In the Classroom 32

How You Can Increase Engagement
by Using World of Warcraft in Your Classroom

SEE THE SHOW NOTES AT: *http://tubarksblog.com/itc32*

Stan Skrabut: Well, welcome back. Thanks for taking time to listen to this podcast, it certainly means a lot. I realized on a beautiful day like we're having where I'm at, you could be doing other things, but you're hanging out with me and I really appreciate it.

I'm pretty excited about this episode simply because I love the topic, I love what educators have done with this particular topic. I love it when educators combine two radically different things together and come up with a new way of teaching or a new way of increasing engagement in the classroom.

What am I talking about? Some instructors turn their love for playing an online video game into a teaching tool that their students also seem to love, they seem to be excited to get into the classroom to do their lessons. What's this game? Well, this week we're going to explore using *World of Warcraft* in the classroom. I learned to play *World of Warcraft.* I've been playing for, I don't know, quite a long time, for at least probably 10 years, or very soon after it came out, I started playing *World of Warcraft.*

I learned about this educators when I started looking for tips on how to improve my game, I was having trouble with certain quests and I want to now how to resolve this, I started exploring, and I tripped upon these educators that were using *World of Warcraft* in the classroom as a teaching tool, I'm absolutely fascinated with how they were doing this, so I went out and searched on this topic.

Before I go any further, I want to talk about what is *World of Warcraft. World of Warcraft* is a massive multiplayer online role playing game created by Blizzard Entertainment. When I'm talking massive, we're talking millions of people on-site at the same time, that they have it divided into all these different realms, or basically servers that players will be on, but in there when you go in to play, you are seeing all these other characters that other people are using to play the game with.

I've been on there and there have been hundreds and thousands of people in the world at the same time that I am, it's just been absolutely fascinating. To play this game you create a character, this character has different classes, each of these classes has different abilities; some are hunters, some are wizards. A lot of fantasy, this is a fantasy game. You can go into this world, you are expected to complete quests or these assignments in order to improve the area, gather items, beat up monsters or what have you.

You can do this playing solo or you can partner with other people and become part of a team, a two-man team or a 20-man team, what have you. That's where I find the fun, is this social aspect. I've gotten to meet people all around the world, help them with their quest, they help me with my quest. I've gotten to know a group of people. You can also play against non-player characters, a lot of the quests have to deal with that, you're interacting with characters that are based on the machine in order to keep things going.

Other things that you can do in *World of Warcraft* is you can pursue a profession, so you may be making armor, or you may be making jewelry, part of that would require that you have another profession that would be gathering supplies, so doing mining in order to gather minerals, or maybe skinning animals as part of it. This all plays into the economy of the game. It is this fascinating world where you can build things, sell things, pursue these quests, move through achievements.

I have played characters for years and never got to the end of everything that I can do. There's worlds to explore, there's achievements to earn, there's quests to complete, all the time that you're building skill and leveling-up in this game. You continue to develop your talents, you gain experience. I've been on the game sometimes for hours, sometimes tens of hours that I've been lost in the game and playing.

I haven't played so much lately, because I've been busy doing other things, but there was a time where I would get into the game and I would certainly play. I at one time had run into a group of folks from the Association for Talent Development, these are professional trainers that are in the association. They were doing some research on how to use *World of Warcraft* for corporate training, I became part of that project.

When I see these individuals at the association, we met up face to face, wonderful people, but it all started with this gameplay. Getting back to the educators. The educators that I was doing research had developed what is called WoW in School or *World of Warcraft* in school, WoW is the acronym for that, WoW in School. This can be traced back to what originally started as an after-school program created by Peggy Sheehy. She was interested how to capture this enthusiasm that students had for playing video games.

