

# THE LEARNING GAMES: TO WHAT EXTENT CAN GAME-BASED LEARNING INCREASE THE CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT OF GCSE YEAR BLACK STUDENTS IN MULTI-ACADEMY TRUSTS?

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## INTRODUCTION

- Across schools in England, certain ethnic backgrounds statistically achieve amongst the lowest 'Attainment 8' scores (this measuring a pupil's achievement in eight GCSE subjects, including English and Maths).
- Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) were introduced in the early 2000s to reinvigorate schools' academic performances by granting them greater autonomy to combat the issues that prevented them from succeeding.
- Per the Department for Education, the added performance value (measuring pupil attainment) of 2/3 of MATs was below average. Thus, the evidence suggests that despite the increased presence of academies, there is yet to be a correlation between funding, increased autonomy, and tangible academic achievements amongst certain pupils.
- The purpose of this research project was to challenge current learning methods applied in multi-academy trusts, to ensure that they are utilising the most current and effective tools to increase the engagement and subsequent attainment of black students – who are amongst those who are least likely to achieve high attainment 8 scores.

## METHODOLOGY

Due to the short timescale of this research project, I am only able to give a hypothetical view of how I would have intended to complete qualitative research. The intent would have been to interview MAT governing staff, headteachers, and teaching staff to measure to what extent sample schools are implementing and integrating game-based learning to their curriculums, and what other methods they are using to decrease the attainment gap between pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, and their more privileged counterparts.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To what extent does one's cultural capital influence their ability to engage with classroom learning?
- To what extent do games positively influence a pupil's cognitive function?
- What factors can influence a student's ability to recall information?

## ON GAME-BASED LEARNING

Moreno-Ger et al refer to Prensky (2001)'s definition of effective game-based learning as being able to balance 'fun and educational value'. This could include simulations designed to subtly teach pupils about leadership, and independent thinking, active-recall, student-focused, games such as Kahoot! A good 'edutainment' function must adapt to the learning capabilities and learning styles of students, and for maximum effect, is integrated into the curriculum and be adequately recorded into an attainment recording system.

## EXTERNAL FACTORS

Frings et al (2019) concluded that one's relationship with their own identity contributed to their academic attainment. Steele (1992,97), found that the 'assessment environment' is more likely to trigger stereotype threat, thus increasing anxiety levels (and subsequently reduce cognitive capacity). Per Osborne (2001), white pupils reported lower levels of anxiety following assessments, thus corroborating that one's level of identity incompatibility can impact how they do at school. This is why an increased implementation of game-based learning is important because pupils are more likely to learn if they are having fun whilst learning – they are also more likely to develop positive social skills – including leadership and independent thinking.

## ON HOLDING MATS ACCOUNTABLE

Per Ehren and Godfrey (2017), MATs need 'accountability controls' both within the respective trust, and from outside to remain effective. An interesting discovery was the seemingly negative impact governmental interference had on the way the trust bodies observed, acted subsequently. For instance, Ehren and Godfrey note that government inference may have negatively contributed to the behaviours of Trusts' bodies. E.g. worse performing schools were more likely to be passed on to other trusts. The issue is that this that certain schools are doomed to fail due to inadequate funding, thus resulting in the students (already less likely to achieve high attainment scores) to do less well.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, my understanding of the topic of game-based learning suggests that the increased implementation of game-based learning methods will only slightly increase students' enjoyment of learning, classroom engagement, and academic attainment. This being because whilst there is evidence to suggest that there exist clear cognitive benefits for childrens' brains from gaming, there is no conclusive manner that one can research how it directly correlates to a pupil's academic success.