

Calipatria High class encourages video gaming

By [ERIC GALVAN](#), Staff Writer

CALIPATRIA — Many parents might not be too happy if their child came home from school and talked about how their day was consumed with video games.

Video games and school typically don't mix.

But at Calipatria High School, video gaming is encouraged.

For the last month, David Gupton's Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program class, in conjunction with the Steps of Success program, has teamed with the Olathe, Kan.-based software-development company I Support Learning to help students with the ins and outs of video game programming. The partnership made Gupton's class the first site in the world to use the company's new video game development "Level II curriculum."

Part of what was learned and applied saw the students create their own computer video games.

"At first I didn't really know if I wanted to do this," said 16-year-old senior Vanessa Mendoza. "But I play video games at home and I have friends that play, so learning how to make video games and learning how much time people put into making them ... it was really fun."

While almost a dream for most kids interested in video games, the point of the class, like every class, is to learn.

From an education standpoint, ISL's curriculum teaches programming basics, design and problem-solving through the creation of three-dimensional video games. The computer-based curriculum teaches students how to create games with their own images, voices, music and ideas, all while learning at their own pace.

The curriculum also serves as a bit of a real-life internship for students.

"During the course the kids receive e-mails, faxes, voice mails ... they've lived the life of having a real job," said Steve Waddell, owner and trainer for ISL. "They lived the pressure. It's like a giant simulation of being in the real world for them."

Part of the reasoning and methodology behind ISL is to help create video games for children who are sick and ill.

Waddell said that the games are geared toward those children with illnesses that could use a positive lift in their lives.

"(The students) just got done creating video games to help kids feel empowered," said Waddell. "They just created video games that can actually make a positive impact on someone's life."

"At our company we don't work to be big, we work to be important," said Waddell.

Part of that is making the designers, the students, feel important as well.

While the students work on projects, they are allowed direct contact with designers and developers at ISL, getting their input and advice.

The direct contact with the company is essentially how the curriculum was manifested.

During the regular school year, Gupton received a postcard from ISL with a list of programs and curriculum. His interest was piqued and he asked for a single-licensed copy for his own personal use.

Shortly thereafter he was asked to teach SOS during the summer and asked what he wanted to teach. Remembering ISL, he looked



SERGIO ESTRADA PHOTO Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program student Daniel Varela, 21, is all smiles as he completes the second level of the "Bacteria Bash" video game at Calipatria High School on Friday.

into the curriculum, took the proper steps, contacted those at ISL and went from there.

Students were then recruited to take part in the incentive-based program and the class was born.

"This is not your traditional classroom," said Gupton. "They're working on their programming as they're going and they're utilizing a lot of student collaboration. And with the curriculum, this is treated like a job."

The basic premise has helped those interested in video games inch closer to a future reality.

Sophomore Edgar Flores, 16, is the only student in the class that wasn't brought in as a member of the SOS program, did not receive any incentive for showing up, but did so on a regular basis, missing only one class so far through the summer program.

For him, the curriculum was like a dream come true.

"I like electronics and I want to make video games as a career," said Flores. "When I heard about this I was really looking forward to it, and I was really excited about coming to this class."

The bulk of the games made had to do with fighting bacteria in the human body in some aspect.

Some games featured lasers that shot balls of bacteria within different parts of the human body all while Kenny Loggins' "Danger Zone" from the "Top Gun" soundtrack was used as the music.

"I've been playing games since I was 4 or 5 and I've played a lot of games. Doing this I've learned that you have to be patient and cooperative with your fellow classmates and with the software," said 16-year-old Rey Zarate, who will be a junior.

As much fun as the students had in creating their own video games, those at ISL also took something from the curriculum.

"It's amazing how they'll get engaged and get so involved when you treat them like adults and it's treated like a job," said Waddell. "This whole thing, we've built authentic relationships, and it's been fun to bring something different here. We had the right teacher, the right situation and the experience has been extraordinary."

>> Staff Writer [Eric Galvan](#) can be reached at 337-3441 or egalvan@ivpressonline.com

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