

# An ordinary day

It's a normal school day, and students are playing a video game while their teacher watches happily. An impossible dream? Not if you study at Nordahl Grieg School in Bergen, Norway.

While many schools and parents are trying to reduce the number of hours young people spend on gaming, teachers here are making video games a central part of their lessons.<sup>1</sup> Bestselling games created just for entertainment are also used in class. The teachers find that they can help develop important skills which are often overlooked in traditional lessons.

Students use the puzzle game *Portal™* in physics to simulate experiments that would be too dangerous in the real world. They have to make up their own experiments in the game environment, for example throwing huge objects from buildings of different heights to test the laws of gravity. Seeing the results makes the topic easier to understand.<sup>2</sup>

People might not believe that a game like *The Walking Dead* can teach anything useful. However, according to Tobias Staaby, Nordahl Grieg's moral philosophy teacher, experiencing a dangerous world where there are zombies around every corner offers his students important educational opportunities.<sup>3</sup> For example, they decide who to share their limited food supplies with, whose life to save, and so on. Discussing these decisions brings to life for the students the consequences of using different systems to judge what is right and wrong. This, in turn, develops the confidence they need to make moral choices in their adult lives.

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Another skill developed through playing a video game at the school is empathy. In *Civilization@*, which is used in social science classes, students focus on world politics by simulating real-world, modern-day conflicts, and playing through possible ways to achieve peace.<sup>4</sup> It also provides memorable experiences of being in the shoes of people with very different opinions and aims. The greater empathy that results from this is extremely useful in the modern world, where we interact with people from a wide variety of backgrounds.

Students also study video games in literature classes and create their own in information technology.<sup>5</sup> 'I truly believe that within a few years we will see a huge explosion in the use of games in an educational context,' he says.

And what do his students feel about this new approach to learning? One student writes on the school blog: 'I think it is a good way to make us think of "work" differently. It gets much easier if you actually enjoy it and want to do more than necessary.' Another, Henrik, likes the way that games get people to work together to achieve something.<sup>6</sup> 'I was already very happy with the "normal" way of learning,' writes Hanne, 'so I don't really feel like I need another alternative.' She accepts, though, that she has classmates whose feelings about traditional teaching methods are less positive, and that new approaches that allow them to be more focused are useful.

Her friend Jakob sums up the reaction of the majority of students. 'We're living the dream!'