Abstract

THESIS: Using Game Mechanics in Design Thinking Methodology

STUDENT: Deborah K. Parker

DEGREE: Master of Arts

COLLEGE: College of Communication, Information and Media

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This paper is a case study that chronicles the development process of Aha! The Game and explores combining game mechanics with a design thinking framework to inspire creative thinking in other settings. Aha! The Game is a design thinking tool that was specifically developed for use with teachers in Muncie Community Schools, a distressed school district in Indiana. Design thinking, a codified, six-step process, has been criticized for being too formulaic and rigid to create true innovation (Iskander, 2018; Jen, 2018; Nussbaum, 2018; Walters, 2011). Design thinking, however, seems to yield impressive results when it is facilitated in the right conditions of a playful environment (Schwab, 2018). In the case of Aha! The Game, teachers report having an overall positive experience after the gameplay. The right conditions were created for teachers with low morale and high anxiety to playfully engage in problem-solving. The game generated 2,547 data points from 10 schools in the MCS district. Further research is merited to explore whether introducing game mechanics in design thinking could yield similar results in other settings.

Keywords: design thinking, gamification, distressed schools