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Bring on the Educational Video Games

More and more schools are turning to video-game learning.

It's a Saturday, and Alfred Lerner Hall at Columbia University is packed with hundreds of New York City high school students. The stage lights up. The rock anthem "We Are the Champions" blares from the sound system. Students erupt into cheers as their classmates file onto the stage. But this isn't a pep rally. The students taking the stage aren't donning jerseys...

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SPRING 2010

"A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops."

— HENRY BROOKS ADAMS

The Most Dedicated Profession



Commitment and passion set teaching apart from nearly every profession and are critical factors in student and school success. How do you keep the passion and commitment levels high day after day?

First grade teacher Sarah Mackey of Elkins Park, Pennsylvania always planned to be a teacher. "I was one of those kids who lined up my stuffed animals and played school." Still, after her second year, she came close to quitting. "I wasn't prepared for how hard it can get, the bureaucracy, the demands from all sides." After some soul-searching, Mackey decided she had to find a new approach. "I love teaching and when I stay focused on the kids and my classroom, it feeds the passion. I do my best not to put my energy into the negatives."

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The Most Dedicated Profession

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There's no debating that teaching is a complex and demanding job. You may be surprised to know that "you" — your attitude, your positivity and your commitment — are the single most important factor determining your success in the classroom. Research on teacher commitment indicates that teachers with high levels of commitment work harder, feel more deeply



connected to their schools and demonstrate an increased desire to accomplish the goals of teaching than teachers with lower levels of commitment. More importantly, students of highly committed teachers are more likely to learn material and develop a positive attitude toward school than those of teachers with low levels of commitment.

"I love what I do," says elementary teacher Joseph Balchunas. "I think it comes from the intrinsic desire to foster greatness in others."

Balchukas does admit that sometimes the going gets tough. "So you motivate yourself by going back to the children, by going back into the classrooms, by remembering what you do and knowing that what you do matters."

TOTY™
Teacher of the Year Award

Who is the Most Dedicated Teacher You Know?

Honor a teacher you admire by nominating him or her.

Each school year, Teachers' Insurance Plan™ recognizes one teacher in each state it serves for the incredible contribution he or she has made toward the betterment of his or her school, students and educational community.

Teachers' Insurance Plan awards each winner a \$1,000 cash prize. In addition, the school that employs the winning teacher receives \$500 to use for school supplies, equipment, or enrichment programs.

Nominate a teacher today. Go to:
www.teachers.com/toty

Deadline: April 30, 2010

Here are a few tested ways to keep your passion for teaching burning:

Find the Joy. Keep a joy journal by recording at least one good thing that happens every day.

Avoid Stress Carriers. Everyone's workplace has them — people who gossip, complain and breed negativity.

Cultivate Balance. Make time for a life outside of work — for exercise, hobbies and reading for pleasure.

Give Yourself Praise. It is easy to focus on what's left undone — on that pile of papers that needs to be graded, that quiz that needs to be written, that lesson plan you wish would just plan itself. Give yourself credit for the many, many amazing things you do every day, the learning you make happen, and the moments of true discovery you create.

RESOURCES:

Teaching Teachers to De-Stress
www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200007/teaching-teachers-de-stress

What Makes a Great Teacher?
<http://practicaltheory.org/serendipity/index.php?/archives/8-What-makes-a-great-teacher.html>

Good Teaching
www.theatlantic.com/doc/201001/good-teaching



Avoid Substitute DISASTER!

Keep your day off from turning into a three-ring circus with these simple tips.



You tried to tough it out, but that bad head cold forced you to miss a couple days of school. You are finally feeling well enough to return — only to discover that while you were sick, your students were on hiatus and the substitute teacher didn't follow your lesson plans. Worse, you hear through the grapevine that your students were wild. Your headache begins to reappear. Not only did you lose two days of instruction, but now you also have to deal with the fallout from those days.

Sometimes a teacher's absence is unexpected or the regular substitute isn't available, resulting in a new or inexperienced person covering your class. Cause for panic, anyone?

