

Keeping the Game in Gamification

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Trends and Issues in Nursing Informatics Column

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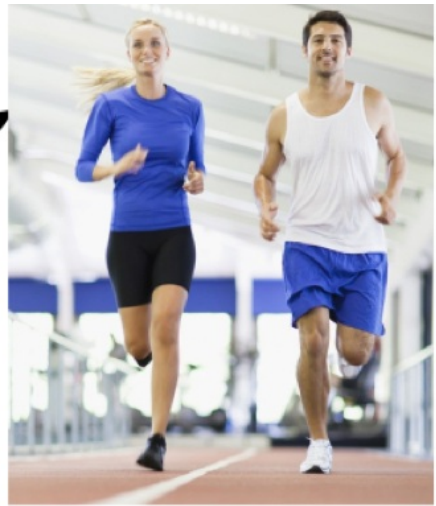
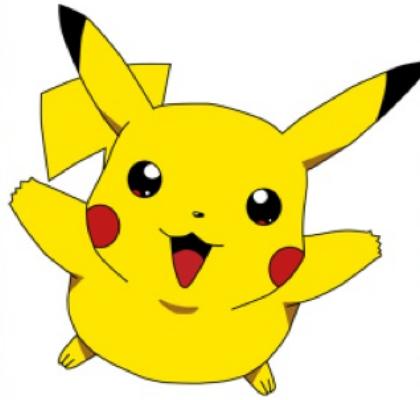


COLUMN

Gamification is an increasingly popular strategy among educators to help enhance student motivation and engagement with course material by using technology to turn learning activities into a type of game. But are all games created equal? For those of us who are taking courses in higher education or have been attending skill re-certifications for years, the answer is a resounding no. Often it seems that putting course content online, or attaching points or badges to content completion, is passed as gamification. But does that really enhance learner engagement with the material?

According to Karl Kapp author of *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction: Game-Based Methods and Strategies for Training and Education* (2012) the real value of gamification comes from creating fun, meaningful learning experiences, not by using badges and points as a type of artificial incentive. In his words gamification is “using game-based mechanics, aesthetics and game thinking to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems” (p.10).

So how do we use game theory to create meaningful gamified learning?



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To create an effective gamified experience we need to take what we know about games and apply it within a learning context. This includes creating a system where learners engage in a challenge and interact with one another and the game system to reach a specific goal or outcome. Ideally this process evokes an emotional reaction in the learners so that they are more inclined to invest their time and energy into winning the game. This can be more challenging than it seems because more and more Canadians are avid gamers, and today's gamers are used to a rich gaming experience (Chee & Wong, 2017).

According to the Entertainment Software Association of Canada (2016), almost 19 million Canadians are considered gamers. That is over half our population, and most of their gaming time is spent on cell phones or other mobile devices (ESAC, 2016). Canadians are becoming gaming natives, and this means they have high expectations for the games they play. This can create a serious obstacle for educators who are looking to make their material a little more fun through gamification (Chee & Wong, 2017).

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NURS 252 Questing Adventure



To keep up with the high demands of gaming natives, it is important to keep the game in gamification. This means including a captivating story line, with instant feedback and interaction with the system. The game needs to have clear rules with definitive outcomes that meet student learning goals while still contributing to the overall story. Ideally students will have intrinsic goals related to the content you are gamifying and the introduction of extrinsic rewards adds elements of competition or cooperation. Having an awareness of gaming aesthetics is essential when working with gaming natives to create a gaming interface that is positively received and can elicit an emotional reaction in the learners. The game design must draw in the learners so they are willing to invest the time and energy necessary to meet the challenge presented, and in doing so, master course content (Kapp, 2012). Keeping the game central in gamification can help you avoid some of the common pitfalls that may occur when you first try gamifying content and make sure that your gaming strategies meet the needs of your users.

References

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