

The Prensky Challenge

Who will be the first to challenge, rather than blame
our students?

By Marc Prensky

[493 words]

*“I never teach my pupils;
I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.”*
– Albert Einstein

Could it be that our frustration that our kids are not getting better grades, higher scores, or going into math and science careers at the rate we would like is *our* – i.e. educators’ – fault, and not the fault of the students?

I think almost all the things we are doing to “improve” education, from George Bush’s rigid “[pseudo-]science based” reading programs to Bill Gates’ “mini high schools” initiative are, to a large extent, wastes of students’ time and our money. The effects we are looking for could be produced much more quickly and easily just by giving the students the proper incentives.

Suppose, for example, that at the beginning of the school year we said to students – at any grade level, and at any level of preparedness – the following:

“We have prepared for you a second semester that is fantastic, and totally future-oriented. We will teach you about space exploration, nanotechnology, genomics, protonomics, bioethics, quantum computing, and all the wonders of the coming world. You will learn to program your phones and iPods to their max. You will build robots that can compete and win prizes. You will read and discuss the best science fiction there is. Your instructors will include – virtually – famous people from all over the world, including famous scientists, game designers, cell phone makers, etc. You will use technology such as 3D

printers and Nintendo DS's. This will be by far the most exciting thing you ever saw in school (and possible anywhere else).

“But here’s the thing: In order to get this fantastic second semester, you, the students, have to learn the entire year’s regular curriculum in just the first semester – and *all* of you must pass the standardized test that says you’ve learned it.

“To get you all to learn, those of you who are strong in whatever areas will need help those who are weaker. You can organize however you like, and work together in groups of your own choosing as much as you want, in order to meet the overall goal, which is that *all* of you pass. Your teachers will be there to guide you as to what you need to learn, and provide whatever help they can that you ask them for. But the basic responsibility for every student’s learning the material in just one semester will be on you.”

Do you think any group of our students, if given this kind of strong carrot, worthwhile goal, and responsibility to meet that goal themselves, would be able to accomplish this?

I think *every* group would. And I’m looking for partners to (1) fund the “future content” creation and (2) provide the students, in order to try the experiment.

Want to help? I’m at marc@games2train.com . Thanks.

Marc Prensky is an internationally acclaimed thought leader, speaker, writer, consultant, and game designer in the critical areas of education and learning. He is the author of Digital Game-Based Learning (McGraw Hill, 2001) and Don’t Bother Me, Mom, I’m Learning (Paragon House, 2006). Marc is the founder and CEO of Games2train, a game-based learning company, whose clients include IBM, Bank of America, Pfizer, the U.S. Department of Defense and the LA and Florida Virtual Schools. He is also the creator of the sites www.SocialImpactGames.com, and www.GamesParentsTeachers.com. Marc holds an MBA from Harvard and a Masters in Teaching from Yale. More of his writings can be found at www.marcprensky.com/writing/default.asp. Marc can be contacted at marc@games2train.com.