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Exploring the Role of Board Games in Fostering Inclusive Language Education: Dixit as a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses board games in inclusive language education. The objectives of the present investigation are manifold: defining terminology underpinning the inclusive realm and an overview of educational regulations in Italy; addressing inclusive education through Tessaro's (2012) and Cottini's (2018) frameworks; explaining Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Cooperative Learning (CL) and their principles; presenting Game-Based Learning (GBL) by focusing on board games as inclusive didactic tools; conducting a multimodal analysis of the board game Dixit; discovering how students perceive Dixit as an educational engagement means; and proposing prospective arrangements to render the board game suitable for learning environments. Therefore, Dixit was submitted to international students attending the Italian Language course of A2 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), at Ca' Foscari School for International Education, located in Venice. The verbal and visual features in Dixit are examined using Gee's (2011) Toolkit for Discourse Analysis, Baldry & Thibault's (2006) Cluster Analysis and Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) model. The analysis of the findings resulting from questionnaires' responses and students' observations is conducted with Nick's (2007) and Pawson & Tilley's (1997) frameworks. The analysis and interpretation of data permitted to show students' perception of Dixit as a didactic tool promoting cooperation and inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Studies conducted to date on the role of board games in language education have explored the subject focusing on their benefits in terms of fun and flexibility (Giles et al., 2019), cultural awareness (Mattheoudakis, 2023), authenticity and meaningfulness of communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), and students' engagement (Treher, 2011). Nevertheless, students' perception of the implementation of board games in educational contexts in terms of inclusion and cooperation has not received due consideration from scholars. Therefore, there is a lack of a basis of data in a context of Italian as L2 to wholly understand how students feel about the usage of board games as didactic tools. This thesis seeks to fill this gap by investigating how students perceive the implementation of the board game Dixit as an educational engagement means in a context of Italian as L2.

In **Chapter One**, this thesis provides a general framework of the context in question, in fact, it addresses key terminology in the inclusive realm and a regulatory excursus of education through the four key phases towards inclusion: medicalisation, assimilation, integration and inclusion. Furthermore, it faces Tessaro's (2012) and Cottini's (2018) framework for inclusive education.

Moreover, **Chapter Two** reports Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and its three principles: providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. Cooperative Learning (CL) and its characterising elements are also confronted, as well as Game-Based Learning (GBL), focusing on board games in language education and their inclusive dimension. In addition, background information and rules of Dixit are addressed.

Chapter Three shows a multimodal analysis of the board game Dixit. The methodologies adopted to conduct the investigation of verbal and visual features are Gee's (2011) Toolkit for Discourse Analysis, Baldry & Thibault's (2006) Cluster Analysis, and Kress & van Leeuwen's (1996) model. Contextual information is also explained, accompanied by concrete examples detected in the game's components, followed by considerations related to the communicative and inclusive relevance of the game under analysis.

Additionally, **Chapter Four** addresses the experimentation underpinning this thesis, providing an in-depth explanation of the methodology focusing on participants' profiles, materials employed, and the procedures adopted for data collection and analysis, i.e. Nick's (2007) and Pawson & Tilley's (1997) frameworks. The main findings obtained from the administration of questionnaires and the observation of students are illustrated by employing tables and graphs.

Eventually, **Chapter Five** presents considerations regarding the four research questions underpinning the experimentation, concerning students' perception of Dixit as a promoter of cooperation and inclusion, and prospective arrangements to render the board game suitable for didactic contexts.

The purpose of this thesis is to expand knowledge on Special Pedagogy literature, specifically on the implementation of board games as educational engagement means to promote inclusion and cooperation and to investigate the contribution of board games in fostering inclusive language education.

CHAPTER ONE

The Concept of Inclusion, its Stages in Italy, Inclusive Education

1.1 Building Blocks of Inclusion: Key Terminology and Definitions

Determining the concept of inclusion invariably faces numerous challenges. Regarding the definition of inclusion, Special Pedagogy literature provides a considerable amount of material; therefore, it is tricky to define it univocally. A shared assumption is that the idea of inclusion is in continuous evolution, indeed, as will be presented in the next subchapter, in Italy, the concept of inclusion goes hand in hand with the development of educational legislation.

Many authors gave their contribution to the definition of inclusion. Pavone (2010: 142) states that "being included is a way of living together, based on the belief that every individual has value and belongs to the community", while Canevaro (2009: 428) interpret inclusion "as a method and perspective capable of achieving a process of mutual recognition, in which the reasons of each individual fit into a path of common growth". However, the closest definition to the one this thesis project is inspired to is provided by Gaspari (2011: 23):

> Inclusion is the culture of the participation of all pupils in the processes of common socialisation and learning within a democratic and welcoming school, understood as a supportive community that looks at differences and diversities as "positive" historical-existential categories in order to place them at the centre of educational action.

From an educational point of view, inclusion is the openness to diversity that enables the activation of a changing process on all the individuals involved in the community, e.g. the class. It can never be fully realised and refers to the educational, social, and political dimensions.

1.1.1 Inclusion Versus Integration

An important distinction to clarify is between the concepts of inclusion and integration. According to Detraux (cit. in Pavone, 2010: 159), "integration is a concept present in different ideologies that results in different applications according to the history of the systems of education and reception of children, the multiple socio-cultural variables, the political will". In the Italian landscape, integration represents a situation and integrating something means trying to make it complete. Therefore, integration provides a compensatory approach and focuses on each student with disabilities or special needs by intervening first on the subject and successively on the context. Frequently, the context is one of the factors causing difficulties in the school environment (Cornoldi, 1999: 8).

On the other hand, the approach based on inclusion intervenes first on the context and later on the individual subject, recognising in each student their own personality and potential. Indeed, the objective of inclusion is attention and respect for all differences and overcoming barriers preventing participation in the educational process. In this regard, the words of Medeghini (2013: 42) prove useful:

> Inclusion is a process that problematises aspects of social life, institutions, and policies: it is presented as a dynamic and unstable process, in continuous construction, because being inclusive is not bound to a prescriptive role, a norm, a constraint, but implies a continuous structuring and deconstruction of organisations and institutional and social contexts.

Canevaro and Ianes (2002) provide a further distinction between the concepts of integration and inclusion. The pedagogists maintain that integration involves the activation of an asymmetric relationship, in which the context is reorganised to be welcoming and attentive, in order to integrate into the group who is different, which in turn is a significant presence, mutating the group and the context itself. Nevertheless, inclusion represents the capability to provide a framework within which all students, regardless of skills, gender, language, ethnic and cultural origin, can be

equally acknowledged and valorised, provided with equal opportunities at school, within a symmetrical link among peers.

1.1.2 Special Pedagogy, Special Educational Needs, Specific Learning Disorders

Once established the terminological foundations for the concept of inclusion and its distinction from integration, it is now considered beneficial to address the explanation of other verbiages underpinning the inclusive realm. Starting from Special Pedagogy, Lombardo (2010:1) asserts that:

> Special Pedagogy is a branch of Pedagogy that intervenes, with well-defined modalities, in the area of motoric, cognitive, and socio-affective disability […]. In general, [it] has the purpose of reconstructing a sense, where the significance of the person and their existence falters due to elements of discomfort, deviance, marginality, or handicap which impede full development and full expression of human potential.

In Italy, among the leading figures in the field there are Maria Montessori and Andrea Canevaro, who can be considered, in different time periods, the parents of Italian Special Pedagogy. Thanks to their tireless effort and contribution they are recognised as leading spokespeople at an international level.

Tessaro (2012: 32), furthermore, affirms that "the common denominator [between language sciences and special glottology] is represented by special educational needs (SEN)". Given the variety of interpretations of the just mentioned concept, this thesis assumes the definition provided by Ianes (2008: 54):

> The Special Educational Need is any evolutionary difficulty, in the educational and/or instructive field, caused by a problematic functioning, in the various areas defined by ICF anthropology, for the subject in terms of damage, barriers to their well-being, limitation of their freedom and social

stigma, independent of aetiology (bio-structural, familiar, environmental, cultural, etc.) and requiring individualised special education.

A further terminological element of great importance for this thesis is Specific Learning Disorders, a group of neurobiological disorders of basic abilities that interfere with the average learning of reading, writing, and calculation (https://www.erickson.it/it/mondo-erickson/dsa-cosa-sono-come-riconoscerli-e-cosa-fare). According to Stella & Grandi (2011: 7), the definitions of each disorder are:

- Dyslexia is the specific reading disorder and is characterised by the difficulty of accurate and fluent reading in terms of speed and correctness;

- Disortography is the specific disorder concerning the constructive component of writing, linked to linguistic aspects, and consists in the difficulty of writing correctly;

- Dysgraphia concerns the executive and motor component of writing; in other words, it refers to the difficulty of writing in a fluid, quick and legible way by third parties;

- Dyscalculia concerns the disorder in manipulating numbers, making quick calculations in mind, and retrieving the results of multiplication tables and different arithmetic tasks

Students with Specific Learning Disorders have the right to avail themselves of compensatory instruments and dispensary measures that allow the conditions for an effective and efficient learning. Therefore, it is deemed noteworthy to pursue clarification of the meaning of two concepts underpinning an individualised and personalised didactic. Hereinafter is presented the interpretation of Cottini (2018: 43) regarding compensatory instruments:

[They] should be understood as didactic and technological devices capable of replacing or facilitating the performance of the deficient ability. These tools relieve the pupil or the student with Specific Learning Disorders from a performance made difficult by the disorder, without however facilitating the task from the cognitive viewpoint.

On the other hand, the decree implementing Law No. 170 of 2010 defines that: dispensary measures are interventions that allow the student with Specific Learning Disorders to skip some performances that, always because of the disorder, are particularly difficult, without decreasing learning objectives (https://www.istruzione.it/esame_di_stato/Primo_Ciclo/normativa/allegati/prot5669_11.pdf).

Eventually, one last distinction proves pertinent, the one between the terms 'deficit' and 'handicap'. The deficit is a mainly stable fact due to the pathology, it should be acquainted to accept it. Conversely, the handicap is a variable, a difficulty caused by the interaction between deficit and context; one of the main tasks of schools is to reduce it.

1.2 Stages Towards Inclusion in Italy: A Regulatory Excursus

This paragraph outlines the stages towards inclusion in Italy that can be identified in four key phases: medicalisation, assimilation, integration, and inclusion. Hereinafter is presented a historical overview of the evolution of educational regulations in support of inclusion starting from the Sixties to the present day. A selection of the numerous laws deemed to be cornerstones of inclusion, which allowed the achievement of important conquests, is addressed.

1.2.1 Medicalisation

The period that can be defined as 'medicalisation' is usually set from the Sixties to the early Seventies. According to Cottini (2018: 30), in those years, "the common belief was that the student in a situation of disability could be helped with the utmost

incisiveness when they were inserted in groups of peers with similar deficits". In this regard, stands out Act No. 1859 of 1962 on the Single Middle School that provided for the establishment of differential classes. Six years later, Law No. 444 on the State Kindergarten is promulgated, which, in Article 3 states:

> For children from three to six years of age suffering from intelligence or behavioural disorders or physical or sensory impairments, the State establishes special sections in state kindergartens and, for the most severe cases, special kindergartens. No more than twelve children can be enrolled in each section.

In those years disability was considered a medical problem of the individual to be treated with caring treatments. Individuals were identified with their disability and marginalised by those who were believed "normal". In the early Seventies, the first steps towards the assimilation of students in a situation of disability in ordinary schools were taken.

1.2.2 Assimilation

From the end of the 1960s to the middle of the 1970s is set the 'assimilation' phase. This period is characterised by the crisis of separate institutions, namely special classes and schools, with the realisation of how limited the results obtained by these measures were. From a normative point of view, it is worth mentioning the Act No. 118 of 1971 which represented a keystone in the process towards inclusion. The law claims that:

> Mandatory education must take place in the normal classes of public schools, except in the cases in which the subjects suffer from serious intellectual deficiencies or physical impairments of such gravity to prevent or render exceedingly difficult learning or assimilation in the aforementioned normal classes.

In 1975, a committee of experts chaired by Senator Falcucci, appointed to address the issue of the assimilation of students in a situation of disability in the common school, yielded a document known to history (Cottini, 2018: 31). As stated by Ministry of Public Education (1975):

> The overcoming of any form of marginalisation of the handicapped passes through a new way of conceiving and implementing the school, in order to be able to truly welcome every child and adolescent to encourage their personal development. In addition, the attendance of common schools by handicapped children does not imply the achievement of common minimum cultural objectives. The assessment criterion of school outcome must therefore refer to the degree of maturity achieved by the student both globally and at the level of the learnings fulfilled, overcoming the rigid concept of grades or report cards.

Furthermore, the document was accompanied by Ministerial Circular No. 227, proposing the gradual assimilation of problematic students into the common school as an educational experimentation, but at the same time, raising the urgency of solving problems of structural and organisational nature in order to achieve the scholastic and social integration of the above-mentioned pupils (https://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/circolari/cm227_75.html9). Overall, the indications of the committee may still be considered innovative and forward-looking, especially when compared to the measures adopted during the years of the medical approach.

1.2.3 Integration

'Integration' is the period usually set from the late Seventies to the late Eighties. As Cottini (2018: 31-32) affirms, Act. No. 517 of 1977:

> represented, from the legal viewpoint, a turning point for the Italian school, both because it rendered mandatory the presence of pupils in a situation of disability in the common school with the consequent abolition of differential classes and special schools, and because it offered remarkable possibilities to favour the transition from simple assimilation to integration.

The law envisaged for the planning of supplementary activities, organised for groups of pupils of the same or different classes, and of specialised teachers in order to accommodate the demands of students (https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1977/08/18/077U0517/sg). In 1987, the verdict No. 215 of the Constitutional Court, ensured the presence of all disabled people in the secondary school, declaring illegitimate the Act No. 118 of 1971, which only declared to facilitate it. In addition, in the following year the Ministerial Circular No. 262, regulated the enrolment and attendance at secondary school of second degree for students in situations of physical, mental and sensory disability without limitation with regard to gravity (https://www.edscuola.it/archivio/norme/circolari/cm262_88.html).

1.2.4 Inclusion

Since the beginning of the Nineties in Italy a period characterised by an increasing attention to inclusion commences to emerge. Framework Law No. 104 of 1992 represents the most important measure in the field of Special Pedagogy. Cottini (2018: 32), in this regard, affirms:

> The law, on the one hand, gathers various previous regulations in an organic framework and, on the other hand, tends to fill in legislative gaps arising in

the various areas: support for the families, school, work, health, leisure time, the social integration.

Articles 12 to 17 on "school integration to ensure an efficient education of disabled people" represent a beneficial background with respect to the regulatory excursus provided in this paragraph; hereinafter are addressed Articles 12, 13 and 14 (https://www.altalex.com/guide/legge-104#). The second and third subsection of Article 12, about the right to education, cites:

> 2. The right to education of the handicapped person is guaranteed in the kindergarten sections, in the common classes of the educational institutions of every order and degree and the university institutions.
>
> 3. School integration has the objective of the development of empowerment of the disabled person in learning, communication, relationships, and socialisation.

Furthermore, the third subsection introduces "a dynamic functional profile for the purpose of formulating an individualised educational plan", which is jointly defined, with the cooperation of the parents of the disabled person, by local health unit operators and specialised teaching staff with the psycho-pedagogical teacher identified according to criteria established by the Minister of Education. Specifically, the dynamic functional profile is described as follows:

> The profile indicates the physical, psychic, social and emotional characteristics of the student and highlights both the learning difficulties resulting from the handicap and the possibilities of recovery, and the abilities possessed which must be supported, stimulated, and progressively strengthened and developed with respect for the cultural choices of the disabled person.

Additionally, Article 13 regulates scholastic integration and defines the role of special needs teachers. Among the means for achieving school integration are listed: coordinated planning of school services with health, cultural and recreational spheres, provision of technical equipment and teaching aids for schools, planning of interventions adapted to the person and the study plan, employment of interpreters to facilitate university attendance of deaf students. Concerning the sixth subsection, it reports:

> 6. Special needs teachers take on the joint title of the classes in which they operate, participate in educational and teaching programming and in the preparation and assessment of the activities for which interclass and class councils and teaching staffs are responsible,

Proceeding with the modalities to implement integration, Article 14 in the first subsection declares: "the Minister of Education is responsible for the education and upgrade of the teaching staff for the acquisition of knowledge in relation to the educational integration of handicapped students".

A few years later, with Law No. 59 of 1997, schools acquired autonomy in legal, financial, administrative, educational, research, experimental and organisational terms. According to Cottini (2018: 34),

> The change has also meant the disappearance of national programmes and greater planning responsibility to schools, performed through a new instrument, the educational offer plan. It includes the didactic curriculum, however, it is not limited to didactics, dealing with the overall project, issues of internal organisation, employment of resources and links with the territory included.

In 2001, the Assembly of the World Health Organisation (WHO) approved the new International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). As stated by

the Ministry of Education, University and Research (https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/0/Linee+guida+sull%27integrazione+scol astica+degli+alunni+con+disabilit%C3%A0.pdf/7e814545-e019-e34e-641e-b091dfae19f0):

> The ICF […] considers the person not only from the "health" point of view, but promotes a global approach, attentive to the overall potential, to the various resources of the subject, bearing in mind that the personal, natural, social, and cultural context, decisively affects the possibility to express these resources. Fundamental, therefore, is the ability of this classifier to describe both the capacities possessed and the possible performances acting on the contextual factors.

Furthermore, the model introduced by the ICF takes into account the multiple aspects of the person, correlating the health condition and its context, thus reaching a definition of 'disability' as "a health condition in an unfavourable environment" (*ibid*.).

The last Italian regulatory aspect addressed in this paragraph consists of the "Guidelines on the school integration of students with disabilities", issued with Note No. 4274 of 2009. Great emphasis is given to the coordinated management of integration by the actors involved in the educational process, above all the school principals. According to Cottini (2018: 36):

> It insists on the involvement of all teachers in taking charge of the teaching-learning process and the assessment of students with disability entrusted to them. In this regard, the assessment in tenths must be compared to the individualised educational plan, which is the reference point for educational activities in favour of students with disabilities. It also specifies that assessment should always be considered as an analysis of processes and not only as a performance assessment.

1.2.5 International Regulations

Bearing in mind that the focus of this thesis is the inclusion landscape in Italy, hereinafter are reported and addressed some international regulations considered worthy of mention: The Salamanca Statement, The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Policy guidelines on inclusion in education.

The Salamanca Statement, adopted at the World Conference organised by UNESCO in 1994, represented a watershed at the international level since it laid the foundations for the crucial principle of inclusion at school: "All children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students" (UNESCO, 1994: 11).

More recently, in 2006, the "United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" was adopted. According to Cottini (2018: 38):

> it certainly represents the strongest and most important resolution to enshrine the right to full inclusion in all contexts for people with disabilities, both because of the solid foundations of the scientific-cultural system that underlies - now corroborated by the international debate, also in light of the social vision of disability - both for the legal and regulatory constraints that commit the signatory countries.

Article 24 is of particular importance, and, regarding the right of persons with disabilities to education, affirms that it should be directed to "the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity" in addition to "the development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential" (United Nations, 2006).

