TSOBL Field Project: Games & Learning Intensive - Breakout Polaris

Stephanie Flynn

I teach at an Expeditionary Learning School where project-based learning is the norm. Three times a year we take a week-long break from regular academic classwork to focus on alternative learning passions as well as cross-curricular connections with students. The guidelines for these experiences are quite loose, but are always built upon either a teacher wanting to share an alternative passion or a group of students requesting a teacher to facilitate an experience they are interested in. In the case of my field project, both instances played a part in shaping my next intensive experience for students.

After designing my creative triad deliverable - a Digital Breakout EDU experience designed to teach and reinforce middle school mathematics standards - I took it one step further and playtested my creation with my students. During these sessions, students were given no instruction on how to complete the task other than what was already shown on the main page of the experience. Being used to my limited instructions and expectations of exploration, critical thinking, and collaboration, students dove in head first to try and solve the mysteries of the zombie themed escape room. The experience itself was incredible to watch. My students had done a few physical Breakout EDU experiences before, but never a digital one. Yet, they all rose to the challenge, and many completed it in the time allotted. At the conclusion of the playtest session, I asked students to fill out a Google forms survey that I had created to have them reflect on their experience and provide me with feedback about the experience. The feedback was vital in helping me to see any flaws in the design as well as what students found to be the most successful parts. However, the most interesting feedback came in the form of students asking for more of these experiences and if they could be a part of creating the next one. This was the inception of my field project titled “Games & Learning - Breakout Polaris.”

My idea for an intensive to be implemented this fall is to have 8th grade students design a Digital Breakout EDU experience to teach or reinforce math concepts learned in 7th grade math. Students will work in teams to create their experience with a unique escape theme. They will also work synchronously at times with Breakout EDU experts for ideas and feedback. Students will work with each other asynchronously by playtesting each other's creations and providing Hypothes.is annotation feedback directly to each other's creations. Students will utilize online tutorials and Breakout EDU affinity spaces for assistance in creating specific components of their Breakout. Students will also use screencasting tools to produce an answer key in the form of a walkthrough video that will be for the teacher's eyes only. My project involved drafting a schedule detailing the specific requirements students will need to complete and when for their projects and a rubric for evaluating their final project. Eventually, this evolved into setting up a Google Classroom LMS with links to resources, related affinity spaces, and links to connect with experts synchronously.

Procedures used to construct this project have revolved around getting the different pieces of technology to integrate with one another and the Google Classroom LMS. Over the course of the last few weeks, students who anticipate being in my intensive in the fall have been helping me to put together the schedule and suggesting workshop activities for scaffolding the project over the course of a week. Success criteria in the form of a rubric has also been collaborated on by students and me.

Since this intensive has not yet been implemented, I do not have the direct findings of its use as a blended learning intensive. However, I have seen the positive impact it has had on my community of soon to be eighth graders. Knowing that they will be a part of creating activities that will be beneficial to our soon to be seventh grader's learning in rich and engaging ways has created a buzz of excitement and status among those who have been helping me to put the experience together. Collaborating on success criteria has produced productive conversations

around appropriate levels of rigor, perseverance, and quality of work. There has been a noticeable difference in the students working on this project with me in terms of how they now assess their own work. I have found that these students are more likely to critically analyze the rubrics that are put in front of them to make sure they are assessing their work accurately and pushing the boundaries of their creativity and thinking.

Time has been the largest obstacle since starting this project. Everything from playtesting my original creation and collecting feedback to collaborating on my fall intensive and creating the different components has taken deliberate planning to embed it into my current curriculum while sticking to the deadlines of this project. I could not simply set aside my current teachings to pursue this collaboration with students, but rather had to find creative ways to embed it appropriately into what we were already doing as a class. It has also been a struggle manipulating Google Classroom to be visually functional as the LMS only supports a stacked list format for assignments and resources. This can make it difficult for students to navigate through their options and assignments efficiently, so I am still working through alternative methods for assignment and resource delivery by using simplified tags in the system.

As a result of this project, I have learned the value in authentic audience experiences when it comes to engagement in classroom content. I have always been a very application based teacher, but my previous activities have not directly involved the students impacting their immediate school community. This experience has taught me that experiences such as these can be very powerful engagement tools for learners thus creating a learning environment of rigor and quality critical thinking. I have also found ways to include technology in a more organic way - using it as a tool to drive and transform the project as opposed to only using it to modify content delivery. My next steps will be to finalize the LMS with additional resources, propose my idea to my principal for approval, and bring my plan into reality this fall as a game-based blended learning intensive.

Artifacts

Google Forms survey results from initial student feedback:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1YwxWEQT5tUM4rnF13V9Tw4nn1rWCNkEnHMTOm5EWXk4/edit?usp=sharing

Google Classroom LMS:

- www.classroom.google.com
- To access the class, go to the above link, sign in with Google using your university email (example: Len.Scrogan@ucdenver.edu), push the + button to join my class, and use the Access Code: 587m26d to join.

Assessment Tools:

- Self Reflection - Essential Learnings Log: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZdU8Z8030Rsb8gjImfulFf0sQeuLw2Wg5FDjYDFcfmc/edit?usp=sharing
- Project Rubric: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Ld_4RNce3_r_GXQ9025MIKnUjxtKWyvd1uRVKd2b19o/edit?usp=sharing

Calendar:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1w2xt11MTs92OMJrGYr9iXkvMVRxm7_jNVkKBFCKY-10/edit?usp=sharing