

Active Learning Through Aesthetic Board Games: A Reflective Workshop Session on Mentoring

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Abstract

In a time of growing complexity, higher education is undergoing profound change. Increasing social inequalities, shifting student needs, and the call for more inclusive and engaging teaching methods pose serious challenges for educators. Active learning is a key element of higher education, as it enhances student engagement, supports deeper understanding, and promotes the development of transferable skills. Among active learning methods, game-based learning offers a unique opportunity to develop competencies by combining emotional engagement, critical thinking, and social awareness. This study presents a workshop that uses storytelling and socially engaged board games to strengthen core competencies among future peer mentors, such as empathy, collaboration, reflexivity, and sensitivity to inequality. The training began with a symbolic reflection using *Dixit* cards, it continued with a Roma folktale and a thematically linked memory game, followed by the board game *Mentortársas 2.0*, in which mentor–mentee pairs navigate the challenges of the Hungarian education system. Through role-play and chance-driven obstacles, participants gain insight into how structural inequalities shape educational opportunities. By integrating emotionally and aesthetically rich narratives with game mechanics, the workshop created space for active involvement and reflective learning. Participants highlighted that the games offered a meaningful and motivating context for practicing mentoring-related skills and for exploring social issues. Several students noted feeling inspired to integrate similar tools into their future mentoring practice. Overall, the workshop demonstrates how game-based learning can effectively support the pedagogical and emotional preparation of future mentors working with disadvantaged students.

Keywords: board games, higher education, active learning, mentoring, peer mentor

Introduction

In response to global social, economic, and technological shifts, higher education has undergone a significant transformation. Universities are increasingly viewed not only as sites of knowledge transmission but also as drivers of social change, promoting inclusion, critical thinking, and civic engagement (Andrewartha & Harvey, 2017). This role has gained urgency amid growing social inequalities and the reproduction of disadvantage through education. Educators are now expected not only to foster cognitive development but also to address broader social justice concerns, such as equitable access to quality education (Kelemen et al., 2013; Marginson, 2016). However, research shows that higher education programs do not always support competency development or active learning. In Hungary, studies also note a shift in student expectations toward more practice-oriented, less theory-heavy curricula (Kocsis & Pusztai, 2024; Kocsis & Pusztai, 2025; Kovács, 2016; Óbuda University, 2018). This highlights the need to modernize curricula—not only to enhance pedagogical quality but also to encourage active learning and provide practical, labor-market-relevant skills (Hurtado, 2007; Teichler, 2011; Török, 2017).

This paper explores the pedagogical potential of board games in preparing future mentors to support disadvantaged students. It presents a university-based workshop model and analyzes participant reflections to evaluate its effectiveness. The session, part of the *Let's Teach for Hungary* mentoring program, combined a Roma folktale, a corresponding memory game, and the board game *Mentortársas 2.0*, which simulates the educational trajectories of disadvantaged students. The workshop aimed to foster understanding of social inequality while offering inspiration for future pedagogical practice through play-based, emotionally engaging methods. The first part of this study introduces the mentoring work carried out within the *Let's Teach for Hungary* program. Then, it explores the educational use of board games. In the next section, we discuss the methodological considerations, the workshop's structure and goals, and an analysis of student reflections and self-reflection. The discussion of the results is followed by the presentation of limitations and our recommendations for academic staff.

Theoretical Background

Changing Higher Education—Board Games as an Intervention

In the context of rapid societal changes, higher education institutions are increasingly expected to contribute to social justice and inclusion. As the boundaries between formal education and community engagement blur, universities must prepare students not only for the labor market but also for democratic citizenship and equity-oriented professional roles (Hurtado, 2007; Teichler, 2011; Török, 2017). The modernization of training content

goes hand in hand with the need to develop pedagogical and methodological culture. Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to enhance the effectiveness of teaching by improving pedagogical practices and knowledge transfer methods. This includes embracing new approaches to knowledge sharing and creating active learning environments that promote practical experience and foster competencies aligned with labor market demands (Török, 2017). To meet these growing expectations, there is a pressing need to incorporate more experiential, student-centered methods into higher education programs. These methods support both skill development and deeper social awareness.

Serious games, designed with educational rather than purely recreational goals, provide a safe and engaging environment for learners to experiment and build skills. By aligning gameplay with instructional objectives, such games can effectively shape learners' attitudes and behaviors, offering valuable contributions to the educational experience (Abt, 1970; Cosimini & Collins, 2023). In higher education, such board games foster experiential learning and emotional engagement (board games: Csempesz, 2016; Kocsis et al., 2024; Szilágyi, 2023), key factors in preparing future mentors to work with marginalized youth.

