

STUDENT TEACHERS' OPINIONS OF EDUCATIONAL GAMES

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Over the course of the past decades the efficiency of segregated education has increasingly been called into question in Hungary, necessitating a thorough review of the theoretical and practical benefits of integrated education. The need for differentiated development is today a necessary part of pedagogical culture, however our teachers are far from ready to meet the demands of individual development and they lack the practical skills and capacities for this.

Keywords: educational games, teaching methodology, university students

The basics of cooperative learning were established in the 1920's by social-psychologists, although it was only applied to teaching methodology in the 1970's. Cooperative methodology has great potential in the educational process, with successful examples from nature sciences and social sciences as well as in music and drama classes. Somehow, cooperative learning methodology is least developed in the field of physical education, despite the fact that the most efficient – and most natural - way to lay the foundation for cooperative learning is through play involving movement.

Futurology researchers increasingly propose play as a valuable pedagogy tool. In play they see an opportunity to pave the way to success, since meaningful and enjoyable play is unimaginable unless the players are open to new ideas. Despite this, our daily experience in teaching shows that our students do not possess the comprehensive play experience necessary to effectively incorporate play into their everyday work as practicing teachers. In our study we wanted to map the mindset of future teachers to see how play, and particularly the cooperative approach, appears.

The survey examined the play experiences of 1st year students with questionnaires administered during the first and the last play classes of the 2007/2008 school year. In the initial survey we asked about both intellectual and physical play, including questions on how frequently the students played and when they had last played. The aim of the second survey was to determine how much the students were impacted by the different physical games after half a year of studying.

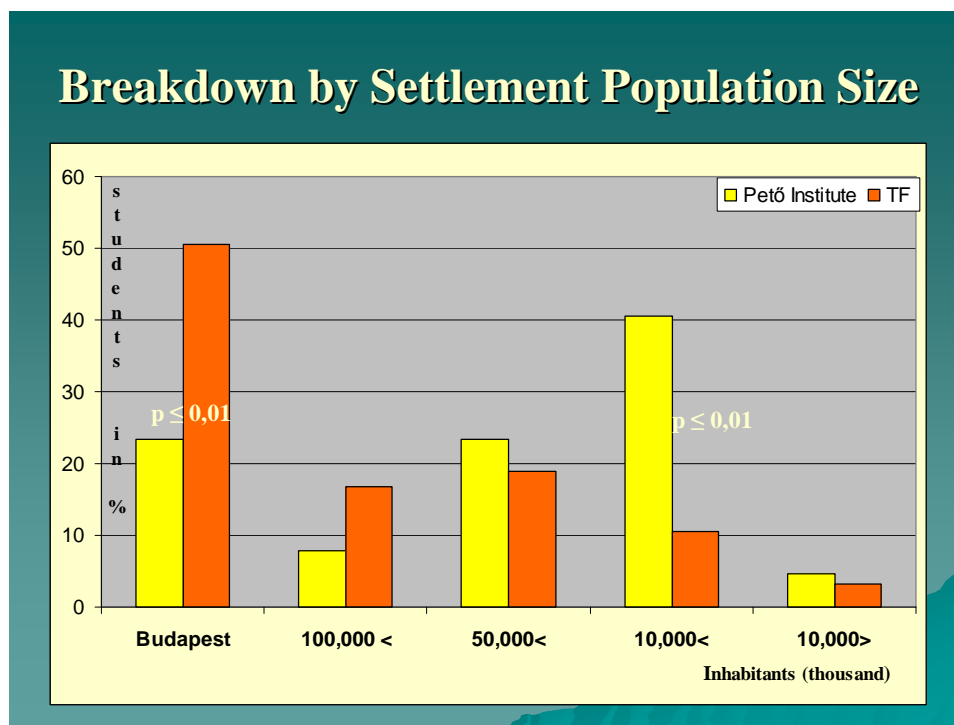
The participants were from the Semmelweis University, Faculty of Physical Education (TF =77) and the Pető Institute, (N=68 students) as graduates of both institutions deal with children. (N=145, students,).

In the first survey demographic data were collected in addition to the questions regarding play. In analyzing our results, we found that the social-

cultural background of the two institute's students was significantly different.

