Teaching
How can games play a supporting role in teaching?

As Darwin once said "Everyone is a genius. But if you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing it is stupid." Unfortunately, society is currently judging every fish on its ability to climb. Forcing all children to follow the same kind of curriculum and assessing them in the same way forces the children to try and achieve the impossible. This will lead to a failure in most cases. Over the years, these failures build up and usually end up resulting in stress levels that are higher than those of adults [1]. In the long run, these stress levels can even lead to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety [2]. These mental health problems will then result in lower grades, making this problem an endless cycle that will never end.

In the Netherlands, we have a specified period in the school year in which high school students are putting in their last efforts to gain their diploma: the final exams [3]. These final exams take place in a period of 2 or 3 weeks, and the exams itself cover all subjects the students have had over the past years: one exam to test the knowledge of 5 or 6 years' worth of lectures. This is a perfect example of a stressful situation for these students. Not only are they forced to cramp a ginormous amount of useless facts in their heads in a small period of time, but to top it off, performing badly in these final exams could lower their GPA or could even result in failing a class. This might lead to repeating a year, which honestly no one would ever want for themselves. You see your friends move on to university, while you are stuck at high school for another year. The pressure put on the students during these final weeks in immense. The preparations for it start fairly early, and the stress is not lowered until the results come in weeks after the finals are done. And of course, there is always the slight chance that the finals everyone worked so hard for disappear mysteriously [4].

In March of this year, a Dutch article [5] stated that at least 5000 VMBO lecturers are not properly prepared for the next schoolyear, mainly due to the fact that the organization that provides the structures for the needed preparation courses was not ready yet. Since a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, teaching without the right preparations could have unforeseeable results. Even though this lack of preparation is not entirely the lecturers fault, they are still the ones that are publicly shamed. If the lecturers are not prepared, how could they ever properly prepare the children for their finals?

Another great example of a failing school support system is the bullying incident that took place at the IJburg College last year [6]. As mentioned in the article, one of the students got bullied immensely while the school directors knew about this but did not intervene. The student ended up dropping out of school. Even though the school board was aware of the situation, they did not intervene (on time) to provide the appropriate needed help, even after continuous remarks from the parents. This does not only show disinterest in the students, but also shows weakness in the study board.

Now that we have seen some great and diverse examples of a failing school system, we can focus on how we could improve it. I cannot cover all the things that have to change in the school systems, so

for now I will discuss one of the (in my opinion) most important one: redesigning the standard curriculum provided by schools.

As Bill Gates once said "I failed in some subjects in exam, but my friend passed in all. Now he is an engineer in Microsoft and I am the owner of Microsoft." Of course, this situation does not apply for every student. Bill Gates dropped out of college because he saw an opportunity to start a business [7], which we all know worked out pretty great for him. Unfortunately, the reality is that most of us do need that piece of paper proving that we are capable of studying. However, if we keep up with the current school system, students that could potentially find the cure for cancer might be discouraged by bad grades enough to drop out.

One of the main problems with the current education system is that it was designed and structured for another age [8]. We still use the same schooling systems as we did in the 1900, the topics might have been adjusted to current events, but the courses are all still pretty much the same. Using the same systems all these decades results in the same view we have had for ages: people view society as a divide between academic "smart" people and nonacademic "non-smart" people. The consequence of this is that many brilliant people think they are not smart at all, just because they did not get a proper education. This should not be a view society strives towards anymore. The first step we can take in order to change this view, is to change the school system. If a proper and fitted education is made accessible for everyone, less people will dropout, and more students will be able to show their own unique potentials.

Games have always been used to teach children. They might not have been digital, but they were there. For example, when I was young, I played games like marbles, jumping ropes, hangman, and the very popular Dutch game "landje veroveren". These games did not only force me to socialize with other children, but they also taught strategy, patience and of course how to deal with losing the game sometimes. However, with the change of time, the games children play have also been upgraded. Schools cannot afford to stay behind. The first step is digitalizing games like hangman and memory, making sure to keep the good learning qualities of these games. The next big step will be using more technology in the classroom for teaching and to track student learning. Technology has a much more efficient way to determine in what stages a child is [9]. For example, a child can be very advanced for his age in math skills, but mediocre in grammar. Keeping track of these skills does not only help the lecturer to assist the children in a better way, but it also helps the children themselves realize their weak points.

However, using these technologies forces the teachers to put in extra effort. They need to familiarize themselves with the systems, but also with the games and the corresponding answers in order to properly assist the children. As Rachid Khouya so perfectly describes "Teachers should be motivated if we want them to motivate our learners; otherwise, the question is left unanswered, 'how can unmotivated teachers motivate unmotivated students?' " [10]. The question then remains: how do you motivate teachers into doing the job they once loved and studied for? We do not live in a world that requires people to know geographical places and basic math skills anymore. We have Google Maps and calculators on our phones for that now. These basics need to be rebranded – need to be made interesting for children to learn again. I think teachers could be highly motivated by developing their own curriculum, which includes technology and games to help the children learn. Shift the

attention from centralized classes to personalized classes, letting the lecturer portray a supportive role. This way, the lecturer will be able to help the children that require attention, and at the end of the day go home with a more fulfilling feeling.

It seems we are ending with the statement that teachers have a big influence on their children. This influence works both ways: an inspiring teacher will inspire their students, while an uninterested teacher will discourage them. In the end, there is only one important question: what kind of teacher do you want to be, and how far are you willing to go in order to reach this?

References

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