Board games have emerged as powerful tools in education, especially for developing empathy, critical reflection, and perspective-taking. According to the literature, current educational challenges call for the renewal of traditional teaching methods (Khalaf & Zin, 2018; Prensky, 2001), primarily through pedagogical tools that also consider the emotional and social dimensions of learning (Illeris, 2003; Lim et al., 2019). Game-Based Learning (GBL), including board games, is increasingly recognized as an educational approach that enables experiential learning in which students actively and joyfully engage in the learning process (Ge & Ifenthaler, 2018; Hwang, 2014; Kangas, 2010; Tang et al., 2009). Games support the development of students' intrinsic motivation (Aldemir et al., 2018; Eltahir et al., 2021; Eppmann et al., 2018; Subhash & Cudney, 2018), which can foster flow experiences (Wang & Chen, 2010). They also play an important role in developing problem-solving skills as well as creative and critical thinking (Perini et al., 2018). Through board game-based learning, students learn to focus, cooperate, and broaden their horizons through new experiences (Jesztl et al., 2016; Juhász & Radics, 2019). Lencse (2015) emphasizes that board games can develop a wide range of key competences (such as aesthetic–artistic awareness and expressiveness, social and civic competence, communication, etc.), making them well aligned with educational goals. Their effectiveness often exceeds that of more traditional forms of learning (Karbownik et al., 2016). Overall, the use of board games not only offers an enjoyable learning experience but also effectively enhances students' collaboration, intrinsic motivation, and key competences.

Based on the literature, we considered it essential to incorporate board games into the workshop. On the one hand, the literature highlights their pedagogical effectiveness, particularly in fostering motivation, empathy, and active engagement. On the other hand, the use of games can serve as a practical model for student mentors, offering concrete methods they can apply in their future mentoring work. Since their mentees are typically younger, alternative, more interactive pedagogical approaches are needed to build meaningful connections. Moreover, for disadvantaged youth, games can foster trust and teamwork, creating a safe and inclusive space for learning and relationship-building. These insights underline the crucial role of mentoring in supporting the personal and competence development of disadvantaged students. For mentoring to be truly effective, however, mentors must possess certain personal and professional qualities, such as empathy, adaptability, and reflective thinking, that enable them to respond meaningfully to their mentees' needs. The workshop presented in this study, therefore, served a dual purpose.

Methodology

Research Aim and Design

The primary aim of this study was to demonstrate the relevance and legitimacy of using board games in higher education, particularly in mentor training. The workshop was part of the *Let's Teach for Hungary* program. We sought to show that game-based learning methods are not only engaging for students but also offer a valuable pedagogical tool for developing mentoring-related competencies. Beyond examining student responses, another important goal was to offer methodological inspiration to other educators interested in designing similar workshops that combine emotional engagement, storytelling, and game-based learning. Accordingly, we aimed to present the workshop structure, the board games used, and the underlying pedagogical and didactic considerations. We also sought to summarize student feedback in order to assess the workshop's perceived effectiveness and its potential for adaptation in other educational settings.

***Let's Teach for Hungary* program**

The *Let's Teach for Hungary* program offers a promising response to these changing needs and educational challenges: it supports the academic progress of primary school students while also providing opportunities for mutual learning, as university students themselves grow and develop through the mentoring process. The *Let's Teach for Hungary* program aims to provide support to children living in small settlements in choosing a career, getting to know the world of work, and using their free time productively. The task of the mentors standing next to them is to show them the excitement and possibilities of the world

beyond the settlement—high schools, businesses, so that they can see how many different occupations and futures they can choose from. Kocsis and Bocsi (2022) examined students' opinions and experiences in a mentoring program. According to her findings, participants' expectations focused primarily on gaining new experiences and discovering unfamiliar environments. In 2023, the program is present in more than 110 elementary schools nationwide. With more than 1,100 mentors studying at 17 higher education institutions and more than 4,700 mentees, we prove that every child is talented in something; this talent must only be discovered (Tanítsunk Magyarországot, n.d.). While the initiative provides an institutional framework for mentorship, there remains a pedagogical need to prepare future mentors for the complexity of their roles and to develop their sensitivity to issues of marginalization. The greatest strength of the *Let's Teach for Hungary* program is that it can serve as an important link between higher and public education, as it requires active collaboration between actors from both sectors to succeed (Antalné Szabó, 2021). Mentorship, when embedded in a reflective pedagogical framework, can foster transformative experiences for both mentor and mentee. Research shows that effective mentoring goes beyond learning support: it requires empathy, mutual trust, and awareness of the mentee's lived realities (Di Blasio et al. 2011; Dávid et al., 2014; Papp 2023).

Mentoring can be embedded in everyday educational practice and contribute to social equity over time. Effective mentoring demands personal commitment, empathy, patience, perseverance, goal orientation, and a strong desire to support others. Key elements include regular feedback, positive reinforcement, attentive care, and active, empathetic listening, grounded in reciprocity and mutual respect (Kocsis & Bocsi, 2022). Papp (2023) stresses the importance of emotional support for disadvantaged youth, who often benefit from safe spaces to express feelings. For many, mentor-led activities such as excursions offer rare opportunities to expand their worldview and develop social skills. In the absence of parental involvement, mentors help fill relational gaps, benefiting both mentees and mentors by enhancing social sensitivity and empathy. As such, mentoring supports holistic development and fosters social equity. Overall, mentoring emerges as a reflective, student-centered, and innovative pedagogical approach that calls for openness and a progressive mindset.

