Digital Learning Games Emerging in Education

Today's classrooms look vastly different than the learning environments of the past. We've already touched on why 21st century learning requires 21st century classrooms, but it's not just physical environments that are changing—teaching techniques have evolved as well, to include the use of digital technologies and even wearables. **There's another trending teacher trick on the rise worth mentioning: Digital learning games are gaining traction among educators. Here's why the gamification of education is working.**

Gamification of Education: A Trend on the Rise

The gamification of education has been around for some time, but many initially viewed the trend as frivolous and likely unsuccessful. Recently, though, digital games have started to emerge as a highly relevant and uber-successful supplement for textbook curriculum. According to a recent survey by Project Tomorrow Speak Up, the number of teachers using games in their classroom has doubled in the past six years. That number is expected to grow in the 2016 tallies, too, as 48 percent of teachers surveyed opted to include digital education games if they were to create their "ultimate" school. And games aren't just for the students—half of teachers surveyed said they'd prefer more game-based professional development, too.

This popularity of the gamification of education indicates it's working. Here are some reasons why:

- **It can help keep the classics relevant.** An educator in Connecticut designed an alternate reality game (ARG) to teach his seventh grade Language Arts class Homer's "The Odyssey." The ARG required students to conduct research and solve problems while combining a narrative structure with immersive game play.
- **It can keep students engaged with difficult subject matter.** A sixth grade teacher in Canada uses the computer game Prodigy to teach math skills. So they don't lose 'battles,' they're more apt to engage with the content and keep trying if answers are initially incorrect.
- **It can help keep skills sharp (and stave off boredom) during summer months**. Many students don't get much educational stimulation during summer months, causing their once-sharp school skills to become dull until fall rolls around again. The right digital game can provide the stimulation they're lacking in a fun, inviting way that looks and feels a lot like playtime. In fact, some options even encourage children to get outside and use what they've learned—the Ready Jet Go Space Explorer app, for example, teaches users about constellations and encourages them to do their own exploring.
- **It's purposeful screen time parents can get behind.** Known for creating family-friendly and educational public programming, PBS KIDS has added another item to their creative resume: An app. The free app, PBS KIDS Measure Up!, is aimed at helping children ages 3-5 develop math skills through a combination of character-filled videos and activities. The kids' app also comes with a companion app for parents that can track activity and monitor progress—taking a bit of the sting out of the screen time debate.

For all these reasons and more, digital learning games have exploded onto the educational scene. This generation of students is already tech savvy and extraordinarily plugged in, so the gamification of education is clearly here to stay. Used appropriately, students, educators, and even parents stand to benefit.