Student Counseling

through

Tabletop Roleplaying Games

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Introduction

Student counseling, as well as Tabletop Roleplaying Games, are relatively new areas of expertize. They are both a products of a modern society. At the heart of both activities lies the choice of who we want to be(come). And both activities allows us to envision possible outcomes based on the choices we have before us.

In our modern world we get to choose our own vocation, as a result of having access to a universal school system. All children are mandated, by law, to gain the basic knowledge required to one day qualify for a wide variety of vocations.[1] Modern day students are faced with such a multitude of choices and demands, that guidance becomes a requirement, in order for them to make informed choices about their own future.[2] The need for student counseling is ever increasing, as our society and educational system grows more complex.

Roleplaying games, on the other hand, is primarily used as a past time activity. An escape from reality, be someone else who could make choices and explore possibilities, which would be impossible to explore in real life. Roleplaying games basically allows for the simulation of fictional lives in a fictional world. And this can be done in any number of ways.[3] The simulation can be as simple or complex as the applied game mechanics and story elements.[4]

I believe that it would be possible, as well as viable, to combine roleplaying games and student counseling. I have actively been working with a student counseling center to conduct trials and experiments with said purpose in mind.[5] This report will present a small sampling of this work.

Problem Field

A problem, facing our student counseling, is how far removed the students are from their choices. Students are faced with dedicating themselves to a path of study before truly understanding how these choices will work out for them realistically. As such, student counseling utilize a broad range of methods, seeking to give a student a better grasp of their possible future on the job marked.

1 Reference 1: Folkeskoleloven § 1 & § 5
2 Reference 2: Vejledningsloven § 1
3 Reference 3: “The Many Worlds of Roleplaying” by myself, cover this subject.
4 Reference 4: “Tailored Roleplaying Games” by myself, cover this subject
5 Reference 5: The Counseling Center in Question is “Ungdoms Uddannelses Vejledningen (UUV) Køge

Student internships and mentoring are among these initiatives. These methods serve to give young people a taste of a job they might seek to educate themselves for.

But student counseling face a problem of lacking resources.[6] Internships and mentoring aren't available in all sectors and our society can't realistically allow students to experience more than a few or a single areas of work in this manner. Students are thus limited in making informed choices based on actual experience with their chosen career path.

But how about simulated experience? Is it possible to adapt a roleplaying game to serve the purpose of allowing students to make educational, career and personal choices, within a game? And will such a simulation allow the students to make more informed choices about their real life future choices? I might be able to answer these questions given time and resources. Neither of these are, however, available to me at the moment. Instead this report will simply focus on how one might go about redesigning a roleplaying game system for the specific use of student counseling. But student counseling is an equally complex task. Although I seek to create a simulated roleplaying game experiment, which covers the task of student counseling in the broader sense of the vocation, this report will, for the most part, only be focused on the student counselor's task of getting the students to understand themselves better. As such I'll be describing roleplaying game mechanics centering on getting students to evaluate their core personality, in a way which allows them to play themselves, within the simulated environment. In short, this report is about allowing student to make the best judgment about their own basic capabilities and then easily identify with a roleplaying game simulation, utilizing the results of the student's judgment and awareness of themselves.

The central problem, which this report seeks to answer, thus becomes as follows:

"How easily will 9th grade students identify and transfer their own real life basic attributes, if they were told to estimate and apply these attributes, in a tabletop Roleplaying Game (RPG)? This through the use of a numeric scale, typically used in tabletop RPG systems. How can we improve and validate such a system, for the purpose of student counseling, by adopting the principal approach of a design based research methods?"

6 Reference 6: "Areas of Tension in the Law of Counseling" by myself & Miriam Canu, cover this subject.

Project Limitations

Although this report is inspired by seeking answers to larger questions, the focus will be mostly on game mechanics. Although I will define the nature of roleplaying games as well as student counseling, I rely on the specifics by referring to other publications which deals with said areas in much better detail.

Another limitation of this report lies in the nature of the collected data. The counseling roleplaying game systems, was tested with youth who had already had some limited experience with ordinary roleplaying games.

The tests was also made under the strain of time, and both test subjects and observers of the tests vary, depending on who I could coordinate successfully with. In particular, the tests suffer from the lack of control over test subjects and environment. Indeed, the only thing I did control during the tests, was the application of the roleplaying game system.

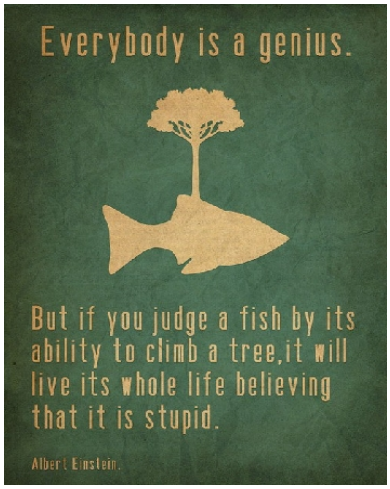
Finally this project will only focus on one part of the total roleplaying games mechanics, utilized in the tests. Much as I would like to cover my entire game mechanics, this report will simply not have the volume to contain this in detail. I have thus chosen to cover the part of the game mechanics pertaining the students basic attributes, leaving out mechanics dealing with the students' needs, networks, skill acquirement, time line and choices within the game simulation.

Defining Roleplaying Games (RPG)

But before I get further into this report, I will need to define the core aspects of a RPG system.

Tabletop RPG often start with the creation of a fictive character on a sheet of paper. Think of this like you are about to describe and flesh out a main character for a movie, by creating this character's CV, complete with grades. The mechanics of the game will tell you what kind of attributes you will need to put into this CV. This would typically be something like current physical, mental & social abilities, a current set of skills, a current number of possessions and a health barometer. The RPG mechanics will also tell you how you will go about grading different aspects of this fictive character. This is typically done by giving a you a number of points, which you can balance or

divide among the attributes and skills, giving more points to some aspects of your character while neglecting others. This in turn will reflect your characters strengths and weaknesses. Another typical way of giving points is to simply roll dices, to determine this, thus creating a more random set of character traits. Most RPG systems utilize a mixture of dice rolls and participant choices. This reflect how much of the fictive character's abilities is determined by random luck and misfortune as well as conscious choices.



This is also the reason why their exist several hundred different RPG systems. The character you get to design is heavily influenced by the RPG systems emphasis on character traits and how you are supposed to determine strengths and weaknesses. An RPG system could be compared to personality tests. The result of your personality is determined by what the test choose to measure and how it goes about doing this.

Like a personality test, a RPG system is often made to serve different types of people, preferences, circumstances, themes, in game goals, etc. A good example is the fact that most RPG games have a health barometer, which typically takes the form of hit points, life force, damage, etc. This clearly reflect that most RPG systems was designed with violence in mind, through out the simulation.

Basically, there exist a huge number of RPG systems, simply because any one system reflects an entire fictional universe, and the mechanics reflect the natural laws of said universe. The perfectly realistic RPG system will apply every science, known and unknown, and create a system for it within the game. If we simply limit ourselves to the science which is known to man, then we should be putting down our characters, genetic makeup, neurological development, social network and interaction history etc. This, of course, is far too complex.

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7 Reference 7: Tabletop RPG Books with popular game mechanics. Each of above RPGs have spawned a small library of suplimental expansion rules and story arch materials.

Like a school exam, an RPG system will make a far simpler system to measure the abilities and skills of a fictional person. Ultimately a RPG system is the art of simplifying an identity down to a bunch of numbers. People often complain about their school grades, because the don't believe that the grade accurately described their ability. But the system is necessary to allow everyone to easily measure, compare or match our abilities with our surroundings. One thing, which the school grading system has going for it, is that everyone is supposed to easily identify with what the numbers represents.

The same goes for an RPG system. The participants will create characters which is comparable to one another, as a result of using the same game mechanics. The participants will then control the character's interaction with each other, as well as the interaction with the universe around the characters, within the simulation, by utilizing the numbers on their character's sheet. Another system mechanics will determine how the character's abilities will affect their actions and abilities to succeed or fail. Solving a math problem, within a RPG system, could be as simple as having a number, on you character sheet, which represents your abilities of logic, a math skill or both. Better numbers on relevant abilities and skills will then affect the odds of success in your character's favor.

These RPG systems again vary wildly from game to game. The typical RPG system will determine the odds of success or failure by, again, utilizing dices. An example would be to have a participant roll one or more dices, dictated by the system, if they roll below their math skill then they succeed in solving the math problem. If they roll above, then they fail.[8]

8 Attachment 1: 3 sample of a Fantasy Tabletop RPG, where 4 children create characters in a simple RPG system, of my own device, and play out a few situations. I have been fully granted to publish these clips.