Participants

The workshop and the research took place in Spring 2025 at the University of Debrecen, as part of a three-hour mentor training of the *Let's Teach for Hungary* program. Participants enrolled voluntarily in the *Let's Teach for Hungary* program. No prior filtering or selection criteria were applied. The voluntary nature of participation may imply self-selection bias,

but it also allows for authentic, intrinsically motivated involvement. Participation in the research was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained. All responses were anonymized during analysis. As the session focused on social inequalities and personal reflection, a supportive and respectful environment was maintained throughout.

The workshop involved predominantly female students, with one respondent identifying as non-binary or preferring not to disclose gender. Most participants were enrolled in undergraduate programs, while one of them was a master's student. Regarding their year of study, 50% were second-year students, 3% were first-year students, and 1% were third-year students. In terms of field of study, participants came from various health-related disciplines, including dietetics, physiotherapy, and health visitor training, as well as from the humanities (e.g., Italian studies). However, only a few were preparing for teaching or social support professions. This stands in contrast to earlier findings by Godó (2021), which identified a strong representation of future teachers and helping professionals among mentor candidates. Socioeconomic background data revealed that most students (75%) came from families with sufficient income to cover daily expenses but were unable to afford major expenses. The remaining 25% reported a more stable financial background with the ability to save and afford discretionary spending (e.g., vacations). No participant reported living in poverty or financial insecurity. They had little prior experience working with children in schools. The limited pedagogical training of students in this sample highlights the importance of experiential workshops like this one, which aim to develop basic educational and reflective competencies for mentoring, especially among students with little or no prior methodological knowledge or pedagogical background.

Although the workshop generated qualitative insights, it involved a relatively small number of participants from a single higher education setting ($n=15$). Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory rather than generalizable. The small sample size precludes statistical analysis; instead, the study aimed to capture the reflective and experiential dimensions of learning. This limitation should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

Data Collection and Instrument

Data collection focused on participant reflections after the workshop. These reflections were gathered informally through a questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two main sections: game experience and overall impressions, suggestions.

The first section contains 21 items using a five-point Likert scale (1 = "Not at all," 5 = "Fully agree"). The questions aim to measure general enjoyment and motivation (e.g., "I enjoyed

the activity overall") and cognitive impact (e.g., "The activity helped me understand the content better"). They also address collaborative learning (e.g., "I was able to cooperate with my peers"), perceived effectiveness of game-based learning (e.g., "I learn more from these types of activities than from traditional classes"), and self-efficacy and flow (e.g., "I felt capable of completing the tasks"). Additionally, the game-specific items explore the value of the game in several ways. They help students reflect on the role and responsibilities of a mentor, understand the life situations of disadvantaged learners, identify challenges and opportunities in mentoring, and acquire new knowledge about mentoring practices.

The second section includes both Likert-scale and open-ended items. Topics covered realism and relevance of the game to mentoring contexts, interest in the dilemmas presented during gameplay, and likelihood of recommending the game to peers. Open-ended questions explore specific knowledge gained through the game, perceived strengths and value of the board game, and reflections prompted by the use of *Dixit* cards. The final section collects data only on the level of study, study program, year of study, perceived family financial situation, and gender.

The purpose of the research was to capture rich, contextualised insights into how students responded to the workshop activities and how these experiences influenced their perspectives on inclusive education and mentoring. Reflexivity plays a central role in this process, as the researcher's own positionality, as both educator and researcher, inevitably shapes the design, facilitation, and interpretation of the learning process.

Results

In the following section, we present the workshop structure, illustrating how integrating Roma storytelling with the *Mentortársas* board game supports the development of socially responsive pedagogical thinking. The analysis of the workshop materials revealed how playful experiences can foster deep reflection on social inequality, mentorship, and the educator's role. The following section presents the main findings.

Workshop Structure and Activities

The workshop consisted of three main phases: introduction to the theme, discussion of the theme, and reflection. The following table summarizes the training process, the objectives, and instructions for each task. At the end of the workshop, we provided the future mentors with a handout containing all activities and tools used, each linked to its specific pedagogical goal (Appendix 1).

