

SEDA Autumn Conference 2024



Session Title: Fostering Empathy Through Play: The Impact of 'Far From Home' on University Staff's Understanding of International Students

Session Type: Research Papers (20 minutes)

Main presenter(s): Sofia Shan, Edinburgh Napier University

Co presenter(s): N/A

Session Summary: In this presentation, I will share key findings from research on the empathy-building board game "Far From Home," aimed at fostering university staff's understanding of international students. Based on data from individual interviews, focus groups with recorded game sessions, and player feedback surveys, the study reveals how the game enhances empathy for the challenges faced by international students. The presentation will also explore practical implications for using "Far From Home" as a training tool within university settings.

Session Outline:

- 1. Cultural Awareness and Empathy:** One of the main goals of "Far From Home" is to foster greater empathy and cultural awareness among university staff towards international students. The study examines how effectively the game allows participants to understand the diverse challenges international students face, such as cultural adaptation, language barriers, homesickness, and social isolation.
- 2. Impact on Staff-Student Relationships:** A key issue is whether "Far From Home" can improve interactions between staff and international students. By role-playing different social identities, staff members can potentially enhance their ability to provide appropriate support and guidance, helping international students navigate the complexities of studying in a foreign country.
- 3. Training and Professional Development:** Another important question is how this game can be integrated into staff training programs. The study will address the effectiveness of using the game as a tool for professional development and its potential to improve staff's emotional intelligence and responsiveness in real-life university settings.
- 4. Inspiring Innovative Teaching Methods:** A key issue addressed is how the game has inspired teaching staff to create their own board games, specifically tailored for engaging nursing students. The new game aims to foster empathy towards patients on long-term recovery journeys and raise awareness of mental health issues. The study will examine how "Far From Home" has sparked creativity in educational approaches, encouraging staff to use interactive tools to enhance students' emotional understanding and sensitivity toward vulnerable populations.

5. Player Feedback and Game Refinement: The final issue involves analysing feedback from players, including suggestions for improving the game. This will inform future iterations of the game and its role in enhancing empathy-building efforts within educational institutions.

References: Decety, J., & Jackson, P. L. (2004). The functional architecture of human empathy. *Behavioural and Cognitive Neuroscience Reviews*, 3, 71–100.

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Sharritt, M. J. (2010). Designing game affordances to promote learning and engagement. *Cognitive Technology Journal*, 15(1), pp. 43–57. (Special Issue on Games for Good: Video Games as Cognitive Technologies.)