Why Roleplaying Games?

I, myself, started playing roleplaying games in my early teens. It didn't take long until I was managing and tweaking games of my own. What strikes me as most remarkable is how the game system made every aspect of my character understandable. I could see how strong, how smart, how charming, how skilled and how rich my character was. And I could use these traits to make things happen within the game. I could even see how I manipulated with the traits, as the game progressed, to better serve my characters needs, wants and circumstances.

It was immensely enjoyable to play these games, but the more sessions I played with different characters and RPG simulators, the more I became aware of the effect it had on me. When the RPG system allowed me choices, then I would create characters which I found ideally to my liking. These character's would reflect my real life traits. I would then apply these traits in the simulated world and see the consequences of my actions. I believe that I grew considerably wiser about myself by testing my preferred traits in hypothetical real life, as well as outlandishly unrealistic simulations. It gave me the notion of what I was hypothetically capable of with my particular set of skills. But more importantly it gave me the notion of what I was hypothetically capable of when I began manipulating those traits.

As I got older, I began playing characters which emphasized being both similar to me and radically different from me in some manner. The simulations taught me different ways to succeed with different sets of traits. I became more versatile in my preferences, in the games, and it spilled over into my real life.

Of course, this was all games. No one was around to explicitly teach me what I could get out of the whole experience. Indeed it was a very mixed experience of lessons. No adults were involved and the teens, running games, would not delve too deeply into what sort of RPG mechanics they would utilize, and what results they had on the participants.

Today, I know that you choose or create an RPG system with the participants in mind. I have created several unique RPG systems which is still in a state of constant development, by the time honored method of trial and error. My RPG systems have become a process of changes, based on who participated in the games as well as the circumstances.

Indeed, the adaptability of a RPG system is the reason why there exist so many of them. And I am far from the first to have had the idea of applying roleplaying game mechanics into other areas besides entertainment. The potential in making RPG system with education in mind has begun popping up as the teens of my generation have become adults with kids of their own. The Live Action Roleplaying Games are leading the way. They are far more wide spread and appeal to a larger group of participants.[9] But most of the live RPG are still relying on RPG systems, behind the costumes and natural settings.

One of the better examples of RPG, applied in education here in Denmark, is Østerskov Private School. This school have been up and running since 2006 by applying their vision of educational RPG combined with classroom teaching. They state that their RPG methods motivates learning and teach an understanding of how society works and how it is affected.[10]

Whether the application of RPG in education is a good idea, is still up for debate. The results of applying RPG within educational systems is still in its infancy. But the RPG community is slowly being introduced into other areas, regardless, simply because we are seeing pedagogues, teachers, coaches and consultants with decade long backgrounds as a RPG players, managers and writers. These people know, from personal experience, that RPG is a powerful and adaptable tool in the right hands, propelling such initiatives as Østerkov School forward.

These initiatives have not gone unnoticed and one of the most interesting projects, currently in progress, is a study on “Roleplaying as a Creative and Motivation Learning Platform” under direct management of Lisa Gjedde PhD.[11] Sadly, the results of this project isn't due until the summer of 2014. But the fact that the project is a 3 year study, funded by tax payer money, tells us that the adaptation of RPG in other areas might hold a good deal of potential.

I am one of those people holding RPG in high regards. I am very curious to see how RPG systems might be adapted to serve other purposes than entertainment. Student counseling is one of those areas. More specifically I hypothesize the following:

1: A RPG character creation system could be adapted to function as a tool for student counselors,

9 Live Rollespil
10 Reference 9: Østerskov Private School Mission Statement
11 Reference 10: “Roleplaying as a Creative and Motivation Learning Platform” project introduction papers

which would allow students the opportunity to recreate themselves on paper. This with the purpose of better understand themselves.

2: A simulation of a students future could be enacted, by allowing the students to play themselves in a RPG system. This would allow student counselors the ability to prepare students, for the complexities of navigating our education system and job marked. This by having the students take charge of their fictive RPG alter ego and then have them make a series of choices in the RPG simulation. The consequences of these choices could be simulated well by a counselor utilizing a RPG system.

Project Method

Philosophy: Popper

Both the act of counseling and playing roleplaying games are very much based on the individuals involved. Every session will differ depending on the individual. It would be impossible for a counselor or a game master to predict the outcome of any one session no matter how consistent he would keep to a script, method and environment. The whole point of the session is to allow the individual participants a high degree of influence on their particular session.

Testing a game system, under such circumstances lead to very tentative results. I could design a game system and then test it again and again without really being able to conclude that this tabletop roleplaying system is perfectly aligned towards counseling students. So I am not even going to try. I have been designing roleplaying game systems for the last 2 decades and I am still modifying, replacing, tailoring and reinventing systems as I go along. No one said it better than Karl Popper:

“No book can ever be finished. While working on it, we learn just enough to find it immature the moment we turn away from it”[12]

I find these words to be particular true, when doing an experiment. If I wish to be scientifically accurate, in the traditional empirical sense, then I should take particular care not to taint the experiment by changing any variables, through out the experiment. After repeating the experiment a fair number of times, in exactly the same manner, scientific truth will emerge by observing whether

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the tested theory holds true. But I often find that the moment I start testing a game system theory, I start seeing flaws almost immediately. Reason being that I couldn't predict all the myriad of variables present in my test subjects and test environments. And I never will be able to do this, with a high degree of satisfactory, in my line of work.

As such I embrace the philosophy which states that scientifically valid theory is an evolution rather than a constant. Any counseling roleplaying system, which I create and test, will never be the absolute right system for the job. Rather it will be hypothetically correct until a part of the system proves unreliable, where upon it is modified or replaced with another system, which is better suited for the task. This is done continually, thus evolving the system through the process of continually hypothesizing, testing and modifying in a loop. With enough iteration of this process one should gain an approximate scientific truth through the method of falsification.

Method: Design Based Research

Through the course of this experiment, I will test a newly developed roleplaying system designed for use in student counseling sessions. But this experiment will also change the system design between each test. These changes will be made on the basic of feedback from, the participants as well as the observers. A flaws in the system is defined as a disability, flaw or quirk which makes it:

- Harder for the participants to relate to the numbers, presented to them through the RPG mechanics.
- Harder for the counselors to utilize the system in a student counseling session.

The primary participants are 9th grade students and their feedback will focus on their ease with the game mechanics. A secondary group of young adults has also been involved. The observers are professional student counselors, who will deliver feedback on the game mechanic's potential use within their counseling environment. Another source will also be myself as I revisit the test sessions through the use of video and audio recordings.

Before the testing begins, I will have designed a roleplaying game system primarily based on my own knowledge and experience, which in turn is supported by existing theory within the fields of student counseling and game theory. After each test iteration the game mechanics will be modified in accordance with the feedback and observations I retain.

These modifications will be inspired by “Design Based Research”.[13] This scientific research method expands on the approach of hypothesizing, falsification and modifying. This is done by grounding the modifications in existing theory, which might work better within the context of the problem one have found. I say that I am inspired by this approach as I utilize both my imagination as well as seeking existing knowledge, when finding new approaches between tests. The point being that any changes I make to the system in between test iterations will give me a better understanding of how the game mechanics work out when I create and work both intuitively as well as systematically on any modification.

As for using Design based research rather than other, more established methods of research, is a matter of time, resources and practical application. I don't have the time or resources to create a truly controlled experiment, which spans the larger picture that is RPG mechanics. Professor Gjedde is leading the way with a project spanning 3 years and a team to back her up. What I have is myself, 2 months and 2 decades worth of experience. If I were to seek results on the same scientific level as Professor Gjedde then I would have to narrow the scope of my tests to something far simpler than what I wish to present with this project. Of course, this project isn't allowing me the room to deal with the whole picture either, so one might argue that design based research isn't much of an improvement. But this method do give a very large incentive, to someone like me. It allows for early experience to influence later results. And since I don't have time, resources and more than 30 pages to write this report, then Design Based Research gives me better tools to produce results. And if this holds true, then I might be able to create a larger and more encompassing project, without compromising the validity of the results produced. More interestingly, I also get results which are field tested, in setting which gives control to the students and counselors. By testing in the field I have a chance of making a product, which might be proven usable to students and counselors. This within the limited time and resources at my disposal. If I do this then I might hypothesize that I might not have a valid result by the end of this report, but I will have a product, which might prove itself valid a few hundred iterations down the road.

