ENTERTAINMENT-DRIVEN VIRTUAL SIMULATIONS IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES:

Engaging Teaching & Live Assessment Strategies
RATIONALE

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).
WHY VIDEO GAMES?

Video games empower learners to solve problems and gain deep understanding of the content.

Many video games marketed purely for entertainment purposes turn out to be really effective at teaching players complicated information and skills (Gee, 2005a).
GEE's (2005a) Learning Principles of Good Gaming

- Identity
- Interaction
- Production
- Risk Taking
- Customization
- Agency
- Well-Ordered Problems
- Challenge and Consolidation
LEARNING PRINCIPLES (CONTINUED)

- "Just-in-Time" and "On Demand"
- Situated Meanings
- Pleasantly Frustrating
- System Thinking
- Explore, Think Laterally, Rethink Goals
- Smart Tools and Distributed Knowledge
- Cross-Functional Teams
- Performance before Competence
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CONSTRUCTIVISM
According to Jonasson (2006), 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.
POWERFUL TOOLS

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).
GENRES OF SOCIAL STUDIES GAMES

Simulations
Semi-historical games that draw on historical concepts that are not bound to specific times or places.

Counterfactuals
Games in a historical setting that allow the player to take extraordinary actions that impact/change history.

Documentary Adventure/Role Playing
Games that are true to real events and allow players to take the role of real people from history.
GAMES ENHANCE HISTORICAL THINKING

- Students develop empathy and a deeper understanding of multiple perspectives
- Enhanced ability to put events in chronological order and show causal thinking
- Analyze primary documents for author’s purpose
- Write explanations of differing viewpoints
- Engage in complex classroom discussion about past events, problems, and perspectives
Pre-Planning
GUIDE
CONSIDERATIONS

- Time
- Location
- Learning Goals
- Models of Instruction
- Resources
IT'S ABOUT TIME

Play the game and review the curricular materials.

Consider the dominant themes of your social studies instruction.

Make a rough estimate of how much classroom time you’ll dedicate to planning.
LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Determine how and when your students will play different parts of the game.
CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE!

Play at Home
Evoke the flipped classroom model - students play the game for homework and discuss the content in class.

Play in Class
- 1 Student : 1 Computer
- Small Groups
- 1 Computer (Class Plays Together)
MODELS OF INSTRUCTION

Because of the flexibility of most games and their accompanying materials, teachers may opt for a low, medium, or high integration method.
HIGH GAME INTEGRATION

• Students play the different parts of the game in the classroom or computer lab, individually or in pairs.
• 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.
• 8-10+ class periods
MEDIUM GAME INTEGRATION

- Students split game play between the classroom or lab and homework
- Game play is complemented with in-class and homework activities in which students write and talk about what is happening in the game.
- Game play alternates with non-game classwork.
- About 5 class periods
LOW GAME INTEGRATION

- Teacher introduces the game to students and assigns students to play the entire game as homework, giving students several days to complete the task.
- Teacher assigns one or two activities to students for homework, and/or holds a class discussion about the events in the game, connecting those events to what students are learning about through traditional study.
- 1-2 class periods
PEDAGOGICAL CHOICES

Face-to-Face Session with Online Materials

Online Session with Learning Guide

Self-Directed Online Session
LEARNING GOALS

Select classroom activities, discussion, and reflection that supplement your learning goals:

Empathize - Socratic seminars and writing prompts

Build literacy skills - exposure to new vocabulary

Work with historic documents - analyze primary sources
REFERENCES