Against the Grain

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Future Through the Past — Emerging Research Literature

Donald Beagle

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Over the summer I was pleased to accept two related writing invitations. First, **Lynn D. Lampert** and **Coleen Meyers-Martin** asked me to author the forward for their forthcoming book, *Creating a Learning Commons*, due out in February 2019 from **Rowman & Littlefield**, (see *https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781442272637/Creating-a-Learning-Commons-A-Practical-Guide-for-Librarians*). Second, I was invited to be the latest interviewee for the "Library Design Thought Leaders" series, sponsored by **Agati Co**, (see *https://www.agati.com/blog/designing-university-libraries-for-the-next-generation-of-students/*). Both opportunities were very interesting, and together they motivated me to revisit the emerging research literature on **LC** assessment and learning space innovation. I want to mention two that stood out.

I just finished reading a chapter titled, "Analysing the Learning Commons in the Digital Age" by **W. Michael Johnson** (**CUNY**) and **Michael John Khoo** (**Drexel**). This is Chapter 7 in the recently-published (February 2018) book, **R. A. Ellis** and **P. Goodyear** (eds.), *Spaces of Teaching and Learning, Understanding Teaching-Learning Practice*, (see *https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-7155-3_7*). **Johnson** and **Khoo** comment, "Our approach is based on systematic observation of student populations in the field. The methodology does not seek to identify discrete causal factors between social learning and environments, only to provide empirical understandings of complementary relationships among space and acts of learning." One of their findings, in particular, (imo), may speak to the question about Gen X and Gen Z, "...the idea that informal learning spaces are generally understood to fall into one of two pedagogical paradigms, either as a traditional / individual / transactional space or innovation / social / collaborative space. Our findings suggest that this dichotomy does not exist in the field; self and externally focused ways of learning formed an interwoven continuum across space and time." But the authors might wish to consider that their research may have ferreted out an early marker of an important ongoing generational shift. It may be that older studies did show a valid and sharp distinction between individual transactional spaces and social collaborative spaces because those studies coincided with **LC** use by (primarily) Millennial and Gen X students. But this newer study may be sending an early signal that as the percentage of Gen Z students increases on campus, that individual-transactional vs. social-collaborative distinction may be blurring or fading into more of the interwoven continuum the authors describe.

The second study I want to briefly highlight is one that might otherwise easily slip under our collective radar, being a presentation paper from the Australian conference **VALA 2018** Library Technology and the Future, describing outcomes from a project at the **University of Wollongong Library**. Titled, "Meet them where they are: Bringing the Learning Co-Op into the Digital Space," author / presenters **Kristy Newton** and **Courtney Shalavin**, describe a planning and development approach

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Considering Games and Gamification in Libraries & Associated Entities — In Praise of Real People

Being an examination of Immersive Participatory, Interactive Analog Games and Their Use in Education in General and Libraries in Particular……..before I forget

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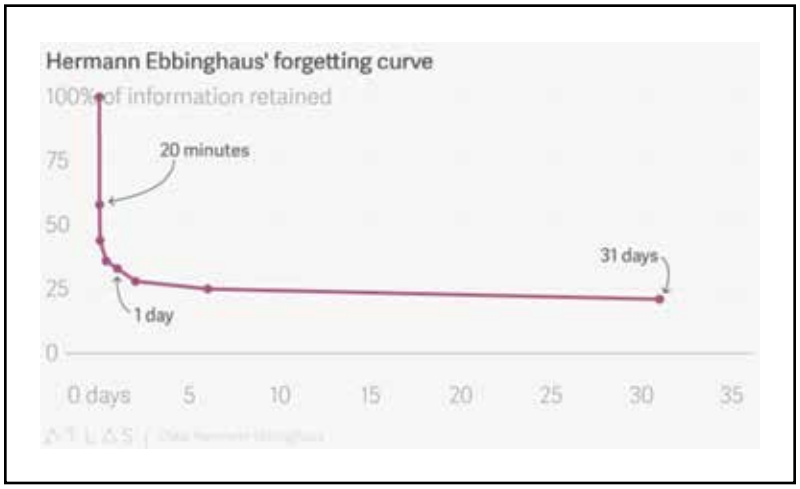
First I want to say that I am not the first to summarize an article in the title (thank you **Mr. Swift**).[1] Second, I want to state that never in a million-zillion years would I *ever* succumb to needless hyperbole. But, what I am going to tell you is spectacularly revolutionary.

