many people in this context embrace, retain and display their inner child more, in ways that perhaps Westernised cultures have done less of.

While the dominant form of pedagogy may not be play-based, there is still a great deal of humour and playfulness, once students know they have permission to play. He suggests that Chinese culture balances two contradicting forces: one, a deep respect for high level rules and traditions and two, a playful streak which makes fun of rules. Tab has expertise in applied linguistics and language teaching and he observes that Chinese is an inherently playful language and that language teaching is a hugely playful field (as a former languages teacher I can agree). Technology and apps for chat and sharing multimedia, such as WeChat, provide opportunities to integrate play into the languages classroom, along with playful behaviours.

These two examples flag up the danger of making general assumptions and of the importance of appreciating different cultural and educational perspectives.

Playful teaching and dominant beliefs

Many participants in this study (particularly in Australia, the UK and the USA) felt that certain beliefs had come to dominate approaches to education in their countries. Some voiced concern at a perceived over-reliance on outcomes-based and metrics-driven approaches to teaching and learning.

In recent years the use of learning analytics to gather data about how students are doing at university has been widely adopted, albeit to varying degrees. Such analytics are used to identify factors which support or detract from student retention and success. Curricula have been shaped around the conclusions drawn from such data. There have been similar projects with regard to the concept of learning gain[43]; with several studies launched in the UK to see how evidence may be gathered of growth in student skill, understanding, knowledge and capability. These have had mixed outcomes.

Opinion is also divided between those who find learning analytics a rich and effective means of seeing how well things are working, and those who feel they don't necessarily give a full picture of student learning, or can be 'gamed' to tell the story that is desired. Some see their use as an effective means of monitoring and gathering information about student activity, others as an invasive, 'Big Brother' ish method of scrutinising their behaviours and movements. Some believe analysing data in this way supports

students reach their potential, others feel it weakens their sense of personal agency and responsibility.

Others still are unconvinced that learning analytics reveal everything that is important for student success, but are at least disposed to work with the situation they find themselves in educationally. Bamber (2020) is one who concludes that, however flawed metrics may be, it is worth academics making their peace with them as they will continue to inform the basis of decision-making for the future. Others are concerned that a dominant metrics-based culture excludes pedagogic or scholarly approaches which do not fit its measurement moulds. This includes prioritising certain kinds of evidence and overlooking others, thereby missing the softer or fuzzier indicators of positive experiences. Along with debate over metrics and analytics, learning outcomes can be similarly controversial. They are either accepted as being useful and specific ways to indicate what a student will know or be able to do at the end of a module, or decried as straitjackets which corral how learning is prized and recognised. Sally Brown (2019) is one who challenges highly proscribed types of learning outcomes and offers a different, looser model.

I offer the following parable as a note of caution towards any means of pedagogical evaluation which is too narrow and rigid in its focus.

Are there still foxes?

Last year when we moved to the country I hung a wildlife camera in the woodland edging the garden. All last summer it captured two foxes wandering through. One had a wonky brush, the other a bushy one, and it pleased me to be able to tell them apart. I watched them stroll, sit, wash, scratch; come home or go hunting or just amble around. They were with us for several months, until November 22nd, which was the last time I saw them. For the next two months I tried to find them. I was worried about farmers shooting them as pests, or the adverse weather affecting their survival. All video footage ceased. The wildlife camera just seemed to capture flapping leaves and the odd rabbit. This really worried me as I had been depending on the visual evidence of their presence to reassure me they were still there.

After Christmas I started moving the cameras around to different sites, trying to second guess a potential path through the garden, sneaking the camera behind a hedge for a trick shot. Nothing. And yet occasionally, right on the lawn near the camera siting, I found traces of their presence, in little piles. These suggested to me they were still visiting but because I could not capture the image, I doubted whether such signs counted. The little piles could have belonged to the fox - but what if they were really from another animal? Finally, at the end of January I rehomed the camera in the spinney, where it had been last summer, and gave up. Early one morning, as I gazed outside I saw a flash of orange cross behind the shrubbery and slip into the trees. A fox had returned, and doubling my joy, had kindly made an appearance on the wildlifecam.

Shakespeare this is not. However I offer it as an analogy for any situation where we insist on prioritising evidence from particular sources and ignoring any signs outside those means which might provide further illumination. In my case, these told me that the foxes were still coming through, I just wanted visual proof. Ha! I hear you say. You are evidence driven, just like everyone else. And yes, I am to an extent. It is nice to have corroboration of what you think you know. However, I wrote this tale (no foxy pun intended) as a nudge to heed and trust the signs around us, even when they don't arrive in a prescribed form or exactly on schedule.

The fox parable can be read with regard to many things; cultural difference, pedagogic approach, methods of evaluation among them. It can also be an analogy for the times when achievement is only recognised if it fits a traditional mode of assessment, as opposed to - say - a playful one.

There are other things which academics feel differently about which may also influence whether or not playful learning is welcomed within an institution. One relates to what it means to be a university. Some academics in Westernised countries have expressed fears that employability driven models have reduced educational thinking to the belief that goals and purpose have to dominate life, rather than count for a part of what is valuable in it. This is further reflected in the now commonplace references to the university as a business; with commercial terminology replacing academic terms. Students are customers, courses are products, learning is commodifiable. This does not matter to those who believe this is simply an accurate reflection of the situation; universities sell goods and services and operate within a market economy. Others are dismayed at the erosion of the distinctiveness of academia. In the powerfully named *Excellence Without A Soul* (2007) Harry Lewis, former Dean of Harvard College, laments what he perceives to be the loss of educational mission of this esteemed institution.

While many institutions have advocated for engaged, interactive and student-centred modes of learning over the last 30 years, ways of teaching which prioritise the transmission of knowledge are still widespread. These fit what Freire (1970) famously described as the 'banking' concept of education; that knowledge is handed over intact, like a parcel from deliverer to recipient. 26 years after Freire Readings noted that "As Fichte put it, the University exists not to teach information but to inculcate the exercise of critical judgement" (1996:6). While teaching in all disciplines may need some element of 'handing over', considerable research by eminent pedagogues (Papert, Bruner) and creativity experts (Robinson) has long shown that transmission alone is an ineffective way to educate.

Readings also argued that the university has become "a corporation, one of whose functions (products?) is the granting of degrees with a cultural cachet" (1996:11). This domination - doing something because it achieves X for us - is seen to crush out creativity, curiosity, richness, variation, novelty and autonomy in learning experiences and

in student learning approaches. These are precisely the elements which participants in this study say are enriched by play.

Participant views on cultural difference and playful pedagogy

Participants shared their experiences of working in other countries on satellite campuses of Westernised universities, or teaching as 'flying faculty' outside their own country of work. In the main they felt that play was not a usual mode of teaching and learning, but was more likely to be present/adopted in the overseas branches of such universities, rather than national institutions. Respondents working on teacher development in Central Asian countries suggest that it is through these partnerships that playful teaching is being introduced as part of university pedagogy. Parallel formal initiatives include the Creative Spark programme run by the British Council. On a less formal level the introduction of play and creativity may take place indirectly through events, activities and communities which bear other names, such as the cultural and creativity hubs in Vietnam. While these lie outside the university sphere, they can link to other examples of partnership initiatives, such as the creativity exhibition held in Vietnam, convened by students and staff at RMIT, and illustrated in the vignettes.

In some cases it is suggested that the lack of play stems from a deep respect for teachers and teaching and the belief that if time-honoured traditions have dictated how knowledge is shared then they must be the right way. One respondent also noted how assiduous students from certain countries are, and their nervousness of doing the wrong thing:

> "[with] private school, high tuition fees, you have more and more students who need to have the degree...they are already part of their parent's company, they earn money, they often have a very standard management think behind them...it's very especially students from Asia I think, apart from maybe Singapore and HK - you could open the management textbook and you would see that they know every single word on that page. And I find it sometimes very sad because they are very smart and hardworking. But they put on this traditional management thinking and they are very scared to break out from that (TVOP IV 34)."

Considerations with cultural difference and play

From the participant interviews there were numerous comments to do with cultural difference and play. These must be appraised as individual perceptions, rather than global assertions. However, nearly all of them raise important considerations around the kind of pre-thinking, awareness, alertness and sensitivity that must be brought to bear in educational play to avoid harm, offence or exclusion.

Some of the comments made by participants related to cultural sensitivity; being cautious

over prizes ("not all jelly sweets are halal") or the ramifications of metaphors that might be used in lectures and conversation (e.g. students perceiving these as literal, or not relating to them).

Others related to familiarity and play traditions:

> "Some of the challenges are possibly cultural – getting students in the classroom for example who haven't ever seen playdoh, have not ever seen LEGO®, haven't played with it, they might have heard of it , but they have not touched it and then we find all of a sudden that somebody might feel much uncomfortable than we thought."

(Conversely, I have had the experience of running LEGO®-based classes with Foundation students in purely international cohorts and finding they adjusted very readily to new ways of communicating and thinking.)

Others noted that play can compensate for times when linguistic communication is limited or less than perfect. In one case this was seen in the feeling that students get after an activity has taken place; they may not have been entirely sure what to do when the instructions were given but as it unfolded and they watched what others were doing and got some feedback on their own actions it all made more sense.

Another noted that having a tactile learning experience, instead of sitting and taking notes, was extremely important in multicultural classes. This respondent cited the example of an elective for students, with 30 people for whom English was a second language. Play was important for crossing the language divide, as suggested in the previous example and also took them from quantitative disciplines like statistics and finance into a very different creative qualitative arena (TVOP IV 38)

Playing across time and cultural zones was a particular design feature of the next example:

> "I did something with students from Spain in the USA a couple of years ago whereby they had to engage in multinational teams to accomplish a common task,. There was not a lot of play there but it was a lot of experiential learning to the extent that they had to cope with time zones, different time zones, different cultures and come up with a collaborative effort to do something in the team, even though they have not met each other in person before...[we] can add some play elements into these...something I would like to do more in the future...so this is something that I would like to encourage ...the cross cultural and cross border team activities, whereby students can actually engage with each other to conduct or to play a business simulation or to play a board game (TVOP IV 41)."

From these few positions and comments it is unwise to draw grand conclusions about play in higher education around the world. However they provide some indications of the ways different learning cultures may engage with play, express play and value it differently to those with which an educator may be familiar.

How do educators perceive value in play?

> I think that play is essential to teach anything but especially serious topics or more concrete concepts in learning. I think that including play on a consistent basis actually leads students to relax and be in a better place to receive the material when they are ready (Survey respondent, USA).

From survey and interview responses particular forms of value were identified and repeated by numerous participants. These are each set out in the following sections.

Value as rated in the gateway survey

After giving information as to their understanding, awareness and use of play, participants were invited to select as many types of play value as they liked from a list of 18 categories. These were chosen as some of the most common motifs (although by no means all) found in play literature and theory, as well as those encountered by the researcher in other previous experiences. They include reference to motifs contained within Sutton-Smith's Seven Rhetorics; those "persuasive discourses" about the nature, function and importance of play. There was then an opportunity for respondents to comment further or suggest missing forms.

The table below summarises how respondents selected an answer to complete the sentence "playful and play based approaches have value in HE because they relate to..." The percentage of responses given is of the total number of positive ratings (strongly/ agree) for a snapshot view. This also indicates the number of respondents for each answer, as this varied.

End phrase	Pilot Survey	Main Survey
...having enjoyable experiences	100%	97.2%
...the progress & development of the learner	100%	95.2%
...our responses to fate, chance, luck serendipity forces beyond our control	85.7%	64.1%
...how we navigate power dynamics and relationships	100%	82.5%
...matters of community identity	85.7%	75%
...use and exploration of the imagination and fantasy	100%	88.4%
...knowledge and expression of the self...	100%	93.2%
...allowing for and exploring disorder, frivolity and nonsense	100%	80.6%
...making space for freedom and experimentation	100%	97.1%
...fostering innovation and creativity	100%	98.1%,
...bonding and socialization	57.9%	96.1%
...resolution of conflict	85.7%	70.2%
...expending surplus energy	85.7%	63.60%

End phrase	Pilot Survey	Main Survey
...relaxing people	71.4%	75.9%
...generating positive mood states	100%	90.3%
...helping people adapt	100%	83.5%
...matters of reward and recognition	71.4%	57.7%
...survival	71.4%	39.4%

Figure G22. Table summarising participant endorsement of forms of play value

As with a previous table including two data sets, these results are shared to illustrate some interesting possibilities, not to make a direct comparison between the two.

All sets of responses in the pilot survey saw extremely high positive scores, and most of them in the main survey. This suggests that all forms of value are seen as relevant to play in higher education. Four of the scores in the main survey saw slightly lower positives; two - fate and energy expenditure - scored in the 60%s, while reward scored in the 50%s. The one exception to a positive rating was survival, which scored in the high 30%s. This is something which is given its own special scrutiny later, in combination with wellbeing.

In the pilot survey bonding and socialization was the lowest scoring form of value. It was a strange result to see however, as in many other contexts bonding and socialization often score highly as forms of value. However, the pilot survey only involved a small number of people, and their answers are not necessarily representative. There might also be another explanation for their answers; while bonding and socialization are seen as important benefits of play, some pilot respondents may have been focussing on other forms of benefit in the classroom and seeing bonding as more relevant for outside it. In interviews, for example, respondents felt that bonding through play was an important precursor to learning. Given that there were significantly more respondents in the main survey, where bonding and socialization were deemed important by almost all respondents, it may be tempting to conclude that its answers are more indicative.

The importance of enjoyment and fun is underscored; something which is corroborated by participants in Barnett's study of fun (2021) in which a contributor observed that while fun can't be forced it is a part of our 'intrinsic values". One participant did note that play may not be fun in the moment. Rather the act of play may be very serious and the feelings of fun can come later (Survey respondent, Military Leadership, USA).

In addition, each of the end phrases can house any number of play examples which increases the potential for value.

Respondents confirmed particular aspects of value, sometimes in multiple combinations e.g. knowledge of self, how to navigate power and how to create community. Numerous comments referred to aspects of the Rhetorics.[44] (It was interesting, however, to see several respondents comment that learning had been omitted from the list, although the researcher had assumed it would be encompassed by Progress and Development.)

Some simply confirmed that the entire list of forms of value was relevant. This sentiment was expressed by a main survey respondent who commented “All of them relate very strong [sic] with my developing values and philosophy towards teaching and management”. Comments relating to a particular aspect of value from the list included play:

- helping you be your true self
- helping to improve mood and adaptability (including in some management research, according to one respondent)
- surfacing links between the self and social dynamics, not only in relation to management theory but also to metacognitive skills
- Illustrating a shift in authority from instructors to students

Progress and development was touched on multiple times as learning, (alone or in teams), grappling with abstract concepts through metaphor and story and three dimensional creation, as retrieval practice, and enhancement of learner confidence and memory; improving knowledge of a topic.

There may also have been reasons which affected whether or not a respondent selected a particular form of value, such as:

1. it not being relevant within their disciplinary context. For example in animal behaviour or early years perhaps the reference to expending surplus energy makes more sense than in accounting or engineering
2. without additional information for the statements of value the terminology may have seemed a little odd. Seeing reward or survival listed without additional explanation may not provide sufficient supporting information for respondents to feel they can comment (See also preceding endnote)

Forms of value from semi-structured interviews

All of the forms of value which were identified in the gateway surveys were echoed by participants in interviews, including by those who had not taken part in the initial survey. The following groupings are synthesised from individual responses and echo some of the reasons already voiced as to why play is important.

1. **As part of a congenial and effective learning environment**

- for positive reinforcement
- consolidating /confirming what students know and understand in a unique way
- experiencing failure in a safe space
- play as a form of mnemonics can help students remember what they have learned
- experimenting with risk taking
- exploring and understanding ethics

- for communicating threshold topics
- breaking down complex issues into parts

This example was cited to show how play can add value to the consolidation of learning:

> “[I am] using an online platform called Redgrasp that sends out a question of the day by email. Students answer these questions in teams to gain points and based, working towards an eventual “End of Campaign Prize”! After answering each question, students get feedback on how others have answered and a short explanation of the correct answer. They are then directed to interactive videos and other constructively aligned learning content on their virtual learning environment, thus creating a learning loop (TVOP IV 33)”

2. **Within this learning environment, supporting relationship and cohesion:**

- feeling part of something
- meeting the needs of a diverse group
- seeing and valuing the perspectives of others
- breaking down power balances and hierarchies

3. **As part of these human aspects fostering qualities in learners:**

- mobilising intuition
- supporting the affective domain of learning
- revealing learning talents and preferences
- creating trust and psychological safety
- expressing the unconscious
- learning about playing well with others
- engendering mindfulness
- intrinsic motivation

> “in my recent study I saw that play increased students’ intrinsic motivation so I, as a faculty, didn’t have to work as hard for them to learn - they took the learning upon themselves and worked hard to learn and teach each other (Survey respondent, Clinical Counselling, USA).”

In this quote motivation is intertwined with activities which make things memorable - another repeated motif in surveys, literature and interviews.

> “It is the part of my job which gets me out of bed and into work enthusiastically every day. I also know that I learnt best throughout my learning journey by doing things, trying things, acting things out, making mistakes. These are the things which I remember (Survey respondent, Health Sciences, UK).”

There were two more which I have not grouped in the above, as they both relate to the groups and yet also can stand alone. The first is:

- play being valued for play's sake, without a purpose or end goal; enjoyment of the play is sufficient reason to participate

While institutions may argue that they make space for free exploration, sometimes there can be a kind of double speak going on. This can cause unease in higher education, not least because the idea of allowing play with no specified outcome may smack of irresponsibility. A counterposition to this is well understood in art and design. Studio experimentation and playing with materials, techniques, concepts are all part of mastering capabilities and creating original or unique works (at any level from amateur tinkerer to potential Botticelli). It is also a slightly rebellious notion that several respondents in this study support; having the faith and the nerve to provide free and empty learning spaces and inviting students to co-navigate these with the educator.

Educators are torn between not wanting to spoon feed students, while also struggling against time pressures and - in some, but not all, cases - student passivity. They struggle to fulfil their desire to enable students to become independent, autonomous, capable, critical thinkers while working within institutional structures (driven by government policy) evoking the production line or sausage factory. Some of them sense a student expectation that if they have paid money for their education they are owed an excellent outcome, regardless of effort. Anecdotal evidence suggests this might be more visible in countries where the shift to fee-based higher education is relatively new (such as the UK), as opposed to those in which it has always been the norm (such as the USA).

The second is:

- playing with rules as part of (positive) subversive and disruptive practices, challenging systems

This point is about playing with regulations, procedures and authority structures, as well as 'the way we do things round here'. This must not be confused with academic misconduct, such as plagiarism and cheating, for which students are hauled up in front of academic disciplinary panels. Nor does it relate to behaviours which destroy play itself, but rather to a challenging of expectations that subverts and gets round rules, or reinvents them, sometimes in companion with the other players.

Forms of value and management education

In addition to the forms of value cited in the preceding section, educators also made these comments with regard to management education.

1. Play has value in critique:

> I do think that play can be fruitfully used to examine management theories and patterns, but mainly from a critical perspective, highlighting the negative consequences of power and information imbalances. (Survey respondent, Research Fellow UK)

2. Play has value in ideation:

> "Ideation is an activity that often goes wrong in business, yet is critical to innovation and success. Typically, the participants are the cause of their own failure as they struggle to participate fully and as a team. Playing with scenarios allows teams to see the benefits of 'good ideation', allowing them to then approach the real challenge with a much better mindset (Survey respondent, MBA, Management, Marketing, UK)."

3. Play is a means to an end, but not the end in itself

As one respondent put it,

> "For me, it is a tool to help find the answers. The play itself isn't the answer, it just helps find the right questions (Survey respondent, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Australia)."

There were two further questions in the next section of the survey, relating to thought hitherto given to the value of play and any strong relationship between their answers and play in management education. Of the seven respondents in the pilot survey one said that they had not thought much about the value of play prior to engaging with the study. Of 102 main survey responses for this question 32 said they had not thought much about play (31%) and 70 (68.6%) said this was not the case. These answers suggest that conducting the survey had encouraged respondents to engage in such thinking, while already many educators are already reflecting on the value of play.

Six respondents in the pilot survey said that their answers related strongly to management education. In the main survey 43 respondents said their answers about value related specifically to management education, whereas 58 said they did not. Respondents who had answered that their answers related strongly to play with management theories and concepts were asked to elaborate further. Some did so with examples, and these have been included in the section on Types of Play in Management Education. Other comments which related to value are illustrated below:

One implied value in terms of it being a means to test out theory:

> "When using theories I find that role-playing can either prove or disprove the theory for the people involved (Survey respondent, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Australia)."

Two respondents offered observations which illustrated the complexity and interrelatedness of forms of play, its value, contexts and connected activities. This from one of them:

> I work at a leadership school, and many of the lessons we teach relate to management and interpersonal skills. Our school employs lots of experiential learning: games, puzzles, physical challenges. In observing my students, there are countless examples of all of the things listed above and as faculty we use that shared experience to allow students to reflect on what they've learned, how they're applying it, and how it relates to their personal growth. So yes, play relates strongly to the teaching of management. It's learning by doing (in a safe environment) (Survey respondent, Leadership, USA).

This particular quote neatly draws together a number of features of play while also using language which brings together diverse terms to describe it. While games and play appear in separate sentences, games are also seen as part of experiential learning. As we have seen, this is a positively regarded term which is sometimes used instead of play, and sometimes deliberately, to avoid any diminishing of the perception of the activity.

One respondent specialising in LEGO® Serious Play®, gaming and wargaming for diverse US institutions remarked:

> In the three multi-day LSP workshops we've facilitated, we've seen an interesting array of willingness and openness to the idea of play=work. Those who are already playful, creative, and innovative, enjoy the method, while others don't seem to enjoy it or value it (Survey respondent, specialising in gaming/wargaming, USA).

This suggests that disposition is key to engaging positively with play, and it is through this disposition that play will have value. For educators writing outside the study such as Walsh (2019) it is how play is introduced to players that is key to them either developing a welcoming, open disposition, or running for the hills.

Educator values and the value of play

The closing question of the interviews asked participants what their values were as educators and how play aligned with these. It was a question which took many by surprise and a little time to articulate their thoughts; however, many commented on how useful the process of reflection was. In asking it, I was interested to see if there was any relationship between play and educator self-perception and to understand the significance of play within their educational philosophy. The strength of the interconnection between the two in their answers was striking.
These can be grouped into three categories:

1. the qualities that educators want to possess and live up to
2. the qualities and capabilities they want to engender in their students
3. what they want to achieve through playful education

While certain values relate to teaching and education, the vast majority of responses

refer to human wellbeing and flourishing in some way. The following sections provide an illustration of some aspects of each of these three. In providing these I want to stress I am not suggesting playful educators are the first and only ones to aspire to these things. All good educators will seek to engender qualities, dispositions and capabilities in themselves and others, whether or not they achieve them with play. Here these are notable because they are seen by study participants as being enhanced by play.

1. Qualities of educators[45]

Respondents aspire to being

- *trustworthy*

"I want students to see me as someone they can trust"

- *ethical and respectful*

"In play you need to respect the individual, you need to be ethical, to have a moral guide and values…"

- *spontaneous, flexible; innovative, inspiring (and inspiring innovation)*

"being able to be spontaneous, adapt and innovate and still be able to work with the jokers or sceptics"
"challenge and inspire people to innovate. I've got to be able to get ideas, I've got to use different modes to do that."
"to be an innovator- show my students new opportunities and new ways"

- *themselves*

"at the heart of what we do I think we need to be ourselves. Honesty is really important for me, honesty in who you are, not what you want other people to think"

- *open*

"if a member of faculty said I want to try this I'm quite happy to say ok let's give it a go and we can measure the outcome: I think there's a real openness to these methods within, well, across the business school"
"If you'd said to me 20 years ago we're going input these little bits of play in you your engineering program…uhhhhh no you're not…it's not going to work…by a lot of learning, by seeing what people are doing, it's changed my attitude and the way I react and work with people a lot, just by seeing how it's affected other people"

- *authentic and humble*

"and knowing you don't have all the answers for students and knowing you are there to learn alongside them and you're trying to be a guide. You're human, you're real."

- *a role model*

"I want to be a role model for my profession"

- *there for students*

"I always want to learn from students and want them to know I am there for them"
"[to] point them in the right direction, be there for them to ask questions and the role of play in that is that I think it breaks down those barriers with students, you know, they really love it"

- *responsive and approachable*

"I want to be very, very responsive to students so they feel like they can come and ask me questions and feel that they're listened to."
"being approachable. If a student's not understanding a concept I want them to know that they can come to me and not be ridiculed"
"I think what I really try to prioritise is approachability. I think learning can be a very vulnerable experience."

2. What they want to engender in their students

- *agency and empowerment*

"I've been working in education more or less since I graduated 12 years or so ago and the one thing that was always key was this notion of agency and empowerment. And to me that is really a very, very fundamental purpose of education in the first place. Like, what I really want to do is provide people with the skills and competencies and knowledge and everything to become a good human being who can act and have the confidence that is required to make choices and speak up and do things because they know they have a say in the way the world is shaping up"
"I'm a critical pedagogue so I'm all about Paolo Freire and bell hooks. I love the idea of empowering students and I think play does that"
"create a learning space rather than tell people what to learn"

Other aspects of agency that they cite include not having one person setting the rules, allowing students to set them for themselves; using play so players can explore how to start thinking for themselves.

- *courage*

"Things don't always work…you tried something and that's courage…"
"I think that's a really important value that the students are brave enough to put their hand up, answer questions, doesn't matter if its wrong, which is a very rare thing because students don't want to do that anymore […] they don't want to hand something in unless it's been checked"

"Everything I do is founded on play values. Stepping out of your comfort zone, not being afraid to fail, trying things, if you don't succeed trying again, building resilience"

- *creativity*

"people often say you can't force creativity but equally if you don't ever give it time then you're not gonna be creative"
"to have medical students realise they are creative beings and they are capable of thinking creatively and being creative and often the process is more revealing than the product"

- *freedom and discovery*

"my values as an educator are about discovery, that learning is about discovery, about possibility, and once the lights go on the list is endless about what you can teach…"
"Play for discovery…what you might find rather than you're on a thing to find something."
"free individuals to be themselves and experiment and take risks and try something different and that happens quite nicely with objects as well"
"The greatest innovators and thinkers are the people who free themselves from convention; they don't think in conventional ways, they're not constrained by the metaphors we use to explain things"

- *how to handle the random or unforeseen*

Many examples relate to dealing with uncertainty, unpredictability; with no time to plan or with no/incomplete information or no prior experience/blueprint for what to do.

