

Details

Gamification in the Literacy Classroom with Dr. Lauren Gehr - 281

In this episode, seasoned educator and instructional coach Dr. Lauren Gehr shares stories that illustrate the power of gamification in the literacy classroom and beyond. You'll hear how gamified learning fosters critical thinking, collaboration, and a deeper dive into content. If you want to try out gamification in your classroom this year, this episode is for you!

Link to live show notes: <https://classtechtips.com/2024/08/20/gamification-281/>

*Gamification

Introduction

Hello there, and welcome to today's episode of the Easy EdTech podcast. My name is Monica Burns, and I am so glad you're here to join me today. If you want to make the most of education technology, AKA EdTech, you are in the right place. My goal has always been to help make EdTech easier and give you ideas to try yourself, share with a colleague, or bookmark for later in the school year.

Every Tuesday on the Easy EdTech podcast, you'll hear stories from my time in the classroom, my work with schools and districts, and my travels to different EdTech events. Get ready for solo episodes where I share some quick tips, stories, and interviews full of practical ideas and stories from new guests each month. If we mention something you'd like to check out, make sure to click the link. You'll find it in the episode description or the summary area where you're listening to this podcast, or you can find every episode and all of the resources we mention by going to classtechtips.com/podcast or by going to classtechtips.com and just clicking on the Easy EdTech Podcast button at the top of the page.

Intro Sponsor Message

This episode is sponsored by the 2nd edition of EdTech Essentials. My updated book from ASCD and ISTE is perfect for kicking off the 2024 school year. It features two new essentials on the impact of AI in education, almost 100 chatbot prompts to try, and much more. The 2nd edition of EdTech Essentials is now available on Amazon. Visit my website at classtechtips.com/books to learn more!

Today's Intro

This week's episode is titled: "Gamification in the Literacy Classroom with Dr. Lauren Gehr - 281" and we talk about what gamification is and isn't, what it looks like in a literacy and

STEM classrooms, and what to consider if you want to bring these engaging experiences to your students. Let's dive into the conversation!

Episode Transcript

Monica Burns:

Welcome to the podcast. I am so excited to chat with you about gamification in the literacy classroom and, you know, beyond <laugh>. But before we jump into all of that, would love for our listeners to learn a little bit about your role. You know, what is your role in education? What is your day-to-day look like?

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

Well, thank you for having me, Monica. I'm Dr. Lauren Gayer. And I've actually had an interesting professional kind of journey this past couple of years. I've taught in an English classroom for the past 14 years, and recently my role has come changed in education, and I am going to be an instructional coach at a high school near Columbia, South Carolina. And so I will be supporting teachers across content areas in their classrooms with implementing best practices and things like that to help their students meet their learning targets or indicators for our state standards. And but it's kind of the perfect fit for me because I'll still get to research and kind of write about best practices and experiment with crazy ideas I have for good teaching <laugh>.

Monica Burns:

Well, having that, you know, perspective, bringing that right into this new role, I am, you know, really excited to chat about a topic that might, you know, include a word people have heard about before or gamification, but they might not really be sure how to wrap their head around it. I know sometimes we hear, you know, lots of different definitions or lots of different explanations and just really to anchor our conversation about gamification in the literacy classroom and beyond today, you know, what does gamification mean in general, but then more specifically in a classroom or, or educational setting?

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

Yeah, for me, when I think about gamification, I think about you are transforming some kind of assignment to include elements of gaming, whatever that looks like for a student or for the

instructor into the way that students master their standards. And it's not always about like playing games and things like that. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. But it's really thinking about, I look at gamification, like looking at the process of creating games. So you have those aspects of collaboration and creating stories and focusing on different outcomes. And it's really become this rigorous design for creating authentic products of learning for students that not only encourages the skills, the like what the standards ask for, but also looking at just social emotional things like working with your peers. And I think a lot of people think gamification and it's like either very techy or solitary, but you really have to work with others to make your games make sense. And so you have to think about others, communicate with others. And then of course, we also have these strategies that are just life strategies that are good, like organization and being productive. And so that's kind of what it looks like in my classroom and kind of in my experience with what I've been doing.

