GSWV Implementation

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Summer 2011

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I found myself having to read the assignment directions multiple times to understand what this project was asking of me. I was somewhat confused. However, after asking my project teammates for some input and contacting my professor I understood better what was being asked of me. I needed to choose a game, simulation or virtual world that I could implement into my current classroom. Well that seemed easy enough! I am currently getting ready to start my fourth year of teaching. All three years thus far have been spent in 3rd grade. I find this age to be very fun to work with-until about April. September through April they are still very much likeable however after April they develop what I like to refer to as "the fourth grade attitude." By this point they are very much tired of third grade and SOL time is upon us. We are really in review mode and they often get frustrated and burnt out. Regardless we press on and strive for success on our end of the year assessments. When it came time to decide on a GSVW that I could implement into my classroom I first had to decide exactly what subject area I was going to center my implementation around. I thought for awhile and then decided to check with my friend Google to see if he had any suggestions for me. This is where I hit the mother-load! I simply typed in the Google search engine "virtual worlds for elementary students." A few of the results didn't really lead to anything until I got about half way down the webpage. Then I discovered "The World of Miamiopia." The name alone intrigued me but boy was I not ready for all the exciting things I would find in this virtual world.

I began by clicking on the link and I was immediately directed to the Miamiopia website. A video started playing that introduced me to the World of Miamiopia. Below you will find the description, found on the website, to the World of Miamiopia:

The World of Miamiopia is where balloons go when they escape from the hands of a human. Once here, these balloons **seek to improve themselves by learning** as much as they can about the world around them. Each building in Miamiopia is filled with learning games.

Some of these games teach the little Miamiopians about math, others about dinosaurs, biology, animals, music, history, and many other topics. Miamiopians "learn to earn". Each time they plan a learning game, they earn coins. **These coins can be used to buy things in the shopping district**.

New Miamiopians get to pick the color of their body, and also the type of eyes that they will sport. **As they play learning games, they can use the coins they earn to purchase clothing, wigs, and other accessories**.

I was totally engrossed. What a great idea and concept. Of course the next step was to create my own Miamiopian. The directions were very easy and a narrator talked you through the steps. Below you will see the screen shots from the Miamiopian creation pages.

My Miamiopian:
Coolgrd3tcher
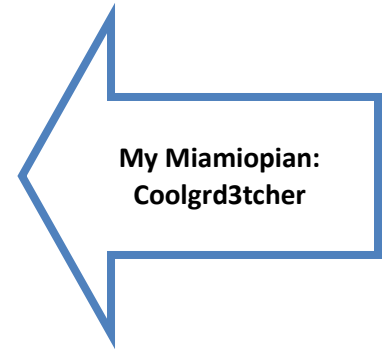
After setting up my Miamiopian it was time to explore this virtual world found above the clouds

of earth. You are prompted with a map and you can use either your arrow buttons or your

mouse to move around the map. The map is broken into districts. There are several districts in

this world and each district has educational games and activities. In addition to these features

each district also contains a medal and trophy that your Miamiopian can earn by completing

puzzles and following the clues. Each game and activity will earn your coins. You can use your

coins to purchase clothes, wigs and accessories for your Miamiopian. I spent several hours

exploring the different districts and trying to earn as many coins as possible so that I could

shop. Below are some of the screen shots of the different stores found in the shopping district.
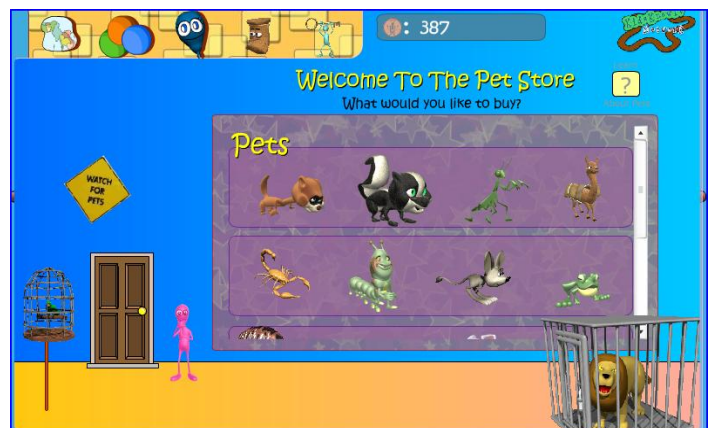
Most items that are available for purchase cost at least 500-1000 points and so the students