"students are not exposed to random circumstances. They very rarely trip up - everything has been within their control and there has been very little opportunity for feeling disadvantaged by their circumstances" (on high achieving students in prestigious UK university)
"Play allows you to cater for the elements that get lost in formal settings"

3. What they want to achieve through playful education

A creative, positive and effective learning environment in which they can

- *help students formulate thoughts, ideas, decisions*

"I use fun and playfulness to actually develop the thinking style"
"I think they have to play to change idea"(sic)

  - For professional relevance - thinking on your feet, lateral thinking and risk taking all part of the medical profession
  - To come up with ideas, expand ideas

"in order to frame and reframe the problem and get out of our current thinking and the thinking that got us into this problem or the way we are typically trained to think. To get out of that I think we need play because it is about finding the problem, not the answer. In a way you can go back to double loop learning or triple loop learning"
"You have to think on your feet in the medical profession and it's about lateral thinking and risk taking"
"[the] frontal lobe is the gatekeeper to all ideas - is this practical/not practical - the subconscious mind working at a higher order of magnitude than the conscious mind - it's working around thinking of ideas. If you feed it lots of ideas and possibilities it will be rearranging and working those things if that's what you are telling it do - you need to switch it off or distract it so you can allow your ideas to come out and repetitive tasks are a means of doing that"

Several referred to the links between design thinking and play;

"that's very much a playful endeavour where we're playing with wild ideas"

- *support the common good*

"this is about utilising play and playful practices that can help us all grow in a positive way and contribute to society, make new discoveries for the social good"
"Being a catalyst for character and community"
"My biggest goal is the success of my students. All my work that I do is with this in my mind. ...the great value is [inspiring] the big values in society through my students through new ideas"

- *make sure no one is left behind*

"I don't want anyone to be left behind. Teaching the subjects I struggled with myself in different ways, having an appreciation of the difficulties that students face"

- *help students develop strategies to cope with adversity*

"Play fits with my values as an educator to the extent that when you play you fail and sometimes you succeed and as an educator you need to actually teach students how to cope with adverse circumstances."

- *kindle a love of learning; share passion*

"I want that they know how beautiful is mathematics" (sic)
"I want students to go away with a love of learning. I strongly feel that a lot of our students haven't got a love of learning, it's been kicked out of them at school and they're all about learning for an assessment and I want them to learn for the joy of learning. So that's where the playfulness comes in, trying to get them loving learning again, rather than learning to get a grade or pick a module...you've got to

find joy from it and interest from it, rather than just doing it as a chore"
"My job here is to make sure that people want to turn up, want to learn and are excited about what they learn. I don't want to do that for any agenda... it's important that we are not complacent."
"when I realised how passionate I was about online games I realised if I could transfer that passion into learning and teaching for our students it'll be extremely beneficial for the students. So I started looking into ways of engaging students in a more playful manner."

- *help students understand the subject*

"Play helps you become not just a better engineer but helps you understand the problems as they are going along"
"Students have to understand that finance is actually part of every decision that you have to make"
"I think also that play can convince students that maths can be used in a very creative way, not only tools to solve equations but to learn to read the world around them"

- *create connection*

"I think my values are...helping people make connections with others, but not in like a 'oh, let's network way, but genuine connections which are based on understanding each other, recognising barriers"
"The important connection between the personal and the collaborative and our own identity question of who we are...a nice phrase comes to mind from Parker Palmer "reconnecting who we are with what we do"[46]
"It is also part of the professional requirements: "Journalism is playful because you have to build relationships with people really quickly...the way you use language, the way you connect with people"
"A creative idea is to connect two neural pathways in your brain that have never been connected before and it may or may not work but can create a new neural pathway"
"[about] effort and creativity.. If you don't know about this thing you won't connect it to this one...the more you understand the problem the more effort you put into researching it the more likely you are to make those good connections that will inspire something that nobody's ever seen before"
"I wanted them to resonate with the content on a deeper level than just memorising what they thought they needed to memorise"

- *see, celebrate and make a difference*

"not necessarily getting rid of barriers but recognising that they are, how they can overcome them, how they can get round them, and understanding difference and actually celebrating difference."
"You can make a massive difference to people's lives, not just in the context of the organisation but in terms of their whole lives. They will take some of the learning

into their homes lives, their personal lives and it changes an awful lot”
“I work in educational development because I want to help people make a difference and see things differently and build on new opportunities. I got into that through working with technology; technology’s a lot of play.”
“One of my core values in life is making a difference and creativity and play enables you to do that in so many different ways and I think as an educator that manifests itself in - obviously you’re making a difference to your students, but you’re making a difference to your peers as well …you can take a step out and experiment and think differently and the benefits of doing that and the results you get are so worth it…”
“ just trying to get people to realise that there’s different perspectives here, there’s different ways of looking, there’s not just your way of doing it….help people accept who they are, but also accept who other people are and recognise those differences are important and valid and the basis of team working and leadership”

- *offer a proper education*

“A proper education, listening dialogue, cocreation, collaboration, going on an adventure together”

- *appreciate process, not just outcome*

“I come back to it again, the importance of process as opposed to a complete focus on the outcome of the journey and how we get somewhere”

- *help students become improved versions of themselves*

“The master apprentice relationship. Not that you become a copy of your master but rather an improved version of yourself…’this is what you do through the senses, not only through the intellect, but also through the senses. So it’s not only about you know certain concepts that you develop together with your master but also mannerisms, styles of how to write a paper that somebody can hear your voice through’…”
“Sometimes I think my values as an educator do not fit the values of the HE business these days, because my values are about enabling students to transform themselves and how they transform themselves is up to them…it’s not about can they get the best paying jobs so we can go up the ranking slightly, or do they even finish? What do students see as important? Who do they want to afterwards? [My job is preparing students for] inhabiting a future them…”
“I like to help people become better at whatever it is they do…”
“Developing people in whatever context”
“Student centred learning. What are their biggest ambitions and fears and hopes and dreams and trying to tap into that a bit in the classroom and trying to make sure that the students understand that it’s really important and it’s not just about knowledge, it’s about change, it’s about transformation to me that’s really at the heart of my values as a teacher”

- *protect and create psychological safety*

Psychological safety came up in many responses as important for all kinds of aspects of classroom learning. In some cases it can be particularly tied to sensitive or difficult subjects, as in this example regarding marketing for social change:
“People doing campaigns on suicide prevention, euthanasia abortion organ donation blood donation.”. Play creates a safety net - using fixed play space or games - which mean at the end of the game it’s all over and participants can return to their normal way of being.
“play gives me a lot of chances to give them a safe space to experiment”

- *entertain students while learning*

“My first role is to educate…ensure that information is either disseminated or gained. Second is engagement I want to make sure that while they are doing that they have a good time…Play fits in very much in terms of that knowledge attainment.”

- *inspire and motivate*

“My fundamental value is that I want to inspire and anything that I can do to inspire students and keep them motivated”

- *create opportunities for multisensory learning*

“My biggest value is that there’s more than just knowledge transfer, like words to someone’s brain, it’s also a sensory experience. …that your body is learning, different parts of your mind are learning, so when you put those all; together then you have real comprehension. Play is learning on multiple dimensions.”
“How we learn and us having a real stake in that, linked with who we are”
“Being dyslexic I’m more prone to being more creative and trying things because I don’t remember the sequencing of orders and things so I am always having to create new things”

- *make learning memorable*

“if you are taught and you’re asked a question in an exam you may well remember what was taught in that session and you answer the question and you move on. But if you’re doing it in a game it’s something that becomes embedded”

- *breathe life into teaching*

The metaphor of life, and of the difference between ‘alive’ and ‘dead’ teaching and learning also recurred across responses. It resonates with some of the other values and also reasons why educators came to use play in the first place.
“…for me, the whole idea of play is a room has got a certain level of life in it, and once a room goes to a certain amount of dead, then I think if you don’t get life into it, then no learning will occur. So, I’m always thinking how much life is in the room right now and what do I need to do? If the room goes dead and I’m halfway

through my lecture, I'll stop the lecture and I'll go, you know, let's just jump into the play now or let's jump into something"
"What I want to do is kind of bring it to life and give then talking points and you know play is so great for that"

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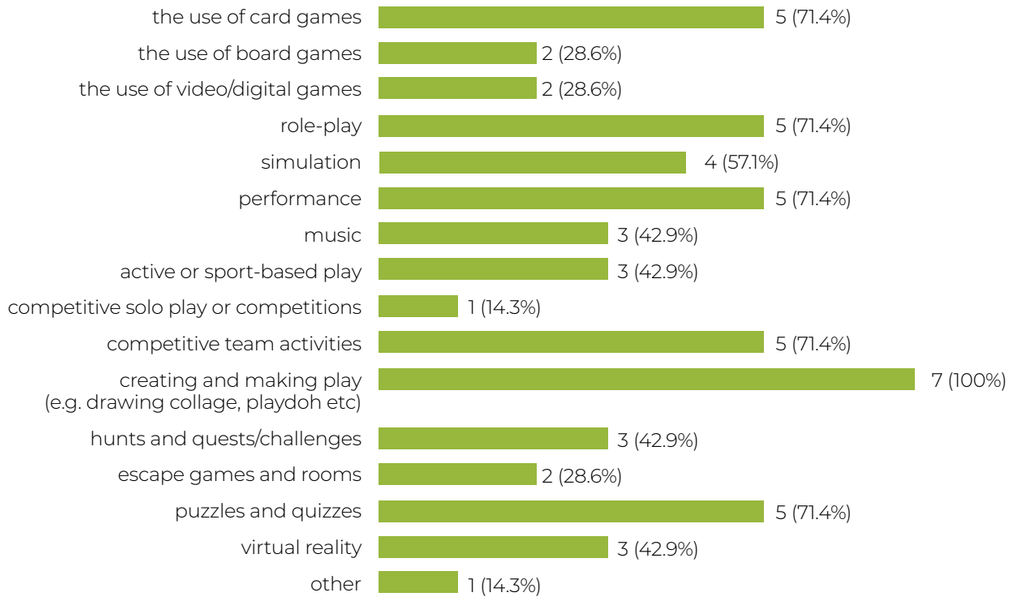
A number of things stand out from this long list of educator aspirations and values. There is a strong thread running through them about being an ethical, caring, committed human being with a desire to serve others and build community. Social justice, as well as academic capability, is writ large. Their commitment to being good teachers and role models is palpable.

Together with, and beyond, all of these statements we may argue that the choice to play is a statement of value in itself. At some point, for whatever reason, in whatever situation, an educator has decided that a form of play or playfulness is the most fitting way to proceed. As part of an endeavour, to stand back from one, instead of one; to pause, to breathe, to change up the energy, to shake up the mind. This choice will be driven by a degree of positive intent: no one in this study was likely to put themselves through the effort to devise a playful experience if they felt it had no merit. They have neither the time nor the resources for that. What they are prepared to do is to take the risk that things of which they had high hopes may falter, while others of which they had low expectations may succeed.

These expression of educator values offer inspiring witness to how and why they use play to support learning in higher education. Here, in synthesis and in complement, are some student voices on the value of play in HE.

Student survey and perceptions of value

As already noted, there was a low response to the separate student survey, with eight respondents from the UK and Denmark. Their subject areas were TESOL[48], modern languages, philosophy and design for play. None came from management education. Here I pull out key answers with regard to their experiences of play and perceptions of use and value.



Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)

Figure G23. Table summarising student experiences of educational play

Interestingly, three respondents indicated in the next question that they had never encountered play or playful learning at university, which seems something of a contradiction. This suggests to me that perhaps my wording was too loose and that some of these had been encountered at school or college. One respondent noted that:

> "Differentiating instruction is promoted in levels K-12, then adults are made to suffer in a 'one size fits all' condition. But [what] happens to the children that grow up and want to attend universities?"

Another alluded to the variations within the university experience:

> "This questionnaire is challenging because my Masters program was brilliant in that we were taught to use play and played to learn concepts along with creative learning methods. However, my doctoral candidacy/EdD is the complete opposite and has no place for play."

They were then asked a series of questions completing the sentence "In my experience play has helped me...Their answers are summarised in the following table.

Endphrase	Not at all	A little	Well	Very well	Brilliantly
...build my knowledge (of a subject or concept)	0	2	2	1	2
...develop practical/physical skills and capabilities	0	3	2	0	2
...develop mental skills and abilities	0	2	3	0	2
...handle a situation or task with incomplete information	1	1	3	0	2
...deal with the unknown or uncertain	0	1	3	1	2
...develop personal qualities	0	2	2	1	2
...be more creative	0	1	1	1	4
...have the courage to do things differently	0	1	1	1	4
...build relationships	0	1	2	1	3
...work in a team	0	1	2	2	2
...feel like I belong	0	1	5	0	1
...get to know people	0	2	2	2	1
...relax and have fun	0	1	2	0	4

Figure G24. Student views of the value of play in educational contexts

The highest scoring responses in the above ratings are for the value of play in helping students feel like they belong, be more creative and have the courage to do things differently, as well as relax and have fun. The first of these will be important when we look at play for survival and wellbeing later.

Additional comments on the use and value of play also echoed educator views and included:

> Play has definitely helped me to be more engaged in the work that I'm doing, it mainly makes it fun and interesting which then allows for better concentration and focus along with all the benefits above.

> Yes, makes learning more fun & interactive and uses the creative parts of the brain as well as the learning theories/ concepts parts. Helps to make theory more memorable if engaging with it in a creative way. But it would involve lecturers having to come up with creative ideas of how to present theory and create activities, which can be time-consuming.

> Yes, I think it's really important because it helps students enjoy their learning more and get more out of university. It encourages creativity and problem-solving, which are also really important in the workplace.

> Play helps when students are not familiar with each other, and it helps to know better about the teacher as well. Play can also happen when students are having an intense learning day - small play activities can help refresh the mind and the body.

One also offered this note of caution:

> Currently, I'm studying a Masters about play, as it is useful to use play and playful tools to approach the classes, I think that sometimes it blurs the information that is [...] to be taught, so if [it] is going to be used it needs to be used in a way that supports the information given, not replace it.

Eight respondents and a little ambiguity in their answers mean this is a very limited and statistically insignificant sample. However, we can see echoes in their responses of points already made by educators in the study. We will also see how qualifications or riders are sometimes made to statements about the value of play; here so that it is not a distraction from what is being taught.

Educator values and value systems: when stars align, when worlds collide

> We spend so much time in work and we spend so much time in meetings and if it's not fun what's the point? [academia] can get very po faced about things... play is very obviously a manifestation of some of those things we want to engage our students in about deeper learning and about reflection and about critical engagement and play really is such a good way to do that (TVOP IV 52).

Underpinning the flourishing or failure of play and encircling these perceptions of value are the value systems with which they come into contact. Encounters and perceptions can be fluid and variable, rigid and unmoving, or veer in between. Educators may feel their practices and beliefs are at one with the encircling systems, or with some and not others, or at odds with increasing numbers of them, with regard to their use of play.

Such systems may be at a micro level - with variations perceptible in small localised groups; a single class, a department, a small network, or at a macro level: relating to their discipline, professional practices, institutional mission, national educational culture. All of these terms contain with them the possibility for huge variation, which will of course affect the actual experience of the educator and their students. This may also vary on any given day with any given selection of people, depending on yet more variables such as topic of lesson, context, location and so forth.

In *The Play Ethic,* Pat Kane (2004) outlined a manifesto for a new way of organizing ourselves, our behaviours and our values (James and Brookfield, 2014:62). He showed how play can be a driver in its primal and more structured forms and set out unflinchingly how the value systems of playful scholars can come into a headlong assault from those of opposing forces:

> Playful scholars are up against the worst kind of industrial-age politics. They are faced by a modern army of clip-boarded Gradgrinds marauding across the developed world, applying tight quantitative measures called 'audits', 'outcomes' and 'performance indicators (Kane, 2004:17).

(We met variations of such measures earlier when considering learning gain and learner analytics.) For him the "'messiness' and 'imprecision' of play" (2004:18) are part of its glories as they provide a launchpad for understanding. This also echoes the study participant who described this as "where the gold comes in". His advocacy is for a multiliterate approach in which play can feature, and which has resonance with the multisensory and multimodal approaches that participants refer to.

A guilty confession

I have to say now that I wince a little when I read references to Gradgrinds or similar dullards. At the same time as I have been critical of educational ideologies which resist play and creativity, I, like many others, have had to try and find the best in them in our working practices. Several of my academic roles have meant that I have had to uphold and implement - if not embrace - decisions and policies to find a way to live with governmental pressures, take forward institutional priorities, wrestle with financial nightmares and marry innovative, delicate, fluid approaches to teaching and learning with unbending monolithic structures. I have even been the architect of structures (hopefully more fluid ones). I have every sympathy with academics who are trying to balance these competing needs and desires in imperfect and constrained circumstances . I know what it is like to feel that something or someone is being compromised - or both. Introducing or turning to play has not been a means of trying to obliterate the reality of the educational climate, but as a means of finding hope, new paths and possible solutions, while maintaining or nurturing some wobbly and fragile form of morale.

Don't we all want the same thing?

Environmental and cultural factors as influences on, as well as elements of, value systems can be both obvious and concealed. On the surface they are not always visibly at odds with one another. Student success, employability, inclusion, saving the planet, for example, are things which a great number of institutions sign up to. Where they deviate relates to what is deemed most important and how to achieve it, even in pursuit of the same goal. Similarly, they may say they welcome creative, imaginative forms of teaching but how this translates into practice (not to mention assessment) may be another thing. In education what counts as success for students and how it can be demonstrated is one such example. For an institution, it may be marked by how many graduates achieve a certain kind of income or employment, a high class degree at graduation, or how many students pass a module, or are retained each academic year. For staff, it may be that a student who seemed high risk achieves a third class degree after many struggles which

is as precious a mark of success to them as the first for another. For the student it may be defined by personal matters - doing as well as, or better than, a family member, holding down a job and gaining a degree, or simply not leaving uni and managing to see it through to the end.

We heard earlier Lencioni's thoughts about hollow value statements and his warning strikes a chord with diverse educators. Throughout the interviews and surveys there were numerous comments illustrating a mismatch between how educators want to work and how they perceive their role, and the differing views of those around them. There are positive examples of where educators talk about the support they receive or the synergy they feel playful learning has with their subject and profession. Equally, there are comments which reveal educators to be rebelling against, or jousting with, the value systems of their institution (even if subject to the wider educational climate and pressures) and feeling out of step with these.

Value systems and the institution

Educators working in institutions which pride themselves on an openness to creative and innovative teaching methods will find that their value systems align in a mutually supportive way. This can be seen in the example of Stanford University's D School in the USA and their range of publications (e.g. Stein Greenberg, 2021) and events supporting creativity in design teaching. There is a nice unity in how and what the School wants to be known for, and how its educators want to view themselves.

Others do not feel so fortunate.

> My institution is exceptionally conservative, ranked number one in the top eight universities in the country – very concerned about being proper and being seen to do the right educational thing. Which means we're a good five years behind contemporary UK practice, ten years behind best practice. Play is the 'antithesis to work'. Really cracked down on play based behaviour on campus (TVOP IV 51).

Others further observe that they are not aware that their colleagues either value or understand its worth.

Rice also alludes to the difficulties of designing play which fits an institution's structures. (While these may not be seen as value systems in themselves, they certainly embody what has been decided is the most practical and best way of designing a formal system through which to engender and assess student learning.)

> There is significant institutional pressure on teachers to justify their approaches, to be able to measure and assess them, and for this process to be audited (2009:12).

This paper, published 11 years before this study began, foreshadows comments of a similar ilk made by its participants. It also chimes with Kane's words and my earlier observations.

In the UK a respondent noted that their well esteemed and long established institution "is a very pedagogically backward university compared to other places. Yet people don't seem particularly concerned with the notion of play, whereas take somewhere like XXX which is pedagogically much further forward [it is less easy]." (TVOP IV 39)

XXX in this example was a UK post-1992 university, one of the so-called 'new universities' converted from a former polytechnical college. It points to the fact that institutions have different fears and feelings concerning their status. Some universities are so comfortable with their reputation that they can accommodate different practices without feeling their credibility is threatened by them. Others feel they still need to prove themselves and therefore adopt practices which emulate older institutions and ways of teaching and learning (even if they do not admit it).Two separate respondents noted that their own institutions were happier about trying something new if it had been around for several years and at least two other universities had tried it already.

This may also point to a very sensible caution about not embracing anything untried too rapidly and then having it backfire on the institution or its students. Where conflict between value systems can arise is often due to suspicions about play which are commonly circulated; trivial, timewasting, not giving students value for money, about messing around. Throughout my career in higher education, and increasingly in the last five years of working in institutions, I heard colleagues across the sector vocalise their fear of any of the following; negative student evaluations; being criticised or ostracised by authority figures who disagreed with their modes of teaching; quality and standards departments being obstructive with regard to academic innovations (often an unfair judgement); not being allowed to do certain things because students were now paying customers and demanded to be taught a certain way. While the actions inspiring the fears may have originated in a desire to do the right/best thing, what that right/best thing needed may have been completely misunderstood.

Whose blessing is needed?

In many cases, the need for permission to play, or to have the blessing of an influential other, is critical to play being valued as legitimate pedagogy.
Several respondents in the survey saw part of the issue relating to a clash with educational managers failing to understand what they were trying to achieve:

> "Please tell 'managers' who as lecturers themselves have looked down upon playful techniques in learning as mucking around, wasting time and lacking seriousness. It is immoral not to enjoy one's education – as a learner and a teacher (Survey respondent, Sport and Health Sciences, UK)."

> "Play in HE is important and should be an integral part of learning and teaching – and the curriculum. And not only students need to play but also staff (Survey respondent, Learning and Teaching Research, Canada)."

> "For play to become fully embedded, 'management' must be convinced of the benefits, and this typically requires some form of metrics that show an increase in something (productivity, level of innovation, wellbeing/sickness rates, etc) (Survey respondent, MBA, Management, Marketing, UK)."

> "It is essential to have the support of management to be allowed to try new and playful things within HE. Without the confidence to fail, playing safe tends to be the default approach to teaching and learning. If your manager can see the value in sometimes failing, playfulness goes from being tolerated to being preferable (Survey respondent, Law, Politics and Natural Science, UK)."

Other respondents (and my own experiences outside this study) suggest that it is not always the 'manager' (programme lead, department head or higher) who is opposed to play. They may be supportive. Other colleagues may be critical of playful methods which they don't use because they are resentful of what they perceive to be popularity pageants i.e. the playful tutor is liked by students who respond favourably because their classes are fun. Fun, here, being synonymous with lightweight or frivolous teaching - in the eyes of the critics.

Many tutors also report that students are still very wedded to the relationship between academic activity and assessment; if there are no marks for something or it does not count towards a formal assessment then it is not worth doing. With playful classes or initiatives which are poorly attended it may well be that students have 'voted with their feet' and not turned up as they have not appreciated it is not worth their while so to do.

Value systems of the subject area

By subject area here, I am also including department, even though this features as an independent category in the gateway survey. In the examples and vignettes of play we saw there were implicit and explicit pointers to how subject area and play form may align. There can, however, also be suspicions that play is not something which can fit the subject's profile and practice. Once again there are opposing positions of this within a single discipline, such as perceptions about engineering being a place where precision and measurement rather than play and creativity belong.

Rice argues that his intervention using a playful dérive to appraise sites in architecture in planning encouraged students to challenge hegemonic beliefs and review what they believed they knew. In addition he noted that

> The nature of knowledge and the institutions that shape that knowledge were also investigated using playful modes of enquiry." (2009:11)

His comments link neatly to our observations of value at an institutional level and to what we understand and believe about our subjects. They also have relevance for other domains, contexts, and considerations of value.

How usual is play in your subject area?

When asked in interviews whether or not play was usual in their subject area teaching, several participants had similarly positive stories to tell. In several cases their play synergised well with their discipline, as in the cases of tourism and events management, journalism, advertising and the creative arts and media. In some areas there was mixed practice:

> Across the whole of marketing there is a clear spectrum, play style behaviour sits up at the creative side. I've got mates of mine who run simulations and emulations; one of them does this big creative market space where it is literally called the QUtopia Online MarketPlace and there's a stall and basically people in costumes... (TVOP IV 51)

> The use of play in my own department seems 'patchy' but there are signs that things are improving and colleagues are becoming more interested (Survey respondent, Journalism, UK).

However, more often respondents answered no in some form to this question. Some of these "nos" were outright while others were slightly attenuated, along the following lines:

- play is unusual (full stop)
- play is unusual for the discipline ("and I am challenging that" responses)
- play is unusual and not everyone knows how to
- play is unusual in this university, but not in others
- play is unusual but should not be, as there is lots of play in social sciences
- play is not usual because it is not called play
- play is not usual but "I get free rein in what I do"

Where there were positive attenuations to the "no" they were along these lines:

- there is some play because it is allied with the discipline
- there is some play but it has to be validated
- play is unusual but welcomed
- games are usual in the subject but the scale of their use here is unusual
- certain kinds of play are unusual e.g. colouring in

- the business school is open to play but their bottom line is "we are the business school, this is how we operate [by using case studies]"

A range of reasons for, and deductions from, this perception that play is unusual can be added to the points made just now.

- They reinforce the mixed and uneven use of play, and show how difficult it is to draw consistent conclusions about the use of play in different contexts;

- They suggest the subject area in which educators work (perhaps in a particular institution, rather than in the subject in the whole world - given the variegated and multistrand nature of academic disciplines) is not playful. Some of this is borne of subject related stereotypes, not just the constraints of the subject or university. Engineers (among others) were particularly critical of their kind:

> Some engineers (and others) are '"straitlaced....I want students to see me as being respectable and a worthwhile source of information and so therefore play is an inappropriate tool.

> I don't think people think you can teach "serious" subjects through play. It's a shame.

