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THE TEST PREVIEW GAME: APPLYING THE GAME SHOW FORMAT

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ABSTRACT

The game show format seen on television is often overlooked as an experiential learning methodology. This paper describes how a game utilizing this format (The Test Preview Game) was used in class as a pretest for a regular exam. Students evaluated the game using an evaluation questionnaire, and this data is presented. Finally, the strengths and weaknesses of the game show format both as a teaching methodology per Se and in terms of its utility as a pretest for an exam are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

All of us are familiar with the game show format as seen on television. "Jeopardy," "The Dating Game," and "Cross Wits," to mention a few, have all captured our attention at one time or another. Despite the game show's popularity and our familiarity with it, its use in the college classroom appears to be minimal. When one considers that game shows entail considerable experiential learning, it is even more surprising.

The game show format would appear to have many potential uses in a college classroom. Certainly, it is one of the most versatile and flexible of all experiential learning techniques. It can be used to teach virtually any subject; it can be used for classes of varying sizes; it can be used for class periods of differing lengths; and, it can be used for both young and old students, both for males and females, and for student groups of differing ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds. The reason the game show format appears to be such a pliable technique is that its requirements are simple: one or more hosts or hostesses, two or more contestants, a game or contest with specific rules, and one or more prizes or rewards.

I will now describe how the game format can be and was used to review for a test. In addition, student reactions to the format will be presented as will some of the apparent strengths and weaknesses of the game show format itself.

THE TEST PREVIEW GAME

The Test Preview Game was designed to serve as a preview for the first exam in a Personnel Management class, although with modifications in the subject matter, it could be used for virtually any course. The impetus for creating the game was the author's dissatisfaction with the standard approach of reviewing for a test (a lecture outlining, describing, or integrating all of the material to be covered on the exam) and the realization that most other experiential learning formats such as exercises, role plays and cases, do not typically lend themselves well to a test review.

Preparing For The Game

During the class session prior to the Test Preview Game, the author gave the class a general briefing on the game including a list of the game rules. Students were told that all game questions would be taken from class notes and specific chapters in the text. They were

encouraged to prepare for the game in the same manner they would prepare for the real test and were told that the questions asked during the game would be similar in format and difficulty to those appearing on the real test.

Two volunteers were requested to serve as MCs for the game show, and two gregarious students fortunately agreed to serve. Although one host or hostess would have sufficed, two were utilized to facilitate the asking of questions to the contestants and to have a judge, if needed.

The remaining 15 students in the class were then divided randomly into 5 contestant groups consisting of three members each. Each team was told to select one student who was to serve as a spokesman for the group and one student who was responsible for rolling a die.

Starting and Playing The Game

At the start of the game, students were told to sit in a circle with the other members of their contestant team, and each team was given a team number (1-5). A giant snake like figure which served, as a game board was then drawn on the black board. It contained a start circle and 100 spaces or adjoining squares. The author then introduced the "stars of the show--the two student MC's. Each "star" attempted to play the Don Pardo, Peter Marshall, etc. role by welcoming each contestant by name to the show. The MCs then described the "valuable" prizes which would be given to the game winners--assorted candy bars, potato chips, and Pepsis.

While the game rules had been given to the contestants during the previous class, one MC reviewed them with the participants briefly. They were:

1. The Game consists of two rounds: a 20 minute regulation round and a 10 minute double point round.
2. Each contestant team rolls a die prior to the question presentation to determine the point value of the question. During the second round all point values double.
3. Questions will be asked by two MCs alternately. The MC not asking a given question will serve as the judge, and his/her decision is final.
4. After being asked a question (Multiple Choice, True-False, Short Answer Essay) each contestant team has 15 seconds to either answer the question or pass it to the next team. If the group chooses to answer, and answers correctly it moves its marker forward the number of spaces designated by the die. If it answers incorrectly; it is penalized by moving back the number of spaces designated by the die. If the group chooses to pass the question, the

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receiving group then has 15 seconds to either answer the question or pass it on to the next contestant team. If no group chooses to answer a given question, the MC answers It and asks a new question.

