



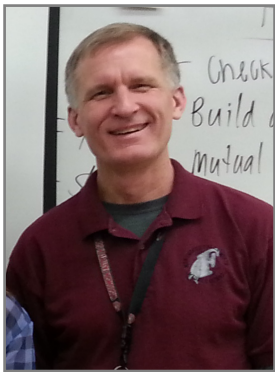
CASE study



A fresh perspective on entrepreneurship for summer school students

Summer-Elective Enrichment Program on Entrepreneurship

An interview with James Nitz
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“The school system wants its teachers to come up with something fresh and new every year,” says Jim Nitz, a middle school business education teacher at Menomonee Falls North Middle School. Jim was switching gears anyway, to teach a three-week summer-elective enrichment program on Entrepreneurship to students younger than high-school age. So a fresh and new approach was already in the cards.

“I had seen GoVenture simulations mentioned on a list-serve and a fellow teacher recommended them to me,” says Nitz, who quickly sensed a good fit for his program. “I figured that business simulations would be as fresh and new as it gets.”

Nitz chose GoVenture Micro Business, a simulation in which students are cast in the role of a mobile business cart owner. Each virtual day, students make the same kinds of decisions a real business owner makes. Then they advance the simulation clock to see the results of those decisions.

“I walked them through the interface,” says Nitz. “But they didn’t need much instruction. The kids picked this up really quickly.”

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Nitz immediately noticed that his conversations with the students started to change. “They became very aware of the Four P’s of the marketing mix [Product Price Place Promotion],” says Nitz. “They were engrossed in how to increase sales, decrease expenses, and handle competition.”

A class field-trip to a local ice-cream parlor was designed to highlight parallels between their simulated businesses and a real-life business.



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“Even running a business as simple as an ice-cream parlor is more complicated than you would guess,” says Nitz. “On top of all the competitive issues, we learned that an ice-cream vendor needs to think about sanitation and food-service regulations – and spoilage if the ice cream doesn’t sell.”

GoVenture Micro Business has ice-cream vending as one of its options, but back at the classroom, Nitz’s students voted to sell virtual jewelry instead. “Maybe the complications of the food service industry scared them away,” says Nitz, “If I had to do it again, I would have made them sell ice cream or popcorn. Jewelry is too tidy. It doesn’t present them with the challenge of managing spoilage.”

But even selling virtual jewelry gave Nitz’s students an opportunity to test the financial measure of their personal value systems. “In the game, most kids gravitated towards hiring the more experienced employees and higher-quality appearance and products. I think the students felt they would get what they paid for.”

The GoVenture Micro Business algorithms do indeed reward investments in quality by increasing the number of shoppers who come to the cart. And, they reward investments in experienced employees with increased reliability, productivity, and customer service. However, those rewards come with a price.

“Pretty soon, my students figured out that their expenses went up when the quality went up,” says Nitz. “So now they had to raise their prices in order to maintain profits.” Even elementary grade students know that consumers prefer low prices to high prices.

Nitz says he was able to assess student progress using the feedback mechanisms generated by GoVenture Micro Business, even though this wasn’t strictly necessary for him.

“This was a summer school,” says Nitz. “So there was no grading involved. But, simulations lend themselves to open-ended, critical-thinking questions.”

Nitz then rattles off a list of potential test questions that sound like a middle-school version of the Harvard School of Business case-study method: 1) Present them with What-if scenarios. 2) Get them to explain why they made that decision. 3) Blogging works well. It allows the lower-grade kids to interact equally with older kids.”

Nitz says the GoVenture Micro Business simulation created lots of natural learning opportunities. “We had a great discussion about Cost of Goods Sold. And one student asked me what a tycoon was? He had never heard the word before.”

Given how easy it was to employ the simulation in class, and how easily the students embraced it, Nitz found the business insights received from one of his students to be a bit ironic.

“One girl played for 115 [virtual] days in a row,” says Nitz. “You know how Micro Business calculates the personal stress levels of the players? Well her stress indicator was maxed-out because she had worked so many days in a row without a break. So I asked her if she thought that was a problem? You know what she told me? She said, ‘It’s work. It’s supposed to be stressful.’”

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