Updating Programs Through Play

Updating a college program is both a motivating and destabilizing moment for a team. Some have been waiting for years, others dread it. Meanwhile, colleagues at the beginning of their careers may be unsure of what it entails but understand quite quickly that it is a demanding time—both intellectually and relationally. This shared practice proposes an educational and rallying avenue for developing a common understanding of the steps and the actions to be taken: the competency-based approach game.

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As part of the process of updating the Special Care Counselling program, an icebreaker activity in the form of a game was designed so that all members of the program team could begin the process with the same basic notions and thus contribute to the endeavour. During this initial mobilization phase, it was suggested that the reference frameworks for competency development and a program-based approach be reviewed before assimilating new competencies. In addition to correcting misinterpretations of concepts, such a practice promotes a common understanding and thus supports decision-making (Cormier & Pelletier, 2022).

The Competency-Based Approach Game, hereafter referred to as the CBA game, presents 24 key concepts in higher education and several pedagogical scenarios that give a preview of the questions to ask and the choices to make when updating a program. It is composed of physical components, such as a game board, game pieces, concept cards, as well as online tools using the Wooclap voting system for entering and debriefing answers.

This game marked the beginning of the process and had the potential to act as a motivational lever and an anchor point for the work committee. As a rallying factor, it mobilized, for once, all the members of a program team, and sometimes other stakeholders involved, around purely and exclusively pedagogical discussions. Similar to the impact of the first course on students (Bélanger & Lussier, 2011), this mobilizing activity became a reflection of the type of pedagogical support and climate that the pedagogical counsellor wished to put in place and, ideally, made it possible to establish a relationship of trust with the team.

The program update process can be akin to several analogies: a marathon, a rally, a mountain hike, a guided adventure (De Ladurantaye, 2012). Each person is free to choose an analogy and then adapt the discourse. In this example, a choice was made to use the theme of a sea voyage in order to give a playful tone to the update process. This theme illustrates, in its own way, that the process involved is not a long quiet river and that this journey will include stopovers on islands, marking moments that are conducive to questioning. The CBA game has been adapted several times in the context of different program updates, which has allowed us to validate the great potential for transferability and adaptability according to the preferences of the pedagogical counsellor or the program team. It is for this reason, among others, that we find it useful and relevant to present the foundations as well as the main stages of design and implementation.

In search of meaning and relevance

A legitimate question arises: what is the purpose of orchestrating a game-based activity in an exercise as formal as a program update? Whether we like it or not, an update is a professional disruption in addition to being a "program shock." The pedagogical counsellor then becomes a facilitator of change. They must not only guide teams in assimilating the mechanisms and reference frameworks involved, but also anticipate apprehensions and establish a working climate based on transparency and respect (De Ladurantaye, 2012). Any activity, whether in the form of a game or a discussion, becomes an opportunity for the pedagogical counsellor to become aware of the participants' perception of change, to perceive the dynamics involved and to adjust accordingly. They must bear in mind that, in the same teaching team, it is possible to find individuals with a high level of pedagogical knowledge but a very low tolerance for uncertainty, and individuals with a low level of pedagogical knowledge but a high tolerance for uncertainty. In addition, other variables directly involved in any change process will be perceived differently by each individual, but will also be influenced by the attributes of the community, its value, meaning or pace. This shows that an update process represents a challenge for support, as it is full of uncertainties, both for the counsellor and for the individuals they support. But it also shows that this activity is more than an upgrade of the
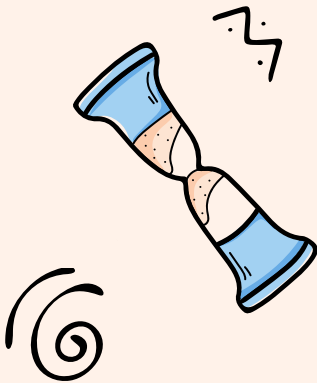
reference frameworks. It represents an opportunity for the pedagogical counsellor to create the conditions for success (Deniger, 2021) by creating a positive dynamic and a climate of trust.

The CBA game: design steps

If updating a program is a demanding and delicate process, the design of a game is, in its own way, a rather complex undertaking, too, and especially composed of several stages.

