

# Involvement and Fun: Unusual Suspects in the Economics Classroom

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## ABSTRACT

There has been much debate on the use of games to teach economics, but little evidence of how students actually learn from these games. This prompted an investigation, in the form of a case study at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), using a qualitative approach to investigate how and why learning occurs.

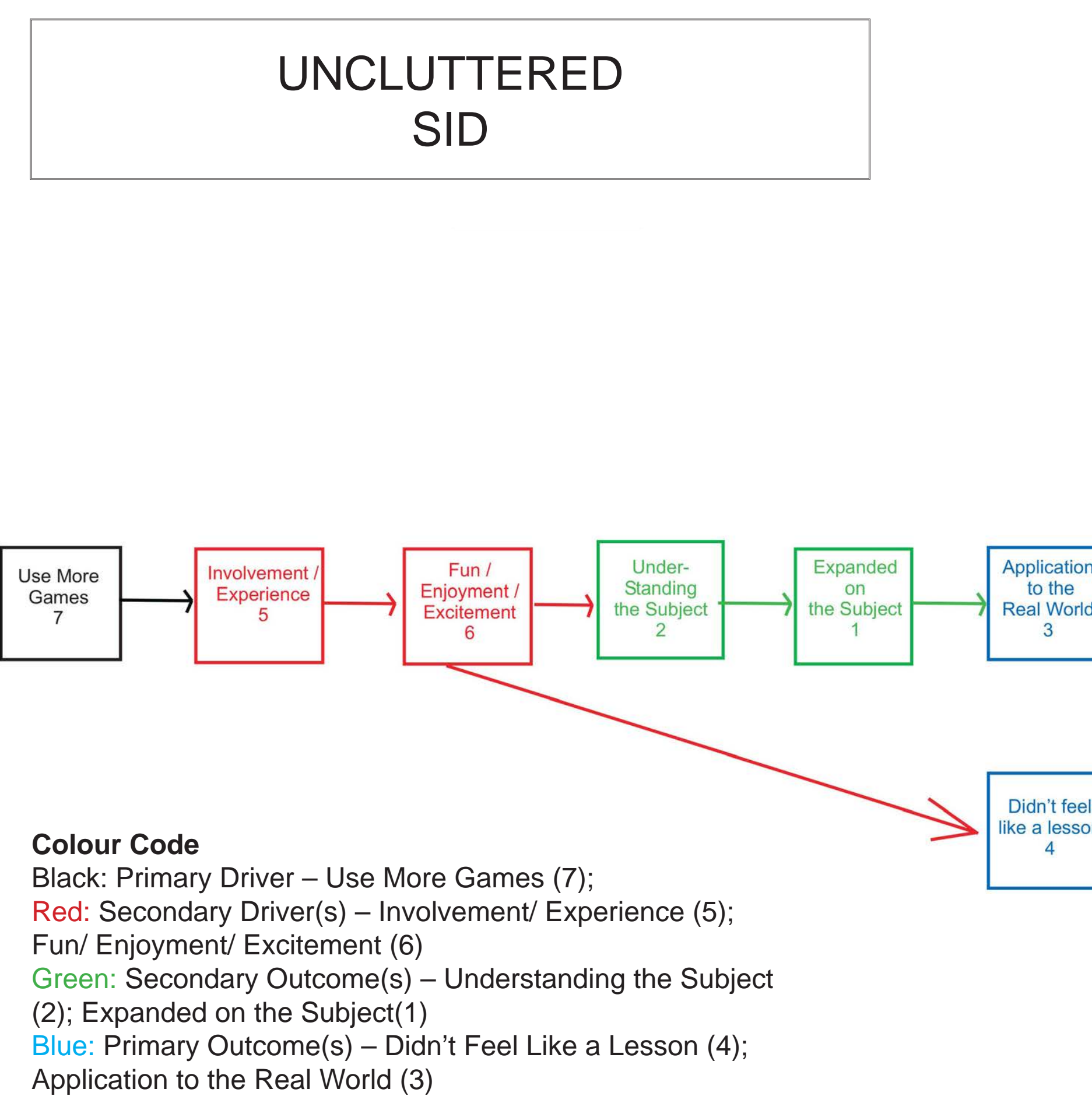
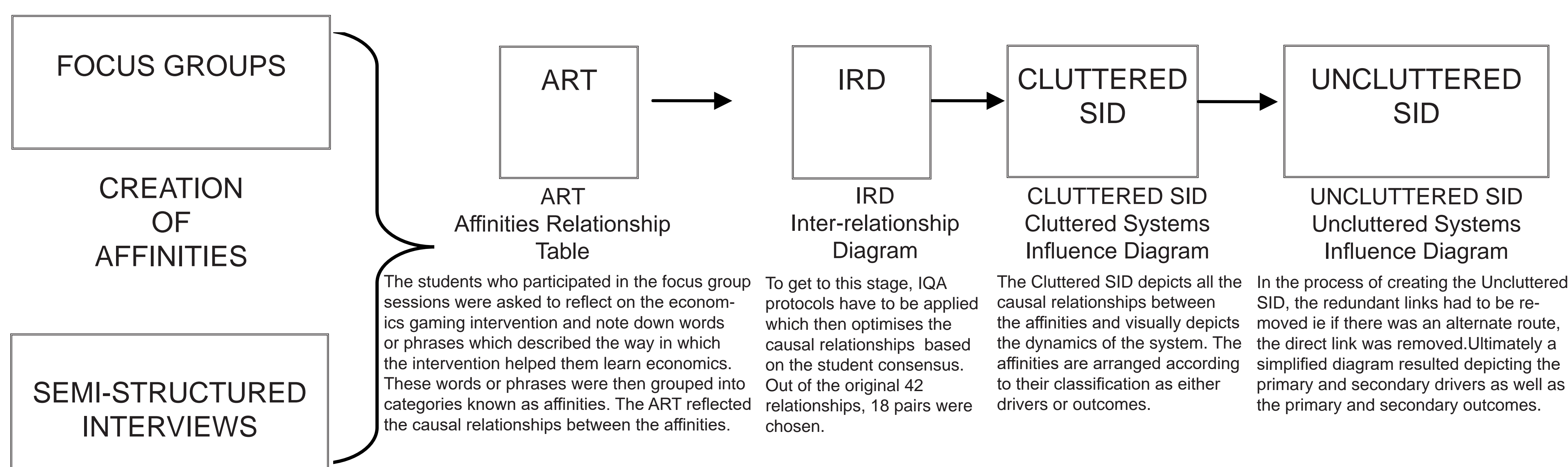
A sample of 1<sup>st</sup> year economics students, who had participated in a series of games on micro-economics topics, were chosen to participate in the research. This meant that they had to attend focus group sessions and participate in semi-structured interviews as part of the IQA (Interactive Qualitative Analysis) method. This enabled the development of a visual model to depict the various components and their relationships of the students' learning process.