Table 1

The workshop structure

Main part	Activity	Instructions, tasks	Goals
Introduction to the theme	Brief introduction, explanation of the purpose of the workshop <i>(5 minutes)</i>	Each participant selected a Dixit card to symbolize how they felt during or after the game. Everyone tells what they chose and why—it can be emotional, thoughtful, or even a reflection on mentoring or social differences.	Participants will be able to express their inner feelings and thoughts through symbolic images. Listening to others' thoughts and feelings helps develop an empathetic attitude.
	<i>Dixit</i> <i>(20–25 minutes)</i>		Free association and the use of symbolic images enhance imagination and abstract thinking.
Discussion of the theme	Opening with narrative: Roma folktale <i>(10–15 minutes)</i>	A Roma folktale was read aloud or retold to the group.	Introduce participants to Roma culture and traditions through storytelling. Encourage appreciation of cultural diversity and the value of oral heritage.
	<i>Memory game as a reflective tool</i> <i>(15 minutes)</i>	A short trial of the memory game related to fairy tales Formation of pairs for the board game: At the end of the game, shuffle the memory cards, everyone draws one, and after finding their partner, the pairs are formed for the next game.	Develop memory, observation, and visual interpretation skills. Reinforce themes from the folktale and foster symbolic interpretation.
	<i>Mentortársas 2.0</i> Social board game as experience <i>(80–90 minutes)</i>	Explanation of instructions and game rules Game: The pairs play the Mentor Companion, with one as the mentee and the other as the mentor.	Offer participants the chance to experience the challenges of mentoring and educational inequalities in a game-based format.
Reflection and closure	Mind map <i>(30 minutes)</i>	Group discussion connected experiences to real-life mentoring challenges.	Promote shared understanding and synthesis of insights through group discussion. Bridge the gap between experiential activities and pedagogical/mentoring theory.

Board Games in Practice

Tools

DIXIT

Dixit is a commercially available board game published by Libellud Studios. *Dixit* is a creative, associative board game in which players use cards featuring unique, dream-like illustrations (GemKlub, 2021). Designed for 3 to 8 players, it is a competitive game in which each player competes individually. The game features large, fully illustrated cards, a scoring board, and coloured rabbit-shaped player tokens. The game develops abstract thinking (Janiga & Haverlíková, 2024), making it the perfect choice for a sensitization program.

In our workshop, we adapted *Dixit* from its original format and repurposed it as an educational tool. This modification aimed to facilitate reflection and expression by using the game to explore students' thoughts, emotions, and experiences related to mentoring.

Book and Memory Card Game

International research indicates that memory card games can be practical tools in both digital and traditional education. A study presenting the development of a web-based memory game illustrates a successful integration of playful learning and technological innovation, with a strong focus on optimizing user experience and educational applicability (Helda et al., 2023). Another study found that memory games, particularly so-called "smart memory cards," positively impact the working memory of children aged 5–12, which in turn can support improved academic performance (see in more detail Hermahayu et al., 2023). These findings support the idea that memory games are not only entertaining but also contribute to cognitive development.

We used *Mért nem tudnak a fák járni?* (Why Can't Trees Walk?), a collection of folktales and a memory card game. The book brings to life the heroes of seven Transylvanian Roma folktales. The stories take readers to a world where imagination breaks the rules of everyday logic, clever twists shape the action, and the line between reality and the supernatural fades. With Andrea Kürti's bright and detailed illustrations, this storybook is a great companion for children aged 5 to 12, leading them into an exciting world. The memory card game features drawings from Gutenberg Publishing's series of folk tales.

Figure 1

Book: Mért nem tudnak a fák járni? (Why Can't Trees Walk?)



Source. Gutenberg Kiadó

Figure 2

Memory card game



Source. Gutenberg Kiadó

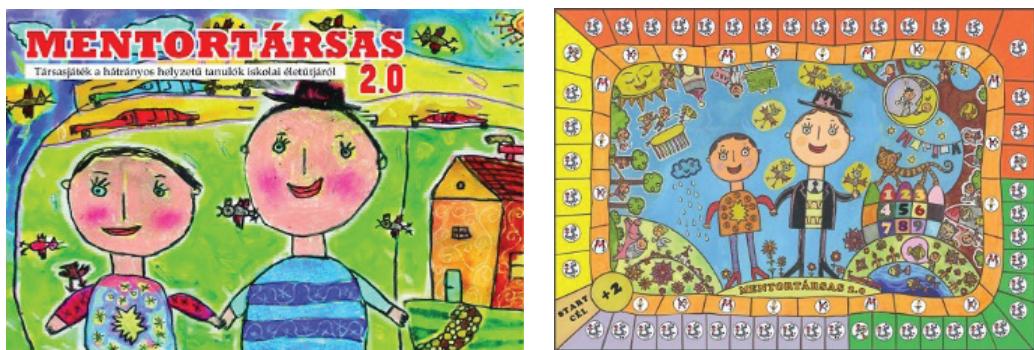
Board Game: Mentortársas 2.0

Mentortársas offers an innovative way to represent the educational journey of disadvantaged students, following their path all the way to higher education. At the same time, it highlights the challenges and difficulties these students face throughout their studies. The goal of the board game is to achieve the highest possible level of education. It provides university students with the opportunity to experience life situations that shape the everyday realities of disadvantaged learners. What makes the board game especially unique is that its situations are based on real-life experiences. The scenarios featured in Mentortársas 2.0 are primarily inspired by the lived experiences of these mentored students (Kelemen et al., 2013). The development of the game is grounded in insights from

the Motivation Workshop's mentoring work and draws on academic literature on school segregation. The illustration on the game box was created by Tamás Csébi, a student of the Igazgyöngy Alapítvány, while the game board itself was designed by Lajos Kovács, a teacher at the same institution (Csempesz, 2016).

