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Untitled. Illustration by Gabriel Alayza Moncloa.

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Special Issue

**Revisiting Teaching and Games. Mapping out  
Ecosystems of Learning**

edited by

Björn Berg Marklund, Jordan Loewen-Colón and Maria  
Saridaki

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Report

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# Teaching Music Theory through Games. To Play, Or Not to Play?

Stavroula Mpoti

## Abstract

Games will always be the most convenient means of incorporating pleasure, fantasy and collaboration into the educational process. But what is the right way to do this? Through my experience, I have learned that there are a few things that teachers must have in mind when they want to achieve learning through games, otherwise the results might be different from the expected ones. Below, I present my viewpoints upon my personal experience from the first attempt I had, while trying to incorporate games in my music theory class.

**Key words:** Music Theory, Games, Teaching, gameenvironments

**To cite this article:** Mpoti, S., 2021. Teaching Music Theory through Games. To play, Or Not to Play? gameenvironments 15, 323-328. Available at <http://www.gameenvironments.uni-bremen.de>.

## Evolving Games into Music Theory

As soon as I started teaching music, I combined the educational process with the game. From the time I was a student, until I became a music teacher, the music theory lesson had been the most unpleasant music lesson in the conservatoires, because it contained only passive learning ways (rules and behavioral exercises) with no substantial connection with the real aim/use of this lesson: playing music! So, I

wanted to change this sterile traditional way of learning and share a new fun side of music theory with my students, through games. I wanted to make them play (with) music.

My first students were six to seven years old and their previous age was inextricably linked to play. So, I thought that games would be the most appropriate means for them to move smoothly into the educational process. As it will be mentioned, the result was the desired one. Each music theory class contained 15 minutes of theory and the remaining 45 minutes were devoted to practice through any game and usually through their favorite board games. Gradually evaluating each game, I created my own games with more positive and attractive elements, avoiding possible difficulties and failures that may have prevented the students from getting involved in the gaming process.

### **The Experiment**

Gradually, I managed to create a new lesson from which the children took for granted in all lessons and for many years. This form consisted of the following elements: practice the learning material through the various tasks of the game, collaborative learning and reward. More specifically, the students were divided into small groups of three or four people. Each team played the game after passing various tasks which consisted of examples and exercises related to their lesson. Those tasks had been prepared before each lesson and had to do with music theory questions, rhythmic-singing-listening exercises, body percussion and playing or composing short melodies on the piano. If the majority of the students in each team won, then they could raise their score or move on to the board game. There was a separate exercise for each player of each team and no one else had the right to answer, but they could

help the player with the methodology of the exercise and direct him/her to find the solution, without pointing it out directly or indirectly. The team that would manage to collect the most points or complete the course of the game first, was also the winning team.



Figure 1. Music board game, *Music Discoveries*.

Each team that managed to complete the game, or exceeded a certain score, received a sticker as a reward. Those stickers did not have quantitative characterizations (first, second, etc.) but qualitative ones (music genius, super musician, music expert, etc.). I tried not to discriminate on the stickers so that there is a relative parity in the classroom. So, I never noticed competition, or disappointment among them. Everyone was just trying to achieve their goal. Basically, I wanted to create an atmosphere based on democracy and equality within the classroom through this playful process, since it itself can be paralleled to a social process. In both of them there are rules, goals, ways of thinking and moving, tasks to *survive*, collaboration







