A BOOK REVIEW: EMOTIFY! THE POWER OF THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN GAME-BASED LEARNING, SERIOUS GAMES AND EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This book review analyzes Michael Sutton and Kevin Allen’s Emotify! The power of the human element in game based learning, serious games and experiential education. The authors work together to bring years of corporate and IT training experience to academics and education in a way that is novel and promising. Game based learning strives to look ahead to the future of how people learn and uses research based applications to get there. In addition to showing the power of self efficacy and prompt feedback in an academic environment that uses gamification as its primary mode of lecture, the book is rife with how to’s for educators.

Keywords: game based learning, experiential education

This book focuses strongly on boosting the level of active learning and the barriers that traditional and online classrooms carry for students via the use of immersive learning environments, mainly game based play experiences. Dr. Michael Sutton and co-author Kevin Allen suggest that educators must work to integrate these “disruptive ideas encompassed by game based learning” in order to boost active learning in a classroom setting, something which research suggests provides greater value for the student. Sutton, an IT pioneer turned professor, brings his expertise to learners in this new and innovative way. In the classroom, he strives to maximize learning via the use of serious gaming and simulations. His business savvy mind and years of experience in the IT field shine inside this framework. Self proclaimed “ad-man” Allen thrives in his ability to provide transformational learning experiences via the use of gamification. Their backgrounds support the book’s emphasis on academic education, showing disparities in the current way that professors and administrators provide learning. Solutions and how to’s are presented, along with ideas for future applications.

The book sets up with a succession of foundational terms and notions surrounding game based learning (GBL). Once said, the authors present sensible and logical approaches to integrating these concepts and generating new marketing ideas for gaining agreements within institutions. The ever growing field of digital technology and online learning has pushed this current generation to a place where they want to learn on their own terms, in a way that mimics the everyday world they live in. These flexible characteristics show the ingenuity of this type of self-led learning, and why it is relevant in today’s world. Challenges are identified and resources are suggested to overcome the mundane and keep things exciting.

What is the right approach and how do you choose among the plethora of options that are out there? This goes to the heart of what Sutton and Allen are discussing, and they do an excellent job providing a case for GBL. Housed mainly in an academic and education context, a detailed framework is provided for summative, formative and post-game playing assessment. This allows the GBL experience to be analyzed, recorded, and used for future research in this area. More importantly, advances in GBL have shown the deficiencies in the Lecture Method, and strongly
support the case for more active learning instructional techniques. Gaming allows for a true experiential learning environment where players can make purposeful decision-making, set goals with learning outcomes, and receive continuous feedback on their educational gains.

As a university faculty member who has spent hours inside of classroom environments trying to maximize the efficacy of my teachings, these methods provide a unique framework. Not only am I able to see student efforts immediately, I can easily track the progress that is made. This progress, or lack thereof, creates a map for who and what I need to focus on. Individualized feedback is streamlined, and assessment models which examine the gamified events show the student results immediately. The authors make a solid case for GBL as the future of education and academics.

This book is written in a simple language, something the reader will appreciate. Although the text is direct and easily understood to a person outside of the GBL field, there is an extensive reference list and index of wealth furthering the case that this active learning option is the way of the future. Emotify pushes its way onto this trending path, engaging the reader in a captivating way. Because the language of the book is less dense than some of its more academic contemporaries, it stands out as a foundational source in the world of GBL.