

Chapter 49

Using Reason Racer to Support Argumentation in Middle School Science Instruction

Marilyn Ault

University of Kansas, USA

Jana Craig-Hare

University of Kansas, USA

James D. Ellis

University of Kansas, USA

Janis Bulgren

University of Kansas, USA

Isa Kretschmer

Independent Researcher, USA

Bruce B. Frey

University of Kansas, USA

ABSTRACT

With secondary students reporting that they are not attracted to science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (STEM) disciplines, educators are turning to games as one strategy to engage students. The goal of integrating games into science learning is to create an excitement difficult to achieve with typical instruction. This chapter reviews games in education, particularly in STEM. Recognizing that teachers often lack the time to integrate role-playing games, the use of casual games is suggested. Casual games are easy to learn and simple to play, and incorporate game features designed to compel students to repeated play. The Reason Racer game addresses the difficult skill of scientific argumentation in a casual, competitive game. Evaluated with more than 700 students, those who played the game at least 10 times during science instruction over 6-weeks improved in every aspect of argumentation, and reported an increase in confidence and motivation to engage in science, compared to those who did not play the game. Readers are walked through the game and the resources in the Teacher Portal.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter has several purposes related both to the use of games to support teaching and learning and the challenge of teaching middle school students the very difficult skill of scientific argumentation. The first part of the chapter provides an overview of the use of games in education, particularly in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education, and a discussion of casual game features that are specifically designed to engage students and can impact learning. The second part of the chapter provides a synopsis of the science practice of argumentation and the effectiveness of the *Reason Racer* game in engaging students in this difficult skill. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the features of the multiplayer *Reason Racer* game and an explanation of how to use the game and the accompanying Teacher Dashboard to support scientific argumentation teaching and learning.

As with any innovation, there are issues, problems, and tentative solutions. These are presented as challenges, not caveats. Our hope is that educators and researchers will include casual games as one of many resources available to support science instruction. Games, such as *Reason Racer*, can be both as engaging as any arcade-style game yet challenge middle school students in the higher order skill of scientific argumentation.

THE INSTRUCTIONAL USE OF GAMES

Games in Education

Teachers have been using games to engage students in learning long before the advent of technology-based games, understanding that games have the potential to excite students while engaging them in content, a condition optimal for learning (Blanchard & Cheska, 1985; Klopfer, 2008; Lepper & Cordova, 1992; Malone & Lepper, 1987). Early work with technology and computers recognized that features of computer-based games could increase student engagement and opportunities to practice skills, particularly for struggling learners. Early research and development of games included, for example, the MathKeys games (Xin, 1999) developed by the Minnesota Educational Computing Company (MECC) and the Arcademic Skillbuilder games (Chaffin, 1982; Chaffin, Maxwell, & Thompson, 1982) from the Developmental Learning Materials (DLM) Company. These games incorporated features such as moving images, user-control, rapid play, and immediate feedback to engage students. These games, however, were single-player and installed on a unique computer, which limited the scope of play. They do, however, provide an early demonstration of the power of technology-based games to engage students and build basic mathematical skills. Subsequent online games have evolved since this early development and can now be multiplayer and engage students in more complex skills.

Research on the effect of technology-based games has consistently shown positive results regarding motivation, persistence, curiosity, attention, and attitude toward learning (Shin, Sutherland, Norris, & Soloway, 2012), that students can have significantly higher cognitive gains when working with games when compared to receiving traditional instruction (Vogel et al., 2006), and that games promote learning and/or reduce instructional time across multiple disciplines and ages (Van Eck, 2006).

For an experience to be considered a game it will usually include goals, rules, challenges, and interaction (Crawford, 2003). Some suggest that games also require competition and quantifiable outcomes (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004) as well as the possibility for error and failure (Squire, 2006). There are

31 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/using-reason-racer-to-support-argumentation-in-middle-school-science-instruction/169049

Related Content

Mentoring and Supervision for Women of Color Leaders in North American Higher Education: Together We Go Further

Elena Sandoval-Lucero, Tamara D. White and Judi Diaz Bonacquisti (2021). *Research Anthology on Challenges for Women in Leadership Roles* (pp. 358-381).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/mentoring-and-supervision-for-women-of-color-leaders-in-north-american-higher-education/278661

Intelligent Assistants and the Internet of Things as the Next Marketing Landscape

Edward Forrest, Christina McDowell Marinchak and Bogdan Hoanca (2021). *Encyclopedia of Organizational Knowledge, Administration, and Technology* (pp. 2071-2085).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/intelligent-assistants-and-the-internet-of-things-as-the-next-marketing-landscape/263675

Exploring Distributive Leadership in South African Public Primary Schools in the Soweto Region

Raj Mestry and Suraiya R. Naicker (2015). *Multidimensional Perspectives on Principal Leadership Effectiveness* (pp. 283-304).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/exploring-distributive-leadership-in-south-african-public-primary-schools-in-the-soweto-region/121144

I Never Saw Myself as a Leader: Lessons From an Unintended Journey in Higher Education

Cherisse Jones-Branch (2023). *Black Women's Formal and Informal Ways of Leadership: Actualizing the Vision of a More Equitable Workplace* (pp. 276-290).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/i-never-saw-myself-as-a-leader/329660

Quality Management System for HEIs: An Overview

Hesham Magd and Siraj Kariyilaparambu Kunjumammed (2022). *Global Perspectives on Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education Institutions* (pp. 1-25).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/quality-management-system-for-heis/288839