Monica Burns:

And I think that's really helpful context for listeners too, because it helps, you know, debunk some of the myths around this, right? That it's, you know, one student playing a game staring at their screen, right? Just very solitary, like you said. You know, this is an opportunity for collaboration, for that critical thinking, for organizing, right? For making decisions. And as we connect this back to the literacy right classroom, how can gamification help students dig deeper into text and improve their comprehension and analytical skills?

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

So I actually started fixating on this idea. My husband is a gamer and plays a lot of games at home. And so I noticed that I really didn't like the shoot 'em up type games. Yeah. What I really loved <laugh>. I loved watching the games with stories where you had a main character that was achieving something in the game. And I could sit and watch those games forever in our, in our younger days <laugh>. So, so I fixated on that idea, and I was just like, how creative it is of the, all of these, like artists and designers when they think of all of these different games and storylines and situations. That's a really hard thing to do, I feel like, as an author or a creator. And so that's what kind of got me into this was the fact that it is liter, it's literacy at its best.

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

You have to read, you have to think about outcomes and make predictions. And so that's kind of what got me into this because I really emphasize with my students creating their own product of learning. And so I don't want them replicating something that I've already told them. I want them to take what I've taught them and do something bigger. And so we could

always have students write stories in a very formulate type way, but this enables them to create their own story and kind of give them choice and practice these really difficult skills for English, especially like character development and plot development and things like that in a, in an engaging type way.

Monica Burns:

And just that separation when we think about different gaming experiences like, you know, the, the gaming experience from my world, right? Or, or my personal experience is all like Tetris on a Game Boy, which <laugh> does not have very much storytelling, right? Yeah. Or very much depth to it. So if there's someone who's had a similar experience to me, right? They might not understand that there's so much more happening, particularly right in the past decade with well developed right. Storytelling within games. Right. Unbelievable. When you think about all the pathways and all the things that have to happen, I mean, to the point that they're making HBO series, right? Based on games, right? Because the narrative and the storytelling is so powerful. So I think that there's this natural connection to ELA skills, right? Whether you're looking at them in an ELA environment, you know, or in a different kind of classroom. So, you know, can you share an example of a successful gamified literacy assignment or, or project that you've implemented yourself or, or maybe you've seen an action with some of the colleagues that you work with?

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

So I actually started this journey with an honors English three STEM class. So the high school in which I worked is a nationally ranked STEM school. And it, so it seemed like a very good way to assess those STEM learners with gamification. And so for them, they still had to write the stories. We focused on gothic literature, Edgar Allen Poe, things like that. You know, start with the really creepy stuff to pull 'em in. Yeah. And my students I originally told 'em they had to code the game because since it was a STEM English class, there had to be elements of STEM learning in there. And so I asked, you know, I told 'em they could code it and like type it up however they wanted to do it. And then interestingly, I had some kids that were like, I'm kind of tired of coding.

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

And they were like, can we just do it differently? And I was like, sure. And so they used Google Slides to help them put their links on the slides that would navigate to other slides and things like that. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. Yeah. It was super cool. And I liked allowing that choice of having them do something that was comfortable for them for their product of learning, but

we really focused on setting and how an author uses descriptions and characters almost to develop setting and have the plot kind of go along. And so I just had some interesting games that popped up because of course you have STEM students and the sky's the limit because they were just creating the wildest type things. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. But the stories, all of these students that had never been English kids, they were more sciencey, really kind of engaged with the story.

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

I've also done a successful type project as well with college prep students. So CP students that used Google Slides to create choose your own adventure games. Yeah. That was kind of an old school way Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> <laugh> of game design. And so the students had already created their own hero based off of a British time period or event in history. And they'd write a, they wrote a narrative story about their hero, and so they took their hero and created clickable pathways to lead someone through their story. And then they also had to think of alternate endings, so people had places to go in their game. And so what was really interesting was when I presented this challenge to both STEM students who, you know, are top of the top of everything, and then my CP students both sets of students really rose to the occasion because you had elements in there of choice. Yeah. And you know just the freedom to do what they want and kind of practice their skills in a low stress environment. So it was super fun.

Monica Burns:

And just all those, those options, that choice. It's so funny that you mentioned the choose your own adventure stories, because one of my very good friends, she posted a picture like last week of her second grader was reading like a Choose your own, like an old school. I don't know where they found it.

