

Learning Through Games

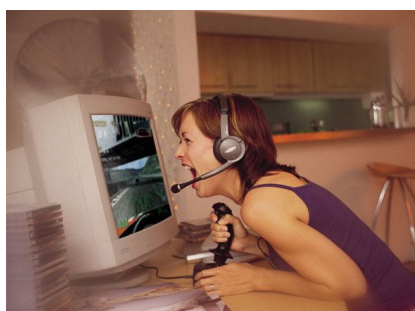
Games capture the interest of young people who spend a lot of time playing them. Educationists recognise that games divert and motivate but many are not sure whether they can make a positive contribution to learning. Why do they engage, how do they motivate and anyway why do games matter to us in education?

Games engage

Games engage because they are fun and we love to play. They have rules and that gives us the structure we like to work with. Games have targets that drive us on. We respond positively to the interaction games offer. Pace is part of good game design and that keeps us interested. Games let us win and that makes us feel good. They mirror real life competition and that is a stimulus. Problem solving forces us to follow our instincts to be resourceful and creative. Contrary to received wisdom games foster social interaction as players seek informational help to complete tasks. Finally, good games work with narrative and that engages our emotions and promotes our understanding. If the underlying objectives are well thought out and combine challenge with feedback then that gives us learning.

Games motivate learning

All well designed games harness many aspects of best practice in motivational teaching. Good games can, for instance, motivate learning through requiring users to role-play within a strong narrative structure. They can promote problem solving demanding creative responses in the context of increasing challenge.



They can take unexpected and novel approaches that provoke interest. Good game-based learning promotes independence, allowing learners to control their own actions, to have an element of control over their experience. Feedback is immediate, relevant and stimulating.

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Games matter

Marc Prensky in an open letter to Barack Obama puts the case for full acceptance of the importance of game based learning in our education systems:

"How can we in our teaching make room for the ... skills of ethical behavior, critical thinking, decision making, problem solving and judgment? Where do we fit our teaching of goal setting, planning, self-direction and self-evaluation? ... Where should we put our teaching of creative thinking, designing, playing, and our helping kids to find their own voice? Where do we teach our students to be proactive, to take prudent risks, to think long-term, laterally, and strategically?"

Next steps

Games engage young people, motivate them to learn and offer a platform that broadens the scope of teaching and learning. The next step for us is to develop games that offer answers to Prensky's taxing questions, games that support and extend the curriculum challenge we continually face: how to set a learning agenda that interests, stimulates and delivers things of value.