

The Psychology of Gamification in Education - Why Rewards Matter For Learner Engagement (Sep 15)

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One only has to have a fleeting knowledge of the eLearning industry to see how much of an impact gamification is having. There are countless articles out there telling us that that it is the future of learning - and it is-, but what is it about gamification in education, or other areas of life, that really makes us want to progress? This article will explore some of the psychology behind what motivates us to learn, and what makes us retain that crucial knowledge.



Gamification in Education

Without being a hardcore gamer it is difficult sometimes to get a scale of the video game industry. We all know it is there, and that clearly millions of people love gaming, but video games just don't seem to get everyone excited in the same way that, say, movies do.

The reality is that the video game industry is twice the size of the movie industry and three times the size of the music industry, going on 2013 figures. [According to PwC](#), video games in 2014 were worth a staggering \$70.3 billion worldwide; and their growth over the next decade is set to rise exponentially, as they become even more immersive, expansive, and most importantly rewarding.

Games Are Everywhere

Many people who wouldn't really consider themselves gamers, or even partial to games, can happily sit there for hours playing Candy Crush, often spending worrying amounts of money on it. When asked why they do it, the response is almost unanimous: "It's addictive!".

Rewards are what make games addictive. Not just random rewards, but carefully planned, incremental rewards that are designed specifically to push all the right buttons (pun intended) and stimulate us to go back, again and again and again, frequently to the detriment of our bank accounts. Game simulation, used in scenarios such as [gamification in education](#), introduces strategic rewards to the education and gamification platform.

We have known about the value of implementing gamification in education and the use of game dynamics in training some time, and we are all familiar with incentive schemes in the workplace. It is exactly the same principle: Reward someone for doing something well and this will motivate them to continue to do it well in the future. Games and gamification in education do just this in an attempt to maintain learner focus, stimulate them to return, and give them satisfaction for an achievement reached or milestone passed.

Games In eLearning

The practical applications of this are profound and have been part of the eLearning landscape for some time now. However, the psychology behind gamification is even more intriguing and just as important for course authors and instructors to understand as the subject matter they are trying to convey. The quicker people designing courses can grasp why it is that including elements of gamification can dramatically improve learner knowledge retention, performance, and efficiency, the quicker they will see the results reflected not just in achievement, but in the their organization's bottom line. This fact has been proven again and again through game studies.

Many people are scared of change, and moving away from the traditional view of learning as classroom-based and teacher-led towards implementing gamification in education can be huge.

Games And Motivation

So what exactly is going on in our bodies when we feel motivated to do something? The simple answer to this is the dopamine released when we are rewarded. Through gamification in education the learning process is converted from active to passive, from simply receiving drip-fed information to being responsible for when and how the information is delivered to you. Once we make this transition and realize that we and we alone can achieve the rewards on offer, we as learners begin to actually want to learn more, relying less on the stick (the threat of failure or fear of disappointment) and more on the carrot (the promise of reward for continued progress).

Dopamine is what our body releases when we receive a reward for some pattern of behavior. Our bodies are so good at sensing this that we can learn to anticipate rewards with a release of dopamine - just think how excited you get when you have ordered a pizza and the doorbell rings, even if it isn't the pizza delivery guy. The product of this release of dopamine, among several others, is motivation.

Harnessing That Rewarding Feeling

By learning to harness this natural disposition to reward stimulus, course creators can design their material around it and make gamification in education a priority. The more goals you achieve, the more dopamine is released. The more dopamine is released, the higher the motivation to progress and attain

yet more rewards. Ask any Learning and Development department what was the hardest variable to control, and I would bet a substantial sum of money on it being learner motivation.

Learner Collaboration

Another thing that goes hand in hand with gamification in education and eLearning is collaboration; working together towards a common goal. It may seem counter-intuitive, seeing as competition is at the very core of gaming, but a shared goal and the right stimuli can seriously boost engagement. Cooperation and collaboration, coupled with gamification <https://www.paradisosolutions.com/lms-gamification>, do wonders for transforming dull or otherwise lifeless content into something that is not only rewarding, but will remain in the learner's brain because the process was fun and engaging.

Tactically Decrease The Boredom

Most learning processes are boring. Read this, learn it, and take a test on it. The actual learning part is purely passive. Once there is an interactive element thrown into the mix, one that seeks to reward the learner -no matter how small the reward-, then the learning process becomes active and the material more stimulating.

However the reward system cannot simply be random, and must also be complemented with a feedback mechanism. Remember, this is a learning process; not just an opportunity to gorge ourselves on dopamine. Simple games like Candy Crush are as successful as they are because the game dynamics offer incentives that are precisely the right amount at precisely the right time. For the developers the desired outcome is that the player makes progress, spurred on by tactical rewards placed throughout the game, and spends their hard earned cash on strategically located in-app purchases.

Progress: The Ultimate eLearning Goal

For gamification in education, and especially corporate training, the ultimate goal is the same: Progress. The player feels like they want to progress because the game provides them with the right amount of stimulus and encouragement at just the right time. Through the process of achieving satisfying goals, being rewarded for anything from simply taking part to completing a course, and receiving the necessary feedback on performance and knowledge, the learner provides him or herself with the dopamine-induced motivation they need to feel like they want to carry on, and for the knowledge to be retained.

Despite seemingly reducing humans to dopamine junkies only motivated by where their next reward is coming from, gamification in education and has been proven to improve engagement and the retention of knowledge. Paradiso Solutions understands the impact gamification can have on eLearning, and Paradiso LMS -Paradiso Solutions' advanced Learning Management System- incorporates gamification and blended learning to heighten the learning experience for its users. Paradiso Solutions understands the need for flexibility and so works closely with the client to identify the features they need, and creates a tailor-made eLearning solution based on these requirements. Don't hesitate; gamification has the potential to transform how your learners approach the learning process, and is set to become a staple in the industry, both in and out of the classroom.