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

Can you choose your own

Monica Burns:

Adventure story? I was like, oh my gosh, I haven't thought about that in a million years. But Right. That way of like, you know, navigating it as a consumer, creating something like that. And, you know, you also said something that I don't think I'd ever really considered around, you know, gaming, which is the world building piece and its connection to the setting. You

know, we think so much about the character, we think so much about what's gonna happen next, and all those things are important. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>, right. And great. But we don't always think about the setting, you know, as much Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And you're so right. That when you're developing these kind of experiences or having kids reflect right on experiences that they've had, the setting like this world that their characters moving through is so crucial, right. To everything that's happening. So I love that because I do think it could really help someone think deeply, right? Go back to the text, find those connections, or just have some really great conversations about what they're seeing.

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

Well, and I think that, especially kind of piggybacking off of what you said, students that play these games don't realize the layers that go into this kind of creation, but then when the students get excited and they start doing it, they don't realize what they're doing is super difficult and rigorous. Yeah. And so it's always fun for them to kind of struggle through the creation of, especially when we're doing the clickable pathways on Google slide where they're like, oh my gosh, my link didn't work. Like I have a hundred slides. Yeah. <Laugh>. And that one link didn't work. And I was like, seeing them struggle through the creative process of putting these things together. It's, there's so much dirty learning going on where it's like they have to push through the, the struggle. So,

Monica Burns:

So many layers. And I love the stem and the literacy connection, right. From your classroom experience. And of course we know. Right. And that's a great example too, of how literacy isn't just part of an ELA classroom. So I'm curious, what have you seen in other subject areas, you know, related to gamification, maybe directly supporting literacy, like your experience or things, things that you've seen that maybe it's not as right explicit there. Would love to hear any other stories or examples you have to share.

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

Well, I think this kind of goes along with when I was thinking about what are some of the challenges that teachers face. I think teachers are scared to do assignments like this. Not necessarily scared though, but they see something like this and they hear gamification and they think playing games. Yeah. And there are a lot of great resources out there for competitive gaming. So it's like, you know, you answer the questions and like they get points and then they win and all this kind of stuff, but teachers are misunderstanding the engagement of gamification where it takes it to that next level. And you have to do that kinds

of that kind of higher order thinking and creating their own game. And so I think teachers get nervous when they hear gaming. They think fun, and then they're like, you can't have fun in a classroom, <laugh>.

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

And I'm like, oh gosh. Yeah. So and I haven't really seen very many people you know, kind of latch onto this idea just in my own little world at my school now, obviously our stem, our STEM teachers at our school in their computer programming class, they do a lot of that kind of stuff. Yeah. But again, I kind of think that they don't see it's more of a focus on content and not necessarily the process. Yeah. And so one thing that a lot of our state standards are doing is they're emphasizing more of the skills unless of the content. So for example, in our new history, I say new, it is 2019 revised social study standards. They're more focusing on, not when did this war happen, but the skills of comparison and things like that, and how do you compare and contrast all of these different things. And so I think that if people focus more on the actual process and the skills of demonstrating their learning instead of like the right and the wrong and the, oh, the kids get really hyped when we play Kahoot, which is also a great resource to use with the kids. So you know, I think more people would be open to using it.

Monica Burns:

And I think, you know, I appreciate your framing there too, right? And the reminder of what this is, what, this isn't what this can look like. And just acknowledging right, where people may come from from their past experiences, right. And bring that into a discussion there, there may need to be some shifts there. Right. And having great stories and great examples, like the ones you've shared, I think really help people wrap their head around this. So, you know, one thing you mentioned was the choice that you were giving kids to explore different things, to create different kinds of products. And I wonder, you know, if you can speak more on how gamification can support differentiated instruction. You know, are you using gamification strategies to assess students or respond to data? Kind of a combination of both. What does that look like in your learning environments?

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

So it's interesting because I tend to center my practice on choice. And I think choice is a teacher's best friend when it comes to differentiation. So for example, when I talked about my STEM class, some of the STEM kids were like cracking that coding magic that they do, and they just jumped on it while other students were like, Hey, we'd love to just write, you know, and that was so beautiful and kind of hit with where they were comfortable. And I think when

you use, when you utilize strategies like gamification, it's the perfect way for students to be comfortable with who they are as learning learners and for you to challenge them as teachers, but to also challenge them in an achievable way. Like, you don't wanna have students, if I gave my CCP students only the option to code, that would be an arduous task.