13 Reference 12: “Design-Based Research - Putting a Stake in the Ground” by Sasha Barab & Kurt Squire, published in “The Journal of the Learning Sciences” 2004, Volume 13, Issue 1, Page 1-14

Project Theory

Student Counseling

Before I could even begin to work out a roleplaying game system, aimed at counseling students, I would need a greater insight into the workings of a student counselor. In the broader sense of the word I use the teachings of A.G.Watts who divide the act of counseling into 4 distinct areas of counseling:[14]

The “Liberal” way aim at supporting the students in choosing a career which fits their talents, needs and preferences.

The “Conservative” way aim at supporting the students in choosing a career which fits the needs of the society.

The “Progressive” way aim at supporting the students in bettering their abilities in order to gain access to better jobs.

The “Radical” way aim at supporting the student's community to better handle the societal problems which might prevent the student from gaining access to desired jobs.

The counselors I worked with deal with all 4 areas and utilize different methods in order to adequately cover their job description. They do, however, utilize said methods separately, depending on what sort of needs they are confronted with, when dealing with each individual student.

As I wish to create a roleplaying game, which is accessible to any one individual, I also need to create game mechanics which will fulfill all the ways a counselor might approach a student. This report will, however, limit itself in the sense that we will only look at the core basic attributes of the students. As such we will mostly be dealing with the “Liberal” way of counseling students while touching a bit on the “Progressive” elements of the game mechanics.

14 Reference 13: “Socio-Political Ideologies in Counseling” by A.G.Watts. Published in the book:“Rethinking Careers Education and Guidance: Theory, Policy and Practice” Danish Translation, 2nd edition, 1st print, chapter 12, pages 213-225.

Before designing the game mechanics, for the first game test iteration, I approached the professional counselors, charged with observing the tests. I asked them how they approached the task of counseling their students in the “Liberal” way. More specifically I asked how they would make the students aware of their current talents and preferences.

The answer was that they, among other things, used a personal self evaluation test, based on a questionnaire, which would categorize and quantify the tendencies and talents of the student into six different vocational areas. The origin of said test was clear, but the utilization of the test was done with the help of work papers created internally by the student counselors.[15] The closest I could get to working out where, when and by whom those work papers was created, was that they were created by someone far back in the past. And when asked why these tests was still in use, I was told that the students gave positive feedback, on how the work papers impacted on them, so why fix what wasn't broken. Student counselor Team Leader Pia Hegner, also mentioned that these test and work papers were made in a time where resources were given to the developing of such things. Resources which have been drying up in recent times.

Although it would be interesting to utilize these tests as a direct part of the roleplaying game mechanics, I chose not to do so. Although the questionnaire might provide an accurate depiction of the student's core identity, I wasn't prepared to spend the first half hour of the test game session filling out more than a hundred questions. What I did gain, from the work papers, was inspiration on how I might shape the game mechanics by taking the 6 vocational areas into consideration:

- Realistic - Solving problems by doing.
- Investigative - Solving problems by thinking.
- Traditional - Solving problems by following rules.
- Artistic - Solving problems by creating.
- Motivated - Solving problems by taking chances.
- Social - Solving problems with emotions

These areas was defined by the mentioned work papers, without clear origins, and they consisted of a number of adjectives, some of which was inspired by Howard Gardners Multiple Intelligence theory. Another work paper gave the students an overview of a bunch of professions which

15 Reference 14: Counselor Self Evaluation Work Papers & Workshop Script - Min Færden i Øernes Verden by Grethe Petersen, Leif Hartman, Kate Pedersen & Grethe Fogh Nielsen

corresponded to each vocational area.

The use of the multiple intelligence theory, as inspiration for RPG systems, is something I have previously done. Each intelligence is well defined and separated from one another. This lend itself well to RPG mechanics which also tend to divide different aspects of a person into distinctive attributes such as strength, intelligence and charisma.

Letting a RPG system be inspired by the counselor's self evaluation test did, however, pose some interesting questions. The 6 vocational areas was not as distinctive in their description. Instead they frequently overlapped. An example would be that a “Realistic” person likes taking chances but a Motivated person solves problem by taking chances as well. No less than 4 of the areas require logic as an ingredient. I realize that most professions rely on more than one distinctive trait, and this is what this test try to reflect. But in terms of creating a RPG system, the replacement of distinctive personality traits with the 6 vocational areas, might cause a problem in describing and assigning specific traits to an action inside of the game simulation.

Game Theory

The other aspect I would need to be clear about, before utilizing a roleplaying game system, aimed at counseling students, would be a greater insight into the workings of a game mechanics. In the broader sense of the word I use the teachings of Thokild Hanghøj who divide the act of utilizing games, in a teaching environment, into 4 distinct areas of influence:[16]

The “Professional Domain” aim at utilizing theoretical and practical knowledge and expertize within the design of the game.

The “Pedagogical Domain” aim at utilizing didactically methods of learning within the game design.

The “Everyday Domain” aim at utilizing the participants own resources, capabilities and networks.

The “Scenario Domain” aim at utilizing the participants experience with exploring and reflecting

16 Reference 15: “Spilscenarier I undervisningen – præsentation af en didaktisk model” af Thorkild Hanghøj published in “Læring & Medier” (LOM), issue 9, 2012

over events, issues, challenges, etc which might exist within the game design.

Thorkild Hanghøj talks about the challenges of implementing games within school environments as the traditional schools often demands a high degree of utilization within the “Professional Domain” while at the same time being biased in viewing games as platforms purely for entertainment and pedagogical purposes. I, however, don't experience this problem. counselors don't really have the teaching role of imparting wisdom within the Professional Domain. Their role primarily consist of guiding the students towards the relevant teachers in question. This also means that a counseling roleplaying game doesn't really have to have extensive knowledge on every educational study or career path. Student counselors make frequent use of large databases, which informs them about requirements, summaries and options available to any student regardless of whether the try to become a janitor or an astronaut. My game will simply utilize the same databases upon need.

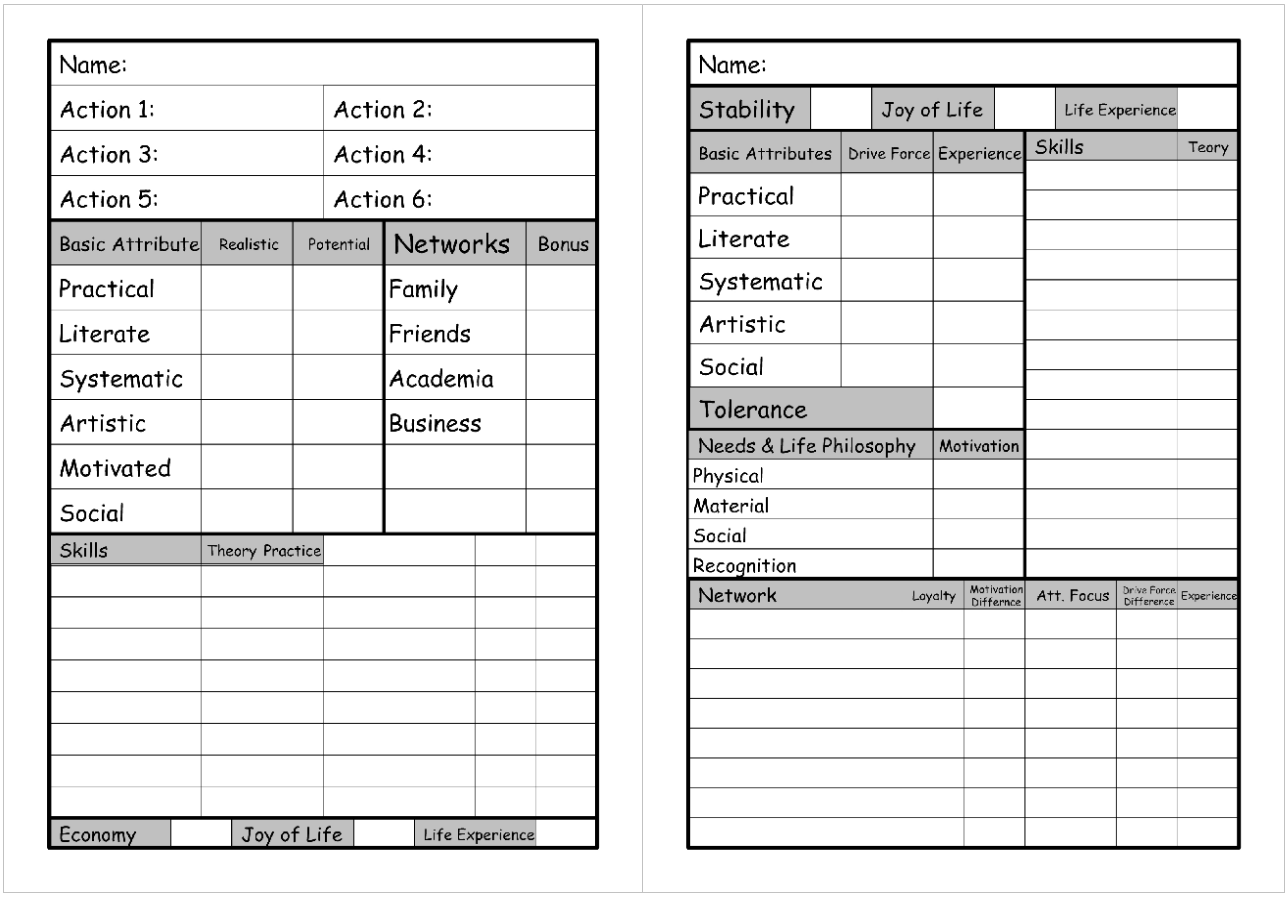
The other 3 domains are however of particular relevance when dealing with student counseling. The counselor is charged with identifying and, if needed, developing the personal capabilities of students who have trouble coping with their education and career path. A counselor is also charged with identifying and, if needed, helping a student in coping with their personal environments, networks, talents and flaws. And last, a counselor is charged with identifying the societal factors and if needed, helping a student in navigating the possibilities and dangers of living, learning and working in the real world.