The last measure here exposed is the "Policy guidelines on inclusion in education", issued by UNESCO in 2009. These guidelines underline the urgency of a reorganisation of the system which represents an opportunity for growth for all and

not only for pupils with disabilities (UNESCO, 2009). Eventually, inclusion is seen as "a process capable of confronting the diversity of needs of all pupils, through the increase of opportunities for participation in learning, cultures and community initiatives" (Cottini, 2018: 40).

1.3 Inclusive Education Benefits All

One of the "Five Key Messages for Inclusive Education" recites (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014: 6):

> Inclusive education aims to offer quality education to all pupils. To achieve an inclusive school the support of the whole community is necessary: from decision-makers to end users (pupils and their families). Collaboration is needed at all levels and all stakeholders need to have a long-term vision of the outcomes - that is, the kind of young people that the school and the community will 'produce'. Changes are needed in terminology, attitudes, and values in order to reflect the added value of diversity and equal participation.

Below will be exposed two different frameworks, provided by the pedagogists Cottini (2018) and Tessaro (2012), advantageous to thoroughly investigate the inclusive perspective of education.

1.3.1 The Four Levels of Inclusion

The following reflection regarding the inclusive dimension of education is inspired by the quadripolar model developed by Cottini. Specifically, the pedagogist identifies four levels of inclusion, namely (2018: 16):

The affirmation of the principles of reference, the organisation of the context and the procedures for inclusive purposes, the methodologies to be implemented to promote inclusion, the verification of the operational significance of those methodologies and the real effectiveness of an inclusive school.

The level of principles is based on the assumption that "all pupils, whatever their condition, are entitled to have access to education within common and not separate contexts" (Cottini: 2018, 27). The author also states that (*ibid.*):

The student with disabilities or other difficulties cannot be conceived as a guest in the school and the classroom, but as an integral part of them, which must change and remove barriers, of whatever kind they are, in order to facilitate the achievement of educational success and the full affirmation of everyone.

These aspects were previously addressed both from a terminological point of view, in the first paragraph of this chapter (consult 1.1 Building Blocks of Inclusion: Key Terminology and Definitions), and from a normative point of view, in the second paragraph (see 1.2 Stages Towards Inclusion in Italy: A Regulatory Excursus).

As far as the organisational level is concerned, precise and flexible coordination between the various actors engaged in the inclusion process, both inside and outside the school, is essential to arrange educational environments able to embrace everyone. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Cottini: 2018, 20-21):

places the concept of accessibility at the centre referred, first, to environments and tools, with the aim of making them available for all. […] The fundamental premise of the UDL is to act by designing and organising contexts with a deep understanding and appreciation for individual variability,

A thorough examination of the UDL perspective will be addressed in the next chapter (consult 2.1 Universal Design for Learning).

The third level ideated by Cottini (2018: 21) refers to the methodological-didactic viewpoint and deals with the didactic procedures prone to promote formative success and the active role of every student, facilitating the participation of all and stimulating interactive relationships and mutual support. Of particular importance are therefore the atmosphere and the management of the class and cooperative strategies. Accordingly, a productive class environment and a positive atmosphere are built through the attention and respect for the students by the teacher: when students feel valued they are more inclined to accept authority, more willing to collaborate and to respect the rules of social coexistence (D'Alonzo, 2012).

It is essential that within the class every student experience a sense of belonging, that they feel important and welcomed by their teacher and classmates, and that everyone benefits from mutual respect. The teacher, for their part, must believe in the potential of the students and impersonate a talent scout; share, and not impose on the class, the learning objectives and involve students in some curricular choices such as the assessment. In addition, it has been proven that preferring cooperation over competitive activities not only helps high syntality but also greater learning success.

Cooperative learning, as will be extensively explained in the next chapter (see 2.2 Cooperative Learning), is based on two fundamental characteristics: first, when students collaborate, a synergistic effect sprouts and it can produce an outcome greater than the sum of individuals' efforts and abilities; second, much of the knowledge is socially built through contact and interaction with the environment (Mitchell, 2015).

Furthermore, the physical context can affect the quality of learning processes. Many scholars (Barrett et al., 2013; Fisher, 2014; Fraser, 2014) have pointed out that there is not an optimal arrangement to be preferred to the others, however, it should be commensurate with the diverse types of teaching activities that are carried out. Cottini (2018: 179), further to this point, declares:

> There is a need to have adjustable spaces, which can, even moving the
> furniture, envisage for collective or group activities. It would be very
> advantageous, even if the size of our classrooms rarely allows it, to create

fixed spaces, separated by panels or libraries, dedicated to different activities (individual work, group work, practice).

The last level refers to empirical evidence. This thesis includes not only an epistemological background set out in this chapter and in the following one (consult Chapter One: Inclusion, Its Stages in Italy, Inclusive Education; and Chapter Two: Universal Design for Learning, Cooperative Learning, Board Game-Based Learning), but also an experimental aspect that will be addressed later, in the fourth chapter (see Chapter Four: Students' Perception of Dixit as an Educational Engagement Means: Methodology and Results), to ascertain whether the use of the Dixit board game in the school context is effective in promoting inclusion and cooperation.

The European Agency for Special Needs among the Five key messages for inclusive education highlights the "widespread awareness that evidenced-based policy-making is critical for the long-term development of inclusive education systems". Furthermore (*ibid.*):

> meaningful, quality data collection requires a systemic approach encompassing learner, placement, teacher, and resourcing issues. Data related to learner placement is a useful and necessary starting point, but it needs to be supplemented with clear data on system outcomes and effects. Data on learner outcomes – the impact of inclusive education – is much harder to collect and is often lacking in countries' data collection.

1.3.2 The Foundations of Inclusive Educational Practices

As stated by Tessaro (2012: 31), educational practices in Special Glottology are characterised by three pedagogical foundations:

> a) value foundations, which are based on the concept of educability and aim at identifying and developing students' potential by means of inclusive strategies; b) epistemological foundations, which take into account that these

students are walking a rough path to acknowledge their own identity; c) methodological foundations, which provide the tools for designing inclusive curricula integrating individualised teaching and personalised learning.

The examination of the above-mentioned foundations is hereafter further discussed. Value foundations pursue the aim of meeting each student's educational needs and value differences and diversities which enhance the learning of all. The exclusion of a student from a group due to a difficult condition harm themselves and, above all, jeopardises the learning of the whole group (Tessaro, 2012: 33).

Consequently, one of the most important tasks of teachers is to discover and give value to the talents, peculiarities, and uniqueness of their students. Tessaro (*ibid.*: 35), regarding the personal educational potential, claims that:

[It] is the set of skills, abilities, aptitudes, functions, and dispositions that prefigures the existential sense and value of a person and that, due to multiple factors, exogenous and endogenous, has not yet fully arisen or realised.

Instead, for what concerns the development potential, the author states (*ibid.*):

[It] is the *educational leaven* of the student, it is the value of their "being in the world"; for a student with special educational needs it is, probably, the only treasure they possess: it cannot be ignored, underestimated, disregarded, mocked, despised. [...] Both the student and the community are responsible for that talent.

The next foundation to be addressed is the epistemological, namely difference and diversity, here "interpreted as historical-existential categories that specify the identity of the person" (Tessaro, *ibid.*), for which a distinction proves beneficial. Etymologically, 'difference' means "to bring more" while 'diversity' recalls the idea of "deviating". Tessaro (*ibid.*: 36), accordingly, provides clarifying instances:

> If two subjects are different from each other due to an intellectual, physical, or psychic ability, it means that both are in possession of that ability, more or less, of one type or another. […] If one subject is diverse from another in one skill, it means that one of the two is in possession of that skill, and the other is lacking or has an antithetical skill.

Also, according to Tessaro (*ibid.*: 37), "the risk of diversity" is considering people *alius* and not *alter*, someone to acknowledge for their strangeness but not to pay attention to and comprehend. Therefore, it is essential to remember that "educational work in the classroom, with groups of pupils interacting, is based on the principle of interpersonal differences" (*ibid.*); a difference should be deemed as a resource rather than a subtraction.

Eventually, the last foundation to be addressed is the methodological, which involves the construction of curricula that integrate individualisation of teaching and personalisation of learning. As stated by Capaldo et al. (2005: 79):

> If with the strategy of individualisation our educational system has tried to make all achieve objectives and contents deemed fundamental, with personalisation it should realise educational itineraries aimed to assure the attainment of objectives based on the single abilities and potentialities of students. [...] In our perspective, individualisation and personalisation should not be interpreted in opposition, but as elements of a single logic that considers them interdependent and essential in the process of personal development.

To explain further, individualisation implies different strategies to achieve common aims, and vice versa personalisation is "the process through which the student incorporates the educational proposal aimed at all, interpreting it within their conceptual and linguistic frameworks" (Tessaro, 2012: 38), thus, foreseeing a differentiation of the objective.

CHAPTER TWO

Universal Design for Learning, Cooperative Learning,

Board Game-Based Learning

2.1 Universal Design for Learning

In 1984, Anne Meyer (clinical psychologist), David Rose (neuropsychologist and educator), Grace Meo, Skip Stahl (educator) and Linda Mensing "founded CAST, the Center for Applied Special Technology, to explore ways of using new technologies to provide better educational experiences to students with disabilities" (https://www.cast.org/impact/timeline-innovation). Over the first decade, CAST researchers explored and refined their principles, priorities, and vision, leading to a new idea of how to use versatile methods and materials to enhance education (*ibid*.). They called this approach Universal Design for Learning. Furthermore, CAST is "a multifaceted organization with a singular ambition: bust the barriers to learning that millions of people experience every day" (https://www.cast.org). According to CAST (2024) (https://www.cast.org/about/about-cast):

> Our Mission [is to] lead, inspire, and convene a global community to design equitable, inclusive learning experiences through our Universal Design for Learning framework.
> Our Vision [is] […] a world where all learning experiences in school, the workplace, and life are intentionally designed to elevate strengths and eliminate barriers so everyone has the opportunity to grow and thrive.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an educational framework based on research in the education sciences, together with cognitive neuroscience, that guides the development of flexible learning environments and instructions that can accommodate individuals learning differences (Rose & Meyer, 2002). The concept of UDL was inspired by the Universal Design movement in product and environment development

formulated by the architect Ronald L. Mace at North Carolina State University (USA). Universal Design principles have the aim of offering guidance to designers in integrating "features that meet the needs of as many users as possible", namely: equitability, flexibility, simplicity and intuition, perceptibility, tolerance for error, low physical effort, size and space for approach and use (http://www.design.ncsu.edu/cud/about_ud/udprinciples.htm).

UDL extends the vision of UD to the educational field to promote the planning of flexible paths to learning without the need for subsequent adaptations (Cottini, 2019: 17). In the video named "UDL at a glance", published on the YouTube channel of CAST, it is affirmed that research shows that the way people learn is as unique as their fingerprints. Nowadays, classrooms are highly diverse, and curriculum needs to be designed from the start to meet this diversity. Universal Design for Learning is an approach to curriculum that minimises barriers and maximises learning for all students.

By 'Universal' it is meant a curriculum that can be used and understood by everyone; each learner in a classroom brings their own background, strengths, needs and interests. Curriculum should provide genuine learning opportunities for each and every student. Regarding 'Learning', neuroscience asserts that our brains have three broad networks, one for recognition (the 'what' of learning), one for skills and strategies (the 'how' of learning) and one for caring and prioritising (the 'why' of learning) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDvKnY0g6e4&t=38s). As concerns the concept of 'Design', two instances might prove clarifying for the importance of thinking about those "in the margins" to simplify things for everyone: curb ramps are employed by people in wheelchairs, but also with strollers and on bikes; subtitles on television serve people who are deaf, people learning that language or at the gym (Ghedin & Mazzocut, 2017; Savia, 2016).

2.1.1 The Three Principles Underpinning Universal Design for Learning

Accordingly, the UDL approach can be summarised in three principles: provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression, which in turn are divided into nine guidelines and several operational checkpoints (Meyer, Rose, Gordon, 2014). The first principle under inspection is the one relating to the

recognition network, the 'what of learning', namely, to provide multiple means of representation, to give students different options to acquire and process information and knowledge. According to CAST (2018) (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/representation/):

> Learners differ in the ways that they perceive and comprehend information that is presented to them. For example, those with sensory disabilities (e.g., blindness or deafness); learning disabilities (e.g., dyslexia); language or cultural differences, and so forth may all require different ways of approaching content. […] Also learning, and transfer of learning, occurs when multiple representations are used, because they allow students to make connections within, as well as between, concepts. In short, there is not one means of representation that will be optimal for all learners; providing options for representation is essential.

The first guideline refers to the perception of information that should not depend on a single sense, however, be visual, auditory, and tactile at the same time. Then, it is crucial to provide as many languages as possible: words, symbols, and numbers. Finally, the third guideline proposes different content comprehension options, for instance, eliciting previous knowledge and explicating recurring relationships and patterns. Hereafter some concrete strategies to be implemented in relation to this principle are presented. Taking as an inspiration Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) (https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/#guidelines), providing text alternatives for any non-text content allows it to be changed into other forms, such as large print, braille, symbols, or simpler language. At the same time, supplying captions, audio descriptions, and sign language interpretations, would ease people with visual or hearing impairments. On the other hand, sensory characteristics such as shape, size, visual location, colour, sound, and contrast could also be used as a means to convey information. According to Strangman et al. (2004: 8) between the strategies for helping students to activate prior knowledge five approaches can be detected: "reflection and recording", namely to prompt students to write down or record what they know;

"interactive discussion", e.g., group discussions of a topic while creating a semantic map (Dole et al., 1991); "answering questions", namely to ask students to make predictions about text contents, because under this conditions they are able to activate background knowledge (Rowe & Rayford, 1987); "K-W-L", e.g. "accessing what I Know, determining what I Want to find out, recalling what I did Learn", which combines reflection and brainstorming ideas about a topic, identifying gaps in knowledge and reading materials to share with classmates (Ogle, 1986); and finally "computer-assisted" (Biemans & Simons, 1996).

Concerning the second principle, the 'how of learning' connected to the strategic network, the aim is to propose multiple forms of action and expression to give students different alternatives to demonstrate what they know. "For example, individuals with significant movement impairments (e.g., cerebral palsy), those who struggle with strategic and organizational abilities (executive function disorders), those who have language barriers, and so forth approach learning tasks very differently" (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/action-expression). Consequently, the first guideline concerns the processing of information that should include the optimisation of access to technologies and support tools. Moreover, the second recommends the employment of multiple media for communication to express themselves. Finally, it is important to guide students in goal planning and strategy development. Some strategies that can be proposed related to this principle, suggested by Cottini (2018: 92-94), are provided below. Leaving students free to choose how to express their knowledge including interaction with hands, voice, buttons and manipulatives. Encouraging the use of augmentative and alternative forms of communication, e.g., Vocal Output Communication Aids (VOCA), to facilitate and increase communication in people who have difficulty in using oral language and writing (https://www.portale-autismo.it/la-comunicazione-aumentativa-alternativa/#google_vignette). According to Gardner (1987), there are different forms of intelligence and mental functioning articulated in several distinct areas, each with its own rules and operations. The eight forms of intelligence are characterised by their own modes of information processing, namely: "linguistic-verbal", which covers linguistic production, abstract reasoning, reading and writing; "logical-mathematical", e.g., to use abstract symbols, such as numbers and geometric figures, and to understand the links between separate

information; "visual-spatial", which concerns the ability to see objects from different angles and perspectives; "body-kinaesthetic", related to the possibility of using the body to express emotions, play and create; "rhythmic-musical", concerning sensitivity to sounds, to the use of voice, rhythmic patterns and playing instruments; "interpersonal", e.g., the possibility to communicate with others and to work cooperatively; "intrapersonal" related to the self and all that pertains to it, such as emotions, thoughts, reflections and forms of sensitivity; and "naturalistic", the ability to recognise and classify the elements of the natural world. The teacher's task is to grasp the intelligence possessed by each student and, on the basis of it, encourage the implementation of strategies to make the most of it (Cottini, 2019).

The third principle is the most significant for the purposes of this thesis since the case study that will be presented in the next chapters is conceived and investigated from the engagement perspective. In fact, the principle under examination is the 'why of learning', connected to the affective network, that recommends providing multiple options of engagement to supply students with different motivating incitements to learn. As stated by the CAST website (https://udlguidelines.cast.org/engagement):

> Affect represents a crucial element to learning […]. There are a variety of sources that can influence individual variation in affect including neurology, culture, personal relevance, subjectivity, and background knowledge, along with a variety of other factors. Some learners are highly engaged by spontaneity and novelty while others are disengaged, even frightened, by those aspects, preferring strict routine. Some learners might like to work alone, while others prefer to work with their peers.

Among its guidelines options to recruit interest might be cited. Learners differ significantly in what attracts their attention and engages their interest; even the same learner develops attitudes with their advancement and attainment of knowledge and skills. Takemae et al. (2024: 3), in this regard, state:

By having the student feel in control of their learning, they can feel more apt to ask questions, immerse themselves in the material, and better use the UDL framework. While allowing the student to feel in control of their learning, the student can hold on to different strategies that were presented to them and use them across all content areas as well as remember these strategies throughout their lives.

"Offering learners choices can develop self-determination, pride in accomplishment, and increase the degree to which they feel connected to their learning" (CAST, 2018). Therefore, optimising autonomy in terms of tools, methods, timings and assessment and the authenticity of the activities proposed, relevant and appropriate to students' background, as well as minimising threats, and creating a relaxed and supportive atmosphere, would positively influence the learning process. Furthermore, Chambers & Coffey (2019: 33) argue that options for recruiting interest may include "structured and unstructured activities that appeal to a wide range of participants and evaluation of the programme to identify continuing needs of the students".

In addition, great emphasis is placed on supporting effort and perseverance. Teachers should push students to set short- and long-term objectives, differentiating the level of complexity of activities, encouraging Cooperative Learning (see 2.2 Cooperative Learning) and peer collaboration, providing frequent feedback focused on the development of self-awareness in students and considering mistakes as positive opportunities for future success. In addition, "planning tools for homework, and monitoring progress effectively to rapidly identify and address issues before they escalate and impact on a students' self-efficacy" could benefit learners (*ibid*.: 34). Teachers might also reinforce students objectives during lessons and offer different levels of difficulty to accommodate diverse learning preferences (Murawski & Scott, 2019: 1). Furthermore, the authors state that teachers could encourage collaborative work among students and provide frequent feedback throughout each lesson employing diverse channels, such as self-assessment, peer evaluation, and teacher feedback, rather than relying solely on final assessment (*ibid*.).

The last guideline here addressed takes advantage of the power of emotions to set realistic personal goals to avert frustration, encourage the employment of personal

strategies for coping with diverse situations and incite to monitor students' progress. To do so, Murawski & Scott (2019: 11) suggest that teachers could facilitate group work, mentorship, or coaching, offer guidance on strategies for persistence, and they could employ scaffolding, positive reinforcement, and breaks to prevent frustration and discouragement. Dzaman et al. (2022) provide a set of strategies to implement in the classroom related to self-regulation, namely: give rubrics at the beginning of an assignment to prompt self-assessment, encourage the use of checklists to track students' progress, create assessments that are outcomes- or competency-based and allow students to demonstrate the learning outcomes, and integrate experiential learning opportunities. Finally, according to Takemae et al. (2024: 3)

> By altering learning strategies and making the curriculum more accessible, while pertaining to each student's strengths, preferences, and interests, each student can carry these techniques with them throughout their schooling and into adulthood, as they become expert learners.

