

The Game That Changed a Future

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These were the early years of my teaching career, and I had a 10th-grade humanities class with six students. The class composition was unique: two exceptionally strong students, two average, and two weak. However, among these six, Mahdis stood out. No matter how hard she tried, she seemed to make no progress. With the help of teachers, the principal, and parents, she barely managed to pass 10th grade, but when she reached 11th, I was once again her sociology teacher.

The students were happy, but I was concerned. The 11th-grade sociology textbook was more challenging than the previous year. I knew the other five, with any difficulty, would pass. But Mahdis? No one had any hope for her. Not herself, not the other teachers, and not even her family.

Yet, I was certain Mahdis had potential; she just hadn't found her way.

Until one day, destiny arrived in the form of a deck of playing cards.

I entered the class and saw the students holding playing cards. I asked, surprised, "What are these doing here?"

The students laughed, "Miss, they're Fatemeh's! The assistant principal scolded her and returned them, saying, 'As if we needed to turn the school into a gambling den!'"

Intrigued, I asked, "Fatemeh, do you know how to play?" She said proudly, "Miss, I'm a master!"

"What about the rest?" One of the students said, laughing, "Miss, Mahdis is also very skilled!"

This was interesting. I asked, "Where did you learn?" "Miss, we play as a family."

The class was filled with energy. Then, the students asked me, "Miss, do you know how to play?" I smiled and said, "No!" The students were excited, "Miss, would you like us to teach you?"

That's when something clicked in my mind. Perhaps this was Mahdis's missing learning point! I had them for the last period, and since it was late March, we didn't have much to do. I agreed, but on the condition that no one found out.

It was the first time the students eagerly awaited the last period. When I entered the class, they had put the desks together. Fatemeh excitedly began explaining the rules of the game, and I was amazed! How accurately, logically, and professionally they explained! Mahdis was just as capable. The game started, and Zahra—one of the class's top students—and I won. The students were surprised how someone who had just learned the game could win.

During the game, I asked Fatemeh and Mahdis about their families, their perspectives, and even the Islamic ruling on the game. Interestingly, they knew a lot, but their view was merely entertainment.

That night, when I returned from school, my mind was occupied. How did Mahdis learn this game so quickly, but not her lessons?

She didn't have a learning problem; her learning method was different.

I spent the Nowruz holidays designing a new game. I created cards that resembled playing cards, but this time with symbols from the sociology book. Important images, multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blanks, and concepts that needed to be related were all on the cards. The first session after the holidays, I gave the cards to Fatemeh and said, "Distribute them among the students like playing cards." When the students saw the cards, they were shocked! But soon, they started playing and became immersed in learning.

And Mahdis?

She, who until yesterday avoided sociology, was now ahead of everyone in learning. In the following sessions, we reviewed the lessons using the same method, and by the end of the year, Mahdis passed!

That day, I learned that no student is truly weak; it is the teacher who must find their learning method.

Discovering Students' Learning Paths: How the Right Teaching Method Leads to Success

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Introduction

The story of Mahdis illustrates a fundamental challenge in education: the diversity of learning styles and the necessity of adapting teaching methods to students' needs. In many cases, students' academic struggles stem not from a lack of ability or effort but from a mismatch between teaching methods and their individual learning styles. This analysis explores the role of adaptive teaching methods, gamification in education, and the impact of teachers' expectations on student performance.

Discussion

1. The Role of Individual Learning Styles

According to educational psychology theories, students learn in different ways—some are visual learners, others auditory, and some learn best through hands-on experiences (Kolb, 1984). Mahdis's ability to master a complex card game revealed her strengths in pattern recognition, strategic thinking, and interactive learning. This suggests that her academic difficulties were due to inappropriate teaching methods rather than a lack of cognitive ability.

2. Gamification in Education

Gamification is an effective strategy for increasing student motivation and engagement in learning (Deterding et al., 2011). In Mahdis's case, transforming sociology concepts into a card-based game made learning familiar, enjoyable, and meaningful. Research has shown that game-based learning enhances engagement, improves conceptual understanding, and strengthens long-term memory retention (Gee, 2003).

3. The Impact of Teachers' Expectations on Student Learning

A key factor in Mahdis's progress was her teacher's belief in her abilities. According to the Pygmalion effect (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), students perform better when teachers have higher expectations of them. While other teachers and even Mahdis herself believed she was incapable of learning, this shift in perspective created a positive cycle of increased motivation and improved performance.

4. Social Learning and Group Interaction

Based on Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978), learning is more effective in interactive and collaborative environments. When course content was introduced through play and peer interaction, Mahdis not only gained a better understanding of the concepts but also boosted her confidence. This case highlights that creating interactive learning environments is a key factor in educational success.

Conclusion

Mahdis's experience demonstrates that flexible teaching methods tailored to students' learning styles have a direct impact on their academic success. While traditional teaching approaches work for some, many students require innovative strategies such as gamification and collaborative learning. This case reinforces the idea that no student is inherently incapable; rather, it is the teacher's responsibility to discover the right teaching approach for each learner. To improve education systems, we must develop and implement personalized learning models that provide all students with opportunities for success.