Wii Have Only Just Begun
By Emily Stone

I have been using EA SPORTS Active for the Wii for the past month. Consistent use of this program has whipped me into better shape in one month than an expensive gym membership has been able to in two years! What is the secret, and what does this personal fitness program have to do with the future of learning?

What makes EA SPORTS Active so effective is the immediate and constant feedback it provides, its customizable nature, the 30-day challenge which provides a steady increase in difficulty, and of course—it is fun to use. The program has been designed by fitness experts and simulates the experience of working out with a personal trainer, only it is much cheaper and more convenient, because the workouts can be done at home.

Hmm…more effective, cheaper, and fun. What if we apply the principles behind this fitness program to revolutionize the way children learn school subject matter?

Imagine: It is Monday morning and Johnny’s mother tells him it is time for school. Instead of boarding the bus, he powers up his video game console and loads his personal learning profile. An animated figure (who looks uncannily similar to Johnny himself) appears on the TV screen, greets Johnny, gives him specific feedback about his academic accomplishments last week, and then explains what is on the agenda for today’s lessons. An interactive daily planner pops onto the screen and Johnny is off. The learning software already knows Johnny’s preferred learning styles, his strengths and interests, and his current level in each subject. It uses this information to modify activities for his level and learning style. Since Johnny does well with kinesthetic learning, many of his lessons involve a motion-sensing controller that has him move his body to manipulate images on the screen and interact with the lesson at his own pace. Other times he uses a wireless writing tablet and pen to highlight, take notes, and select answers on the screen. Because Johnny is very interested in animals, his lessons often feature texts about different animals and when he scores at least 80% on an assessment, a short Animal Planet video will play.

Johnny’s mother has never seen him having so much fun and learning at the same time. The activities and assessments have been designed by education professionals and are aligned to state standards, (although there are many extension and elective lessons that go beyond the standards). Once each month Johnny visits a local learning center to take a proctored assessment and measure the learning software’s effectiveness. To Johnny and his mother’s delight, Johnny scores very well on these tests.

Back to reality: The scenario presented here is just a starting point. Interactive, customizable learning software could be implemented in school buildings. It could be used at home and at school, for supplemental learning, for summer learning, for remedial and enrichment learning. The big idea is that we have only just begun to explore the educational implications of the technology available.
I feel privileged and excited to be part of the changing face of education, as both an online master's student and a virtual elementary teacher. I completed my master's degree while living in three different states. I collaborated and shared ideas with teachers in Korea, Canada, and California. I experimented with text-to-speech software, edited a group wiki, became proficient at web design, and conducted educational research in my own school. **Online learning is not 2nd class learning.** On the contrary, it is 21st century learning, and continues to be a growing phenomenon. This is true in the K-12 arena as well.

Two years ago I had not heard of public, virtual, K-12 schooling, and now I am an experienced online teacher who advocates the value of this learning choice for families. Clayton M. Christensen and Michael B. Horn, authors of the book, Disrupting Class, predict that by the year 2019 50% of all high school courses will be delivered online. Virtual learning is here to stay, and I am thrilled to help lead the way in improving schooling through technology and innovative ideas.

As my last formal online class comes to a close, I am nowhere near “done.” I will continue to use blogs, professional organizations, and free webinars to stay current on education topics. When a new phrase, policy, or idea comes up, I will use the Internet to find out more information. I have learned a lot about web design, but now I want to learn Flash, Captivate, and other software and programming languages. I am developing an interest in adult education and instructional design, and will visit professional organizations’ sites to do research on these topics. I love to learn and if it were financially possible I would pursue advanced degrees in a variety of areas. Our rapidly changing world rewards those who are able to adapt and grow with it. In my future positions I hope to empower all students with the tools and desire for lifelong learning.