Previously, I waxed on about how analog (board) games are experiencing a resurgent public interest. The recent theme of this column has been how this analog game renaissance is starting to figure prominently in training and education and how this is affecting libraries. Specifically, I expounded on recent library practice of turning to the design and use of escape rooms to enhance and inspire their instruction and promotion. I recently came across some information that has shed more light on this analog / education / library phenomenon. It's about human attention span and forgetting almost everything….if I remember correctly.



I am a multifaceted person. Okay, I have at least two facets. I love games, and I forget things on a regular basis. It's what I do. Now I assume (and hope) that there is not a direct connection between these two things. But, now I know that one can certainly positively affect the other. Do I mean to say that forgetting things can make one better at playing games? Not exactly. But, leaning, after all, is systematic memorizing, and the ability to pay attention greatly helps to build this systematic memory. Also, it helps to not forget so much.

In the 1880's German psychologist **Hermann Ebbinghaus** first hypothesized the "forgetting curve." Through a mathematical formula he developed with data from experiments, he basically showed that upon being presented information, within one hour, people have forgotten an average of 50 percent of the information presented. Within 24 hours, they have forgotten an average of 70 percent of new information, and within a month, 90 percent of it.[2]

Well, that is depressing.[2]

Now add to this the fact that the amount of knowledge actually learned in a lecture classroom in the first place is limited due to a student's attention span. It has been estimated that the average attention span in a lecture classroom is seven to ten minutes.[3] Probably for an article it is a bit longer, but I'm still going to assume that I have only about ten minutes before I lose most of you. Bottom line here is that learning is hard. What could possibly help to increase attention and retention?

Now, the regular readers of this column certainly know well what will easily alleviate this problem and make learning significantly more engaging and increase retention: games of course. You know the mantra. Games are great blah blah, and make learning fun blah blah, and we should all just play games in the classroom blah blah.

Really? Well, maybe...kind of. But, before you yell "game it, baby" and charge into the classroom brandishing your copy of *Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing*, let's look at the application a bit more closely.

Teachers know — and educational psychologists have confirmed — some definitive characteristics that the most effective learning programs have in common:

- **Impactful:** The experience inevitably grabs the learner's attention.
- **Relevant:** The content is clearly relevant to the experience (it applies to you at that moment in time) and memorable (it endures over time).
- **Engaging:** The environment is rich and invites exploration, enables experimentation, and "Learning by Doing."
- **Motivating & Inspiring:** Keeps the learner motivated to maintain his/her effort and attention by offering an inspiring reason for learning the content.
- **Play:** The learning experience incorporates the most natural way of learning all living species: Doing something simply because it is fun and challenging.

So, that's a no-brainer. Games contain all of these things. So, go educational games! Yaaa! Well, maybe.

When most folks talk about "educational games," they tend to think of video or digital games. In fact, when the "games in education" tidal wave first started washing over education, it was in the form of digital games. Though primitive at first (ahh, pong) these video and computer games offered the promise of access to effective and engaging and fun

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that is rather distinctive from any I've seen described from sources such as the Learning Spaces Collaboratory co-hosted by **NCSU** and the **University of Calgary**. Sometimes the most significant innovations don't come from media stars of the library world at well-resourced projects like LSC, but slide in from seemingly unlikely places like the **University of Wollongong Library**. I'm still digesting the implications of what **Kristy Newton** and **Courtney Shalavin** have done and describe in this paper, but I hope to have further observations in a future ***ATG*** column.