

Uniekies: your disability as your superpower

Design by Janine Innemee

Text by Pieter Desmet

What does it feel like to be a superhero? With Uniekies, a game designed by Janine Innemee, you can experience this yourself. The game is intended for children in the ages of 6 to 11 years old. What makes this game special is that it encourages active play between children with and without a physical disability. Uniekies's positive approach is a good example of how you can take someone's own unique strengths as the starting point for an innovative design.

The league of superheroes

Uniekies revolves around the superheroes: children with a disability. There is a whole array of heroes, as each disability represents a specific superpower. For example, there is Lens (the Secrets Master), the superhero character for children with a hearing impairment. Lens is able to communicate at great distances and pass along secret signs. Bumper (the Space Master), the character for children in a wheelchair, is able to clear the playing field fast as lightning and protect his followers. Flow (the Flex Master) has trouble with actions requiring fine motor skills but is also super-flexible which means he can easily crawl through narrow spaces. In short, an entire legion of unique superheroes: the Uniekies.

Fortunately, those powers aren't just for superheroes. Children without a disability can experience them as



well, but they have to make an effort. Together with the superheroes, they make special super power suits for dress-up. A bumper suit, for instance, is made by stringing lots of balloons to your body. With this suit, you can 'bump', just like superhero Bumper. At the same time, you experience the challenges of getting around in a wheelchair in a playful way. Once all the superheroes have their costumes on, the children come up with a game together in which they can use their super powers.



Playful solidarity

With Uniekies, the children experience equality by playing with their differences. The game offers a context for solidarity and lots of active fun. The game is very modest in terms of the materials needed. All you need is a set of cards with instructions that you can print and cut out yourself: cards that show the limitations and superpowers of the superheroes and cards that give tips on how you can make the superhero suits. You can use all sorts of materials that can be found in every home: aluminium foil, an umbrella, lots of adhesive tape, etc.

From limitations to possibilities

The main idea behind the project was that removing physical barriers was not enough to encourage play between children with and without physical disabilities. It's just as important to remove social barriers. During her research, Janine discovered that children without disabilities have a double attitude with regards to playing with children who have disabilities. On the one hand, they don't want to exclude any children, but on the other hand they're afraid that playing with them will be dull if they need to adapt to others' limitations. This dilemma trans-



lated itself into the design challenge: Developing a game that promotes social integration between children with and without a disability by positively influencing the children's attitude. With Uniekies, children discover how adventurous and exciting the interaction between limitations and capabilities can be. And this solves the dilemma between playing together and being challenged.

Tape, foil, and rubber bands

What inspires me, is that Janine has made the disability the central focus of her design in a positive way. In the magic of the game, there is equality –

precisely by emphasising the differences rather than minimising them. With the superhero metaphor, the attention shifts from limitations to possibilities, to the unique power of each child. And by encouraging creativity, the children's empathy and understanding of each other is stimulated. Accessibility is just as important: the game's simplicity makes it very accessible to everyone. Eventually, the quality of a design is determined by the meaning and added value to the users, and if that can be achieved with so little material, it makes the design that much stronger.

Uniekies was designed by **Janine Innemee** as thesis project for the master's programme Design for Interaction at the TU Delft. The project was initiated by design agency Panton, and was carried out in partnership with the Nederlandse Stichting voor het Gehandicapte Kind (NSGK) and the Delft Institute of Positive Design (DIOPD). Thesis supervisors were Mathieu Gielen, Deger Ozkaramanli (TU Delft), Joris Swaak and Ingeborg Griffioen (Panton). For more information: www.diopd.org

Colophon

Uniekies: Your disability as your superpower

2018

Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering

Delft University of Technology

The Netherlands

Product concept & design by Janine Innemee

Text by Pieter Desmet

Photographs and images by Janine Innemee

Cover photo by Shutterstock

Graphic design by Rozemarijn Klein Heerenbrink

Copyright © 2018 by Pieter Desmet and Janine Innemee.

All rights reserved. This article or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner without written permission of the copyright holders.

This article was published in the booklet “Positive Design: Delft students design for our well-being.”

It was originally written for the Dutch Journal of Positive Psychology (www.tijdschriftpositiepsychologie.nl).

Download a free version of the booklet at www.diopd.org

Reference

In communication, please refer to this publication as follows
Desmet, P.M.A. (2018). *Positive design: Delft students design for our well-being* (pp. 8-11). Delft, Delft University of Technology. ISBN: 978-94-6186-912-8

DELFT INSTITUTE OF
positive design