During the planning phase of the CBA game, the very first task was to consult the literature on program updates and identifying the essential concepts and theoretical notions that needed to be reviewed by the program team. There are many reference frameworks for competency development and program-based approaches. However, the key references that were consulted to delineate the concepts were internal policies and guidelines (Program Management Policy (PMP) and program-based approach), presentations made over time by the office of the Academic Dean, the presentation of the new program by the Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur (MES), and the *SOS labyrinthe* toolkit (Ducharme, Paquin-Boivin & Pelletier, 2022).
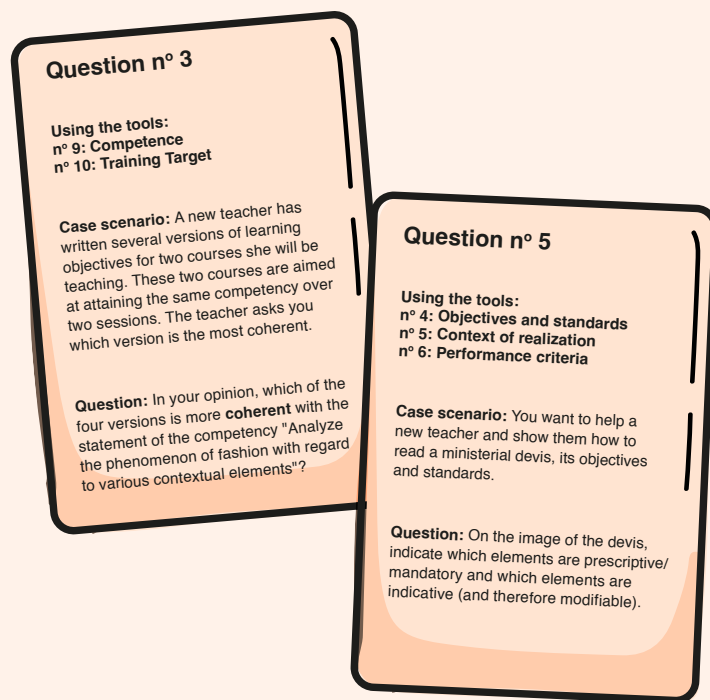
In all, 24 concepts were selected as essential and assembled in a booklet called *Coffre à outils* [*Toolbox*, Ed.], which presents one concept per page, numbered for easy reference. The explanation of the concept is followed by sources and references deemed relevant to deepen the understanding of the notions and QR codes to direct the reader to external resources such as Bloom's taxonomy and the DISCAS taxonomy.

During the organization phase, we had to take into account a quintessential constraint: the time allocated to the icebreaker activity. In reality, program teams can only allocate one to three hours for this activity. It is important to keep it simple and relatively short. That's why scenario writing is the most appropriate way to cover so many concepts in such a short time frame.

Based on advice and testimonials from people who had already coordinated program updates, case scenarios that could be used to put the teams into action were created to present examples in various disciplines. This had the advantage of de-personalizing the cases and facilitating pedagogical and program reflections.

Figure 1

Examples of playing card scenarios

Question n° 3

Using the tools:
n° 9: Competence
n° 10: Training Target

Case scenario: A new teacher has written several versions of learning objectives for two courses she will be teaching. These two courses are aimed at attaining the same competency over two sessions. The teacher asks you which version is the most coherent.

Question: In your opinion, which of the four versions is more **coherent** with the statement of the competency "Analyze the phenomenon of fashion with regard to various contextual elements"?

Question n° 5

Using the tools:
n° 4: Objectives and standards
n° 5: Context of realization
n° 6: Performance criteria

Case scenario: You want to help a new teacher and show them how to read a ministerial devis, its objectives and standards.

Question: On the image of the devis, indicate which elements are prescriptive/mandatory and which elements are indicative (and therefore modifiable).

The case scenarios include a choice of probable scenarios related to conditional knowledge, such as the appropriate taxonomic level and pedagogical alignment (questions 3 and 5). True/false questions were selected for their effectiveness in quickly presenting declarative knowledge, such as the mandatory and prescriptive elements of the devis.

Ten questions have been created to address the majority of the concepts. The questions are often accompanied by additional documents that the teams must consult.