2.2 Cooperative Learning

According to the American psychologist Slavin (2011: 1), Cooperative Learning "refers to instructional methods in which teachers organize students into small groups, which then work together to help one another learn academic content". Furthermore, Mitchell (2015), as mentioned in paragraph 1.3.1 (The Four Levels of Inclusion), affirms that CL is based on two fundamental elements: the synergistic effect that creates when students collaborate and cooperate that leads to results greater than the sum of individual efforts, and the social construction of knowledge through contact and interaction with the environment.

2.2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Cooperative Learning

As stated by Slavin (2011: 2):

> While there is a fair consensus among researchers about the positive effects of cooperative learning on student achievement, there remains a controversy about why and how cooperative learning methods affect achievement and, most importantly, under what conditions cooperative learning has these effects.

The American psychologist (Slavin, 1995) identified four major theoretical perspectives on the achievements effects of Cooperative Learning, namely: motivational, social cohesion, cognitive-developmental and cognitive-elaboration. The motivational perspective on Cooperative Learning posits that task motivation is the most important part of the learning process. According to Slavin (2011: 5-6):

> Cooperative incentive structures create a situation in which the only way group members can attain their own personal goals is if the group is successful. Therefore, to meet their personal goals, group members must both help their groupmates to do whatever enables the group to succeed, and, perhaps even more importantly, to encourage their groupmates to exert maximum efforts.

By contrast, the social cohesion wave, or social interdependence theory, suggests that the cohesiveness of the group affects the effects of CL. Johnson & Johnson (1998) assert that within this perspective students help each other learn because they care about the group and its members and derive benefits in terms of self-identity from group membership. Additionally, Slavin (2011: 9), regarding the two perspectives above addressed, claims:

> [Social cohesion perspective] is similar to the motivational perspective in that it emphasizes primarily motivational rather than cognitive explanations for the instructional effectiveness of cooperative learning. However, motivational theorists hold that students help their groupmates learn primarily because it is in their own interests to do so. Social cohesion theorists, in contrast, emphasize the idea that students help their groupmates learn because they care about the group.

On the other hand, the psychologist (Slavin, 2011: 12) argues that:

> The cognitive perspective holds that interactions among students will in themselves increase student achievement for reasons which have to do with mental processing of information rather than with motivations. Cooperative methods developed by cognitive theorists involve neither the group goals that are the cornerstone of the motivationalist methods nor the emphasis on building group cohesiveness characteristic of the social cohesion methods.

Hereinafter are addressed the two most notable cognitive perspectives, e.g., the developmental and the elaboration perspectives. Regarding the former, Vygotsky (1978: 16) defines the zone of proximal development as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers". In his view, therefore, cooperation promotes growth since individuals within groups perform more advanced behaviours. Similarly, the Swiss pedagogist Piaget (1926) asserts that social-arbitrary knowledge can only be learned by interacting with others and imitating their behaviours.

Conversely, the cognitive elaboration perspective supports that if information needs to be retained in memory and is related to prior knowledge, the learner is involved in a cognitive restructuring of the material (Wittrock, 1986). Thus, explaining

contents to someone else is considered one of the most effective means of elaboration, benefitting both the 'tutor' and the 'tutee' (Devin-Sheehan et al., 1976).

2.2.2 Characterising Elements of Cooperative Learning

As stated by Johnson & Johnson (1999), the correct application of Cooperative Learning provides for the presence of four fundamental conditions: positive interdependence, individual and group responsibility, social skills and the review and continuous improvement of group work.

Positive interdependence is determined when each member of the group cares not only about their own performance but also about that of peers. In this regard, Comoglio (1996: 6) states:

> This condition is not achieved by simply reuniting the members, by simply stimulating them to cooperate, or by requiring them to create together some final product. Instead, it is the result of the ability to properly structure the task to be assigned to the group and prepare the necessary learning materials.

Moreover, some strategies to encourage interdependence in groups are: making objectives clear, encouraging members to divide up the work to develop individually, assigning complementary and interconnected roles, entrust to each student different resources to stimulate sharing (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

In cooperative working groups there is both individual and group responsibility. In fact, the common goal is achieved through the work of individuals, but all the members strive in order that everyone performs their task at best. In this regard, it is necessary to collaborate on behalf of the teammates in difficulty, not to replace them, however, because their scarce results would affect the overall performance of the group. The effectiveness of cooperation is based on the sense of individual responsibility towards others that generates a virtuous circle of mutual help and support (Ellerani & Pavan, 2003). Constant mutual support is therefore essential.

The basis of activities involving cooperative groups is, according to Cottini (2018: 216):

> the possession by group members of specific assertive and prosocial skills, which are fundamental for the willingness to help and be helped, encouraging and improving mutually, willingly accepting reprimands, conceived as improving and not as critical to the person, expressing behaviours that induce confidence and openness to be positively influenced.

Furthermore, Comoglio (1999), provides a further significant perspective regarding CL and social competencies:

> Cooperative learning, in its various forms and modes, is undoubtedly a significant way to design learning experiences to prepare new generations to conceive learning as a social construction of knowledge, to promote cooperation and collaboration through guided and ongoing exercises that develop social skills essential for adult life, to learn to work together on complex tasks by finding in others help and integration together with the recognition of their own possibilities.

Developing social skills while learning curriculum topics renders Cooperative Learning more complex than individualistic or competitive learning, but the results are more effective and above all promote more inclusive and welcoming educational contexts for all students (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

Subsequently, a noteworthy aspect of CL is the continuous improvement of group work through a critical evaluation of the work and the results obtained, with the aim of "improving the effectiveness of group members in contributing to unite efforts to achieve the goals of the group" (Johnson & Johnson, 1998: 29). Assessment, in this case, becomes formative and solicits for metacognitive reflection. The members of the

group have the opportunity to discuss the progress made in relation to the objectives and analyse the quality of their relationships (Morganti & Bocci, 2017), thus understanding which individual behaviours benefit the group and which should be reconsidered.

In addition, the assessment dimension, both individual and group, represents a further feature of Cooperative Learning. Individual assessment is related to the responsibility that each member has for their work, whereas group assessment concerns the overall work and the final result (Tessaro, 2002). The teacher can evaluate the individual performance of the pupil, the role played for the group and, eventually, the class itself can give feedback after the presentation of the content.

As regards the organisational aspect, the role of the teacher and the formation of groups are crucial. The teacher has a supportive role towards the work of individuals, as a facilitator and planner of the learning activity (Johnson et al., 2015; Sharan & Sharan, 1992). In Cooperative Learning, the teacher's authority is transferred to students who share the leadership. Undoubtedly, it is fundamental that the teacher, when proposing this approach, explains it to the class and states its characteristics, rules, objectives, and benefits. The teacher also has the responsibility to form groups and organise the setting of the class.

It proves essential that the groups provide for a limited number of members, usually from two to six, and that each of the components is assigned a precise role and task according to the outcome the group intends to pursue. "Small groups encourage the active participation of all members, increase individual responsibility and reduce the possibility of evading the task" (Cottini, 2018: 215). Groups should follow a criterion of heterogeneity at the level of skills, "social class", gender, cultural differences. Hattie (2012), accordingly, maintains that students learn better where there is more heterogeneity than when separate classes or groups for "gifted" students and students with learning difficulties are created.

Despite the above-mentioned numerous authoritative contributions concerning the effectiveness of the usage of Cooperative Learning, many teachers do not implement it, even though they are knowledgeable of it, due to difficulties related to the demand for accurate and extensive planning (Ghufron, 2018; Magnanini & Morelli, 2021) that requires considerable effort in terms of time and energy. Adams

(2013) furthermore argues that Cooperative Learning is difficult to manage since, in its implementation, the teacher must be able to incorporate the foundations of CL, such as positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, group processing, and social skills.

2.3 Game-Based Learning in Language Education

Game-Based Learning and gamification are "increasingly recognized in educational environments and have a greater impact on education because they are innovative technologies and include games to promote learning" (Fonseca et al., 2023: 5). The two pedagogies mentioned above related to the game in educational contexts are often confused, therefore, a distinction between the two is provided below (*ibid.*). Gamification has different definitions according to the context and the people (Landers et al., 2018). In the educational field, it is defined as a design process that uses games in non-game contexts (Deterding, 2019). On the other hand, Game-Based Learning implies that the game and all its features are used as an educational tool to make learning fun and enhance the educational content (Camacho-Sánchez et al., 2023). Overall, "in GBL, games are incorporated as part of the curriculum content to achieve specific objectives, and in gamification, game elements are used to be effective in the teaching and learning process" (Dahalan et al., 2023). Nevertheless, this thesis addresses Game-Based Learning since the experimentation confronted in Chapter Four provides for the implementation of the board game Dixit in an educational environment.

Game-Based Learning (GBL) could represent one of the latest trends in education and is steadily increasing its popularity across several fields involving language learning. According to Plass et al. (2015), GBL "takes the social experience of playing a game to a learning environment, allowing educators to use game mechanics for promoting specific activities to attain defined learning outcomes". Additionally, as stated by Turan & Akdag-Cimen (2019), nowadays "researchers are looking for new teaching methods to meet the changing needs of students and learners learning a new language because the development of technologies has also changed the profiles and needs of learners". The Game-Based Learning field began to take off

in late 2010 with the idea of employing game mechanics in non-game situations to accomplish various goals while boosting user engagement and motivation (Chitroda, 2022). Recently, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, GBL gained popularity due to the widespread resort to online learning and alternative approaches to teaching.

Regarding the benefits related to Game-Based Learning, especially in language education, the existing literature provides many contributions; hereinafter are presented the most relevant ones. Flores (2015) states that "language acquisition has been demonstrated to benefit from pedagogical strategies like the communicative method, which emphasises interaction, but incorporating game-based strategies has been found to increase learner motivation and engagement". Again, Thurairasu (2022: 64) maintains:

> It has been observed that the primary goal of using the game-based concept in the language education process is to increase students' motivation, engagement, and integration with the learning materials, instructions, and exercises, which are perceived as a less interesting task by some learners, particularly school students. Gamification is argued to be a more enjoyable, engaging, motivating, and successful way to learn a new language as a second language.

Furthermore, Hansch (2015) supports that people who play games regularly improve in facing everyday life challenges and develop problem-solving abilities, in addition to mental skills such as concentration and time management. Hodent (2021) also asserts that scientific research proves the potential of playing games to enhance brain plasticity and boost human development. When a person plays a game, as stated by Errity et al. (2016), three situations occur: psychological gratification, altered states of consciousness or learning processes and enhanced adaptive skills. Regarding analogue games, Rye & Sousa (2023: 904), state:

An important benefit of analogue games lies in their capacity to facilitate in-person social interaction and collaborative engagement. In an era characterised by heightened interconnectivity facilitated by digital devices, analogue games present a valuable avenue for students to actively participate in substantive, face-to-face interactions with their fellow peers (Fjællingsdal and Klöckner, 2020; Wu et al., 2014; York, 2020). This not only facilitates the advancement of social and emotional growth (Dell'Angela et al., 2020; Hromek and Roffey, 2009) but also fosters the development of crucial communication, negotiation, and teamwork abilities that are in high demand in the contemporary labour market (Reuter et al., 2021).

Players physically handling game components such as cards and tokens can benefit from a reinforcement of learning through hands-on interaction and successfully increase sensory involvement. The tactile nature of analogue games can provide noteworthy benefits for individuals who perform well in an immersive learning environment (da Rocha Tomé Filho et al., 2019; Tsong et al., 2012). Eventually, Mavroudi et al. (2021) propose several design principles to increase the effectiveness of educational games:

First, the purpose of the game has to be made clear to the participants beforehand. Second, the participants need to have the necessary knowledge of the game rules and its content in order to relate it to their previous knowledge as well as to learn new skills and knowledge.

The literature underpinning Game-Based Learning presents contributions in support of its effectiveness, below some studies are addressed. Darling et al. (2008) research showed that GBL enhances a variety of student skills, including vision, space, technology, language, dynamics, cognition, socialisation, and collaboration. Additionally, Bavelier et al. (2012) and Wardoyo et al. (2020) claim that its usage has a significant impact on benefitting the increase of learning outcomes, while Huang et

al. (2017) and Ding et al. (2017) assert that students' performance improves after the introduction of games as a strategy to learn. Further skills and functions that were proved to undergo improvements within the implementation of games in didactic are problem-solving (Posso, 2016), multitasking (Strobach et al., 2012), memory (Moisala et al., 2017), attention (Vallett et al., 2017), reaction times (Jimenez et al., 2015). Furthermore, it was proved that games promote self-regulation, encouraging students to focus on their learning outcomes (Zap & Code, 2009).

2.3.1 Board Games in Language Education

Taking into account that the experimental section of this thesis deals with the board game Dixit as an educational engagement means, hereafter a discussion of board games in language learning contexts is addressed. It is possible to identify different pedagogical approaches to using board games for teaching. According to Nousiainen et al. (2018), they are:

> 1) the use of entertainment board games […] for educational purposes, 2) the use of board games with more or less explicit learning content (e.g., using Scrabble for learning to spell or Periodic for learning the periodic system), and 3) learning through the process of designing educational board games.

Due to the nature of the board game Dixit, whose purpose is to entertain, but at the same time characterised by a marked adaptability to educational contexts (see 2.4 Dixit: a Picture is Worth a Thousand Words), a mixture of the first and the second approach is the focus adopted throughout the experimentation. Moreover, concerning the benefits of the implementation of board games in educational environments, below are listed some contributions in terms of benefits. As stated by Giles et al. (2019: 9), board games tend to create learning opportunities that are described as "fun, social, flexible, and inexpensive". Moreover, Mattheoudakis & Panteliou (2023) argues that board games "are also considered to be quite appropriate for developing students'

cultural awareness, as they are a form of entertainment and […] they are considered a means of transmitting cultural information".

According to Richards & Rodgers (2014), board games provide life-like scenarios and replicate real-life contexts: communication is both authentic and meaningful, fluency is an important dimension of this communication, and learning occurs through a process of creative construction by involving trial and error. Thus, board games are to be considered communicative activities par excellence since they create a playful learning environment where students are engaged, communication has a clear and substantial purpose and language mistakes are not penalised (Treher, 2011).

In Italy, only the legislation concerning Primary School and Kindergarten explicitly concerns games, and official evidence that Board Game-Based Learning is perceived as a useful resource only for pupils (Caon, 2022: 55). Since the equivocal opposition between play, meant reductively as leisure, and study, characterising of the school environment, is still strongly rooted, game is attributed a "filling function" representing a break between activities to recovery before returning to the commitment of study, often linked to the concept of fatigue and constriction (Siviy, 2016). To deconstruct these prejudices, it proves useful to distinguish "free games" and "educational games". Educational board games own three characteristics (Caon, 2022: 56), they are:

a. demanding: involving psycho-physical, cognitive and affective involvement;

b. continuous: constantly accompanying the life of the child and continuing to play a role in the life of the adolescent and then of the adult […];

c. progressive, not static, renewing, factors of cognitive, relational, affective growth, expanding knowledge and skills;

2.3.2 The Inclusive Dimension of Board Games

Inclusion appears to be a minor concern of Game-Based Learning research; nevertheless, hereafter is discussed an overview of the existing literature. According to Booth (2021: 189), board game communities tend to be characterised by an "overall friendliness and welcoming nature". Considering the results of Sousa (2020) and Veldthuis et al. (2021) studies, board games can cultivate a sense of inclusion within learning; this can be attributed either to their ability to promote a wide range of soft skills or because of their support of individuals who do not necessarily possess a particular disability. Moreover, Sousa et al. (2022: 4) claim that:

> Since inclusive education strongly emphasizes participation and interaction, and these are strongly present in analogue games (players largely play in direct face-to-face interaction and must continuously activate the game together to run it), tabletop games hold significant potential for inclusive education.

Eventually, in the board games field, inclusion concerns the acknowledgement of human diversity and its interaction with the game, along with the avoidance of barriers between the player and the desired playful experience (Hamilton, 2022). The current pathway in framing inclusion and educational systems aims to provide for a person-centred approach to welcome individuals' needs (Sousa, 2022: 4).

According to Berti (2023: 65), teachers have the possibility to choose from endless playful elements and:

> - "play" on the adaptability of rules and materials in structured and semi-structured games.
> - strengthen the class group through cooperative games.
> - stimulate the participation of students in inventing games and activities that involve and entertain all peers.
> - integrate in the lesson a narrative, creative or theatrical game that stimulates the imagination, the recognition and the expression of emotions.

Furthermore, Manuzzi (2002: 149) claims that it is necessary in educational contexts to spread a "game culture", which includes the enjoyment of playing conceived as an inclusive tool. Berti (2023) and Staccioli (2021) suggest widening the perspective of inclusive Game-based Learning and considering it a "playful system" comprehending the choice of the game as a tool, a playful attitude and a conscious temperament in its implementation to ensure the grasping of students incitements, interests and unexpected events.

2.4 Dixit: a Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

This subchapter will cover the board game protagonist of this thesis, namely Dixit. The game is recounted by addressing its creator and illustrator, its editions and expansions, and components and basic rules. Dixit is "a game of interpretation and fantasy with beautifully illustrated cards. Surprising, convivial and fun to play with family and friends" (https://www.asmodee.it/product/dixit/#game-details).

Dixit was born in 2002 from the idea of the French child psychiatrist Jean-Louis Roubira, who specialised in the mother-child relationship. Roubira has the habit of cutting images from children's magazines, that he usually employs during his psychotherapies for therapeutic purposes, in large part attributable to the works of Charles Perrault, made of an enchanted atmosphere, iconic characters, fantastic elements and astounding scenery. Production companies do not give credit to the idea of Roubira because Dixit is considered too abstract and intellectual, and also, the sum of royalties to pay for the images is enormous. After some time, he meets, introduced by a friend, Marie Cardouat, a French illustrator of stationery and children's books. Cardouat submitted a portfolio to Régis Bonnessée, founder of Libellud Studios, and won the commission to illustrate the cards for Dixit.

In 2008 the game was produced by Libellud, a game publisher founded in Poitiers, born thanks to Dixit. In 2009 Dixit was given the prize *As d'or - Jeu de l'Année* (French Game of the Year) at the *Festival International des Jeux* (International Festival of Games), and in the same year the box cover and scoring board underwent a makeover. The following year, it was nominated *Spiel des Jahres* (German Game of the Year), considered the most prestigious award for board and card games. From 2010

onwards each year an expansion is published, specifically: 'Quest' featuring eighty-four cards following the style and themes of those in the original version of the game; 'Journey' (2012) designed by Xavier Collette with a style akin to *Pixar* animated films, 'Origins' (2013) by Clément Lefevre, 'Daydreams' (2014) designed by Franck Dion, 'Memories' (2015) by Carine Hinder and Jérôme Pélissier, 'Revelations' (2016) created by Marina Coudray, inspired by Art Deco and Surrealism, 'Harmonies' (2017) illustrated by Paul Echegoyen, 'Anniversary' (2018) on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the game, created by all the artists who contributed in drawing illustrations of the previous expansions, and finally 'Mirrors' (2020), by the cartoonist Sebastien Telleschi.