> Our students are paying this much money and therefore they expect the best of and they expect that to face to face teaching...a lot of content heavy material.. within the law school they're quite straitlaced about things and it's all legally, to the point where they won't even challenge the regulators...

> I have tried to get more members of my department to use play activities but with limited success. I know that some people in the wider engineering community use gamification as a teaching tool.

- They suggest way that play is interpreted can also account for a lack of uptake:

> Play is not usual and not everyone knows how to. "When I tried to put a gamified learning system in a particular unit I tried over a period of four years. It took about two to three years to convince my colleagues that actually the process works and even when they adopted the process because the lab has philosophical foundations ,the freedom to play and all that stuff, they implemented it in a very sort of mechanistic way and the majority of people don't know how to play. So that's also not helpful. If you don't know how to play it's very difficult to facilitate other people's play.

Some respondents indicated openness and receptivity from colleagues, as well as a certain hostility towards their use of play:

> my head of department is very supportive with my innovative ways of learning and teaching but some of my colleagues roll their eyes (TVOP IV 53)

Some are treated with disbelief that a playful approach has any weight to it:

> In my interview one of my colleagues asked a question, which was quite challenging , in front of everyone in an interview scenario, 'you know, this is all very well doing the play and having fun and I can see how it makes your lessons really popular, but what my students are going to want is where's the meat here? Where's the actual XXXX?'...and my view is more that this is about building a mindset, it's transformative, hopefully. It's about giving students the chance to see that from play comes great thinking and great freedom and you get a chance to experiment (TVOP IV 24).

Such comments or behaviours suggest a lack of patience with some or all playful approaches, stemming from, and assuming, a lack of value. We will see similar objections listed in What Gets in the Way of Play.

In their consideration of critical reflection in social work, Savaya and Gardner highlight the complexities of interplay between personal and professional values and how these may impact on the workplace. These are akin to the theories of espoused theory and theory in use (Argyris and Schön, 1974) or the gap between what people say are the values that they hold and their actual behaviours in the world.

Their example, although not related to play, offers a useful point of reference when integrating play into a multicultural, diverse, higher education curriculum. They write of social work as being a profession "strongly anchored in Western humanistic values". They continue:

> Yet it is widely recognized that personal values, preferences, attitudes, and beliefs, which may or may not differ from the professional values, affect social workers' practice and decisions (Higgs & Titchen, 2001; Park, 2005; Yan, 2008). Scholars have repeatedly expressed concern that the intrusion of these personal elements into social work practice may lead to bias and errors in judgment and decisions that impair the effectiveness of interventions (Arad-Davidzon & Benbenishty, 2008; Gambrill, 2005). In consequence, writers have emphasized the need for social workers to be aware of the values they bring to their work and the ways these values influence it (Baldwin, 2004; Yan & Wong, 2005). The call for awareness rests in the understanding that people are often unaware of the values that underlie and guide their behaviors (2012: 1).

What their paper recognises is the impact of the meeting between different value sets and value systems at work in their profession. The lack of awareness that they point suggests (as this study has revealed) that exploration of values - including through play - may be insightful. This impact and the need to develop awareness of values

underpinning behaviours are both also relevant in consideration of value and play. From the examples in this study it seems, however, that any osmosis between personal and professional values is a positive factor in designing playful higher education experiences.

Value systems of wider higher education

One of the concerns repeatedly voiced is that play is perceived as a poor relative of 'proper education'; implying lower quality teaching and learning. This is wholeheartedly rejected by participants in this study.

Play and 'a proper education'

Participants express a deep commitment to teaching and learning or satisfaction at successes. Many feel they are operating against the tide in terms of appreciation, support, funding, resources, time and autonomy. None of these, unfortunately, are new laments, nor are they reserved for playful educators. They are accompanied by increases in bureaucracy and managerialism, eating into preparation time for teaching and personal academic development. Educators fear they have become entrenched in systems where everything has to be nailed down and spelt out and there is no room for fluidity, nuance or happenstance.

They further fear that their complaints and protests are likely to be dismissed by university managers and government ministers as the entitled and out of touch whingeings of spoiled and cloistered academics.

Higher education, pedagogy and play

Some of the problems with play in higher education are perceived to stem from weaknesses elsewhere in the educational system. One participant - a former primary school head - observed that things like difficulties with independent learning at university - can be identified much earlier: "Children can become more dependent on teachers at eleven than they were at four or five". Play, therefore, at all ages becomes important for fluidity in movement through the different stages of education.

Others criticise the conception of education as a purely linear experience. They argue instead that there are many routes to learning and solving problems/taking decisions. There might even be multiple correct possibilities, each underpinned by different bases or reasons. School systems in which everything is driven by assessment and learning to a test are railed against, as is the way that the arts, music and creative subjects have been squeezed out of the curriculum. Both of these things are contributing to students only being interested in how to pass an exam.

Others feel that students are being misled in terms of how quickly they can become

competent and autonomous in a particular subject. They feel that institutions make false promises to students and place staff under duress by offering courses with unrealistic timescales which are supposed to offer the same depth and quality of learning as longer ones.

A good news story and counterposition to this, cited by study participants, has been the LEGO® Creative Play Lab initiative, launched by the LEGO® Group in Denmark but with bases in several countries. This is a development project focussing on the teacher and pedagogic education - making the teaching profession more aware of what play is and how play can be applied, used and understood.

The view that universities are nervous of alternative modes of teaching and learning appears to be both a shared perception in this study, but also a generalisation which merits some pushback. In the UK, USA, and Australia, for example, there have been decades of initiatives to develop active learning, alternative and creative approaches to teaching. There is a wealth of books on creative teaching and learning. So there is an acceptance and an appetite for innovative teaching methods; however, earlier books do not reference play and playfulness to the same extent that latter day publications are starting to do.

The concern with metrics alluded to earlier resurges when educators discuss their views of higher education as a sector.

> “Educational managers who have never encountered experiential learning think it must all be about Excel spreadsheets and other performances measures (TVOP IV 36).”

This participant is referring to experiential learning, not play here, however the point is the same. The failure to understand a particular form of teaching and learning affects the ability of an individual or institution to appreciate it or to identify its benefits.

For some time there has been a strong focus on specified outcomes, learning gains and levels (not necessarily wrong in themselves, unless poorly designed or applied, or considered the only valid means of evaluating learning). In tandem with this, pedagogic approaches which are open ended and seemingly unsystematic are viewed with suspicion. For play proponents, not knowing what is going to happen and letting go of control contributes to the richness of awareness and experience. As TVOP IV 37 put it, “standing in the open, embracing the unknown and then the feeling of agency” is part of becoming capable to handle uncertainty. For them the precise measurement and documentation of a play experience, in an attempt to make it look more rigorous or systematic in a learning context, is also what kills the play stone dead.

Another participant echoed this sense of loss of freedom and of forging one’s own educational discovery.

> “I do remember the very first time I looked at one of the items on the curriculum for the PG Cert that we did at XXXXX …looking at constructive alignment …was it, Briggs? Biggs? Briggs? …and it just made me weep reading about some of these scenarios that they had. You know, if the student knew exactly what they were doing, in advance and why they were doing it, and how they were going to do it, and what they were going to learn, then that was constructive alignment, and that’s how it all should be and it made me die a little bit inside because I just thought, well, but that isn’t how I went to university. That’s not what I got out of uni. I didn’t know what I was going to learn in advance and I loved it because it was always a surprise and we had such amazing tangents, conversations with incredible academics and you know, you just found yourself going down a bit of a rabbit warren and that was wonderful and I hate the whole, sort of, it has to be all lined up and very, very, very sort of, prescribed (TVOP IV 46).”

The dangers of over prescription were further identified by this respondent:

> “I’m very wary of systems and processes and believing that, you know, this thing will fix this problem in education…[…]…I think that education is a slow, weird, inexplicable process often, that inputs don’t lead to outputs and things happen in the middle that are really difficult to understand, and I think play’s a really good way of understanding that as well (TVOP IV 22)”

Others commented on the importance of not knowing necessarily where they were going with their students, but about creating a community of trust.

For the next respondent the importance of HE was about self-development, not regurgitation of facts. Their own experience of HE was:

> “very much about telling people what to think or giving people theory and then trying to see if they could repeat it back at you and for me I was always looking for a way to get people to take a look at what they’re learning and think about themselves…ok so how does who I am fit in with that and what have I got to bring? (TVOP IV 3)”

For this respondent, it was about rediscovering the inner child and why this mattered.

> “I think it needs to be part of an approach, a philosophy that becomes a shared philosophy, and I think risk-taking, and having a go and particularly with where, you know, these are going to be the teachers of the future. So, for us, it’s a bit like, you know, we need to reconnect with ourselves, as people who remember and can still embrace play because it’s so vital for our younger learners in how they, in how they experience and make sense of the world (TVOP IV 56).”

All of these quotes point to the passion and the purpose behind an open kind of play and experimentation which is seen sometimes as counter to a culture of outcomes and measurement.

For one respondent a passion for teaching and learning also meant protecting academia; including its hallowed traditions. They saw the university as being a place for intellectual engagement and enquiry, one which honours reading and discussion and exploration. New ways to explore subjects should not be excluded as long as they don't undermine the intellectual arena. This, they felt, sat neatly alongside the need for robust new systems and practices to be created in order for higher education to embrace play in the mainstream.

> If we call for playfulness in HE we really need to think about how to do this in a way so it doesn't align people that are not comfortable playing or that it should be room for all kinds of people and not just new certain kinds of people. And there should be a clear academic purpose around it that we are able to kind of point towards afterwards, or the students are able to point to us afterwards and say ok, so the way I actually engaged with theory here, or philosophy was way more deep and serious and hard work than I would ever do if I sat in lectures on critical pedagogy. I actually understand it better now (TVOP IV 49).

Prove it to me: indicators and evidence of the value of play

> I think it's an underpinning philosophy. I think it's a big value. It's like big data. It's the big value in terms of approach because actually sometimes it's not necessarily about breaking everything down and saying, okay we can put some play in there, we'll put some play there. It can be that, and sometimes it needs to be that, but I think for me, having a playful philosophy is an important place to start (TVOP IV 56).

The forms of value that have been set out already provide copious illustrations of how play can beneficially impact adult learning. Tanis's dissertation thesis on playfulness in adult education also supports this assertion (Tanis, 2012). Parallels can also be found elsewhere. For example, in their study of play at work Petelczyc et al (2017) offer comprehensive examples of studies which point to benefits at an individual, team and organisational level. These were also identified by participants in this study in an HE context. They suggest similarities between the benefits of play at work and its benefits in higher education. They distil three main areas from previous play studies:

- individual: benefits categorised under four areas of affect and wellbeing, attitude, cognition, task-related outcomes
- team: improved trust, bonding and socialization, a reduction in hierarchical boundaries and a sense of solidarity
- organisation: a friendlier atmosphere and stronger culture of commitment.

This statement, given our present experiences living through (and hopefully beyond) a global pandemic, is also pertinent:

> Organizations that endorse play have been shown to be more capable of sympathizing with a view of the future being unknowable (Andersen & Pors, 2014)

> and more flexible in decision-making (Pors & Andersen, 2015). Play has also been shown to promote organizational creativity via openness, intrinsic motivation and collaboration among team members (West et al., 2013).
>
> Petelczyc et al, (2018:176)

Relationship, creativity, development of qualities such as openness, improved motivation, engagement, grasp of subject and accurate application of concepts are also benefits identified in this study.

Importantly, for some needing to prove that play has value (either to themselves or others), some educators report an visible link between playful teaching and exam performance - even if the play form has been very different. Fleiner (2019) used classroom makeovers to teach the intricacies of life, governance and politics in particular historical eras. Bringing to life strategic manoeuverings, conflicts, and dilemmas of the age through re-enactments and re-visioning enabled students to grasp the nuances and complexities and demonstrate their understanding through more traditional forms of testing.

The following examples show the variety of comments made about how it is possible to see the impact of play translate beneficially into learning, growth and achievement.

Colleagues from Journalism report that they see evidence of necessary skills, such as the ability to communicate across different media, enabled through play and visible in coursework.

In the example below from Accountancy and Law educators also point to the extent to which seeing play successfully support learning comes as a surprise to the most diehard of doubters. In Business an educator commented on the way play improved the ability to present in a very short space of time.

Evidence of its positive impact is seen also in the way 'success breeds success, play breeds play'. Positive outcomes from play-based learning lead students and educators to want to use more of it. It also gives confidence to other educators to try it in some form, once they have seen it working well in other situations. In addition to this, as seen in the quote below, play can act as a launchpad for other actions or capabilities.

> Once the success of some of the more elaborate initiatives started circulating then actually colleagues were hugely welcoming, wanted "in on it", asked me to run it for staff events etc (TVOP IV 16).

> [participating in play] springboards other activities. I don't know if you remember me getting quite excited about charcoal and a large piece of paper...that was inspired ...because of a particular session I'd attended. Not that I can't put charcoal to a large piece of cartridge paper on my own but I think to be honest I don't think I would have produced that particular piece of artwork had the other activity not informed or given the opportunity (TVOP IV 56).

> What happens is that once you start to get good results from play and those engaging things and good feedback, of course it feeds it (TVOP IV 47).

> We've measured the feedback of the students, which was very good. (TVOP IV 41).

> I've seen it in their assessments...you can actually point to the evidence... With journalism it's so much about multimedia, it's not just about words, it's about images and videos and audio, so it's getting students to make those connections... (TVOP IV 24)

> We tested [the use of LEGO® Serious Play®] with the accountancy and finance law, with the tax avoidance stuff, they actually did the exam questions. And they wanted to test the knowledge around the subject matter for the exams...[...]But they really didn't think it was going to work. They thought it was going to be an absolute car crash. They were blown away, because [...] "Oh, my God, they've actually picked up everything that I wanted them to achieve", you know, you know, and I think it was the penny dropping. Not with the students. It was with my colleagues and the sceptics around it (TVOP IV 17).

> ...you don't know what the brain will come up with. If you ease them to a particular stage [using playful methods]...my students like the fact that they can present at this level after just two weeks exposure. I've never seen people present like this...we don't need to be, you know, suffering through the basics (TVOP IV 18).

On a play-based approach to a laboratory technique:

> Two biomedical students came up to me and they just said "thank you so much for doing this session...we've been doing this throughout the whole year and our experiments always go wrong and we don't understand what we're doing wrong. But now we've got it (TVOP IV 31).

The same students had been on the point of withdrawing from their course.

> it's changed my attitude and the way I react and work with people a lot, just by seeing how it's affected other people (TVOP IV 44).

> [when I started it] I was doing it because I enjoyed it and wanted students to have a good time. Whereas now I do it because I really do see the pedagogic benefits (TVOP IV 20).

> When you are helping an individual you are helping an organisation – does not matter how small a piece of development appears to be the impact on the organisation is massive (TVOP IV 44).

I leave the final word to this respondent, whose observation in a time of lockdown is also relevant for educational development:

> A month ago, I didn't see the purpose of Disney +, last week I can't believe how valuable it is. So you know, things change (TVOP IV 23).

In Short

It seems something of a contradiction to say 'in short' something which has been rather long, given everything that has been said about value, values and value systems in these pages. A great many viewpoints have been shared as to the value of play in HE and also on how subject, institutional and national contexts can impact on this, positively or negatively.

Coming in for some debate were educational narratives which seem to militate against play. In identifying these points of conflict the argument is not that traditional practices and existing systems are necessarily all bad. However, when they over dominate, stifle alternative approaches which support diverse learners, or focus too narrowly on what constitutes good teaching and learning, then they are damaging. This selectivity is something that Sutton-Smith contends with regard to the different Rhetorics of play - that, by definition, the advocates of one Rhetoric are most likely going to be positioning it as superior to the other Rhetorics. Cultural difference may also influence whether and how educators play, but it is a much more complex and nuanced subject than the brief discussion allows for. In identifying points of difference and competing pedagogic paradigms the aim is to argue for a more accommodating cohabitation of views and practices than is sometimes found.

Reflection

What comes to mind when you read through these comments on value, values and value systems?
From your own use and experience of play in HE, are there any forms of value that have not been mentioned that you are surprised to see missing?
What, in your view, are constructive ways to manage the different views of value, especially when positives meet negatives?

PLAY FOR SURVIVAL AND WELLBEING

I have given this category of value its own special, separate place in this account as it relates to all aspects of human life, not just higher education. I also suggest it is not overexaggerating to use the term survival and place it in first place in this heading, rather than more usual references to mental health and wellbeing. To illustrate, in 2020, as Covid-19 took hold, I was invited to give talks on play for survival and also contribute to Dale Sidebottom's book *All Work No Play* (2021). This makes a personal and heartfelt plea for play to be central in daily life, for mental and physical well-being.

During the periods of lockdown during the pandemic, play became a means of navigating frightening and uncertain circumstances. It was not simply a means of passing the time. Play was key to the emotional survival and mental well-being of many; separated or distanced from the people and ways of being that mattered to them and were normal in their lives. The absence of these things and the inability to do what we usually did exacerbated anxieties at an existential, as well as a practical, level.

Just by looking around me from Spring 2020 onwards, the signs of play were everywhere. Chalklines for hopscotch on pavements reappeared. Paintings, pebbles, rainbows, signs and messages were left for others to find and take solace from. Bird boxes with candles were tucked in woodland walks for the passer by and guerrilla poetry[47] offered a point of connection from one stranger to another.

Figure G25. Guerrilla poetry and painted pebbles

Across the world all kinds of games and solo play pursuits were suddenly regaining attention and claiming their place as a means of entertainment and occupation. Jigsaws

were impossible to get. Stocks of stand up paddleboards (SUP) ran out. Runners donned Spidermen outfits instead of Lycra when jogging round their streets, to amuse and uplift those shielding and unable to leave their homes. Shoppers wore inflatable dinosaur outfits for trips to the supermarket, as a means of playful interaction and - allegedly - also out of a belief that these were protective suits. Online play and interactions of every kind exploded. Dark humour about the situation we found ourselves in was expressed in cartoons and spoof images of cultural icons, such as the Mona Lisa wearing a mask (James, 2020b).

Figure G26. Free hammocks cartoon, by Kate Curtis

Moving away from a focus on the pandemic, the theoreticians we encountered at the start of this account, and many other writers, all emphasise that play is central to human (and animal) existence and thriving. Many play advocates are pointing to neuroscience (Diamond, Portnoy) and psychology (Edelman, Brown) to present evidence of the mutual beneficial reciprocity between brain and play. They also cite the relationship between the brain and play as being a significant evolutionary and survival factor; something to which participants in this study also refer. Having looked at the Rhetoric of Fate at various moments in the preceding pages, and in the light of Covid 19, the idea of using play for survival to navigate a harsh, random, uncomprehending universe and the machinations of Fate might have started to look quite sensible.

Participants in this study also made heartfelt statements about the importance of play in enhancing the human experience; for ourselves and each other. Several saw play as a fundamental human right and need, something which is important in difficult times and

which gives us hope. Play is also seen as a means of pondering big questions: how can we achieve net zero? How we work sustainably? What does it mean to live well? It is about imagining a different world:

> It is possible to create a different kind of society, it is possible to create different ways for us to live together. And you know, some days with everything going on, it's just extremely hard to maintain that belief but what's the alternative? I couldn't really live with accepting that the current state of affairs is the best way that we can live together as human beings. I really have to believe there are other ways. And I still believe that play is not the end goal as such, but this other way of living together (TVOP IV 37).

The importance of connection

> There are really a lot of wonderful initiatives that's (sic) been growing out as a kind of resistance movement, or at least a movement of people insisting that even in these sort of more dire circumstances play remains important or becomes even more important (TVOP IV 37).

The dire circumstances in question here again reference the global pandemic. As already alluded to, problems of isolation and disconnection at the height of the pandemic made student mental wellbeing concerns rocket. The Connected Student report (2021), published by Salesforce and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, surveyed 1,128 students and 1,076 staff in North America, Europe, and Australia and found student mental well-being to be a source of major concern. Issues that had existed before the pandemic were exacerbated, with 76% of students and 73% of staff reporting that maintaining their wellbeing remains a challenge. There was some variation across the 10 countries in which the survey went live; the highest level being among students in Nordic countries (91%), and the lowest among students in Spain (72%) (2021: 11).

Among the questions they found institutional leaders to be asking were how they can show the value of learning from anywhere; in parallel they found "students expect their institutions to do more to help them remain well, prepare them for careers, and deliver learning options that go beyond on- campus attendance" (Salesforce 2021:7).

Amidst the different factors impacting on student wellbeing, the second half of this paragraph on mental health and isolation resonates strongly with responses from my own study:

> More than one-third of students say institutions can further aid their wellbeing by offering more opportunities to feel more engaged and less isolated, more online access to mental-health experts and telehealth services, and more wellness support overall.

> Those three categories are real departures from the norm," says Asia Wong, director of counselling and health services at Loyola University New Orleans. "Students aren't asking for a new app or more communications from the president. These are big requests. They want connection, they want help, and they want therapy (Salesforce, 2021:12).

The report cites national variations; for example, students in France seemed less concerned about wellbeing support from their universities. A reason for this was deemed to be that they are likely to be engaging with support networks outside university, as they do not have a campus-based model of studentship. Overall though, poor communication was seen to be provoking a trust gap in relationships with their institution.

Similar concerns are strongly expressed by staff who have struggled to maintain a work-life balance among other things during the pandemic.

In the webinar *Sealing the Cracks* speakers from the policy thinktank WonkHE predicted an even greater focus on mental health and wellbeing in UK universities in 2022. This was partly because of a governmental drive for all universities to sign up to the Student Minds Mental Health Charter but also because of the expectation that Covid 19 would overshadow the sector for years to come. The urgency for even greater attention to mental health are summarised in this post by Blake here.

Play, the emotions and survival

From a wealth of sources of information on student mental health and wellbeing these few provide a backdrop to consideration of play and wellbeing at university. In non-educational settings the importance of a healthy vagus nerve for emotional balance and resilience is something which has also become a popular topic. This has reached social media platforms through the work of people like physiotherapist Jessica McGuire, who is bringing awareness of the impact of dysfunctional vagal workings to Instagram[49]. In the post I have linked to here, she stresses that "Play positively impacts on your nervous system by improving your inner resilience & self-regulation. It's a powerful way to exercise your vagal brake, which keeps you calm & balanced".

In his foreword to *Play for Life, Play as Emotional Survival* (Sutton-Smith, 2017) Henricks compresses Sutton-Smith's theory that play is an aid to survival. It becomes this through rehearsal of strategies and behaviours to deal with conflict, through primary emotions which drive play and which are themselves attenuated by secondary emotions, and through our cultural enactments - like daily engagements or collective festivities. Play acts as an emotional management system, mediating our raw and immediate responses to situations with our knowledge of the behaviour that society deems is appropriate.

The main body of *Play for Life* is then dedicated to Sutton-Smith's thesis setting out the role of the primary emotions in different play contexts which ally themselves to his earlier work on the Rhetorics. He draws on the work of neurologist Antonio Damasio in listing these emotions as surprise, anger, fear, disgust, sadness and happiness. Apart from happiness he sees these as largely negative emotions, which, to be kept in check, will require the modifying impact of secondary emotions which are whipped out reflexively as part of human self-regulation.

Interrogating this premise is not the business of this study, although it is helpful to know what was informing Sutton-Smith's thinking. What is relevant is the impact of the emotions with regard of the kinds of play engaged in (and the underpinning or surrounding reasons for, and responses to this) and how participants view play as form of emotional survival at university. This includes, or links back to, the faking of emotions by roleplayers or actors who are creating a convincing performance but not actually feeling the things they express.

Across the interviews numerous references were made to the impact of the emotions in playful learning, with a few of them illustrated here. Some of the examples of emotional engagement relate to different degrees of emotional survival, emotional self-regulation and awareness and the impact of the emotions in particular learning situations. These are all a form of educational survival, if not the existential variety, however, positive outcomes can contribute to overall wellbeing.

- game-based learning being a means of crossing the liminal space between not understanding and understanding without fear
- learning experiences which become far more memorable due to the 'emotional rollercoaster' or different emotions participants experience
- educators having interest in role of the emotions in learning
- activities which detect emotions/support emotional learning, such as simulations, games and escape rooms; inviting students to send gifs of how they are feeling at the start of class
- nurturing intuition which becomes professional wisdom
- "play accesses the emotional and so it is almost fundamental to my philosophy of teaching that there has to be a space where they can get to know themselves" (TVOP IV 4)
- "[play can be] messy, it doesn't look clean it's emotional and it requires a deep engagement from individuals" (TVOP IV 8)
- "one of the students actually said to me in class you know I love the drama of the atmosphere we're creating" (TVOP IV 24)

In one example play was an important way to deal with difficult subjects: doing research with Public Health System in Australia and running workshops to gather primary data on difficult issues like bullying and harassment:

> "...so it was a big priority for me to make whatever the researching, the gathering aspect of the data to be fun and energising and not dragging people back into this place where they have to recount stories that have emotional pain in them (TVOP IV 38)."

In this way, play was a means of detaching participants from deeply felt or personal associations with a difficult subject and being able to loosen up before engaging.

Sutton-Smith refers to emotional survival, however, in day to day conversation, when we are up against it, we may just use the word survival on its own. "How are you?" "Oh, surviving. Just about". In most cases, while we may be intensely challenged by events we are unlikely to be meaning that literally. Survival in relation to play in this study, then, does not have the Darwinian connotations of evolutionary theory or natural selection - the fight for actual physical survival. It is much more likely to be related to the emotions and to our mental health and wellbeing, in keeping with the earlier comments in this section. Having said this, Sutton-Smith also points out that animal and human life is touched by elements of existential angst; combatting fears about how to succeed and persist in the face of risk, or death. He suggests that:

> "Play itself may be a model of just this everyday existentialism. As Edelman says, the metaphor of the brain as a jungle is much more appropriate than the metaphor of the brain as a computer, which is to say that the metaphor of life as a jungle is perhaps more relevant than the metaphor of life as civilisation (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 228)."