Objectives and useful materials for the CBA game

Objectives	Materials required
Identify the appropriate taxonomic level for learning objectives	A sheet presenting objectives with different taxonomic levels
Read a logic diagram and consult the deployment of competencies in terms of hours	The logic diagram of a program of study
Identify the desired qualities of an exit profile	Program exit profiles
Recognize the prescriptive elements in a statement of the comptency	A ministerial devis presenting a competency
Understand pedagogical alignment: competency – objectives – comprehensive assessment	A sheet presenting objectives with different taxonomic levels

What are the rules of the game?

Once the questions have been chosen, it is time to decide how they will be put into play. The form and modalities of such an activity alone can be a source of motivation or demotivation for the program team. It is necessary to know how to balance the game aspect with the pedagogical aspect (Lallier, 2018) and to explain the choices made according to the goal pursued. Since the purpose of the CBA game is to evaluate the mastery of pedagogical concepts and to allow for the team to become up to date, a collaborative tabletop game was chosen. According to St-Pierre (2010), several conditions favour engagement in a game-based pedagogical activity. In addition to having a clear pedagogical objective, the game must include precise instructions, offer a sufficient level of challenge, provide the possibility of exercising a certain amount of control over the game's options, have a certain aesthetic appeal and adequate ergonomics, and provide help, tips and tricks.

Some games of chance do not allow for control of the participants' progression. Since participants may not answer all the questions or land on a certain square, it is impossible to validate their understanding. As for role-playing or escape games, they are complex to script, but above all, they are not easily modifiable for other occasions or uses. This is why we chose a quest game in small teams, combining physical and online components to stimulate the senses.

Content of the game, per team

- A game board illustrating the stages of the quest (in our case, islands numbered from 1 to 10, but it could be any other metaphor)
- Envelopes containing the tools related to the questions (in our case, placed under the corresponding islands)
- A game piece to move along the board (in our case, a small cardboard boat)
- A rules sheet and the QR code leading to the Wooclap voting system
- Two *Toolbox* booklets

Minimum duration of the activity

- 60 minutes for the game
- 30 minutes for the group debriefing

Rules

- Work in teams of three or four people
- Start the journey at step 1 and proceed chronologically
- Read aloud (one person) the instructions on the cards for each step
- Validate (a second person) the answers in the voting system and then provide feedback

Figure 2

CBA game board and accessories
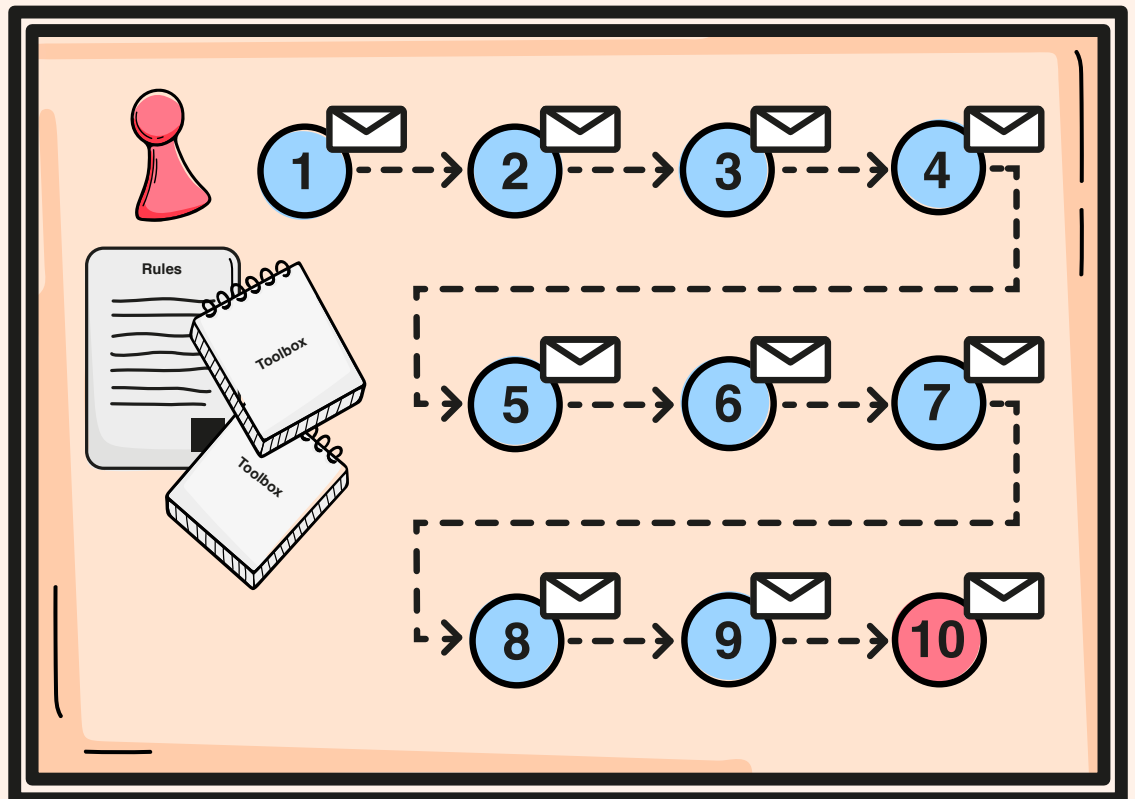
The physical setup consists mainly of a game board with numbered steps that correspond to mandatory stops to ensure that participants are exposed to all the concepts. This also allows for monitoring the progression of participants and increasing the complexity of the questions as the game progresses. The addition of online tools, such as Wooclap, chosen for its simplicity of use, is intended to facilitate the progression of the quest. Answers are entered by a participant into Wooclap and the team gets immediate feedback. It also allows the organizer to consult the answers once the activity is over.

