#  GAMES IN EDUCATION?

When it comes to education, there are a lot of different methodologies. Some of them try to emphasize the active role of the students in their own learning process. Project based learning, service learning or cooperative learning are examples of this approach. The use of games or game mechanics can be included in this group of methodologies too.

The use of games in education (and in other environments such as companies) is usually known as gamification. But a deeper approach to the subjects reveals a misunderstanding that mix up two different concepts that have subtle differences and must be distinguished.

The use of game mechanics during the lessons is called **gamification**, but it doesn´t necessary mean the use of games. We implement **some** **mechanics and we use them to motivate our students or regulate some aspects of the lessons,** but they are not games *per se*.

For example, we can give a student some kind of “advantage card” when they answer a question correctly. This card can give some advantage such as an extra half point in their grades or the opportunity to choose between two questions of an exam. Another example could be the use of game money to regulate and control the questions of our students. When they are working on a project and they have questions, we can set “a price” for the answer (if we find that it is a reasonable question, we can set it free) and the student must decide if it is worthy paying or if it is better for him to think the answer or try to find it somewhere else. This way we are encouraging the students to solve problems and look for the information they need. The third example is to have a sort of scoring system when the students answer questions. This system has both advantages and disadvantages related to the competitive behavior.

If **proper games (with all their elements and rules) are used to teach something** we are applying another methodology called **game-based learning**. These games can be videogames or board games and can be bought, be a variation of a game or can be designed by the teacher. Some examples of this method are the use of a Trivial Pursuit, Scrabble, vocabulary card games, etc.

So, the main different between game-based learning and gamification is the use of complete games or the use of specific game mechanics during the lesson.

Now that the difference between those concepts has been set, a question must be answered… Are these methods useful?

I think and believe they are. If we look at nature, animals (specifically mammals) learn through games. Lion cubs learn their first hunting moves and develop their instincts when they are playing and “fighting” with other cubs or adult lions. That’s their preparation before their first real hunting. The same way, babies start exploring the world and learning concepts like colours, shapes, etc. through games. These learning methods are maintained during the first stages of education but, somewhere between primary and secondary school, the methods change and games are forgotten and just used for fun in non-academic environments.

Games can recreate realities, teach attitudes, encourage team-work, and teach concepts while they are keeping the attention and encouraging the motivation of the students. Another crucial aspect about games is that the mistake is accepted as part of the game. When playing, mistakes are perceived by the students as something normal and they can confront it better than the way they would do in more stressful situations.

In conclusion, a careful, moderate and well-prepared use of games or gamification strategies in our lessons can keep a high motivation and attention in our students and, at the same time, teach them some strategies, attitudes and concepts.

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