



At the 6th Grade's September 12th Open House, I shared information about how my “gamified” class works. Of course, some parents were unable to attend, and they understandably may have the same questions that those who were present had asked.

A LITTLE HISTORY

Several years ago, when I was teaching writing (ELA) in 8th grade, I started using some of the strategies that games designers use—the same elements that make games appealing to people. My writing overlay was called Diddorol, and it garnered a lot of interest over the time I employed it. This year, when I moved to teaching 6th grade reading, I created a new overlay specific to reading, and less complex to make it age-appropriate.

A CLARIFICATION

A gamified classroom is not a computerized classroom. In fact, I think I have students use computers less often than other teachers. I also don't tend to use actual games in my instruction or in lessons. “Gamified” just means that I use certain, specific strategies to increase engagement and motivation, and to alter workflow and assessment to make things more fair.



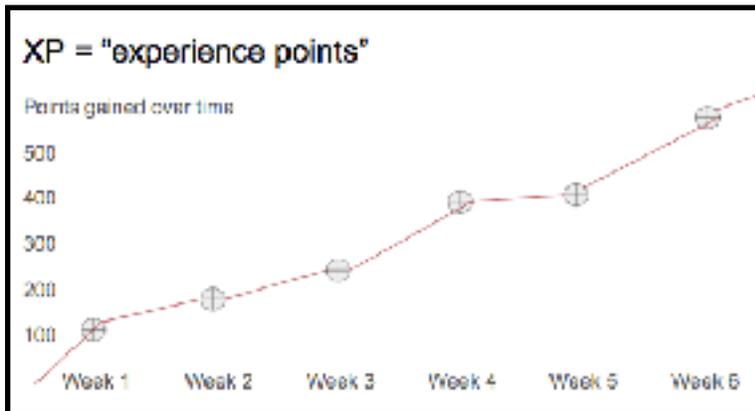
In my class right now, I primarily make use of two game design elements: Storyline, and XP.

Storyline* to give tasks meaning / context



A storyline allows assignments to be given a new context. Instead of an ordinary quiz or test, students may be challenged to defeat an evildoer by demonstrating their intellectual prowess. Instead of learning an abstract skill in an isolated session, it can be contextualized into the framework of a fiction.

Please see the appendix at the end of this piece to read the “first chapter” in the story of TaSEDA.



XP is an abbreviation for “Experience Points,” a system of scoring used in certain computer games. Often, a player will earn XP for completing tasks, and those points add up over time. As points increase, the player moves through levels.

In this class, I don’t use levels, but I do use XP. I have found that aggregate points are often more fair than the traditional method of grading—averaged scores, for

example, are easily dropped significantly by a single zero, whereas continual effort and improvement is rewarded with an XP system.

Unfortunately, as the grading system has changed in the district, the way I use XP has had to change to accommodate our use of power standards, so it’s not quite as easy to understand as it used to be. It used to be that I had it linked directly: The more points earned, the higher the grade.

When Power Standards were adopted, I shifted the use of XP to determine the students’ HOW (Habits of Work) scores. This makes a certain amount of sense, in that effort is logged by XP, but it was imperfect: HOW scores are also supposed to reflect students’ behaviors and attitudes.

	Regular grading (Prior to Power Standards)	HOW score (Last two years)
225 XP	D-	1
300 XP	D	2
600 XP	C	2.5
900 XP	B	3
1800 XP	A+	4

This year, I gave a lot of thought about the role that XP ought to have. I started by looking at the Power Standards system we use.

Power Standard scores

1 = Limited progress toward meeting standard

2 = In progress toward meeting standard

[2.5 = "just barely" meeting the standard]

3 = Meeting the standard

4 = Exceeding the standard

Power Standards were designed to monitor and report out to parents the student's level of accomplishment on a clear, specific skill and/or understanding of specific information. They do not take effort or attitude into account. As such, XP is ill-suited to be used as a method of recording this.

Barrington School District, though, did not adopt a "clean" Power Standard model. As well as the numbers 1, 2, 3, and 4, we also have fractional increments. More over, Barrington devised a hybrid system, one that reports out not just on the Power Standard with the 1-4 digit, but that also displays a score.

A NEW ROLE FOR XP

The more I thought about the Power Standards model, the more I felt the "4" made no sense to me. If a student meets a standard, that means that they have demonstrated a true understanding of and a genuine competency in that knowledge or skill. How can one "exceed" competency?

I decided that doing anything **above and beyond what is needed to earn the "3"** could be rewarded with XP, and that XP could be used to improve a "3" to something better.

ANOTHER CONCERN

When Barrington adopted a hybrid system, administration tied a percentage score to each of the intervals, and I fear this displayed percentage is (understandably) misunderstood/misread by parents:

Barrington's "Hybrid Model"

Power Standard	Percent indicated	What most parents see
1	47%	F
2	66%	F
2.5	75%	D-
3	84%	C or B
4	87%	A

These percentages imply that a student who has all "3s"—a clear indication that he or she has demonstrated competency in the Power Standards model—is actually a rather mediocre student. For that reason, I decided that XP should also have a second role: Besides being able to improve a "3" to a higher score, it should also be able to be used to improve the percentage score displayed in Powerschool.

As such, students are able to, by doing extra and better work, improve their scores in reading class. In order for parents to know what the actual earn Power Standard scores were, I will add a comment to an adjusted score, and indicate what the actual assessed score was in that comment field. (See screen shot on next page.)