- The team which has advanced Its marker the furthest on the game board is the winner. in the event of a tie at the end of the game, the contestant groups involved will each get one roll of the die. The team with the highest roll will then be asked the final question. That team can either answer the question or pass it to the team with the second highest roll. If a group chooses to answer the question, they must answer it correctly or lose the game. If a group chooses to pass the final question, the receiving group must answer the question within 15 seconds Or lose the game.

At the end of the game the MCs announced the winners of the game to the class and presented them with the “valuable” prizes.

Debriefing and Evaluating the Test Preview Game

Following a round of applause and congratulations to the winning team, the game was debriefed by the author. The objectives of the game were spelled out at this time, and students were told why the game show format had been selected to review for the first exam. Following debriefing, students were given a questionnaire which asked their opinions regarding the game. The results of this evaluation are presented in Figure 1.

a more thorough way to review for the exam.

A CRITIQUE OF THE GAME SHOW FORMAT

The game show format can be evaluated in terms of its utility as an experiential leaning technique per Se and In terms of its utility for facilitating a test review. The two are obviously interrelated in that if the game show format, in and of Itself, is not effective in developing students at the cognitive and process level, then using it as a methodology for reviewing for a test will necessarily also be unsuccessful. The opposite, however, is not necessarily true, i.e. the game show format could be a generally effective teaching methodology, but just not suitable for a test review.

Ireland and Hoover [1] have observed that the game show format “is an excellent example of the benefits of whole-person learning. The total learning experience of each participant is highlighted by affective involvement (the thrill of competing, the desire to win, the ‘owning of one’s selected response,’ etc.>, as well as the actual game behavior (competing, persuasively communicating, dissonance reduction during debriefing, etc.) Most importantly, all of these “process” benefits of experiential learning are not obtained at the expense of cognitive learning. In fact, just the opposite occurs.” [1, p.65].

In addition to being an excellent experiential learning technique the game format has the added benefits of being highly flexible. As was observed earlier, It can be used for small and large classes, for class periods of

FIGURE 1
TEST PREVIEW GAME EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Please evaluate the Test Preview Game we have just completed by circling the number which best represents your opinion.

Question	6	5	4	3	2	1	Not at all	Mean Response
1. To what extent, if any, did participating in the game provide you with new knowledge regarding employee evaluation/performance appraisal/training/wage and salary administration?								
Very much	6	5	4	3	2	1	Not at all	5.0
2. To what extent, if any, did you enjoy playing the game?								
Very much	6	5	4	3	2	1	Not at all	5.18
3. To what extent, if any, do you prefer the test review game approach to reviewing for an exam versus the more traditional approaches to review for exams?								
Very much	6	5	4	3	2	1	Not at all	4.77
4. In general, to what extent do you feel that the game is a worthwhile educational experience?								
Very much	6	5	4	3	2	1	Not at all	4.82

General comments Please write any additional comments you wish to make below and on the back.

Figure 1 shows that, in general, student opinions are quite favorable on all four questions. Students thought they gained new knowledge related to the course (Question 1), enjoyed the game (Question 2), preferred the game show format to traditional test review methods (Question 3), and felt the game was a worthwhile educational experience (Question 4). In addition to these four questions, students were asked to write any additional comments they had regarding the game. All but one of the comments were favorable with the most common comment being something to the effect that, “Using a game was a good idea.” The only negative comment indicated that a lecture would probably have been

varying lengths, and for student groups which differ in terms of age, sex, ethnic, religious, and/or racial backgrounds.

