

Results from a PhD: dedicated poker players perspectives on: their learning processes, problems with combining poker playing with education, and stigma related to poker.

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Name	Age	Started playing seriously	Current/former professional?	Education affected University?
Paul	30	2005	Current	Major
Peter	29	2004	Former	Pause
Patrick	28	2004	Current	Pause
Pierre	27	2006	Current	Dropped out
Adam	30	2002	No	Dropped out
Aaron	28	2005	No	Pause
Arthur	26	2005	No	Not started
Alfred	WNC	2009	No	Not started
Andrew	23	2010	No	Pause
Austin	23	2008	No	Minor
Alex	21	2012	No	Major
Andy	20	2013	No	Not started
Oscar	>35	1999	Former	No
Otto	>35	2002	Former	No
Oliver	>35	2005	No	No

Brief poker history

Online poker 1998

1999, the TV-show Late Night Poker used cameras inside poker tables (hole-cameras) to display the players cards ([Davy, 2015](#)).

2003 - 2010 “the poker boom” the global Internet poker revenues grew from US\$365 million to approximately US\$2.4 billion in 2006 (Monaghan & MacCallum, 2008) and an estimated US\$4.99 billion in 2010 (Cook, 2016).

Online poker made it possible to:

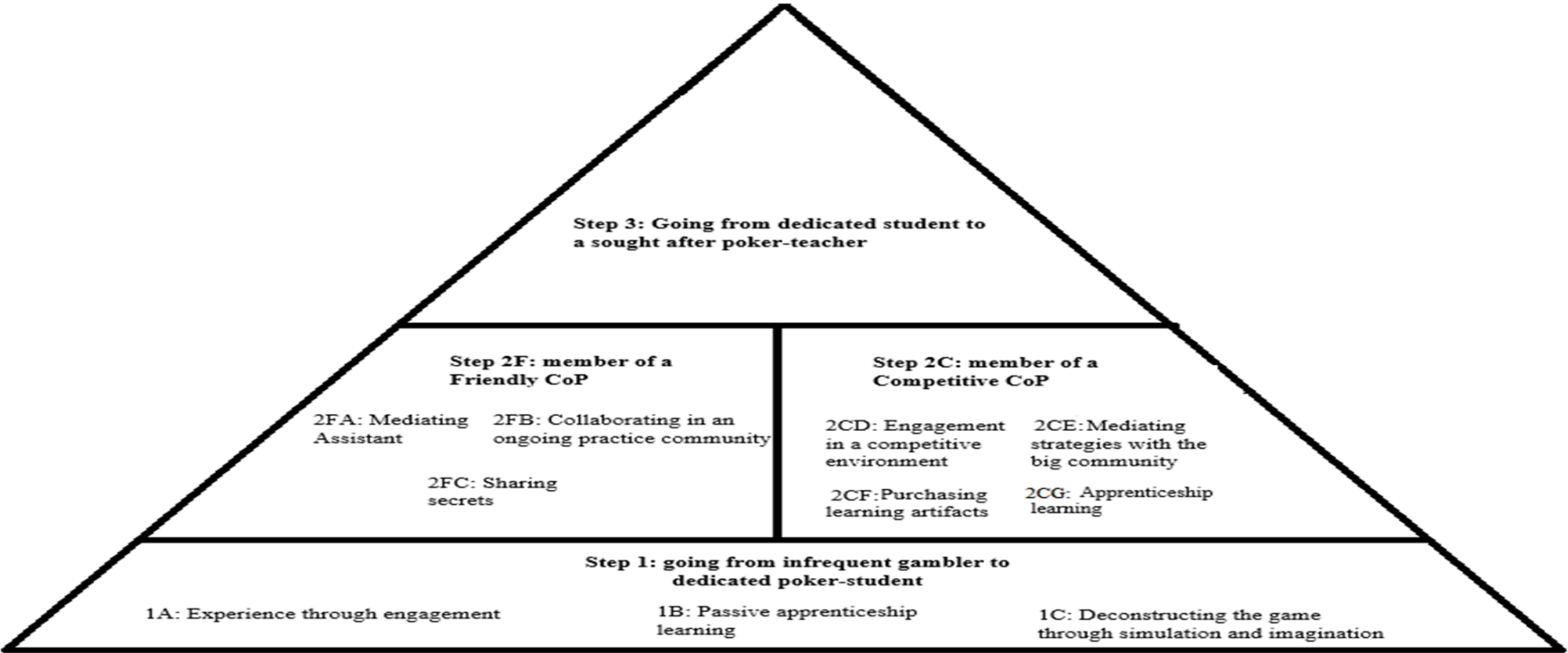
- Play whenever and whatever
- Play 50-120 times as many hands per hour
- Play together, discuss hands
- Receive hand histories (detailed recipets)
- Use poker tracking programs (database)
- Use a variety of other tools