You will still know the original, actual assessment

--	3	3
--	3	3
--	3	3
--	3.25	3
Columns/7		

The modified score is entered, changing the percentage shown, but a comment is added

The comment tells you what the actual Power Standard score was

There are two ways a student can use XP.

XP TO IMPROVE INDIVIDUAL SCORES:

A zero (0) indicates that the work was never turned in, and it generally cannot be changed. There will occasionally be exceptions to this rule; it will depend on the assignment.

Scores of 1, 1.5, or 2 (“failing” scores in the percentages) can be raised to a 2.5 (a “barely passing” score).

Change a 1.0 to a 2.5 = 200 XP

Change a 1.5 to a 2.5 = 150 XP

Change a 2.0 to a 2.5 = 100 XP

A score of 2.5 cannot be changed. (A 2.5 indicates that the student did the minimum, and that it is not clear whether the Power Standard was fully comprehended.)

A score of 2.75 can be raised to a 3, 3.25, or a 3.5.

Change a 2.75 to a 3 = 50 XP

Change a 2.75 to a 3.25 = 75 XP

Change a 2.75 to a 3.5 = 100 XP

Note: a 2.75 cannot be raised any higher than to 3.5

A score of 3 can be raised to a 3.25, 3.5, 3.75, or a 4.

Raise a grade of 3 or higher by .25 = 25 XP

Raise a grade of 3 or higher by .5 = 50 XP

Raise a grade of 3 or higher by .75 = 75 XP

Raise a grade of 3 to a 4 = 100 XP

**IF
QUESTIONS
LINGER,**

please don't hesitate
to get in touch with
me!

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XP TO RAISE A TRIMESTER GRADE:

Without using XP, the best score a student can get in a marking period is a 3.0. To earn a score of 3.25 to 4, XP can be used to raise individual assignments, or it can be collected, “banked,” and “cashed in” at the end of the trimester.

To raise a TOTAL GRADE at the end of the term:

+.25 = 500 XP

+.5 = 800 XP

+.75 = 1200 XP

+1.0 = 1800 XP

The First Chapter of “TaSEDA”

You are lying in bed after a long day of school, and you’re almost asleep, when you think you hear a noise outside. You sit up, and through the nearest window, you spy an orange ray of light. The light swings about, as if a searcher were holding a flashlight and moving it about...except the light shines from somewhere above.

Suddenly, the beam shoots straight toward your window, and directly into your eyes. You hear a gentle hum, but it is not scary; in fact, it sounds soothing, and you feel more at ease. The window opens on its own, and you see a friendly looking creature—is it a *guinea pig*?!? Yes, it appears to be a guinea pig all right, but you realize it’s not like any guinea pig from Earth when it starts talking to you. (Well, there are also the facts that it is green, and about your size.) It calls you by name, and it speaks in friendly voice:

“Gosh! I finally found you! I had no idea there were so many humans on this planet! It was like looking for a jivvery in a splotchdrift!

“Well, anyway, you don’t know me, but TASEDA has been watching you for a long time, and we feel that you are just the right kind of thinker we need. Oh- I guess you don’t know what TASEDA is. Lemme tell you. TASEDA is the Time and Space Exploring Detectives Association, and I am the regional director. My name is Squeakums. (Long story, don’t ask—ever. Please. It’s a touchy subject for me. Let’s just say that my parents had a weird sense of humor.) Anyhow, we at TASEDA have recently realized just how little we’ve explored of all that’s out there, and just how slowly it’s been going for us, and so now, we are now actively recruiting. And I am here,” - it pauses here, to groom its whiskers and wiggle its nose in an endearing way - “...to ask you to join us. We SO hope you join us! *We need your mighty fine brain.*”

Suddenly, Squeakums looks startled at his own words. “Oh! I don’t mean we’re going to TAKE your brain!! No, no, no! I mean we need the help of especially good thinkers, like you!” It looks at you, expectantly. “I really hope you’ll join us. There’s a MULTIVERSE of stories and information, and we want to get at it all and make real sense of the whole shibbledorth!”

Squeakums seems to be quite fluent in speaking English, but the critter does sometime use words you don’t recognize, words that you think are not English at all. You infer that English is not this critter’s first language.

“What about my parents and all my friends?” you ask, reasonably.

“Oh! No worries! No worries! You will have almost complete control of when and where you go, and of how long you are there! They’re really pretty awesome, the technologies we use. Imagine: You could visit ancient Egypt this morning, go to Washington DC in the afternoon to witness a current event with your friends, and stop by a space colony on Mars in the evening! And you won’t miss a meal or mess up your schedule—unless your reckless with the tech, of course.

“So, whadda you say? Will you join TASEDA and help us out?”

You shrug, and ask, “But what’s in it for me?”

Squeakums smiles—and it’s an unexpected and slightly silly vision, to see an enormous green guinea pig smile. “YOWGURFLUFFLES! You’ll have all sorts of amazing adventures and you’ll gain more wisdom and knowledge every time you explore, you’ll meet amazing characters who will stay with you for the rest of your life, and you get to keep, forever, all the tech and training and skills that TASEDA shares!”

Okay, that sounds pretty good, but you are prudent. “Why not? It doesn’t sound like I have anything to lose. But I reserve the right to quit at any time.”

“Oh, no one controls your choices in life except you. I promise you this, though: The longer you stick with TASEDA, the more you’re going to like what we do, and you’ll probably keep exploring long after you stop working with us. It’s addictive,” Squeakums states, “but not in a bad way. This will only make your brain stronger, and better, and lead to better options in life!”