Students would get out of school and they would play four, five, six, eight hours on a video game, but she couldn't get them to spend 15 minutes doing a homework assignment. What was grabbing those students in this video game that they wanted to play, why couldn't we capture that same enthusiasm in the classroom? She pondered this idea and she ended up finding some other individuals like Lucas Gillispie and Craig Lawson, who were also gamers that played *World of Warcraft*. They built this curriculum that they initially used in an after-school program, but they've also weaved it in to the general curriculum.

They found out that you could use *World of Warcraft* to teach different educational concepts in the classroom. What's really cool is they have documented all this. There is a book that's almost 300 pages long just packed full of ideas, these ideas are also

tied back to the common core standards and they're aiming at typically eighth graders for this, but I can see this being used even at the college level and higher education, being able to create this type of curriculum, could be for a business class where you're working with the auction market, where you have to build a business in *World of Warcraft* where you sell goods and you get input of supplies, you build the goods, you sell them, a supply and demand type thing.

This guide I was talking about is called WoW in School: A Hero's Journey, like I said it's packed full of ideas. These quests that they have created for the classroom, they also have rubrics tied to them so that they can more easily measure what is going on, how students are faring in this class. The group on founders, they've also built a guild. A guild is a group of players, you would consider it a community of practice, you have these guilds in the game of *World of Warcraft*, that one is typically part of a guild if you want to do more socializing.

It's possible you can play the game solo and not be part of a guild, but the guild I think makes it more fun. You try to be part of a guild and that way you have other people to socialize and quest together with. They created a guild called Cognitive Dissonance, this Cognitive Dissonance WoW guild, it's still available, it still takes membership, typically you have to be an educator.

They have kind of and interview process where you fill out information in order to be part of the guild. When I was part of this group that was from the Association of Talent Development, we got a group of us together, we were part of the Azeroth Training Society, that was our particular guild. We were working on how to build lessons using *World of Warcraft* to teach, provide training, and how to do that. It was quite fascinating.

There was another guild out there called the Inevitable Betrayal, it is also a guild of educators. There's a lot of these guilds out here. In the reading that I've done, the research that I've completed on *World of Warcraft*, it's been going on for a long time, I've collected all kinds of articles. There are a lot of folks are like LinkedIn for example, that when you mentioned that you're doing *World of Warcraft* specifically that you were an officer in a Guild, the ears perk up because to run a multi hundred person Guild and do all the activities is a very busy leadership opportunity that is recognized.

It's tough to run a volunteer organization as such, and trying to keep everybody happy and trying to promote it and try to move it forward. All this does take leadership and it is actually recognized, there's a lot of folks that recognize this Guild, and the fact that it requires effective leadership. Let's get into some strategies for using *World of Warcraft* in the classroom.

I'm going to start with language arts. It could be languages as in modern languages, but also languages as in English and literature and such. There's a lots of different ways that you can use *World of Warcraft* in supportive language arts. One of the activities that she had students do was, compare their game characters, their *World of Warcraft* characters, to the character Bilbo Baggins, which was part of the *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* and how those characters compared.

They would have to write an essay for example or create a video, something that may be tied to universal design for learning, different ways of doing that. They would write short stories how they compared and contrasted with those particular characters. Another idea that they had shared was writing short stories based on their characters' adventures that part of it was focusing on empathy and failure, but when you have a game character and you're writing a story, it's a lot easier to imagine the story and be able to capture the right words and the feeling because you're describing the scene, you're describing the action and this is a good place to start by using the game as a catalyst or a stimulus for this.

Other things that they would do is create riddles or rhymes. They would go into the public areas and challenge through the public chat for other people to figure out the riddles. This was an opportunity to do some public performance in very much a safe environment. You're behind your keyboard, but you could go out there and share your riddle with everyone and see how well they guessed it.

There's other things that you can do that, you can be a stand-up comedian in the market square and just keep sharing jokes. You can also be a storyteller in these market squares. A lot of it is through, you have to type it and see what people say, but you can also then analyze that and self reflect and a maybe that reflective piece in the classroom talking about this.

