



**“For Crown or Colony?”
Fall 2009 Implementation Study Executive Summary**

Mission US: “For Crown or Colony?” is a prototype digital history game developed by THIRTEEN/WNET New York Public Media under CPB’s *American History and Civics Initiative* (AHCI). With AHCI, CPB has sought to foster the development of innovative digital media products that strengthen children’s engagement with US history and civics, and also to build knowledge about how these products can fit into current US schools and classrooms.

In fall 2009, Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) conducted a field test of *Mission US* in 20 5th -9th grade classrooms across four states. Three-hundred-eighty-seven students ages 10-14 participated. Classrooms were in 8 urban, 7 suburban and 4 rural schools located in New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Montana.

The Game

Mission US: “For Crown or Colony?” is a web-based adventure game intended to help middle school students understand the social, political, and economic conflicts that led to the American Revolution. Players take the role of Nathaniel Wheeler, a young printer’s apprentice, who must carry out tasks for his master while confronting Bostonians’ clashing views on British authority and colonial protest. Students complete 5 episodes of game play, 15-20 minutes each, culminating in the Boston Massacre, around which they must choose to take sides.

The Curriculum

Mission US curriculum materials are intended to help teachers bring game events, characters, and arguments into the classroom so that students actively debate them. They include vocabulary exercises, primary source documents, writing prompts, and graphic organizers that connect game experiences to more formal academic knowledge.

RESULTS

The results of this early, largely qualitative study of *Mission US* in the classroom suggest promising directions for the further development of AHCI digital products, classroom supports, and research methodologies.

Teachers’ Overall Assessment

As a group teachers were extremely enthusiastic about *Mission US* and its effectiveness for students – particularly students who struggle academically. Features they cited most included:

Engagement 16 of 18 teachers said that students were more intellectually and emotionally engaged during the *Mission US* unit than in the typical unit they teach.

Supports for struggling students 13 of 18 teachers said that students who struggle academically, e.g., with reading or attention, performed better in the *Mission US* unit compared to most units. Teachers credited the game’s strong storyline and characters, as well as audio supports for reading, with helping struggling students succeed.

More human history 17 of 18 teachers said that *Mission US* helped their students see the events leading to the American Revolution “in more human, everyday terms that they could understand.”

Active discussions 11 of 17 teachers said students were more involved in classroom discussions than in the typical unit.

Ambitious teaching 15 of 18 teachers said that as teachers, they reached a greater variety of learning objectives with the *Mission US* unit than they do in the typical US history unit they teach.

Implementation Patterns

Despite some initial apprehension, teachers said they were surprised by how smoothly *Mission US* fit into their curriculum and teaching.

Time. Teachers used the game and curriculum for a greater amount of classroom time than the 3-4 days developers anticipated.

Locations. Teachers found *Mission US* flexible enough to use in a variety of settings – classroom, computer lab, and home.

Use of curriculum. Participants rated the *Mission US* teacher guide as “excellent.”

Technical challenges. Most teachers described technical problems with the pilot implementation as a “slight challenge.”

Future use. The great majority of teachers said they are eager to use the game in their curriculum next year, and that they want to use any additional *Mission US* games.

Student Views of the Game

Mission US was appealing for students both in school and out.

In school:

- Three quarters of students (73%) said they were interested or very interested in playing more *Mission US* games in their social studies classroom.
- Students said that the *Mission US* unit, compared to their typical history unit, got them more interested in the history topic being taught, and reduced their boredom with history class.
- Most students said they enjoyed learning history with *Mission US* not because it was a videogame (only 6%), but because taken as a whole, the unit was a big change from the way they usually learn history. Students said their typical history class stressed teacher lecture, reading, and tests (50%), and in contrast, they cited the *Mission US* story and characters as very interesting and appealing (15%).

At home:

- Students used the game as an opportunity to engage with friends, siblings, and parents. Approximately 25% of students said they played the game at home accompanied by their friends, by a brother or sister, or by a parent.
- Students said they talked about the game outside of class with friends (51%), parents (38%), and siblings (20%).

Student Learning Outcomes

Students using *Mission US* improved both their content knowledge about the American Revolution, and their skill in analyzing a primary document from the Revolutionary era. These results confirm and extend those found in an earlier and much smaller pilot test of the game.

