

WoW in SCHOOL PROJECT

FALL 2010 REPORT



Overview

After just over a full year of implementation, the WoWinSchool Project has evolved from an after-school club to an in-school language arts elective. This program has impacted over 30 students in the 7th and 8th grades at Cape Fear Middle School, providing students with opportunities for enrichment in reading and writing, leadership experiences, and opportunities to engage a global audience. Though the original Title II-D (part of No Child Left Behind) funding used to initiate this project will run out at the close of this fiscal year, Pender County Schools has been awarded a generous grant by the Breneman-Jaech Foundation that will sustain it for an additional year. This grant has allowed for the purchase of mobile gaming laptops allowing the program to move into a more natural classroom environment. It will also provide for the game's subscription fees and development of both curriculum and professional development related to games and learning using virtual worlds. Already, participating students have engaged in exciting projects and activities related to the course and their work is gaining the attention of the press and organizations with an interest in technology in education. This report addresses program activities conducted in the months of August through November 2010.

Program Activities (August – November 2010)

- The program began the 2010-2011 school year serving 16 students in the WoWinSchool: A Hero's Journey elective course. One student enrolled in the course moved on to the high school. A new student will be joining the class during the first week of December.
- Seventeen Alienware m11x laptops were purchased with grant funding and funds from Cape Fear Middle School. Thirteen of these were purchased using initial grant funds and an additional four were purchased through the school's budget. These laptops, designed for gaming, have allowed the program to move from the media center lab into the classroom. The laptops' rich multimedia capabilities will also allow for a variety of digital projects and future game-based learning initiatives.
- Students are currently wrapping up Quest 6 and are beginning Quest 7 (course modules) in the Moodle-based online course. The flexible and granular nature of the Moodle environment has allowed course instructors the ability to respond creatively to the changing game environment as in-game holidays begin and the upcoming *Cataclysm* expansion nears.
- Students have completed numerous writing assignments related to their experiences in World of Warcraft including:
 - *Threaded discussions.* A variety of threaded discussions in Moodle about topics related to their experiences in the game. These typically include both peer and instructor feedback for content, grammar, and spelling.
 - *Five "Hero's Journals."* These are reflective writing assignments that encourage students to make connections between experiences in the gaming world, in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, and in their everyday lives.

- *Collaborative story-writing.* Students formed groups and wrote a story about their adventures and heroic deeds one sentence at a time.
- *Holiday-themed Riddles.* Students wrote riddles, patterned after those found in *The Hobbit*, and based on the in-game Halloween events.
- *Mission statements.* Following a discussion of the role of player guilds in the game and after researching a variety of corporate mission statements from companies like Avon and Blizzard Entertainment, students drafted their own mission statements for their player guild, *The Legacy*.
- *Live Tweets.* With the upcoming game expansion, *Cataclysm*, the game developers have initiated a large number of changes to the story world in the weeks leading up to the expansion's launch. To capitalize on this rich story-driven game change, the Moodle course was modified to accommodate a Twitter-based writing project. Students began with research on the lore leading to the *Cataclysm* events both through websites like *WoWWiki* (<http://www.wowpedia.org>) and through in-game quests. They then selected a character from the game world and wrote Twitter messages about the unfolding events from that character's point-of-view. This allowed students to engage a global audience and to explore literary concepts like point-of-view and story progression. These messages can be found by searching the #wowinschool hashtag.
- Several "digital literacy" concepts have been explored through class activities and projects including basic photo-editing techniques using GIMP software, effective online communication and etiquette using Twitter, and techniques for discerning the value of online information such as that found in a wiki.

Publicity and Presentations

The WoWinSchool Project continues to be a requested conference topic for emerging technologies and game-based learning. The following presentations have been made or submitted for presentation:

- *Games in Education Society* – presentation and hands-on workshop for educators – August 2010, Albany, New York.
- *Tech and Learning Magazine's Tech Forum – Atlanta* – primary discussion topic at a "Games in the Classroom" roundtable led by Lucas Gillispie. – October 2010, Atlanta, GA.
- *Southern Worlds Online Conference 2010* – online presentation via Second Life – October 2010, Online.
- *ISTE: Special Interest Groups – Virtual Education* – online presentation via Second Life – November 2010, Online.
- *Global Education Conference 2010* – online conference – November 2010, Online.

- *NCTIES 2011* – submitted presentation and workshop – March 2011, Raleigh, NC.
- *Digital Media and Learning Conference 2011* – submitted as part of a panel on learning in MMORPG's. March 2011, La Jolla, CA.
- *ISTE 2011* – submitted for presentation. June 2011, Philadelphia, PA
- *Building Learning Communities Conference 2011* – submitted presentation and workshop – July 2011, Boston, MA.

The program has also been the subject of several blogs, Twitter posts, and a recent article in the online education magazine, *Converge* (<http://www.convergemag.com/classtech/World-of-Warcraft.html>).

The hub of project activities, the WoWinSchool Wiki (<http://wowinschool.pbworks.com>), has received over 3,000 unique visitors from 78 countries from August to November of 2010.

Project Growth and Expansion

As information about the WoWinSchool Project spreads, other pioneering schools are considering joining Cape Fear Middle and Suffern Middle School. Project coordinators have been contacted by schools in New York, Pennsylvania, Florida, Washington, and New Zealand. Each of these has expressed interest in starting a similar project.

Discussion is underway that will involve current project stakeholders, especially students, in deciding how to best bring new schools into the program and coordinate collaborative projects, such as a student guild web page.

Professional Development

In August, approximately 15 educators from the Albany, New York area participated in a hands-on tour of World of Warcraft in a session that addressed games, virtual worlds, and the learning that takes place in World of Warcraft. In November, approximately 45 teachers from Pender County Schools participated in a similar session during district-wide professional development.

Evaluation Measures

One of the aims of this project is to assess the impact of the program on student performance in their regular language arts course and with local and state-mandated standardized testing. To date, students have completed the first round of district-administered reading assessments. These exams assess material covered in the first nine weeks of instruction. Data from these assessments is used formatively to guide classroom instruction. These tests were administered online, district-wide, through a service called *ClassScope* and as part of the students' regular language arts course and not as a component of the WoWinSchool course.

Scores for students participating in the WoWinSchool: A Hero's Journey elective using this reading assessment ranged from 36% to 78% correct with an average of 61% among the 15 students tested. The average for all students at Cape Fear Middle was 57% and the average for all classes district-wide was 55%. Data collected will serve as a baseline for measuring individual student growth.

Financial Report:

Grant funds provided by the Breneman-Jaech Foundation were used to purchase 13 laptops at a cost of \$1061.48 per unit for a total of \$13,799.24. The current balance of grant funds is \$1200.76. Cape Fear Middle School purchased an additional four units for the program for a total of 17. Additionally, 15 USB mice were purchased using carryover EETT (Title II-D) funds.

Upcoming Project Activities

Over the next few months, work will continue to develop the year-long Moodle-based course. As new funds are available, a cart to securely house project laptops will be purchased. Project coordinators will be developing presentations explaining observations and evaluation of the program. The project will continue to be publicized through various media, including an upcoming story in a local newspaper. Students will be wrapping up work on an activity related to propaganda, creating digital propaganda posters related to Cataclysm events. Following that, students will continue to explore the evolution of heroes through both their own experiences in game and through their reading in *The Hobbit*.