will have to spend lots of time playing the educational games in order to get enough coins to go

shopping. Believe me when I tell you-I was hooked! I was determined to get enough coins to

buy a pet skunk.

Learner Considerations

Now that I was hooked on this VW I needed to decide if my learners would be able to

handle the site. If I would be able to simply turn them loose and let them figure it out on their

own or if they needed to be guided. I felt like the best way to implement this VW into the

classroom was to first model it on my classroom SmartBoard. Together as a class we could

create our own Miamiopian and play as a class for several week. It could be my end of the day

wrap-up review. Each day we could explorer a different district until we had earned enough

coins to make purchases from all the games we would play. In order to really have the students

understand the importance of the activities and how the VW is set up several weeks of

modeled practice were the best option-especially for younger 3rd graders.

Technical

When it comes to the technical aspects of the VW it is very self-explanatory. It walks you

through all the features and games. The only downfall that I found was that the games were

sorta hard to find. You had to have your Miamiopian do a lot of walking in order to find the

games in the district. You would know that you had found a game when you found a brown

box. Smoke would appear and the game title would pop out of the box. As previously

mentioned when starting out modeled practice would be necessary however, after a few weeks

when the students were ready to be turned loose each child would need to set up their own

Miamiopian. This is an easy process however it could be displayed on the SmartBoards found in

the computer labs and the children could walk, through the process with the instructor.

The Pilot

When the time comes to pilot this program I still firmly believe that the best option

would be to create a class Miamiopian and work in the VW for about a month. This will give the

children time to become familiar with the map, tools and activities. We don't just want to turn

them loose. We want them to fully understand so that when the time comes to make their own

character they are ready to jump in and continue earning coins. After the month of group

playing I think the next month should be spent on specific tasks. When the students log into

their virtual world they will have specific districts they are to report to as well as specific games

to complete. Goals can be set for coins and desired purchases. After the first two months of

guided and directed practice the students can then be "turned loose." Just not without

guidelines. I think setting a coins goal would be very important. For example if they use this VW

three times a week then they would need to earn 500 coins each week and would be allowed to

enter the shopping district once a month for dress up their Miamiopian. Setting goals will help

the children stay focused and work toward their potential.

Coaching

As for the role of the teacher-our first goal is to show the students how to get started in

the program. We want to leave no stone unturned. Hence the first month of whole group

practice and then even the second month of specific instructed practice. We want to be there

as a support for the children but if they are taught well enough the first time then our hope is

that when they are released for independent practice that they are prepared enough to handle

the responsibility.

Resources

I will be honest this site has excellent activities and functions but as for support it

seemed to be lacking. The site is sponsored by the "Kids Know It Network." This site gives

excellent support and resources. Now I am not saying that the Virtual World of Miamiopia does

offer this support I just haven't been able to find it at this time.

Timeline

September	*October*	*November-June*
TSW work together as a class to create their Miamiopian. They will continue to work together whole class getting familiar with the virtual world, coins, activities and districts.	TSW create their own Miamiopians. They will be permitted to begin playing independently but with specific guidelines and instructions.	TSW be free to work through the districts at their own pace. However, if the VW is used 3 times a week TSW need to accumulate at least 500 coins each week and be permitted to use the shopping district once a month.

References

Aldrich, C. (2009). *Learning Online with Games, Simulations and Virtual Worlds*. San Francisco,

   CA: Jossey-Bass

The World of Miamiopia. http://www.miamiopia.com/ Retrieved July 21, 2011.