One further advantage of the game show format would appear to be that it typically does not require a considerable amount of faculty time and effort. As Bob Barker would say, “The Price is Right.” Developing a game board and preparing rules for the game is a relatively simple procedure. In fact, an instructor could just follow the rules of one of the television game shows such as “Jeopardy” or “Hollywood Squares.” Alternately, one or more student volunteers might be willing to

assist the instructor in accomplishing these tasks. Perhaps the most difficult and time consuming aspect of a game show is preparing the questions to be asked to the contestants. Instructor manuals, previous exams, and review or discussion questions within a text all serve as potential question sources. Students who are not contestants can be asked to submit questions also.

Given these advantages, what then are the major weaknesses of using the game show format? One potential problem with it stems from the students' prior associations with and perceptions of television game shows. Students typically perceive game shows as an enjoyable but nonetheless frivolous, or even downright silly, activity. Shows such as "The Dating Game," "Truth or Consequences," or "Let's Make a Deal" create the impression that game shows are not intended to be educational. Hence, when a faculty member announces to the class that a game show will be conducted in class, students may immediately be skeptical of its educational value. This skepticism may ultimately serve to reduce the student's actual learning, resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Unfortunately there is little a faculty member can do to alleviate this problem other than to announce that the game is of educational value and should be taken seriously. Nonetheless it is hard to undo what many years of television viewing has accomplished.

A second potential problem with the game show format stems from the fact that in the typical game show; some contestants must wait while others are answering one or more questions. While observing other contestants attempt to answer questions can be a valuable learning experience, one could argue that because the idle contestant is not being constantly challenged or required to engage in some activity, learning is less than optimal. It is important to note that this problem can be minimized by allowing contestants the option of passing questions to other contestants, as was done in the Test Preview Game, or by having several, even all, of the contestants answer each question.

Given then that the game show format per se has both strengths and weaknesses, how effective is it specifically for test preview purposes? To answer this question one must review the traditional reasons why faculty members utilize reviews for tests. These are: (1) To familiarize students with the type (question format, level of question difficulty, etc.) of questions which will be asked; (2) To convey specific information (cognitive or process) to the students. Traditionally during a test review faculty members emphasize specific points made previously in class or in the text or mention an important point they had forgotten to address during a previous class session; and (3) To integrate information covered during the course either in class or in the text. Faculty frequently show students during a review for a test how previous information presented in class interrelates and/or they show the interrelationship between the class and the text material.

How effective is the game show format in accomplishing these specific objectives? One could surmise that it can certainly be used effectively to familiarize students with the type of questions which will appear on an exam. In selecting questions for a game show, an instructor need only select questions identical in nature to those that will appear on the actual test. The game show format, through careful question selection and development, can also be used successfully to convey or reinforce specific knowledge and to emphasize certain points made in class or in the text.

While the game format would appear to be effective in

accomplishing these two objectives, its utility for integrating and interrelating course materials appears to be somewhat questionable. At the least, it presents a unique challenge to an instructor. How, for example, can an instructor use the game show format to convey the interrelationships between human resource planning, the selection process, performance appraisal, and wage and salary administration? Or, how can one use the game show format to convey to students that the material contained on pages 173-178 of the text book relates to or explains more fully the points demonstrated in last week's experiential learning exercise? It would appear that it would be quite difficult for a faculty member to use the game show format to accomplish these tasks. One solution to this problem, of course, is simply to discuss important interrelationships during the relevant class session. Or, one could simply divide a review for the test into two separate parts: a game show and a discussion showing the interrelationships which exists between the course materials.

CONCLUSIONS

For many years the game show format has been neglected by college faculty members. Yet, it appears to be an excellent experiential learning technique for it potentially develops students at both the cognitive and process level. In addition, it is highly flexible, does not require a considerable amount of faculty time and effort, has minimal disadvantages, and students appear to enjoy its use. It does not appear to deserve the negative treatment it has received in the past.

REFERENCES:

- [1] Ireland, R. Duane and J. Duane Hoover, "Experiential Processing of Differing Managerial Perspectives; The Use of A Game Show Format," Association for Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, 1979, pp. 63-65.