This notion of a jungle seems to have relevance for participant commentary on how play supports the navigation of the random, unknown, incomplete, inaccurate, misleading. The days when you have to deal with a situation on the hoof, with no preparation time, no full briefing, no complete deck of cards. The days when you feel ambushed, taken unawares, have to joust with difficult people and situations. The same situations which students as graduates will encounter - and in fact students as students find themselves in already - in all the ongoing life experiences which encompass their times of study.

Note. While play spaces may be safe and protected arenas which are a step away from reality I have always resisted the tendency to describe anything that is happening outside university as 'the real world'. The life of a student (and of all those working with them) is just as real as any kind related to their future and/or professional lives.

Isolation and not belonging

We have already seen how competing value systems related to the achievement of goals and priorities can undermine academic experiences. An example from higher education enables us to see the impact of those competing values and value systems

(or simply dysfunctional ones) in the context of work. Waller's research study *A Sense of Not Belonging at Work (SoNB)* (2019a and 2019b), looks at participant experiences of not belonging, and the emotional, cognitive and behavioural processes involved in a sense of not belonging in the workplace. She identifies four major categories of a SoNB which are: absence of close quality relationships, absence of shared characteristics, a sense of not adding value and the undermining of self-efficacy, self-esteem and self-concept. She discusses the negative impact on the workplace of members who do not feel they belong and resolving strategies.

Parallels can be drawn between what Waller finds and how educators and students can feel if their sense of belonging at university is diminished. For students the sense of alienation, isolation and anxiety that is produced can contribute to a retreating away from experiences and into themselves - at the least. Both can doubt their ability to do their jobs or study effectively and competently. A vicious circle can be set up whereby a lack of confidence and self-belief undermines desires for integration and community. For playful educators, a sense that members of their institution see their activities as inappropriate can cause them to feel their capability or professionalism is being criticised. Convinced they know otherwise, in many cases educators laugh this off - perhaps defensively or defiantly, as them ...

Being seen as mad/silly

The following cluster of phrases come from individual educators in this study; all of whom shared a perception or a fear that they are being seen as one or both of these things in using play.

- "a bad thing to use play, if I felt that strongly about it, could be that I might be seen as stupid or silly or irrelevant you know. If I would pay too much attention to the opinion of others, what they think about me, I wouldn't do it and I think that often stops people."
- "so this is loosely mad"
- "kind of silly"
- "the mad professor and his bears"
- "so obviously it's just mad"
- "I thought I was the mad person in my school going let's all play and can we do something on LEGO® and Oh I'm using escape rooms and it's been really interesting because a lot of my nursing and biomedical science colleagues have come up and gone oh I hated doing this can we have a go...I don't feel quite as isolated as I did, I guess, cos I think everyone just thought I was mad"

Of course, what participants are voicing here is not that they really are mad or silly, but rather that others might see their use of play in those terms. Why that might be can stem from all kinds of factors - many of them listed under Gargoyles. Perhaps one of these relates back to the frustrations with tired pedagogies and inhibiting systems

referred to much earlier; that 'good' education is only judged as such by being in a familiar, recognisable and time-honoured shape. If students are asked to write an essay that is acceptable; if they are asked to demonstrate their understanding of certain concepts or procedures through novel means that is where the doubts can creep in from unconvinced observers.

Enabling students to belong

In terms of the student experience, it is easy to see how students who do not feel they belong at university, or who are not being taught in ways that enable them to contribute, engage, grasp and master, drift to the margins, lose motivation and focus and even give up. They may even mislabel themselves as "not being bright enough for uni", when this is not true.

While every student, teacher, teaching situation, programme, institution and so on are different, there are enough examples of play in this study to suggest that play is also a significant factor in enabling students and staff to feel they belong and have something to offer. Play is also seen as a powerful enabler of connection, in terms of human relationship as well as being important for different subjects, such as management theory. In the first Play and Creativity Festival at the University of Winchester a participant commented "I've had conversations with people I never talk to about things we would not usually talk about". A similar observation is made time and again in LEGO® Serious Play® workshops and was endorsed by study participants:

> "Some research on playful methods revealed that the strongest thing that came out was that students valued the social interaction that play creates- that probably is the essence of what I do, connect people and get them to open up to each other and connect with each other (TVOP IV 26)."

Another stressed the importance of cooperation, which is also a means of connection:

> "to explore spaces where students could do something unconventional, without them competing against one another (TVOP IV 4)"

In short

In these pages we get a sense of a subject which is being far more deeply and widely dealt with; that of the emotional wellbeing of staff and students in higher education. Play is seen to be a valuable means of supporting this from a variety of angles. We are reminded of the many different factors which may affect emotional wellbeing,

including outside and world events, as well as our own ability to be resilient, adaptive and emotionally strong. We are also reminded of the many ways in which staff and students at university can feel excluded from its activities, and how play, again, may be used to reboot these experiences in more positive form.

Reflection

What are your thoughts when you consider these examples of the importance of play for emotional survival and wellbeing?
Are there any which particularly strike home?
Has anything vital been left out?
How important do you feel play is for wellbeing in higher education?
What else would you like to add here?

PERCEPTIONS OF VALUE AND THE SEVEN RHETORICS

> To repeat, each is called a rhetoric because its ideological values are something that the holders like to persuade others to believe in and to live by. Much of the time such values do not even reach a level of conscious awareness. People simply take it for granted, for example, that children develop as a result of their playing; or that sports are a part of the way in which different states and nations are bonded together; or that play is a desirable modern form of creativity or personal choice; or that contrary to all of these, play is a waste of time (Sutton-Smith, 1997:12).

Having seen the extent to which value and play are inextricably linked, we might wonder at this point how necessary it is to bring in the Seven Rhetorics. To be honest, at times during this study I have wondered the same thing. Play in HE can get along fine without the theoretical overlay, so what exactly does it contribute? Is it just some arcane academic exercise because I have nothing better to do? (I have, I am just asking myself to be sure). This, incidentally, is of no disrespect to Brian Sutton-Smith, whose work is greatly admired.

The conclusion I came to was that, given the high regard in which *The Ambiguity of Play* is held, and because the Rhetorics are persuasive arguments which - by nature - imply value, I couldn't NOT think about their relevance. As Sutton-Smith notes, such rhetorical devices may be influencing how we feel and think about things even without us being aware of them. However, what I also concluded by the end of this study was that, while they are fully visible in HE play and appear in participant 'persuasive discourses' as to play's value, the fit between the two is only a partial one.

According to Sutton-Smith, the particular Rhetorics he presents are situated within wider rhetorics, such as beliefs about religion, politics and morality, and "constitute the incessant discourse about who we are and how we should live" (1997:14). This easily translates into debates as to who we are and how we should educate; no small considerations.

At the start of this study, I outlined the nature of the Rhetorics and how they had come to be defined, with all their specific features, interrelationships, and complexities and

contradictions. (I appreciate it's been a while, so if you want to go back and remind yourself, feel free). I compared Sutton-Smith's intentions in writing *The Ambiguity of Play* with those of this study and cited his late career ruminations that, despite his distinction as a scholar, he was still wrestling with achieving a finite and final understanding of play. Now, I review the Rhetorics in terms of their presence in higher education teaching and learning and their relevance for considerations of value. To do this, I will take each one in turn.

Presence and relevance of the Rhetorics in HE

Progress. As Sutton-Smith identified, this Rhetoric as most prevalently associated with learning of some kind - predominantly that of children - and one which advocates for play with regard to animal and child development but not that of adults. Progress certainly looms the largest of all the Rhetorics with regard to learning at university. The idea that it is reserved for children is contradicted in this study, as play is clearly shown to apply to adult learning and growth. The associations of play with childhood learning may, however, be like the sticky heads of roadside plants which children love to throw at each other. They fasten themselves instantly to jumpers and are a devil to get off. In the same vein, associations with childhood don't detach easily from views about play and can contribute to resistance to it in adult/university learning. The Progress Rhetoric is one that comes across strongly in participant responses through examples and words such as improvement, transformation, development, mastery and many more. One respondent observed that, while it is the most dominant in higher education, perhaps it should not be? That question could be the subject of a PhD thesis or an entire academic conference.

Fate. Sutton-Smith and Caillois both talk a great deal about gambling as one example of the play of chance and fate, which may seem an odd element for higher education. And yet there are many examples of this Rhetoric of play offered in the Gallery. Considerations of managed risk, throwing the dice, and dealing with the random outcomes that are produced when we experiment, venture with strategies, make decisions with the best information and capabilities we have (however imperfect) as we step into the unknown are all forms of play which have globules of fate and chance swirling around in them. Our metaphors similarly reflect this - "leaving things to chance", being "in the lap of the gods" or "dealt an unfair hand of cards"; hanging "on the roll of the dice", and "thanking our lucky stars".

In the context of higher education there is a tango of tension between control and freedom. We endeavour to protect students against the impact of chance through structures and organisation, while also allowing them to experience managed forms of uncertainty. We do so for them to test out what it feels like when they don't know what to do and their best ideas and attempts seem inadequate. The usefulness of play in this emanates from words and phrases like 'jumping in the deep end", "giving it a go", "trying and failing", "leap of faith", "taking a chance" and dealing with what comes. Allied to

these is the notion of "sharing before we are ready" (Utley, 2021), where we do not wait for something to be perfect before we get feedback on it. In these ways Fate and Progress walk hand in hand at times, despite Sutton-Smith's assertion that they are inimical to each other.

Fate in higher education can also encompass - if I may be so bold - serendipity and coincidence; an off-the cuff decision to look at a website, phone up about a course, take an elective out of intrigue rather than expedience, a chance accompanying of a friend to an interview, which may all lead to unexpected opportunities, decisions, desires which take someone on a road to new educational experiences. While these do not sound like playful choices they still may be in spirit, and the way they turn out may be seen as the intervention of Fate.

Power. Sutton-Smith groups the Rhetorics into two camps - the ancient and the modern. Power is one of four ancient Rhetorics, together with Fate, Identity and Frivolity, which "predate modern times and advocate collectively held community values rather than individual experiences" (1997:10). It is a Rhetoric concerned with representations of conflict and shoring up the status of those who control the play(ibid). In it most negative and depressing forms, this Rhetoric can conjure the darker side of play and the experiences of those who feel caught up within a system, rather than in charge of it and able to influence it in anyway. (Cynics may remark that academia is a power game in itself; with its hoops to jump through, milestones, hierarchies, competing agendas, nerves and pressure to do the 'right thing' e.g. how to teach, conduct research, where to publish and much more. Non cynics may thoroughly enjoy the challenge and the drive that all of these engender.)

His observation that such a Rhetoric is "anaethema to many modern progress and leisure-oriented play theorists" (ibid) can also be seen to parallel the extremes of autocratic educational practices; the unchallenged supremacy of the institution or the teacher, modes of assessment, or final rulings made.

And yet, in many modern institutions, concerns over unfair power dynamics and authority models have led to numerous initiatives to redress the balance, such as staff-student partnerships, equitable practices, de-marginalisation of groups and interests, inclusion of the student voice in all activities. Through co-constructed and student-centred teaching practices the Rhetorics of Progress and Power can potentially be seen to realign - although there are also contrary situations where consultations and partnerships conceal power structures favouring the institution and which undermine any possibility for deviance or dissent. Power is also visible in the strength of opposing discourses to a play ethic in teaching, learning and research; as not being 'the way we do things round here'.

Sutton-Smith makes clear that each Rhetoric, although self-contained, can also house many variants of itself. None are purely black and white or water tight. Thus power play is not all about winning and losing, the dark versus the light, the dominant versus the

underdog. A respondent from Management and Business alluded to the subtler, more noble forms of discovery that play within the Power Rhetoric may make possible. They had found that certain, intangible, common-sense,'good' things like trust or curiosity would be taken for granted, if it were not for play helping understand their role in conflict resolution and problem-solving.

Opposition to the Power Rhetoric can be seen in forms of collaborative play which can give rise to exposure and resolution of conflict in different ways:

> "People who disagree with you can be your biggest allies, you might not see it that way but we can learn loads from them."

> "Games and puzzles which draw out differences between people but also draw out the recognition that differences actually cause conflict but also solve problems at the same time."

> "A way of communicating and having experiences that you have never had before – 'participatory democracy."

Identity. With some alignment to the Power Rhetoric, Sutton-Smith describes Identity as relating to (traditional) community celebrations and festivals which also shore up and take forward the identity of the players within them. In higher education this may be expressed through extracurricular activities or the rituals of the institution. They can also be found present, on a much smaller scale; perhaps in team or group activities with an element of competition. An example may be where a group of students are having to pitch the distinctive features of their collective identity, perhaps as a means of negotiating or bidding for funds, recognition, or the accordance of a contract in a playful setting. Play as identity may also feature in playful co-design practices in which the creation of the design blueprint or solution, perhaps for a community building, space or shared resource, needs to involve those who will be using it.

In the wider academic community, Identity may be most visible as part of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), special interest groups or other gatherings, whereby likeminded educational practitioners and supporters can come together to enjoy, share, consolidate and develop together. Such communities (including the informal and small scale) can be found in diverse settings. They include arts and crafts groups, sports fraternities, archaeological digs, fieldtrips and other joint activities. Identity is also expressed through enjoyments along the academic journey and by milestones or markers of significance (a discovery, an anniversary, souvenir, ritual) or the celebration of achievement (success, completion of a challenge).

These are only an illustration however. Others can be found across universities, subject and geographical boundaries, and through partnership/outreach activities, in networks,

clubs and meetings. These, and the increasing number of places and spaces where playful HE educators can develop are all ones where the Rhetoric of Identity may tie in. The need for the latter is voiced by respondents in this study who either want to find their play tribe in higher education, or are glad to have already found it.

Finding one's tribe, and feeling like you belong, are important features of a connected, rooted and meaningful learning experience. Dearybury and Jones (2021:182) also stress the importance of creating a playful community which is inclusive of all kinds of participants. In their example the importance of knowing and valuing peers is one important aspect of this. Others include ensuring that the value of play is made transparent, and that the ability to play caters for different participatory preferences - from quiet, peripheral engagement or rowdy centre stage performance.

Brief aside here. While we will later look at obstacles to play, sometimes positives come out of the times when it goes wrong, however. Numerous respondents cited honest, humble - and often hilarious - anecdotes of when play went wrong on a first attempt. One of them noted the value of their own group as a place in which to share and reflect on attempts to play, and how to refine them.

> "We've created a playful practice community at XXX because I think play is inherently social and when you're designing play opportunities and particularly games you need that social interaction to kind of test it and I know this comes out of me trying to do a disastrous game on followership with my leadership students. It was a disaster (TVOP IV 52)."

I love stories of failure. For me these admissions of educational UGH are not moments of shame to be hidden away. They are the reality that creating newness or difference is not always immediately successful. These stories build rapport and understanding between educators who are trying to do similar things and can cheer them on their way, knowing they are not inept and alone. They provide value en route to value.

The Imaginary.

> "The use and exploration of the imagination and fantasy – I find it important that students can imagine how concepts and theories apply to the real world. Therefore by using play-based scenarios and other playful role playing activities students can experiment and explore concepts and theories before then applying them in the real world (Survey respondent, Business and Marketing, Australia)."

The Rhetoric of the Imaginary can relate to fiction, performance, world-conjuring,

navigation of parallel universes, and creative and making practices. Sutton-Smith characterises this Rhetoric as "sustained by modern positive attitudes towards creativity and innovation" (1997:11). It occurs to me as I review the different play practices and forms of value that the Imaginary could potentially apply to every single one of them. Writ tiny or large, the imagination is stimulating and coagulating thoughts, impulses and ideas and has the capacity to unite all other Rhetorics (or is able to) in a way that Sutton-Smith does not discuss.

In discussions with fellow readers of Sutton-Smith I was also interested to hear that some educators who feel their subject area sits entirely within the Imaginary find no mention of it in his text. The sense they, and I, got from the articulation of this Rhetoric was that it was more about recognised artistic, literary and creative practice, rather than the makings and doings of people on an everyday scale - however talented these might be. This may be unintentional on Sutton-Smith's part but it raises questions about this Rhetoric and HE creative, making and building play.

The Self. The Rhetoric of the Self can accompany deep forms of play - dangerous, risky, exhilarating; taking you to the edge of your nerves and exploding your boundaries of joy. Or if that just sounds a bit too much, about your own enjoyment of play and what you want to get out of it. This is a feature that can be seen (not always playfully) in forms of reflective practice at university, or personal and professional development activities which make space for students to explore what they really, really want.

The value of the Rhetoric of the Self may also be expressed through playful self-awareness or in engagement with aspirational goals of certain institutions, such as graduate attributes. One respondent noted that for engineering students taking on management study they were unused to such a focus on the self and that play related to this was useful as a way of disrupting their accustomed engagement with the world. This example is useful as an illustration of how a Rhetoric may be an unnatural visitor in, or way of thinking about, a discipline (self-reflection, focus on feelings about own experiences). And yet by nature of being unusual, it may also ally with another less visible Rhetoric (Frivolity) through its disruptions of usual ways of being and doing.

Play was also described by educators at the start of this study as important for them being authentic, and part of who they are. This, too, is allied to a Rhetoric of the Self.

With regard to another aspect of this Rhetoric I want to pause on the subject of solo play and The Self. As I have already mentioned, in many cases, play is seen as a joint activity, rather than a solitary one. This, I believe, benefits from some review in a higher education context. This is not because it never happens[50], but because it does not seem to take centre stage.

Solitary play is often categorised as reading or hobbies and the developmental trajectory outlined by Mildred Parten; creating a framework which outlined the shift of children from solitary play when young to more social play as they grow (PlayvolutionHQ).

A liking for solitary play in adults is very different to cases where play deprivation in childhood has led to antisocial behaviour (described in Brown, 2009). As most of us can vouch, and participants confirm, it is perfectly possible to be sociable creatures and yet prefer solitary play forms to group play.

Some solitary play forms can also be considered together-but-apart. At the University of Winchester from 2017-2019 I co-convened a creativity and play festival for all, with colleagues from different Faculties and Departments. While many play activities were collective, others allowed for solo, or varying degrees of, participation. Several activities were creative ones set out at tables where you could play with others there or do your own thing; others were jigsaws and puzzles set out in a separate space for any passerby to add a piece or two. In this way the pleasure of participating was, for the individual, contributing to an emerging image, not the enjoyment of contributing to it with others.

From these reflections I conclude that solo play can also reside under the Rhetoric of the Self, even in its least dramatic emanations. I still wonder whether solo play features less in our university play opportunities than it could or should; or whether in fact it is present, but mostly lurking, unsung, as part of other activities.

Frivolity. This Rhetoric conjures the ancient tricksters and fools "who enacted playful protest against the orders of the ordained world". (Sutton-Smith, 1997:11). In a humorous online piece for the UK university policy thinktank WonkHE, Greatrix offered this piece on games in lockdown. This both illustrated the spread of games in HE, while spoofing them through their own University Top Trumps. As I observed at the outset of this study the Rhetoric of Frivolity - depending on your subject area - may be the least visible of the Rhetorics. It featured less than any other examples in our block of play types and examples.

Sutton-Smith sees Frivolity as a Rhetoric which can comment on the all others - in educational terms this includes any play practices which question and challenge norms or the status quo, among other things.

In an interview with a military educator I asked about the place or absence of frivolity:

> **Interviewee:** "I do agree that, especially the ancient rhetoric of play as power, and even, sort of, the play as progress, the educational aspect of it, that is there. I do think there are other elements of play that we don't respect or take advantage of because we're so regimented and standardised and we are literally in uniforms, doing the same thing and so...
>
> **Interviewer:** So frivolity and chaos and disruption wouldn't be your thing?
>
> **Interviewee:** But it should be right? I mean we are not tackling engineering puzzles, these are mysteries, wicked problems that have no end solution, and I'm also interested in how you then validate that to your senior leaders, cos they don't wanna

> hear that, right, like even though I know in my heart we are going to get to the right answer..."

This snippet of conversation was, for me, an important recognition of the presence of the Rhetorics in diverse higher educational contexts. It was also an illustration of the potential of a Rhetoric such as Frivolity in highly unlikely contexts and of constraints on its acceptability.

Frivolity relates to ways that play can disrupt, deconstruct and reconstruct; barriers, norms, hierarchies, assumptions. One respondent even described play as disruptive technology, using the analogy of the way the world changed first with mobile phones and then with touch screen technology. Outside education we see it in the work of satirists and comedians commenting on the state of the world as we know it. It is rife in the memes and gifs that mock figures, habits, events, behaviours. Inside education, in a small way, we may see it in our sense of humour or jokes with which we comment on our subjects.

Frivolity can also be a form of release which is important for a sense of emotional balance, psychological and mental wellbeing. Nor does frivolity have to be overt, in your face, loud clowning around. It can just as easily take shape in the quiet drawing of a cartoon, lampooning a bastion. It leads us to ask the question whether quiet Frivolity can also be found within mindful, contemplative guises which resist the relentless drive of educational models which are all about the go go go; bigger/better/brighter/more aspirations in life. Contemplative mindful pedagogies (Reeve, 2021; Payton, 2020) are about noticing and allowing, not necessarily forcing - something which is not always prized in university education (although observation is often important in different disciplines) - are also part of the desire to see and do things - including research - differently.

And if it cannot belong there, where would we situate a rhetoric of play value that allows for slow play? After all, there have been movements of slow food, slow fashion and the emergence of the Slow Professor (Berg and Seeber, 2016). You might argue that contemplation and mindfulness are not forms of play by themselves, and yet they find themselves in creative play, labyrinth walking, movement and many other forms of play which may be silent and solo, not always collective. This leads us then to ask whether or not a Rhetoric such as Identity would not be a more suited spiritual home for advocating quiet resistance and letting be; in groups of like-minded practitioners.

Morini refers to Simon's characterisation of Games Studies as "...a true, undeniable "bulwark of uselessness", a field of thought that can work in resistance to all appeals to productivity and efficiency. Because what can be more frivolous, in "productive" common sense, than spending a couple of days discussing the philosophy of computer games?" (Morini, 2016). He sees this "bulwark" under attack in institutionalised education, particularly at university by what he calls compliance-oriented modes of learning. He recognises that some of these can be noble endeavours, such as shifts towards more

sustainable modes of living; rather than education simply being the means to the end of economic gain.

All of which is to suggest that Rhetorics of Frivolity, (to adopt Sutton-Smith's plural), which seem unlikely modes of discourse in higher education, can be much more valuable than given credit for.

Where there are gaps in, or divergences from the Rhetorics

That the Rhetorics relate, to a greater or lesser extent, to all higher education play types found in this study suggests two initial things to me. One, that they have relevance for deeper conversations about play and its value; which go beyond liking or disliking it. Two, that, as persuasive discourses (to which we as playful educators may or may not be directly party) they may influence the extent to which play is seen as a positive or negative.

Sutton-Smith points to the difficulty of approaching "the subject matter of play directly when there is so much implicit ideological rhetoric that comes with these disciplines" (1997: vii). While his focus is in distilling Rhetorics from the ways people discuss play forms, rather than on the forms themselves, these ways of discussing still may impact on the kinds of play that are deemed acceptable in higher education, and which forms dominate.

There are further points to consider. Sutton-Smith describes his Rhetorics as being popular cultural Rhetorics, which we unconsciously absorb and propose without necessarily being aware of them, or of their sources. This is potentially something to be aware of when we consider What Gets In The Way of Play, as negative or restricted views on play in HE may be being influenced by ways of thinking which have distant or invisible origins.

In addition, while points of synergy between the Rhetorics and higher education play have been identified, we also need to consider where there may be gaps. One, I mentioned in my introduction to the Rhetorics, relates to the criteria which Sutton-Smith specifies for something to be considered a Rhetoric in his terms. His specifications are partially problematic for consideration of play in HE. Elsewhere in this text I have cited at least three more divergences; the near-absence of references to higher education in the Rhetorics; the insistence under the Rhetoric of Progress that it excludes adult play; and the dominant focus on collective, rather than solitary, play across numerous play authors. (From your own reading and experiences you may already have thought of others yourself. They may even differ from mine). In the next section I bring together these and one or two other gaps.

Sutton-Smith, Caillois and play in HE

Much earlier in this text I presented this diagramme, which I am including here again as a memory jogger.

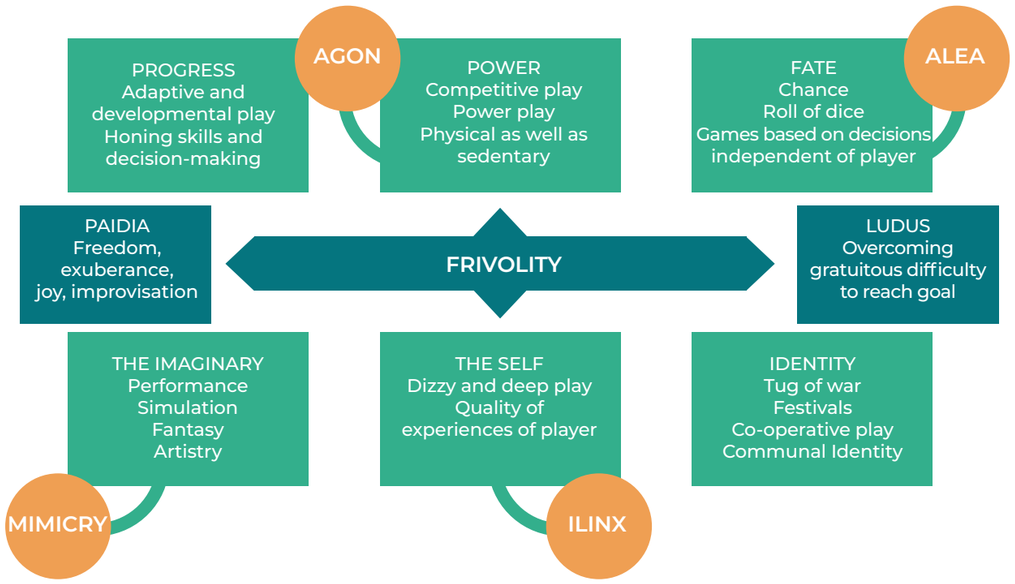


Figure G27. An overlay of Caillois' play types and Sutton-Smith's Rhetorics (2)

In it I mapped out in a very basic way the relationship between Sutton-Smith's Rhetorics and Caillois' four categories of play: agôn, alea, mimicry and ilinx, and also his ways of playing - paidia and ludus. I did so in an attempt to see how types of play in HE might fit in one or more and because it occurred to me that there were some strong correlations between his categories of games (which he conflates with play) and Sutton-Smith's Rhetorics. These are overlaid in the orange circles. Doing this was part of what helped me unearth further questions and gaps in both models with regard to play in HE.