The games emerged as key catalysts which placed involvement and fun at the core of the learning process, leading to a deeper conceptual understanding of the micro-economics topics. This has implications for economic education, as modern students clearly learn more through active participation and involvement.



STUDENTS LEARN FROM GAMES

## INVESTIGATIVE METHOD INTERACTIVE QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS (IQA)



## KEY DRIVERS IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

### PRIMARY DRIVER: 'USE MORE GAMES'

Pivotal in the creation of an environment which acts as a catalyst in the process of developing deeper conceptual understanding of economic concepts. However, the establishment of a holistic learning environment is dependent upon the support of the secondary drivers: 'Involvement' & 'Fun'

### INVOLVEMENT

**Involvement extends beyond mere active participation and interaction. It encompasses elements of autonomy, competence and relatedness.**

A high degree of autonomy enables individual, self-determined choices to reach pre-determined learning outcomes. In this situation, the students are in control of the learning process which they describe as "being hands-on", "actually doing", "you are really there"...

"Yes, I was involved. It felt like something real. It didn't feel like Sir was teaching us what to do. It felt like it was happening for real, like in real life."

\* An increase in competence leads to heightened self-esteem as the students master the economic concepts through playing the game.

"When you are involved in something you get the experience, so when you get the experience you get to understand what you are doing more because of the experience."

\* Relatedness is closely linked to competence, as the building of a community of practice in which the students are able to build relationships and bounce ideas off each other develops into a useful learning resource within the economic classroom.

"Then I got that experience of how it is to be involved with other persons, with other people and discussing each teasing each other what the game is you are playing ja you are so weak in the point you are weak there so ja and then it is, hence it was a game."

### FUN

**Fun is paramount in unlocking deeper conceptual understanding and transforming the normally 'dry' economic theory into meaningful, tangible applications which students could relate to in everyday life.**

However, the words 'fun', 'enjoyment' and 'excitement' are not usually synonymous with the traditional academic learning process.

"Okay, this one's easy. If you're having fun and enjoying something and you're excited you're gonna wanna learn more and know more about the subjects, so ja."

By introducing the element of 'fun' into the classroom, a new appreciation of the relevance of economic theory was fostered as students were exposed to new ways of learning through the playing of games.