Using this game, you can use it as a backdrop to write virtually anything. You can use it to create video, animation and video where you're doing basically Machinima and so this requires storytelling, it requires story boarding and editing, but you can basically produce a film with your little adventure, with your character as a centerpiece of this adventure and go ahead and and create this film.

The nice thing is, is you can do this as a group, as a team, where you could have other characters in. As you're capturing this, have a character come in from the left and one from the right and you would capture this on video and then you would stage another scene and do this. All that idea of film-making and editing to tell a story can come into play. When I was in the Azeroth Training Society Guild, one of the things that we did was going on a photo shoot.

We had a photo taking contest and we had to go and take different photos from around the *World of Warcraft* world and we had a contest in who took the best photo in different categories. That was a lot of fun. You could have your students create a podcast where they and their teammates talk about strategies for different encounters and how you would solve those encounters and create tutorials that you would walk people through as you're doing this.

Another idea is using PowerPoint to create a presentation that discusses an issue. There's also issues in the game. *World of Warcraft* is a microcosm of the real world, so you have bad behavior going on, or you have really good behavior. Catching that in action and reporting on it, that you can have these types of discussions. What is it to put on a character that is a gender opposite of you and how are you treated in the game?

There's been a research done on this, but it's absolutely fascinating when you do it as your own. There are other discussions or this idea of game playing. Is it harmful? What do parents think of this? Digital citizenship, that comes into play, teaching them to be respectful in the game. Other things that you can do that have a language of arts leaning are to create a webpage or a Wiki.

Creating guide for new players for example or creating a guide for this part of the world or a guide on how to play a certain character. These are other ways that you can get them excited about writing and creating content. Other things that you may want to do is research these different add-ons, so students can research and add-ons to the game. Now add-ons are tools that will help you do different things in the game a lot easier.

With those ad-ons, students can report on them. You have an add on that tracks where you can find herbs as far as a profession and you can compare different add-ons. One of the powers of *World of Warcraft* is learning how to work in a spacial environment. Being able to provide directions for example in *World of Warcraft* is quite useful. You could have students write down directions how to get from one point to the world to the another point to the world and so, they can enhance this with visuals, different pictures, overlay of the map and just all kinds of things that you can add to this.

Creating comics, poetry parodies, all kinds of different ways that you can do this. Katrina Schwartz wrote an article and it's this article called *World of Warcraft* finds its way into class. She talks about kind of the excitement of what these teachers who are using *World of Warcraft* were bringing to the classroom and they compared it. When she shows she was basically talking about Peggy Sheehy once again.

She says, "When I bring these to other teachers, I'm constantly told, I don't get anything like this from them." She said in a reference to the writing her students produce. They write complex arguments because they are passionate about the game, the storyline in the class. Another area that you can do this is language learning that you could actually find the version of *World of Warcraft* for the language that you're teaching.

They would have to work through that whole language being able to play it in German or French or Italian and be able to play the game. Also, *World of Warcraft* is a great tool to help learn about other cultures or traditions because in *World of Warcraft* you have these other cultures and traditions, maybe not what you would see in the real world, but there are different cultures.

Putting on as a hat for somebody who studied sociology that you could go in and examine these different worlds and report on those worlds, I think is pretty fascinating. As I mentioned earlier, talking about business, that what you could do is have students learn about business mission statements and then form a Guild and create a mission statement for that Guild, what its purpose is, what their key goals are, and how they're going to get there?

Other ways that you can use it in business as I mentioned, you can build things. You learn these recipes, so you need supplies so that you get the supplies. How are you going to get supplies? You could pay other people to give you supplies and you can trade gold for supplies, then you use those supplies to build these other crafts that you could then sell on the market place.

You can build a supply and demand economy and increase the products that you sell and figure out which ones are selling and even advertise for them, so you can set up a storefront basically and participate in market analysis and analyze what's selling and what's not selling and how to make a profit. That's all done through the auction house. In terms of science, there is all kinds of flora and fauna that are in these different areas and each area has different species of plants and animals.

