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Informal Learning:

Board Games as a Learning Tool

Introduction

Integrating board games into classroom instruction offers a valuable opportunity to foster informal learning experiences for students. Informal learning is a unique approach to acquiring new knowledge (Manaig, 2020). By incorporating this form of game-based learning into educational settings, educators can enhance student engagement, promote problem-solving skills, provide immediate feedback, personalize learning experiences, and facilitate the real-world application of knowledge that reflects experiential learning (Kolbs, 2024). Board games encourage active participation and collaboration, stimulating critical thinking and decision-making abilities in a fun and interactive manner. By exploring the significance of using board games as a form of informal learning in the classroom, educators can highlight the various benefits they can offer in enhancing students' cognitive development and educational outcomes.

Board games are tabletop games played on a premarked surface where players move pieces according to specific rules to achieve a set objective. Piette (2021) describes these games as involving strategic planning, decision-making, and competition among players, fostering critical thinking and social interaction. Board games come in diverse forms and complexities, from traditional classics to modern designer games, offering entertainment, educational, and cognitive development benefits.

History

Board games have been educational tools for centuries, spanning ancient civilizations like Egypt and India. In ancient times, games like Senet (Tūhura Otago Museum, n.d.) and Pachisi (Walker, n.d.) were not only sources of entertainment but also imparted symbolic and educational lessons, teaching strategy, counting, and decision-making skills. Throughout history, board games have taught moral values, social norms, and academic subjects such as

geography and mathematics (Attia, 2016). In the 20th century, educational board games gained popularity for their ability to engage students and enhance learning outcomes. Today, board games continue to be valuable teaching tools in classrooms worldwide, fostering collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity among learners. Pope (2021) and Hunsucker (2016) describe the potential of board games as an educational tool to address climate change action. Board games can be used to replace traditional methods of conveying lessons to learners.

Theory

Using board games as a teaching tool can be supported by the theory of experiential learning, as proposed by David Kolb. Kolb's experiential learning theory (2024) posits that individuals learn most effectively through a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. Board games provide students with a concrete and hands-on experience, allowing them to actively engage in the learning process, similar to what Kolb presents. As students play board games, they encounter challenges, make decisions, reflect on the outcomes, and adapt their strategies based on the feedback they receive during the game. This experiential learning approach fosters a more profound understanding, critical thinking, and the practical application of knowledge. Kolb's experiential learning theory aligns with board games, serving as an effective teaching tool that facilitates active learning, skill development, and meaningful educational experiences for students in the classroom.

Educational Successes and Engagement

Integrating board games into educational settings has proven to yield remarkable educational successes and high levels of student engagement. O'Neill and Holmes (2022) review how board games help young children learn in various subjects, including math,

science, language, as well as social and emotional skills. They discuss how board games, especially those that encourage teamwork, can enhance learning in classrooms, therapy sessions, and homes. The authors highlight the potential of board games to support learning across various areas, suggest exciting opportunities for future research, and propose formal and informal academic research to continue drawing knowledge from diverse sources (O'Neil & Holmes, 2022).

Research and classroom practice done by Rajković and company (2020) demonstrated the positive impact of using board games and project-based learning as a teaching tool. Within lessons, board games were used to promote academic performance by helping students grasp complex concepts, reinforce learning objectives, and enhance retention of information. Furthermore, Rajković explores the interactive and fun nature of board games, capturing students' interest and motivating them to participate actively in learning. The element of competition, collaboration, and challenge in board games fosters a sense of engagement that keeps students invested in their education.

Conclusion

The exploration of board games as a teaching tool in the classroom has revealed significant benefits for students, including enhanced engagement, improved academic performance, enhanced critical thinking, and improved social skills development. Educators can create dynamic and interactive learning experiences that cater to diverse learning styles and promote active participation by integrating board games into educational settings. Research studies have consistently demonstrated the positive impact of utilizing board games in lessons, enhancing student motivation, problem-solving abilities, and collaboration. Board games are a versatile tool for educators to personalize learning experiences, foster multidomain learning, and empower students to become enthusiastic and active learners in

the classroom. As the field of board game-based learning continues to evolve, promising opportunities exist for further research and exploration into the potential of board games to support educational outcomes across various subject areas and settings.

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