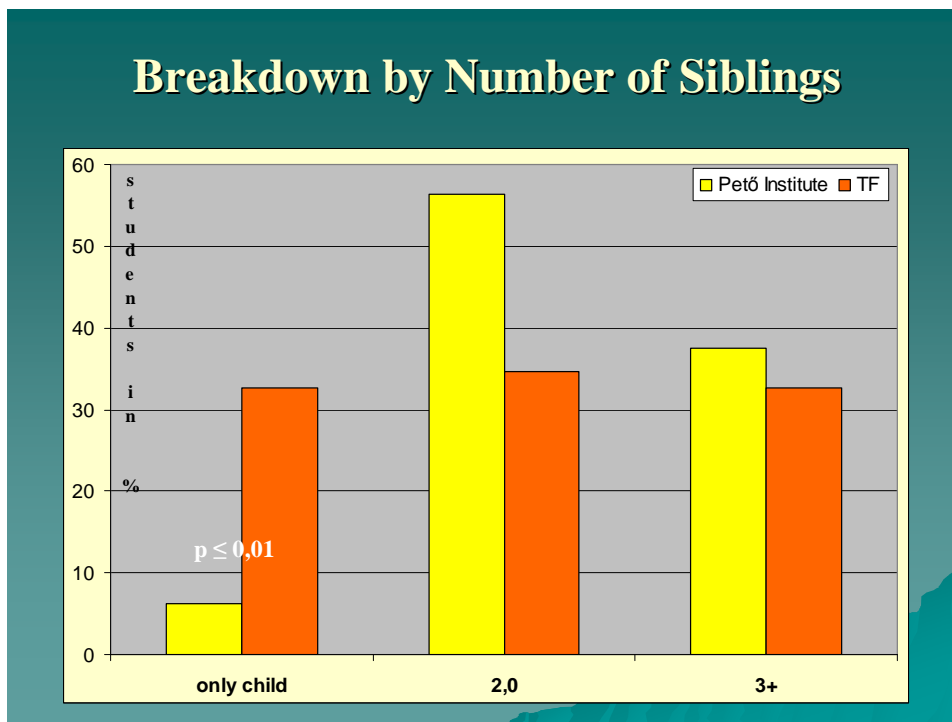
1.) First of all, settlement population was analyzed. (graph 1.) A sizable majority of the Pető students graduated from high schools in small cities with 10,000 – 50,000 inhabitants. A significantly smaller number of students came from Budapest, compared with the students from Semmelweis University.

Graph 1.



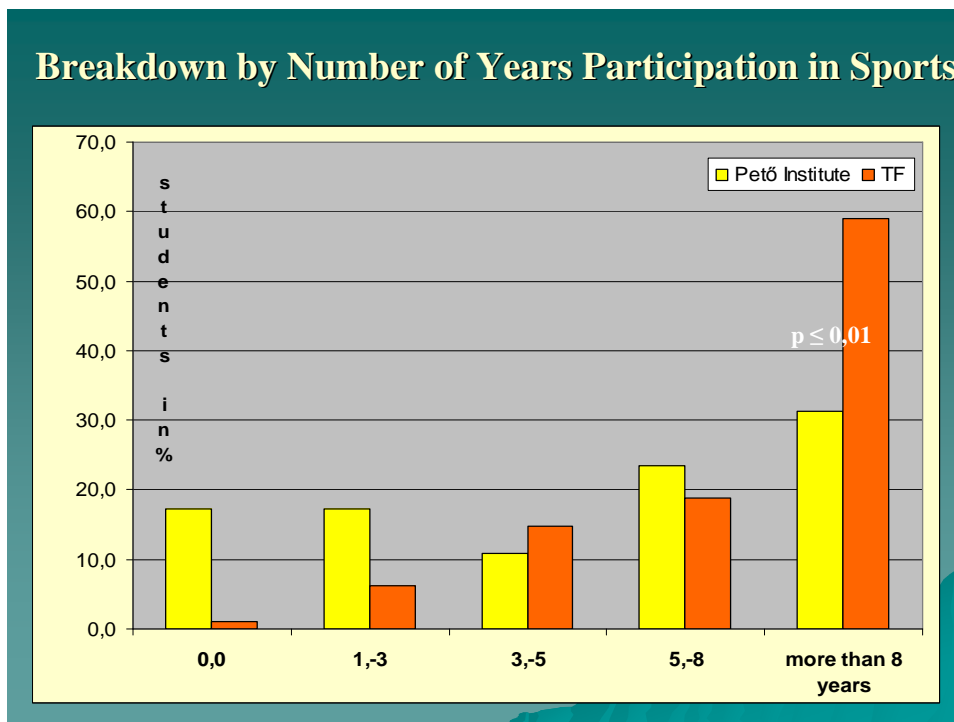
2.) The number of siblings was then examined (graph 2.). We expected our sample to reflect Hungarian demographic data, which was largely the case at the Pető Institute. Most often two children are raised in a family. Families with 3 or more siblings are slightly more common than those with only one child. Thus, it was surprising that almost a third of the students from Semmelweis University were only children, which was significantly more than the students from Pető Institute.