Figure 3

Board game: *Mentortársas 2.0*



Source. Motivációs Műhely

The game is played in pairs of mentors and mentees. The board consists of two concentric circles, with the outer circle representing the path of disadvantaged students. This outer path illustrates the various stages of the Hungarian education system through color-coded spaces from kindergarten to higher education. The distribution of the spaces is proportionate and realistic: the yellow section represents kindergarten, followed by a significantly longer red section for primary school, and then the green section for secondary education. Once a player completes secondary school and obtains their graduation certificate, they can advance to the purple section, which represents higher education (Csempesz, 2016).

In the game, reaching higher education presents a significant challenge for disadvantaged students. Progress is hindered by "fate cards," which represent barriers players must overcome. These cards contain short narratives offering glimpses into the everyday preschool or school experiences of disadvantaged children. For example, a card might indicate that the student attends a segregated school where most classmates are disadvantaged. The student is interested in history, pays attention, and often raises their hand in class. During the break, their classmates call them a nerd. As a result, next time they decide not to participate. For this reason, they move back one space in the game (Csempesz, 2016). Overcoming the challenges presented by these cards often requires

the support of a mentor. As indicated on the card, the mentor takes the student to the university library, a modern glass building. The next day, the student tells their friends that hundreds of people were reading there at the same time. Their mentor says that many students spend the whole day studying there and even receive scholarships. In the student's mind, the university becomes a "cool" place, so in the game, they move forward two spaces (Csempesz, 2016).

The player acting as the mentor moves along the inner circle of the game board and plays not for their own advancement, but to support their mentee, reflecting one of the game's core, realistic elements. The mentor and mentee form a team. When the mentor lands on certain spaces, they draw either a mentor card or a question card. By solving tasks or answering questions, the mentor can earn extra moves to help their mentee progress. The primary goal of the mentor cards is to enhance the gaming experience rather than to strictly convey academic content. These cards feature school- or learning-related terms that the mentor must explain through pantomime or drawing, while the mentee tries to guess the correct word (e.g., parent-teacher conference, dictation) (Csempesz, 2016).

In the *Mentortársas 2.0* board game, players who take on the role of a mentor character can also draw "mentor experience cards." These cards tell short stories about the challenges and successes mentors encounter. What makes them unique is that the same situation can turn out positively or negatively depending on the result of a dice roll; thus, a single event may become a memorable success or a difficult lesson in the mentoring process. For example, one card indicates that the mentor helps one of their mentees prepare for a test all afternoon. At their next meeting, they happily share that they received a B in math after their study session. This news fills the mentor with pride (Csempesz, 2016).

In *Mentortársas 2.0*, alongside mentors and disadvantaged students, there is also a character who is not disadvantaged. This is an average student: not particularly wealthy, lucky, or exceptionally diligent, just someone living in circumstances that allow for uninterrupted educational progress. They attend extracurricular classes, occasionally face difficult periods too, but generally follow an educational path that, for their disadvantaged peers, may seem like an unattainable dream. By the end of the game, this contrast becomes strikingly clear: while this student reaches university, the disadvantaged characters usually finish in vocational school or do not even obtain a qualification, despite doing their best. *Mentortársas 2.0* draws attention to this social reality: in Hungary today, some students face disadvantages through no fault of their own, and despite all their efforts, receive poor-quality education, often drop out of school, or complete it with a qualification that provides them no real opportunities in the labor market (Csempesz, 2016).

Developing Aesthetic Awareness and Expressive Skills through Board Games

Dixit, the storybook *Mért nem tudnak a fák járni?*, the accompanying illustration-based memory game, and *Mentortársas* are not just didactic tools, but also media with significant aesthetic and artistic value. They are particularly well-suited for developing aesthetic and artistic awareness, expressive ability, and creativity. The surreal, open-ended imagery of *Dixit* encourages symbolic thinking, associations, and storytelling playfully, providing an artistic experience that activates the inner world of images and narrative creativity.

The storybook *Mért nem tudnak a fák járni?* is illustrated by Andrea Kürti, whose unique visual style and richly detailed, lyrical drawings offer a powerful visual experience that speaks to both children and adults. The memory game created from the book's illustrations not only develops visual observation and memory but also invites deeper interpretation of the image, thus creating a strong connection between play and the goals of arts education. What makes *Mentortársas* 2.0 unique is that, in addition to raising social awareness, it also holds artistic value: the game board and box illustrations were created by disadvantaged youth and their teachers (Igazgyöngy Alapítvány, n.d.). This supports the development of visual expression while also conveying the philosophy of participatory art. Used together, these four tools offer participants an opportunity to engage with their own experiences and others' realities in a more sensitive, creative, and reflective way, while simultaneously developing their aesthetic awareness, visual literacy, and expressive repertoire.

Table 2

Visual Recognition and Interpretation—Questions for the Memory Game and Book Illustrations

Aspects	Questions
Content Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Which story scene or character do the images on the memory cards remind you of?• What happened in the story at the point shown on the card?
Connection Between Image and Story	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• On which card did you feel the image most effectively capture the mood of the story? Why?• Is there an illustration that "tells" more than the text itself? What does it add?