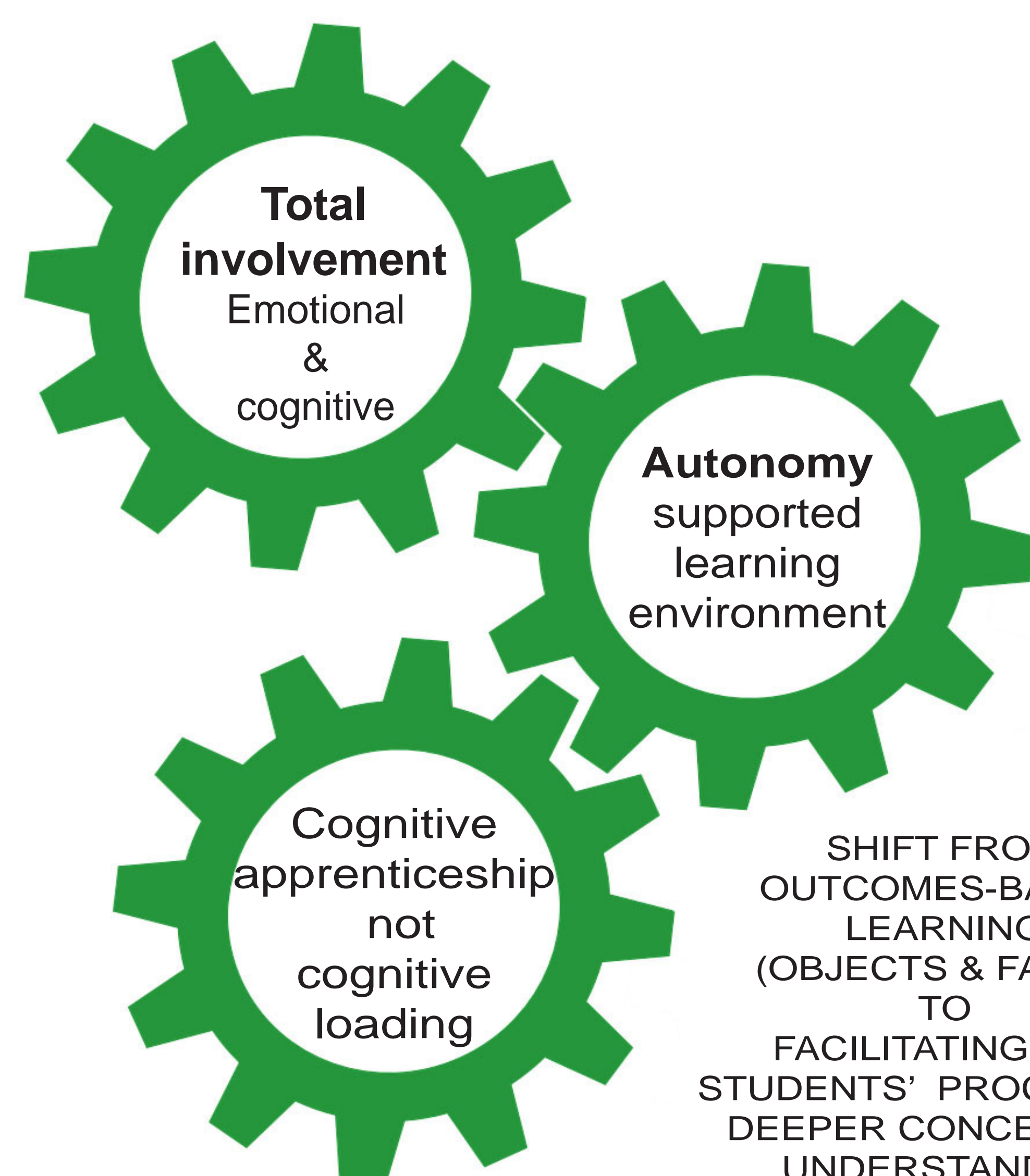
According to Fredrickson (1998) 'broaden-and-build' theory, positive emotions play a prominent role with respect to problem-solving, paying attention and reflection.

However, positive emotions are more than mere feelings and, in fact, cultivate an environment where the students become fully immersed in the learning experience.

The boredom expressed by the students evaporated as they migrated from a passive learning environment into one which was vibrant, active and filled with fun and exciting possibilities.

*Use more games. Even before we started this, I promise you that if you use more games you are going to understand the subjects so much more. It is so much fun!*

## IMPLICATIONS



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- Fredrickson, B.L., 1998. What good are positive emotions?. Review of general psychology, 2(3), p.300.