Involvement and Fun: Unusual Suspects in the Economics Classroom

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ABSTRACT
There has been much debate on the use of games to teach economics, but little evidence of how students actually learn from these games. This prompted an investigation, in the form of a case study at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), using a qualitative approach to investigate how and why learning occurs.

A sample of 1st year economics students, who had participated in a series of games on micro-economics topics, were chosen to participate in the research. This meant that they had to attend focus group sessions and participate in semi-structured interviews as part of the IQA (Interactive Qualitative Analysis) method. This enabled the development of a visual model to depict the various components and their relationships of the students’ learning process.

The games emerged as key catalysts which placed involvement and fun at the core of the learning process, leading to a deeper conceptual understanding of the micro-economics topics. This has implications for economic education, as modern students clearly learn more through active participation and involvement.

INVESTIGATIVE METHOD
INTERACTIVE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS (IQA)

KEY DRIVERS IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

PRIMARY DRIVER: ‘USE MORE GAMES’
Pivotal in the creation of an environment which acts as a catalyst in the process of developing deeper conceptual understanding of economic concepts. However, the establishment of a holistic learning environment is dependent upon the support of the secondary drivers: ‘Involvement’ & ‘Fun’

INVOILVEMENT
Involvement extends beyond mere active participation and interaction. It encompasses elements of autonomy, competence and relatedness.

FUN
Fun is paramount in unlocking deeper conceptual understanding and transforming the normally ‘dry’ economic theory into meaningful, tangible applications which students could relate to in everyday life.

IMPLICATIONS
Use more games. Even before we started this, I promise you that if you use more games you are going to understand the subjects so much more. It is so much fun!