Graph 2.



3.) In our study we also analyzed the students' participation in sports (graph 3.). By participation in sports we mean all physical activities which are long term, goal-oriented and carefully planned, including not only traditional sports but also, for example, dance and yoga. In general, the number of years of participation in sporting activities met our expectations, although this is not to say that we believe it to be optimal. At the Pető Institute, the number of students who never participated in regular sporting activities or did so only for a couple of years is high. (All together almost 40% of our students.) Student from Semmelweis University spent the most time in regular physical activity.

Graph 3.



The cardinal differences of micro-social milieu did not remarkably effect the willingness to play either around the table or on the court.

When we examined how often the students sat down around a table to play, there was no significant difference found between the students. Some 30% of the students play card and board games often, and more than half of them play occasionally. For physical games there were some differences between the participants, but they were not significant. It is very rare for the students to play either intellectual or physical games on a very regular, frequent schedule (table 1.)

1. Table: The frequency of play by P.E. (N=77) and Pető (N=68) students

Frequency(%)	Frequency of			
	Intellectual games		Physical games	
	TF	Pető Intézet	TF	Pető Intézet
Never	0	0	4,2	3,1
Rarely	12,6	12,5	26,3	37,5
Occasionally	52,6	53,1	34,7	42,2
Often	32,6	32,8	28,4	10,9
Almost always	2,1	1,6	6,3	6,3

There was no difference between the two sets of students when we were examined the **last time** they participated in games. Even more saddening was the fact that students at Semmelweis University did not play more often in spite of the fact that all the equipment and courts are within easy access day in and day out.

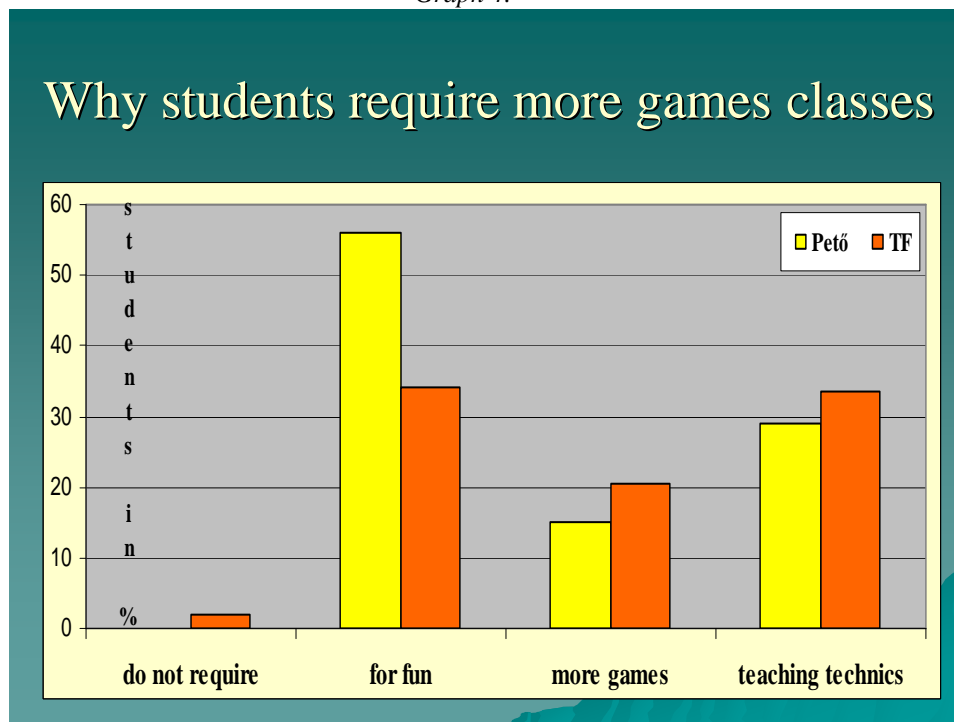
2. Table: The last experience of playing games by P.E. (N=77) and Pető (N=68) students