Libellud, following the great success of Dixit, also published variants of the game: 'Dixit Odyssey' in 2011, whose cards are drawn by Pierô and coloured by Cardouat, 'Stella' (2021) illustrated by Jérôme Pélissier, and 'Dixit Disney Edition' (2023) with eighty-four cards, illustrated by Natalie Dombois, each representing a *Disney* or *Pixar* film. Furthermore, in 2022, a series of puzzles of 500 and 1,000 pieces reproducing in large format a selection of illustrations are published. Finally, in 2023, the application 'Dixit World' was launched worldwide. The game, translated into more than a dozen languages, in South Korea has even materialised in a local sitcom, which has increased exponentially sales. Hitherto, Dixit has over twelve million copies sold worldwide.

Inside the box, also illustrated in the style of Cardouat and organised in six convenient compartments, there are: eighty-four illustrated cards, eight voting dials, eight wooden rabbit pawns, a game board, and a rulebook. As anticipated, the cards created by Cardouat, are often a tribute to the great of art and literature, from Magritte to Dali. The various images selected respond to the sensitivity of the designer because they focus on childbirth, freedom, the adult-child relationship, poetry and love, themes familiar to Roubira. Players create the story from a simple image, giving shape to a signifier by embodying it in a meaning. The voting dials reflect the design of some illustrations, while the wooden rabbit pawns seem inspired by the White Rabbit of Lewis Carroll's masterpiece *Alice in Wonderland*; these components are in white, yellow, red, pink, purple, green, blue, and black colours. The scoreboard is characterised by a scoring track and a reminder of how to score points to facilitate the

scoring phase, especially for beginners. A more in-depth analysis of the visual and verbal features of the game is provided in the next chapter (see Chapter Three: Dixit: A Multimodal Analysis).

Regarding the rules of Dixit, the minimum number of players is three and the maximum eight, whereas the recommended age is from eight years old, however with some expedients, it can be played even by younger children; in fact, the game is characterised by a marked multi-generational nature that allows it to be played even by grandparents and grandchildren. Concerning the average length of a game, it is estimated at thirty minutes. Before starting the game, each player chooses a colour and takes the corresponding voting dial and rabbit pawn, to place on the starting space of the scoring track; moreover, the eighty-four cards are shuffled, and each player is assigned six of them. First and foremost, during each turn, a different player embodies the role of the 'storyteller'. The game ends when one or more players reach or exceed thirty points: the player with the most points is the winner.

Hereafter is presented an adaptation of the rules available on the Libellud website. Each turn may be divided into three stages: create a riddle, solve the riddle, and scoring phase. After the setup, the storyteller looks at the six cards in their hand and selects one that inspires them, without revealing it, from which they announce a clue aloud (a word or phrase). Each other player then selects, from the six cards in their hand, the card that they feel best illustrates the clue given by the storyteller. Then each player secretly gives the chosen card to the storyteller, who shuffles all the cards collected with their own.

The second phase implies that the storyteller randomly places the cards face up around the game board next to the indicated card slots, the numbers on the slots must remain visible. The other players' goal is to find the storyteller's card. Each player, except the storyteller, takes their voting dial, then secretly turns the wheel to display the number of the card that they think is the storyteller's card; players cannot vote for their own card. When everyone has voted, the players simultaneously reveal their voting dials and place them on the cards they refer to.

Subsequently, the scoring phase starts. The storyteller reveals which card is theirs and counts the votes they have received. If all players voted for the storyteller's card or if no player has voted for the storyteller's card, the storyteller does not score

points, while the other players each score two points. If some players voted for the storyteller's card, but not all of them, the storyteller scores three points and players who voted for the storyteller's card also score three points; the other players do not score points. In addition, each player, except the storyteller, scores one bonus point for each vote received on their own card. Players move their rabbit pawns along the scoring track one space per point scored.

All of the cards used during the turn are placed face up in a pile away from the game to form the discard pile. Each player draws one card from the draw pile to have six cards in their hand again. If there are not enough cards left in the draw pile to deal to all players, the remaining cards and the discard pile are shuffled to form the new draw pile. The player to the left of the storyteller becomes the new storyteller for the next turn.

The clue can be a sentence consisting of as many words as desired. It can be invented or borrowed from existing works (poetry, song, film, proverb...). The clue can even be sung, mimed or be an onomatopoeia. If the clue is too easy, for instance, too descriptive, or too difficult, too abstract or personal, the storyteller may not score any points. Players must find the right balance, so that at least one player, but not all of them, can find their card.

A characterising element of the board game Dixit is precisely the fact that, apart from some rules to follow, there is no limit to the fantasy of players and there are no right or wrong answers but only an opportunity to encourage the imagination of the players. The cards deliberately leave room for different interpretations to render the game experience enriching both if played with acquaintances and with unknown people, because, in any case, it allows players to discover new and original perspectives and points of view.

CHAPTER THREE

Dixit: A Multimodal Analysis

After debating inclusion, the development of inclusive practices in the Italian school system and Game-Based Learning with a specific focus on board games, it is time to conduct a multimodal analysis of Dixit. Concerning the structure of this chapter, firstly, it addresses the current landscape underpinning inclusivity in board games. Subsequently, the methodologies adopted to conduct the analysis of the board game, i.e. Baldry & Thibault's (2006) Cluster Analysis, Kress & van Leeuwen's (1996) model and Gee's (2011) Toolkit for Discourse Analysis, as well as the data, are presented. Furthermore, this chapter provides background contextual information regarding Dixit that represents a beneficial tool essential to establish an overview of the topic and to understand the hereinafter of the thesis. Finally, it proceeds with the multimodal analysis and discussion of the obtained results, followed by considerations not uniquely of visual and verbal nature, but furthermore related to the communicative and inclusive relevance of the components of the board game under analysis.

3.1 State of the Art

Board games, as proven by their long history and broad reach across cultures (https://medium.com/@peterattia/the-full-history-of-board-games-5e622811ce89), "are forms of entertainment that engage children and adults alike in a large variety of settings" (O'Neill, 2022: 82). Moreover, according to Sousa et al. (2023: 10) "board games seem to have a relevant role in the promotion of several aspects that are transversal to the success of the learning process, both at psychological and cognitive levels".

As far as inclusion is concerned, as stated by Booth (2021: 189), the board game community tends to be characterised by an "overall friendliness and welcoming nature," aligned with an industry that is mostly willing to receive players' feedback and hear their needs. Additionally, authors including Sousa (2020) and Veldthuis et al. (2021) assert that board games foster a wide range of soft skills and benefit people

with specific disabilities or conditions, therefore promoting a sense of inclusion in the learning process. At the same time, however, Sousa et al. (2023: 10) argue that:

> Although the board game community and industry are seen as particularly inclusive (Booth, 2021), inclusion and accessibility appear to be a minor concern of [...] game-based learning research. Nevertheless [...] the potential in promoting a sense of inclusion in the learning process, which can be provided by board games, is also highlighted.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (see 2.3.1 Board Games in Language Education), studies conducted to date on board games have explored the subject focusing on their effectiveness as tools to increase learners' interest and motivation to learn a new language (Dehganzadeh et al., 2020; Flores, 2015; Rahmadani et al., 2024) and to practice specific learning outcomes related to grammar (Mattheoudakis & Panteliou, 2023; Mavroudi, 2021) and vocabulary (Panmei & Waluyo, 2023; Zainal, 2023). However, the multimodal analysis of the board game Dixit in terms of visual and verbal features and corresponding communicative and inclusive relevance has not yet received due consideration from scholars. The aim of the current investigation is to examine meaning-making elements in the board game such as the box, the rulebook, the game board, and other components as well as to identify possible inclusive communication practices.

3.2 Data and Methodology

As regards data collection, components of the board game were retrieved through manual research on the Libellud Studios website (https://www.libellud.com/en/resources/dixit/). As addressed in Chapter One (see 1.1 Building Blocks of Inclusion: Key Terminology and Definition) the definition of inclusion to which this thesis is inspired to is provided by Gaspari (2011: 23), namely, the participation of all students in a democratic environment, supportive of differences and diversities. Therefore, the criterion of selection of the material followed an

inclusion-oriented approach, that is to say, the first and classic version of Dixit was chosen because it is considered the most suitable to ensure an active and welcoming participation of all the students involved in the experimental study underpinning this thesis. This seemed to be the most appropriate choice in order to conduct a multimodal analysis, investigating materials considered representatives in terms of visual and verbal practices, in addition to their communicative role. A quantitative investigation was not considered suitable due to the type of investigation and the consequent limited amount of resources examined. Hence, the sample consists of the components of the board game Dixit: box, rulebook, game board, voting dials and wooden pawns.

The methodological approach adopted to conduct the present research is multimodality; more specifically, visual aspects are examined using Baldry & Thibault's (2006) Cluster Analysis to investigate clusters and identify their function and realisation, while Kress & van Leeuwen's (1996) model is used to analyse the just mentioned clusters. To better understand Baldry & Thibault's (2006) cluster analysis[1], it proves necessary to define what a 'cluster' is, namely (Baldry & Thibault, 2006: 31):

> a local grouping of items, [...] [which] may be visual, verbal and so on and are
> spatially proximate thereby defining a specific region or subregion of the page
> as a whole. The items in a cluster are functionally related both to each other
> and to the whole to which they belong as parts

According to Takayoshi & Selfe (2007: 1), Baldry & Thibault (2006) propose the method of investigation to face texts that "may include still and moving images, animations, color, words, music and sound". As stated by Baldry & Thibault (2006), elements which can be detected in a static image are hereafter reported. First of all, participants, namely, anyone or anything involved in the meaning-making of the message; the relationships between participants and their actions, i.e., processes; the written or spoken verbal component of the message; kinesics, namely body

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[1] The main model of inspiration for Baldry & Thibault's (2006) cluster analysis is systemic functional linguistics, "an alternative to the very abstract and formal theories of syntax" (Baldry & Thibault, 2006: xi).

movements, gestures, direction of gaze, hand position; and proxemics, the space among participants. It is important to analyse the elements present in the components of the board game and how they are positioned because the proximity or distance between them holds significance in terms of the impression that the beneficiaries have about the game and can also be an indication of the purpose of the game developers.

Concerning Kress & van Leeuwen's framework (1996), the authors offer (2006: 1):

> usable descriptions of major compositional structures which have become established as conventions in the course of the history of Western visual semiotics, and to analyse how they are used to produce meaning by contemporary image-makers.
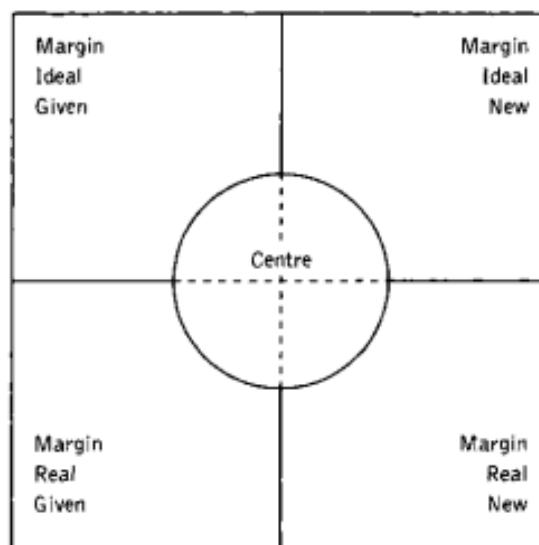

Figure 1. The dimensions of visual space
Source: Kress & van Leeuwen (2006: 197)

Figure 1 depicts the layout of meaning-making in images employed in this investigation which involves the following sections: left and right, top and bottom, and centre and margin. According to Kress & van Leeuwen (2006: 181), the horizontal structure complies with visual information as "Given" or "New". Elements on the left are presented as "Given", something the viewer already knows, "commonsensical", and "self-evident". On the contrary, features placed on the right are meant "problematic", "contestable", something that is not yet known and, therefore, the viewer must pay attention to them. As regards top and bottom, authors including Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) and Holsanova et al. (2006) state that (*ibid*.):

> The vertical dimension refers to the placement of the information from top to bottom, graduating from general on the top to more specific meaning at the bottom. The upper section is considered to give idealized or generalized gist of the information and it is presented as the 'Ideal'. On the other side, the lower section in compositions is perceived as specific, informative and practical, and presented as the 'Real'.

Eventually, according to Kress & van Leeuwen (2006: 196):

> For something to be presented as Centre means that it is presented as the nucleus of the information to which all the other elements are in some sense subservient. The Margins are these ancillary, dependent elements. In many cases the Margins are identical or at least very similar to each other, so that there is no sense of a division between Given and New and/or Ideal and Real elements among them.

In contrast, verbal features are investigated with Gee's (2011) Toolkit for Discourse Analysis. As stated by Cesiri (2015: 115), 'discourse' is "the organization and expression of knowledge, ideas, experience that is rooted in language and specific

socio-cultural contexts", thus, the analysis of discourse involves the discourse community, namely: speakers, individuals, communities, domains. Regarding the Toolkit for Discourse Analysis, Gee (2011: 1) stresses that he is basing the approach on a perspective that "sees discourse analysis as tied closely to the details of language structure (grammar), but that deals with meaning in social […] and cultural terms, a broader approach to meaning than is common in much mainstream linguistics". Furthermore, Gee (*ibid*.: i) provides:

> the tools necessary to work with discourse analysis, with engaging step-by-step tasks features throughout the book. Each tool is clearly explained, along with guidance on how to use it, and authentic data is provided for readers to practice using the tools.

Gee (*ibid*.: 1) also argues that:

> any theory of discourse analysis is made up of a set of tools with which to analyse language in use. In my view, no one theory is universally right or universally applicable. Each theory offers tools which work better for some kinds of data than they do for others. Furthermore, anyone engaged in their own discourse analysis must adapt the tools they have taken from a given theory to the needs and demands of their own study.

In the light of the aforementioned, the discourse analysis of the board game employs only some of the twenty-seven tools considered more suitable for the material under investigation, below an overview is reported. "Tool 4: The Subject Tool" examines who is being constructed as the subject of a sentence and the implications this has for the discourse (Gee, 2011: 25). "The Doing and Not Just saying Tool" considers both what is said and what is being done through language use, the social action performed (*ibid*.: 52). The eighth tool, "The Vocabulary Tool", analyses word choices to understand what they communicate about social identities (*ibid*.: 61). Furthermore, the

understanding of why language is used in one particular way to accomplish specific purposes is the aim of "Tool 9: The Why This Way and Not That Way Tool" (*ibid*.: 63). Eventually, the tenth tool is addressed, namely "The Integration tool" that examines how different elements of language work together to create meaning (*ibid*.: 68).

3.3 Contextual Information

Before proceeding with the multimodal analysis, it is necessary to understand the contextual information of the materials analysed and the communicative situation behind their creation. Therefore, hereafter are presented some elements that contribute to the investigation of Dixit, both in terms of verbal and visual components of the board game.

First and foremost, Dixit is a French board game designed by Jean-Louis Roubira, a child psychiatrist, and illustrated by the artist Marie Cardouat. It was launched by Libellud Studios, a French board game publisher, founded in 2008 in Poitiers by Régis Bonnessée. Libellud "develop[s] innovative games revolving around imaginary worlds, sharing and dreams" (https://www.libellud.com/en/). Employing the words of Libellud Studios (*ibid*.):

> At Libellud, we are committed to offering you games both accessible to play
> with the whole family, and tactical to be enjoyed with friends. [...] Dixit was
> the first game using image interpretation mechanics within an ever-changing
> dream world.

In July 2020, Libellud joined the Asmodee Group, "a leading international game publisher and distributor [...] headquartered in Guyancourt, France" that retailed their products in many countries (https://corporate.asmodee.com/news/libellud-editor-of-dixit-and-mysterium-joins-asmodee/).

In addition, Dixit won a considerable number of awards; hereafter is an overview of the most renowned. In 2009 Dixit was given the prize "*As d'or - Jeu de*

l'Année" (French Game of the Year) at the *Festival International des Jeux* (International Festival of Games) (https://www.festivaldesjeux-cannes.com/fr/festival-label-as-d-or-jeu-de-l-annee) and "*Juego del Año*" (Spanish Game of the Year). Furthermore, in 2010 it was nominated "Best of Show" (Italian Game of the Year) at Lucca Comics & Games, the largest game event in Europe and the second globally, after *Comiket* in Tokyo (Cipriani, 1995: 127) and "*Spiel des Jahres*" (German Game of the Year) (https://www.brettspiele-report.de/index.php?s=dixit&Submit=Suchen), "considered the most prestigious award for board and card games", indeed, "a *Spiel des Jahres* nomination can increase the typical sales of a game [up to 1900%]" (https://medium.com/@peterattia/the-full-history-of-board-games-5e622811ce89). According to (*ibid.*):

> The criteria on which games are evaluated are: **Game concept**: originality, playability, game value; **Rule structure**: composition, clearness, comprehensibility; **Layout**: box, board, rules; **Design**: functionality, workmanship.

Further features to take into account when analysing a specialised discourse, namely "a discourse used in domain specific-contexts [that] can involve technical and scientific levels of language (registers) as well as case-specific contexts of usage" (Cesiri, 2015: 116), according to Brown (1983: 38-39) are: the setting, namely where the text is produced or used, the communicative intention of the producer, the addresser and the addressee participating in the communicative event, the medium, the content, and the level of formality.

Dixit's verbal components can be found in its box and rulebook. Accordingly, the expected addressee is the general public, probably, families or otherwise board game enthusiasts; indeed, it is recommended from the age of 8. The medium used is written and the communicative intention of the author is to convey basic information and explain how to play the board game. Concerning the level of formality, it is low, consistent with the target of potential players.

Moreover, as reported by Cesiri (2015: 116-117), to differentiate a text from another, the following elements should be considered:

field: the object of communication (its topic), tenor: the relationship between participants (the writer and the readers, the speaker and the audience), mode: the channel (printed, video, multimodal) and medium (spoken or written) of communication.

The field is information such as the number of players, recommended age and playing time, as well as the rules to follow and some tips. On the other hand, the mode of textual components in Dixit is multimodal, both verbal and visual. Eventually, the illustrators establish a relationship of reliability with the public, giving useful instructions to enjoy the playing experience.

3.4 Visual and Verbal Analyses

After presenting the methodology adopted and taking into account the observations brought to light regarding the context of situation, the visual and verbal analysis of Dixit is hereafter reported. The components of the board game are analysed individually in terms of their most significant meaning-making features and corresponding communicative and inclusive relevance. Concerning the visual analysis, Baldry & Thibault's (2006) framework is used to detect clusters and identify their function and realisation, which are consequently investigated employing Kress & van Leeuwen's (1996) model.

