

Week Six - Gamification

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The Process

My school is adopting the Common Core Standards this year and utilizing the elements already created in the textbook we have been using, Journeys. In my lesson, I wanted to be able to use the elements already in the lesson and just add game elements to motivate students to not only understand the content, but to use the content in some way. I used a backward design approach and considered what I wanted the students to be able to do considering the skills and content in the lesson. I wanted them to be able to understand the concept. The skill was drawing conclusions and making generalizations. The story is about Cesar Chavez and his struggle to get better working conditions for migrant farm workers in California. I built in a type of game level system by using the Schoology option of student completion where the student must complete one task to move on to the next. This way a student will read, listen to, or watch a video about Cesar Chavez and then write a post answering questions before moving on. I can check their mastery of the concepts at each discussion post. For added fun, and choice, I added a dice rolling exercise to choose the question they can answer. This makes it chance, but it can also be a choice, since I cannot check to see what number they rolled. I have many different elements to pass before getting to the final stage - the mission. Much like the final stage of a game, this one is the biggest and most important. I set up a story for the students to participate in. I made it relevant to their situation and a little fun for them, so they can see it as less serious as their normal work. However, the expectations have been laid out and are still high. This piece will be graded by me, the instructor, and will allow them to win the game! They will have an unlimited amount of tries to pass this mission, because I want them to understand that failure is acceptable. They will also earn a badge for completing their mission that they can keep and look at to remember their mission and hard work. The badge will not be their grade in our school, however. We will be switching to a Common Core Standards grading system that tells whether they have mastered the standards.

Challenges

There are several challenges that come up when developing a gamified lesson. One is that it can be quite tricky to come up with an end result that is fulfilling the game and the lesson. On one hand, using the lesson goals will be a direct match to what you want to teach, it will probably not be very interesting for the students. However, developing a fun game with an interesting end might not always be aligned to the stated outcomes. Trying to walk that line is what professional educational game developers have been trying to do for decades, but we are supposed to be able to do it in class. Instructors must accept the idea that these games will inevitably fail once in awhile and we should learn from that. Bring the students into the process will help that, but it still might not work. I have not tried it yet, but I can see this as a problem.

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Another challenge is thinking a few steps ahead of the goal. I find that the best games will not have the learning goal as the end, but in the middle. Teaching the idea and using it in the middle of the game means that by the end of the game you have been working with the skill until you have mastered it. This means that teaching the skill should come early and then each successive 'level' should be using that skill in a new and relatively harder way. That is easy to understand, but much harder to create into a learning environment than it seems. Backward design is essential for this. We must figure out what we want the student to be able to do with the skill or lesson, then go another step farther and build something from there, that way they have to learn the skill to be able to pass the final test/mission.

As I continue to play around with play in my classroom, I suspect I will face many more challenges, but to fail is to progress. The students are not the only ones playing a game.

Successes

One of the biggest successes in this was unexpected and probably overlooked by many - thinking outside the box. Thinking of the classroom as a game forces you to consider other approaches to a problem, rather than just doing the same old way you have for years or it was taught to you. This is the biggest benefit to thinking like a gamer. Not that gamification will revolutionize school, it might not, but thinking about problems in the classroom from different angles will benefit all involved for sure. This process forced me to consider the outcomes I wanted for my students more than any other lesson planning I have done. Even if the badges, points, and leaderboards do not work, the ideas that you come up with to challenge your students will. I feel very confident in the ideas that I am starting to come up with. Games are only fun because they challenge and change. Playing a game with the same outcomes all the time gets tedious, so why do we teach that way? Thinking this way makes the designer try new things and experiment.

Another success of this is that it is a fully formed class before starting the class. Sometimes, we do not fully form the lesson before walking into class and it can be tricky to 'wing it'. There is no substitute for preparation, and this forces the instructor to prepare all the way to the end before starting. You need to have badges, point systems, and materials already prepared. This can be true of other methods as well, but this makes you think on a more macro level. You begin thinking about the entire year. How will this system work for the whole year? Will this concept work throughout the year?

Student Response

I believe my students will enjoy this idea. My students already enjoy a healthy competitive attitude. This will feed into that attitude and motivate them. The slower

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students, or students who do not enjoy the competition as much, will be able to work at their own pace. I will have more time to be able to help them along as well. The faster students can be assigned to another student to help. In the future, I will use groups as well.

My students really like to have a framework for their work. I think they will enjoy the storyline they are being put into to make the work more relevant to them. They will be able to write about their opinions and voice their concerns and the skills will be secondary to them, so they will be more relaxed to use their English without worrying about being judged. Shyness can hinder certain students from participating, but this method helps to bring the walls down because it is fun. They all get excited about games.

Future Design and Gaming

Gaming will definitely change the way I design in the future. It is changing the way I design now. I am already trying to build a full year long puzzle game build into the lessons. The students will be finding clues throughout the year for a final reveal on the last mission. It will be similar to how they write police dramas on TV. There are always the crimes they solve in the one episode so the viewers that skipped an episode or have never watched the show can still enjoy it, but they overlay that with a continuing storyline to keep the longtime viewers coming back. Using it is two-fold on TV - the love interest and some past case that is haunting the cop now. If I can weave a storyline into the class like that, that involves game elements along the way, then I can create a class that keeps students interested in class without them even knowing how hard they are working or that they are even learning skills. They will want to learn the next skill without me asking because they want to know what happens next. Basically, I want a year-long whodunnit game. I have had great success, on a small scale, with our mystery day games where we solve the crime of the missing teddy bear using clues. Gaming has helped me frame the course on a larger scale, rather than lesson by lesson. The bigger picture has a better view.

In the future, I will continue to use gamification for developing the classes I teach. I know enough about it to build a class. I think anyone who has played a game and starts to see their class a certain way will have enough knowledge about it to do this. It is not just badges, leaderboards, and points; however, it is creating a world in the classroom that motivated the students to want to learn. To tap into the intrinsic curiosity and wonder a child has and using it to help guide them into learning. It is also about understanding the responsibility a teacher has as the guide to not lead them astray or take advantage of the students. We must also consider what they want, how they learn, and what motivates them to help maintain that game. It is a never-ending effort on both sides and we must respect that. This is not a fix-all one-time and done sort of method. It is a paradigm shift, if understood properly, in how to approach learning.

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My Lesson

<https://www.schoology.com/course/194392148/materials?f=14700060>