These 3 aspects will also, necessarily, be represented within the game mechanics I design. But again, this report will primarily be focusing on “Everyday Domain” as well as the “Pedagogical Domain” as these are relevant within the game mechanics. Mechanics which pertain to the student's basic attributes and the potential use and development of these, within the game simulation.

Project Empirical Work[17]

Overview

This project ended up having 4 iterative tests, making up the bulk of the projects empirical data. These tests have been documented on video, except for the 4th iteration, which was conducted in an actual counseling situation. This project will, however, rely even more upon the character sheets, used by each participant, when documenting the effects of the system mechanics during each test.



Name:				
Action 1:		Action 2:		
Action 3:		Action 4:		
Action 5:		Action 6:		
Basic Attribute	Realistic	Potential	Networks	Bonus
Practical			Family	
Literate			Friends	
Systematic			Academia	
Artistic			Business	
Motivated				
Social				
Skills	Theory Practice			
Economy		Joy of Life		Life Experience

Name:					
Stability		Joy of Life		Life Experience	
Basic Attributes	Drive Force	Experience	Skills		Teory
Practical					
Literate					
Systematic					
Artistic					
Social					
Tolerance					
Needs & Life Philosophy		Motivation			
Physical					
Material					
Social					
Recognition					
Network	Loyalty	Motivation Differnce	Att. Focus	Drive Force Difference	Experience

The 1st Iteration character sheet compared to the 4th, and last, iteration. This report focus on the "Basic Attribute" area.

It is, however, the reflections and changes done before each iterations which are of particular interest. On the next page is an overview of said changes where:

- Basic Attributes is the basic attributes used to describe a person within the game.

17 All parents of the participants, have given their written permission to allow the project material to be published in their original form. Surnames have, however, been redacted. The exception being the participants from the 4th iteration, who's names have been redacted in whole. All observers have verbally gone on record saying that they agree to be recited as a part of the publishing of this project.

- Scale Identifier is the numeric scale used to describe the characters ability/identity within each basic attribute. The participants would always be told to create their character to resemble themselves as closely as they could envision.
- Action System is the dice system and RPG mechanics utilized in determining odds of success within the RPG simulation.

	Iteration 1	Iteration 2	Iteration 3	Iteration 4
Basic Attributes	6 vocational areas: - Practical - Literate - Systematic - Artistic - Motivational - Social Each area was represented with a current indicator "Realistic" and a possible future development indicator "Potential"	The indicator for future development, "Potential", was removed from the character creation.	Removed "Motivated" attribute and applied it in other aspects of the RPG system mechanics. Replaced the "Realistic" indicator for the vocational areas with "Driving Force" Added another indicator describing "Experience" in each vocational area.	Unchanged
Scale Identifier	Scale from 1-20. 1 represents a crippling handicap while 20 represents a total mastery. Each participant got 60 points to distribute between the 6 vocational areas "Realistic". They got 40 points to distribute between the 6 vocational areas "Potential"	Initially a Scale of 1-4, but changed to a scale of 1-5 on request from the participants. Each participant chose their levels, in each the 5 vocational areas, as they saw fit... But this gave the participants such hardship that I they instead got 18 points to distribute between the 6 vocational areas.	Scale, inspired by the Taxonomi of Bloom, ranging from -6 - +6 where each level was clearly defined on a visual aid. Each participant chose their levels, in each the 5 vocational areas, as they saw fit. Each participant also chose on a scale from 1-5 how much "Experience" they had in each vocational area.	Each participant now choose their "Experience", for each vocational area, on a scale from 1 to 8, where each level is clearly defined in a table.
Action System	Participant would use four 6 sided dices to determine their odds of success. The "Realistic" indicator of any vocational area, utilized within the action, would be added together with possible skills and network numbers. The total would determine how low a participant would need to roll in order to succeed with an action. An arbitrary number would be added or subtracted, if the action was extraordinarily easy or difficult in nature.	Replacing the four 6 sided dices, participants would now use a low sided dice, when trying to determine their odds of success, while doing an easy action. Increasingly higher sided dices would be used while doing more difficult actions.	Participants now use their vocational areas "Experience" number in conjunction skill and network numbers. The dice utilized to determine odds of success still have more sides the more difficult the action. But now the dice also have more sides, if an action isn't ideally suited to the "Driving Force" of the vocational area, used in dealing with the action.	Unchanged

The tests themselves were conducted in secluded surroundings on school property. The Participants and observers present were invited, and indeed encourage to collaborate with me in influencing

each test. As such, the only true observer was in fact the camera and microphone present. Feedback on how the system worked out was often given directly after the tests, but I also conducted a separate interview with the "observing" counselors after the last iteration was done.

Designing the 1st Iteration Game Mechanics

For the purpose of the first roleplaying game system test iteration I chose to use the mechanics from a game, I designed, for recreational use with 9 year old participants. This game's basic attributes was inspired by the Swedish mainstream roleplaying game "Draker & Demoner".[18] But where the mainstream inspiration requires the use of several books containing the systems mechanics, the game I designed basically removed or simplified most of the mechanics to the point where an ordinary nine year old could easily create a game character. This was done by making sure that no mechanics utilized any mathematics or reading requirements beyond the scope of a 3rd grader. The system also dispensed with any sort of eccentric dices normally found in most tabletop roleplaying games, as most participants wouldn't have access to such dice. Most importantly a character could be created in a very short amount of time. This taking into consideration, the shorter attention span of younger participants. Put together, this game mechanics was created to give a broad spectrum of participants access to the tabletop roleplaying experience, rather than catering to an intellectual male dominated "nerdy" subculture.

Choosing this mechanics boils down to the simple aspect that I am aware of a counselor's need for a game mechanics, which can be used by anyone. It is also important that the creation of a character don't take up too much time, as a counselor's time with a group of individuals is limited to begin with.

Now; the old Swedish D&D system identified 7 core attributes when designing a character, for use within the game simulator: Strength, Physique, Size, Agility, Intelligence, Mentality & Charisma. You determined what your character was born with by rolling a 6 sided dice 3 times, and add the rolles together, for each ability. If you rolled 10, in any one ability, then the character was born average in said ability. The further below or above 10 the more disadvantaged or talented your character would be. A role of 5 in Agility would signify that the character was very clumsy while a role of 15 would make the character very graceful. These numbers would have both direct and indirect effect on the game simulation. Indirectly you would be restricted in what sort of professions

18 Reference 16: "Draker och Demoner – Expert" by Lars-Åke Thor & Anders Blixt, Published by Västerås 1987, First Edition

you could choose. A low intelligence would prevent you from becoming a priest, scholar or magician. Directly, you could be required to successfully roll beneath your basic attribute, with a 20 sided dice. This would happen within the actual game simulation, whenever the situation called for it. An example would be a role beneath your charisma, as you try to pet a cat within the game. Any skills you character possessed or acquired would, however, work separately from your basic attributes. Basic attributes would mostly be used to determine how much of an effect your skills would have. Swinging an axe successfully would not require a role under strength but would instead require a roll under a skill handling axes. The basic ability would simply determine how big of an axe a person was able to handle.