Aspects	Questions
Interpretation of Symbols and Motifs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What might the object, color, or figure in the image symbolize? • Do you see any recurring motifs that might appear in several stories? (e.g., a scarf, a horse, a bird, a road, a star)
Characteristics of Romani Art (for initiating a sensitizing discussion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways are these illustrations different from those you usually see in other storybooks? • What kind of atmosphere do these pictures convey: vibrant, dreamlike, decorative, or minimalist? • If you had to name a “style,” how would you describe these images?
Discussion Starters on Cultural Meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What values are represented in the stories and the illustrations? (e.g., family, cleverness, survival) • Why do you think it is important to include these stories and images in education? • How can Romani folktales and their accompanying illustrations help to challenge and reduce prejudice?

Feedback

Firstly, the mentors selected *Dixit* cards that symbolize their mentoring experience or role, and then associated the following words with them. These words represent different aspects of the mentoring process and can be grouped into thematic categories.

Table 3

Key dimensions of the mentoring role based on Dixit card reflections

Category	Words	DIXIT cards
Relationship and Emotion	connection, bonding, mother hen role, help	

Category	Words	<i>DIXIT</i> cards
Challenges and Coping	social anxiety, coping tools, overcoming	
Guidance and Direction	guidance, direction	
Self- and Other-awareness	understanding people	
Playfulness and Creativity	play, colorful	

The relationships and emotional connection category includes words that express the mentor's emotional bond, trust, and connectedness with their mentees. Mentoring is not just about knowledge transfer, but also about creating a safe, supportive, and accepting relationship. Mentors often play a nurturing role, providing emotional presence and stability (Kocsis & Bocsi, 2022; Papp, 2023). The second category includes aspects related to the emotional and psychological challenges mentors may encounter. Mentors may face their

own insecurities or fears, and they also support mentees in managing theirs. The terms “overcoming” and “coping tools” reflect the personal development that occurs through mentoring. The guidance and direction refer to the mentor’s role as a guide and supporter (Godó, 2021). The mentor acts as a counselor and role model, helping mentees find their way and gain new perspectives. This role requires responsibility and leadership. The self-awareness and understanding others category focuses on how mentoring enhances self-reflection and interpersonal insight. Mentoring is also about learning—not just about others, but about oneself. It develops empathy and a deeper understanding of human behavior. The last category reflects the creative, colorful, and playful aspects of the mentoring process. Mentoring is not always a formal process; it can be experiential, fun, and varied. The diversity of situations and personalities adds vibrancy to the mentoring role.

Finally, the reflective component using *Dixit* cards was also received positively. Students found the cards effective in helping them articulate thoughts and emotions related to mentoring (mean = 4.4), and they considered the integration of visual-reflective tools beneficial for pedagogical and social topics more broadly (mean = 4.4). They noted that the *Dixit* game, in particular, can help disadvantaged students express themselves and articulate their emotions, while providing a safe space for communication. Some of the thoughts expressed by the participants referred to the cards facilitating expressing what they could not express in words; in the same line, the cards enhance expressing opinions; participants also referred to the cards being a mode of escape from real life; one of the benefits mentioned was that there are no wrong answers.

The evaluation of the workshop revealed overwhelmingly positive student perceptions of the Mentortársas board game as a pedagogical tool. Participants consistently reported high levels of enjoyment and motivation. On a five-point Likert scale, students rated their overall enjoyment of the activity and willingness to participate in similar sessions in the future at 4.6. Their sense of motivation during the game was also notably high (mean = 4.3).

In terms of educational value, the activity was seen as beneficial for understanding course content (mean = 4.4), identifying personal areas for improvement (mean = 4.0), and enhancing subject-related knowledge (mean = 4.2). The board game format was considered appropriate for formative assessment purposes (mean = 4.1), indicating its potential as a reflective learning tool.

Open-ended responses further reinforced these results. Participants emphasized the game’s potential to deepen understanding of social inequalities, foster collaboration, and provide a creative yet meaningful way to engage with complex educational challenges.

One question in the survey asked students to identify a specific piece of information they learned from the board game. Many highlighted teamwork and cooperation, as well as the challenges faced by disadvantaged students. According to the students, the board game is an effective and enjoyable form of learning that both stimulates thinking and teaches through real-life situations.

The game also significantly enhanced participants' understanding of the mentoring role. Respondents indicated that they had acquired new insights into the nature of mentoring (mean = 4.4) and gained a better grasp of the challenges faced by disadvantaged students (mean = 4.8). Additionally, the game supported reflection on participants' future responsibilities as mentors (mean = 4.3) and strengthened awareness of the mentor's role (mean = 4.6).

Interpersonal collaboration was another key outcome. Students rated their ability to work with peers very highly (mean = 4.9), and many noted that they had learned from their fellow participants during the session (mean = 4.2). The game elements themselves were perceived as both entertaining (mean = 4.4) and motivating (mean = 4.3), with several respondents reporting a sense of immersion or "flow" while playing.