Alone, we go faster; together, we go further

All teams have the same questions, except for the last question. One half of the teams, forming the first group, has question A and the other half has question B. The goal is for the two groups to work together to solve a question inspired by escape games. So, a little element of surprise awaits them for the very last question. The answer is the number on the tool card, and all the numbers collected by each team form the combination of a lock that opens the group's "hidden treasure." This last question symbolizes the attainment of a common goal as a group and shows that even if some teams progress faster in the game, they all arrive at their destination together, just like the process of updating the program.

The game-based approach allows people to feel rather than intellectualize the situation under study and to create complicity between them (Chamberland, Lavoie & Marquis cited in Johnston & Michaud, 2010). The CBA game achieves this objective. The participants confront their perceptions and explain their understanding in a non-threatening setting. In addition, the CBA game allows for error and stimulates interaction between people.
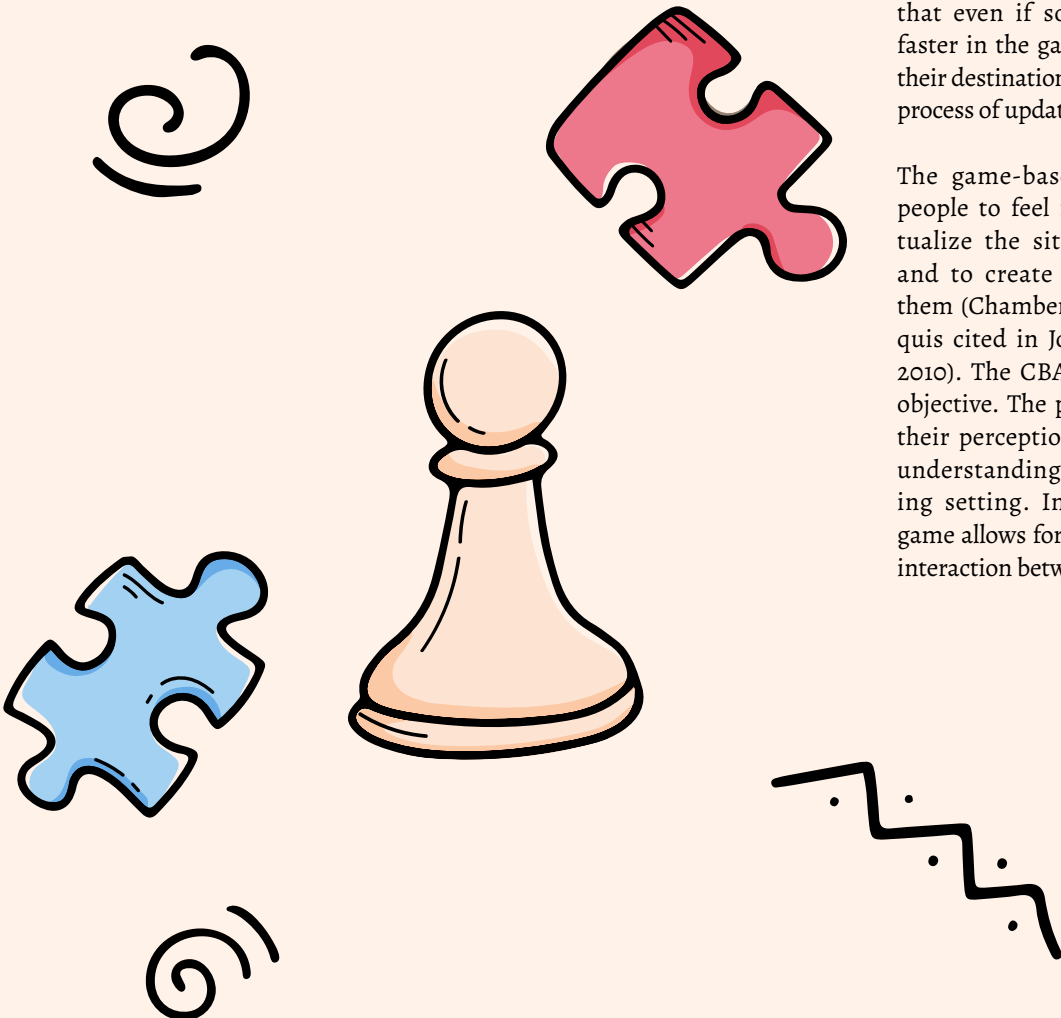
Table 2