https://edge1.pokerlistings.com/assets/photos/_resampled/Optimized_WM-bertrand-grospellier-30580.jpg?t=1453384271

Learning poker in different communities of practice

I have used Lave and Wenger's (1991) theories on situated learning and learning in a community of practice.



Deconstructing the game through simulation and imagination

Pierre: *“In Hold’em manager, [a poker tracking program] every time I have a hand that I’m kind of unsure about, there is this nice feature that you can click on the hand up to the left and then it will be stored in Hold’em manager. So after each day that I play, I try to store every hand that I’m uncertain about and then I often review them afterwards.”*

Step 2: become member of a practice community

- Poker is highly competitive and deceptive.
 - Two different communities of practice: Friendly and competitive.
- Friendly community of practice:
 - Mediating Assistant (learning partner)
 - Collaborating in an ongoing practice community
 - Sharing secrets

Mediating Assistant (learning partner)

Patrick: *“This German is probably the person that has been most important for my poker learning curve. Because before that time I had learned everything by sitting alone pondering and reading threads and stuff on the Internet, and watching videos on the Internet. I had read a few books too, but those books were limited in forms of learning outcomes. ... He played the same stakes that I did... We talked poker basically non-stop and discussed different hand strategies and what to do. And told each other everything we came across of useful information and things like that and in that sense we became better and better together.”*

Competitive community of practice

- Learning from mediating strategies in the big community (poker forums)
- Purchasing learning artifacts (coaching videos),
- Apprenticeship learning (purchasing personal coaching).

Step 3: Going from dedicated poker-student to sought after poker-teacher

Paul: *“I used to look through hand histories ... and watch him play, make notes, and look at possible errors. ... The majority of those you coach have a good idea of what poker is, but it’s that little notch that keeps them from becoming as good as needed. So it’s a fine-tuning. And also I think what many pay for is self-confidence because when you are coaching someone, then you have to be good at telling them when they are doing things right too.” [...] Now coaching is more about doing something about their database, like PokerTracker.”*

Implications of article one

- Modern artefacts unavailable before 1999 has revolutionised the learning possibilities in poker.
- When a lot of players work hard on improving their game the average player becomes better.
- Learning takes time and makes it difficult to combine poker with studying.

Article 2:

Can We Expect More Students Dropping out of Education to Play Poker or Has Online Poker Become too Challenging?

Journal of Gambling Issues, 2017(37).

WSOP main event winners 2008-2012

“The success of Jonathan Duhamel is proof that poker offers a chance for young people who want to make a decent living without attending college”

(“Poker and the doors,” n.d.).



Image links: <https://pokerground.com/en/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Peter-Eastgate-768x512.jpg> <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/58/JoeCada.jpg/220px-JoeCada.jpg> <http://www.flopturnriver.com/poker-photos/jonathan-duhamel.jpg> http://www.pokerstarsblog.com/assets_c/2011/11/pius_heinz_wsop_champion_size-thumb-450x299-147903.jpg https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/news/660/media/images/63839000/jpg/_63839621_63839294.jpg

2013 Ryan Riess (23) graduate (BA in business) before winning the WSOP main event

WSOP: *“Did you ever consider putting your degree to work?”*

Riess: *“No. It was poker the whole time.”*

<http://www.wsop.com/news/2013/Jul/4518/GETTING-TO-KNOW-THE-NOVEMBER-NINE-RYAN-RIESS.html>



Education or poker?

