

The Battle for Dondervoort: Using the powers of pervasive games and play communities in education

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“What are you? A fortification master? Cool. I’m the counsel.” (student, 14 years, 2010)



Which character suits you best?



The interface of the game

The Battle for Dondervoort

The Battle for Dondervoort is a pervasive, social school game developed with students and teachers, that teaches youngsters (ages 12-15) about an important and unique part of Dutch history in a rather unconventional and innovative way.



Do the loyal civilians win at the end of the week?



Or the traitors?

The game

The game transforms the classroom for a week into the fictional fortified city named Dondervoort during the Dutch Eighty Years' War (1558-1648). Every student has a custom-made house and plays a different character in this city, for example a fortification master, a host, a carpenter, a thief, a metal worker, the counsel, a noblewoman and so on. The goal of the class is to defend their city from the Spanish invaders, which attack every night. In order to do so, they have to work together and share information with the rest of the class that *only* their character has received by mail. But they need to be aware; there are also traitors among them who secretly work for the Spaniards. Who to trust? And who wins the game at the end of the week: the loyal civilians or the traitors? During the week teachers from different classes can also use *Dondervoort lessons* to support the game experience. In these lessons students can earn game assets. At the moment, teaching packages are available for *History, Mathematics, Arts, and Gymnastics*.

At the end, students will make a field trip to a fortified city nearby their school to play *Urban game*. Similar to the school game, the students have to prevent secret saboteurs from causing misfortune.

Therefore, they have to discover important buildings in the city and expose the saboteurs. This way the students also visit a real fortified city and are able to associate Dutch history with the present.

For More information (in Dutch):

www.slagomdondervoort.posterous.com/

<http://www.slagomdondervoort.nl>



View of the fictional fortified city of Dondervoort



Every student owns a house in Dondervoort

Powers of pervasive games and play communities

The game uses the powers of pervasive and social gaming principles to motivate and educate. These principles are:

- Using the strengths of the play community, as defined by DeKoven (2002), to let students educate each other. In the beginning students take a test that appoints them with a suitable character in Dondervoort. The game encourages them to share the unique pieces of information given to the character. This way, the students teach each other. This is an important strength confirmed by the teachers involved.
- The game is pervasive: you can play it anywhere and at any time during the week. It blurs the boundaries between game and not-game, spatial, temporal, and social (Montola, 2009). By doing so, it also blurs the boundaries between lessons and not-lessons, school and not-school, learning and not-learning. The game uses and creates an active play community outside the classes (in breaks and at home) to share information. Testing revealed that students do this a lot.
- The game combines the strengths of digital technologies and real life. You cannot win the game by just clicking your mouse. You need to work together (talk, fight, stalk, negotiate, etc.) in real life too. This perfectly fits the post-digital world these students live in (Copier, 2007).



Students testing the game

References

DeKoven, B. (2009). *The Well-Played Game*. Lincoln: Writers Club Press.

Montola, M., Stenros, J., Waern, A. (2009). *Pervasive games: Theory and design*. Burlington: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers.

Copier, M. (2007). *Beyond the magic circle: A network perspective on role-play in online games*. Utrecht. Doctoral thesis Utrecht University.