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Community in Crisis

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Abstract

Community in Crisis is a literacy learning game that immerses students in an authentic workplace experience while learning literacy skills, engaging with meaningful texts, and developing 21st century life skills. Players take on the role as Director of Common Ground Community Center, a local organization responding to the effects of a major hurricane. As the Director, players must focus on providing services to the community with the help of their support staff by deciding how best to respond to daily challenges by making critical decisions based on information gathered through various sources in the game. As players navigate through the life of a working professional, they learn how to be critical thinkers, tackle real life problems, become strong decision makers and hone valuable literacy skills.

Game Overview

Community in Crisis (CIC) (Figure 1) makes an authentic connection between school, college and career and offers students opportunities to practice select Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Reading for Informational Text. The game focuses on the aftermath of a major hurricane that has hit the town of Port Douglas and players, who take on the role as Director of Common Ground Community Center, the town's local community service organization, must read their way through their day at work solving problems and making evidence-based decisions.

Figure 1. Screenshot of Community in Crisis.

CIC consists of 12 episodes, each representing a full day at work. Each episode centers around a particular theme. At the beginning of each episode, players are presented with the central issue of the day and must decide how best to respond by gathering information from informational texts, conversations with colleagues and town citizens, and performing workplace tasks. They also have their smartphone handy throughout the game with tools such as a ToDo list, text messages, glossary and note-taking applications to help keep things organized.

The game addresses 21st Century Skills as defined by the P21 Framework and assesses students in three CCSS for Reading for Informational Text. These standards were specifically chosen to help players develop a strong foundation for success in reading comprehension and college and career readiness.

Assessment

Each episode also contains one major workplace activity (Figure 2) that is a seamlessly embedded assessment focused on one CCSS and where players must read and interact with a real-world document that is related to the day's central issue. Tasks for completing each assessment include determining the best images or text to use in a document or citing evidence that supports a particular point.
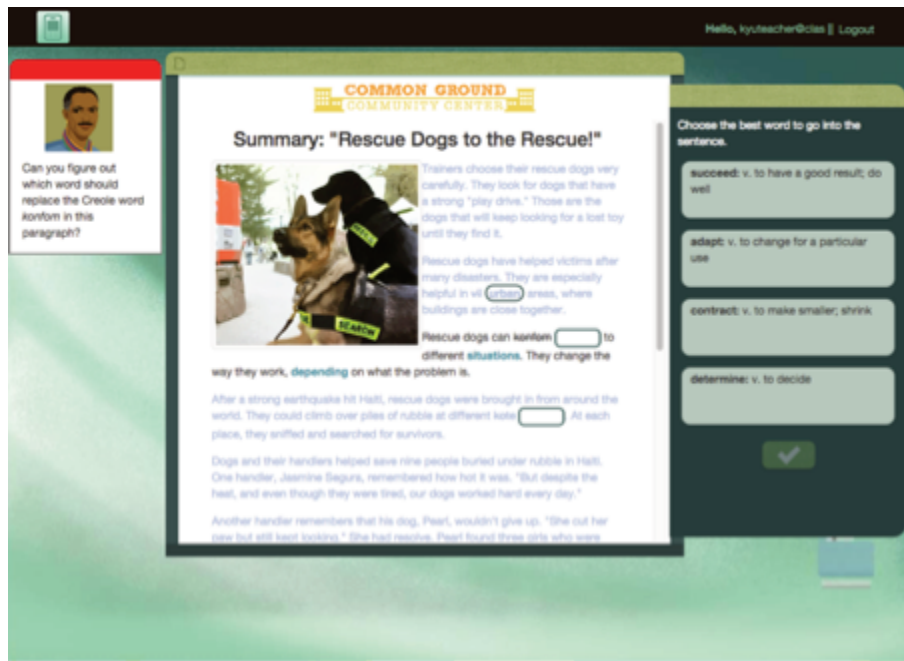
Figure 2. Moderate level workplace activity.

Behind the scenes, *CIC* differentiates instruction and moves students through different types of tasks based on their performance in a workplace activity. All students work with the same text and what distinguishes the assessment levels are the tasks that students perform. The first time students complete an activity of a particular standard, they will complete a moderate activity that is an average level of difficulty. Based on their initial performance, players are then routed seamlessly, the next time they complete an activity assessing the same standard, in different ways:

- If performance is above the threshold, students will move to an advanced activity, which is the most difficult task and contains more items.
- If performance is within threshold, students will complete another moderate activity.
- If performance is below the threshold, students will complete a support activity, which is an easier task and contains less items.

As players navigate through the game making decisions and completing tasks and activities, the game will respond to the player to provide each with a unique experience.

Teacher Dashboard

Community in Crisis also provides a comprehensive teacher dashboard that provides real-time data to inform instruction. Teachers can create and manage accounts, control which episodes students can access and when they can play them, view student progress and performance reports by class and by student, and play the full game and various levels of each workplace activity. Data from reports allow teachers to determine instructional decisions and next steps with their students.

Educator Guide

Community in Crisis also contains wrap-around materials included in an Educator Guide to deepen the in-game experience. The Guide includes:

- Pre-game lessons that build knowledge background knowledge, 21st century skills lessons, literacy lessons that focus on the main concepts in each episode and post-episode discussion questions.
- "Text Talk" lessons provide students with the ability to develop their own reading fluency, and the opportunity to engage in collaborative text-based discussions.
- "What's Next" lessons provide a lesson and guide for teachers to reinforce the core literacy skills assessed in the game.
- "Serving My Community" is a student-driven collaborative learning project with a focus on creating a community service organization.

Acknowledgments