Alex: *“I think I need to make up my mind whether I should play even more to become really good, or whether I should play less and do it as a hobby and perform well at school instead. Because it affects my performance at school. It has to, in a way, if you want to be good at it. I need to take a deep look at myself and figure out what I want.”*

Poker is more important

Pierre: *“During the week we could agree to go to a movie on Friday, but when Friday arrived I was playing six tables and making \$2000 an hour and I felt that I just had to cancel.”*

Don't talk to them, they will not understand: How poker players experience criticism and stigma. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, 2018(39)

“Others don't understand”	Competence not acknowledged
	Believe it is dangerous
	Not a real job
“Don't talk to them”	Information control
	Outsiders
	Successful but misunderstood
	Lack of meaning
Ethical dilemmas when relating to problem gamblers	Free will - unless addicted
	My responsibility to inform them?
	Actively or passively avoid

Others don't understand

Andrew (23): “I’m almost completely certain that the people in [the Norwegian Gaming and Foundation Authority], I really don’t think they have any clue about what it is. And about them saying it’s a game of chance. I can understand the second argument, about people developing gambling addictions, OK, all right that is a possibility. But to claim it is a game of chance—that is just utter nonsense.”

Feeling like an outsider

Patrick: *“You fall outside of society; there is no doubt about it. I sleep to around 2–3 [p.m.] o’clock every single day. And when you are playing on the internet, you spend an extreme amount of time in front of the computer, so it takes a lot of time. And so, of course, most of the time you hang out with other people that play poker, so you’re kind of living in your own little bubble. [...] But there comes a point where you’ve been in the bubble for so long that it gets tempting to try out the ordinary life too.”*

Moral dilemma

Aaron: “That is kind of the dilemma with poker; for someone to win, others have to lose. To some degree, it is their own choice to play, but if someone is addicted, then they don’t really have any freedom of choice. In a bar, they are supposed to stop you if you drink too much, and it should be the same in a casino.... And the question is who is responsible for that? To what degree do we as players support an industry that does not always take good care of their customers?”

Passively avoid problem gamblers

Patrick: *“[Thinks for a long time] I have thought about it so many times, that I should tell them that they should quit. But I am not sure if I have ever said it to them like that. I think. I don’t remember any specific episodes. But I think that I have left the game myself to end the game in situations where the problem gambler gets broke and ask if the game will continue after he has been to the ATM. But considering that the question made me think for five minutes, it has not happened often.”*

Actively avoid problem gamblers

Author: *“Have you ever encouraged other players to quit playing or wind down?”*

Paul: *“Yes, many times. It is a hell of a lot easier to be nice to them and tell them they will be fine. But if you see a person that loses their mind every time they play, then that person should not play, no matter how intelligent that person might be.”*

Author: *“Have you ever received negative comments from other players when encouraging someone to leave?”*

Paul: *“Well, yes, I have actually. If you play live, the others might not enjoy that [the problem gambler] leaves. However, I have gotten more support than criticism. If two players get mad, then it’s often 10–15 that say that they wanted to do the same thing, but that they were too afraid to say something.”*

The articles

Talberg, O. N. (Forthcoming). Learning poker in different communities of practice. - A qualitative analysis of poker players' learning processes, and the norms in different learning communities. (accepted JGI 04. September 2018)

Talberg, O. N. (2017). Can We Expect More Students Dropping out of Education to Play Poker or Has Online Poker Become too Challenging? *Journal of Gambling Issues*, (37).

Talberg, O. N. (2018). Don't talk to them, they will not understand: How poker players experience criticism and stigma. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, (39).

Talberg, N. (2017). Kjennetegn ved unge pokerspillere Er poker særlig attraktivt for elever med gode karakterer? *Tidsskrift for ungdomsforskning*, 17(1).

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