Regarding realism and practical relevance, the *Mentortársas* board game was rated highly realistic in its portrayal of mentoring experiences (mean = 4.6). The decision-making scenarios embedded in the game were also found to be thought-provoking and engaging (mean = 4.3). Most participants expressed a willingness to recommend the game to other students or prospective mentors (mean = 4.5), indicating its perceived transferability.

The students clearly supported the integration of board games into higher education, as these tools make learning more experiential and practical, especially in pedagogical and mentoring contexts, helping students learn more easily through play. They emphasized the usefulness of board games in fostering creativity and imagination, supporting self-expression in mentoring relationships, enriching course content, and providing moments of relaxation.

The mind map (Appendix 2), created during the *Mentortársas* board game session, reflects the complex social and educational issues that participants identified through gameplay. Keywords such as luck, inheritance, irredeemable disadvantage, and parental obstacles highlight how structural factors shape students' life trajectories. Topics such as school segregation, free school choice, teacher attitudes, and vulnerability show how systemic inequalities shape educational opportunities. The inclusion of preparation for sexual life suggests

that participants viewed mentoring not only as academic support but also as broader life guidance. Overall, the mind map illustrates how the board game encouraged critical reflection and helped participants see mentoring as part of a larger socio-educational context.

Discussion

Interestingly, only a small number of participants in the current sample were pursuing studies in teaching or social support fields. This diverges from previous findings by Godó (2021), who reported a strong presence of future educators and helping professionals among mentor candidates. Most participants had minimal prior experience working directly with children in school settings. The limited pedagogical background of these participants underscores the value of experiential, reflective workshops like the one described in this study. Such training sessions can serve as an entry point for developing foundational mentoring competencies, especially for students with little exposure to educational theory or practice.

The findings of this study suggest that board games, particularly those with social, reflective, and aesthetic dimensions, can serve as practical pedagogical tools for mentor training in higher education. The *Mentortársas 2.0* board game and the *Dixit*-based reflective activity were not only well received by participants but also contributed meaningfully to their understanding of the mentoring role, social inequalities, and collaborative learning.

First and foremost, students perceived *Mentortársas 2.0* as a highly engaging and relevant simulation of real-world mentoring experiences. Its game-based structure, embedded with role-playing and decision-making elements, provided a meaningful context for participants to explore the complexity of educational trajectories shaped by structural disadvantage. Student reflections confirmed that the game made abstract concepts such as inequality of opportunity, institutional selectivity, and the importance of guidance tangible and emotionally resonant. These findings align with prior literature emphasizing the transformative potential of game-based learning in fostering active engagement and more profound understanding (Perini et al., 2018; Aldemir et al., 2018).

The activity was also effective in enhancing students' self-reflection and insight into the mentor role. The thematic associations students made through *Dixit* cards provide evidence of a nuanced understanding of mentoring as a multidimensional task. The evaluation data also pointed to a strong sense of collaboration among participants. Peer learning was frequently mentioned as a positive outcome, and the high ratings for cooperation and group dynamics underscore the social learning value of board games (Wang & Chen, 2010).

Importantly, participants viewed the training activity not only as enjoyable but also as educationally valuable. They highlighted its capacity to consolidate knowledge, raise awareness of mentoring challenges, and inspire future use of similar tools in their own pedagogical practice. These findings suggest that game-based learning can serve both as content delivery and as professional identity formation, a dual function particularly crucial in teacher education.

In sum, this study affirms the value of integrating game-based and aesthetically rich tools into mentor training programs. The approach not only fosters reflective and empathetic thinking but also encourages creativity, cooperation, and critical awareness, all essential qualities for future educators and mentors. As universities increasingly seek methods to bridge theory and practice, particularly in socially responsive teacher education, board games such as *Mentortársas 2.0* offer a promising direction for innovation.

As the workshop facilitator, I held dual roles as educator and researcher, enabling close observation of participants' interactions and reflections. My background in inclusive education informed the choice of tools, including *Mentortársas* and the Roma folktale memory game. However, this dual role also posed challenges. The storytelling activity, for instance, was less engaging than expected—participants responded passively when the tale was read aloud. Future sessions could benefit from sharing the story in advance or using collaborative storytelling methods. Group size also affected the depth of discussion, with smaller groups likely offering more meaningful reflection. While the memory game worked well for partner-matching, more explicit instructions and pacing would help students better grasp its reflective purpose. Overall, we recommend using more participatory narrative techniques, tailoring group size to session goals, allowing time for debriefing, and offering written reflection options.

It should be noted that the workshop was a single session, which may have influenced participants' engagement and responses through novelty effects, the researcher's presence, or specific group dynamics. The one-time implementation limits our ability to assess the sustainability of the attitudinal or reflective changes observed. Future research involving repeated or longitudinal sessions would allow for a more accurate understanding of the lasting impact of such activities.

Conclusion

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the workshop was conducted in a single higher education setting with a relatively small group of participants, limiting the generalizability of the results. The analysis was

primarily conducted by the workshop facilitator, who, while offering deep contextual insight, may also introduce interpretive bias. Interviews could strengthen the validity of the findings in future studies.