Don't worry. Be proactive and increase the chances that your students and the substitute will have a productive day with these tips:

1) Establish Expectations. Talk to your students about your expectations for behavior and classwork in the event you are out. Tell students that you expect them to treat a substitute teacher with the same respect they show you and that they may be called upon to help locate materials or even explain the schedule!

2) Leave Clear Directions. Prepare a folder that includes schedules, protocols, particular student needs, etc. Leave the folder in your top desk drawer so that the substitute will have no trouble finding it. Prepare clear lessons, with a focus on routine activities.

3) Team-up with Another Teacher. Arrange with a nearby colleague to check on one another's classes in the event either of you is absent. The regular teacher can answer any questions in terms of rules, schedules or behavioral expectations. They may even agree to provide a place in his or her classroom for a mildly disruptive student from your class to work during a "time out."

4) Handle Discipline Carefully. Don't let reports of bad behavior go ignored. Students who misbehave during your absence should be dealt with when you return. Never impose discipline on the group — because of the behaviors of a few. Responding to a substitute's reports of misbehavior requires a delicate touch. Ignoring the reports gives the impression that students can misbehave with impunity. A simple apology, from the student to the substitute, can often resolve the situation.

RESOURCES:

Substitute Teaching: Tricks of the Trade www.qnet.com/~rsturn

How to Pack a Substitute Teacher Success Kit

www.ehow.com/how_5319366_pack-substitute-teacher-success-kit.html

Bring on the Educational Video Games

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...this is a new kind of competition. The students on stage take their places at a long table lined with laptops and gear up to go head-to-head in the first citywide multiplayer educational video-game tournament.

Once viewed by educators as the equivalent of junk food, video games are increasingly embraced by schools as a

way to teach students key concepts and skills. Take the competition at Columbia. The video game students are playing is not your usual alien destruction battle. Players navigate a 3-D landscape of an alien planet in an effort to collect glowing spheres that they then use to solve algebra problems.

Performance before Competence

One of the earliest advocates of using video games as tools for helping kids learn was James Paul Gee, a professor of literary studies at Arizona State University. Gee, the author of [What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy](#), first made the connection between video games and education by watching his then 6-year-old son play video games. "I was blown away by how difficult they are," he says. "People pay fifty bucks to be entertained by something that essentially requires them to solve very long and very difficult problems. It's hard to get kids to do that in school, yet they'll go out and pay for the opportunity to do it in a video game."

Part of the reason for that discrepancy, Gee says, is that video games use very good learning principles. When playing a video game, practice makes perfect. You may fail initially, but then you work to become competent. In other words, video games emphasize performance before competence.



disease is spreading there — they're analyzing, they're writing in their journals, they're working together. Meaning, they're learning the science, writing and communication skills we want them to have."

Not only are kids excited to play video games, they're excited to show off what they've learned. "If I ask students to write a five-paragraph essay, I get all kinds of sighs," Jackson says. "But when they're writing about what they're learning in these [virtual] environments, you can't even stop them from writing."

RESOURCES:

Exploring the Video Game as a Learning Tool www.ercim.org/publication/Ercim_News/enw57//emerson.html
Video Games and the Future of Learning www.academiccolab.org/resources/gappspaper1.pdf



Video Games Go to School

Sharnell Jackson, the chief officer of e-learning in the Chicago Public Schools, has seen the positive effect of video games in schools first-hand. Chicago teachers have been trained to use an online multiplayer game developed by researchers at the National Science Foundation and other academic institutions. The game is focused on simple scientific inquiry. Students work together in small research teams, collecting samples and performing simple experiments to understand why residents of a virtual 18th-century town are becoming ill.

"Our teachers are beginning to realize that we can address academic concepts and skills in the video game environment," Jackson says. Believe it or not, sometimes video games can offer a more rigorous learning experience for students than conventional teaching techniques. "When students enter the virtual town and explore why a certain

Test Prep Fun?

Make this necessary task exciting with teacher-tested ideas.