The game I designed, for younger kids, cuts the basic attributes down to 4: Health, Agility, Intelligence and Charm. The use of 3 dice role per basic attribute is kept but players are allowed to switch the numbers rolled around, between attributes, as they desire. This was primarily done for entertainment purposes. The D&D system would trap the participants in their randomly generated genetic makeup. My system allowed players to choose which attributes they wanted to put emphasis on at the cost of others. This in turn would motivate the younger players immensely, as they could create a character reflecting their own interests and fascinations. 10 is still the average for each attribute, but rather than role under an attribute, with a 20 sided dice, one would us 4 ordinary dices, added together, to determine the outcome of an action. Skills and basic attributes was also tied directly together. If you tried to handle an axe, in this game system, then you would add your axe handling skill together with your “Agility” and roll under this number, with 4 six sided dices, to succeed in this action.[19]

Taking above system and modifying it for use with students in a counseling capacity was done by first changing the basic attributes to approximate the 6 vocational areas used in the counselor's questionnaire. I thus ended up with the Basic Attributes: Practical, Literate, Systematic, Artistic, Motivated & Social. Rather than letting a random set of dices determine how many points they would have in each of these attributes, I simply gave them 60 points to distribute among the 6 attributes. The students was told to distribute the points to reflect themselves as accurately as possible. 10 was still the average in any one basic attribute and any rolls under skills or attributes was retained. And this thus became the basic core attribute mechanics for the first test iteration of a

19 Attachment 1: 3 sample of a Fantasy Tabletop RPG, where 4 children create characters in a simple RPG system, of my own device, and play out a few situations. I have been fully granted to publish these clips.

game, which hypothetically would be capable of counseling students through tabletop roleplaying games.

Hypothetical Outcome of 1st Iteration

The first iteration of the Roleplaying Counseling Game (RPCG) was a very safe bet on my part. My participants was familiar with the earlier game system which the counseling system was based upon. I only had 3 participants, which I had played RPG with on numerous previous occasions. In other words I went into the first iteration fairly confident that the “Everyday Domain” aspect of the game was amply covered.

What mostly worried me was the time available. Even though I had chosen the simplest RPG system in my arsenal, I was very much in doubt on whether the character creation and game simulation could be done within the time frame at my disposal. I was also unsure of whether the simple mechanics would be able to accurately portray the participant's reality within the character generation and game simulation.

I also worried that I might not be able to clearly describe each vocational area in a distinctive way. I spend a lot of time trying to find the single right word to describe each of the 6 vocational areas. One could say that I ended up compromising between making each vocation area clearly distinguishable from one another and still holding true to the counselors original intent with said vocation areas. It would be of particular interest to see how the participants would respond to and utilize this set of basic attributes, when trying to create themselves on paper and making actions based on said traits.

I also planned on make the participants do the simulation twice. So I would ask them to duplicate their character, ones made. I was hoping to give the participants the opportunity to do different choices, the second time around, which would affect the numbers on their duplicate character differently from the first. Basically, they would do simulated iterations of their future. Part of this would be their ability to develop their basic attributes, which is why I chose to represent the each vocational area with both a “Realistic” number and a “Potential” number. The idea being that their potential abilities could be converted into realized ability, to be added to the “Realistic” number.

1st Test Iteration[20]

The first test was done with 3 9th grade male students and their own student counselor sitting on the sideline. A fourth student called in sick. The character creation went smoothly. It was very obvious that the participants had little problems working with the character creation system. In fact, both I and the participants were sometimes talking implicitly about the workings of the system. A point which the participants student counselor, Mrs. Hedegaard, was quick to mention after the iteration, as she was struggling to understand the system at first glance.

Neither the participants or the observers seemed to take much issue with the 6 vocational areas, and it was fairly easy for me to describe them. But I did take note of some issues. It was the plan that the participants would develop their characters into the future. This meant going to school and developing skills, developing existing and new networks, developing their economy, etc. This certainly also included developing their vocational areas. But the participants just didn't do any actions which made attempts at changing their Basic Attributes.

As the simulation progressed, it became obvious that there just wasn't time to do more than one run. As such the participants didn't get to try alternate ways of developing their simulated alter egos. Yet one issue with the action mechanics began to present itself, as the game progressed. The participants would begin to build such a high degree skill points that they could easily succeed at anything, unless I put in a negative denominator, on account that their action was much harder than any standard action one would take. This wasn't really a problem. In a standard RPG I would frequently say that the players had would simply roll beneath their Agility + Weapon skill to hit someone. But if they wanted to aim at their opponents head or eye, then they would have to subtract 5 or 10 points from their total Agility + Weapon skill before rolling beneath the number with the 4 6 sided dices combined. The fact that this was happening more often in the RPCG attested to the fact that the participants was succeeding in developing. They played their simulated future all the way from 9th grade, up through their youth education and just a bit further. They got jobs as well but several of the participants would go back and finish a collage degree. The simulation, however, never got that far.

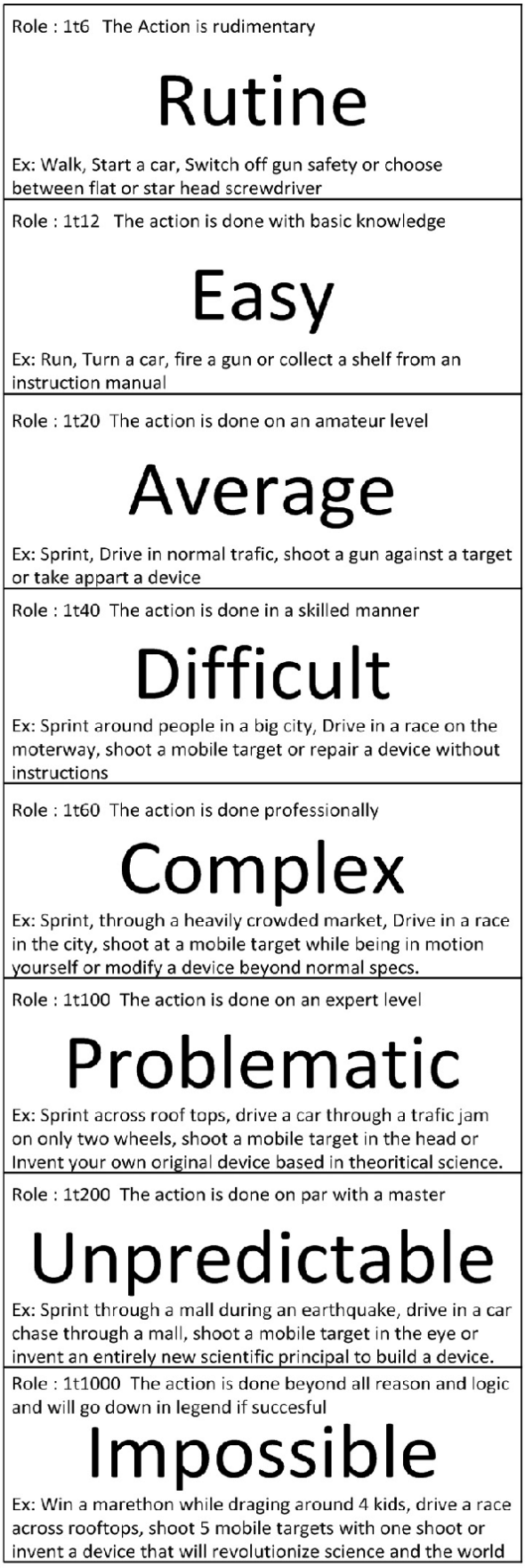
20 Attachment 2: Raw footage and participant characters, pertaining iteration 1

Iteration Reflections & 2nd Iteration Reconfiguration

A typical RPG system is often learned by trying things out, rather than sitting around observing. I didn't fully think into the test, that not only did the participant need to relate to the numbers... the student counselors would obviously also need to relate to this. In fact, my participants were being far too familiar with the game setup. The participant's focus on developing skills, rather than trying to develop basic attributes, could very well be contributed to the fact that regular RPG mostly focus on the development of skills rather than the basic attributes.

I mention that the participants quickly gain a lot of skill point. Yet, this system was never geared toward this kind of development in the characters skill levels. This reflects that the players were always rolling with the four 6 sided dices. I could build a modifier table which would simulated that the players were taking on more difficult actions as they gained more skill. But I felt that this would be a clumsy fix. The simply RPG system simply wasn't up to the task of dealing with large scope character development. This, combined with the fact that the observers had a difficult time relating to the 1-20 scale, utilized in determining the basic attributes meant that I ended up discarding the system in its entirety.