I revisit and amend it here to reflect those questions, gaps and also synergies. An initial plan to reflect the strength of presence or frequency of use by size of diagramme elements was unworkable. How important a Rhetoric is will depend on context, even if that context is looser than the kinds of criteria that Sutton-Smith specified in his own work[51]. So instead I overlay the original diagramme with some of the questions that have arisen through analysis of study data. The red shapes indicate where there are gaps or questions. The red cross marked HE simply indicates that, rather than HE, being confined to one particular type or play or one single Rhetoric/group, has interplay between all types/Rhetorics/groups, due to its diverse nature.

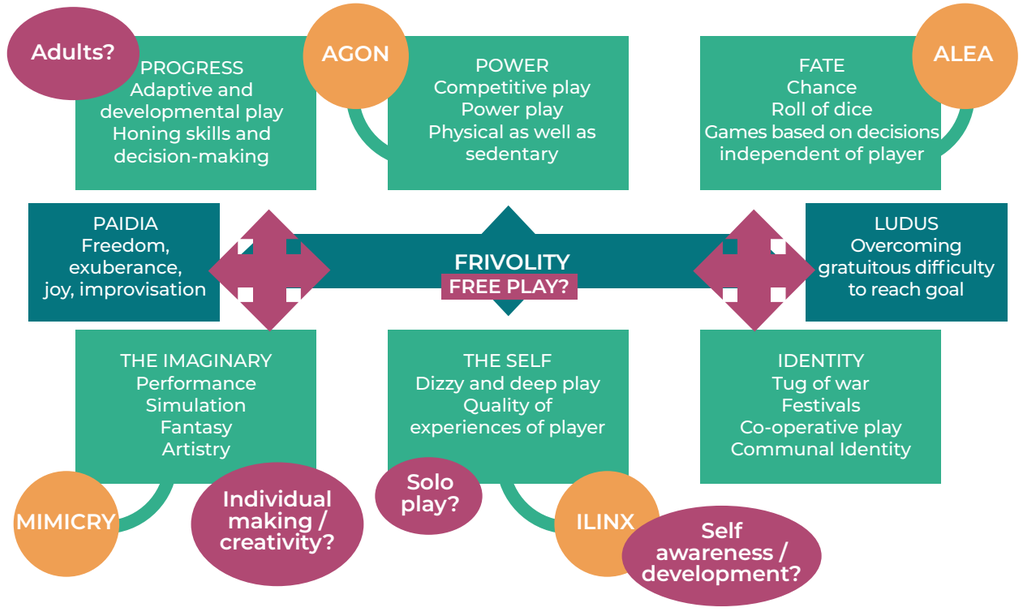


Figure G28. Revised overlay of Caillois play types and Sutton-Smith's Rhetorics showing gaps and questions

Caillois conflates physical and mental games so that these may both reside in company with the Power Rhetoric. He also allows for hybrid versions of games which may reside under two categories of his four part framework; an example being card games which will involve, in part, the luck of the draw, in part, player skill. Certain forms of play can also negate each other, such as Agôn and Alea, where determinism meets destiny; not dissimilarly to the ways that certain Rhetorics might oppose each other. Agôn and Ilinx may either cancel each other out (planning, organisation and attention versus what he describes as the elemental need for disturbance and tumult) or perhaps conjoin, as in the celebration of victory. Paidia, as emotional tumult is also the opposite of the strategic, applied and constrained ludus.

Sutton-Smith also refers to different Rhetorics cancelling each other out, or to the way that one will seek to assert its superiority over another. In this way, an argument for the value of one kind of place may be undermined or quelled by a competing one. He keeps Frivolity until last as a Rhetoric which can comment on all the others, perhaps in the way that it can overturn their philosophical premises by poking fun at them all.

The rhetorical evocation of Ilinx/The Self as deep, risky vertiginous (head spinning) play is something that is likely to have a limited place in higher education; perhaps belonging in sports, theatre, dance but unlikely to find a home in other disciplines? (This is a genuine question). It is possible, but unclear, from the articulation of Frivolity whether or not it

might have some common ground with Ilinx; perhaps in terms of giddy, crazy rebellious behaviours.

From having mapped out different play types against the groupings in this diagramme, I return to the potential omissions in the Imaginary/Mimicry. Sutton-Smith notes that artists and creatives are the mouthpieces of the Rhetoric of the Imaginary. However, he does not seem to consider the lesser everyday creativity that may be found in multisensory or visually based learning approaches. Caillois' category of Mimicry does not allow for creative making, although it does make much of illusion, performance, spectacle and the imagination.

What is missing from The Self, although Sutton-Smith allows for "fun, relaxation and escape" is the solo play which I made a case for earlier.

Other arguments of value noted through the play examples by study participants are not mentioned in either Callois or Sutton-Smith's frameworks. These may be implied by Rhetorics such as Progress or the Self and relate to self-knowledge and awareness, and some of the metacognitive capabilities that higher education seeks to nurture.

There are therefore areas of higher education play which are not considered in these two theoretically based typologies of play. At the other end of the spectrum, neither typology seems to allow for a kind of play which finds its presence in all categories - with perhaps the exception of the vertiginous whirling of Ilinx/parts of The Self.

Where all Rhetorics unite in one play form

As part of the reflections in the block of play types across the disciplines I invited you to consider which Rhetorics might be associated with the different categories of play I set out. I also wondered whether you felt one (or more) could be said to have a relationship with a single specific example of play. I have also noted that Sutton-Smith argues for specific kinds of Rhetoric, emanating from play theory, to be associated with specific kinds of play, players and contexts. I have equally noted that through focussing on the playful practices of educators these Rhetorical confines don't apply in the same way. The examples I mapped out earlier, looking at possible Rhetorical discourses relating to The Class of Nothing and my daily game of Wordle, already showed it was possible to detect several Rhetorics in terms of how one may experience that play. In a further example here I show how it may be possible to identify all seven Rhetorics at work in a single play experience.

LEGO® Serious Play® as a potential illustration of all seven Rhetorics

The LEGO® Serious Play® method involves a systematic set of building

activities which are focused on a central question. In response to this, participants create metaphorical, rather than literal, models to express their thoughts and feelings, share their models with others and reflect on what has been learned. This activity then provides the basis for the next. In marketing or business terms the central question might be how a student-company can reinvent a product to give it new life (Progress - in the sense of newness, development and also student learning) and revive its financial fortunes. There might be a competitive element, if multiple student teams are involved. It might be about winning against them, or winning against imagined commercial competition, rather than a specified opponent (Power). There may be an element of Fate involved if the facilitator changes the basis on which a model had been built: first asking them to build X and then asking them to imagine it represents Y. If it is a workshop about building strong teams then Identity will come into play; there will also be an element of fantasy, simulation and performance through the creation of this alternative LEGO® world and the way participants tell the story of what it represents (Imaginary). At some moments participants may be invited to think of the worst or best that could happen - in the most blue skies or impossible kinds of forms (Imaginary and Frivolity). And finally there is always an element of solo building before creating shared models, as well as the element of participant satisfaction. (Self)

We can see all seven Rhetorics in this example of one play form, and potentially in others too, as shown earlier.

The kinds of value that participants have found in play can be expressed through all or any Rhetorics, depending on what the play has been like. Play for the development of thinking and skills may be described by Rhetorics of Fate, Power, Progress when relating to boardgames, simulations, and competitive play. Or the Imaginary, if creative thinking is part of the play, or to Frivolity if some kind of iconoclastic mental activity is at work. Belonging and connecting may be articulated through the Rhetoric of Identity, as part of communal bonding. How students learn to handle uncertainty or unpredictability may relate well to Fate, but perhaps their success in so doing is also closely allied to their experience of that play (The Self) or the skills they have acquired to manage crises (Progress).

There are many occasions where it is difficult to relate a form of value of play to a specific Rhetoric. There are others which prompt the question is it the Rhetoric that frames the play, or the play which leads the Rhetoric? For example, if play is a valuable form of incentivising learning, this could sit under any of the Rhetorics, depending on how the player liked to be incentivised. Are they gamblers, power brokers, rule breakers, reward junkies, thrill seekers? Similarly, in educational terms if the Rhetorics are to persuade us

of the best ways to teach and evidence success then what that success looks like will vary according to the different Rhetorical ethoses (ethos? ethi?). Recognition of status? Ability to make money? Contribution to the common good?

From the responses provided by participants I have also found the language they use to describe value is hard to marry up with a particular Rhetoric. Where does bringing life to teaching fit in? Ostensibly under Progress - and yet the notion of 'bringing life to' is much more emotive than a developmental trajectory suggests. At least one respondent talked about playful learning being messy and imprecise, and the need for freedom and a lack of instrumentality being paramount. You might argue that these are not qualities which you want in engineering, automotive design, or medical surgery. So the disciplines will influence which Rhetorics and which features of play hold sway.

All of these points lead me to suggest that while the Rhetorics can frame conceptions of value in higher education and show where they join with higher education play, they - and at least one other theoretical model, that of Caillois - are incomplete.

This raises a host of other questions, such as:

> Do we need, and is it possible to create a new, additional Rhetoric (or more than one) or can we elaborate the categories of the Rhetorics so that they explicitly include any missing elements from higher education? I am tempted to answer these elements no, difficult and probably. This I have roughly done already in my observations and diagrammes thus far, although I do not suggest it is the only way to interpret the situation.

Alternatively, perhaps it needs a different kind of approach entirely. For this, I turn to my experiment in bringing in Caillois and to the Writings, Thinkings, Doings of much earlier. In these I made reference to work that has been done to create some kind of theoretical platform for play. This gave examples of models, frameworks and theories of play which are relevant for specific purposes and within particular contexts of higher education. There are, no doubt, others that I am not aware of. I suspect, however, that the observations cited that there are no uniting frameworks or theoretical models for higher education play still hold true. This leads to the question whether or not it suffices to allow for multiple frameworks which fit these different purposes, or whether higher education needs something universal and formal. Assuming such a thing is even possible.

I will consider this further in my final wrap up of this study, however, I close here with some final observations on how using the Rhetorics has helped surface discussion about the value of play in higher education. Most of these are covered in In Short; however, experimenting with the Rhetorics has confirmed for me something else. This is how much different play theories and positions contribute to deepening appreciation of play

experiences in higher education. I am not saying - of course- that everyone has to read lots of play theory before playing - that would be nonsense. Part of the joy of play is simply engaging in it, without preamble or debriefing.

However, the confusion and ambiguity that surrounds play as a concept impacts on perceptions of the value of play in higher education. Exploring play theory to contextualise and investigate play experiences is a means of enhancing the robustness of our own understanding of the value of play. What this study has also confirmed is that that is precisely what participants are doing already. The scholars and writers on play cited in Writings, Thinkings, Doings are also already taking play theories, or particular forms of these, to argue for new developments in play for higher education learning. Their efforts will be constructive in enabling others who are unfamiliar with play as a scholarly subject to deepen their own understanding.

What is the value in considering the presence or absence of the Rhetorics in playful HE?

I have already answered this in a brief way, at the outset of this section. Here, in slightly more detail, are some reasons to consider the relationship between the Rhetorics and the use of play in higher education - and formal adult learning more widely. They summarise points I have made about the Rhetorics and play in HE throughout this text.

1. The Rhetorics can all be found, to a greater or lesser extent, across higher education.

2. The Rhetorics are visible and relevant as forms of value systems (a term that Sutton-Smith uses for them also.)

3. Not only are they visible, but their presence has impact, even if educators and students are not always aware of it. They permeate thinking about, and responses to play; not least in terms of educational expectation

4. Even if they do not explicitly reference certain forms of value that are detected in this study, they offer a basis from which to appraise what is missing.

5. In higher education there may be any number of other Rhetorics, depending on the structures and cultural belief systems within which the educational experience is taking place. Such Rhetorics might be constructed around any of the main preoccupations of a higher educational institution; such as efficiency, data analysis, value for money, employability and sustainability. They might even be created around the core values of an institution or of the sector.

6. Some of these potential other Rhetorics in HE may echo the polarities of play which are also about value. These may have similar opposites; a Rhetoric of inclusion and equality and learning/success/achievement for all versus a Rhetoric

of elitism, success, hierarchy (the best of the best) and material gain. Such Rhetorics may permeate mission statements and other kinds of value expression put out by the institution as their guiding principles.

7. Play may be a means of exploring and determining these and other kinds of Rhetorics that may be circulating, visibly or subliminally, in learning experiences and institutions.

8. While certain Rhetorics and aspects of Sutton-Smith's discussion focus on children, it is clear from this study that they are equally applicable to adults. Two examples are the inclusion of adult development in the Progress Rhetoric or the multiplicity of adult identities as well as child identities.

9. In his theoretical model of the Rhetorics he suggests that play forms and the Rhetorics themselves (the discourses about those play forms) have synergies but are not identical. He argues that the Rhetoric and the play form are likely to have strong affiliations with, or be contained by, the discipline. This is not borne out by this study, either by considering higher education as a whole or by considering specific disciplines such as management. However, you can test this for yourself.

10. He notes, on this point, that there is often very little relationship between the players' own play definitions and those of the theorists. I found this to be the contrary if you take playful educators as the players. If you take their students to be the players then the picture may be a little more mixed, but this would require further investigation.

11. Finally, each reader of Sutton-Smith's proposal may take different things from his text depending on their context; therefore the territory is rich for new disciplinary perspectives.

In short

Having considered the Rhetorics in the light of all the play types collected in this study, and of those outside it, I venture that:

- all Rhetorics feature in consideration of the different types of play at university
- some feature more prominently than others; in particular the Rhetoric of Progress, but not only this Rhetoric
- different kinds of play may have a relationship with the kind of Rhetoric that can be detected but not necessarily with the tight kinds of framings required by Sutton-Smith's criteria for a Rhetoric
- some Rhetorics are more prominently and positively accepted in HE than others. Once again Progress is an obvious frontrunner.
- there are gaps in the Rhetorics regarding aspects of play in higher education
- the Rhetoric of Frivolity seems to be the least visible of all the Rhetorics, but strangely, the one on which I may have expended the greatest number of words.

Reflection

How satisfying to you are the Rhetorics as a means of fully expressing all the kinds of value and values associated with play in higher education?
Where, in your view, is their resonance particularly strong, and where is it weakest?
For you, what does an increased appreciation of the Rhetorics bring to perceptions of play at university?
How useful or interesting do you find consideration of the Rhetorics with regard to your higher education experience/practice?
Are there any theories of value or persuasive discourse that you think would be better suited to a consideration of play in higher education?

gargoyles

In which I gather together differing opinions about play

I have chosen the term Gargoyles (apart from the obvious reason[52]) because they can repel or attract, depending on how you feel about them. Gargoyles are creatures with grotesque features, often seen sticking out of cathedral buttresses. Depending on your aesthetic bent or sense of humour, you may find them charming and funny, ugly and repellent, or somewhere in between. Feelings about them are divided.

Participant feelings about play may be similarly divided or polarised; I illustrate these divisions and oppositions on a spectrum of feeling with what I call polarities of play. Having set out many examples of these differing views, I move on to think about the times when things get in the way of play. We have already seen substantial positive comments about play which fall into the Gargoyles are Great! category. Here I look at comments and perceptions which place play in the Gargoyles Are Not Good category. I will also reflect on the kinds of obstructions, misapprehensions and negatives that can create resistance and adversely impact play.

POLARITIES OF PLAY

A question I have been asked when running workshops on play is “what is the best form of play for me to use with my students?”. This is an impossible question to answer. It depends on so many factors and variables, not to mention the nature and teaching style of the educator and the nature and learning dispositions of the students. I open with it here as it intimates that there is another question at the opposing end of the spectrum; “what is the worst form of play for me to use with my students?” The only answer to either question (apart from suggesting better ones) is to say “it depends’.

I use this to foreground introduction of the polarities of play, because “it depends” is what is at work in most of the examples here. (We will later look at the times when forms of play are unacceptable or inappropriate). What this section flags is that there are many diametrically opposed views about play, and fewer points of universal agreement. In this study some of the few points of relative consensus were around play needing to have a purpose, planning well and caring for the wellbeing of participants. On many other aspects views varied according to the circumstances and preferences of the educator, along with many other variables already referred to.

What I am calling polarities of play describe a spectrum of participant viewpoints on aspects of play in higher education, with two extreme ends. Holflod (2021) describes similar points of contrast as paradoxes -such as tensions between freedom and structure, rigidity and amorphousness - which can be found in HE play and which are noted by some participants.

However the polarities are not paradoxes; each end of a polarity is not a contradiction of the other but rather recognition of existing opposites and alternative views. I may have a sweet tooth. You may have a salty one. Sweet and salty in themselves are neither good nor bad in this context, but they are our preferences. We see this in differences of opinion over safe versus risky play. Each polarity may be desirable, in different contexts. Where it gets more complicated is when a lack of safety turns into threat or harm, or anything that can be considered non play. Equally, it may be that while some educators want their students to feel safe, others want them to feel brave. Not polar opposites of each other but indicators of indirect contradictions and differing priorities.

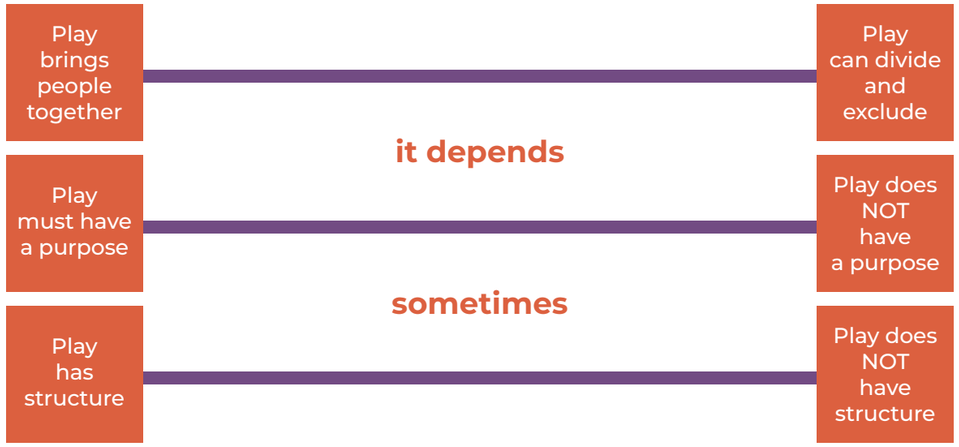


Figure G29. Sample of polarities of view regarding the nature and value of play in HE

In this study the polarities represent the expression of experience and belief by a person in a certain context, in time. They frame the breadth of views on experiences of play in HE, for example

- the environment within which educators are trying to use play (supportive colleagues/management/culture or atmosphere)
- divergent preferences and aversions with regard to play
- views about educational paradigms and priorities, right down to …
- what education is and is for
- the nature of play and how play feels
- how to differentiate play from other things, such as games
- how best to nurture a playful culture; barriers and opportunities.

A playful educator in one institution may see their playful practices as running completely counter to how their subject is usually taught. The polarity may reflect their experience of the situation in which they are working. They may express this as Outside/Inside - outside the norms and expectations of teaching in their field. One educator may advocate for lively physical play as the greatest way to bring people together, while another will loathe it and find it awkward and alienating. The polarity here might simply be Best/Worst for achieving X, or in a specific example, Connecting/Alienating. In this example the polarity is between two opposing views on a similar subject. Equally polarities may describe opposing responses from colleagues to play; my peers are supportive/my peers are disinterested/resistant. In such a case the opposing mood may be a reversal of the positive one, but not necessarily a direct contradiction of it. There is a great deal of difference between disinterest and resistance.

A final illustration of what might be a polarity relates to conflicting feelings within the

individual e.g. those who create lively, active, play experiences while preferring quiet, still, internalised forms of play. This person identified how they could have very different feelings about a form of play depending on whether they were facilitating it or doing it:

> “I have quite strong aversions. One of the things that's kind of funny in the sense of if you give me the role of facilitator I'm quite willing to run certain parts of a workshop which as a participant I'd be telling you where to stick it (TVOP IV 51)”

The sheer number and contrariness of the polarities helps explain why it is so hard for playful educators in HE to reach any kind of consensus as to what is most appropriate, enjoyable, rewarding, beneficial and valuable with regard to play in their educational context.

An important thing to note here is that there is no fixed, complete list of polarities. I have simply noticed them emerge from interviews, research, events and contacts in which people have expressed their opinion about play. These opinions are likely to be generated and held by individuals, although feelings about some polarities may be shared by others. Another way of trying to explain what I mean by them is to call them the multiple, diverse and opposing views held by people on the subject of play which make universal agreements about nature, definition and practice hard to achieve. Now I understand why Sutton-Smith called his book *The Ambiguity of Play*. Hopefully you understand why I have chosen to use the shorthand polarities of play.

The polarities that I include here come from those identified throughout this study. They could potentially be added to infinitely. Many of the them have already revealed themselves in preceding parts of this document. As they are personal and subjective it may also be that some of the ones illustrated do not speak to an individual, while others will be shouting loudly. You may come up with more that are not included. I suggest their main usefulness lies in

a) how they highlight the sheer variation in, and contradiction relating to play experiences in HE
b) understanding the differences of opinion or approach that may need to be considered or accommodated
c) recognising the barriers and opportunities to play that might exist in any given context.

Examples of polarities which follow are grouped under these headings:

Love versus Hate

Competition versus Co-operation

Inclusion versus Exclusion

Worth versus Waste

Help versus Hindrance
Pro versus Anti
The Nature of Play: This versus That
Teaching and Learning: This versus That

These are each extremely general categories, which I will partially illustrate. Some will have accompanying text and examples, while others remain as lists. Both are open to interpretation.

In addition, some polarities may also echo aspects of the Rhetorics. If we take the polarity Competition versus Cooperation we can see two potential Rhetorics allying themselves, one with each end. The Rhetoric of Power, in dealing with 'agonistic' play which is about victory and proving superiority, will resonate with Competition. The Co-operation end of the same Polarity may speak more to the Identity Rhetoric. You may feel that certain polarities reflect experiences in a particular discipline, just as Sutton-Smith argues that certain Rhetorics belong with certain kinds of play and play context. They may also be affected by 'couching' Rhetorics, or those other persuasive ideological viewpoints which permeate our environment and shape our views without us being aware of them.

Love versus Hate

A repeated motif in interviews and other forms of secondary data gathering is the extent to which educational users of play can be entirely at ease with some forms and deeply against others. So examples might fit these kinds of poles

1. love this type of play v hate that type (e.g. roleplay, gamification)
2. hate icebreakers, love icebreakers
3. younger students do not want to play v older students do
4. games v play (games are better than/preferred to/different)
5. liking the names of certain play forms v disliking (and calling them something else)

> "I'm so opposed to a lot of business games because they're just a way of dressing up over rational thinking, you know, the idea that you can actually know the future" (TVOP IV 9)

Expressed as a polarity (pro v anti business games) the other end of this viewpoint might be "I like business games because they give structure and help prepare players for future ocurrences".

Participants also had strong views about terms such as icebreakers which seemed (like roleplay) to engender very mixed responses. Some accepted the term, while others

hated the connotation with awkwardness or forced jollity and coercion. The latter group preferred terms like warmup, connection former, stimulus activity.

Student responses to play created various different polarities of view as well. While there were many references to positive student-centred experiences and play that was co-designed with students, there were also concerns about negativity from students. Numerous respondents noted that they found mature students to be more prepared to play than the eighteen year olds who have just come to university from school. There was a sense that the latter are expecting a particular kind of teaching experience and feel short-changed if they are presented with something different.

Throughout the study a discussion ran around the differences and similarities between games and play, with some conflating, and others distinguishing, the two areas.

> "I tend to use game-based learning rather than play-based. I find students respond better (and so do I) when there are clear aims and boundaries (Survey respondent, Media & Digital Marketing, UK)"

While roleplay was widely used there were split views as to how users/participants felt about it. These ranged from things like role play works well in person and on zoom to roleplay puts too much pressure on students. In such a case you can also see that a polarity may not necessarily be a straightforward opposite, but be more broadly related to the topic in question.

Competition versus Cooperation

Competitive play featured as a particularly strong polarity, with participants strongly divided as to its positives and negatives. Many forms of play listed in this study have a competitive element, one which may be rewarded by prizes, incentives or other forms of recognition. Polarities here might be

1. competition is motivating for students v competition adds to stress
2. prizes and scoreboards are incentivising v prizes and scoreboards have negative impact
3. competitive play is enjoyable and good for morale/bonding v competitive play is divisive
4. competitive play builds character v competitive play knocks confidence

The assumption expressed by some respondents was that competition/reward is naturally seen as positive and incentivising.

> "I have a big bag so when someone wins a quiz in the week they can choose what they want from the bag. So it used to be things like chocolate and 50p sweets from Tescos and so on but what I've started to do now is put more student fundamentals

, so if Colgate's cheap at Tesco's I'll buy three packs and put one in my bag for students or jars of pasta and sauce and all that kind of silly stuff (TVOP IV 20).

> Even though it's a game and it's a very safe environment it does give people the ability to start to think in a real way and if the game is set up properly and it's playful but serious you bring in a bit of competition which really we feel really helps (TVOP IV 44).

Not everyone felt the same.

> I don't like competition. I don't think competition helps nearly as many people as it hinders. And so I'd rather everyone feel like we're on the same team, because through cooperation, we can actually help each other and that's cool. So, like, when somebody gives an answer, and I go, Okay, excellent, perfect answer. Why is he wrong? And everyone's like, okay, okay, I'm on it, all right, and no one feels put upon that they're getting told that they're wrong, but I need you to engage in critical analysis. I need you to find out why you might be wrong, and be prepared to argue back, but I think that if we were competing, that that procedure of cooperative, constructive learning wouldn't work (TVOP IV 29).