Race to the Top

"My class loves using the whiteboard to answer test-prep questions. I create a list of questions and my students take turns at the board writing their answers as quickly as they can. The team with the most points at the end of the review receives a prize — free reading time at the end of the day. The children love this review activity and it really builds their cooperative and listening skills while effectively preparing them for their tests."

—*Lauren Crisp, Knoxville, Tennessee*



Win Big

"I tell the kids all year that every test is a chance to 'show-off' what they know and that achievement pays off. When we check our practice test, we add up their winnings! Students write \$1 by each correct answer using a colored pencil. Then, they 'earn' 50-cent bonuses each time they show extra work, circle clue words, draw pictures, etc. Students are surprised at their totals. It's a way of making achievement seem very concrete."

—*Linda Wolfe, New Knoxville, Ohio*

Daily Challenge

"I start with three review questions. The first question focuses on something learned several weeks ago, the second question on something recent and the third refers back to the previous day's lesson. Students write their answers on small pieces of paper and put them into our prize bucket. (My students can go back and look in their notes if they get stuck, and this keeps their old notes organized and legible.) After we go over the answers, I select three correct answers out of the bucket, and reward those three kids with a small treat. (Our bucket is filled with pencils, stickers, erasers, and temporary tattoos.) It's quick, motivating and relatively inexpensive. Plus, it gives me valuable feedback because I can see what topics kids are struggling with."

—*Julia Davis, Mechanicsville, Virginia*

RESOURCES:

No Pain, High Gain www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=4006
Test Prep Activities www.education.com/activity/test-prep

Pop Quiz

Q: Where do more rollover crashes occur — on highways or rural roads?

answer on page 4.



Surprising Facts about Kids and Car Safety

Think you know how to keep kids safe in the car? There's more to it than buckling up.

Most accidents with kids occur on residential streets during routine trips — on the way home from school, soccer or the store. That's why it is so important to obey all the same rules for a 5-minute driving errand that you would for a 5-hour vacation trek. Always buckle a child up, no matter how near or far they're going — in a car or a bus.

Big kids are at bigger risk. According to a study by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 98% of parents use child safety seats in the first year of a child's life — but as children grow more independent, safety adherence falls off. Only 78% of 4- to 8-year-olds are strapped in booster seats. Statistics reflect this difference: children between ages 4 and 8 are more likely to be injured in a car than babies and toddlers.

A parked car can be dangerous. According to Kids in Cars, an advocacy group that tracks deaths/injuries to children left unattended in or around motor vehicles, 246 kids died in 2009 in accidents that did not involve a moving vehicle. Some were hurt playing in the car, by releasing the emergency brake or moving the gearshift lever and setting the car in motion or by becoming trapped behind fold-down seats. Bottom line: Children should never be left alone in the car or allowed to play in a parked car, even if it's right in your driveway.

RESOURCES:
Child Passenger Safety—NHTSA www.nhtsa.dot.gov/portal/site/nhtsa/menuitem.9f8c7d6359e0e9bbb30811060008a0c/
Kids and Cars www.kidsandcars.org Safe Kids Worldwide www.safekids.org



Rollovers: Know the Facts to Reduce the Risks

Rollovers are one of the most dangerous types of car crashes. While trucks and SUVs are more prone to rollovers, driver behavior, road conditions and weather are also very important factors.

Stay Away from Road Edges. 95% of single-vehicle rollovers happen when a vehicle leaves the roadway and slides sideways, digging its tires into soft soil or striking an object such as a curb or guardrail.

Know Your Vehicle's Rating. A vehicle with a 1 star rating is at least four times more likely to roll over than the highest-rated vehicles (5 stars) in a single-vehicle crash.

Maintain Your Tires.

Improperly inflated and worn tires can be especially dangerous because they inhibit your ability to maintain vehicle control, the most important factor in reducing the chance of rollover.

RESOURCES:

Safer Car www.safercar.gov

Rollover Prevention www.consumersunion.org/rollover/rolloverratings.html



Pop Quiz Answer:

A: Nearly three-quarters of all rollover crashes occur on rural roads.

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