

Social Value of Gaming

Kelly Czarnecki maintains that teens with poor literacy skills often also need to work on their social skills. Gaming allows teens opportunities to develop interpersonal skills for interacting with adults and peers and team playing.¹ John Beck and Mitchell Wade explain in their book, *Got Game*, that gamers become more sociable and develop leadership skills.² Brian Mayer describes his thoughts that videogames require communication with other players who must talk to each other, and encourage the sharing of information in his article for *Library Gamer*.³

In a *Harper's Magazine* article, Thomas de Zengotita explained that videogames are not really intended to be solitary activities. The default on most gaming consoles is for four people. The Xbox 360 shares the play of one user with everyone else who is playing at that time, and they can make comments. Online games involve large social networks and involve the formation of guilds for collaboration.⁴ Kevin Maney makes the startling assertion in his article in *USA Today* that videogaming has become such a popular culture phenomenon that not being fluent in videogames can be a social disadvantage for kids.⁵

According to James P. Gee and other researchers who contributed to an article for the School of Education, UW-Madison, game play is a thoroughly social phenomenon. Multiplayer games, sometimes with thousands of people playing at the same time, allow players to participate in virtual worlds with their own economies, political systems, and cultures. The communities that game players form are organized around the shared goal of developing expertise in the game and the skills, habits, and understandings that the game requires. Creating virtual worlds involves integrating knowing and doing and creating shared values that makes someone an expert within a game.⁶

Jessie Scanlon explained, in her article written for *Business Week Online*, that the intersection of social-networking and gaming becomes a second niche area for serious gamers. Scanlon said that even publishers that are not using Web 2.0 are thinking about how their games can function as a service rather than as a three-hour entertainment package. One example is a real-time sports news "ticker function" that will allow players to capture game highlights, add captions, and share the images with friends. In the future all games may have a feature that allows users to print out a frame or upload it to Flickr. Scanlon thinks Web 2.0 technologies that support sites like MySpace and YouTube may be used in the future to help rein in the costs of blending social networking with games.⁷

In an article in *Teacher Librarian*, Densie Agosto explained that computer confidence can affect girls' success with problem solving activities and encourage them to tackle math problems. Another study found that when girls worked in pairs or small groups they solved significantly more math puzzles than girls who worked alone. The opposite was true for boys. Girls in the

¹Czarnecki, Kelly. "A Revolution in Library Service." *School Library Journal*. May 2007. 53:5.

²Beck, John and Wade, Mitchell. *Got Game*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press. 2004.

³Mayer, Brian. "Gaming, School Libraries and the Curriculum." *Library Gamer*. Feb. 11, 2008.

⁴de Zengotita, Thomas. "Grand Theft Education." *Harper's Magazine*. Sept. 2006. 313:1876.

⁵Maney, Kevin. "Video Games Aren't Necessarily Turning Kids' Brains to Mush." *USA Today*. Jul. 13, 2005.

⁶Gee, James P, Halverson, Richard, Shaffer, David Williamson, and Squire, Kurt R. *Video Games and the Future of Learning*. Wisconsin Center for Education Research, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison. 2005.

⁷Scanlon, Jessie. "Getting Serious About Gaming." *Business Week Online*. Aug. 14, 2007.

study preferred collaboration over competition and have a preference for real-life locations (houses or neighborhoods), while boys favored fantasy locales (warp zones etc.).⁸

James P. Gee referred to online gaming universities, blogs, or other spaces created by gaming groups to collectively improve their games, as “affinity spaces.” Participants in them don’t care about identity, age, gender, class, or nationality. Credentials, degrees, and affiliations give players no status. There are no formal instructors. People with expertise are recognized and valued. The distinction between readers and authors is blurred. Sometimes the distinction between game developers and consumers is also blurred. Groups of people around the world working together to solve problems is common in digital spaces. The only barriers are really the amount of free time players have, their reading levels, confidence with the medium, and fluency with technical discourse.⁹

Players need a place to go to play with other gamers, even if they are all playing on their own laptop. This desire of gamers to be with each other as they play their games has resulted in some referring to *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life* the “new golf.”¹⁰ Libraries can fill the need gamers have by providing space for them to play together. Some libraries go further and provide the games and equipment as well.

