

Research the Problem- The Problem and my Solution

Background

I decided to do some research on the negative effects of education on students, just to see the scope of the problem. From my findings, it seems that it can be broken down into two similar, but different effects:

First off is stress. Stress is a natural bodily response to something that is threatening or frightening. In students of all ages, it seems that stress occurs most often before or during exams. Some studies show that levels of stress are also increasing in class. This is due to an increase of standardized testing- this then managed to perform as a platform in which to compare students with a numerical measurement. This has led to teachers at all key stage levels to *“orient students to performance goals and comparative standards of excellence instead of internal mastery goals,”* [Scott Paris, a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan]. This emphasis on external goals has created an ‘unhealthy classroom’ scenario in which, *“standardized tests provoke considerable anxiety among students that seems to increase with their age and experience.”*

Secondly, as this seems to be a longer term effect of the ‘unhealthy classroom’ scenario, there is depression. Teenage depression can be triggered in the same way adult depression can, but could also be triggered with things such as; social rejection, family turmoil or problems with school work or exam pressure. Depression and lead to a large list of negative effects (those of which I will not list). With this in mind, the need for students to start enjoying education and having fun in class seems a lot more of an important issue.

This issue is further inflamed by this idea of schools finding clearer ways to rank the students in terms of performance. If each test can be given a percent or a letter, then you have given students a clear classification that can be used to show their worth as a person whose life is determined by education. This can set up a class system, with each certain break in percentile forming their own groups. Much like the socioeconomic economic groups in society, you see that while those in the top percentile seem to have it better, the stress of staying on top and fear of falling plague them. There is also these idea of the lower percentiles coping with the depression associated with being at the bottom position. Unlike these classes, in education there is also the middle classes that are constantly reminded that they are inferior to the top classes, and that their future will be out of their control unless they manage to raise their class.

While that situation is hard enough on a person- leading to crippling stress. You then have to include the mechanic of tests and exams into the situation. Your whole “ranking” as a student is determined by this one event. This gives an unrealistic amount of stress assigned to a single task, there is no aspect of life outside of education that mimics the importance in such a concentrated time. It is no wonder that both inside and outside the classroom, education is associated with negativity in the eyes of students.

Interpretation

While I have researched in depth about stress and depression, the issue has very little to do with those topics. Rather than tackle those huge issues- the task is to avoid it all together. When faced with the task of “Getting an online thing to...” I interpret that as a request to make an online resource. Of course, this puts me in a bind. I need make a resource for science without it having the negative association of education.

After thinking for a while, I thought about the idea of learning being second nature to enjoyment. Rather than looking at the other online learning resources available and trying to make a better version, I looked back at the problem and looked at other possible solutions. I don't have to directly tackle the problem; I just have to remove it.

I am aware that the above paragraph sounds cryptic, but I will go back to my point. When trying to think of fun while still being education, the mind goes to this idea of an educational game. Due to the massive focus on this idea of fun, I'm not even going to consider this idea of 'interactive activities' that some online resources like to use to try and break up the monotony of static learning. There is also this idea of interactive guides or videos that are also invalid as it wouldn't be much of a project.

As someone who has been a student for 12 years and secondary education isn't that far back into my history, I can remember using a lot of online resources for many different subjects. Some were dedicated sites (like Teach ICT), they only offered information related to a single area of study, other websites (like BBC Bitesize), they tried to supply a lot of information about a lot of different subjects. One thing I have never really seen was these resources manage to create a good 'educational game'.

Continuing this idea of the unattainable goal of the 'perfect' educational game, I have come up with the rather painful decision of "let's not". What this informal statement means is that why I will attempt to come up with a game based on GCSE science- to avoid this trap called 'an educational game', I will instead formally state that my solution to the problem is purely promotional to the subject.

Resuming my frozen point with the inclusion of my point made above, rather than directly tackle the problem of current education and the issues it brings up (like depression and stress), I will use this concept of a promotional game to try do the opposite of the problem rather than solve it. If GCSE education is negatively linked due to exams and crippling pressure, then I will try to promote some positive associations with a relaxing experience that introduces students to GCSE science topic without the pressures of trying to gain an education.

Judgement and reasoning

I know my client wants an online resource that will help increase the number of students considering GCSE science. It would be an insult to try and say that my solution will directly affect the target audience. I feel that rather than making students take part in a survey after playing my game (they will, but I believe that these results are better taken with a pinch of salt), the real judgement should be taken in other factors that symbolise important meanings. Things like:

- "How much attention were they paying to the game?"
- "How was their posture, was it relaxed, or did the game seem to stress them out or make them uncomfortable?"
- "After the game did they instantly close the tab, or did they take a couple of seconds to look at the end screen?" (this makes more sense to an avid gamer, as it shows that they are recalling the game).
- "Did they seem disappointed at the length? Did they ask if there was more?"

Oh course, I haven't explained certain points of my solution like "why did you choose the exact form of game like you did?". This solution was decided myself. As someone who didn't have a computer until much later in life (relative to my whole life), I spent a lot of time in my primary school playing flash games from foreign websites in school. While I don't recommend spending time in education using the computer the break school rules- I believe that these simple breaks really help to break up the stress of school.

Realistically, the idea of a full video game with hours of gameplay would be unreasonable. The situations that arise in a school environment means that any video game played on a computer would have to be broken down into levels. It would also be ineffective to save these levels to a certain account. Flash games were aware of this, spawning what could almost be called a subcategory of games. Features of these games meant to be played in school included tutorials that could be finished in under a minute and levels that unlocked in order, but also could be unlocked via a password distributed at the end of each level, perfect for a student who has no permanence.

Personally, I guess that my solution all falls back to the early days in school. As I was the first year in the school, it took two years for the IT to finally block, filter and remove every flash game that could be played. Even now, five years later I am seeing students desperately trying to find loop holes to play games. If a student is content to play the Google Pac-Man for entertainment, then like alcohol in the prohibition- my game will certainly be welcomed by students at least in the school. It is on these principles that I believe that the solution that takes the best advantage of the situation while still remaining computable singlehandedly by myself is a simple game that draws inspiration from the flash games I played at that age.