

**Games drive class learning**

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XBOX consoles and popular video game Guitar Hero are being used in schools to engage students.

Under an Education Department plan, four northern metropolitan region schools will try Guitar Hero "for initial exploration of the tool for education purposes".

An Xbox 360 is now used in classes at Melbourne High School, Deakin University, La Trobe University and Monash University.

Melbourne High School information and communication technology director Adrian Janson says: "Essentially, we now have a programming course, with industry standard programming, that translates to the IT industry. It's taken everything to a new level."

Mr Janson uses so-called XNA tools, downloadable on Xbox, in his classes.

His lessons are so popular, students spend their lunch breaks in class doing more work.

This week, as Mr Janson's class reconvenes for another term, Guitar Hero will begin trials at other schools.

An Education Department spokeswoman said: "We always explore the best educational opportunities for our students and there's growing evidence that games are valuable tools for learning.

"Apart from improving dexterity, concentration and persistence, games can improve decision-making, multi-tasking and parallel processing.

"The department explores a range of emerging technologies, including digital games, and their potential to impact on student learning. Guitar Hero is one of these technologies."

Guitar Hero creator Activision is happy to be rocking the classroom.

"Guitar Hero has revolutionised the way we experience music," product manager, Peter Skjellerup, said.

"We're proud Guitar Hero has been embraced by such a broad and diverse audience.

"The phenomenon has even spread into educational institutions that have embraced video games like Guitar Hero in order to help them deliver a higher level of engagement with students."

Mr Janson said Xbox in school was serious fun. He said students were making world-class games.

"It's serious, but not incredibly serious," he said.

"I encourage students to play their own games, or each other's games. That's more the focus."

Microsoft group category manager Jeremy Hinton said Xbox had a legitimate place in schools.

"The youth of today needs to be engaged in different ways," Mr Hinton said.

"It's a powerful way to engage kids and give them a great start to a future career in the fastest growing entertainment industry in the world."

In other states, Xbox is used in classes at Cherrybrook Tech High, Australian National University, Queensland University of Technology, University of Technology, Sydney and Western Sydney TAFE.

More technology news, Play liftout, inside.

**Edition:** 1 - FIRST

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