

Designing a board game as a vehicle for multicultural education

Multiculturality is a rising challenge in European countries that are increasingly opening up for immigration such as Finland. The national policies for openness often become counteracted by all levels of nationalist activity fueled by prejudices for foreign ethnicities and cultures. Multicultural education is a sector of Global education that helps people to see the value of diversity and further to respect human rights worldwide. Traditionally multicultural education has meant educational practices where the emphasis is on learning from other cultures. However, this approach can further exaggerate perception of cultural boundaries and strengthen racist attitudes. In this talk we propose a novel activity-based solution for multicultural education. Our solution presents a design of board game *Myth* intended to instruct youth and young adults about dynamic nature of cultural identity and about the construction process of Finnish identity.

Playing board game is about telling a story. This occurs interaction within the rules and game mechanics set by the game designer. These stories behold both intentional and unintentional meanings and values. A game always communicates a world view that can even be at extreme a political vision. When the players receive intellectual and hedonic pleasure from mastering the game mechanics, it is probable that they become less defensive for the ideas presented in the storyline of the game, whether they are violent, peaceful, or otherwise political. This opens up new possibilities for creating learning environments that can be reached by heterogeneous groups. It also gives game designer a great amount of responsibility over the told stories. The history of

educational games is not glorious. Our experiences show that players very quickly abandon obviously educational games that try to push facts instead of letting players to discover information through their own activities. Playing an educational game should be primarily fun, and meet the standards of a game, to become an effective vehicle for anything. Repetition is part of learning and when the game is fun enough and flexible enough it is played again and again.

Myth, The Story of Väinämöinen (2009) is a board game for multicultural art education. The game unearths transnational connections related to Finnish national art of 19th century and early 20th century, the time when the idea of so called "pure finnishness" or in other words Finnish nationalism was created with help of artists. *Myth* game's hero is Väinämöinen, a wizard from the Finnish national epic. The game takes a new approach towards multicultural education by emphasizing the role of understanding Finland and finnishness as something, originally multicultural. The players reconstruct the Finnish national identity as they receive trough playing an active role as artists who are building a new multicultural self portrait of Väinämöinen meanwhile gaining understanding how the looks of Väinämöinen in the images in 19th century and beginning of 20th century national art are a mixture of ideas borrowed from many different countries. This game has been commercially released in late 2009 and its effect as an educational intervention remains yet to be investigated.