**Instructional Video Games: Overcoming Usability Barriers in the Classroom**

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**Abstract:** Using video games in the classroom can be an enriching and beneficial experience for both student and instructor. However, there are specific barriers that prevent educators from using video games in their curriculum. This practice session will examine the barriers and provide solutions in order to make integrating gaming into learning seamless and effective. Participants will be encouraged to share their experiences with technology and gaming in the classroom. Practical resources and existent lesson plans will be examined and discussed. Upon conclusion, participants will be able to take actual examples of using video games in the classroom and apply them to their lessons plans.

**Literature Review**

There are many barriers that prevent educators from using video games in the classroom. The majority of reasons are similar to the barriers preventing instructors from using any type of technology in their teaching method: time constraints, lack of equipment and the fear of trying something new are just a few. In the article, Why educators should care about games, (2009) Barab, Gresalfi, & Arici reason that using video games in the classroom encourages a state of learning called “transformational play.” Transformational play is not just the act of playing the game, but applying knowledge and skills through decision making and critical thinking while playing the game. “Positioning students in this way sparks their interest, but equally important, leads to deeper engagement with content.” Gee supports the idea of using gaming ass an instructional tool, arguing that “Good game designers are practical theoreticians of learning.” Quality video games that spark the interest of millions of players are using common teaching techniques within their game; however, the player doesn’t even notice they are learning. Not only are educators supporting the use of video games, they are creating online resources for fellow instructors to use and modify. Educational sites have been created for many video games, including Minecraft (http://minecraftedu.com/), Portal 2 (http://www.teachwithportals.com) and SimCity (http://www.simcityedu.org/). Using these resources and exploring the possibilities that are already being implemented can help educators overcome some of the barriers preventing them from using video games in their classroom.

**Goals and objectives for the practice session**

As a result of this practice session, participants will be able to:

* Identify the common barriers that prevent using video games in the classroom
* Recognize the benefits of using video games and how it can create positive learning environments for instructors and students
* Observe the different ways that video games can be easily incorporated into a variety of different subjects
* Find and share educational resources that provide lesson plans, real-world examples and technical support for using video games
* Effectively integrate video games into their lesson plans

**Description of Practice**

This presentation will discuss the difficulties instructors face when integrating technology into their classroom. Then I will compare them with the barriers that prevent educators from using video games in the classroom. I want to create an open discussion about their experiences and fears using technology and video games in the classroom. The two barriers I will then focus on are “Why should we use video games?” and “How can we use video games?” First I will address the “why.” I will review the current literature, sharing the thoughts and practices from educators like Clark Aldrich and Sasha Barab. Then I want to focus on the “how.” I want to give the participants concrete examples of how to use video games in a variety of ways. I will show them several video game websites that contain usable lesson plans and creative ideas. I will show example of a lesson plan I have used in the past using the game SimCity. Finally, I will talk about equipment accessibility and budget concerns. Many video games can be played on a PC, and special education prices are available. It is my hope that confronting and discussing these major issues will help aid the integration process of video games in the classroom.

**Discussion**

This presentation is meant to be used as a guide that is backed by empirical research. When I mention to my colleagues that I an advocate of using video games in the classroom, I can see the interest in their eyes. However, the interest is quickly vanquished when they become overwhelmed by the possibility of introducing a video game to a classroom that they aren’t sure how to play. If they do know how to play the game, purchasing a classroom license and incorporating it into the classroom are other deterrents. Their fears turn into barriers and override their original excitement over a new teaching tool. This presentation addresses and provides solutions for those barriers.

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