Future research could adopt a longitudinal perspective to examine the long-term effects of game-based and reflective activities on mentors' attitudes and practices. Expanding the workshop to multiple higher education institutions would enable cross-institutional comparisons. Moreover, combining qualitative reflections with quantitative data collection could enhance the validity and transferability of results. Building on the workshop's promising outcomes, several avenues for future research can be identified. First, longitudinal studies could investigate the sustained impact of game-based activities on mentors' (or pre-service teachers') attitudes toward disadvantaged learners. Observing how these early reflections translate into long-term pedagogical practices would offer valuable insights. Second, experimental designs involving control groups could more rigorously assess the effectiveness of various tools (e.g., board games) in developing critical awareness and reflexivity. Third, a participatory action research approach involving students, educators, and community members, particularly from marginalized backgrounds, could deepen the authenticity and relevance of the materials used. Collaborations with Roma artists and storytellers could enrich the workshop experience and foster the co-creation of pedagogical content.

The workshop highlighted the transformative potential of artistic and game-based tools in sensitizing pre-service teachers to issues of social inequality and educational disadvantage. Based on these insights, the following recommendations can support wider integration in higher education or specifically teacher education. Using visually rich and emotionally engaging materials, such as illustrated folktales or symbolic games, supports not only knowledge acquisition but also emotional and ethical engagement. Encouraging students to analyze illustrations (e.g., those by Andrea Kúrti) fosters interpretive thinking, aesthetic awareness, and empathy. This also supports the development of visual literacy, a key 21st-century skill. Board games like *Mentortársas 2.0* offer immersive experiences that reveal structural inequalities in education. These activities can catalyze deep reflection and discussion about systemic barriers. Workshops involving sensitive themes require structured reflection (e.g., mind maps, group discussions) to help participants articulate and process their reactions. Elements of the workshop, such as the memory game or simplified versions of the board game, can be adapted for use in primary and secondary education to develop students' empathy or explore diversity and equity themes. By embedding these practices into teacher training, educators not only promote inclusive attitudes but also equip future mentors and teachers with creative, culturally responsive pedagogical tools.

Overall, while the findings of this study are promising, the small, self-selected sample and the one-time nature of the intervention mean that the results should be viewed as preliminary. Future studies on a larger scale and in diverse contexts could provide stronger evidence on how artistic and game-based pedagogies contribute to mentor preparation and social awareness. Nonetheless, this exploratory workshop demonstrates the potential of such tools to inspire reflective, empathetic, and socially responsive practices in higher education.

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Appendix 1

Guide for Mentors: Playful Pedagogical Tools

Why use board games to address these topics?

- *Emotional engagement*: Game situations allow participants to step into the lives of others (e.g., disadvantaged youth).
- *Reflection*: Experiencing a situation makes it easier to articulate thoughts and dilemmas.
- *Experiential learning*: The joy of playing motivates students while engaging with meaningful content.
- *Social sensitization*: Hidden prejudices and structural injustices may surface through play.

1. *Mentortársas 2.0*

Topic: The life paths of disadvantaged youth: opportunities and obstacles.

Game roles: Mentor and mentee.

Pedagogical goals:

- To understand the difficulties of social mobility.
- To experience how much a supportive person can matter.
- To reflect on the role of a mentor/educator.

Tips for classroom/workshop use:

- Suitable for social studies, homeroom sessions, or career orientation classes.
- End with a reflective circle or a discussion using Dixit cards.

2. *Roma Folktales and Memory Game*

Topic: Cultural diversity and learning about marginalized communities.

Tools:

- A storybook of Roma folktales.
- Matching memory game with visual illustrations.

Pedagogical goals:

- Reducing prejudice in a narrative-based environment.
- Sensitization through storytelling, not direct teaching.
- Developing children's imagination and empathy.

Usage tips:

- Select 1–2 folktales and read them aloud with dramatic expression.
- Discuss: “What was fair in the story?”
- Follow up with the memory game using the tale’s characters and motifs.

3. Dixit

Topic: Expressing emotions, thoughts, and experiences through images.

Use in this context:

- After Mentortársas or the folktale session, participants select a card to help verbalize their experiences.

Pedagogical goals:

- Opening up nonverbal channels.
- Supporting self-reflection through play.

Tips:

- As a closing activity: “Choose a card that represents your experience today.”
- Possible discussion prompts:
 - o “What does your card symbolize for you?”
 - o “If this image represented a feeling, which one would it be?”

Further game-based ideas on these topics

Topic	Board game idea	
Problem solving	SZITU	The events of an imaginary class trip, during which, of course, problems arose. Can we recognize the problem and the emotions it triggered in us?
Communication, self-awareness	Körvonal (Quality Time)	A card game consisting of questions and suggestions that help us get to know each other and ourselves better.
Career Orientation	CV	Players design life paths combining jobs, skills, and obstacles.

Appendix 2

Photos from the Workshop

