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## **Team plugs into kid's love of video games to teach them about science, medicine: They allow for experiences different from pen and paper, educator says; [1\* Edition]**

FRANCES BULA. *The Vancouver Sun*. Vancouver, B.C.: Mar 1, 1993. pg. B.3

### **Abstract (Summary)**

In the first project of its kind, [Maria Klawe] is coordinating an American-Canadian team of computer scientists, teachers, education professors and commercial-game producers that will look for ways that schools can plug into children's fascination with video games.

"Why video games? They're part of children's culture. And they really allow for certain types of mental experience that are very difficult with pen and paper. They're also a lot cheaper than computers," says Klawe, who is head of the University of B.C.'s computer-science department, the mother of two video-game players, and the kind of person who goes to schools and uses her juggling skills to explain math and science.

The Lemmings game, says Klawe, trains kids how to program because they have to plan very complicated series of steps to save their lemming characters.

### **Full Text (751 words)**

*(Copyright The Vancouver Sun)*

YOU LOOK at the Super Nintendo game Street Fighter 2 and see the evils of macho violence and weapons worship combined.

Maria Klawe looks at it and sees a way teachers could use it to teach children how biologists figure out ways to fight diseases.

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"Why video games? They're part of children's culture. And they really allow for certain types of mental experience that are very difficult with pen and paper. They're also a lot cheaper than computers," says Klawe, who is head of the University of B.C.'s computer-science department, the mother of two video-game players, and the kind of person who goes to schools and uses her juggling skills to explain math and science.

The GEMS group (Games for Education in Math and Science) wants to do two things. First, find ways for teachers to use existing video games to explain ideas in school for the Grades 4-7 set. A game like Streetfighter 2, where there are eight characters with six to eight kinds of weapons, is like an analysis program that makes kids try to figure out which fighting style works best with and against different characters. Just like scientists looking for disease cures.

The Lemmings game, says Klawe, trains kids how to program because they have to plan very complicated series of steps to save their lemming characters.

But the trick with the kind of learning kids do in video games - or in any learning anyone does - is that the learners have to understand that they are learning and what it is. Otherwise they can't apply that to other situations.

"When kids play video games, there's more going on than just hand-to-eye coordination. I'm sure they think while they're playing but there's no link from that into what they're learning," says Klawe.

So teachers need material that can help them explain to students how what they learn in video games can be transferred - like the link between fighting with different weapons in a video game and fighting with different weapons in scientific research on disease control.

Secondly, the team wants to create new video games that will make kids use even more sophisticated calculations. They also have to create games that will appeal to both kids who are already experts and those who aren't part of the game-playing group, particularly girls.

To teach how to do math with negative numbers, for example, they might create a video game where the character goes through lenses that expand or shrink its size by a certain factor, and occasionally turns it upside down. To get through the passageway, the player would have to figure out how to get it to a certain size and right side up.

The research still has to be done, but Klawe says her informal talks with hundreds of girls in classrooms tells her that video games will have to be structured differently for them.

"Girls are very interested in 'worthwhile' activities, and they tend to see video games as not worthwhile. They like games that have real teamwork - not just a competition for the highest score. They like games that have people interactions, and they really like creating," says Klawe.

To accomplish all of this is going to take several years of research, a team of 24 people - including Simon Fraser University professor Gerri Sinclair and the Burnaby video-game company, Electronic Arts - and \$8 million.

They need to study how children actually play video games, how far the game-creators can push the learning part before kids start to lose interest, and what will make teachers buy into the idea of using video games.

"We need to work very hard not to take the fun out," says Klawe. The group plans to set up a research site at Science World to study what children like - a harder job than you might think, since children's critiques are often along the lines of "It sucks when he falls off the toadstool with the umbrella."

Part of the research is for the group members themselves to find out what is involved in video games.

"All the adults on the team have played Lemmings," says Klawe.

"And they're all stuck."

#### [Illustration]

Black & White Photo; IAN SMITH;Vancouver Sun; LEARNING IS FUN: Maria Klawe gets kids interested

Credit: VANSUN

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[Databases selected:](#) Canadian Newsstand

## **UBC slam dunks coach Thomas: Guard cries foul as abrasive coach let go; [Final Edition]**

*Terry Bell. The Province. Vancouver, B.C.: Jun 20, 1995. pg. A.47*

### **Abstract (Summary)**

After arriving in 1989, [Misty Thomas] revived the moribund UBC women's program, but school officials decided not to renew her contract after it expired May 31.

A source said [Maria Klawe] told Thomas that "competition has no place in athletics at UBC.

Staff file photo/ Misty Thomas can keep the ball and whistle, but she'll have to change sweatshirts after UBC fired her. (95-1526) ;

### **Full Text** (468 words)

*(Copyright The Province (Vancouver) 1995)*

Technically foul.

That's the mood around parts of the University of B.C. campus following the apparent firing of women's basketball coach Misty Thomas.

After arriving in 1989, Thomas revived the moribund UBC women's program, but school officials decided not to renew her contract after it expired May 31.

Thomas, who was the Canada West coach of the year after her team won the division championship for the 1993-94 season, is the second head coach to be fired.

Frank Smith was turfed as head football coach last winter and replaced by his son Casey.

Thomas couldn't be reached for comment Monday because she was at the University of Arizona defending her thesis.

But the school apparently wants a kinder, gentler approach from its basketball coach. It means the volatile Thomas had to go.

No UBC official could be reached for comment. Athletic director Bob Philip and intercollegiate athletics co-ordinator Kim Gordon were on their way to a conference in P.E.I. Monday.

Dr. Maria Klawe, vice-president of academic services, was also away from the office.

But a source said Klawe told Thomas that "competition has no place in athletics at UBC.

"She (Klawe) said she was doing Misty a favor because Misty would not want to stay in that kind of situation."

The move took at least one player by surprise.

Starting point guard Lori Kemp of Richmond averaged 14 points per game last year. She didn't like the way the situation was handled.

"Quite a few of us were very surprised," said Kemp.

"Misty Thomas is a great coach. She hasn't taken a day off since the day she got there. She's always scouting,

recruiting, watching film.

"Yes, she's tough on us, but she made me a better player. That's what it's about."

Apparently not.

The day after the Thunderbirds lost in the Western Canada playoff to the University of Victoria, school officials sent questionnaires to players soliciting their views about Thomas.

Officials then told Thomas that her players wanted her out and that the desire was unanimous.

Kemp disagrees that the feeling was unanimous, and says several players have sent letters to university administration expressing disapproval of the move.

"Some players weren't surveyed and there was no indication that the survey could lead to a firing," said Kemp.

"If they'd said they were going to use the evaluation to determine her contract (status) then it (the results) would have been a lot different."

Thomas had an abrasive style.

On the court she yelled at officials. Off it she battled with school officials and didn't mince words with players.

"She's intense," said Kemp. "For a few players that's a problem. She made me a better player."

#### [Illustration]

Staff file photo/ Misty Thomas can keep the ball and whistle, but she'll have to change sweatshirts after UBC fired her. (95-1526) ;

#### Indexing (document details)

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