

Chapter 31

How to Track Progress: Progressive Tracking Games

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ABSTRACT

*This chapter introduces a second kind of tracking game: progressive tracking games. In it, the authors show how students can use progressive tracking games to develop tracking skills that will become more sophisticated over time, rather than a simple matter of mastering facts. They introduce four levels of tracking that can be used to enhance learning. The levels take ideas and start with (1) definitions, move to (2) learning methods, build to (3) listing examples, and finish with (4) applying ideas in new ways. They introduce a series of games that teachers can use to help students learn how to track more progressively. They draw their examples from literature (*The Great Gatsby*), history (“*The Gettysburg Address*”), philosophy (miracles), and poetry (“*I Could Not Tell*”).*

A PROGRESSIVE TRACKING GAME: DOG-WALKING AND FOOD POISONING

So far, all our games have treated conceptual ideas as virtual reality, while non-virtual reality has become their testing ground. This is a feature of the games today’s students have grown up with: a journey into a world of challenges—obstacles overcome by perception and, in some games, coordination. There are games where the aim is to find Waldo or build a Sim City, and other games (the ones detailed here) where the aim is to examine pearls through the eyes of Trobriand Islanders or ferret out real-life waiters and Sisyphus-types. There are games that occur entirely in virtual reality, and others, like ones detailed here, that split their time between virtual, conceptual reality and examination in non-virtual reality.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-7589-8.ch031

But there is another feature of games that we have so far not discussed: levels. A common question put to players is, “What level are you?” If our previous games might be categorized as Tracking and Testing, there’s now a new game in town, and in this book: Tracking and Progress Games. This is, to a degree, a matter of framing. The underlying idea is a simple one: A progressive tracking game involves the acquisition of a skill at Level One. A second skill is vital at Level Two, but the second skill builds on the first. The third skill builds on the first and second. The fourth skill depends on the first, second, and third. The quicker and more accurate a player is with Skill 1, the better able will she be to achieve a similar proficiency with Skill 2, and so on. That’s progress, folks. Digital gamers have a term—Easter eggs, which mean signposts of progress. If you “find an Easter egg,” it means you have achieved the requisite progress so far and now have a way onward and upward to the next “egg.”

But what are the applications—this feature of digital games—for improving classical learning? For one thing (not the only one), it might simply be the way a course is organized.

For instance, a professor might point out, if she were a sociologist, that the course will entail four stages of growth: learning what social facts are; learning how social facts are established and researched; learning the work of the great practitioners in this field; and learning how to observe and research social facts in one’s own environment. In other words: 1. Workable Definition, 2. Research Methods, 3. Historical Examples, and 4. Applied Imagination. Different instructors will want to develop their own growth templates.

But let us go back to our Sociology teacher. She might appear on the first day or class and offer an overview. What is a social fact? The instructor might give an example of one: the maintenance people on this campus wear uniforms, while faculty and students do not. Or: when students take a class they sit while teachers stand. These are social facts, but why are they social facts? So: Level One involves being able to define what is meant by a social fact and pick them out. Is dog-walking a social fact? Is shunning a restaurant where you got food poisoning a social fact? Once you can answer these questions with skill and persuasion, the professor might tell her students, you have passed Level One.

And this is a necessary prep for Level Two: The research and establishment of social facts. If you think dog-walking is a social fact, how would you try to make your case? What research would you do? Whom would you talk to? Is it just walking a dog or is it also a certain way of walking a dog? Is it certain dogs as opposed to others? Is a poodle especially “walkable” in order to communicate something about class, while not walking a Pit Bull is a way of saying something about status? At Level One you gained some facility with the concept and selection of social facts. At Level Two you must contemplate how to get into the tall weeds of survey and research. You will not actually do so yet—not until Level 4—but you have simulated the process in your own mind, with the professor, and with classmates and through readings.

Level Three: Now that you yourself, the instructor goes on during this first day of class, have simulated the roles of a theorist and researcher of social facts, you are ready to read the findings and ideas of other, more skilled and famous, social fact theorists and observers than you may turn out to be. Until students had contemplated this business for themselves, they weren’t ready to appreciate and critique social theorists who proposed seminal findings in the estrangements of city life, the links between theology and the profit system, and the myriad ways by which people try to manage the impressions of others. So: a man jumping out of a window to his death after being fired is not a physical fact but a social fact; a person striving to be rich as a sign of God’s favor is not an economic fact but a social fact; a person wearing vertical stripes in order to look thinner is not a fashion fact but a social fact. You, the professor says, will be a more thoughtful and critical reader of Durkheim, Weber, and Goffman. So: your Level One skill

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