

Game Based Learning with DnD



"Those who make a distinction between entertainment and education may not know that education must be entertaining and entertainment must be educational."

This is how Marshall McLuhan invoked the principle of so-called edutainment in 1964. At that time, this neologism, which would appear in 1970, was completely innovative and assumed that the basis of education was playing, to make the student active and the learning experience more motivating. You can learn by doing, by changing the setting of the learning environment and proposing activities that enable the learner to be active in solving problems

that are set for them.

The 1970s is also the period of Papert's constructivist approach to learning, which was conceived as a learning path especially linked to the production of artefacts or Learning Objects, to make the student active and prosumer. Almost fifty years have passed since then and we still ask ourselves how there can be a different kind of learning in today's school, able to skip from a transmissive teaching method to one that is much more engaging for the student.

New educational modalities are opening up with the era of podcasting, video editing and storytelling. Experiments began a few years ago and today both podcasts and videos have come into full swing at school. With regard to storytelling, it plays an important role in memorisation. We learn better by telling and memorising stories, rather than a whole series of notions that we have to internalise for the test, which soon afterwards fade into oblivion.

Schools, especially in the USA, are winking at areas of experimentation that will certainly be in vogue in the near future: Dungeons and Dragons (DnD or D&D). D&D was introduced in 2018 by Professor Kade Wells who is now teaching at Harrisburg North Middle School in South Dakota. He calls "D&D the best metacognitive tool for education"¹. But what is D&D? It is a role-playing game created in 1974 by Gary Gygax and his friend Arneson, who laid the foundation for the board game that has become the most famous in the world. A common thread in the US series *Stranger Things*², DnD is very popular especially among the nerds. The game evolved thanks to the Gen Con that Gygax and his friends had organised since 1968. At these conventions, both young and old, 20 to 39 years old, board game lovers met. The aim of the game, which is purely fantasy, is to experience an adventure led by a Dungeon Master (DM). The DM is a guide who creates a situation to be proposed to the participants in the game. They invent, with the help of a card, a character with the following characteristics: name, sex, age, race, skills (strength, dexterity, charisma, constitution, wisdom, intelligence), etc. These attributes influence the character's abilities and evolution. Specific rules must be observed and players are provided with a game board, dice of various shapes and numbering, and the game manuals. The success of various actions is determined by the roll of the dice in combination with the characters' skills. DnD may be the future of learning at school as predicted by Kade Wells.



¹ <https://www.tomshw.it/culturapop/imparare-giocando-dungeons-dragons-arriva-a-scuola/>

² 2016 US television series created by the Duffer Brothers and distributed by Netflix

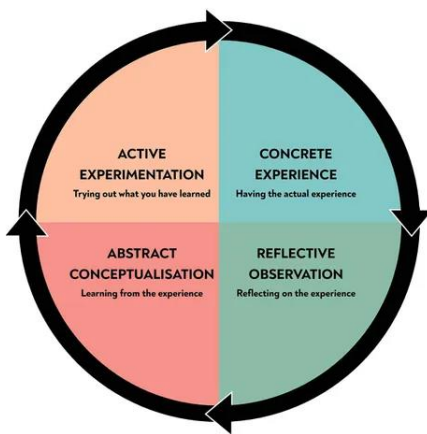
For the time being, the integration of game activities into the curriculum is mainly carried out in elementary and middle schools in the United States. Thanks to this game, children have implemented

their reading skills and have a better interpersonal approach with their peers. Furthermore, Kade Wells claims: "Playing Dungeons & Dragons makes you smarter".²

Wizards of the Coast has designed educational programmes to provide teachers with an organised approach in the classroom.³

In conclusion, D&D is a great way to learn. It is a game based on storytelling that enables exponential growth of the student as the game stimulates the brain to activate creatively. Sarah Roman gives the example of The Canterbury Tales and Beowulf⁴ and how children, by playing and identifying with other characters, are able to explore parts of themselves and expand their personalities.

For secondary schools, the game could be activated in the literary or historical field. The rules of the game should be modified due to the fact that a teacher can have a maximum of two hours in a class. Since DnD can take between four and five hours, Kolb's cycle⁵ allows us to apply more appropriate rules. By reshaping the game's original experience, it can be adapted to the needs of the class. Certainly the game, as a learning tool, allows the student to be placed back at the centre of the learning process.



Dissemination

Project news and results will be published on the project website available at this link. <https://www.gamelearnproject.eu/partners>

³ <https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/51790/how-dungeons-dragons-primers-students-for-interdisciplinary-learning-including-stem>

⁴ <https://dnd.wizards.com>

⁵ <https://www.wnyc.org/story/dungeons-and-dragons-critical-hit-classroom/>

⁶ <https://www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html>