Positive and negative aspects of the CBA game

Positive points	Ideas for improvement or suggestions
The terms of the game (rules, physical and online components) are easily understood by the participants.	Reduce time to set up. Develop simplified versions, including eliminating the game board.
The participants have serious discussions.	First, assess pedagogical knowledge.
Teams of three or four allow for positive team dynamics. This configuration allows for observations on group dynamics and team climate.	Beforehand, conduct a test on the attitudes that prevail in a conflict situation (Thomas-Kilmann method, 1976).
The game is transferable and adaptable. Several versions of the game have been deployed by colleagues since the first iteration.	Adapt the game to the identity of the programs involved.
Points of caution	
Some questions lack precision or require too many resources to be consulted, which makes the game unnecessarily complex.	Simplify some questions and limit the number of resources.
The high noise level may interfere with the concentration of some participants.	Place the teams in different rooms.
There is insufficient time to provide feedback on the responses.	Modify the questions and resources. In other iterations, this allowed more time for feedback.

In sum, the most positive aspect of this whole venture was its concrete and tangible utility. Throughout the program update process, members of the update committee referred to the questions in the game when selecting the right taxonomy level or creating an appropriate exit profile, for example. The toolkit also proved to be a handy reference tool for decision making, empowering the teachers on the update committee when making and evaluating choices.

Conclusion

A program update is demanding for stakeholders, and the gamification of such an exercise may, at first glance, seem futile. However, an icebreaker activity like the CBA game shows that it is possible to get a serious start on the work at hand while having fun.

In my practice, I felt it was essential that this "pre-update" activity had several characteristics: it had to be effective, but also meaningful and authentic. One element that has not been addressed in this text, but is the backdrop to this initiative, is that this game was to reflect my support and guidance style as a new pedagogical counsellor in this program team. This style is rooted in our personal, disciplinary, pedagogical, and relational identity (St. Germain & Labillois, 2016, p. 30). If one remains true to one's anchor points, support and guidance will be imbued with authenticity, a weapon of mass connection. This facilitates the establishment of a trusting relationship and demonstrates respect for our own integrity

(Houle & Pratte, 2017). This is why the form of the components and the choice of modalities for this activity were thought out with respect to my own professional identity. As a fashion teacher with a background in presentation design, specialized in enhancing and creating atmospheres that communicate a brand image, this aspect of my identity had to shine through.

Inspired, as a teacher, by Fortin and Gonzalez's pedagogy of the unexpected, I wanted this activity to be able to capture participants' attention, stimulate their memory, and encourage their active attention (2017). Therefore, moments of surprise were added to the activity, in order to respect this facet of my pedagogical identity. The game, adapted to the identity of the facilitator, has the potential to personalize pedagogical support and guidance and bring people together, by putting forward the facilitator's values and colour. For me, this is also what the CBA game represents. ▬

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