Fourth Graders' Views of BrainWare SAFARI

Students in a fourth grade class (13 boys and 13 girls, ages 9 to 11) who used BrainWare Safari during the 2008-2009 school year were surveyed on their use of video games and their feelings about BrainWare Safari. These students completed on average 108 ± 15 levels of the 168 levels in BrainWare Safari's, with a minimum of 80 levels and a maximum of 135 levels. They worked for 12 weeks with an average of 29 ± 3 sessions.

Game-Playing Other than BrainWare Safari

Most of the students reported that they play video games an hour or less a day, with boys spending slightly more time than girls playing them. Only two students reported that they were allowed to play video games before doing their homework; the rest said they played after homework or only on weekends. They play video games on a variety of platforms, including computers, Wii, Xbox, and Nintendo DS. The students reported playing a wide array of games, from Scooby Doo to Halo and from Harry Potter to golf. Video games have become a social activity for these students, with only 6 saying they play alone. Siblings, friends, and even Mom and Dad play video games with them.

The students also play a wide array of non-video games. The games fall into three main categories:

1. Sports (Soccer, Basketball, Baseball, Tennis, etc.)
2. Board and Card Games (Chess, Monopoly, Parchesi, Uno, etc.)
3. Role-Playing (House, Sword Fights, Barbies)

When asked what else they would like to tell us about video games, students talked about them being fun and entertaining, sometimes challenging and requiring thought, other times not having much value other than entertainment. One student talked about liking them because he/she was good at them. A few students felt they might have negative effects – being addictive, or "killing brain cells." Most comments, however, focused on enjoyment.

Reactions to BrainWare Safari

When asked if they would recommend BrainWare Safari to others, the group was unanimous. All students would recommend the program. When asked what ages they would recommend the program for, the students generally recommended the program for students around their own age. All students also said they would play BrainWare Safari 2 if it were available.

The students responded to open-ended questions about what they liked and disliked about BrainWare Safari, and what they found hard or easy. All but one of the students said they looked forward to using it. The one who didn't said he/she thought it was a test.

What they liked:

Mentions of games in general or specific games	15
Mentions of learning, thinking, memory, brain	13
Mentions of fun in general	9
Mentions of challenges and overcoming them	4
"Almost everything!"	1

What they didn't like:

Mentions of games in general or specific games being hard*	21
Mentions of game play features (e.g., number of characters)	3
"Nothing"	3
Mention of games being too easy	1

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*Note: As is typically the case, different students mentioned different games, likely reflecting the specific areas where their individual skills were not as strong. Sky Scanning, an exercise that develops integrated auditory and visual skills and that most users find challenging, was mentioned by several students as being difficult.

How they thought BrainWare Safari could be improved:

More games		11
Making a game or games easier		7
Making a game or games harder	2	
Adding game features (e.g., more characters, music)	7	
Better instructions		3
"Nothing. AOK."	1	

Whether the program helped them and how:

Helped with new skills in general		11
Improved memory		4
Improved ability to see and visualize		3
Helped with school in general		2
Helped with taking notes	2	
Ability to do things faster	2	
Helped with math		1
Helped with writing		1
Not sure		1

Summary

The fourth grade students who used BrainWare Safari in their class overwhelmingly indicated that they enjoyed the experience and felt that it had helped them develop new or stronger skills. They cited both the fun and the improvement in thinking skills for reasons they liked the program. Most students found the program hard at one point or another. This is typical and expected and usually comes up when students are working in areas where their skills are not as strong and they are pushing those skills to new levels of automaticity. Based on the students' average progress through the program (number of levels completed), this group was challenged to the same degree as most students their age. It is also important to note, that even though students found some parts of the program hard, they also considered the program fun.

The comments on what the students did not like or thought could be improved indicate that the students were generally focused on the activities themselves and the level of challenge, rather than on specifics of graphics and game play. While students mentioned some game feature suggestions to improve the program, their reactions to the video-game aspects of the program were positive.