Other comments not attributed to individuals included:

> The idea of competitive play - I haven't really explored that and it's not my natural territory

> I don't like anything that has the potential to be boring or too long or extremely competitive rather than collaborative

> I don't mind a bit of competitiveness but I would prefer for it to be in teams rather than putting one student against another

> I don't like anything that undermines student confidence or just plays into the whole competitiveness of medical school

One educator had found a balance between the two.

> Students can choose how to play either hugely competitively or just engage and have a lovely time

Inclusion versus Exclusion

1. Inclusive v exclusive
2. Privilege v equality
3. Leveller v divider

Some opinions expressed through the study are divided as to whether or not play includes or excludes. In favour of play as a mechanism for inclusion, participants cite the increased involvement of students where there may be a linguistic or cultural barrier; the fact that everybody in the class participates; the increase in a coaching/facilitating culture in teaching which encourages student development in more open and inclusive ways. Play is seen as a leveller which ensures everyone's voice is heard and "gets everyone to the same place".

In counterpoint to this position participants expressed concerns over play as a form of privilege or exclusive practice. Bound up in these concerns are factors such as hidden issues of power, the extent to which university learning is truly participatory, social class, and sensitivity to the needs of neurodiverse students or those with specific learning differences/requirements. Play ceases to be a leveller if those organising it assume that every player has an equal or equivalent amount of knowledge and cultural capital to bring to it, when they don't.

> I do get the impression that play is a very white middle class thing (TVOP IV 27).

> Anything that involves kind of shifting and changing the rules and being a bit subversive, I guess is my kind of play style. Which I then have to really battle to fight against because I've realised that not everyone has those same preferences to me and again, that's quite a privileged position to be in, where you are able to negotiate and you're able to have enough sort of literacy of what games are about to understand that you can do that you know (TVOP IV 22).

> University participation often doesn't involve conversation and negotiation so I was interested in developing models of understanding; student and researcher, teacher participation that are much more democratic and negotiable and play was a way into that basically (ibid).

This educator took particular steps to make sure that - in advance of a play experience that was likely to take many of the students by surprise - the path to participation was at least smoothed a little:

> I usually email all of them in advance, anybody who I know has some sort of support plan, I email them before and say "I'm not going to tell you what's going to happen, but it's gonna be a bit odd, it's going to be uncomfortable, it is meant to be like that. Please don't share this with the rest of the cohort, if it's something you think you might struggle with come and talk to me about it in advance, or don't come or feel free to leave midway through the session (TVOP IV 55).

Worth versus Waste

1. Intangible benefit v expectation of evidence
2. Proving value v can't prove value

3. Valued v not valued
4. Admirable v mad

This polarity grouping is all about perceptions that play has value in HE versus perceptions that it is a waste of educational time. We have already noted the tension that arises when trying to show the value of something when limited by forms of measurement that don't quite fit. In the arena of research we have also seen concerns expressed that if we don't allow for new ways of researching we will fail to find the means and modes that work in new territory. Similarly there may be resistance to anything which does not fit recognisable research/scholarly parameters. (I am conscious that the way I write and present in this study might fall into that category for some).

The following polarities have no examples to illustrate their various sub categories. You can, no doubt, imagine the kinds of tensions that could fit under each heading. The first two groupings can also be seen as complementary.

Help versus Hindrance

1. Barriers to play v opportunities for play
   e.g. My educational context surrounds me with barriers when I try to play v my educational context provides many opportunities for play
2. Supportive management v disinterested management
   e.g. I have the autonomy to teach the way I want and my line manager/head trusts me to do a good job v my line manager/head is not interested in what I do and/but is influenced by beliefs that certain kinds of pedagogy are appropriate/preferable
3. Colleagues in favour - colleagues against
   e.g. my colleagues enjoy and support what I do v my colleagues poke fun at it
4. Incentives of play types v turnoffs of play
   e.g. as seen in Competition v Co-operation and shortly to be seen in What Gets . In the Way of Play

Pro versus Anti Play

1. Pro play v anti play
2. Resistance v acceptance
3. Fear v courage
4. Accepted v rejected
5. Trivial v serious
6. Play has no negatives v play has many negatives

All of these potential groupings can be found in What Gets In the Way of Play and in the discussion of value, values and value systems. They are not always easily separated into

big categories. Educators may be pro some kinds of play, anti others. Some forms of play may be accepted, others rejected. And so on.

The Nature of Play: This versus That

1. Innocence versus darkness
2. Real v pretend
3. Painful versus pain-free
4. Conformist v unconventional
5. A means to an end v an end in itself
6. Inspiring v exposing
7. Sophisticated v trivial
8. Comfort - discomfort
9. Disruption v connection
10. Risky v safe

These examples relate to how play can be judged or experienced. The first of these has not been greatly touched in this study, as I have already stated. However, it is an important one to bear in mind as play is sometimes confused with what I call 'rainbows and unicorns' - a kind of utopian engagement where everything is happy and fair and everyone is kind. Many theorists talk about the darker side of play; when play is not fair, or kind, or inclusive, or is manipulative and mean. For participants in this study these times are when play ceases to be play.

With regard to no.10 many educators in this study refer to play as a means of dealing with topics and practices in a safe space. This notion of safety is problematised and transformed into one of 'principled spaces' in this resource from colleagues at the London School of Economics.

Teaching and Learning: This versus That

1. Proper v improper education/pedagogy
2. Free v purposeful
3. Loose and open v rulebound and structured
4. Fresh approach v boring and tired
5. New v traditional
6. Normal v strange
7. Planning v chaos
8. Standards v passion
9. Small versus large

The above kinds of polarities are ones which surfaced when we looked at what brought

study participants to play and will surface again when we look at barriers to play, and what will help it thrive in HE. They relate to tussles around teaching modes; seen either through the eyes of the playful educator in opposition to others, or as their view of how they think their practices are perceived (strange). “I feel my choice to play is perfectly normal and appropriate versus my colleagues think I am mad or silly”.

In no.7 planning was seen as important for play in the overwhelming majority of cases. However, its polarity may also be beneficial. Chaos can be liberating and enlightening, rather than a confusing, hectic muddle. Even that kind of muddle might be playfully instructive - and perhaps makes you appreciate a bit of structure and containment. No. 8 illustrates two ends of a polarity which do not have to be mutually exclusive, but complement each other. In some comments regulations and standards were seen as the straitjacket which stifled a passion for teaching. However regulations and standards may need to prevail in some circumstances and may even support the expression of that passion. In no. 9 small versus large related to participants who think you can only play in small groups, while others believe you can still play in large ones. It may also be the point that some forms of play can be quick, simple and small scale, and just as effective as something which is intricate, large scale and more time consuming.

In short

This section focuses on the differing - and sometimes completely opposing - opinions that participants and other playful educators hold about play. They are called polarities of play to reflect the diversity (and strength) of opinion and lack of overall consensus on any one thing. The polarities include participant views on their own play preferences and practices as well as their beliefs about what play can, and should be, for. In themselves, the polarities are not necessarily a matter of bad versus good, they are simply the opposing ends of difference. They are also subjective. In some polarities we also see tussles that relate to perceptions about the right or wrong way to do things, which equally reflect the sense of value, educator values and the confluence/conflict between value systems which were set out in greater detail earlier.

Reflection

What are your thoughts when you look at these polarities?
What kinds of opposing poles of opinion can you identify in your own play experiences?
Which of those described here resonate most strongly with you?
If you are aware of any important polarities that are not included and should be, what are they?
What do you feel is the impact of these polarities on play in higher education? (positive or negative)
What connections (if any) do you see between the Rhetorics and any polarities?

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF PLAY?

By now it should be clear that, while playful learning in HE may still be seen as unusual, or sometimes under the radar, appreciation for it at university and in equivalent educational environments is growing. The number of educators who are starting to use play in some form is increasing, and/or becoming more visible. Opportunities to integrate play into the curriculum/experience are being taken and more people are building up confidence to experiment with playful practices. In addition to the play-related clubs and networks now emerging, learning and teaching units are also often hubs for developing creative, imaginative and alternative pedagogies.

Many respondents in this study were entirely happy with how their play experiences were unfolding in higher education:

> “Once the success of some of the more elaborate initiatives started circulating, then actually colleagues were hugely welcoming, wanted “in on it”, asked me to run it for the staff events, all of that. I have not been badly received by the institution, everybody’s welcomed it (TVOP IV 16).”

> “I’ve gotten a lot of support for the various activities I do, and I run them in different ways in different venues...once they’re on board, especially the students, once the students are on board I don’t hear any kind of grumbling (TVOP IV 29).”

> “My head of department, fortunately, is very supportive (TVOP IV 55).”

> “My head of department is very supportive of my innovative ways of learning and teaching. In fact he put me forward for an award... (TVOP IV 53)”

Numerous respondents also mention offering support to other colleagues who are not sure where to start with play, thereby providing ideas and mentorship which help build up playful practices. In some cases they are educators in roles which allow them to design games or playful interventions for colleagues whose workload prevents them personally trying to do this.

Reasons for resistance to play

> “I think you have to do a lot of convincing people that actually this is a really useful tool, this is how we learn as humans this is going to take us to the next level.”

In Creativity. Theories and Themes; research, development and practice Runco (2014) reflects on the importance of incubation for allowing an embryonic creative spark to take further shape. In so doing he cites Parnes' (1967, in Runco, 2014) idea of "make it happen" tactics, versus "let it happen" tactics. It might be tempting to see formal, organised higher education as being in the " make it happen" camp; which may be why some prioritise forms of play that fit this mould. Pure play might be seen to fall into the "let it happen" camp; as illustrated by the kinds of play already alluded to which are goal free and less structured.

Whether to make it happen or let it happen is not really the central issue here. However, the failure to appreciate let it happen tactics, or see them as frivolous time wasting, can prevent the potential of play being recognised in higher education.

Runco shares Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein's 2006 conclusions that

> "given the general tendency of modern society to undervalue and marginalize play of all kinds, particularly in educational settings, these data [about worldplay] must cause concern that critical creative facilities and our children and adolescents are being short changed (Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 2006:421, in Runco, 2014:359)."

Not just our younger members of society either, according to respondents in this study.

The reasons why there can be resistance to play can be grouped under a number of headings and include intrinsic and extrinsic barriers. Intrinsic barriers include play aversions (dislikes), negative feelings about the play in question (fear, discomfort, awkwardness) and emotional responses to play. These kinds of negative feelings are different to the times when educators said they feel uncomfortable or stressed about using a certain form of play, but persist because they can see how well it works with their students. Extrinsic barriers may be an unwelcoming climate, belittling comments about the use of play, or structural and systemic blocks. Creating both intrinsic and extrinsic barriers may be things like unethical, insensitive or ill-judged play, and exclusive play.

In what follows we can find evidence of what Runco memorably refers to as various "barriers and squelchers" (2014:360) which can inhibit the desire to play. Squelchers through the eyes of this study may include the classic dampeners which get aired before anything is tried for the first time; "they (whoever they are, often students) won't like it", "I don't think I'm allowed", "if it goes wrong I am in terrible trouble". He cites Von Oech's list of 10 barriers to creativity. They are

> "...the tendency to
> 1. look to the right answer
> 2. focus on what is logical
> 3. follow the rules
> 4. consider what is practical
> 5. avoid ambiguity
> 6. avoid mistakes
> 7. avoid play
> 8. stay within our own areas of experience
> 9. avoid the possibility of appearing to be foolish
> 10. think of oneself as uncreative
>
> (Von Oech, 2014, in Runco,2014:360)

All of the above could feature in a list about play, as opposed to creativity, with the removal of no. 7 (for obvious reasons) and a replacement of uncreative in no.10 with "unplayful". Many of the barriers they identify are listed in the subsequent sections; fear has its own large section as it, together with misunderstanding, could lie at the base of most barriers to play in higher education. Fear can also be said to infuse each one of Von Oech's items.

In interviews, study participants were asked questions relating to their play aversions (they were asked about preferences as well, but those have already been covered, whether they felt there were any negatives to play, and whether there were any unacceptable forms of play. We consider their answers to these three next.

Play aversions

These relate to any kinds of play the participants were not keen on. Articulating them in detail is important because it shows the variety of positions respondents in this study hold concerning different kinds of play. They also illustrate that while proponents of play may be enthusiastic about the appeal of some kinds of play, they hold equally strong views as to why they don't like others.

Games and gamification were particularly contentious among participants. Monopoly was unpopular for taking too long, while it, and other games, were disliked for the imposition of rules. Some participants hated competitive games, especially if they felt these brought out the worst in their students or alienated any. Conversely, one complained about the negotiation that has to be engaged in in collaborative play, while another preferred collaborative play for being more human and connected than competitive play. One participant who attends play conferences said they felt an imposter at such events because they felt they were expected to be doing a lot of running around and getting involved in multiplayer games. Two respondents who are highly experienced in educational play admitted they hate games with other people.

A partiality for solo play, as opposed to play with others, was picked out:

> I'm an introvert by preference so play is a very solo activity for me... I'm great at playing on my own and finding much space in that

The positive side of gamification (as a motivator e.g. incentivising progress in a running app) was variously noted, however many respondents criticised it:

> There's a sort of almost a positivist approach to a lot of the gamified systems, even from people who claim they are interpreters. The problem is it is actually partially true and that's what turns me off...it kind of makes me realize that the majority of people behave in predictable ways...gamification plays on that (TVOP IV 1).

Gamification was also criticised for

- strip mining useful elements from games: using them to capture data or processes like attendance; thereby just using the convenient, and not the powerful parts of play
- a lack of consent or criticality
- superficiality and under-using play
- the way that people are being manipulated through triggers to set off certain kinds of behaviours or choices:

Other forms of play which drew strong opposing views were icebreakers and role play. As we saw just now with the polarities of play, the suggestion of an icebreaker caused much heart sinking and embarrassment among participants. Several talked about using an alternative name for any kind of warm up or opening activity to get away from the negative connotations. The main problem with role play for several respondents was the embarrassment factor, difficulty in relating to the character, the sense of exposure in having to play a role in front of people, or that it was perceived as too challenging. These are, of course, in contrast to the positively viewed examples we saw in the vignettes of play earlier on.

> I don't like roleplay – ok I do it with some students on a physio course and they said the problem with role play is we are not that character. So I can't empathise with a 65 year old lady who's broken her hip (younger male respondent).

Some had aversions to particular materials such as playdoh, while the idea of having a predefined purpose or not was highly divisive. In the 'against' corner were comments such as:

> As a child I hated arranged playdates because of their determinative nature. When business people say I want you to run these sessions and I want everybody in the room to think this -that's the business equivalent of the arranged playdate (TVOP IV 3).

> I think play where there is a fixed outcome I really struggle with (ibid).

In addition to these 'repeat offenders' in participant responses, there were also some individual aversions, all of which find their polar opposite in other responses:

• 'Touchy Feely' play

> There are definite play events that I have been to in the past that have been a bit too vague and woolly and huggy (TVOP IV 22).

• Play for the sake of play

> I don't like play for the sake of play in HE – I'm actually a really traditional person within the humanities...I really like philosophy and heavy thinking like lectures and going to conferences and being allowed to just listen to people talking for nine hours and having that kind of room to think within myself (TVOP IV 49).

This quote is useful as a reminder that play practitioners can hold multiple positions with regard to play and academia. They can be staunch defenders of the old ways while also wanting to embrace the new. In introducing or advocating play there is also sometimes the assumption on the part of those new to the idea that what is being proposed is a total replacement of everything that exists, with play. Play does not have to be an either/or choice however, it can be a matter of accommodating the two. In some cases a dominance of play might be the aspiration of educators, and in others it is a question of including play judiciously and in a balanced way.

> You need to combine play with a range of other approaches. It's a bit like having a meal, It's not just cake, You can't just have cake (TVOP IV 47) (I personally believe you can, however).

• Play which disorients students

> I don't like the stakes when they're like that, I know some people do like that, it's not my thing...unconventional for me I think is using different learning formats and different things in the classroom than what they're used to

• Performative play

> This is one of the areas where I've really tried to practise and to improve because for many years I was struggling a little bit with this. Like, I was so into play and I created these play events and everything and there were these physical forms of play that while you're playing it feels a little bit like a performance for someone else. And I just didn't like that. I generally don't really like performing (TVOP IV 37).

> I'm very introverted so I hate exposing myself to the room with very performative play (TVOP IV 2).

The first of these two quotes reminds us of a point made several times in this study that those who play do not always feel supremely at home in the kind of play they choose. They use it, however, because of the value it has and as a means of pushing their own

boundaries. We should recollect here that playing out of your own comfort zone is not the same as playing inauthentically. Even if it is uncomfortable there is an element of choice and a drive to try something out. Inauthenticity comes in when there is no belief in or commitment to what you are doing.

• **Privileged play**

> A lot of play that verges on performance art – interesting but 'there's a sense of privilege around it, where, suddenly, if you're not careful the person who's actually running the activity becomes the star of the activity and then you're suddenly not co-owning things,...[there's a] barrier to entry...it's about someone showing off how playful they are (TVOP IV 22).

The view as to whether play is a matter of privilege and exclusion, or a levelling and inclusive force has already been mentioned in Polarities of Play. This quote illustrates the view many participants had of the need to have some kind of general plan or end point (even if the actual outcome is not specified). As one noted, without a plan or the facilitation skills to move the play on there is a risk that the focus becomes more about the game itself, rather than learning from the game.

This does suggest that, examples of free play and play for play's sake notwithstanding, there is still nervousness about allowing play to have value in itself. However, in some cases the lack of purpose or outcome may be precisely the point of the activity, and part of a learning process. To get round this and allow for play to be what it is while underway, numerous responses participants emphasised the need for reflection and debrief post-play, to be able to tease out and unpack learning moments.

Negatives to play

Many respondents observed that, if there were negatives, they were not necessarily the fault of play itself.

> Not necessarily any negatives. Maybe one can think that they will not take things too serious or they will see their studies as not being serious, but I personally don't see it as a disadvantage because I think when you are engaging through playing even more so you understand better the importance of concepts, how to apply them. You don't have to make it complicated.

Their comments included the observation that there is no wrong form of play, only wrong ways to play. Wrong ways would include not knowing what you are doing or why you are doing it or not having an intention behind it. Play that has been poorly designed or thought through comes in for repeat criticism. The potential labour intensity that can accompany creating a good play situation rather than quickly knocking out a Powerpoint is also identified by several. (The alternative view is that it can take just as long to prepare

excellent "traditional" teaching resources and experiences as it does to design a simple game or playful intervention, which may be very rapid.)

Some make assumptions or generalisations which others may, or may not, relate to:

> Don't frame it as play because then people fear 'you're going to make us do plasticine' and everyone's had a bad experience with plasticine, you know where it hasn't worked and it's been really awkward.

Some respondents spoke about the extrinsic barriers to play, such as the kinds of play that are deemed permissible. There were several concerns that play was not sufficiently tied to the task, or had elements of it 'cherrypicked' as a garnish to enliven the class without the full substance which gave it a point. An educator lamented that they were often "asked so many times to add entertainment to the classroom", observing that if it is seen only as entertainment it misses out on value. A lack of understanding as to why play is being used is seen to cause sceptical parties to then challenge the play leader "and they may not be able to justify it and then you end up with damage to the play approach because people just think they are playing games now".

> In itself it's not negative at all but in certain subject disciplines you've got very different views about things like playful learning – some will embrace it others will be uncomfortable and it might just boil down to individuals and it's not always what you think.

> Because I come from art and design and people tend to assume oh yeh people in art and design they'll be up for it. Well no not necessarily...but the sciences which I used to think well they won't like this they're absolutely creative and engineering went for it.

Both of these comments point to beliefs about the relationship between play and specific academic disciplines. They also address the need to avoid any generalisations and stereotyping which would overlook cases of play that goes against the tradition of the discipline.

One respondent warned against a perceived lack of criticality in the way play is used and perceived - perhaps also harking back to Petelczyc et al's reference to positivity in play literature. These words are also perhaps rooted in a desire to defend play from criticisms of a lack of academic rigour and thinking:

> People [who] get blindsided by play...based on a not very academic premise...that play is in itself good...I think there are a lot of downsides to play and playfulness that we are not seeing (TVOP IV 49).

Another echoed this sentiment, warning, perhaps, against an overdose of optimism:

> “I think play scholars have a problem with their own approach – everything can be saved and be better. Democracy would be better if everyone knew how to play. The school system would be better if just everyone knew how to play, teaching would be more interesting if teachers knew how to play.”

This may indeed be the position of certain play proponents - and not just play scholars. However, I would argue that the same might be said for many things about which people feel passionately; jogging, composting, green vegetables. One might also argue that this level of optimism or belief is necessary to face up to the strength of opposition that playful learning can encounter. Perhaps the key requirement here is the critical and discerning eye, the evidence basis and also an allowance/adjustment for variation and context.

One of the biggest negatives perceived relates to what I will call The People Factor. Some of the comments that were made included:

> “People who don’t realise people are learning when they are playing with LEGO®, they are just doing it in a different way”
>
> “One person can ruin a group mood”
>
> “Games can bring out the worst in people, as well as the best”
>
> “Cultural references that are exclusive or would not work with a certain demographic”
>
> “Conditioning of bright students”
>
> “Mature students more open to play than younger ones”
>
> “It’s uncomfortable…people can be distanced if they’re not into games or even its idea, the other negative is the customer looking in on it[53] saying, well, that’s not what I purchased…I’m paying for you to teach them something, not sit around telling stories or playing with LEGO®.”
>
> “When your play partner is closed”
>
> “I’ve been paired up with one other person… that other person was extremely uncomfortable and very closed and you begin to mirror each other’s behaviour and it can be really hard to get out of that space…but I think with creative delivery and facilitation that can be overcome…when I do warm up exercises, [I think] what is the thing that can help people overcome that fear…”
>
> “I can certainly think of scenarios where I’ve thought oh my goodness this is really awkward or I don’t want to be here right now”
>
> “That’s one of the things I like about the LEGO® techniques is that talking to people - often people come in very cynically but when they see how it is structured and you’re not just doing it for the sake of it, they can see the purpose”

One respondent went so far as to observe:

> “Most educators are mimics and not innovators. Most educators are not experts in designing, developing or facilitating learning. They are expert in their field and not scholar-practitioners in adult learning (TVOP IV 50).”

While some may concur with this respondent’s views and experiences relating to their particular area of adult learning, I suspect others may baulk at this generalisation. It suggests to me that they have come into contact with subject specialists who, being experts in their field, do not feel that gaining additional qualifications in teaching and learning is necessary. Having taught on, and been involved in, many postgraduate teaching programmes I find that most specialists who are reluctant to participate are pleasantly surprised by what they get out of them.

Unacceptable forms of play

Many respondents felt that as long as play had a purpose and was correctly facilitated there were unlikely to be any unacceptable forms of play. Others felt that it depended greatly on context and how the play was introduced and undertaken. An interviewee working in the area of play design and the design of playful learning identified an interesting quandary which required fragile and careful balancing:

> “The disclaimer is, for me personally, I’m working with design for play. So we have an obligation to not disregard basically any kind of play. If we deem it an interesting type of playing experience then I feel like we have an obligation to cover it. But of course as soon as you start moving into the more wild, maybe physically challenging, dangerous play and the darker forms of play it is bordering on cruelty you know. It might be too challenging for most higher education teachers to engage with if they’re not so interested in how play might lead to different learning experiences and I can totally understand because, you know, it can easily get out of hand and …sometimes you are on the border of something that is not pleasant and not maybe even fruitful from a student perspective. So I would really consider that, of course, some kinds of play are more appropriate than others (TVOP IV 37).”

Several respondents specified numerous things which would make play unacceptable. These included dark play which can involve intimidation and unethical behaviour, sex play, physical play involving touching and contact, inappropriate frivolity (e.g. in a palliative care situation), unkind play or banter, play which excludes through social privilege (by means of relying on equipment, play literacy or forms of cultural capital which would mean those without could not play), gendered play (e.g. women excluded from management games for ‘alpha males’), accessibility issues, sensitivity towards mental health, protecting confidentiality (in medical disciplines where much information is off limits).

All of these are forms of play which clearly fall into the unacceptable category; not least because in causing hurt or harm they cease to be play (Bateson and Martin, Brown, Caillois), and because they are all inappropriate in an educational context. There are numerous other variables in the mix when deciding what is acceptable or unacceptable play in higher education and what needs to be avoided. These include play type, intention, preparation, facilitator skill, player attitudes, sometimes stage of study, time, resources and so forth. This respondent noted the importance in education of a post-play debrief.

> “It depends on where your boundaries are and what is and isn’t play. I don’t think I’ve come across anything I’ve thought no that’s not working or I’m not happy with that. I mean there are sometimes when people do wacky things and I think Oh God where is this going and I would never do this and then they usually prove something really interesting. Play as long as one has got some sort of purpose and an idea of where it is going and that it is followed with some sort of reflection and an opportunity.”

Fear and negative perceptions

Fear is a repeated motif in reasons why educators are concerned about using play. Feeling afraid can affect someone’s willingness to engage in play and their evaluation of the risks and ramifications of so doing. It may be affected by factors such as group size, demographic, and wider learning environment (e.g. departmental or institutional culture). Many of the negative comments directed at play also contribute to educator fearfulness. In some cases colleagues who are unused to play and wish to try it also want assurances that they are ‘allowed’ to play and that, if they do, everything will turn out alright. They may also want a cast iron guarantee of the exact outcome of an experiment, which is very hard to give. A respondent noted that even with colleagues who are interested or ask for help/inspiration “they normally want to know how can I persuade my department that this is ok, or that this is worthwhile”.

The concerns that educators expressed related particularly to fear of:

- failure and related vulnerability
- certain play forms
- reputational damage; being discredited as an academic
- not being seen as expert or professional, or even respectable
- how people will react
- being mocked
- looking childish

This respondent pointed to the reflective judgements that they make in any learning situation:

> “Do I wanna be vulnerable or should I take a step back? Does this not feel like a safe environment to be myself? I think that’s the crux of it. If there are times when I haven’t felt safe to be silly, that I might have been judged, or it would have landed flat. It’s important to think about who the people are who are gonna be in your sessions, what their background is, what they may be comfortable with and what information you’re asking them to divulge. (TVOP IV 38)”

Negative perceptions include:

- open ended play will look/be directionless and chaotic
- play is not considered ‘proper education’

> “The only downside is the perception of other people, not valuing what I do – that is the only disadvantage, when other people don’t understand the fact that you’re doing something different.”