3.4.1 Box
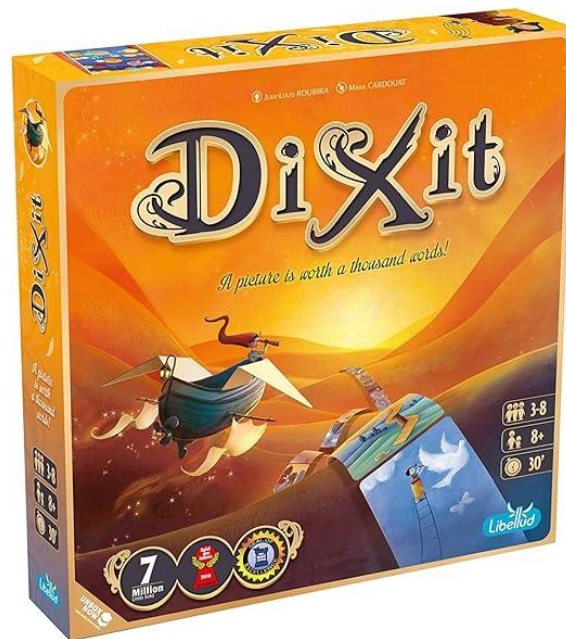
Figure 2. Dixit box

Source: https://www.libellud.com/en/dixit-universe/

As can be observed in Figure 2, the first element under analysis is the box of Dixit. Consistent with the objectives of this study, it is considered sufficient to analyse the front face of the box and exclude the other sides from the examination inasmuch they display the same features; therefore, the front cover is deemed to be the most representative part to address.

Employing Baldry & Thibault's framework (2006) it proves possible to propose the following considerations. The participants involved in the front face are a fantasy subject in a wooden sailboat and a landscape composed of yellow and orange dunes scattered with illustrated cards. As regards the fantasy subject, they are a young character, smiling in a veiled way, wearing a blue and gold striped shirt and a long red hat who observes the surroundings with a monocle held in the left hand. The only living element of this box cover appears giving the right side to the observer and the gaze aims at the landscape. Being Dixit a board game which encourages imagination, also the boat depicted in its box is peculiar; in fact, it is equipped with sails and wings that allow flight. The landscape presents orange colours both for the great dunes and

the sky, sunny and concurrently starry. Furthermore, dunes are marked with a path made of some of the illustrated cards protagonists of the game. This path could be meant as a metaphor for creativity which guides players in envisioning new imaginary worlds, indeed, the foreground cards show two types of stairs, in turn symbolising the journey towards fantasy. The abovementioned visual elements are placed at the bottom of the box to leave room for the name of the game that occupies most of the upper surface.

The front face of the box presents additional elements that are worth analysing, namely the logo, information concerning the number of players, the recommended age and playing time, and some of the prizes the board game was awarded, as mentioned in the previous paragraph. Specifically, to display the basic knowledge necessary to enjoy the playing experience, there are three black rectangles adorned with a gold border, each showing an icon and numbers. Respectively these boxes contain three figures and the minimum and maximum number of players per time, an older and a younger silhouette to highlight the multigenerational nature of Dixit, and a clock to define the medium length of a game, namely thirty minutes. Moreover, the box shows the number of units sold, a prize considered to be one the most renowned accolades in the game industry, "*Spiel des Jahres*" and a "seal of excellence". Each of the three data is placed in a black circle to enhance the colours employed to convey these facts: white, red and yellow and gold and blue. The edge of the three-rounded shape is gold, and, at the ends, it is decorated to simulate the ears of a trophy. Lastly, in the lower right corner emerges the light blue and white "Libellud" logo, which resembles a dragonfly.

The front face of the box partially complies with the model proposed by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996). Overall, the principle whereby the upper section represents general information and the lower margin more specific and informative content is respected. In fact, in the lower left margin the prizes bestowed to the game can be detected, namely, practical information known by the general public, deeming the reputation of the game. On the other hand, the lower right margin shows a preview of the illustrated cards and useful information for those who are preparing to play Dixit for the first time, e.g. a novelty. The majority of the verbal elements in this box can be found in the upper central part: the name of the game, which occupies about a quarter

of the box, catalyses the attention of the viewer which subsequently shifts to the motto and the names of the designer and the illustrator of Dixit.

Hereafter are reported observations identifiable in terms of verbal elements guided by the Toolkit provided by Gee (2011). First and foremost, in this box the verbal elements are reduced to the minimum and condensed in the upper and lower margins. The first element to lure is, predictably, the name of the game written in a refined cursive font. The writing is black with a golden outline, matching the other features and the recurring colour range of the various verbal components, and highlights especially the letters 'd' and 'x' adorned with graceful decorations.

Below the name of the game, positioned about a centimeter distant as a subtitle, is placed the motto of the game "A picture is worth a thousand words!" that embodies the spirit of the game and is repeated several times in the rulebook. Its purpose is to draw attention and entice the observer to try the game and show a simple black italic font. Nevertheless, the elements placed in the highest portion of the box, as well as the only ones written in capital letters are the names of the designer and the illustrator of Dixit. Both are preceded by a small icon, respectively a bulb representing the concept of ideation and a brush drawing a stroke that refers to the artistic aspect. The recurrence of the phenomenon of the substitution of verbal elements with symbols, detectable also on the game board and the rulebook, is hereafter addressed.

A further instance of the usage of symbols to replace verbal features, indeed, is provided by information relating to the number and age of players and the average length of a game, preceded by small symbols, previously explained, that minimise the employment of words and simultaneously ensure understanding. On the other hand, as regards the information in the lower left margin, the employment of verbal elements is more substantial although still restrained. In fact, three captions can be detected: the quantity of units sold, whose number "7", underlined, occupies most of the circle, the name of the award "*Spiel des Jahres*" and the year in which it was won, e.g. "2010", and finally the lettering "seal of excellence" all written in a minimal white typeface.

3.4.2 Rulebook
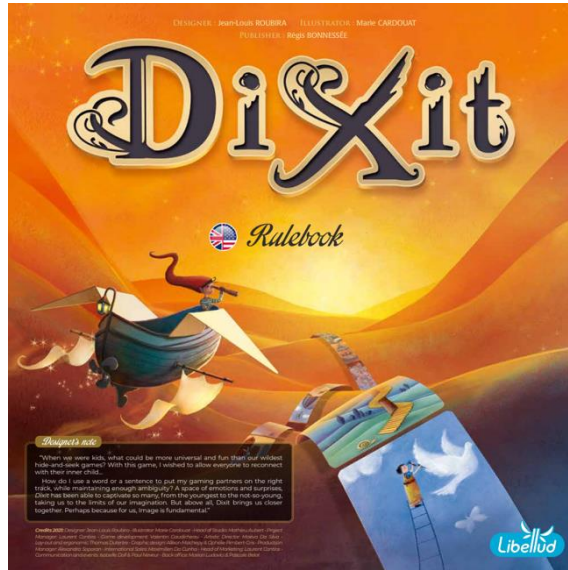
Figure 3. Dixit rulebook page 1

Source: https://www.libellud.com/en/dixit-universe/

Figure 4. Dixit rulebook pages 2-3 Source: https://www.libellud.com/en/dixit-universe/

As can be noticed in Figures 3 and 4, the next item under consideration is the Dixit rulebook consisting of a total of four pages. This analysis focuses on the examination of the first three pages since the last one is not considered pursuing the nature and objectives of the present investigation. As regards the elements related to Baldry &

Thibault's (2006) framework, the first page, depicted in Figure 3, exactly traces the description provided for Figure 2, except for the absence of the elements depicted in the lower margin, described in the previous paragraph, and the addition of a brown box with a gold frame to report a designer's note.

Moving on to the detection of meaning-making elements in the following pages (Figure 4), it is possible to observe the employment of frames of different sizes to contain various useful information to guide the game experience. The background faithfully reproduces the design present in the box (Figure 2), therefore characterised by dunes with bright colours, yellow and orange, at the top, and darker, tending to brown, at the bottom of the page. In the upper segment of the second page of the rulebook, two squares of similar size are located: on the left corner, there is a white box whose gold title is inserted in a dark blue rectangle, while on the opposite side, a yellow box with a gold frame, whose blue title is inside a gold rectangle-shaped frame, can be detected. The rest of the page is characterised by an additional square following the same pattern and palette as the one on the top left, containing three gold frames one of which is clashed. Moreover, the third page is composed of four squares of rectangular shape and approximately the same size; three of these show the same colours as the one in the upper right corner of the second page. The only box deviating from the two recurring patterns described above is the one located at the bottom of the third page which is blue with a white title in contrast with the blue elliptical where it is inserted.

Other significant visual elements reported are the game board and some of the eighty-four cards in addition to stylised icons of rabbits, clouds and voting dials aimed at facilitating the clearness and understanding of the rules. The abovementioned symbols, which can also be found on the game board, will be visually analysed in the forthcoming paragraph.

As far as Kress & van Leeuwen's (1996) framework is concerned, the considerations made for Figure 2 can also be applied to Figure 3. On the other hand, as regards Figure 4, it can be stated that the model is in part respected. On the second page, indeed, information about how to play is placed in the central part, while at the upper margin are relegated the most general facts such as a game overview and a description of the setup. Instead, confronting the third page, the presence of specific

and practical information in the lower section can be ascertained, namely the precise rules to follow in case of a game with three players.

Proceeding with the Discourse Analysis employing Gee's (2011) Toolkit, hereinafter are reported considerations regarding the verbal features in the rulebook of Dixit. As regards Figure 3, credits (1) may be detected, i.e. the list of professionals who participated in the creation of the game, written in italics and a quote of the author characterised by a very different style from the one shown in Figure 4, that will be examined shortly. Specifically, regarding pronouns, 'I' and 'we' are used; the first person singular pronoun displays two connotations. Through it, the child psychiatrist and designer of the game Roubira recounts his hopes (2) and, in addition, puts himself in the player's shoes (3). Then, the pronoun 'we' conveys a sense of sharing and nostalgia for childhood (4). The purpose of this note is to create an emotional connection between the designer and beneficiaries of the game.

(1) *Designer: Jean-Louis Roubira – Illustrator: Marie Cardouat – Head of Studio: Mathieu Aubert – Project Manager: Laurent Contias*
(2) **I** wished to allow everyone to reconnect with their inner child...
(3) How do **I** use a word or a sentence to put my gaming partners on the right track, while maintaining enough ambiguity?
(4) When **we** were kids, what could be more universal and fun than our wildest hide-and-seek games?

Concerning Figure 4, the first observation that may be drawn is the use of very similar and linear fonts for all the verbal components of the rulebook under examination. To distinguish the titles of the various sections from the text, a recurrent strategy is the use of different colours, in contrast, increased font size and bold (5). Instead, in the body text, to highlight pivotal words, numbers or sentences, in addition to bold (6), italics is also utilised (7).

(5) **Game overview**

(6) **But this clue must be subtle because, if everyone finds their card, the storyteller does not score at all!**

(7) *8 card slots*

As anticipated, a further frequent pattern is the use of small symbols such as rabbits, and various stylised game components placed next to the words they refer to or even replacing them, for instance, clouds substituting the words "point" and "points". Also, with reference to the setup, to list the components and steps to follow before starting the game a bulleted list (8), letters (9) and numbers (10) are detected.

(8) ◆84 *Dixit* cards

(9) **A** *1 scoring track*

(10) **1** Each player chooses a color, then takes the corresponding dial and rabbit pawn.

An important aspect of this text is provided by pronouns, in relation to which a focus will be realised hereafter. 'They' is the most recurrent pronoun and is displayed in two different connotations. The first case is the alleged gender-neutral 'singular they' referring to the storyteller (11) that follows plural agreement rules while the semantic reference is singular. The second connotation of the third-person plural pronoun pertains to the other players (12).

(11) **They** select one [card] that inspires them (without revealing it), from which **they** say a clue aloud.

(12) [...] the players simultaneously the players simultaneously reveal their voting dials and place them on the cards **they** refer to.

Taking into account the use of verbs, simple present, simple past and present perfect are the most recurrent. The present simple tense (13) is employed to illustrate the rules and it is detectable in every portion of the text. The past simple (14) is instead used, above all, in the explanation of the scoring phase. Lastly, present perfect (15) may be detected in the text section addressing how to behave at the end of each turn.

(13) The first player who **finds** a clue to form a riddle **becomes** the storyteller for the first turn.

(14) Some players **voted** for the storyteller's card, but not all of them.

(15) If at the end of a turn, one or more players **have reached** or **exceeded** 30 on the scoring track [...]

On the whole, the verbal analysis of this rulebook has shown the specific choices at the textual and paratextual levels that were involved in the creation of an accurate and effective outcome in the conveyance of the communicative message. Consequently, the text achieves its communicative intention, namely, to convey how to play Dixit.

3.4.3 Game Board, Voting Dials, Wooden Pawns

Figure 5. Dixit game board and voting dials
Source: https://www.libellud.com/en/dixit-universe/

Figure 6. Dixit wooden pawns
Source: https://www.libellud.com/en/dixit-universe/

Figure 5 represents the square-shaped game board of Dixit composed of a scoring track, eight card slots and a reminder of how to score. Hereinafter, the elements of the board are analysed from a visual viewpoint, since verbal components are not displayed, with the exception of some numbers, not particularly noteworthy.

The board is blue and discloses thirty boxes of rectangular shape furnished with clouds containing numbers in ascending order from one to thirty; specifically, the multiple numbers of five are blue, while the remaining are white with a thin blue outline. The beginning of the path, where the pawns are placed waiting to start the game, is in turn a cloud with footprints to highlight the starting point and the track is made further visible appearing clearer and brighter than the background of the board. Additionally, on each side of the square board, there are two slots to place the players' cards: they are gold-coloured rectangles each marked with a number from one to eight, the maximum number of players; the black numbers are inserted in gold rounds embellished with decorations on the right and left.

On the opposite side of the starting point, there is a sort of table, characterised by three rows and four columns, as an aid for players to remember how to score points. In the first column, to represent the narrator, a single black and gold rabbit with a yellow thought bubble is depicted, indicating the player who is speaking during that round, while to display the other players three gold rabbits are illustrated. Once more, in the first row, the three bunnies are employed, however, in this case, they are green meaning that the player guesses, and vice versa red if the player is wrong; to emphasise the previous concept, the green rabbits are accompanied by ticks and the red ones by crosses. The leftover cells of the table, gold in the second and fourth column and yellow in the fourth one, are marked by clouds representing the points scored, while if hidden by the red prohibition symbol they indicate a dearth of points. To the right of the table, beside the last row, there is an additional yellow cell with a white frame

containing a voting dial and a card, an equal sign and a cloud meaning that if a player's card, in a round in which they are not narrators, is voted they score a point.

On this occasion, the model of Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) does not seem to be followed, in fact, the boxes of the scoring track and slots for cards are evenly distributed in the game board. The only exception is represented by the reminder of how to score points which, being a crucial element, is centrally placed in line with what Kress & van Leeuwen state regarding information located in central sections.

Additionally, the rulebook establishes that each player is assigned a voting dial and a wooden pawn of the self-same colour to choose between white, yellow, red, pink, purple, green, blue and black. Even in this case, the below-mentioned components are devoid of verbal elements, except for numbers in the voting dials, therefore, their analysis is carried out only from a visual perspective.

Concerning the eight voting dials, they consist of 3 elements, 2 in cardboard and 1 in plastic. The cardboard elements have respectively an elliptical and a round shape with a corrugated edge, while the plastic element allows to join the two cardboards through a system of interlocking. The elliptical-shaped components depict some of the illustrations of the eighty-four cards of the game, whereas the gold-coloured rotating elements show numbers from one to eight that enable the player to vote for the narrator's card during each round.

As regards the eight wooden pawns (Figure 6), at first glance they remind of rabbits, however, in line with the fantasy spirit of the game, if they are observed from a different angle, they can, in turn, represent ducks, if imagining the ears of the rabbit as the beak and the tail as the front paws. Consequently, this can mean that the same item considered from a different viewpoint can mutate completely, and, therefore, imagination and interpretation pave the way, especially in this board game.

The crucial and essential element of Dixit is its cards, characterised by eighty-four different illustrations. For the purposes of this analysis, an in-depth visual examination is not considered suitable, nevertheless, in the next chapter, designated to the experimentation, will be provided some instances deemed exemplifying how the illustrations are interpreted from different viewpoints.

3.5 Discussion and General Remarks

The considerations that may be drawn taking into account both the contextual information, analysed in subchapter 3.3, and the visual and verbal features, presented in subchapters 3.4.1, 3.4.2 and 3.4.3, are of multiple natures. The main question that these observations will answer is the employment of inclusive practices in the game components.

From a visual perspective, what emerges is the use of an array of warm colours such as gold, yellow, orange and brown counterposed to cold shades, blue and indigo. The outcome is a pleasant and cheerful front box, to which contributes also the adornments in the name of the game, in the accolades and also evoked in the paratextual elements in the rulebook. In addition, rectangular and square geometric shapes with rounded corners are used in the game board and in the rulebook in order to schematise different types of information, such as the setup of the game, how to play and the scoring phase.

In terms of inclusion, the graphic aspect of the game, namely themes and imagery, is representative of variegated cultural backgrounds, genres and ages. An example is the multi-generational nature of the game that can be played in the family allowing constructive dialogues between several perspectives. This inclusive representation, furthermore, allows players to experience a sense of belonging, comfort and engagement with the game.

On the other hand, the verbal aspect presents dynamics prone to be accessible to different communication styles and not to perpetuate stereotypical linguistic forms. The game opts to avoid the use of heteronormative assumptions and employs the gender-neutral 'singular they' to embrace the identity of players who may feel all represented and welcomed. Also, the imperative is almost totally avoided since it could be interpreted as a form of power exertion and therefore ensures not to reinforce societal values such as the emphasis on competition or the celebration of individual expression.

Some paratextual features detected in the rules prove helpful for players with specific learning disorders (SLD); instances are hereafter presented. The use of symbols associated with certain words eases players with dyslexia by providing them

with a graphic element in support of the text. Moreover, for players with dyscalculia proves beneficial the employment of symbolic marks to support the scoring phase.

Overall, Dixit constructs a playful and collaborative social environment by encouraging creativity and promoting empathy. Consequently, the incorporation of diverse imaginations allows players to handle and appreciate different perspectives and experiences in an authentic manner, fostering a sense of community and inclusivity of different backgrounds.

This board game, nevertheless, shows some limitations in terms of inclusion. In fact, the use of a cursive font compromises transparency for people with dyslexia, therefore, it may prove favourable to think of compensatory tools such as simplified rules written in block letters. Moreover, the aid provided by graphic signs, i.e. rabbits and clouds, and colour codes benefits players with dyslexia and dyscalculia, however, at the same time, jeopardises comprehension in people with dyschromatopsia and daltonism.

Finally, inclusive practices in board game design are evolving, driven by a growing recognition of the importance of representation, accessibility and cultural sensitivity, in creating enjoyable and meaningful gaming experiences for all players. The last chapter of this research will discuss alternatives and readjustments of the game and its components to enhance further accessibility and inclusivity.

CHAPTER FOUR

Students' Perception of Dixit as an Educational Engagement Means: Methodology and Results

After debating the inclusion realm, Cooperative Learning, Game-based Learning, and a Multimodal Analysis of the board game Dixit, it is time to conduct the experimentation underpinning this thesis. Concerning the structure of this chapter, firstly, it addresses the current literature related to the implementation of board games in educational settings, and it provides research questions and aims of the study. Subsequently, the methodology section focuses on the participants' profiles, the materials used, and the procedures adopted throughout the experimentation for data collection and analysis. Finally, it proceeds with the display of the main results obtained from the observation of students and the administering of questionnaires.

