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## Leveling Up

Earn CE certificates via these free online webinars. Find these and more at [edWeb.net](http://edWeb.net).

- **How To Design an Engaging Learning Environment for Millennials**, Tue., June 3, 4 to 5 p.m. ET on [edWeb.net](http://edWeb.net).
- **Make your Students FLIP for Learning Using Videos**, Wed., June 4, 4 to 5 p.m. ET on [edWeb.net](http://edWeb.net).
- **Transform Your Classroom with Popular Games**, Tue., June 10, 4 to 5 p.m. ET on [edWeb.net](http://edWeb.net).

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## Special ed teacher turns class around with gamification

*Editor's Note: This information was taken from an [edWeb.net](http://edWeb.net) webinar entitled "[How One Teacher Gamified Her Classroom.](#)"*

Kate Fanelli, a special ed high school math teacher at Beacon Day Treatment Center in a suburb of Detroit, was struggling with problems familiar to many special ed instructors. Many of her students had severe emotional impairment, were not interested in math and were easily distracted. They had a wide variety of ability levels. They avoided doing work, acted out, skipped class, and exhibited "learned helplessness."

She could have accepted it as par for the course – 87 percent were on free or reduced lunch, and many were on medication, had psychiatric diagnoses and even court involvement. But she wanted better.

Inspired by hearing [Marc Prensky](#) speak at a conference, Fanelli did more research and then decided to make her class itself into a game. She adopted game characteristics such as avatars, leveling up, points, working at the right level of difficulty, embedded learning, and "semiotic domains" (mirroring what a professional mathematician would do in the real world). This use of game elements in a nongame setting is called "gamification."

Calling her game "MathLand" (not to be confused with the elementary mathematics curricula), Fanelli took the Common Core standards, broke them into 21 levels, and gave each a logical scope and sequence. She created lessons in Word and designed "levels" including information-gathering quests, labs, and more traditional lessons. She gave each level three parts: 1) the lesson itself, with step-by-step instructions, vocabulary, and 4 to 5 math exercises, 2) optional practice problems exactly like the lesson exer-



*Kate Fanelli with student avatars.  
Courtesy of edWeb.net*

Please see [Gamification on page 3](#)

## Discover playful learning at GLS10

One of most highly regarded events to explore the connection between play and learning is the annual GLS conference hosted by Games+Learning+Society. This year's event will be June 10 to 13 in Memorial Union, Madison, WI.

A Playful Learning summit on June 10 kicks off the event with a selection of workshops for teachers, designers, researchers and others in the elementary through higher education arena.

The GLS10 conference itself offers a variety of talks by respected leaders in the playful learning field, as well as showcased games and opportunities for networking.

Costs are \$75 for the summit and \$275 for the conference for students and K-12 teachers, and \$625 for others. Register online at <http://glsconference.org/2014/conference-registration/>.



*Leveling Up*, continued from [page 1](#)

- The Impact of Mobile Devices on Learning and Communication, Wed., June 11, 4 to 5 p.m. ET on [edWeb.net](#).
- Innovative Online and Blended Learning Solution for Language Learning, Thu., June 12, 11 a.m. to noon ET on [edWeb.net](#).
- Enhancing Children's Experiences with Mobile Apps, Mon., June 16, 3 to 4 p.m. ET on [edWeb.net](#).
- Using Smartphones in the Classroom, Tue., June 17, 5 to 6 p.m. ET on [edWeb.net](#).
- Promote Student Engagement with Shutterfly's Photo Story App, Tue., June 24, 4 to 5 p.m. ET on [edWeb.net](#).

### About *Special Ed Tech*

*Special Ed Tech* is published monthly from September through June by the director of Aspiring Games Foundation  
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*Special Ed Tech* welcomes your questions and article suggestions. Direct all queries and subscription requests to the editor, Becky Palmer-Scott, at [SpecialEdTechEditor@gmail.com](mailto:SpecialEdTechEditor@gmail.com).

### About Aspiring Games Foundation [www.aspiringgames.org](http://www.aspiringgames.org)

Aspiring Games Foundation supports the creation and use of learning games and educational technology for individuals, groups, and classrooms.

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*To see the MathLand syllabus and more, go to <http://www.edweb.net/.59eb3586/>*

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*Fanelli said this new approach saved her. She hasn't met a student yet that won't participate. Students attend class regularly and get right to work.*

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*Kate recommends the following books:*

- *"What Video Game Have to Teach Us About Literacy and Learning," by James Paul Gee*
  - *"How Computer Games Help Children Learn," by David Williamson Shaffer*
  - *"Mindset" by Carol Dweck*
  - *"Never Work Harder Than Your Students" by Robyn Jackson*
  - *"Why Don't Students Like School?" by Daniel Willingham*
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### *Gamification, continued from [page 1](#)*

cises which the student could get help with, and 3) a mastery test which the student must pass with a 100 percent score while working alone.

