

Interactive game helps teach history to high-school kids

June 4 2009, By Etan Horowitz

Students who have trouble staying awake in history class now have a new way to learn about the Civil War and other topics: an interactive video game where they try to stop a band of evildoers from changing the past.

The game, called "Conspiracy Code," was jointly developed by The Florida Virtual School and 360Ed, an Orlando company that makes education video games and software. The game officially launched Monday, although the two companies have been testing it with [students](#) and teachers since February.

"They are not memorizing facts, they are experiencing history," said Andy Ross, vice president of Global Services for the Florida Virtual School, which is based in Orlando and provides online courses to more than 60,000 students. "It's a different way of learning, and it's really engaging a lot of elements that kids look at today."

In the last couple of years, schools across the country have been incorporating video games and multimedia tools into lesson plans, using technologies students are familiar with to engage and entertain them.

This is the second major "edutainment" product from 360Ed, which is staffed by recent graduates of the University of Central Florida and run by Ben Noel, the director of UCF's graduate school of [video game](#) design and development and a former executive at Electronic Arts' Tiburon studio in Maitland. In September, 360Ed released "Burn Center," a game that simulates an explosion at a theme park to make

sure doctors and nurses can treat burn victims.

In "Conspiracy Code," students control two characters charged with uncovering a conspiracy to rewrite American history. To do this, the students progress through 10 missions where they collect clues that help them advance while teaching them history.

Each of the missions represents a chapter in a history book and built into the game are several ways for instructors to make sure students are retaining the information. This is done through essay questions, assignments where the students have to create a multimedia project such as a PowerPoint presentation or a video as well as through frequent phone conversations with the teacher.

The game is designed to replace an entire year of a high school American history course, and students can complete it at their own pace.

"I thought it was better (than a traditional class) because you get to go search for the clues and you don't want to stop looking for them," said Zachery Cox, 16, of Lakeland, one of the students who participated in the test of Conspiracy Code. "There are times when I just wanted to keep playing it."

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