4.1 Introduction and Research Questions

As discussed in Chapter 2 (see 2.3 Game-Based Learning in Language Education; 2.3.1 Board Games in Language Education and 2.3.2 The Inclusive Dimension of Board Games), studies conducted to date on the implementation of board games in linguistic educational settings have explored the subject focusing on their effectiveness as tools to increase learners' interest and motivation to learn a new language (Dehganzadeh et al., 2020; Flores, 2015; Rahmadani et al., 2024) and to practice specific learning outcomes such as grammar (Mattheoudakis & Panteliou, 2023; Mavroudi, 2021) and vocabulary learning (Panmei & Waluyo, 2023; Zainal, 2023). Nevertheless, students' perception of the implementation of board games in educational contexts in terms of inclusion and cooperation has not yet received due consideration from scholars. Therefore, there is a lack of a basis of data in a context of Italian as L2 to wholly understand how students feel about the usage of board games as didactic tools.

The aim of this study is to contribute to filling this gap by investigating, through a case study, how students perceive the implementation of the board game Dixit as an

educational engagement means, in terms of inclusion and cooperation, in a context of Italian as L2. Specifically, this research seeks to understand how students feel regarding the use of board games in educational settings in the light of their previous experiences and the current experimentation, identify why in their opinion Dixit encourages or discourages cooperation and inclusion, and propose suggestions to improve the use of the board game as a didactic tool from inclusive and cooperative perspectives. The following research questions are addressed:

1) How do students perceive the implementation of board games in educational settings?

2) What aspects of Dixit as an educational engagement means promote cooperation?

3) What aspects of Dixit as an educational engagement means promote inclusion?

4) What changes can be implemented to improve the usage of Dixit in educational settings?

4.2 Methodology

To conduct this experimentation a mixed methods case study design was adopted. Quantitative data are collected through multiple choice questions of a questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics (Nick, 2007), whereas qualitative data is derived from open questions and the observation of students during the research and analysed employing grounded theory and realistic evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). The methodology adopted throughout the study is aimed at promoting inclusive didactic and cooperative learning. In particular, priority is given to: student-centred experimentation modes that respect the specific characteristics of participants and their times and attitudes (Tangney, 2014), active involvement modalities that provide for the management of groups in order to encourage the direct engagement of participants in the research process (Fedeli, 2019), 'peer education' approach in which students, sharing their skills and knowledge with the group, assume in turn the role of learner or teacher (Pellai et al., 2002), and the methodology of 'learning by doing', namely,

students are encouraged to understand reality and give space to their curiosity within game-based learning (Brucchietti, 2010).

4.2.1 Participants

This study involves a sample of nineteen international students attending the 'Foundation Year' at Ca' Foscari School for International Education, located in Venice. According to Ca' Foscari (https://www.unive.it/pag/34804/):

> The Ca' Foscari Foundation Year aims to prepare international students for undergraduate studies at an Italian university. Each student chooses a study track in the area of interest for their future studies, combined with a language component that allows them to focus on reaching the language requirements for enrolling in a degree programme in either Italian or English.

Specifically, students participated in this research in a context of Italian L2 lessons of A2 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), during the third trimester of the Academic Year 2023-2024. Before the Italian course started, a language placement test was conducted by the School to determine the proficiency level of students and enrol them into the appropriate courses. All participants started attending Italian A1 level classes in October 2023 three times a week and upgraded to A2 level in January 2024, reducing the lessons to two per week. Furthermore, from November 2023 to March 2024, some of the students benefited from additional tutoring lessons, conducted by the researcher of this study, on a weekly basis, which were replaced from April to June 2024 with the presence of the tutor as a co-teacher one lesson a week.
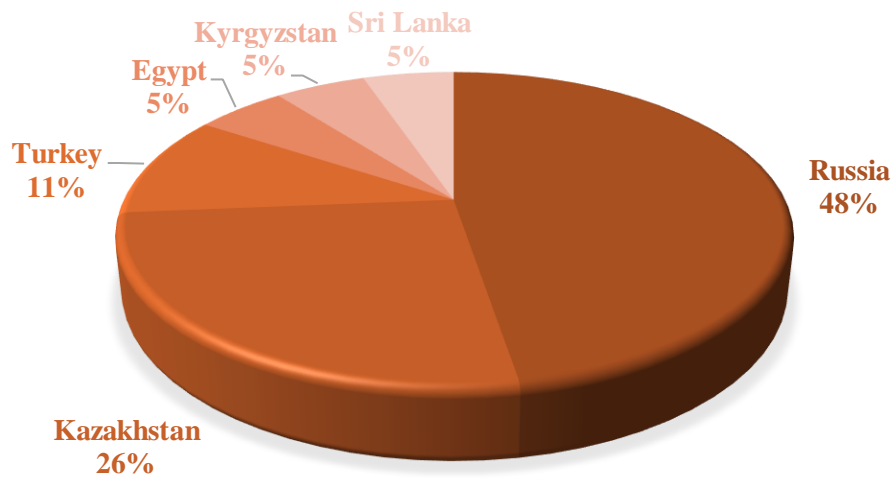
Figure 7. Participants' countries of origin
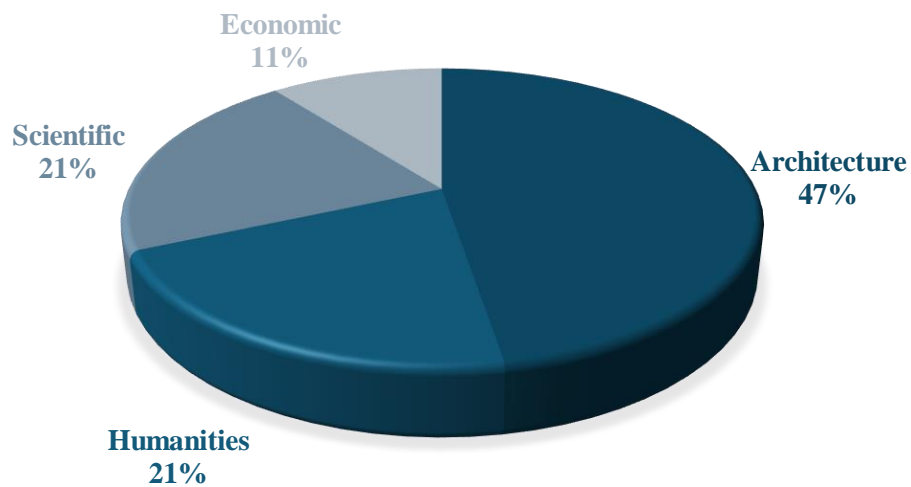
Figure 8. Participants' areas of education

Participants are mostly female (N=14, 74% female, N=5, 26% male), and their ages range from eighteen to twenty-five years old (77% are eighteen or nineteen years old). Regarding their countries of origin, shown in Figure 7, they are from: Russia (N=9, 48%), Kazakhstan (N=5, 26%), Turkey (N=2, 11%), Egypt (N=1, 5%), Kyrgyzstan (N=1, 5%), and Sri Lanka (N=1, 5%). All of them completed their secondary education

and obtained a school-leaving certificate in their country of origin. Figure 8 depicts participants' areas of education that are also very heterogeneous: Architecture (N=9, 47%), Humanities (N=4, 21%), Scientific (N=4, 21%), and Economic (N=2, 11%).

4.2.2 Materials

In order to investigate students' perception of the board game Dixit as an educational engagement means in terms of inclusion and cooperation, materials of various natures were employed. Before participants were asked to play the board game, forms with informed consent (Appendix A) were distributed, and the objectives of the research and the rules of the game were presented to them through slides created with 'Canva' (Appendix B), an online graphic design tool, displayed on a projector cover. Furthermore, with prior authorisation from students, the entire experimentation was recorded.

Subsequently, all the components of the board game were employed. The students were handed illustrated cards and voting dials, while, to facilitate the procedures, the game board and the wooden pawns were managed by the researcher with the help of the teacher of the course, always remaining visible to the students. For the whole duration of the game, an overview of the illustrated cards (Appendix C), placed in seven rows of ten cards each and two rows with seven cards each, for a total of eighty-four, retrieved on the Libellud Studios website, was projected to ease the voting procedure (https://www.libellud.com/en/resources/dixit/). Moreover, while students were playing Dixit, the researcher utilised a form (Appendix D) to collect significant actions performed by participants. The paper was structured in the form of a table with five columns, each dedicated to: name of the participant(s), code to identify the illustrated card they are referring to, description of the card, points obtained in that round, and notes.

Furthermore, a questionnaire (Appendix E), created on 'Google Forms', was sent via mail to all the students, whose answers were synchronised on 'Google Sheets' to facilitate the collection and subsequent analysis of data. The questionnaire was novel designed, since the papers mentioned in the introductory section did not include any research instrument that could be reused or modified for the purpose of this

research. The questionnaire included eighteen questions: five related to demographic information (four closed-ended and one multiple choice), three concerning board games and their use in educational contexts (one open-ended and two multiple choices, one yes/no and one in a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "never" to "frequently"), three in particular on the experience with Dixit (three multiple choices: one yes/no and two in a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "rarely" to "very frequently" and from "not enjoyable at all" to "extremely enjoyable"), four on the cooperative and inclusive aspects of the game (two open-ended and two multiple choices in a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"), and finally three on the general assessment of Dixit as a didactic tool and suggestions to improve cooperation and inclusion of the game (two open-ended and one multiple choice in a four-point Likert scale, ranging from "not likely at all" to "extremely likely").

Finally, in the second experience with the board game, students were asked to invent stories employing some of the illustrated cards. The observation conducted by the researcher were noted in a form, similar to the one above-mentioned. The form (Appendix E), specifically, included a table with four columns, each dedicated to: name of the participant(s), code to identify the illustrated cards they are referring to, story based on the cards, and notes.

4.2.3 Procedures

The experimentation was implemented in May 2024 and lasted ninety minutes, in a different classroom than the one where students are used to attending the Italian L2 course, due to an unforeseen event that hindered access to the building where 'Foundation Year' lessons are usually held. The room had a capacity of forty-five people and chairs and desks were arranged in six long rows; in addition, a desk with two computers, a projector and a screen to project were available. The setting of the class did not allow to move furniture because it was fixed to the floor. The preliminary phases of the experimentation, namely the presentation of 'Canva' slides, were held in English to ensure an appropriate understanding of the objectives of the study and the rules of the game, since all participants have at least a B2 proficiency, while the board game was played in Italian.

While the students were entering the classroom they were asked to divide, according to their preferences, into a maximum of eight groups of two or three people each. The groups were not chosen beforehand for two reasons: the possible absence of students could have upset the plans, and because being familiar with the students and their propensities in terms of working methods, observed during the year, the researcher believed they would feel more comfortable and motivated by choosing who to work with. In the end, the class was divided into seven groups, five composed of three and two of two students each. In addition, groups were helped to sit in a circular layout with respect to the arrangement of chairs, to facilitate communication within the various groups and, at the same time, to allow an adequate distance among groups so that they did not interfere with each other.

The participants, who had previously been informed about this experimentation, were reiterated the activity that was taking place during that lesson, given informed consent (Appendix A), and invited to read and compile it carefully. In the meantime, the teacher and the researcher set up the various equipment including computers, projector, paper form and board game.

Subsequently, with the help of slides (Appendix B) created with 'Canva', the objectives of the study and the rules of the game were presented to the students; hereafter the content of each slide and the consequent description provided to students are presented. The first slide shows the title of the experimentation, namely "Students' Perception of Dixit as an Educational Engagement Means" and while it was projected, the researcher explained in general terms this Master Thesis project and the visceral role of students' participation in support of the experimentation, and therefore, the entire thesis. In the second slide, the schedule of the study was presented, namely, the description of its objectives, overview and rules of the board game, playing the game and observation, and compiling of the questionnaire. Regarding the third slide, participants were explained the objective of the experimentation, i.e. to discover how students perceive Dixit as an educational engagement means in terms of inclusion and cooperation. The slide also illustrates simplified definitions of both terms, which are also included in the questionnaire questions regarding inclusion and cooperation to ensure a proper understanding of their meaning. The fourth slide shows some general information about Dixit, that is to say, a board game with eighty-four illustrated cards,

and the only abilities required to play it, e.g. creativity and imagination to interpret the cards, highlighting the fact that there are no right or wrong answers. In this slide, it is also reported that each group will have six cards and a voting dial and that in turn, each group will play the role of the storyteller. The fifth and last slide projected before playing the game illustrates the rules of the game, explained extensively in the second chapter (see 2.4 Dixit: A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words), simplified by dividing them into three phases: "pick a card and give a clue", "find the storyteller's card" and "scoring phase".

Each group was then randomly assigned six cards and a voting dial, whose colour determined the team name (pink voting dial = group named "pink"). It was also explained that, given the layout of the class, the game board would remain visible to everyone at the teacher's desk and that the pawns would be moved by the researcher based on the points obtained at each turn by the groups. In addition, the researcher highlighted the fact that the competitive aspect provided by the assignment of points was maintained in view of the general tendency of the class to feel motivated when involved in a positive competition, however, for the purposes of the research, the points only play a marginal role to elicit considerations in the light of correlations with other elements.

A trial round was then proposed with the researcher being the storyteller and, therefore, picking the card and its description. This round determined that all the students had understood the game, thus, each group carried out a round impersonating the role of the storyteller, for a total of seven rounds. The cards were shown to students both in paper and in digital format by projecting an overview (Appendix C). In the meantime, the researcher, helped by the teacher, guided the phases of the game, collected and distributed the cards for each turn and observed students' significant behaviour noting them in the form (Appendix D).

Once informed consent (Appendix A) was obtained from all the participants, the questionnaires (Appendix E) were sent via mail. These were completed voluntarily by all nineteen participants. Data were stored in a password-protected 'Google Sheets' file, accessible only to the researcher. Identifiers in the sheet were replaced with the participants' initials. The data collected were handled by the researcher in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The quantitative data of the

questionnaire were analysed using basic descriptive statistics (Nick, 2007). The qualitative data, both from the observation and the questionnaire, were analysed manually using grounded theory and realistic evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997), having no pre-conceived dimensions or conceptual categories in mind. Thus, the analysis was performed in a deductive manner allowing the main themes and patterns to emerge from the data.

One week after the first phase of the experimentation, students were once again proposed an activity implementing the board game. In this case, only the illustrated cards were employed, thus voting dials, wooden pawns and game board were not considered. Also, the rules of the game were changed: students were required to invent stories taking inspiration from the cards. Students were asked to divide into the same groups formed the previous week and were randomly given one card for each component, for instance, groups of three students received three cards, while groups of two received two. After providing students with some time to invent stories each group shared theirs. In the meantime, the researcher was available to answer the participants' questions and to annotate considerations related to noteworthy behaviours (Appendix F). When all groups recounted their stories, participants were encouraged to suggest different interpretations of cards or alternative endings and to vote for their favourite narratives.

After examining and comparing the responses to the questionnaires (Appendix E) and the observations collected in the five- and four- column form (Appendix D; Appendix F), the research identified recurring elements and patterns, highlighting significant themes. As regards the description given to the illustrated cards, the researcher refers to group names, e.g. White.

Group	Components' initials	Country	Area of education
White	B.A.	RU	ARCH
	K.Z.	KG	ARCH
	Ne.V.	RU	ARCH
Yellow	Ka.A.	KZ	ARCH
	Kh.A.	KZ	ECON
Pink	E.A.	RU	SCI
	M.E.	RU	ARCH
	No.V.	RU	HUM
Purple	L.F	RU	ARCH
	P.M.	RU	ARCH
	S.P.	RU	ARCH
Green	A.N.	KZ	SCI
	J.A.	KZ	HUM
	K.K.	RU	ARCH
Blue	A.T.	KZ	HUM
	H.K.	LK	HUM
Black	A.Z.	TR	ECON
	E.A.	EG	SCI
	G.A.	TR	SCI
Keys:			
RU=Russia, KG=Kyrgyzstan, KZ=Kazakstan, LK=Sri Lanka, TR=Turkey, EG=Egypt ARCH=Architecture, ECON=Economic, SCI=Scientific, HUM=Humanities			

Table 1. The composition of groups in terms of initials, country and area of education of participants

Table 1 shows an overview of the composition of groups; participants are referred to in terms of their initials, e.g. B.A., country of origin, for instance, RU, and area of education, e.g. ARCH.

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Experience with Dixit

This paragraph addresses the responses gathered in Section 2, dedicated to the investigation of students' experience with the board game Dixit. As regards Question 6, i.e. "Have you ever played Dixit before?" the majority answered "No" (N=11, 58%), whereas a quarter of students were aware of Dixit functioning (N=5, 26%). Three students (16%) answered "Maybe". Related to this question, Question 7 asks, "If yes, how frequently do you play Dixit?". Of the students answering "Yes" to the previous question, three stated they play it "Rarely" (60%) and the other two "Occasionally" (40%). Furthermore, even if Question 7 was not mandatory and required to be answered only in the case of an affirmative response to Question 6, a part of the students who stated they had never played Dixit, answered "Rarely"; however, these data were not included in the just mentioned overview since they are misleading.
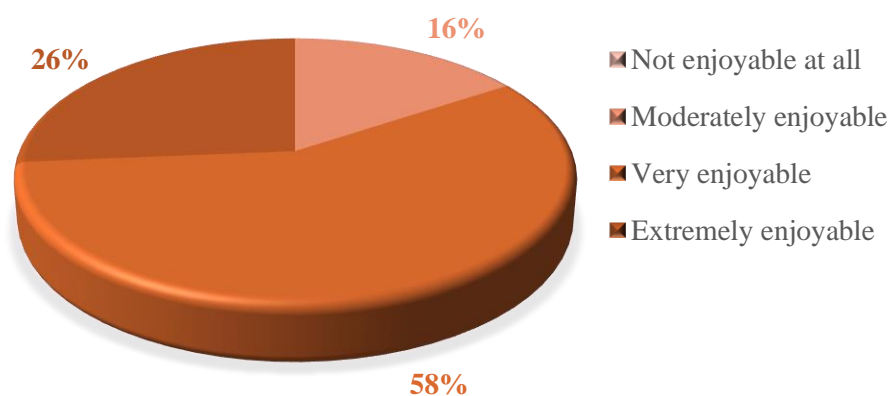
Figure 9. Responses to Q8 'How would you rate your enjoyment of Dixit?'

Figure 9 shows the participants' responses to Question 8, namely, "How would you rate your enjoyment of Dixit?". The majority of the students answered positively (N=11, 58%) or very positively (N=5, 26%) regarding their enjoyment of the board game. A minority of participants answered, "Moderately enjoyable" (N=3, 16%), while none of them think that the board game is "Not enjoyable at all".

4.3.2 Educational Engagement of Board Games

Below are discussed the responses obtained from Section 3 of the questionnaire concerning the educational engagement of board games. Responses to Question 5, "How often do you play board games?" showed that the majority of students play them "Rarely" (N=14, 74%) or "Occasionally" (N=5, 26%); the polar answers of the Likert scale "Never" and "Frequently" were not selected by any participant. The majority of students responded affirmatively (N=13, 68%) to Question 9, namely, "Have you ever played a board game in an educational setting (e.g. classroom)?" while the remaining part claimed they did not (N=6, 32%).