> “The two people most senior to me who make the yay or nay call on this were risk averse, very strongly risk averse, and play to them is also still quite risky unless you can show this is a play thing that’s been done three years ago by two other universities. So in a sense they really love LEGO® Serious Play® because it’s 20 years old.”

Having something to show for it

No one wants to leave a learning experience feeling they got nothing out of it. However, play that has no visible agenda, outcomes or predestined goals (not just play that does have these things) can free up head space for students to make observations, find insights and allow aspects of what they have encountered to sink in. The concern that they have to demonstrate outcomes was on the mind of several respondents, including the difficulties of measuring something that is hard to measure; the intangible and more subtle outcomes, which are unintended but no less important for that. Having something to show for it may also be a matter of students deciding what is important to them in an experience, not just their teachers.

> “Some people are fine, just to sit and play for hours and hours but more people I think need to demonstrate they’ve got something from it, and I think that’s partly our sort of predispositions as adults, that worry in a work context…you need to have something tangible to show.”

> “How do you measure…if not measure, then document in ways that are really sensitive to the play experience, the fact that people have their individual experiences and their shared experience?”

> “[play] needs authenticity, purpose and creating the conditions whereby this feels right and doesn’t feel like a bolt on and participants can connect with their own reasons for play as to someone else’s reasons for using play”

Ways to identify that something may come through facilitation of play or through the kinds of post-play reflections already alluded to. They also include the alternative indicators and signs that were mentioned earlier, rather than archetypal measuring sticks.

Other obstacles

Some of these have already been referred to, such as a perceived stigma and the need for support from leadership and management. One respondent complained of a lack of support:

> “There are no courses and infrastructures to support the colleagues that want to learn how to use or create new games (Survey respondent, Management, UK).”

This quote is particularly important for flagging the sense of isolation many playful educators can feel, even though this respondent was in fact - and unbeknownst to them - working in an institution with several other playful educators and informal networks. It emphasises how lines of communication and visibility can be blocked within a single organisation, not just in a disciplinary area. It heralds comments made elsewhere from colleagues who feel a similar sense of being outside of the mainstream, or on their own.

Others touch on implications of working with technology:

> “I have an interest in using games, apps to engage with students when I am teaching. Since GDPR came in place I have experienced lots of challenges in using such app, online games due to contracts, licenses and GDPR issues. I feel restricted by my institution with the digital tools I can use to enhance my teaching and I don’t think the institution understands the value that they can bring. (Survey respondent, Business & Management, Scotland).”

> “How can we conduct play-based activities virtually by video -conference? Something that can be done in breakout rooms? With a low technological starting barrier (Survey respondent, Medicine, New Zealand).”

> “Not all want to play, you have to understand your students to know when to introduce play (Survey respondent, Early Years Education, UK).”

Understanding and defusing resistance

This recital of things that can get in the way of play can sound somewhat deflating. However, a number of things spring to mind when wondering how to deal with blocks or obstacles of these kinds. (Note. Here I am not referring to the times when there is good reason for resistance to play, such as the examples of when it is unacceptable.)

a. Many of the obstacles relate to pre-formed mindsets: “I won’t like this because…” “I don’t like this because…” “It won’t work because…”.

This is illustrated in the box below by the story of an experience I had a few years ago.

Determined to dislike

A preformed mindset which is determined to dislike something may be rooted in immoveable views. Several years ago I facilitated a largescale outreach activity using play to provide primary school children with an experience of a day at university. It was part of an initiative to encourage younger pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to understand that universities were just as much designed for them, as for pupils with different educational experiences and histories.

Numerous alumni of the host university volunteered to work with the children and their teachers throughout the day and help orchestrate the play. All helpers were enthusiastic, energetic, keen. Bar one. When I asked them why they had offered to be a part of the event, I was told “I have come along because I can’t stand this sort of thing and I know it doesn’t work. So I am here to prove it.”

With the rigidity of that headspace any flexibility in facilitation - gaining and keeping attention, rerouting activities to channel energies, changing up planned activities to make sure that a boisterous crowd of 70 plus youngsters under the age of 10 were all engaged - was, for them, proof of failure.

To me, and to others involved, afterwards, shattered from the efforts of the day, the event had been a success. Pupils left intrigued, happy, entertained, having tried something new through building with LEGO®, drawing, quizzes and a variety of other things. We had risked an experiment, with all the concerns about risk, success, failure, fallout that go with that. Despite my relief that things had gone well, I still had one question in my own (tired) head. It was about ‘the one who got away’. Why was that alumnus helper so determined in advance that play should fail? What was it in their experience of play, or education, or a whole heap of other things for that matter, that had made them so antagonistic to the thought that something they did not like might still have value? I’ll never know.

Play is not the only activity which can attract resistance in advance. A similar feeling can be voiced with regard to creativity. If someone believes they are terrible at drawing, or thinks they are going to be asked to come up with something ingenious at a time when

they are out of ideas, they will feel exposed and not want to share anything. They may even avoid the activity altogether.

Resistance - although hopefully not as unforgiving as the one in the story just told - can appear in many forms and situations; for example, from:

b. fear of a negative comparison with others

c. the concern that if something new is being introduced it might tamper with student learning, enjoyment and trust and belief in their educators, course and institution

d. play not being commensurate with the expectations of a higher education experience

e. fearing a loss of their control over a situation and almost certain ridicule

f. being responsible for overseeing courses or delivering them and not wanting to risk anything which could undermine that

g. the expectation of negative behaviours by others towards the use of play is a major obstruction in the confidence, desire or consideration of using play

Resistance may even come from playful educators who know who to do it well and who fear that bad interpretation, engagement or execution will give play in general a bad name.

So what can we do about resistance to play? Should we do anything? Aren't people entitled to 'hate play'? The answers are all kinds of things, yes, and not without any basis. Let's go with the first two questions.

In 'normal' play situations, there is always the possibility that the player can cease playing or walk away from the game. In educational settings teachers try to ensure that everyone participates in learning opportunities until the end, to help them master challenges, ensure equity of opportunity, access, and so on. In a lecture hall, a student who is disengaged can discreetly fall asleep at the back. Their disconnection or discomfort may be more visible in a play setting.

As in the story I have just told, if someone is categorically determined not to engage in play and equally determined to resist attempts to persuade of its value, the efforts to achieve otherwise may be hopeless. Better to find ways that they can remove themselves with dignity or find other things do and allow others to continue playing. However, where there is even a chink of openness to play, however much shrouded in reluctance, finding ways to get past blocks to it in order to enjoy and benefit from it as much as individually possible is something that playful educators continually seek after.

With regard to the third of these questions, the answer has to be no, if hating play stems from prejudice, intolerance and a lack of understanding as to what play might be in an HE context and what it can achieve. And, with that entirely partisan observation, I will get down off my high horse and wrap this up.

In short

Despite substantial content dedicated to the positive arguments for, and examples of, play, play in higher education is not always appreciated. To differing extents, opposition may arise from emotional, perceptual and cognitive blocks as well resource or support issues. Recognising that they exist enables honest appraisals of when play works and when things might hamper it. It also provides a basis from which to think about whether resistance to play could, and should, be addressed and how educators might find ways to enable play to thrive in their learning environments.

Reflection

What are your thoughts about the obstacles to play listed here?
Which, in your view, are the most impactful in higher education?
(How) do they resonate with your own experience of play in higher education/adult learning?
Are there any that you feel are missing?
What other ways are there to look at obstacles and negative views of play?
How might the higher education community address solutions to difficulties with play?
What other comments would you like to make here?

GATEWAY

In which
I gather together differing opinions about play.
I move on from the things that may cause play
to have an unfriendly reception in higher education and
consider how these may be positively managed.

GATEWAY

WHAT PLAY NEEDS TO THRIVE IN HE

Looking back over the ways in which play can be undermined or blocked, most of them are to do with human perceptions and the orchestration of play, and not with the play itself. This is not to say that resistance to play does not ever have valid origins. Feelings of dislike, discomfort and objections are very real and powerful to the person reacting, and also hard to shift. I can list any number of kinds of play that I can't bear the thought of when they first come into my head. Karaoke. Role Play. Running-about-play with strangers. Things that involve me making an ass of myself when I don't feel ready to take that risk. Anything that makes me too visible. Playful breakout rooms if I'm not in the mood. I can appreciate them when they are done well by others and am happy to observe them in action (unless they are deeply awkward). When I think about why I don't want to do those things, I tap into the same kinds of obstacles identified earlier; fear of exposure, feeling not good enough to try something, thinking I won't like it, a loss of control over what will happen. And yet, whenever I have tried any of these things (bar the first one), I have found something in the experience which has redeemed it - and not just the relief when it is over.

This study - thankfully - is not about me. However, I share anecdotes from my own experience because each of us can think of kinds of play we are happy to engage in, and those we aren't. So when we are thinking of introducing play into the higher education curriculum we need to be aware that there will be 'non-negotiables' in the heads of some and room for manoeuvre in the heads of others. How can we accommodate these two potentially opposing forces? And should we?

James Adams answers these two questions in *Conceptual Blockbusting* (2019)[54], where he offers a compelling account of the kinds of blocks we can come up against; perceptual, emotional, cultural and environmental, intellectual and expressive. Although he is writing about idea generation, most of the block he identifies can apply to play. He takes the example of the nine dot logic puzzle to illustrate how, when faced with riddles or challenges, we start imposing imagined boundaries, on our solution-finding. When we allow ourselves to think beyond those boundaries, we become capable of all kinds of imaginative responses. He provides a range of activities and examples to help the reader shake off the shackles of their own boundaries; something which can be hard to do when a voice in your head insists that trying something new is bound to end in tears.

The value of working through your own blocks is voiced by many participants in *The Value of Play in HE*. It relates to what they have gained by trying something playful they were not sure they would like. In some cases this meant working on their own aversions and preferences to ensure that they could make some sort of peace with how they felt. This anticipates, of course, a willingness to try something new, be open to the

opportunity, veer away from the script a little. What participants also identify is the need for a clear and positive intention behind the play; a feeling that play at this point, in this way, for whatever reason, will be a valuable and valued experience.

From the emerging literature on play there are diverse positions as to what play needs in higher education. Outside HE, but speaking to an audience of HE educators at the 2021 Playposium, Kane (2021) suggested that play in HE needs:

- recognition that play's excesses, experiments and performances - an imaginative rehearsal for reality - are adaptive & capability-enhancing, not maladaptive & costly
- to understand that we are moving within and beyond boundaries, to a time of what he terms play realism
- for the purpose of education to be seen as being an active vacation

To support this last recommendation institutions should:

- shape a campus to be flexible, open to adaptive potentiation - like MIT Hacks, Hacker's Hall of Fame
- "expand satisfactions!" experiment with different modes of learning, & living, in the same space - virtual/actual
- ensure that college/university is about enjoying the experience of self-determining their time and interests

These are suggestions which many playful educators are already implementing, and which require a supportive, conducive environment in order to succeed. There are many other ways in which to foster engagement with play in higher education in a way that encompasses all the kinds of competing desires and practices and positions we have already identified. This is not in an ill-advised attempt to please everybody, which is impossible, but as a means of developing and deepening understanding of play so that it at least gets a fair trial, before any final judgement.

All of the following assumes that local context, with everything that entails, informs any actions and decision-making. Among the suggestions that are offered here are:

- creating, exploring and supporting a play culture that is open, tolerant and respectful of difference

This really encompasses all the following, which are:

- allowing for all kinds of participation
- rebuffing negativity and myth making concerning playful pedagogy
- researching play in university learning/subject areas to deepen understanding and reflect critically on its complexities
- allowing for a wide spectrum of play, including free play, without imposition or exclusion
- creating or joining local/global networks of play practitioners, educators, researchers
- evaluating appropriately and judiciously, especially if current metrics and measures do not allow for a true consideration of playful learning

Creating, exploring and supporting a play culture that is open, tolerant and respectful of difference

As just noted, creating a favourable atmosphere, in which all participants feel free to join in with play if they want to and know that diverse practices are accepted and valued, is a fundamental step to welcoming playful learning. From play theory and literature, study participants, play practitioners and students, we know that humans and animals cannot play if they are sick or stressed. A first step to remove fear and anxiety about playful learning is by being receptive to, curious about, and interested in, different ways to play; not resistant and judgmental.

Respecting difference is also about accepting familiar pedagogic approaches which are working well. Creating a play culture does not mean that everything else has to go out of the window. An informative lecture, fascinatingly delivered, by a speaker who knows their stuff and how to communicate it, can be a joy to listen to and a spark for the mind. Engaging seminars and debates likewise. Creating a play culture is about ensuring that new practices are encouraged to emerge and are discussed and shaped in a constructive way. It also means that some of the obstacles we encountered earlier can be dealt with by healthy and positive means, as opposed to knee-jerk negativity.

One way to foster such a culture - and there are many - is through ludo-literacy:

> "'Ludo-literate design' is based on identifying the main goals, translating them into playful challenges, rules and feedback in a game frame. But it is also based on understanding of social and cultural frames, and recognition and respect for individual differences (Mäyrä, ND)."

Mäyrä is identifying the conceptual and mechanical requirements for designing play and

games well, while also emphasising the points we have already made on the need to be sensitive, to and aware of, difference in how we play (see also de Koven).

Another way is through engaging in activities which will help create that environment; for example, to generate the kinds of qualities that educators cited when thinking about their own play values. They include tolerance, openness, respect, understanding, authenticity, and human connection. The experiences within that environment will have been carefully considered; intentional and inclusive in their design. They will be focussed on the participants and what they need.

A recent experience I had sums this up metaphorically.

> Think like a bee
> I enrolled in a beekeeping course and in week one we were exhorted to do the following: think like a bee. Bees process information and communicate in ways very different to our own. They are creatures of ritual, routine and habit. They dance for each other to indicate good sources of forage; they memorise the location of their hive and how to enter it. In deciding where to house a hive it may be tempting to think about avoiding noise so as not to disturb the bees. And yet a more important consideration is vibration, not just noise, as this is something to which bees are particularly sensitive. Unless we have been calamitously jolted about on a train for hours, our own sensitivity to vibration may be less marked than that of the bee. All of which is to say that in designing teaching experiences, whether with play or not, we already know that it is not enough to think about how *we* want to do it. We have to think about what will work best from a participant perspective. This may involve being honest with ourselves - and them - about what is most sustainable and what we are prepared to risk on their behalf.

Start small

The idea of fostering a playful culture can sound overwhelming, however, it does not have to be on a grand scale. Perhaps it is just about finding a small number of like - minded people - in the same way that special interest groups have often started - and doing your own thing. There are countless examples of these in the university sector. It may also be a way to encourage the many academics who are feeling overwhelmed by workload and other commitments and who fear that creating playful opportunities has to be a time-consuming affair.

Perform some practical magic

Alongside the general recommendations, it might be that newcomers to play at university, and those interested in incorporating play into teaching/learning/development/scholarship, are not sure where to start. Some of the considerations in the following list might be useful. There is also the wealth of ideas in this study as to how else you might go about it, and why.

Things to think about are:

- how well you know your students/participants
- how many of them are in the group (size does not have to be an obstacle)
- how long you have with them (one off session, whole course?)
- your reasons for wanting to play
- the kind of play you have in mind
- how much time/energy/motivation/inspiration you have to invest in creating a playful encounter
- anything which might be holding you back? which may lead to...
- who/what are you worried about? Why?
- any scope you have for allowing different levels of engagement in the play in question? Exuberant, centre-stage, visible? Peripheral, quiet? Solo? Group?
- how might you manage different thresholds for entering, engaging in and exiting play?
- how you can balance enough time for the play to have value (even if this is "just" joy) and not be so prolonged that players lose interest or momentum or feel over-stretched
- who can help you with any aspect of this?
- is there anything else you need to consider?

What you are trying to achieve may be as simple (?!) as trying out playful experiences in order to give people confidence to play, or boost their belief in its value. In which case the above may still apply, or an adjusted selection of the list.

These are points for reflection, not trick questions. How you answer them will be governed by your own set of circumstances and your own educational approach. Some forms of play will benefit from having an established and trusting relationship with students who are open to experimenting - as partners, rather than guinea pigs. Numerous participants, for example, cite the value of co-designing or adapting play. Other play experiences may work well given the element of newness and surprise, especially if you are a lecturer they do not know already. In terms of size and shape, play can come in all forms and does not need to be elaborate, longwinded or complicated in order to be enjoyable or thought provoking.

Air assumptions

In some cases, addressing the planning and logistics aspects of play might be easier ones to tackle than those relating to people; their perceptions, preferences and priorities, relating to their values and value systems. Airing assumptions involves both listening to, and engaging with, the perspectives of others and also being prepared to look at our own. Honest and respectful conversation, trialling of certain experiences and reflecting on them afterwards with a view to finding ways forward is one way. Another might be simply through activities or discussions which allow for the following equation to be explored: Statement - Perception - Assumption.

For example:

> I hate physical play (statement) - because it is invasive or exposing (perception) - challenges the assumption that everyone likes to run around or can.
>
> A self-reflective analysis of the same statement and perception may also relate to a personal feeling or belief - I hate physical play because I feel I look stupid - with the possibility of thinking how "I" might be persuaded - or persuade myself - to try something.
>
> I hate team games - because I feel embarrassed when I lose, or pressurised not to let the side down - challenges the assumption that everyone is motivated by a competitive element
>
> Similarly, let's all do performative play - because it will be such fun - assumes that everyone will find it enjoyable; which, as our earlier examples showed, is not the case.
>
> An elaboration of this to move beyond the status quo will be to add a question at the end of it - what would it take for me to feel more accepting of physical play? In what circumstances might I be persuaded to play in a team activity?

You could even make this a game.

Note. It was only after writing this section that it occurred to me I was inspired by the work of Nancy Kline. Kline's work on creating thinking environments is highly regarded, and she has created effective processes by which we can unpack our assumptions and blocks. An example can be found in this précis here. Her techniques are powerful tools to use in coaching and staff and educational development settings, among other things.

Live and let live

In order to address the complexities of play and the assumptions surrounding it, allowing them to surface and be explored, individuals and institutions need to create a healthy

live-and-let-live culture. Already numerous networks have sprung into life, with many afficionados joining in straight away, followed by the 'nervous willing'. However, just as Wenger (1998) suggested, Communities of Practice are not solely for core members, but also for the occasional visitor or peripheral participant. So, a welcoming play culture should allow for the unpersuaded to ask questions and explore practices in their own space and time. Objections to play can be raised and explored in the round. As we have already seen in this study, and others, experiences of play are diverse, divergent, subjective and contradictory. A healthy culture will invite that scrutiny and allow for reflection and action in the light of new understanding.

The danger is, of course, that the convinced won't want the objectors to join in and ruin the fun, and the objectors will just know that it is all rubbish anyway. So the divide between play proponents and play opposers continues. However, one of the most effective ways to argue for a positive is through example. If students have enjoyed a learning experience and found it beneficial - like the medical students referred to in considerations of value - then news of this will spread. They talk across courses. As practices become positively discussed and viewed then non-play colleagues (as is already happening) will invite their playful confrères to help them introduce play on their own courses.

Rebuffing negativity and myth making concerning playful pedagogy

Fight the fiction

Just as humans are predisposed to read situations as they most want, they (I know, we) can slip into an unfortunate habit of telling half-baked, half-remembered, mostly exaggerated stories of things they think they have heard. In a game which bears multiple names, such as Telephone or Secret Message (as well as others now considered inappropriate) a circle of players whisper a statement into the ear of the next person, who whispers what they think they heard to the next and so on, to the end of the circle. Inevitably, or hopefully - for the fun really to take off - by the time the last person announces what they think has been whispered it is not remotely like the statement that was actually made. This article in the Wall Street Journal tells the story of a First World War military unit trying to send messages to HQ about proposed action. As the message was relayed through a series of subordinate messengers it transformed from 'send reinforcements we are going to advance' to 'send three and fourpence, we are going to a dance.'

While this example is often used to illustrate how badly awry attempts at communication can go, it can show how a university rumour mill may mangle decisions, judgements and experiences (not in your university, of course). When this relates to play it may result in assumptions about what educators are allowed to do (irrespective of how many times the regulations have or have not been read), or what actually happened. It may also relate

to assumptions about cultural stereotypes, possible impacts and outcomes, which are rooted in vague possibility rather than actual accuracy.

Offer development

Needless to say, barriers to play do not only stem from negativity and resistance. Colleagues who are unsure about play may benefit from some professional development to help them examine their concerns and look at ways to resolve them. Dr Laura Mitchell made this point in correspondence:

> “Some of my colleagues are distressed by how they need to plan out learning objectives, but I find they are easily compatible with designing play in learning. This in itself is a word game for academics! Setting out how a game can help us learn is not as challenging as people think, but it often requires getting away from prioritizing those top-level cognitive goals like ‘analyse’ or ‘evaluate’. Through play, students can discover, imitate and respond to core practices in the discipline, such as how to write a code of ethics or value statement, or they can organise, compare and practice when researching marketing or recruitment strategies! These can all be playful activities if you acknowledge their role as steps in reaching the goal. But what staff really need is guidance on this; they are often experts in a field of research, not game design. So I think providing professional development and support to infuse education with play would really help people.”

Researching play in university learning/subject areas to deepen understanding and reflect critically on its complexities

This is one of the prime ways to achieve the second objective and contribute to the creation of the first. Already this study has given multiple examples of the myriad approaches and interests that can be brought to bear on researching play in HE. It has included commentary from educators who are critical of blanket advocacy. Arguments that play is the answer to everything, while cheering to hear, may not be sufficiently rooted in evidence, overblow their claims, or fail to allow for nuances, complexities, or difficulties. Building up a research base - which is what many proponents of play are now seeking to do - reinforces the credibility of play. It may pain us to use this phrase, but it is necessary. However, this new research must also include new approaches; to data gathering, analysis and dissemination, which break new ground as befits the subject. For it to really achieve some purchase, the research community itself will also have to make some attempt to accommodate such new approaches.

Allowing for a wide spectrum of play, including free play, without imposition or exclusion

A live and let live culture of play is inclusive of all types of play and ways of playing, as long as they do not include any of the unacceptable features listed in What Gets In The Way

of Play. The polarities of play and play aversions remind us to be aware that one person’s play heaven is another person’s misery.

A wide spectrum of play, shared, discussed and engaged in in a healthy enquiring culture, allows for the co-existence of these different types. It is also about understanding that play, like anything else in life, is not static. Engagement and preference may also be fluid and developmental through different iterations of play, or responses to it. Forms of play may have their day and then no longer be appropriate, enjoyable or desirable. Or simply the player leader (if there is one) and/or participants may just have done it too much and it is time for a change.

It is also about seeking out new kinds of play. As confidence grows, educators start thinking of what else they might like to try. A question in the gateway survey asked respondents if there were any kinds of play they would like to try but had not yet. Several baulked at the question saying - quite sensibly - that they could not answer because ‘they didn’t know what they didn’t know.’ Many said they were open to suggestion. Some wanted to try digital play because they had done very little of it. Others were pushing themselves to experiment with play which was just beyond their comfort zone as part of their own learning and development. Others still were prepared to hand over the reins to their students and get them to create playful experiences that they could learn from.

As our examples and consideration of the Rhetorics have shown, certain forms of play are more valued and visible than others currently in higher education. Several participants in the study stress what is potentially being missed by not allowing for free play i.e. play that may well have an intent (space to explore creativity for example) but not an end goal or finite structures such as time and place encompassing it. The purpose - if any - may also be identified by the player, not by the overseeing educator.

Coaxing, not coercing

There is also something to be said here about the fine line between involvement and coercion. Even when play is adopted institution-wide, there should be sensitivity as to how to invite people to play, without them feeling they are being bulldozed into forced fun. How we interpret free engagement in an educational context may be different from how we engage in our own forms of play outside it. Some people may never come on board. It may also take time to involve people who are reticent to start with, and for appreciation of new opportunities to embed.

Creating or joining local/global networks of play practitioners, educators, researchers

One of my suggestions in creating a proposal for this study was that I would set up an international network of play practitioners. Months into the study it became apparent to me that this would not be necessary, as several networks were either reinforcing

themselves or new ones were emerging. Yet another network, during a time of life on the laptop, was the last thing anyone needed. The job was already being done well by others.

After several years of participating in such groups myself I notice that a) some members belong to several groups, so there is travel between the networks (fine) b) there are some who stay within their networks (also fine) c) there are local clubs which concern themselves with play in their particular environment (this too is fine) and d) there are many educators interested in play in HE who are not aware of how they can find out about such networks (not fine, but sometimes hard to reach everyone who wants to know about such things). One participant felt that there was not enough sharing between lecturers as to what they do with their students and yet many universities have been running conferences on creative, imaginative learning for many years.

Not everyone is clubbable. Not everyone has the desire to join a group or feel obliged to attend meetings, or perhaps are not sure what they might get out of one, or be able to contribute. Some might even be nervous of joining such a group in case it reflects negatively on their perception of what they are doing. However, such networks are predominantly free to join, collegiate and welcoming, supportive and interested. They are an excellent source of ideas, suggestions of resources and materials, and a place in which familiar issues such as resistance to play, or the difficulty of playing in certain situations, or how to resolve logistical necessities of play, or how to transform a face to face play experience into one that can work online and so forth, can be shared among like-minded practitioners.

Evaluating appropriately and judiciously, especially if existing metrics and measures do not allow for a true consideration of playful learning

Considerations of play in research have already pointed to the need to find different ways to evaluate; ones which are sensitive to play and do not crush its essence. One example of looking for alternative indicators of value can be seen in the Project Zero[55] account of the International School in Billund's whole school meeting. Three indicators were identified; evidence of Choice, Wonder and Delight which point to impact through playful learning. Evidence of these three in operation were noted by the headteacher:

> "Observing the conversations, Camilla sees elements that look like playful learning. She sees staff making and changing rules, inventing, imagining, exploring while envisioning future school policies, and taking risks (for some, in expressing their opinions). She overhears colleagues helping each other articulate ideas and notes that it seems altruistic. That at 7:00pm on a work day 80 people are having a productive, forward moving conversation she sees as achieving and succeeding" (Project Zero, 2018:7).