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

And they would never get to that feeling of someone playing their game and being like, oh my gosh, that was a great game. And so I had some students I never give them limits or requirements for how long their games have to be. And so I had some students that spent so much time with their games, and at the end it was 200 slides, and then some students that like had 10 solid slides and they were like, look what I did. And so and then of course, you kind of build in naturally with your writing workshop processes. You look at what does the student need as a writer. You have the students that are very simple sentences and it's not as, you know, in depth as others. And so it's, it's a system that you can use in your classroom to naturally differentiate so students can be proud of their learning and can rise to the occasion of challenging themselves. So

Monica Burns:

No, and just that understanding of what everyone needs, responding to those observations, right. Those past experiences and giving them some choice and you know, just having them create something that they're excited about. And, you know, your emphasis on the process here is, is so interesting because I feel like, and, and you might be, especially with your ELA background, you know, having conversations on the AI of it all and what this means, right? For kids writing essays and just the implications. And I feel like many of my conversations this year have been focused on the process, right? What can we do to really celebrate the process as opposed to just celebrate that essay <laugh>, you know, at the end. Yeah,

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

For sure.

Monica Burns:

And so I love this idea of really leaning into the process and having kids create something that they're working with a peer, they're collaborating, they're probably getting feedback right. In a, in a manner, right, in a loop too. So just so much to think about here for listeners who are looking to explore something new or maybe revisit something that they haven't right.

Considered in a little bit. So, you know, where can people connect with you? I will link out to all the things so they can find you, they can find that great article on Edutopia that you wrote too. Where can people connect with you? Where can they learn more about your work?

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

So of course they can visit Edutopia and Edutopia does a great job of you know, curating their resources from each of their educator writers that they spotlight. But also my blog LoveED focuses on you know, cultivating the passion of education again, and giving teachers access to you know, resources and strategies to help their students enjoy learning, but also for teachers to enjoy teaching again when teaching can just be so hard right now. And then they can also find me on X @thegehrbear and for sure, definitely email me. I love sharing resources and collaborating with other, other educators. And so any of those ways people can reach out.

Monica Burns:

Well, thank you so much for your time today and sharing all of these great ideas with listeners.

Dr. Lauren Gehr:

Thank you, Monica.

So let's make this EdTech easy with some key points from the episode...

Gamification promotes critical thinking and collaboration.

Students can benefit from choice.

Focus on the process as well as the final product.

Remember, you can find the shownotes and the full list of resources from this episode including all of the ways to connect with Dr. Lauren Gehr on classtehtips.com/podcast and finding today's episode #281!

Outro Sponsor Message

This episode is sponsored by the 2nd edition of EdTech Essentials. My updated book from ASCD and ISTE is perfect for kicking off the 2024 school year. It features two new essentials on the impact of AI in education, almost 100 chatbot prompts to try, and much more. The 2nd edition of EdTech Essentials is now available on Amazon. Visit my website at classtechtips.com/books to learn more!

Outro

Thank you for listening to this new episode of the Easy EdTech Podcast! I love creating new episodes for you each week, but I could use a bit of help spreading the word about the podcast. Can you leave a rating or review on your favorite podcast app?

Spotify will let you tap on the stars, and Apple Podcasts will let you tap on the stars and leave a one or two sentence review.

Thank you so much for taking this extra step, it helps other educators find episodes like this one when they are searching for EdTech tips.

Episode Resources

- Connect with Dr. Lauren Gehr on [X \(Twitter\)](#) & via [email](#)
- Check out Dr. Lauren Gehr's blog [LoveED](#) & [Edutopia profile](#)
- [Putting a Playful Spin on Literary Analysis](#) (Dr. Lauren Gehr's Edutopia Article)
- [Kahoot!](#) (Game-Based Learning Platform)
- [Unexpected Ways to Connect Literacy and STEM with Dr. Jacie Maslyk](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [How to Choose the Best Gamified Reading App](#) (Blog Post)
- [Must-Try Tips for Creating Review Games with Lauren Hawkins](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [AI and The Power of Play](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [Engaging Algebra Game for Middle School Math](#) (Blog Post)
- [How Games Can Make Learning Stick](#) (Podcast Episode)