Instead I introduced another RPG system of mine: Dice difficulty. The RPG dice difficulty chart which I have been using and modifying for years, based



upon participant feedback, has served me well in dealing with major character development. The dice chart did, however, range from lowly 6 sided dice and all the way up to a 1000 sided dice (see picture). I didn't wish to have a lot of high numbers involved in this game, so I improvised a new simpler scale. One where simple sided dices would reflect things like 9th grade tests or getting low skill jobs, while many sided dices would reflect actions like writing a university report or getting an influential position in society. I didn't write the scale down because I didn't want things set in stone, when applied in the second iteration. Rather I would want to create the scale at a later point, when I had a better idea where the different dice belonged in relation to the new scale system.

Being free of the four 6 sided dices, I also discarded the 1-20 scale in favor of a much simpler scale of 1-4. Basically you were either “Crappy”, “Bad”, “Good” or “Awesome” in any one vocational area. I know that this was as simple as it gets, but I was curious as to how this would work out. I also removed, potential development entirely from the Basic Attributes. I wanted to make this game flow more easy and for participants and counselors to grasp the concept of the numbers no matter what their background were in relations to number systems. This would also be far more relevant in the 2nd iteration, where the participants didn't have any significant RPG background of particular note.

I also decided to entirely dispense with the notion of giving the participants a number of points to distribute between the vocational areas. In a regular RPG it is important to create a balance between that players, in order to create a dynamic group working together towards a common goal. This definitely wasn't a mechanics working well with a RPCG. Rather it contradicted the whole purpose of creating yourself on paper. The mechanics would basically force the participants to ultimately start the game simulation being an average human being, regardless of whether the person had fewer or more points, distributed between the 6 vocational areas, in real life. I'm surprised that I didn't catch this “Jante's Law” mechanics which is basically a part of almost every typical entertainment game, starting all players as equals. So iteration 2's participants would simply choose the on the scale of 1-4 in accordance with their how they perceived themselves in real life.

2nd Test Iteration[21]

The second test was done with 2 9th grade female students and a student counselor team leader sitting on the sideline. The female participants had played the simple version of the RPG system. But this was 5 years in the past. They did mention, themselves, that they had little to no recollection of the way they had played the games.

The character creation went less than smoothly, this time around. The participants used quite a bit of time trying to decide where they were on the 1-4 scale. One participant expressed the need to have a scale with a midpoint. She also asked if she could put in decimal points. As such we changed the scale from 1-5.[22] After almost 5 minutes of dilly-dallying around I did, however decide to discard the notion of letting the participants work out their own basic attributes. Instead I went back to the model from iteration 1 and gave the participants 18 points to be distributed between the 6 vocational areas. This participants didn't exactly care for this method either, but at that point in the test I need to get the ball rolling forward.

After taking more time than I would like, creating the participant's characters, we started the game simulation. The entire game really did captivate and engage both the participants and the counselor. The introduction of the Dice difficulty system worked very well with the simple numbers given.[23] According to the Counselor the impact on the participants was profound, as the participant would spend the entire ride home, talking about how they navigated the RPCG system and how this might play out differently in real life.[24]

2nd Iteration Reflections & 3rd Iteration Reconfiguration

In retrospect, I believe that a 1-7 scale would have been ideal to employ as every participant is already quite familiar with the 7 point school grading scale. But what really stood out as a problem with this game, was the fact that the participants had severe trouble evaluating themselves by having me explain the vocational areas and then simply giving them a scale with the most basic of reference points.

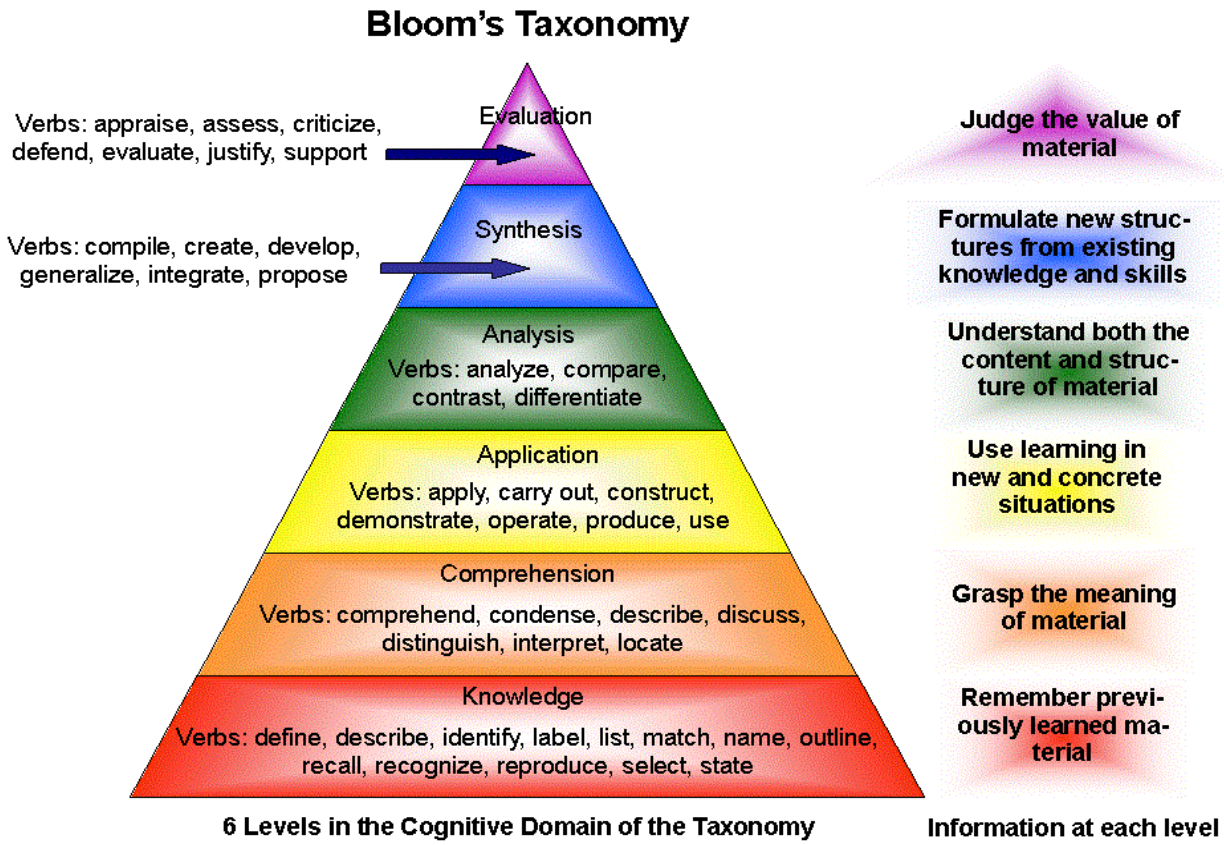
21 Attachment 3: Raw footage and participant characters, pertaining iteration 2
22 Attachment 3: “Iteration 2 Raw Footage” 8 minutes into the recording.
23 Attachment 6: “Counseling Feedback” 14 minutes and 30 seconds into the recording. Also see Character Quotes
24 Attachment 6: “Counseling Feedback” 2 minutes and 25 seconds into the recording. Also see Character Quotes

Further more, it was a problem that the system didn't address the fact that basic attributes could play a crucial role in the development of a character. As the system stood now, participants were much more focused on improving their skills as opposed to self development. At this point I took a step back and asked myself what sort of tools I was being subjected to as a student, which would encourage me to develop my core attributes.

Keeping in mind that we should try and make more scientific sense of the RPCG system mechanics I had the inspiration to try and rebuild the Basic Attributes around Bloom's Taxonomy Scale.[25] This scale is used by most universities to show students the different steps to approaching any given area of knowledge. I personally loath this scale as I have a particular preference on where I find value in applying myself, while the university have an entirely different set of preferences in mind for me. I am, however, very intrigued by the fact that any action I do, becomes immensely harder to accomplish if I am forced to apply myself outside of my comfort zone.

On the opposite end we have the the typical RPG scale, which is simply an indicator of natural ability, rather than an indicator on your preferred way of applying said natural ability, or lack their off. I didn't wish to loose this aspect of the game. I still wished for participant to utilize their basic attributes actively within the game simulation. But I dialed it down by removing the term “Realistic” and replacing it with “Experience”. Now the indicator of 1-5 was merely representing how much practical experience the character had accumulated in each vocational area. The concept of practical experience was originally applied to the characters specific skills, rather than basic attributes. By applying them to the basic attributes, rather than the specific skills themselves, the concept of practical experience became a much more relevant number to boost. Practical experienced, gain through the use of one skill, could now benefit an entirely different skill, if both skill were combined with the same vocational area, when doing an action.

25 Reference: “Benjamin Bloom 1913-99” by Elliot Eisner, published in “Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative education, vol XXX, issue 3, September 2000.