Subject	School	Learning objective	Game played
English (N=8, 62%)	High School (N=5, 38%)	Vocabulary (N=5, 38%)	Kahoot (N=4, 30%)
History (N=1, 8%)	Elementary School (N=3, 24%)	Communicative skills (N=3, 24%)	Ludo, UNO (N=2, 15%)
Not mentioned (N=4, 30%)	Not mentioned (N=5, 38%)	Not mentioned (N=5, 38%)	Not mentioned (N=7, 55%)

Table 2. Most frequent answers in responses to

Q10 'Please briefly describe the context in which it was used (e.g., subject, lesson objective).'

Table 2 presents the results of Question 10, "Please, briefly describe the context in which it was used (e.g., subject, lesson objective)", and shows the main answers that emerged from the participants' descriptions with respect to their experience with board games in educational settings. Also, the table shows the frequency of occurrence of each answer. The most frequently mentioned subject is "English" (N=8, 62%), and in terms of school, students experienced the implementation of board games mostly in "High School" (N=5, 38%). Concerning learning objectives, "Vocabulary learning"

(N=5, 38%) represents the most popular, and the game cited by students with a higher frequency is "Kahoot" (N=4, 30%).

4.3.3 Cooperation

This paragraph concerns the responses gathered in Section 4, dedicated to the cooperative aspect of Dixit.
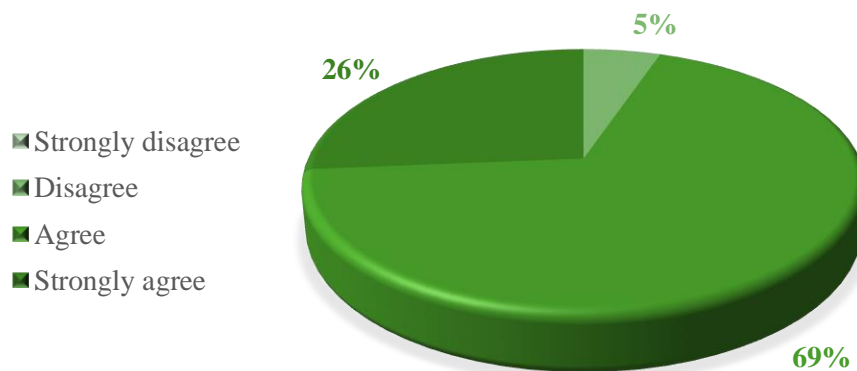
Figure 10. Responses to Q11
'Do you perceive Dixit as an educational engagement means promoting cooperation among students?'

Figure 10 shows students' answers to Question 11, "Do you perceive Dixit as an educational engagement means promoting cooperation among students?". The majority of respondents answered positively (N=13, 69%) or very positively (N=5, 26%), just one student disagreed (5%) and none strongly disagreed. To the question "Can you describe why Dixit encourages and/or discourages cooperation? Give some examples (e.g., students mutually sharing knowledge)", all students, apart from one who refused to answer, responded positively and gave examples of the reasons why Dixit encourages cooperation, without citing any that discourages it. As far as Question 12 is concerned, hereafter are reported some significant answers given by students.

"*Games in which one team is supposed to be a winner always seems to attract student's attention during class, which helps the process of learning*" (A.T.-KZ-HUM).

"*Students are communicating with each other, making a team, getting closer to each other while expanding vocabulary*" (K.K.-RU-ARCH).

"*It encourages cooperation because you need to work in a team to decide what picture you want to choose*" (No.V.-RU-HUM).

"*This game allows to create a pleasant and friendly atmosphere, as well as to share our thoughts and knowledge*" (B.A.-RU-ARCH).

Most of the answers directly refer to the characterising elements of Cooperative Learning, namely, shared leadership, positive interdependence, and individual and group responsibility.

4.3.4 Inclusion

Below are addressed the answers gathered in Section 5 of the questionnaire about the perception of students regarding Dixit promoting inclusion.
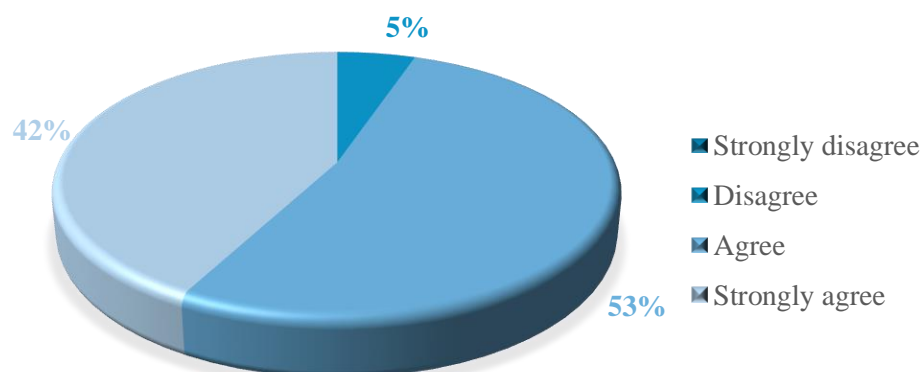

Figure 11. Responses to Q13 'In your opinion, does Dixit promote inclusion among all students?'

Figure 11 depicts respondents' opinions in terms of the inclusion of the board game. The majority answered positively (N=10, 53%) or very positively (N=8, 42%) to Question 13, "In your opinion, does Dixit promote inclusion among all students?" and, as stated in the previous paragraph regarding Dixit's cooperation, just one student disagreed (N=1, 5%) and none strongly disagreed. As regards the following question, Q14, "Can you describe why Dixit encourages and/or discourages inclusion? Give some examples (e.g., no limits are set to creativity and imagination)" below are displayed some contributions of the participants.

"In this game all you have to use is imagination, so it is simple to play and for everyone to be included" (A.T.-KZ-HUM).

"It encourages inclusion because you need to work all together as a team, so everybody is involved in the discussion" (No.V.-RU-HUM).

"Inclusive themes, encouragement of empathy and understanding" (B.A.-RU-ARCH).

The majority of the responses relate to values underpinning inclusion, such as collaboration and empathy. Also in this case, none of the students proposed instances of Dixit features discouraging inclusion, and just two did not respond (11%).

4.3.5 Overall Assessment of Dixit as a Didactic Tool

This paragraph reports respondents' answers to questions in Section 6 of the questionnaire, thus regarding the overall assessment of Dixit as a didactic tool and suggestions to improve cooperation and inclusion of the board game.
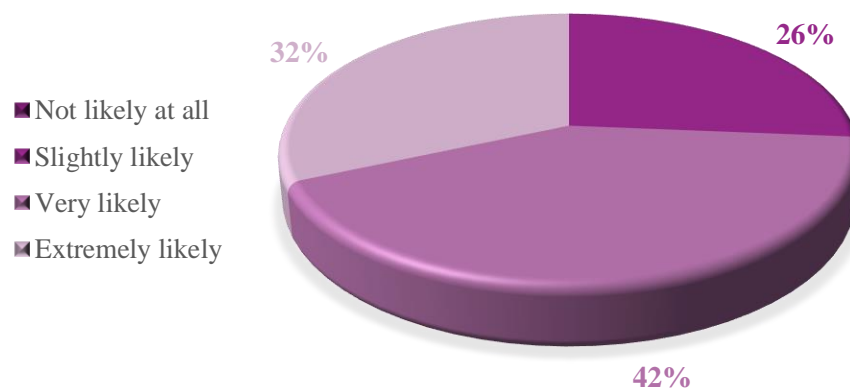
Figure 12. Responses to Q15

'How likely are you to recommend using Dixit as a didactic tool to others?'

As can be seen in Figure 12, all students responded positively to Question 15, namely "How likely are you to recommend using Dixit as a didactic tool to others?". 42% of the students (N=8) are "Very likely" to do so, 32% (N=6) are "Extremely likely", and 26% declare they are "Slightly likely". Again, none of the students think they are "Not likely at all" to recommend the game as a didactic tool. As far as Question 16 is concerned, namely "What did you like the most and what would you change of the board game Dixit?", below are reported some instances provided by students.

Like:

> "I loved the creativity of all the pictures" (A.T.-KZ-HUM).

> "Guessing the right card was the thing I liked the most in the game" (H.K.-LK-HUM).

> "I liked playing in a team and also the fact that it is a fun way to study" (K.K.-RU-ARCH).

Change:

> "The points won by each group had to be written on the blackboard" (G.A.-TR-SCI).

> "The explanation of rules and points system" (A.Z.-TR-ECON)

> "Less people, more speaking" (Ne.V.-RU-ARCH)

All participants answered this question, specifically ten of them provided the feature they liked the most (53%), seven of them both something they appreciated and something they would change (37%), and two just pointed out an aspect they would change (10%). The last question here addressed is "Any additional comments or suggestions regarding the use of Dixit in educational settings to improve cooperation and/or inclusion (e.g., changing the rules, implementing other components)". To this question, most students responded with appreciation and argued that the game was properly applied (N=9, 47%). However, some participants gave suggestions, often elements already expressed in previous answers (N=4, 21%), so below are reported contributions that generate new information than those already mentioned.

> "Explanation of the rules. How and how many points does the team get and for what" (M.E.-RU-ARCH)

> "Team play, reflection and discussion, creativity and critical thinking, provide optional prompts or thematic guidelines to help students" (J.A-KZ-HUM)

4.3.6 Observation During the Experimentation

During the entire experimentation, students were observed, and behaviours retained significant for the subsequent interpretation of data were noted down in a form (Appendix D).

Group	Card (see Appendix C)	Description
Black	3rd row – 6th column	Pace (Peace)
Purple	1st row – 3rd column	Morte (Death)
Yellow	9th row – 6th column	Infanzia (Childhood)
Pink	2nd row – 1st column	Prigione (Prison)
Blue	6th row – 1st column	Matrimonio (Marriage)
Green	6th row – 6th column	Tesoro (Treasure)
White	4th row – 10th column	Idea (Idea)

Table 3. Overview of cards and descriptions chosen by storytellers' groups

Table 3 shows an overview of the seven rounds of the board game competed during the research. Each row provides the group which impersonated the role of the storyteller in that round, the illustrated card chosen, and the description given by group members. To understand which cards are pertained, refer to Appendix D and identify them based on the position described in terms of rows and columns.

Additionally, the second time students were proposed an activity implementing the board game they were asked to invent stories based on the illustrated cards. Also during this second phase, the researcher annotated noteworthy behaviours performed by participants and beneficial for the interpretation of the study outcomes.

Group	Cards (see Appendix C)	Story (Italian)	Story (English)
Black	7th row – 6th column 7th row – 2nd column 6th row – 6th column	*"C'era una volta un ragazzo di nome Oliver a un grande banchetto. Con una lente d'ingrandimento guarda la sua mano e ha un'idea. Va alla spiaggia dove trova una grande conchiglia con delle monete d'oro. Capisce che il vero tesoro è lui stesso. Torna al banchetto e racconta agli amici che i veri tesori sono dentro di noi.*"	*"Once upon a time, there was a boy named Oliver at a large banquet. With a hand lens, he looks at his hand and has an idea. He goes to the beach where he finds a large shell with gold coins. He understands that the real treasure is himself. He returns to the banquet and tells his friends that the real treasures are within us."*
Purple	2nd row – 3rd column 5th row – 5th column	*"Un ragazzo si trova nel deserto e cerca l'acqua. Chiama il suo amico gatto e gli chiede aiuto. Il gatto pittore crea l'acqua con il suo pennello e la sua tela."*	*"A boy is in the desert looking for water. He calls his cat friend and asks for help. The painter cat creates water with his brush and canvas."*
Yellow	2nd row – 2nd column 4th row – 10th column	*"Una persona trova le chiavi per aprire la sua mente e sale la scala verso i suoi sogni e obiettivi."*	*"A person finds the keys to open their mind and climbs the ladder to their dreams and goals."*
Pink	2nd row – 1st column 4th row – 2nd column 4th row – 5th column	*"Il ragazzo prova a scappare dalla prigione e sogna di comprare dei giocattoli e dei libri a suo figlio."*	*"The boy tries to escape from prison and dreams of buying toys and books for his son."*
Blue	5th row – 9th column 5th row – 10th column	*"L'uomo osserva gli insetti che lo portano dall'albero magico dove esprime un desiderio."*	*"A man observes insects that carry him to the magic tree where he makes a wish."*
Green	6th row – 1st column 6th row – 4th column 6th row – 8th column	*"Il ragazzo costruisce la città con case colorate a forma di uovo. Al mare incontra una ragazza con le trecce e le chiede di sposarlo."*	*"The boy builds the city with colourful egg-shaped houses. At the beach, he meets a girl with braids and asks her to marry him."*
White	7th row – 8th column 6th row – 2nd column 9th row – 2nd column	*"Una grande goccia di pioggia aiuta la ragazza triste nel deserto a bere."*	*"A big drop of rain helps the sad girl in the desert to drink."*

Table 4. Overview of the stories invented by groups

The employment of the forms in Appendix D and Appendix F were envisaged by the researcher especially as tools to deepen the interpretation of the data provided by the questionnaire's responses. For this reason, in the next chapter, the considerations generated by the observation of students will play a central role in the discussion of the results.

CHAPTER FIVE

Students' Perception of Dixit as an Educational Engagement Means: Discussion and Adaptation Proposals

The considerations that may be drawn taking into account both the responses to the questionnaire and the observation of students during the experimentation, addressed in the previous chapter (see Chapter Four: Students' Perception of Dixit as an Educational Engagement Means: Methodology and Results), are of multiple natures. In light of the data collected, this chapter displays reflections regarding the four research questions the current experimentation seeks to find an answer to and provides prospective arrangements to render the board game suitable for learning environments.

5.1 Discussion

Similar studies conducted to date regarding Dixit implementation as a didactic tool have shown that adult students benefit from its usage when practicing grammar structures, "performing significantly better than students who practiced the same structures with the use of coursebook activities" (Mattheoudakis & Panteliou, 2023: 11). Furthermore, Vitancol & Baria (2018: 146) through their study observed that participants showed improvement in group communication during the game, and "thus playing Dixit can improve group communication, make the process as natural and fun, and […] optimize the relationships and dynamics of group communication". Nevertheless, the present study sheds light on new findings concerning the usage of the board game Dixit as an educational engagement means to promote inclusion and cooperation.

5.1.1 How Do Students Perceive the Implementation of Board Games in Educational Settings?

Considerations related to the first research question find answers in the questionnaire, specifically in Sections 2, 3 and 6, and in the observations conducted both when playing the board game with all the components and the original rules and in the second experience with the game only employing cards and envisaging for the creation of stories. What emerges from the students' responses to the questionnaire is that all students play, at least rarely, board games, hence it follows that they should be aware of the dynamics that arise when involved in such types of activities (Q5).

In addition, a small part, a quarter, of the participants had already played Dixit and knew the components and rules of the game (Q6). All students who answered that they had already played Dixit are from Russia. In this regard, it might be stated that the reason is that the board game was translated into Russian, while the same cannot be said of the other native languages of the students who participated in this study, such as Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Sinhalese and Turkish. From the answers, it also emerged that the respondents who already played the game were each in a different group, therefore five groups out of seven had within them a student aware of the rules of the game before they were explained by the researcher, which may have facilitated the game and encouraged cooperation among peers. In support of what has just been stated, the only two groups to have asked the researcher for clarifications about the game rules were those in which no participants previously knew Dixit. Moreover, all respondents appreciated the board game, mostly defining it as "very enjoyable" (Figure 9: Q8).

As concerns the students' previous experiences with board games implemented in an educational setting, most of them had already witnessed Game-based Learning (Q9). Consequently, the outcome of their experience may likely have positively or negatively affected their predisposition to this experimentation. Furthermore, it emerged that the majority of students who had previously played board games in the classroom did so during language lessons in high school (Table 2: Q10).

According to the answers collected in the questionnaire, all students, with different extents of likelihood, would recommend the use of Dixit as a didactic tool (Figure 12: Q15). Specifically, it can be noted that students who have expressed a high

probability ("extremely likely" or "very likely") in recommending the use of Dixit for educational purposes mostly belong to the "humanities" and "architecture" areas of education. It may follow that these students have a predilection for linguistic-verbal and visual-spatial intelligence (Gardner, 1987) and appreciate activities that involve the use of oral language to develop stories about images: Dixit's purpose.

In the answers to Question 16, concerning the most liked aspects and those considered to be changed in the board game, there was a recurrence in answers focused on highlighting the positive aspects of the game. In particular, the creative design of the illustrated cards and the communication within the groups were appreciated. The students who gave their opinion also on the element to change appear to agree in identifying it in the allocation of points, defined in general as confusing. Furthermore, from the responses, a correlation between those who appreciated the communication within groups and the "humanistic" area of education appears, as well as a pattern between students who indicated the creativity of cards as their favourite feature and the "architecture" area of education. Also in this case, therefore, it seems that the study area, and consequently their attitudes, have influenced the students' responses.

In light of the above reflections on the questionnaire's results, from this study, it emerges that students largely perceive positively the use of board games in the educational context. Specifically, taking into account the observation of the students during the study, it could be argued that Dixit was appreciated both as a board game in itself and as an educational tool, having been played in the Italian language.

5.1.2 What Aspects of Dixit as an Educational Engagement Means Promote Cooperation?

Proceeding with the second research question, the reflections that can be expressed follow the responses to Section 4 of the questionnaire regarding the cooperative aspect, and once again the observation of students conducted by the researcher. What can be noticed from the answers, provided by participants when asked whether they perceive Dixit as an educational engagement means that promotes cooperation between students, is that a vast majority agree (Figure 10: Q11).

Taking into account respondents' views on the reasons why Dixit encourages or discourages cooperation, they expressed opinions that emerge very positively (Q12). Among the reasons why they found the board game cooperative was the fact of cooperating within groups to choose the card and its description and identify the storytellers' card, each providing their own point of view. It was also pointed out that in this way they had the opportunity to communicate more among peers, sharing ideas and creating a friendly and pleasant atmosphere. It can therefore be argued that students mentioned the peculiar elements of Cooperative Learning, such as positive interdependence, individual and group responsibility and the development of social skills.

The only student who disagreed with Question 11, observing the other answers given by them, "moderately" appreciated the game (on a four-point Likert scale including the following options: "not enjoyable at all", "moderately enjoyable", "very enjoyable", "extremely enjoyable") and did not answer the question asking to indicate examples for which Dixit encourages or discourages cooperation. Considering their lacking answer to Question 12, a further line of reasoning of why they may have perceived the game as non-cooperative can be linked to their learning style. Generally, during Italian lessons, when the class is encouraged to work in groups, this student requires instead to work alone. It can be imagined that the student would have preferred to participate in the game individually, but this would have destabilised the general structure of the experimentation, as well as its objectives.

Overall, it can be maintained that the students perceived Dixit as an educational engagement means promoting cooperation, meant as groups of students working together with a common educational goal, and demonstrated this through the questionnaire responses as well as the observations conducted during the experimentation.

5.1.3 What Aspects of Dixit as an Educational Engagement Means Promote Inclusion?

Reflections concerning the third research question derive from the questionnaires' responses, specifically in Section 5, and the observations conducted throughout the whole research. From the students' responses to Question 13 (Figure 11) about whether, in their opinion, Dixit promotes inclusion among all students, almost all respondents agreed. It can also be noticed that, compared to those who did so for Question 11 (Figure 10), three additional participants "strongly agree" that the board game promotes inclusion. Consequently, five students "strongly agree" that Dixit promotes both cooperation and inclusion and three students while they "agree" it is cooperative "strongly agree" that it is inclusive. As a result, students who "agree" to define the board game cooperative, also "agree" in defining it as inclusive, in some cases declaring the game, with an even higher level of conviction, promoter of inclusion.

