

Virtual School Begins Rolling Out Game-Based Courses

by Dave Nagel

Florida Virtual School this week rolled out a series of courses based around a new educational game called Conspiracy Code.

Developed in conjunction with **360Ed**, an educational software developer, Conspiracy Code is an online, immersive, 3D game designed to provide an active learning environment for high school students, one that's designed to engage students and help strengthen a number of 21st century skills, in addition to covering the core subject area. The game is facilitated by teachers, who participate in the game along with the students.

"As our world becomes more and more interconnected, students apply the critical thinking, cognitive and communications skills from video games to real-world situations. This new set of courses leverages the power of the technology within an educational framework to better prepare students for the next steps in life," said Florida Virtual School President and CEO Julie Young in a statement released Monday.

According to 360Ed, Conspiracy Code helps students with written communication, problem-solving, and collaborative skills, in addition to "higher-order thinking" skills. It offers practice games, a variety of question types, support for written assignments and essays, game-based assessments, and "discussion-based assessments."

Beginning this month, the first course to use the software at FLVS will be American History, a full-credit, high school-level class. The game is set in a fictional metropolis. In it, students adopt fictional personae and build up their knowledge of American history to "stop a vast conspiracy that is threatening to erase and change the course of history."

As 360Ed described it, "Conspiracy Code is built on a foundation of challenges and missions that allow students to learn progressively. Based on their own understanding of content and the use of clues--standards-based, historical data--students self-select their path and pace through the course. As they follow a sequential learning path, they master complex ideas before moving on to the next level or mission. Conspiracy Code offers students multiple communication mediums and a variety of sensory-type game play activities that enable the use of their strongest learning attributes to build higher order thinking skills."

FLVS serves middle and high school students and estimated its 2007-2008 enrollment at about 100,000 in grades 6 through 12. It serves all districts in Florida and also operates around the country with educators in 35 states, according to the most recent information available. It employs more than 400 full-time and 176 adjunct teachers. It also operates a global program that it launched about two years ago.

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<http://www.thejournal.com/articles/24435>