So now, each basic attribute would have both an "Experience" scale and a new scale, going by the name of "Driving Force", inspired by Bloom's taxonomy scale. I started to create the new 1-6 scale by clearly defining each number clearly in the order of things. It was my hope that this scale might give the participants a more accurate picture of their basic abilities and how they would impact their actions significantly. One thing which I took note of at once, was that Bloom's Taxonomy scale didn't cover the entire spectrum of human learning preferences. Rather, it simply covered the aspects of positive learning preferences. This scale is a functional tool for an university student, but the student counselors have mostly been mandated to council students with difficulties in completing school or applying themselves to the job marked. I was very much in doubt as to whether Bloom's Taxonomy scale would make sense to individuals who had trouble even staying in school. So I set about creating a modified scale ranging from 6 to -6 where 1 to 6 was inspired by Bloom's original scale, while -1 to -6 was created by myself to represent the complete opposite of the values described in 1 to 6. 0 was put equal to complete apathy. I was very exited to see how 9th grade students would take to categorizing themselves within above framework. Would they find this scale better suited to the task of creating a good RPCG?

The dice system, utilized in determining odds of success within the game simulation, remained

unchanged from the previous iteration. You would simply be using your basic attributes experience, in combine with skills and networks, to determine the number to roll beneath. The dices would still be adjusted in accordance with how difficult the players actions would be. The changing factor, of course, being that actions would now be more difficult, with worse odds as a result, if the action taken was removed from the character's vocational area “Driving Force”.

With the introduction of “Drive Force”, I also created the concept of changing ones view on attaining knowledge and experience. As a participant would advance their character through school, work and higher education, they would realize that their ability to make successful actions would depend highly on where they themselves preferred to be. They could then choose to do an action which would specifically focus on expanding their “Drive Force” number to include a range on the scale of -6 to +6. Such an action would come at the price of lost experience, as some of the experience gained in one way of learning would become obsolete or irrelevant, as the characters world view expanded.

A “Tolerance” counter was also added to the next iteration. This indicator would simply state if the participant had the ability to tolerate working outside their own “Drive Force” without incurring the added difficulty. This is a half measure to developing your “Drive Force” range. Where “Drive Force” is always in effect, no matter what, the “Tolerance” could be negated by a negative “Joy of Life”, which is another aspect of the games mechanics. The positive aspect of building “Tolerance” rather than developing “Drive Force” range would be that you kept a hold of the characters accumulated experience. Basically the mechanics are the choice between adapting to changing circumstances, or staying true to ones original character and taking what comes in stride.

What worried me most about the new mechanic's was the added complexity. But with these mechanics I was also hoping to create a much more realistic simulation of what it meant to

accurately depict who you are, and then having take measure of your future actions and how these actions will be influenced by the person you are or will develop into over time. Would you choose to challenge your way of learning, understanding and doing? Or would you stay within your comfort zones and excel at these.

The possibilities of this kind of though processes, within the game simulation, also led me to remove the “Motivated” vocation area entirely, leaving just 5 basic attributes. The decision to do this was in part that I thought this area didn't fit well into the “Drive Force” scale. I hadn't seen the area used at all during the 2 first iterations either. And personally, I felt that this area felt so out of place as a basic attribute. I thought that this area wasn't so much a distinct vocation, on its own, but rather a part of each of the other areas in general. As such I removed it and made it into a game mechanics instead. If you stayed within your “Drive Force” comfort zone, then you would be rewarded with more actions, over a period of time. If, on the other hand, you would stray outside of your “Drive Force” zone, then you would be rewarded with tolerance points if successful in the action.

3rd Iteration Test[26]

This test was conducted under rather adverse circumstances. Originally I intended the RPCG to happen with all 6 originally invited student participants, as well as the 2 counselors and 2 additional counselors which I was planning on working with in iteration 4.

The character creation went smoothly. But again the counselors was telling me that they would have trouble following some of the numbers, utilized when creating the character. Mostly they were intend on figuring out how to run the game themselves. Again, some of the RPCG mechanics was a more implicit affair.

The male students did, however, create much more self relatable characters this time around, as opposed to the first iteration. Of particular note, was the difference in how Thor described his artistic vocational area. In the first iteration he gave himself 1 point.[27] This basically signified that he had the artistic ability of rock who wouldn't be able to create a stick figure drawing if his life depended upon it. Now, in iteration 3, his artistic ability was set to -2 on “Drive Force” and 1 on

26 Attachment 4: Raw footage and participant characters, pertaining iteration 3
27 Attachment 2: “Iteration 1 Character Sheets” Page 1

“Experience”.[28] This indicate that he simply don't see the point in doing anything artistic in his life and have very limited hands on experience with such endeavors. The contrast between the 1st and 3rd iteration game mechanics makes a fair contrast, when seeing the shift in Thor's evaluation of himself.

Sadly the actual game simulation, of the character's future lives, was cut very short. So I continued the RPCG session in private, with just the camera as an observer, and managed to get one participant play through. The feedback, which I got from the participants, was that they wouldn't care to play this version of the RPCS if it was applied to a regular entertainment RPG.[29] The reason being that the game was too realistic. But for the purpose of creating a believable character of themselves, and playing out their future, they commented that this ended up being a very believable scenario.[30] “This could this becoming a reality” was the words chosen by the single participant, who tried a simulation of his future, with his character.[31]

3rd Iteration Reflections & 4th Iteration Reconfiguration

It was obvious that I had actually neglected to create proper tables, pertaining the dice difficulty system. Ironically I had created such tables for all the newly introduced systems. But the shift of focus towards the Bloom inspired scale, as well as a more nuanced Life Philosophy system based on Marslow's pyramid of needs, set the Dice Difficulty Table back.

This time around it was even more important, for me, to make the RPCG mechanics more transparent and available. Reason being that the 4th iteration would not be done with 9th grade students but random youth, receiving actual aid and classroom guidance in a UUV center. This would most likely make for a better test, in terms of participants with a far more diverse set of abilities and skill sets, or lack their of. One thing I had noticed with my previous iteration participants, with the exception of one, were their ambition for their own future. These student had a god idea of where they were going and how they might go about getting there, with their particular abilities and skill set at their disposal.

So I set about creating a table, clearly describing the different levels of difficulties. Lacking proper

28 Attachment 4: “Iteration 3 Character Sheets” Page 1
29 Attachment 4: “Iteration 3 Raw Footage” 3 hours, 9 minutes, 30 seconds into the recording.
30 Attachment 4: “Iteration 3 Raw Footage” 2 hours, 58 minutes, 00 seconds into the recording.
31 Attachment 4: “Iteration 3 Raw Footage” 2 hours, 57 minutes, 45 seconds into the recording.

time to research alternate ways of doing this, I simply took the 8 point level Dice Difficulty table, from my own RPG systems and began modifying the descriptions to reflect the different levels of basic attribute “Experience” levels, as well as the “Theoretic” levels of skills. It was clearly a rushed job, but went with it regardless.

4th Iteration Test[32]

The forth test was done with 8 young adults of mixed male and female students and their 2 student counselors sitting on the sideline. Non one of them had any experience with RPG whatsoever. The camera could not be an observer in this setting, but a video interview was conducted with the student counselors right after the conclusion of said tests.

The character creation process proceeded fairly well. Most participants expressed a good understanding of the character creation process. This included the councilors, who also participated in creating themselves on paper.[33] But it was also obvious that some people just were not very clear on what to make of some aspects of their future actions. One participant, in particular, seemed to be very little invested in the process of creating himself on paper and coming up with possible future actions for himself. He did, however, fill out his Basic Attributes, and they painted a clear picture of why he either couldn't or wouldn't invest much time in creating himself on paper. The only attribute which he gave himself a positive number in was his “Practical” vocational area. All the other vocational areas was at either 0 or -1. This basically spelled out that this participant only found any relevance dealing with anything, if it was something he could do with his hands. By assisting him in the task I got him to at least recognize that he had more than just skill in mechanics. He also had skill in driving.[34]

The group basically split down the middle, in terms of participating in the actual simulation of a future choice. We did not have a lot of time so we didn't get around to everyone. Trying out an action. Those who did get an action of theirs simulated, in the RPCG, were also the participants who volunteered themselves. We took the time to get feedback from everyone, and it was pretty obvious that half of the participants didn't figure out how their characters numbers fit together with the actions they could take.[35] The counselors put emphasis on the need for the simulation to possibly

32 Attachment 5: Participant characters, pertaining iteration 4
33 Attachment 6: “Counseling Feedback” 7 minutes and 5 seconds into the recording. Also see Character Quotes
34 Attachment 5: “Iteration 4 Character Sheets” Page 15 & 16
35 Attachment 6: “Counseling Feedback” 4 minutes and 10 seconds into the recording. Also see Character Quotes

make use of physical activity. It was also noted, how much time participants would require to sit around simply listening to the other participants doing their actions. I solved this problem partially by getting the other participants involved in giving feedback to who ever was doing an action at the moment. This, however, didn't really have much of an impact in this group.

