

**"ENTERTAINMENT-DRIVEN VIRTUAL SIMULATIONS IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES:
ENGAGING TEACHING & LIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES"**

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BENEFITS OF GAMING

- Meet students where they are, by “partnering for real learning” (Prensky, 2010)
- Increased student engagement and buy-in
- Meeting achievable in-game goals can function as authentic assessment (Tsai, et al., 2015)
- Connection to several NCSS Themes (NCSS, 2010) and the C3 Framework

MANAGEMENT

- Firmly established procedures for device usage in the classroom
- Requires a high level of integration both in the classroom and at home
- Time must be set aside for initial instruction, periodic progress checking and debriefing
- Whole-group activity
 - Dissemination of student roles & responsibilities
- Teacher debriefing may be essential in unlocking social studies connections

PEDAGOGY

- Gameplay can be infused with lessons on microeconomics, socialism/Communism, the Cold War
- Majority of game-play needs to happen outside of the traditional classroom
- Game offers daily reports on progress, can be used as formative assessment checks
- Can be played with a collaborative, whole-group effort or individually
- Teacher should “stress collaborative activities and real-world connections” that stem from gameplay

EXEMPLARS

- Assassin’s Creed by Ubisoft
 - <http://assassinscreed.ubi.com/en-us/home/#>
- Oregon Trail
 - https://archive.org/details/msdos_Oregon_Trail_The_1990
- Valiant hearts by Ubisoft
 - <http://valianthearts.ubi.com/game/en-US/home/index.aspx>
- Fallout: Shelter by Bethesda
 - <http://www.falloutshelter.com/>
- Qonqr by Qonqr, LLC

- <http://www.qonqr.com/>

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COMMENTARY PAPER

Incorporating aspects of video games in the classroom, otherwise known as the gamification of education, creates an interdisciplinary nexus between social studies content and the socialization of adolescent learners. Using gaming in grading can foster motivation in the classroom and encourage progress, cooperation, and camaraderie among students (Itō, 2010). By integrating gaming in education, instructors can implement ideals and feelings that come naturally in gaming, such as a sense of agency that inspires players to take control of their character's future. As educators, we should strive to transfer those same concepts to our students in order to foster a greater engagement in their coursework.

Infusing games into education offers instructors the benefit of harnessing interactive multimedia worlds to bring a multitude of social studies subject to life. The research that goes into developing both storyline and setting makes video games an ideal secondary source that can be used in conjunction with primary sources (Itō, 2010). Game developers often spend years investigating their topic as well as send artists to accurately portray historical settings to make them appear as lifelike to a historical event as possible. Students should be encouraged to make connections between video games and their social studies content to help them achieve a deeper understanding of the material in a novel and more authentic manner. Along the gaming journey within the social studies classroom, students develop empathy and a deeper understanding of multiple perspectives; enhance their ability to put events in chronological order and show causal thinking; analyze primary documents for author's purpose; write explanations of differing viewpoints; build literacy skills and exposure to new vocabulary; engage in complex classroom discussion about past events, problems, and perspectives (Gee, 2003).

Prior to rolling out a game, instructors must familiarize themselves with the multimedia and consider the dominant themes of the social studies instruction. Before, during, and after playing each part of the game, students process what they are doing through discussion, writing, and other activities facilitated by the teacher. Educators must estimate how much time will be dedicated to planning, in addition to determining how and when students will play different parts of the game (Itō, 2010). Will the flipped classroom model be utilized in order to have students play the game for homework and discuss the content in class? If the game will be played in class, will each student play his/her own game, work in small groups, or experience the digital world as an entire class with the instructor or a single student modeling the gameplay?

If the latter model is employed, which I recommend for most open world platform video games, students should be required to analyze the virtual content and communicate their responses through a live data collection medium, such as *Plickers*, *Poll Everywhere*, *Kahoot!*, or a plethora of social media outlets. By being forced to interact with the multimedia in a manner they're accustomed to, students are actively engaged in the visual analysis and teachers are rewarded with a multitude of authentic data that captures the class' thought process.

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, "The Nation's Report Card," only 18% of eighth graders perform at or above the proficient level in American history (2014 Assessment). How can educators find a method in which to connect with today's students by breathing new life into dry content? The Entertainment Software Association (2015) reported that four out of five U.S. households own a device used to play video games, amounting to 155 million individuals actively gaming nationwide. This translates to roughly 42% of Americans playing video games regularly, understood as three hours or more per week, with an average of

two gamers in each game-playing household. Why not harness this enthusiasm for video game-based content in the classroom?

Barbara Chamberlin, project director at the New Mexico State University Learning Games Lab asserts: “Games offer immediate feedback, you can see your progress, you can try something and be frustrated but later learn more... that’s why game play is so engaging to us” (Entertainment Software Association, 2015). While video games are historically identified as male-dominated activity, recent data (2015) displays that girls aged eighteen or younger are rapidly surpassing boys as the leading content consumers, respectfully comprising 33% and 15% of the market share. Educators must become cognizant of this growing trend when selecting games, ensuring that playable female characters and storylines that includes female perspectives are present.

Gamification is rooted in a constructivist theoretical framework. According to Gardner (1991), constructivists base their theory on the belief that learners construct their own reality; therefore an individual’s knowledge is built on his/her own experiences, mental structures and the beliefs that shaped the interpretation of the events. Since video games are a staple in the adolescent learner’s social diet, instructors can draw on multimedia content and gaming grading systems to enhance student engagement and comprehension in social studies. This intersection between meaningful subject matter absorption, powerful pedagogical strategies, and seamless technological prowess has been labeled as the TPACK framework (Koehler & Mishra, 2009). Building upon Shulman’s (1986) notion of pedagogical content knowledge, video games empower learners to solve problems and gain a richer understanding of social studies concepts.

Many video games marketed purely for entertainment purposes turn out to be an effective tool for teaching students complicated information and skills (Gee, 2005a).

Barab, Gresalfi, and Arici (2009) have defined video games as powerful tools that through virtual quests expand the strategies associated with the traditional curriculum and transform students into investigative reporters, environmental scientists and historians who resolve meaningful dilemmas. By becoming heroes with the power to transform virtual worlds, the students are motivated to learn the course content as this would be necessary to make informed decisions (Gee, 2004). They will discover consequences and will more deeply understand that failure means an opportunity to start over and improve their performance (Gee, 2005b). According to Gee (2005a), there are three distinct genres of social studies video games: simulations, which are semi-historical games that draw on historical concepts not bound to specific times or places; counterfactuals, understood as games that take place in a historical setting that allow the player to engage in extraordinary actions that impact/change history; documentary adventure/role playing games, which are true to real events and allow players to take the role of real people from history.

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