

Chapter 3

Are Wii Having Fun Yet?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today's students live and thrive in a digital environment, and educators need to help them succeed in the present, as well as their impossible to predict future. Using elements of gaming in the classroom, the authors of this case have provided their students with a challenging and engaging classroom setting where creative and critical thought processes are encouraged and rewarded. This chapter is based on two years' worth of work (still ongoing today) incorporating the Nintendo Wii gaming platform into multiple subjects and grade levels. Since there is no way to know what our world will have to offer when the youth of today graduate from college, it is vital to focus on helping students learn how to think creatively and critically, adapt to different situations, and work collaboratively with others to solve problems and complete tasks. The authors feel gaming in the classroom allows students the opportunity to practice and refine these important life skills.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter is based on two years worth of work beginning in 2009 and continuing on in the present time, incorporating the Nintendo Wii gaming platform into multiple subjects in our 4th through 8th grade classrooms. One of our school goals was to increase the students' aptitude in Math computation and problem solving

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skills. We had been following an educational blogger out of Australia, Tom Barrett, <http://edte.ch/blog/>, who was focusing on using the Nintendo Wii in his 4th grade classroom. His primary goal was to increase student engagement during learning experiences. Barrett was using Wii games in a nontraditional way. For example, he was using the golf game in Wii sports to review three digit subtraction with his elementary students. We began by bringing in a personally owned Wii system to a 5th grade classroom with the mission of increasing student engagement, excitement and skills in the subject of Math. The fact that we both were familiar with and owned Wii gaming systems made this opportunity seem perfect.

The first time we utilized the Wii gaming system in the classroom, we just did a little practice with the students so they could see it in the room and in action. One of the games that was purchased was *Are you Smarter than a 5th Grader?* One of the options is called Flashcards where the players (we used four different students) have a question and then get four choices. Each of the questions is worth a different amount of money depending on the grade level. If the student gets the question wrong they lose half of that amount. If they get it correct they get the full amount and if they are the first one to answer the question correctly, they get bonus money. We had all of the students who did not have a controller writing down their answers on paper at their desks. So, it should have been a review for all students and we had several do well. We only had time enough to play two rounds and actively involve eight students, but all in all it was a very successful first installment of the console.

This mission proved so successful that we have expanded the use of the Wii into more grade levels and subject areas.

OBTAINING THE EQUIPMENT

To implement this program, the first thing we needed was the hardware. Due to budgetary constraints, there was no money to make the purchase through the school. So, we brought a Wii in from home on a trial basis. The classroom was already equipped with a ceiling mounted projector which allowed for easy connection to the Wii gaming system. As we utilized the Wii with the students and were impressed and excited with the outcomes and student engagement levels, it became obvious that a school based Wii was needed in the classroom. Fortunately, just such a game system was donated later that year.

OVERVIEW OF NINTENDO WII™ SOFTWARE UTILIZED

See Table 1.

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