

Jan/Feb 2009

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Jan/Feb 2009 • Issue 10

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MICA (P) 146/05/2007

Begin Anew

Jump feet-first into 2009

Head In
The Clouds
Cloud Computing simplified

Discover your
side
WILD

On Guard!
Fencing finesse



Dragonica
Revealed

New Look, New Content, New Ideas **INSIDE!**

Editor's Note

Happy New Year and welcome to a brand new edition of @iKnow.

2008 has sped past, it seems like only yesterday we were putting together the last year's New Years issue!

Despite being only a date, the start of a new year is a good way to start anew and to plan ahead. You can see from the outside in we've also made some changes to the magazine – a new logo, new look and a new section

to put grown-up readers in the know.

So what's inside? Weijie explains the ins and outs of starting a new school, while I go exploring with some wild Singaporeans. We also learn of the latest goings-on in innerspace with Gerry, get up close with the characters of Dragonica and Chin Wei discovers the valour of fencing.

In our new section we continue our look at the FutureSchools programme,

discover the future of computing is in the clouds and Christine talks gaming with Dr Ashley Tan of NIE.

So get reading and remember we love to hear your feedback.

Lastly, thanks to all the people who contributed their time and stories over 2008. Your efforts are greatly appreciated.

Have a great year ahead!



Marc Checkley
Editor

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Distributed by iKnow Pte Ltd.

Printed by Winland Printing Pte Ltd.

The fun in Future Learning

By Christine Yee

The world is always changing and so too is education. Not only are there new ways to teach but also new ways to learn.

Singapore has always been a leader in merging technology with education and the launch of IT Master Plan 3 marks another milestone in e-learning methods.

This issue, Christine Yee talks with Dr Ashley Tan from the National Institute of Education (NIE), who is promoting gaming as a powerful tool in ICT education.



Profile:

Dr. Tan Min Chung, Ashley

- Assistant Professor of Learning Sciences and Technologies Academic Group, NIE
- Director of the Media eXperientiaL (MxL) Studio

Christine: From your point of view, what are the benefits of learning through gaming?

Dr. Ashley: There are several and I can sum them up in three areas: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. I'll use a Wii game, Trauma Center (TC), as an example. In TC, players pretend to be surgeons who have to operate on patients.

The psychomotor benefits are more obvious to most people. Through this gamers may develop better dexterity and eye-hand coordination. Simulations of physical games, scenarios, or machine control allow gamers to rehearse important physical movements that they can translate into real life, e.g., a golf simulator, car engine simulator, flight simulator. In a simple game like TC, quick reflexes, and fine motor control can all be enhanced.

Cognitive gains in playing a game like TC might include basic anatomy and an implicit understanding of cause and effect. Players are not likely to be successful the first time round and they can pick up problem-solving and strategic thinking skills by trying different approaches each time they play.

The affective gains are less obvious. Detractors may argue that gamers may not appreciate life because, if a patient dies, they can repeat the procedure without consequence. However, my own experience playing the game and watching others do the same reveals that players want their patient to live; they do not intentionally kill the patient just for fun. Surgical procedure can be performed carelessly or precisely, but as the game rewards precision, players learn that precision and this concern for the patient's well being is important.

Social games try to get players to understand various sociocultural [sic] or international issues. Such games create an emotional experience for learners. For example, in Darfur Is Dying (<http://www.darfurisdying.com/>), the plight of the people is made more real when players take the role of Darfurians who have to collect water while avoiding the militia who want to kill them. This game creates an awareness of such atrocities and leads players to more information about the situation in Darfur.

Christine: How can the games help to build personal or social skills like leadership and management?

Dr. Ashley: Games that are collaborative in nature are more likely to develop social skills. This is quite opposite to the perception that gamers are loners or antisocial.

Collaboration might take place online, e.g., World of Warcraft, or face-to-face, Wii Trauma Center. Any of these games will have main objectives that are difficult or impossible for individuals



to solve alone. In working together, leaders may emerge and plans must be quickly thought out to overcome problems. Collaboration requires gamers to manage time, energy and resources. They need to make clear and logical decisions, react to new situations, learn from mistakes, and try again. Doesn't that sound like what adults do at work every day? But while our work can be tedious, these games are fun. The learning, while not obvious, is internalised anyway and could be transferred to another game or a real life scenario.

Christine: How do you see learning trends developing in the future?

Dr. Ashley: The future of learning will (and should) focus less on content and more on thinking skills. In the past, schooling might have prepared us quite adequately for our one and only job. In the future, kids will job hop and will need to learn on the job or on the run. Our kids are not called "knowledge workers" for nothing. They must be able to find information, analyze and evaluate it, and possibly create something new from it.

The future of learning will also focus on the development of the individual to his or her fullest. This means customising education to the needs of each learner. In contrast, our current educational system is largely one-size-fits-all at the moment. Organisations like Edison Learning offer some alternative opportunities. For example, one of the approaches in Edison Learning is that students of different ages mingle and learn from one another. Their "class" is not based on age but on ability and interest. Furthermore, learning is not restricted to formal face-to-face classes, but also e-learning and community learning.

I'd add that another important source of learning in the future will be informal learning opportunities. Most people would associate formal learning with school and informal learning anywhere else. Informal learning is not defined by where learning takes place, but more of how. It is not necessarily planned; it is more like whether such learning is allowed and encouraged to happen. Informal learning might take place on field trips, learner-initiated discussion forums or chat groups, or by playing games. Games are a perfect example of informal and accidental learning. When I ask my pre-service teachers what they learnt from the gaming sessions I facilitate, most of their answers are totally unexpected and invaluable.

If kids play certain games in a responsible manner, I think that they will be better prepared for working life because they are already learning and practicing the principles that adults had to learn the hard way.

Christine: Is there any research that proves gaming benefits learning?

Dr. Ashley: There is some anecdotal and empirical evidence that gaming benefits learners. I recommend that you visit: <http://www.socialstudiescentral.com/?q=node/58>

AFP also has a story on how surgeons who played games were actually better than those who did not. (http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5h3illcleTXNc7NB4gSVzrhP_3ZA).

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