Going in there and creating a catalog of this that you can do sampling, you can have students draw these out and describe them and really go ahead and map out these worlds creating these field guides for these different plants and animals. There's wet regions, there's dry regions, there's snowy regions, there's all kinds of different things and you can build out a wiki with this information, looking at it from a scientist perspective.

In the world of math, all kinds of calculations that you can do, damage per second, you can experiment with different weapons and calculate the damage per second, build out charts with that. There's a thing called buffs that will help your character and add protection or add increased capability, so calculating that you can do those type of analysis. Analysis on healing, in armor, in resistance and just graph this information out, lots of powerful stuff.

Social sciences, as I alluded to you that different parts of the area have different cultures and going in there and analyzing it maybe from an artist perspective where you capture the art in an image and describe it or you can describe like an anthropologist going in and looking at how things work in a certain area that you can just sit back and observe and watch other players and see how players compete in the area.

There's a lot of really powerful ways that you can analyze and do kinds of research in a game just by sitting back and then coming back to the classroom and discussing it. I see this very much at a college level, going in and looking at these different worlds teaching research methods, all kinds of research. The nice thing is, everybody has a pseudonym so you're not dealing with the names of real people.

That's a start but you can go in and look at this world which has continents, countries, cities and wilderness, all this different area and all these different people that have different characters, classes, gender and being able to collect data in different ways that you can collect data, that you can capture the chats that are happening, that you can sit back and you'll watch an area and analyze how many different characters run through that area, then you can work on coding and different things like that.

It's amazing and once you start thinking about it from the perspective of your discipline, what you could go in and figure out ways that you can use *World of Warcraft*. Now, outside of *World of Warcraft*, there's also some supporting sites. One of the tools that I learned about that evolved, I believe, out of all this was 3D Gamelab and it's now called Rezzly and Rezzly is a world that you can create so you can build these quests that you can have your students do.

I did this for a class where I was teaching online course development and we were using a website called Moodle, which is a learning management system, and I used this 3D Gamelab or Rezzly to build that quest for things that I wanted my students to do, and they went in and did this and supported that. Rezzly, that was initially designed at Boise State University, they did an amazing job, really good stuff.

It's out there and it's available that students can go in and level up, earn badges and achievements, complete quests, lots of things that you can do in that program, it's really a powerful tool. The students not only are learning the skills that you want them to learn in the classroom, but there's also other benefits, like Lucas Gillespie talks about, not only is improving in writing and vocabulary and sentence structure for his class, but they are also picking up other skills, social skills, leadership skills, empathy for others, being able to cope with failure.

That's a huge one because in a game, it doesn't always go right and the fact that they develop this tenacity in order to keep working on a quest until complete is really huge. Being able to use technology, that's also part of this and communicating with technology. You can have where you're communicating through the keyboard or you can communicate through Voice over IP, different ways of doing that.

Big part of the game is critical thinking and problem-solving, digital citizenship is part of that, being able to set goals and attain those goals especially under time elements, a little bit of time management in there and this whole idea of diligent. What I find really powerful about *World of Warcraft* is that it scaffolds learning very well, that you start at a very low level with very basic things and over time, your skills keep developing and a good class should be doing these types of things.

Like *World of Warcraft*, you don't go further until you've demonstrated mastery in a previous quest, you don't get to the higher levels just because you want to, you have to work your way up there. I applaud what Peggy Sheehy and Lucas Gillespie and Lawson did, very cool stuff. I encourage you to go check out *World of Warcraft* in school or WoW in school just to generate ideas.

There may be other games out there that you would explore and maybe apply to this, but I think *World of Warcraft* is a really good place with so many disciplines on how to apply what you're doing. A photography course, you can teach composition using *World of Warcraft*. It's, I think, fascinating and I've loved the game and I've loved the different things that I've learned because of the game especially when I see what research is out there related to this game. Thanks for checking this out and before I let you go, here's a plug from my book.