In short

There are many ways to create opportunities to nurture a playful learning culture, and defuse some of the objections from those who are opposed to such a thing. In this section we have seen 'helicopter view' suggestions, including addressing assumptions, practical advice, conducting research and ways to find ones tribe. These can be, and already are being, interpreted at a local level in specific ways.

Reflection

How do you feel about this different ways to foster a playful learning culture?
If you have experience of any of these approaches, how well have they worked?
What are other ways that might be helpful for helping play to thrive?
What is most needed in your context for a culture of playful learning to grow?

GEMS

In which
I draw out some headlines from this study to try to distil key points from an ocean of observations and examples. A word of advice to any readers in a hurry here. It may be tempting just to read Gazillions at the beginning. and then these pages as a shortcut to the whole story. You'll get some crystallised messages in these bullet points, but you'll miss out on context, variation, riders and nuance. Short and speedy read? Or slow and complex? Your call.

GEMS

HEADLINES FROM THIS STUDY

Gems, as we know, are precious stones formed from geological materials, moulded by compression over millennia and sometimes crystallised by fluids and gases beneath the surface of the earth. While the suggestion that my key messages are 'precious' might be going too far, I'm using the metaphor of gems as a way of synthesising some headlines from this study (Plus it starts with a G).

Given everything that has gone before (ooh - two gs in there) it is a struggle to reduce the contents to concluding bullet points. However, despite the diversity and detail, I think there are repeated motifs which characterise present perceptions of the use and value of play in higher education.

Here they are:

- **Labels and masks.** Play is defined diversely, bears various names and is often hidden under other labels
- **Defining is distracting.** While discussion of play is important it can also divert focus from the value of play to the nature of play. It is a difficult dance to accomplish at times
- **All in.** Play in some form is used and valued by all participants, across many subjects. (There is a rider here; all in does not necessarily mean all in, all of the time, with all kinds of play. People have their preferences and aversions)
- **All disciplines can play.** The block on play types shows that there is no limit to the kinds of play that may be incorporated into a formal programme. It is just a question of finding the right fit
- **Management educators play diversely.** While games/simulations are common forms of play in management education they are not the only kind
- **Walls can come down.** Stereotypes exist as to the kinds of play that will be embraced by particular disciplines; the arts will love performance and drawing, the sciences will like puzzles and logic based play, management and business will prefer role play and purposeful play. While there may be some truth to some to these, examples have also shown that the partitions between the subjects are removable
- **Play belongs in HE.** Play is seen as valuable for all kinds of personal growth and development, relating to (among other things): skills, qualities, emotions, capabilities, mindsets, knowledge, understanding, relationships, self-awareness, metacognition, grasp of concepts, dealing with the unknown
- **Feel the force.** All respondents believe play to have a positive impact on student learning, and some suggest they have evidence to support this. This takes numerous forms, a repeated motif of which is play as a sandpit or safe trial space in which to experiment and take risks
- **The senses are sensible.** The multisensory and tactile nature of play is often cited as an enhancing factor in university learning; this was made problematic by the onset of Covid 19 and increased the need to find alternative remote ways of studying and engaging

- **Let play be play.** Play is also seen as valuable in, and of itself, although the educational climate does not always allow for this, or for free play
- **It's personal.** Educator identity and beliefs about education are strongly bound up in their choice to, and choice of, play. Conceptions of educator identity are combined with aspirations about role and responsibility. These include a desire to uphold and embody certain qualities such as trust, approachability, openness, honesty
- **Rebels with a cause.** The decision to play has often stemmed from the desire to reinvent or step away from present dominant models of teaching and learning
- **The academy matters.** The decision to play is not anti-academy. It comes from a passionate desire to uphold standards of teaching and learning. Participants offer evidence of deep passion and commitment to academic practice and scholarship which they believe is enhanced by play
- **Value varies.** All believe that play has value, although they conceive of this value diversely
- **Play is informed.** The play of study participants has an informed basis, whether this be theoretical, practical, based on other influences or own experience
- **Play is unusual.** Participants see play as unusual in their higher education context
- **Play experiences are Pick and Mix.** There is consistent variety, rather than constant universals, in their experiences of play, however...
- **Play is (mostly) purposeful** There are strong repeat motifs about the need for play in HE to have purpose, even if this is not always accepted as a feature of play
- **Play is permeable.** Although educators in different disciplinary fields may use familiar forms of play, or ones which have come to be associated with them, the flexibility and adaptability of play means that most forms of play can migrate across boundaries and be adjusted to fit new contexts
- **Polarities run through play.** Experiences of and beliefs about play all have their opposites, with perhaps the exception of beliefs around unacceptable forms of play. Those revealed in this study are illustrative of the divergence and diversity in play practices and views. While many examples have been unearthed through this study others can be revealed by anyone reflecting on and exploring their own experiences of play in HE. Such polarities reflect the values and value systems of different people and environments
- **Researchers play too.** All kinds of research approaches were mentioned in this study; empirical experimentation with play in teaching, action research, research into the nature and use of play, and play and playful means for designing and conducting research projects. Findings offer numerous illustrations of each of these areas; from specific play forms in particular subjects to playful cross-disciplinary activities which develop research skills and the grasp of research concepts/theories. Together they suggest that, as with teaching, the use of play is more widespread than is recognised
- **Play is a human basic.** The human importance of play - in higher education but also in life more widely - comes through strongly as a motif in the study. Its value and significance are emphasised as part of responding to, and coping with, a global pandemic. Play is about connecting, emotional experience, belonging. In tandem with the value of play for connection and belonging is a belief that learning through

play (sensitively managed) can be beneficial for a sense of wellbeing and as stress mitigation

- **Values merge, values clash.** Educators comment on the impact of alignment between their educational values and those influencing their activities, as well as on what happens when there is a disconnect between these two. Impacting factors may be localised, such as students and colleagues or from the wider prevailing educational climate and government policy (not just in the UK)
- **Play to grow.** Participants express an openness to continuing to developing their play practice, as part of stretching and challenging themselves, not just their students
- **Play has persuasive partners.** Sutton-Smith's Seven Rhetorics can relate to in higher education play, and how the value of this play is articulated. Some Rhetorics have a stronger presence than others, depending on context. Not all aspects of play practice and value identified in this study are visible in his descriptions of them. suggestion that for something to be a Rhetoric of play it would need to have disciplinary containment and alignment is not borne out in this study. There are also other Rhetorics circulating in HE which relate to trends, preoccupations and core values of institutions
- **Play is proper education.** See everything that precedes this page
- **HE is special.** Some of the features of and positions of play from non-educational (and particularly non HE) literature are questioned by play proponents at university. The idea that play can, and should be purposeless, is strongly rejected by many participants in this study. The possibilities for play to be voluntary and freely chosen - other major features of play theory and definitions - are also seen as constrained, although not impossible to achieve
- **Play and HE are ambiguous.** A colleague suggested to me that we should talk about The Ambiguity of HE[56], as well as the ambiguity of play, given that higher education is full of differences, contradictions, preferences and subjectivities, just like play
- **Play is not the problem.** Several respondents note that play in itself is neutral; it is how you use it that makes it a positive or negative. Poor facilitation, fear and dislike are the greatest barriers to positive play experiences in HE. Thinking through the reasons for, and ways to, play is important for creating meaningful experiences
- **Resistance is real.** It can also be managed. This can be through good preparation and facilitation, but also through understanding the blocks and objections people have to play and their perceptions of it
- **Play can thrive if...**there are a thousand ways to answer this question, and just a few are offered this account of *The Value of Play in HE*

How might you answer this question?

GAZING OUT

In which
I gather my thoughts about all that has gone before and review where we are right now with play in HE. Having done so, I frame a few principles to consider should anyone be inspired to formulate a future framework or basis for play in HE.

GAZING OUT

Are we in an age of play in HE?

Much earlier, I asked this question in general. As I wrap things up, I return to it and add in a focus on higher education. Perhaps the quickest answer is that it depends on where you are and how you view things. The optimist will look at the copious examples of practice and value in this study and see hope for the dawning of a new age of playful learning. The pessimist will focus on the reasons why play is resisted in higher education and think the age is a long way off yet.

One participant was defiant about perceptions that play is childish and inappropriate in HE:

> “There’s a big barrier, but it doesn’t mean we should not use it. I think we should even more than we are using it because students actually understand the concept very well and the reality demands that we prepare them better, and preparing them better is not just about giving them theory because theory, they can read at any time. What they don’t have is the opportunity to experience that (TVOP IV 41).”

In the final section of the survey, participants were invited to make any other comment they wished about play-based or playful learning. 54 did so from the main survey and three from the pilot. Some explicitly welcomed the study, while others referenced either the perceived stigma attached to play or an uncomprehending managerial force within their institution. The following selection of quotes suggest that there is belief in the value of play and support for its integration into higher education pedagogy. Perhaps what they also suggest is that the age has not dawned yet but it should have done.

> “This is a valuable enquiry and delighted to see it (Early Childhood Education, UK).”

> “Amazing research here – play in HE needs more and more research backing so those grumpy old naysayers can see that it’s not trivial (Clinical Science, USA).”

> “We need this playful perspective to impact those at the top of the leadership pyramid (Education, UK).”

> “I am fully signed up! It should be more widely encouraged, but it can be ‘frowned’ upon or is misunderstood by colleagues and students (Education, UK).”

> Play in HE is important and should be an integral part of learning and teaching – and the curriculum. And not only students need to play but also staff (Researcher, Learning & Teaching, Canada).

These quotes above and this one below also suggest a need to do much more convincing outside play circles:

> For play to become fully embedded, 'management' must be convinced of the benefits, and this typically requires some form of metrics that show an increase in something (productivity, level of innovation, wellbeing/sickness rates, etc) (Innovation and Entrepreneurship, UK) .

Others still regret that there is not enough play in higher education:

> We don't do enough of it. People think of play as frivolous, but I've found that it keeps students focused and helps them learn (VP Curriculum, USA).

> I feel playfulness is underused in higher education and those who use it manage to stand out and inspire students (Tourism and Events Management, UK).

> I wish more lecturers embraced it (Sports Coaching, UK).

> It's something that deserves far more attention – and we need to keep finding playful ways (rather than academic) to talk about it – and research it. Would have loved this survey to be a game of some sort (Journalism, UK).

As we have also seen, many educators are concerned about dominant influences which are detrimental to working and studying in HE.

> Within academia you are subject to increasingly stressful and demanding workloads and expectations in a hypercompetitive and performance – based system. This may lead to a reduction in creativity whilst promoting stress, mental ill-health, poor career management and performance (Researcher, UK).

> I think my absolute pet peeve is instrumentalisation, of both play and education. I see a lot of efforts to transform game [sic] (and university) into something that is directly useful for productivity, and I think that way lies catastrophe (Research Fellow, UK).

It would appear, given the mixture of views listed above and elsewhere in these pages, that we are making progress with the recognition of play in higher education as legitimate academic practice, However, in terms of mainstream acceptance of playful pedagogy, with a substantial body of research, we are still not there yet. The next question, without getting too quasi-philosophical, is to ask "well, where is it that we are not yet?" What kind of an age of play is it that contributors to this study would like to see, and what will it take to reach it? I imagine, once again, given the diversity of perspectives and preferences regarding play, the character of an age of play might vary considerably, depending on who is describing it. I leave visualising that to anyone who wants to try.

Closing thoughts: towards a framework of play in higher education

We saw earlier on that various frameworks of play for adult learning/in HE are starting to be created. It was not an aim of this study that I create one, however it seems only polite to reflect on what might be included for higher education, should anyone be planning to take this on.

Part of the creation of a framework may also be to address the fascinating, but vexed, question of what we mean by play. I am not going to rehash everything that was said earlier, but simply redirect you to that discussion, if that's where you want to return.

Distilled from my suggestions about ways to foster a playful learning culture, as well as everything else in this study, I suggest that a framework for play in HE needs to have the following 8 features:

1. A loose but tight fit. Broad enough to welcome all disciplines, while equally allowing for specificity to suit the subject and its players

2. Reflective and insightful engagement. These are mutually supportive. Thinking about what our play experiences have meant and revealed to us

3. Inclusive and respectful behaviours. Being aware of the times when play might exclude possible players and how to avoid this; being respectful in how we voice our play preferences and concerns and in how we respond to the equally respectfully expressed views of others

4. A scale of orchestrated freedom. If participants cannot play freely, that they have some element of freedom in their play. This also allows for a way in which they can cease to play if desirable.

5. Open and receptive mindsets. These in terms of environment, culture and behaviour at all levels

6. A sense of origin and direction. Thought has been given as to why play is being introduced and how it might unfold. There is a reason for the play, even if there is not predetermined outcome.

7. An informed basis. This may be empirically founded and evaluated or theoretical and scholarly or both.

8. Multiform, multivocal, and multisensory aspects. Almost anything can become play if we so make it. Allowing for all variations of play that are ethical and non-harmful.

Goodbye

And with these suggestions I leave you.

My dear reader, you have made it to the end.

You've tallied your points
And your Gs you've espied.
Collect your bouquet,
Wear your medal with pride.

Thank you and go well.

Professor Alison James
August 2022

> "Play's positive pleasure typically transfers to our feelings about the rest of our everyday existence and makes it possible to live more fully in the world, no matter how boring or painful or even dangerous ordinary reality might seem."
>
> Sutton-Smith, (2017:35)
> *Play for Life: Play Theory and Play as Emotional Survival*

> "Play is a phenomenon for which there are no adequate criteria at hand. Its internal multiplicity of meaning can perhaps be most readily approached with the tools of a dialectic that does not smooth out the paradoxes. The great philosophies have always recognized the eminent essentiality of play, which common sense on the other hand does not recognize, because for it play means only frivolity, artificiality, unreality, idleness. Thus Hegel says for example that play, because of its disinterested and superlatively lighthearted nature, is the most sublime and only true form of seriousness. And Nietzsche says in his *Ecce Homo*:
> I know of no other way of coping with great tasks, than play."
>
> Fink, Saine & Saine, (1968)

granularities

In which
I provide a Bibliography and a few Notes on the text.

If you would like to look at additional supporting documentation for this project please go to *https://engagingimagination.com*

As in the oft quoted line from Robert Burns' To A Mouse, we all know that 'the best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men Gang aft agley' (thank you poetryfoundation.org for finishing that line off for me). So it is with weblinks. Despite repeated efforts, some of the urls in this bibliography have repelled all attempts at linkage. If you can't access the link via the 'here' "button" please copy and paste the full url into your own browser. And may the force be with you.

Note. All links in this publication were correct as at August 16th 2022.

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NOTES

Groundwork

[1] This was picked up by Selin Soylu and incorporated into her design for the front cover of this study. Did you spot it?

[2] I know this is a bit vague but I stopped counting after 270 - largely because there were so many possibilities of sub category or variant to what I was totting up the numbers started to be meaningless. Not entirely though, because when you start talking hundreds things feel nice and substantial.

[3] This is, of course, a homage to Meatloaf.

[4] For anyone not familiar with the time that the singer Prince changed his name to a symbol here is an article *https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-36107590*

[5] You can find out more here *https://engagingimagination.com/.*

[6] I am sorry to say that their name escapes me

[7] I have already explained that there is mixed practice here in whether or not citations are labelled. In an early draft I used role titles and countries to give some contextual colour to the anonymous participants. However, I ultimately felt that this was too revealing in some cases of who the respondent might be and so stepped back from this.

[8] Survey design note: The act of using one questionnaire for two groups of respondents - those working in management education and those in other disciplines - was an expedient means of having a single questionnaire to analyse. It also recognised the multiple roles and interests that many educators have and the boundaries that they cross in their academic practice. Clear indications were provided that if you did not work in management education you did not need to answer the questions related to it. However, the presence of questions directed at management educators did concern a small number of respondents who were not clear if this meant either that their responses were less important (absolutely not) or that the survey was only for management educators (also not the case). In retrospect it may have been simpler to have had two surveys - one for management educators only and one for teachers in other disciplines. However, this would have set up what would appear to be an unnecessary or misleading divide between all the disciplines concerning the use of play. In the case of some respondents it appeared that their range of activity blurred the lines in terms of differentiating between these. For example, in teaching multiple diverse subjects, or having portfolio roles, or working in areas where management education and a seemingly unrelated subject were both combined. Having a single survey for all respondents did require further work to interpret some of the answers to questions specifically on management teaching, as positive responses and examples were provided from other subjects. Also additional investigation was required into the individual responses in the survey tool to clarify - if possible - whether the generic title given by the participant masked management involvement. This was not always achieved satisfactorily. Finally, several respondents simply indicated that they did not work in the management area. While this made it easy to categorise their answers, conversely to the previous statements it may also have meant that they DID engage in play which was relevant for management learning but did not recognise it as such because they were not affiliated to that academic area.

[9] While these were available on the project website I did not advertise them explicitly to participants, however.

[10] Braun, Clarke and Gray recommend email interviews for reasons of practicability which would have merit in this regard. However, my own experience of such is that sometimes the responder will react with more brevity than the researcher would like, due to time and labour factors involved in having to type out their answers. Some colleagues were aghast that I resorted to the old fashioned technique of human transcription, however my proposal had included this and it worked for me.

[11] I have opted to refer to the Seven Rhetorics using a capital S and R. Sutton-Smith does not do so, however I find it makes it easier for them to stand out when referred to.

[12] My apologies if you would have liked to have it to hand here. Ultimately I was working with a set page count in my final draft and I just could not fit it in. The mapping of criteria for something to be a Rhetoric was interesting to do, however, it was somewhat tangential to my main focus.

[13] I happily offer bonus points at various places, however, it is entirely up to you how you score and what you award yourself.

[14] Frames in media culture are the means by which an event is presented to a reader or viewer so that they are led to a preferred conclusion, intended by the presenter. Goffman's conception of frames was that they were the product of a larger culture, but could also be transformed to be those intentionally fabricated by an individual as well. If you do not wish to read Goffman but want a quick understanding of what his work was about this article by the Encyclopaedia Britannica online may help *https://www.britannica.com/topic/frame-analysis*

[15] Quote taken from the abstract to their full paper

[16] I have deliberately omitted all of these names from the bibliography as respondents did not cite particular texts, only names and/or general areas of influence. The exception is where I have cited a specific publication by someone they mentioned.

[17] Taken from the About page on the PLA website: *http://pla.playthinklearn.net/index.php/about/*

[18] This page number is something of a conundrum. It is marked as 21 but comes up as 40 in the online pdf. In case you are having difficulty finding it. If you do not, it was probably how I read it.

[19] Of 45 comments in the main survey, 11 noted that they had nothing to add or that the definition was sufficiently comprehensive.

[20] Serendipitous encounter: we ended up chatting on a flight back from Denmark about play.

[21] Wonder is a word that I have seen crop up in unexpected places in HE over the last decade, and it is a welcome one. Two university strategies for learning and teaching incorporated developing a sense of wonder and a university lecturer at a third institution cited their use of a playful contest in which students presented their hour long exploration of a city through 'the eyes of wonder'.

[22] A levels in the UK are one form of qualification aimed at the 16-18 age group. They may be taken at school or college and are used as one kind of determinant for entry into university.

[23] There is so much more that can be said about the relationship between play and fun and studies into fun which mirror the same activity we undertake with play; wanting to understand it better, finding it contradictory, slippery and complex. Two examples include Bogost's book *Play Anything*, in which sees fun as something which is not necessarily pleasurable but which is associated with the impact of engaging in novel activity. Laura Barnett at the University of Surrey has also recently conducted a study on teacher and students' perceptions of fun in HE learning.

[24] I have left the vignettes in as verbatim a state as I can. However in places I have removed repeat or distracting phrases, and 'pause and thinking noises' like umms and ahhs, although these were conscientiously recorded by the transcriber in their original format. These tweaks have been to make the accounts more readable and retain the energy and focus in their stories.

[25] *https://www.kent.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusivity/wellbeing-map/biodiversity-walk*

[26] This is a reference to a scene in the film *Die Hard With A Vengeance*, in which Bruce Willis and Samuel L Jackson, in role, attempt to solve a water jug riddle to prevent a bomb exploding. You can watch the scene here. *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vdF6NASMiE*

[27] Foundation courses in the UK are those which allow students to complete a year's preparatory study in order to progress onto a degree course.

[28] "Project X is one of the most challenging, yet rewarding, experiences of the Squadron Officer School curriculum. It consists of various physical obstacles and complicated tasks that a team must solve together, using strength, creativity and teamwork." *https://www.military.com/deployment/i-got-this-sos-student-spouses-take-on-project-x.html*

[29] For a whole raft of examples of flashmobs, as well as an explanation of the term look here *https://davidcharlesfox.com/what-is-a-flashmob-history-meaning/*

[30] Zoom interview 2020

[31] During his presentation for the GamechangersFest 2020 David described all games as educational in some way - they all have a message and/or information embedded in them. There is a line to tread however; if people enjoy them they will be more receptive to the educational aspects, but if you try too hard to convey the message you risk boring the players.

[32] Wordle was created by Josh Wardle as a free game for his friends and family to play during the pandemic. It became so popular it was bought by the New York Times in 2022. The link in this text is to the NYT version of the game although various imitations have also been launched and variants such as Nerdle (a numbers game) and Heardle (using music intros). If you want to make your eyes go funny you can also play Quordle, which is four Wordles at once. This article tells you more about Wordle if you are interested, and want to know what the NYT paid for it.

[33] The first example includes six Rhetorics, the second five. The first leaves out Fate and the second leaves out the Imaginary and Frivolity.

[34] Available online here. *https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/subject-benchmark-statement-business-and-management.pdf?sfvrsn=db39c881_5*

[35] Email exchange with author, (May 9, 2022)

[36] orchestrated by Jenni Carr at LSE and kindly provided by her

[37] Dr Laura Mitchell, lecturer in management, based at the University of York, with whom I had face to face conversation and several email exchanges

[38] This answer (and others in similar vein) was important because of its reference to Porter's Five Forces. I had been at pains in interview to ask about the use of play for the teaching of management concepts and theories, as well as for management education in general, as part of my commitment to my funding brief.

[39] The comments and queries about the study's special interest in management concepts and theories foxed a number of respondents. Several said they did not teach them , others questioned why I was only asking about management concepts and theories - presumably as opposed to concepts and theories in any other disciplines. I found myself therefore broadening the question away from management concepts and theories to play for management education in all its breadth. This seemed to work better.

[40] As opposed to verbalising thoughts, in case this sounds like a statement of the obvious

[41] VUCA-Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous. You can find more about the origins of the acronym here

[42] Interview with study contributor in IT University in Pakistan

[43] This presentation here offers an introduction to learning gain, while Kandiko Howson offers this reflection on the success of learning gain initiatives in the UK, here

[44] As I concluded my data collection I did ask myself whether or not including references to aspects of the Rhetorics in statements of value, given that I had not provided any indepth explanation of Sutton-Smith's work (to not overload respondents), had been too soon. While so doing may seem a strange for an opening survey there were several reasons for this.

1. The original intention had been to present, discuss and explore these as part of an indepth, face to face workshop. This was going to involve participants in exploring a range of play types and theoretical positions and test these against their own higher education contexts. With the onset of the global pandemic this became impossible.
2. I did not want to make assumptions about the levels of engagement with play theory of any participants. This proved to be wise as many respondents had read a highly diverse range of authors on play, as seen in Writings, Thinkings, Doings; some of them were aware of Sutton-Smith's work.
3. At the time I created and launched the survey I was having real concerns about being able to contact anyone to be able to gather any data at all. So I put as many key elements into the Gateway survey as I could
4. As the Rhetorics form part of the theoretical basis for this study it did not seem sensible to leave them out.
5. Greater explanation of theoretical elements such as the Rhetorics - given their complexity - would also have been very difficult without taking up a lot more of the participants' time in a survey situation. Furthermore, leaving out any Rhetorics that might have been harder to grapple with such as Fate, Survival, would have left gaps in the data when needing to consider the presence and relevance of the Rhetorics as a whole.

[45] I have deliberately not included references to individuals to avoid the text looking too bitty

[46] Parker J Palmer, American author, educator and activist whose philosophy is all about helping to re-inspire and reconnect educators and social care workers and health workers etc with that sense of the home and their identity in their work

[47] Teaching English as a Second Language

[48] Guerrilla poetry is the name I use to denote poems which are distributed unofficially in shared and public spaces. Other forms of similar intervention might be found arts, where items are left for people to find and take or leave as they choose, or street art which may appear without bidding on walls and other structures. This particular poem was attached to a wall in a Lyme Regis park in 2021, during a period of lockdown.

[49] Yes. I know. For some readers, citing Instagram is about as credible as using Wikipedia as source material for your dissertation. Like it or not, however, it is important to recognise the impact of social media platforms and their messaging, as well as the professional use to which they are put. This is just one example of many sites offering mental health support to rebalance the vagal nerve; speaking to the felt need of those who follow its pages.

[50] Participants have already commented on the way that solo elements may exist in joint activities

[51] In the supporting documentation on my website I also provide a chart showing how I mapped play/rhetorical arguments for play in HE against Sutton-Smith's specified criteria. You can find it by visiting The Value of Play in HE pages at https://engagingimagination.com

[52] Letter G. You knew this.

[53] This from an educator who was working in consultancy as well as teaching in institutions.

[54] If your book budget is running low you can also find a free pdf of the 2nd edition online, although this book is such a joy I would recommend getting the latest edition. For the purposes of the exercise I refer to you can find it in this version here. *https://muqithfiles.files.wordpress.com/2020/07/conceptual-blockbusting-a-guide-to-better-ideas-by-james-l.-adams.pdf*

[55] This description of Project Zero comes from PZ's website: Founded by philosopher Nelson Goodman at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 1967, Project Zero began with a focus on understanding learning in and through the arts. Over the decades, we have continued our inquiry into the arts and arts education, while drawing together diverse disciplinary perspectives to examine fundamental questions of human expression and development. Our research endeavors are marked by a passion for the big conceptual questions, a passion for close collaboration with practitioners, a passion for the interdisciplinary, a passion for the full range of human development, and a passion for the arts."

[56] This inspired suggestion came from Laura Barclay of the University of Portsmouth in an online book group discussion I facilitated on The Ambiguity of Play for the Playful University Platform in March 2022