4th Iteration Reflections

The interesting part of playing this 4th iteration, was how different things played out from the other iterations. There could be a lot of reason why the RPCG action mechanics went over half the participant's heads. It could be that people didn't get to play, but merely had to contend with watching. And those who did play only got to try a single action, rather than a succession. But I also see the flaw lying with myself. The 2nd iteration game mechanics might have made much more sense to these participants. Reason being that I had unwittingly converted the mechanics back to using the entire range of dices from four to a thousand sides. Obviously the much more elegantly improvised dice difficulty system, utilizing only low and average sided dice, would work better in this situation.

But the real lesson, to take with me, was the realization that my game mechanics would get in the way of reaching some of the participants, simply because they didn't care to participate in a game based on numbers, text, talk and imagination. It could be interesting to continue with a fifth iteration, where I would try to dispense entirely with the RPCG action mechanics. Any actions, taken by the individual, would instead merely be discussed in a group setting. The participant would think of their future actions and write down every aspect of how hey imagine the outcome. How will the action most likely affect different aspects of their character. The group would then look over the participants imagined outcome and simply point out alternative outcomes, which occurs to them. This might possibly be a much better fit for a counseling session.

Dispensing with the RPCG action system does, however, make it less of a game. And this is not to be dismissed. These participants showed obvious willingness to work very intimately with themselves. They could clearly describe and identify themselves within the numbers of the RPCG. They did express a certain apprehension at upon seeing possible futures revealed to them. But it was still within the safe confines of a made up situation.[36]

36 Attachment 6: “Counseling Feedback” 5 minutes into the recording. Also see Character Quotes

Final Analysis

The feedback given to iteration 4 shows the struggle to balance between the professional, pedagogical, everyday and scenario domain, inherent in the RPCG. The scenario of the games has focused on recreating the participants on a character sheet and then simulating a hypothetical future. But the everyday domain, of the participants, clearly put limits on what can realistically be done within said scenario, in iteration 4.[37] In contrast, everything went brilliantly in iteration 2, on account of doing the game with highly capable students.[38] The pedagogical domain dictates that the mechanics of the game become as realistic as possible, in order for the participants to learn as much as possible about themselves, society and their future in it. But more advanced game mechanics is contradicted by the same domain's wish to have mechanics which are approachable and easy for participants to work with, no matter the background. Basically this becomes a balancing issue.[39]

As for the participants ability to relate to the basic attribute numbers, I would say that it depend heavily upon the purpose of the game. I chose to use the counselor's vocational areas, because they were relevant in finding jobs within different sectors. I would chose a different set of attributes, along the lines of D&D, if the purpose of the game was going adventuring with swords and magic spells. The 7 intelligences could also serve as basic attributes, if you wish to have more psychologically balanced set of basic attributes. And Bloom's Taxonomy scale is an ideal fit, if you make a game focusing on the development of said basic attributes. As the participant's 9th grade boys commented: They wouldn't want to bring Bloom's scale into a regular entertainment RPG.

With this lesson in mind, it becomes less relevant to find the best RPG mechanics suited for student counseling. Rather it becomes more relevant to identify which systems will best serve different people and purposes. I merely ended up going with Bloom's Taxonomy Scale combined with because I found it prudent to make more room for a “Progressive” RPCG, in the later iteration as opposed to the more “Liberal” RPCG scene in the first 2 iterations.

And it was worth doing so. Only one participant ever tried to develop one of her basic attributes in the very last iteration. But that one person also commented that this simulation had a profound impact on her view of possibilities in her future.

37 Attachment 6: “Counseling Feedback” 4 minutes and 10 seconds into the recording. Also see Character Quotes
38 Attachment 6: “Counseling Feedback” 15 minutes and 35 seconds into the recording. Also see Character Quotes
39 Reference 4: “Tailored Roleplaying Games” by myself, cover this subject

Conclusion

Design based research and the iterative process have some important features, which have benefited the advancement of the RPCS. The most important one, being that the method allows me to step in and out of a chaotic test environment. There is no doubt that my use of observers and gathering of feedback are seriously compromised by everyone being caught up in the activity and not being able to plan properly in advance. But by connecting the tests with feedback and reflections, and making changes based on not just my own, but other theoretical frameworks, I do manage to make changes to the game mechanics.

But do the process actually validate the RPCG system? Not as well as I would like. It holds definite merit that I can compare different tweaks and reconfigurations to the game mechanics. I can say that one sort of mechanics work better than another. But the nature of the tests also make it impossible to give me a clear answer to why one system works better on one group, while another system works better with another. The most valid results I have is when I compare iteration 1 and 3. Since these were both conducted with the same group of 9th grade boys, I can also make a valid point in concluding, that the changes made to the system made these particular participants more capable of identify and transfer their own real life basic attributes, to their character alter egos.

Why then didn't I simply create all of my iterations with the same participants? The simple answer is that this isn't the way the world works. Counselors don't get to pick and choose who they counsel. I really messed up my ability to make any valid conclusion, when I chose to make the 4th iteration, with completely random youth. Ignoring this iteration would give me the ability to conclude, that well adjusted 9th grade students, with some degree of experience in regular entertainment RPG, respond well to the RPCG system changes, made between iteration 1-3. That is, if the participants are indeed the very definition of well adjusted 9th grade students. But I took a step further and asked the question of how random youth responds to the RPCG system. And I can't really answer that question with any sort of validity just yet. But I do see the power of the iterative process. If I keep testing with random youth then I'll also get a more complete picture of how said youth responds to the RPCG mechanics and changes made back and fourth.

So, to sum up, I tentatively conclude that my participants did transfer and relate better to the RPCG scale number systems as I tweaked it between iteration 1-3. It was of particular value to approach the system through the eye's of an outside theoretical source, following the methodical course laid

out by design based research standards. But the validity of above conclusions can be severely questions in that the number of iterations, they are based upon, are too few in number.

Discussions

The advantages of using RPG in counseling, as well as other vocational environments, lie in the fact that a Games often don't make sense to outside observers. Think of when you look at other people playing a game you know nothing about. It gets boring to watch as you aren't privy to the implicit mechanics of the game. It rarely start making any sense until you sit down and start playing yourself. This is the irony of writing a report like this. I imagine that it is a poor substitute for being an active part of the tests. I would also recon that this is the reason why games are being resisted as a valid method of learning.

I have learned to tolerate the value of the Bloom's Taxonomy scale. But I don't really care to move to the top of the stairs. I'm much more dedicated towards steps 1-5. Reason being that I believe that step number 6 is a matter of politics. Everything is relative and nothing can be the absolute truth. Interesting as that might be, it also makes it a real headache to make any sort of valid point. But step number 6 is necessary to systematically weed out the unfeasible and invalid. I just don't care to work with the traditional method of doing this. I see grand research projects, with clinically validated conclusions, be picked apart, taken out of context, ignored or simply misused for what ever purpose people see fit.

But I actually like the iterative development process. I find it enjoyable to throw stuff around and see what sticks. I don't pretend to have mastered Design Based Research, but if this method allows me to be right in the middle of things, and still do some sort of scientific validation in the process, then I'll gladly put my lot in with this bastard of science.

Attachments & References

All Attachments and Reference Material/Links is found on the tiny USB key, found tied to the spine of this report you are holding. All video files should be playable on any standard media player. Most documents requires a PDF file reader. All links require an active internet connection. The date of all links provided was actively working on the 10th of June 2013.

Source Material

"Design-Based Research - Putting a Stake in the Ground" by Sasha Barab & Kurt Squire, published in "The Journal of the Learning Sciences" 2004, Volume 13, Issue 1, Page 1-14

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"Draker och Demoner – Expert" by Lars-Åke Thor & Anders Blixt, Published by Västerås 1987, First Edition

"Benjamin Bloom 1913-99" by Elliot Eisner, published in "Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative education, vol XXX, issue 3, September 2000.

"Socio-Political Ideologies in Counseling" by A.G.Watts. Published in the book:"Rethinking Careers Education and Guidance: Theory, Policy and Practice" Danish Translation, 2nd edition, 1st print, chapter 12, pages 213-225.

Counselor Self Evaluation Work Papers & Workshop Script - Min Færden i Øernes Verden by Grethe Petersen, Leif Hartman, Kate Pedersen & Grethe Fogh Nielsen