

HUBS workshop: Learning through Games and Play



The HUBS workshop on learning through games and play on 19th July 2017 was hosted by Dr Pen Holland and Dr Katie Smith at the University of York. Eleven staff from York (Biology, Health Sciences and the Hull York Medical School) were joined by a further twelve delegates from academia and scientific education travelling the length of the UK and overseas.

The keynote speaker was Dr Louise Robinson from the University of Derby, who engaged the audience on the convergent evolution of games and education. She introduced ideas of flow (complete immersion) and gamification, and gave numerous examples of how to incorporate games and game mechanics into teaching in higher education, to change student behaviour and improve engagement and learning.

Micro sessions were led by Dr Pen Holland (York: using Lego to learn sampling and analysis for ecology), Dr John L. Morton (South Wales: using jigsaws to interest biology students in biochemistry), Sam Butcher (Labster: enhancing bioscience courses through gamified laboratory simulations), Dr Mel Lacey (Sheffield Hallam: gamification in the first year, and creating an app), and Dr Louise Robinson (Derby: Park Life, a board game for conservation). Although these represented a wide range of angles from which to approach games and play, a number of common topics became apparent. Key among these were the promotion of teamwork among students, improved attendance and engagement with the course, and the opportunity and freedom to fail safely.

Plenty of time was built into the schedule for conversation, and this was kick-started by a riotous game of delegate Top Trumps, using information about areas of bioscience interest, favourite games, etc. One way to get started with games in teaching is to use a game that you like and know well, and think about how it can be adapted to be a teaching tool. To this end, a range of card and board games were available for delegates to play with and talk about over lunch and coffee. The day finished with group discussions about the use of games for teaching and scholarship in the biosciences on an individual and an institutional level. The mix of listening and doing in an informal atmosphere made the day a great success, and everyone went home with new friends and new ideas.

