

Tactical Error

I don't do computer games. Let me make that clear right from the start.

That's not to say I don't make use of my computer. I use it a lot. As a third year education student, I don't think I could survive without my laptop. It holds all my notes summaries, my lesson and unit plans, copies of the curriculum guides ... all at my fingertips whenever I need them. It even has its own internet connection.

But it got me into trouble once.

I was almost through my first practicum. I was helping to teach grade six science, the unit about 'flight'. I didn't know much about the topic, so I asked my supervising teacher where I could learn some more.

"Dave, have you ever flown a small plane?" he asked me.

"I've never even *been* in a small plane!" It was true. All I knew about flying was that the plane needed wings. And an engine.

"OK, here's what you should do." He proceeded to give me some suggestions.

When I stood in front of the class two days later I was as prepared as I'd ever been when teaching. I'd hooked my laptop up to the Smartboard, and my Powerpoint on the principles of flight was running. I'd thoroughly researched this; I had a folder full of photos and diagrams, and my presentation was a killer! Rather than mark up my diagrams, I had decided to rely on the Smartboard to let me draw arrows and label things as I taught.

It worked like a charm. The kids and I now understood everything there was to know about pitch, yaw and all that other stuff. And I was pretty sure my supervisor, who was sitting at the back of the room taking notes like mad, was impressed.

My plan to finish the lesson was amazing. I'd like to take credit for it, but it was my supervisor's idea.

"Dave, you should try something that I've always wanted to do, now that I have a Smartboard in my room."

He'd suggested I play 'Flight Simulator' with the kids on the board.

Microsoft Flight Simulator isn't really a game. I'd found that out when he'd given me a copy to install on my laptop. Fortunately my computer is relatively new; the program installed easily and it worked like a charm.

Flight Simulator lets you fly a plane! From starting the engines, through take-off and landing, the program mimics the experience of flying a small plane very accurately. Too accurately, as I was about to find out.

Running the program while hooked up to the Smartboard should make the experience even more realistic for the kids. That was our plan.

The kids gathered around my desk as I selected a small plane and started the engine. I planned to take a short flight, and then let the students give it a try. My supervisor assured me that they'd quickly grasp the concepts involved in flight once they took the controls.

But I had to survive my flight first. I'd read the manual the night before, and although I hadn't tried to fly, I was pretty sure I could master the controls. I hoped I wouldn't crash. That would be embarrassing.

One student turned off the lights. I gave the engine full power and headed down the runway. The engine noise was loud. Someone in the 'tower' was shouting something in my ear. With the big screen and the darkness of the room, the experience was very real.

I lifted off. This was easy!

A minute later I decided to bank the plane to the left, to get a look at the airport I'd just left.

That was a mistake.

As I banked, and looked down, one of the students lifted the side of the desk a little, hoping to make the experience a little more real.

OK, it was my fault. I'd forgotten why I never did amusement park rides. I have a queasy stomach. And it's probably a tribute to the designers of the game that a first-time flyer could get vertigo.

I got vertigo.

And, of course, I threw up.

As a practice teacher, I'd always wondered what I'd do if a student threw up during one of my lessons. I'd been told the correct thing to do was to look after the sick student, even if it meant leaving the rest of the class alone for a few moments.

What happens when the *teacher* throws up?

The students were pretty good about it. I got 'Ewww, gross!' from a few of the boys, but my supervisor and several of the students helped me clean up. I was more than a little embarrassed. They thought it was funny.

But, you know, I think it added something to the lesson. The students were so amazed that someone could get sick from flying on a computer that they all wanted to be next. They figured it must be an awesome experience.

None of *them* threw up!