Gamification

Salen and Zimmerman (2004) define a game as a "system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome" (p. 80). While this is an effective definition, we also have to include the emotional connection people feel when playing games as well; players invest themselves in competing and feel the excitement that comes with winning and/or potentially losing. They are also intrinsically motivated to participate--no one ever feels like they *have* to play a game; people actually *want* to play. The advent of video gaming increased engagement, and, as a result, some are willing to play for several hours in one sitting. Imagine, then, harnessing these attributes of playing games and applying them to learning? Where the instructional design and delivery of a class increased engagement, was leveled to clearly and effectively assess competency and progress, and evoked similar emotional reactions experienced by those vested in "playing." This is the basic idea behind *gamification*.

Kapp (2012) identifies *gamification* as "using game-based mechanics, aesthetics and game thinking to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems" (p. 10). Essentially, game design elements are used in non-gaming contexts like education, business, and even the military. This is one of the misnomers about *gamification*; that it is a new theory and approach to learning. In fact, all three of the aforementioned institutions have used some form of game-based learning for teaching concepts, professional development, and training. Only the term *gamification* itself is new to serve as a way to bring all the elements of game thinking, design, and implementation under a single concept.

Gamification takes the participants of a class, to some degree, back to their childhoods and to the enjoyment of getting to "play." As children, we learned by doing through exploratory and social play (the outcomes of which neuroscience has verified as significant to cognitive development), whereby children learn to create choices for themselves, explore the possible, and utilize their imagination. Play "lights up the brain" with engagement and is essential to social skills, adaptability, intelligence, creativity, and ability to problem solve (Ginsberg, 2007; Brown, 2009) . McConigal (2012) points to play as the mechanism by which people can become resilient and apply the skills acquired to a greater good towards social change.

Playing games can create cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses in people due, in part, to the visualization stimulus that occurs. It can improve and/or accelerate understanding because participants have to problem solve, create choices, make decisions and predict outcomes. Affective senses are heightened because the emotions evoked in players when playing triggers the need to mitigate change and adapt to the situations presented in a game. These intense cognitive and affective responses can motivate behavioral change because a change in mind has occurred. Given the benefits of "play," why do we limit, and even stop, playing games? Perhaps the question is not so much about if students are willing to play games, but rather if faculty are willing to create and enact them in the first place.

There are terrific flash games available on the internet that can be used to add a game-based element to your online course:

•For Business: "Gazillionaire"

•For Health Sciences: "Pandemic"

•For Computer Science/Programming: "Alice" and "Rails for Zombies"

•For Political Science/Government: "DarfurisDying"

And so many more: Download THIS to learn more about games being played for social change!