Emerging Technologies with Games and Gamification using Studyladder

I have been using a free version of Studyladder www.studyladder.ca with my grade 3 students. It only took about half an hour to register all my students. They are knight1 to knight23. I used their classroom number along with my last name to help protect their identity. They also login with a very simple password. Studyladder supports a variety of subjects with thousands of activities. In k-7, there are 2785 math activities alone. I simply select the activities for the students to use and the students have access to them. Students are able to work at their own pace to complete the activities. They can even watch tutorials. While completing the fun activities, students are tasked with the challenge of completing all the activities within the two week time period.
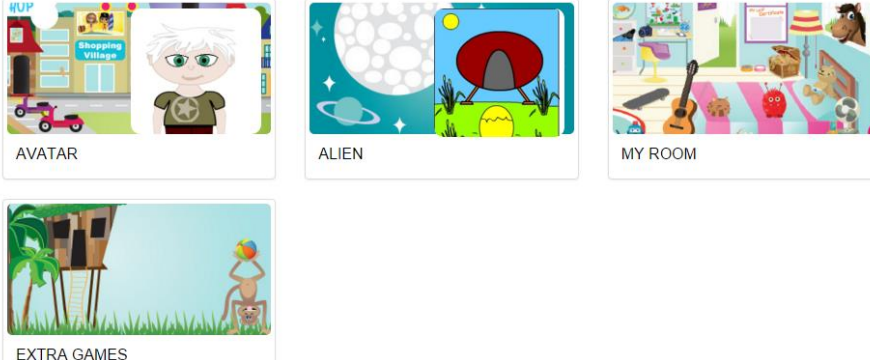
Here is the latest challenge for the students to achieve.

As the students complete each activity, it disappears from the choices. The program then tells the student how many are completed. After completing an activity students earn spending money and points.

Their spending money earned is used to add to your avatar, collect pet aliens, add items for you room, and earn extra games to play.

As the students earn points for completing activities, they also earn certificates. This student just needs 4 more points to get a bronze certificate. There are over a 100 certificates from Bronze to Shield of Excellence.

It is also very easy for the teacher to look at each student's results.

Sat, 13th Feb 2016				
Share between two Math » Division » Share between 2.	6:17pm	0m:30s	7 / 10	😖
Dividing by 4 Math » Division » Dividing by 4.	6:16pm	0m:19s	6 / 10	😖
Share objects between four Math » Division » Dividing by 4.	6:15pm	0m:31s	10 / 10	😃
Share counters between three Math » Division » Dividing by 3.	6:14pm	0m:49s	8 / 10	😃
Dividing by 3 Math » Division » Dividing by 3.	6:13pm	0m:32s	10 / 10	😃

The teacher can also see how the class has done in each activity too.

Students enjoy "playing" Studyladder in my classroom. It reinforces what has been taught and tracks their progress. It is a simple program to use.

My initial thoughts are that this is a great program. It reinforces concepts taught, records progress, and it is fun to use. I also use it for blended learning. Half the class can be working on Studyladder, while I work with a smaller group giving them more attraction. I have also divided the classroom into three groups with one group working on Studyladder, one group doing standard worksheets, and small groups working with me. These methods appear to be working extremely well.

I am, however, concerned about the amount of screen time that the students receive. According to Screenfree.org, "For older children and adolescents, excessive screen time is linked to increased psychological difficulties that include hyperactivity, emotional and conduct problems, difficulties with peers and poor school performance." http://www.screenfree.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/screentimefs.pdf   When we first started using educational programs in the classroom, we spent an hour or more at a time. More must be better, right? I did notice that my classroom was more challenging behaviourally. I now only allow for no more than 30 minutes during the school day. The results showed no extra behavioural problems. I still have concerns about what the long term effects on screen time will have on children.

My district supports using technology in the classroom. They have provided us with iPads, computers, and smartboards. The technology department does direct us in the ways we should be using them. They do not support the use of technology that could be used for drill and kill worksheets. Because they do not support this type of activity, we are not given all the tools necessary to run many great educational programs. One activity on Studyladder has the students moving manipulatives to form 'groups of' while dividing. Despite this being an excellent use of technology, we cannot do this because our district will not load flash, or a version of it, on our iPads.

Personally, I will continue to blend technology into my classroom. The technology department is aware of what I am doing and watching with great interest. Other teachers are paying attention too. Studyladder is a great free program. If Studyladder starts to charge for use of their free program, will I continue to be supported?