In her new class, Fanelli gives each student a folder (which is kept in the classroom) which contains the entire syllabus and a portfolio which serves as a cumulative record to track progress. Rather than listening to whole-class lectures, students study the material independently and ask Fanelli (or each other) questions. The only whole-class lecture is once a week, when Fanelli addresses issues that the entire class seem to be facing, such as how to graph or use a graphing calculator.

Each student starts the year with zero points (an 'E') and has to earn 20 points to advance to the next letter grade. It takes 100 points to earn an 'A.' Fanelli gives students points for passing each mastery test.

Fanelli also lets students have avatars. She laminates faceless stick figures on notecards and sorts them on a bulletin board divided into avatar levels. All students began at "Apprentice" level, and level up by earning 'dots.' (Dots are punchhole-sized stickers from Office Max.) Dots are earned for completing a level, for every five days they are in class the entire time (with no bathroom breaks or counselor visits), and for good performance in class.


Once students earn 10 green dots they become "Professors." Professors can have a larger avatar with printed clothing (though no face or hair). After earning 15 red dots at Professor level, students achieve "Genius" level and can add face and hair to their avatars. After 20 yellow dots at Genius level, students reach "Blue Dot Genius" and can make a nonhuman avatar. That is the final level and students can get unlimited blue dots. Fanelli also gives certificates for each status achieved and puts associated dots on those.

Fanelli said this new approach saved her. She hasn't met a student yet that won't participate. Students attend class regularly and get right to work. They no longer fear falling grades. They work at their own pace and collaborate on everything except the mastery tests. If they are absent, they don't miss instruction. Students can see the end-point to the work and know they can quit when finished. This approach has encouraged good social skills, since students offer help to those behind them in the class. Test scores have also improved.

Fanelli noted that the approach requires that she plan the entire class by the beginning of the school year. She said there is less paperwork, and she takes less work home. It's also easy for substitutes to manage the class.

On the downside, she must respond quickly to students in class, and give instruction repeatedly; sometimes students wait to get her attention. She warns that she has at most 10 students and too many more students could be hard to handle. She has no slow days. There is increased record-keeping since she tracks how each student spends time on- and off-task during class; she uses a computerized grade book. She also has to finagle recording student progress in the school's traditional grading system, where students can start with an 'A'.

Fanelli said this approach can be used for any subject matter, but using good instructional design principles is a must. She advises using clear, explicitly stated objectives; giving students many opportunities for self-assessment and reflection; making connections while tutoring individuals to help them see the big picture; and integrating technology and manipulatives into instruction.

Fanelli recommends reading a few selected books to prepare (see the sidebar at left.) 

# Play Worthy

## Social Skills

### At a glance

**Name:** Hidden Curriculum for Kids; Hidden Curriculum for Adolescents and Adults

**Topic:** Social skills

**Cost:** \$1.99 each

**Platform:** iOS (iPhone, iPod, iPad)

**How to get:** Download from iTunes

# Hidden Curriculum on the Go

Created by Asperger Autism Publishing Company

Reviewed by Becky Palmer-Scott

It can be reasonably argued that success in life, or lack of it, is not so much a factor of educational achievement as it is of social skills. In this arena, learning from experience can be disastrous, since saying or doing something awkward or inappropriate can cause a person to be ostracized. Unfortunately, it's hard to anticipate or prevent every faux pas that someone can make. And giving uncalled-for social advice to an individual can seem presumptuous and condescending.

The AAPC (Asperger Autism Publishing Company) has two apps to help, one for kids and one for teens and adults. Highly rated, the apps are called "Hidden Curriculum On the Go," and they list the unwritten social rules that most people naturally pick up on but which the learning disabled often do not. Tips are listed one per page and users can scroll through them. If desired, users can save the tips in a "Favorites" list or e-mail them.

Examples for kids include "Fair means that everyone gets what everyone needs. It does not mean that everyone gets the same thing. Equal is when everyone gets the same thing. Fair is when everyone gets what he or she needs," and "It is not a good idea to say every single thing you think. It might hurt people's feelings."

The app for adolescents and adults includes the same types of tips, and also explains how to speak to police, rules about borrowing money, social conventions in dating, and other situations faced by teens and adults. For example, "If you are having a dinner date with a member of the opposite sex, please know that 'having dessert' can be a reference to having sex," and "Only borrow money from friends and only do so when absolutely necessary. Then pay your friend back as soon as possible."

Intentionally or not, some tips are humorous, which makes reading them fun. One adult tip states, "When filling out forms, 'sex' refers to gender. It does not refer to how often. Do not fill in a number. Just check a box: M for Male or F for Female (not M for Many Times or F for Few Times)."

There are about 90 tips for kids and 110 for adults. The tips are good conversation starters or could be suggested reading for students during free time in class. As of this writing the apps are only available on iOS devices such as iPads, iPods, and iPhones.

Do you know of good learning games you would like to tell others about? Write to our editor at [SpecialEdTechEditor@gmail.com](mailto:SpecialEdTechEditor@gmail.com). ✉

