



An Interview with Karl Kapp

Description

To continue the interview theme for another week, I present my interview with Karl Kapp. Karl is an eLearning expert, author, researcher and all round fountain of information and understanding!

Can you sum up what you do in a single sentence?

I teach, study, research, write, and educate others about the convergence of learning, technology and pedagogy with a focus on games and gamification.

How did you get involved with learning and helping people understand it better?

I discovered the field of instructional design my first year out of college. I was working for a company that happened to be an instructional design firm. Working for them changed my life, when I found out what the field was about and how it impacted people through carefully designed learning interventions, I wanted to be a part of it. When I found out about this field, I changed my graduate program of study from Educational Counseling to Instructional Technology and I haven't looked back. I think the ability to impact learners through instruction is compelling and to do it with methods like games and gamification is even more exciting.

When did gamification show up on your radar?

Well, to answer this question, I went back to my blog to see that my first post with the word "gamification" was November 8, 2010. It was a post about Jess Schell's *Gampocalypse*. But actually, I had been thinking about and writing about the concept for some time. I knew that learners could benefit from elements of games integrated into instruction but I didn't have a catchy word for it. In fact, I had written about game-based elements for learning in my 2007 book, *Gadgets, Games and Gizmos* but didn't have a jazzy term for it. So when I heard the word "gamification" I knew that was the term I could use. Not everyone likes the term but it sums up the idea of using game elements in traditional instruction pretty well.

How do you see games and gamification (remember our comment discussion on the difference a while back) affecting education in the next few years?

Games for learning and gamification appear to be gaining momentum in the learning industry and I do not see a slowdown in growth. Several elements are converging to spur this growth. First is that the technology used to create learning games and gamification experiences is becoming more accessible. It is still difficult to program a high level game and all of the associated artwork but it is 10 times easier than it was just five years ago and in another five years it will be even easier than today. So the technology is making it easier to create high quality learning games.

Second, the current generation entering the workforce has grown up playing video games. They are familiar with the conventions of video games, they play video games on their mobile devices and they are not opposed to using video games for learning. They understand that the medium of learning games can help them learn because they have learned by playing games. They are also expecting more “fun” in every day interactions so elements of games added to every day experiences like driving a car or paying for gas are expected to be more “game-like.”

Third, the research-base for game-based learning is finally starting to grow. Previously there was little focus on games for learning aimed at adults in the research literature. However, the combination of the first two items has generated an entire focus on the area of studying games for learning and the existing research to date has been positive for the impact of games for learning. Gamification still needs some more research to determine when it can be most effective but there are a number of elements underfoot in that area.

Fourth, games have the added element of replayability. Most people would not want to sit through a typical classroom lecture or online learning module again and again and again. Yet, these same people will play a game over and over. Games provide the chance to practice and hone skills because the learner wants to engage with them time and time again because they have elements that lend toward replaying scenarios or situations and observing the outcome. Gamification, if done well, will propel people through content and help them cover material more effectively by knowing what is of value by the difficulty of earning the points or badges.

But keep in mind games and gamification for learning still encounter resistance and this is because the people resisting don't understand that well designed games or a gamification event contain all the best learning design: they start easy and allow the learner to gain skills as they go, this is the pedagogical element of scaffolding, they provide models of desired behavior, this is Bandura's Social Learning Theory, when played over time, they use the concept of Distributed Practice, they provide Targeted Feedback and they allow the learner to employ all the elements of Self Determination Theory which are autonomy, relatedness and mastery. Games and gamification events when designed correctly, are the perfect vehicle for learning and that is why I think the future of games and gamification for learning is expanding.

Do you see value in gamification outside of education?

Yes, we need to learn constantly in all types of situations from learning which subway train to take to get where we are going, to learning how to fill out an expense report to learning how to make the best choice for our health. Given all of these reasons, I think gamification is going to gain a great deal of traction outside of the educational environment. Designers are going to add more and more game elements to everyday experiences and we are going to be immersed, for better or worse, in gamification. At times it will even seem like too much.

How do you see it changing in say the next 3 or 4 years?

I hope that in the next 3-4 years, we will have more data on what really works and what is hype and that we will see less superfluous adding of game elements and more targeted and thoughtful gamification. I see more understanding of what works and what doesn't work and more thought behind gamification of learning events. I also see more acceptance of game-based learning and a greater understand of the power of interactive learning to make a difference. That's my class is full vision. The other vision is that vendors have overdone the entire game and gamification thing and that they add games where they are not needed, gamification is forced down people's throats and there is tremendous backlash. But let's go for the first vision of the future.

How do you see MOOCs affecting the future of education

To me a MOOC is really just an online course, a large lecture online course. There will be no real lasting impact of MOOCs. They will eventually monetize as either a for-fee software service or an advertisement-driven medium like television. The real impact on the future of learning would be adaptive MOOCs or online courses that adapt to what the learner doesn't know. The real revolution in online learning will come with adaptive learning not with broadcast based learning that we currently have with MOOCs.

I assume you are a gamer ? What are you playing when you have the time?

I am a gamer! My current passion is Assassin's Creed III. I've lost weeks playing that game. And I cannot wait until Assassin's Creed IV. On my mobile phone I like Sid Meir's Civilization Revolution and on my iPad I like The Silent Age.

What is your favorite game of all time

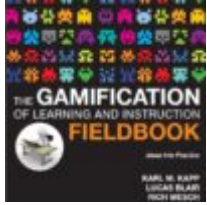
My favorite video game is James Bond 007 Nightfire for the PlayStation II. For some reason that game just really impacted me, I'll still play it from time-to-time. My favorite board game is still Stratego. I had a CD-ROM of that game a while back and it was just as awesome. I also really liked RIVEN, the sister game to Myst.

Thank you to Karl for taking the time to do this interview, check out his blog at <http://karlkapp.com/> for insights into eLearning, gamification and more!

Karl is author of the best selling learning book [The Gamification of Learning and Instruction](#) which explores the research and theoretical foundations behind effective game-based learning and gamification for learning. In the book he examines everything from variable reward schedules to the use of avatars to the gamification of pro-social behaviors. He has recently completed the accompanying fieldbook which is a [how to guide to developing games, gamification and simulations](#).



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