Last time	Last time of playing			
	Intellectual games		Physical games	
	TF	Pető Institute	TF	Pető Institute
1 week	23,2	31,3	25,5	7,8
2 weeks	32,6	31,3	12,8	21,9
1 month	31,6	21,9	24,5	31,3
2 months	7,4	9,4	13,8	18,8
Half year	5,3	6,3	23,4	20,3

The results of the initial survey appear to substantiate the practical experience that play as a source of pleasure is not an integral part of the everyday lives of our students in their youth.

The second survey took place during the final class of the educational games semester. Our results indicate that more than 40% of the students would like to learn more about play. However, we noted with regret that for almost half the students participation in the course was only a pleasant way of spending their time. Responses to another question (graph 4.) revealed that while every student wanted to use play in their work later on, only a third of the students noticed a lack of teaching methodology, despite the fact that this was barely covered in the course.

Graph 4.

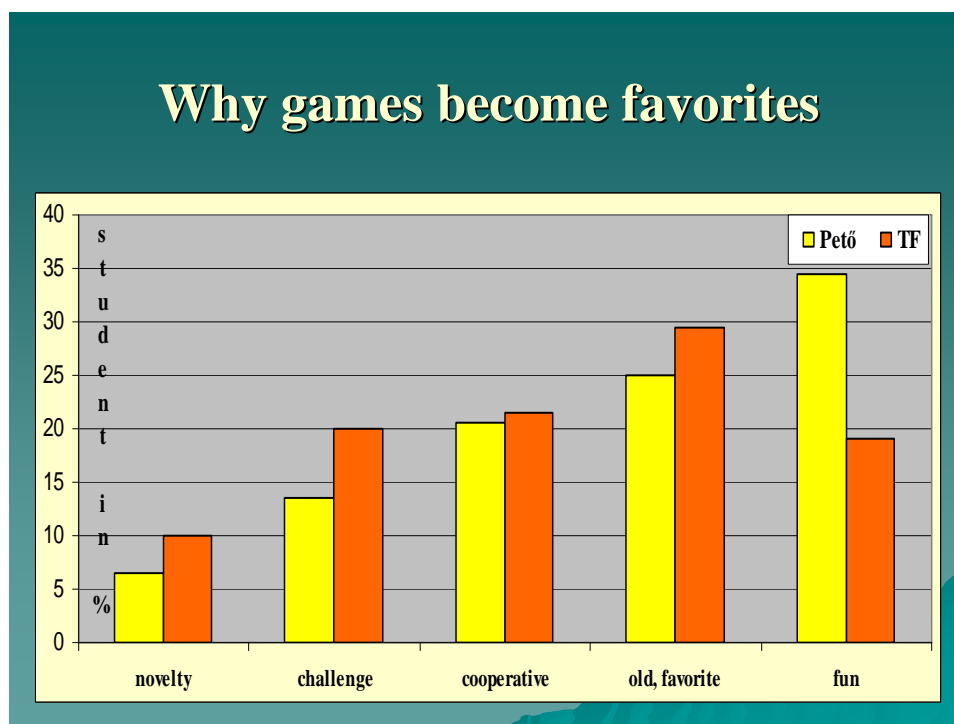


It was one of our goals to learn why certain games become favorites. It was discouraging to note that, in choosing their "favorite play," for female students novelty was the least influencing factor (graph 5.). The old, well known games were welcomed while little interest was shown in new ones.

During the semester the aims and methodology of cooperative games were introduced systematically. The advantages of cooperative games in

physical education were highlighted. Unfortunately, cooperation with other players was no more appealing for future teachers than the challenge posed or the fun nature of the play (graph 5.)

Graph 5.



All over, our results show that the play related knowledge of students increased during the course. However, we did not managed to make students conscious of the positive benefits of learning through play. We will use our experiences with this and future studies to review and modify the course topics and structure.

In higher education it is not enough to teach a significant number of games. It is just as important to stress the positive impact of playing games on students and to actively promote the use of games in education for students of all ages. The new Bolognese system provides a great opportunity to improve the teaching methods and techniques of games for master students.