

I recently made a very strong statement on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn about snakes and ladders and whether it was a game..

Snakes and Ladders is not a game and we should stop using it in gamification and serious games.

Obviously, it was designed to provoke some comment, but boy was I surprised with the level of interaction I got over the three channels. The LinkedIn conversation may still be going on!

As expected, there were those who agreed and those who did not. Some were using Snakes and Ladders in training very successfully, others agreed that it was a pile of pants.

My justification was as follows: Snakes and Ladders gives the player no agency, no control of the outcome. The player has no influence at all over how the game will play. There are no challenges and no skill needed either.

However, those who felt this was unfair pointed out that as a mechanism for delivering content, it was a great platform. Attaching external values and storytelling to the ups and downs of the game were easy metaphors for many real-life experiences. The unexpected rises and falls of a career for instance.

What was more interesting, in the end, was that the discussion slowly turned into a more philosophical debate about the nature of games.

Lusory Attitude Is Back in the Spotlight

I have spoken a lot about the [nature of play](#), highlighting that play is subjective and contextual and relies on "[Lusory Attitude](#)", ie a playful state of mind. It seems that the same is true of games. Snakes and Ladders may not seem like a game to an adult, but to a child it is magical. They approach it with a lusory attitude, never noticing they have no control. They are absorbed in the competition, the story being played out as the climb ladders and slide down snakes.

I was reminded that anything can *feel* like a game if you approach it with the right frame of mind. Our job as gamification designers is to create experiences that help to frame the solution in a way that allows our users to approach and engage with that lusory attitude. A

narrative that carries a shallow game mechanic, a series of extra challenges that make the core delivery mechanic more interesting, [fake choice](#) that makes the user feel they have some level of agency and control etc etc etc.

Is it gamification heaven or hell? It depends how you use it, just don't be lazy and use it as the only nod towards games in your solution!

Social Media

The other nice lesson was about the nature of social media - it works best when you remember the **social** bit ☐

Below are links to the various conversations - there are some real nuggets of gold in there, thanks to everyone who got involved!

The LinkedIn Conversation

The Facebook Conversation

The Twitter Conversation

[Is Snakes & Ladders a Game?](#)