What emerges from the examples provided by the participants regarding what encourages or discourages inclusion in the game (Q14), the answers, once again predominantly about positive aspects, focus on the contribution given by each student in the choice of the card and its description, on the simplicity of the rules which consequently broadens the possibility for more people to play the game, the encouragement of empathy and understanding and the contemplation of more points of view both within the group and with other groups.

As in the previous case, only one student disagreed when asked if Dixit promotes inclusion, the same who did so regarding Dixit being a cooperative game. Taking up the considerations made in the previous paragraph it might be thought that the student was uncomfortable working with their group or that they did not think their own perspectives were shared and embraced by other members, thus feeling excluded from the group and in general from the proposed activity. However, even in this case, these assumptions cannot be validated because the student did not answer Question 14. The only open answer provided by the student is to Question 16 about the aspects liked and to change of Dixit, to which they replied that they would prefer there were fewer people and to talk more. This response could therefore support the hypothesis that, although the groups were encouraged to talk, and from the observations it appears

they did so extensively, the student was probably not listened to as much as they would have wished.

In light of the foregoing considerations, participants' opinions regarding Dixit as a board game promoting inclusion among all students, namely allowing full and active participation of all peers, seem positive. Also in this case, as well as for the cooperative aspect, the answers provided by the students to the questionnaire and the observations carried out by the researcher led to a widespread agreement on the inclusion promoted by the game.

5.1.4 What Changes Can Be Implemented to Improve the Usage of Dixit in Educational Settings?

Proceeding with the fourth and final research question, the considerations that can be developed concern mainly Section 6 of the questionnaire in addition to the observations made by the researcher. As anticipated in the results, the students mostly expressed positive opinions focusing on the aspects they appreciated of the game. Among these, there are the design of the cards that encourage creativity and the cooperative nature of the game that allows peers to work in groups and share ideas and points of view (Q16). At the same time, however, respondents expressed their opinion on what they would change of the board game applied in the educational context to make it more cooperative or inclusive (Q17).

It emerged that the suggestions mainly concern the points allocation phase. With regard to the points, one member of the "black" group, the winner in both phases of the experimentation, suggested writing the points obtained by each group on the board, which, in order to specify, was not done because it was not the main purpose of the research conducted, although in the case of that group the competitive aspect has produced a positive outcome encouraging members to apply themselves. Further suggestions were related to communication, that is to provide a way to communicate between groups and establish the researcher/teacher to prompt thematic guidelines to foster students' creativity. Conversely, the student who did not agree with Dixit as an engagement means promoting cooperation and inclusion, in this case, expressed that

what they would change of the game is envisaging for a smaller number of participants and more opportunities to talk.

Inspired by the suggestions given by the students and with the ultimate aim of accommodating as many opinions as possible, hereafter are presented some proposals to improve the game in terms of cooperation and inclusion with the idea of its implementation in the educational environment. Starting from the components of the game, the illustrated cards are an essential element that embodies the spirit of the game marked to accommodate more viewpoints and enhance individual creativity; for this reason, they are considered an unavoidable component when administering this board game.

According to the researcher, the other components of Dixit, namely the game board, voting dials and wooden pawns could be replaced by a digital alternative. Providing manipulatives as a form of expression for students is listed among the strategies proposed by Cottini (2018: 92), however at the class level, if the groups are placed within a high distance, the use of the voting dials could prevent a lively sight by classmates. The same applies to the game board and pawns; it is desirable that the setting of the class allows moving the furniture to ensure that every player has the opportunity to see the board and move the pawns, otherwise, a digital alternative can be created so that everyone can actively participate in the game.

Regarding the adaptability of the board game in a language educational context, Dixit allows teachers to be flexible and adjust the rules to the purpose of their classes. As demonstrated in the second phase of the experimentation, rules can be adapted also by involving the students in proposing alternatives in line with their attitudes. The great versatility of the cards allows educators to apply many active learning techniques. Some instances could be the "Jigsaw" (Aronson, 2002), the method in which each student owns a part of knowledge, also applicable to let students discover the rules, and "Pass the buck" to involve couples or small groups of students in contributing to create a story based on how it was started by their peers.

In light of the above mentioned, Dixit has proven to be a versatile and accessible game, but to be made even more cooperative and inclusive some measures can be taken keeping in mind the needs of the class and the teacher. In order for all students to feel comfortable in their learning process, it is beneficial that they can

choose with whom to work, to facilitate the cooperative process, and they are free to express themselves according to their preferences in order to feel included in the proposed activity.

5.1.5 General Remarks Regarding Observations

Further aspects that are worth underlining are those relating to the observations conducted by the researcher while playing Dixit with classic rules and all the components as well as those gathered when students were required to invent stories based on cards. As for the cards and descriptions chosen by storytellers, it can be noted that they were all substantives, mostly feminine, characterised by dichotomous connotations. For instance, the nouns related to a semantic area associated with positivity were: "peace", associated with a dove, "childhood", to describe a card with a teddy bear, "marriage" for the ring displayed in the card, "treasure" since the card depicted a shell with gold coins, and "idea" associated with a lit torch. At the same time two groups consisting of only Russian students, in their turn as storytellers, chose the words "death" and "prison" to interpret their cards, considered negative words. Regarding this, the researcher noted a greater predisposition from the students when the description given by storytellers was positive, while they found more difficulty in reinterpreting the negative clues.

An aspect that surprised the teacher of the course was the great commitment to this activity by the group of students who are usually not very participatory in the classroom and tend to obtain minimum passing grades in the canonical assessment methods. The engagement and enthusiasm in the group also emerge from the answers given in the questionnaire, from which it follows that they felt valued, and this also had a positive impact in the following lessons of the course, in which it has been possible to notice a greater attendance and study effort. The group in question was the winner of the game, earning many points because they managed to reinterpret the themes proposed by the other groups in a shareable way.

As for the stories invented in the second phase of the experiment, they were characterised by positivity, hope, redemption, dreams, friendship and love. In some cases, the cards used both in the first and the second phase of the experimentation by

different groups were interpreted from the same perspective, such as the cards described as "prison", "treasure" and "marriage". Unlike the descriptions of the first phase, which although generally positive also contained negative ones, the stories are all characterised by happy endings. The stories that peers declared winners were those of the "black" and "pink" groups, considered the most original and creative. It appears once again that the winner is the group which, solely relying on previous academic assessments, was less expected to succeed.

Overall, the observations showed that the students appreciated working in groups and committed themselves to working together to achieve a common educational goal. In addition, the "black" group of students who generally obtained minimal assessments proved successful in the activities proposed during this experimentation, which also had a positive influence on their investment in the Italian L2 course.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this case study. Limitations that could have hindered the reliability of the outcomes are of various natures and concern time, space, and resources; hereafter they are addressed. Firstly, the main limitation of the study is the size of the sample, 19 students in total, which may reduce the statistical power of the findings. The reason for the low numbers is related to the researcher's choice to conduct this study with students of the same school, 'Ca' Foscari School for International Education', and attending the same study programme, 'Foundation Year'. When participants come from different schools, variables such as characteristics of the student population, teachers' qualification and training, educational background, teaching experience, and school curriculum cannot be controlled, and, eventually, they interfere with the results (Mattheoudakis & Panteliou, 2022; Al-Jarrah et al., 2019). Of the three Italian language courses the researcher was the tutor of, it was chosen the group with the highest number of students and a teacher who agreed to devote some time of their lessons to conduct this research.

Secondly, the study was conducted in a classroom that did not allow to move

furniture because it was fixed to the floor, which may not reflect the usual conditions under which Italian classes of the selected group were taken. In fact, starting from the day when the experimentation took place, Italian classes were moved, due to an unforeseen event, to another building from the usual where students had been attending classes since October 2023. This made it difficult to create the optimal spatial conditions to conduct the game and the whole research both in terms of the adaptability of furniture to the type of activity proposed, and because students were used to learning in another room.

Thirdly, potential confounding variables, which could have influenced the outcomes, were not fully controlled. Students were eagerly asked not to employ online resources and ask the researcher, the teacher or their peers if they had any doubts. However, it cannot be ensured that they did not have access to the Internet to find prompts to describe the cards or to search for the translation of some words. It is also possible that participants answered in a certain way by being guided by the "compliance bias", that is, by showing a tendency to agree and be positive about anything the researcher presents.

Fourthly, it was possible to replicate the study only twice, which hindered capturing further in-depth considerations. The researcher tried to make the most out of the time the teacher of the course devoted to conducting this research. Administering the board game and the questionnaire some other times should have been desirable to grasp further useful reflections.

Finally, the experimentation was limited to a specific population, a group class of international students attending Italian L2 lessons of A2 level at CFSIE in Venice, thus the results may not provide sufficient evidence that would be generalisable to other groups. However, the positive outcomes, even if deriving from a limited number of participants, shed light on the positive perception students have of Dixit and of employing Game-based Learning in educational environments. In the conclusions proposals for further research according to the above mentioned are expressed.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis sought to demonstrate the role of board games in fostering inclusive language education. This was made possible by conducting a multimodal analysis and an experimentation, the results of which have outlined that the board game Dixit is positively perceived by students as an educational engagement means promoting cooperation and inclusion.

In the course of the thesis, questions were initially faced to facilitate the understanding of the context and the topic addressed, namely terminology and definitions underpinning the inclusive realm, an overview of the evolution of educational regulations in support of inclusion through the four key phases of medicalisation, assimilation, integration and inclusion, and Tessaro's (2012) and Cottini's (2018) frameworks to address the inclusive perspective of education. Furthermore, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and its three principles, Cooperative Learning (CL) and its characterising elements, Game-Based Learning (GBL), specifically focusing on board games in language education, and Dixit, the cornerstone in the realisation of this thesis, were presented.

Subsequently, the multimodal analysis of the board game Dixit took place. The methodology adopted to analyse visual and verbal features, namely Baldry & Thibault's (2006) Cluster Analysis, Kress & van Leeuwen's (1996) model, and Gee's (2011) Toolkit for Discourse Analysis, was explained, as well as contextual information, accompanied by concrete examples detected in the game's components, followed by considerations related to the communicative and inclusive relevance of the game under analysis.

Finally, the experimentation underpinning this thesis was addressed, providing an in-depth explanation of the methodology focusing on participants' profiles, materials used, and the procedures adopted for data collection and analysis (Nick, 2007; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Then, it proceeded with the illustration of the main findings obtained and, eventually, taking into account the observations of students during the entire experimentation and the responses to questionnaires, displayed reflections regarding the four research questions, concerning students' perception of

Dixit as a promoter of cooperation and inclusion, and prospective arrangements to render the board game suitable for didactic contexts.

Similar studies conducted to date regarding Dixit implementation as an educational tool have shown that students benefit from its usage when practicing grammar structures (Mattheoudakis & Panteliou, 2023: 11), and improve group communication as well as relationships and dynamics within workgroups (Vitancol et al., 2018: 146). Nonetheless, the current research sheds light on new findings related to students' perception of the board game Dixit as an educational engagement means to promote inclusion and cooperation in educational environments. Based on these observations, future studies and research could be conducted with different board games and wider samples of participants to develop new findings in order to be able to draw generalisable conclusions and ascertain the role of Board Game-Based Learning in fostering inclusive language education.

The idea for the topic of this thesis stems from the union of two fundamental values, a teaching attentive to motivate and include all students and a boundless passion for the English language and its power. I hope to have generated an intriguing contribution to special pedagogy literature, providing my viewpoint as an enthusiastic future teacher. Extremely grateful to all the people who have struggled to obtain a more inclusive educational environment, I wish this thesis, in its small way, may be my personal starting point to make this world an increasingly inclusive place with the compelling contribution of games.

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<u>APPENDICES</u>

Appendix A: Informed Consent

Dear participant,

This study is conducted by Alice Bragato, a postgraduate student of Language Sciences, under the supervision of Barbara Baschiera, Professor of Pedagogy and Didactic of Inclusion at Ca' Foscari University of Venice.

By accepting this form, you agree to participate in the study and the activities included in it and authorise the researcher to store in digital format and process the data in a confidential manner for the entire duration of the research project. To protect your privacy, all data collected will never be traceable to your person in accordance with current regulations. The data will be treated anonymously in accordance with EU Regulation 2016/679 and Legislative Decree n. 196/2003.

The main interest of this study is to investigate students' perception of the Dixit board game as an educational engagement means in terms of inclusion and cooperation. The proposed activities include the administration of the board game and a questionnaire.

For any questions regarding the study procedures and to change/revoke your consent to participate in the study, now or in the future, please contact: Alice Bragato - 881392@stud.unive.it

Name and surname:………………………………………………………………………….

Date of birth:………………………………………………………………………………...

E-mail address:………………………………………………………………………………

I declare that I have carefully read and understood the information above, and I agree to participate in the study described here. The consent may be modified/revoked at any time prior to the anonymisation of the data.
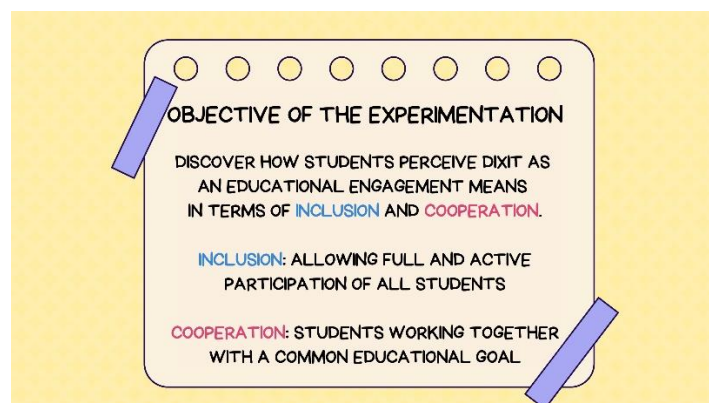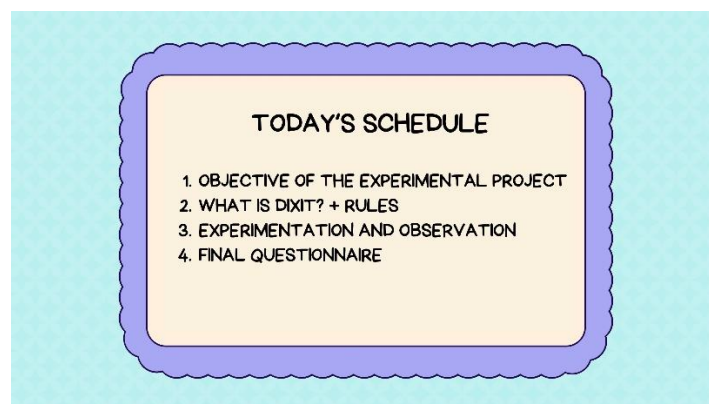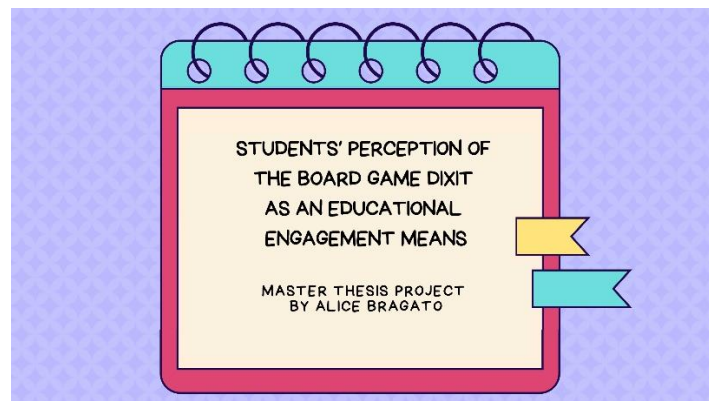
- o I agree
- o I do not agree

……………………………   …………………………..

Place and date   Signature

Appendix B: 'Canva' slides

DIXIT RULES

FIRST PHASE: PICK A CARD AND GIVE A CLUE

The storyteller (narratore) picks a card (WITHOUT REVEALING IT) and thinks of a word/sentence to describe it.

Other players (giocatori) choose a card that best fits the clue of the storyteller.

All cards are collected, shuffled and RANDOMLY placed face up.

SECOND PHASE: FIND THE STORYTELLER'S CARD

GOAL: find the storyteller's card!

Each player, except the storyteller, SECRETLY votes the card they think is the storyteller's.

All together players share their votes.

THIRD PHASE: SCORING PHASE

Storyteller:
- 0 POINTS if every player or no player voted their card
- 3 POINTS if some players voted for their card

Other players:
- 3 POINTS if they voted the storyteller's card
- 2 POINTS if every or no player voted the storyteller's card
- 1 POINT for each player voting their card

COMPILE THE QUESTIONNAIRE

THANK YOU!

Appendix C: Overview of Dixit cards

Source: https://www.libellud.com/en/resources/dixit/

Appendix D: Form to collect information during the game (first phase)

Storytellers' group (e.g. Yellow)	Card code (e.g. 1st row, 3rd column)	Description (clue)	Points	Notes

Appendix E: Questionnaire "Students' Perception of Dixit as an Educational Engagement Means"

Section 1: Demographic Information
0. Name:
1. Country of origin:
2. Age:
3. Gender:
4. Area of education (e.g., scientific, artistic):
5. How **often** do you **play** board games?
   o Never
   o Rarely
   o Occasionally
   o Frequently

Section 2: Experience with Dixit
6. Have you **played Dixit before**?
   o Yes
   o No
7. If yes, how **frequently** do you play Dixit?
   o Rarely
   o Occasionally
   o Frequently
   o Very frequently
8. How would you **rate** your **enjoyment** of Dixit?
   o Not enjoyable at all
   o Moderately enjoyable
   o Very enjoyable
   o Extremely enjoyable

Section 3: Educational Engagement of Board Games

9. Have you ever played a **board game** in an **educational setting** (e.g., classroom)?

- o Yes
- o No

10. If yes, please **briefly describe** the **context** in which it was used (e.g., subject, lesson objective):

Section 4: Cooperation

11. Do you perceive Dixit as an educational engagement means promoting **cooperation** among students? (**Cooperation**=small groups of students working together with a **common** educational **goal**)

- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

12. Can you describe why Dixit **encourages** and/or **discourages cooperation**? **Give** some **examples** (e.g., students mutually sharing their knowledge)

Section 5: Inclusion

13. In your opinion, does Dixit promote **inclusion** among all students? (**Inclusion**= allowing full and active **participation** of **all** students)

- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

14. Can you describe why Dixit **encourages** and/or **discourages inclusion**? **Give** some **examples** (e.g., no limits are set to creativity and imagination)

Section 6: Overall Assessment

15. How likely are you to **recommend** using Dixit as a **didactic tool** to others?

- o Not likely at all
- o Slightly likely
- o Very likely
- o Extremely likely

16. What did you **like** the most and what would you **change** of the board game **Dixit**?

17. Any additional **comments** or **suggestions** regarding the use of Dixit in educational settings to improve **cooperation** and/or **inclusion** (e.g., changing the rules, implementing other components)

Appendix F: Form to collect information during the game (second phase)

Group (e.g. Yellow)	Cards codes (e.g. 1st row, 3rd column)	Story	Notes