

From Fun to Skill to Knowledge – and Back

The Spectrum of Edutainment Methods Revisited

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Abstract

The central goal of education to transfer knowledge is best achieved if there exists an emotional incentive to acquire the offered content on the side of the auditorium. As many examples in e-learning environments have shown even time pressure and stress accompanying the learning process are accepted by students as long as they have some fun. For teachers this implies that they have to gain concise insight into the situation of their target group: What is it that might be considered by this group as 'good fun', how could the emotional basis on which edutainment applications builds upon look like?

The moment this question is posed it is immediately clear that an e-learning platform of the kind 'one-size-fits-it-all' has to fail. Applications have to be as diverse as the approached types of auditorium are. Different backgrounds and different cultures do provoke a diversity of applications – and since knowledge content hopefully will determine software development or at least software choice (and not vice versa!) a colourful spectrum will emerge. It not only will depend on the e-learning equipment available, the quality of teachers and the type of audience, it most crucially also will depend on the knowledge to be transferred. Fun with mathematics surely looks different to fun with gender competence!

Once a catchy e-learning environment has succeeded to engage students in playing with the issues at hand the first thing they acquire is skill. There is no doubt that skill, versatility of treatment methods, is an indispensable pre-requisite for knowledge transfer. Nevertheless there should be no doubt that a deeper level of knowledge – beyond skill – exists, a level to which the e-learning environment also should guide to. While phase of skill usually is connected to speed the deeper level usually needs some slowing down and muse. For designers of edutainment environments this is an extremely demanding challenge. Only after having achieved some deep knowledge, the student will fully recognize the journey of learning just experienced – and still will appreciate it as another kind of fun.

In the paper we will provide a few examples of our long-lasting experiences in the field ranging from macroeconomic simulations for universities to feminist computer games.