In a 2007 *VOYA* article, Erin Helmrich and Eli Neiburger explain that they began to use videogaming at the Ann Arbor Public Library in Michigan to targeted teens because of their high interest and participation in games, but also because they are among the hardest to reach with traditional services, especially boys. Gaming meets 17 of the 40 “developmental assets” identified by the Search Institute as important attributes communities must have to help teens become contributing members of society when they are adults.¹¹

Helmrich and Neiburger matched gaming events at Ann Arbor with some of the Search Institute’s developmental assets to indicate how gaming events can address the needs identified by the Institute.¹² The positive outcomes of library gaming events include:

- Caring neighborhood—The gaming events are inviting and relaxing.
- Community values youth—Teens are involved in planning and organizing the events, and gaming activities have led to bonding that crosses cultural, economic, and racial divides.
- Youth as resources—Teens offer color commentary during the tournaments, describing the action and who is leading.
- Set boundaries and expectations—The games must be organized and run fairly.
- Provide adult role models—Teens who participate see library staff as adults who share and respect their interests.
- Provide opportunities for positive peer influence—The tournaments encourage fair play and good sportsmanship.
- Set high expectations—Knowledge of the games is required and respected.
- Constructive use of time—Tournaments help turn a pastime into a more constructive use of time and help parents understand the interests of their teens.

⁸Agosto, Denise. “Girls and Gaming: A Summary of the Research with Implications for Practice.” *Teacher Librarian*. Feb. 2004. 31:3.

⁹Squire, Kurt and Steinkuehler, Constance. “They Research, Teach, Learn, and Collaborate. So Far Without Libraries.” *Library Journal*. Apr. 15, 2005.

¹⁰Danforth, Elizabeth. “Games, Gaming, and Gamers: Why You Want Them in Your Libraries.” *BiblioTech*. Oct. 2007.

¹¹“40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents.” Minneapolis, MN; Search Institute.

¹²Helmrich, Erin. and Neiburger, Eli. “Video Games as a Service: Three Years Later.” *VOYA*. June 2007.

Tournaments also address some of the Search Institute's "internal assets." Getting kids into the library for tournaments has results in many positive connections, more engagement in the library, and increased use of its resources. The gaming events address these internal assets:

- Reading for pleasure—Reading materials are always available during tournaments for use as players wait for their turns.
- Positive values—Teens model their love of the game which becomes a bond between players.
- Social competencies—Teens are involved in the planning and management of the tournaments which helps them develop social skills. They have a sense of control and know their input will be respected.
- Positive identity—When the library sanctions gaming, the community comes to see gamers as engaging in positive activities which lead to a positive identity for the gamers.
- Personal power—Leadership roles help give teens a sense of personal power.
- Self-esteem—Self-esteem is enhanced for teens because of their gaming knowledge and ability. Kids who might otherwise function on the fringe of their peer group can become valuable resources for mainstream kids. Games are the great equalizers because they don't depend on athletic, artistic, or academic accomplishments which are most frequently valued in school environments. Access at public libraries eliminates the difference between the kids who have the games and equipment at home and those who don't.
- Positive view of personal failure—Failure in games has no repercussions for the real world so kids feel they can always try again and can track their own improvement.¹³

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Agosto, Denise. "Girls and Gaming: A Summary of the Research with Implications for Practice." *Teacher Librarian*. Feb. 2004. 31:3. www.girlstech.douglass.rutgers.edu/PDF/GirlsAndGaming.pdf
- Beck, John and Wade, Mitchell. *Got Game*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press. 2004.
- Czarnecki, Kelly. "A Revolution in Library Service." *School Library Journal*. May 2007. 53:5. [www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6438272.html?q="revolution+in+library+service](http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6438272.html?q=)
- Danforth, Elizabeth. "Games, Gaming, and Gamers: Why You Want Them in Your Libraries." *BiblioTech*. Oct. 2007. <http://isobibliotech.blogspot.com/2007/10/games-gaming-and-gamers-why-you-want.html>
- de Zengotita, Thomas. "Grand Theft Education." *Harper's Magazine*. Sept. 2006. 313:1876. <http://harpers.org/subjects/ThomasDeZengotita>
- "40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents." Minneapolis, MN; Search Institute. www.search-institute.org/assets/
- Helmrich, Erin. and Neiburger, Eli. "Video Games as a Service: Three Years Later." *VOYA*. June 2007.
- Gee, James P, Halverson, Richard, Shaffer, David Williamson, and Squire, Kurt R. *Video Games and the Future of Learning*. Wisconsin Center for Education Research, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison. 2005. www.wcer.wisc.edu
- Maney, Kevin. "Video Games Aren't Necessarily Turning Kids' Brains to Mush." *USA Today*. Jul. 13, 2005. www.usatoday.com/tech/columnist/kevinmaney/2005-07-12-video-games_x.htm
- Mayer, Brian. "Gaming, School Libraries and the Curriculum." *Library Gamer*. Feb. 11, 2008. <http://librarygamer.wordpress.com/2008/02/11/gaming-school-libraries-and-the-curriculum/>
- Scanlon, Jessie. "Getting Serious About Gaming." *Business Week Online*. Aug. 14, 2007.
- Squire, Kurt and Steinkuehler, Constance. "They Research, Teach, Learn, and Collaborate. So Far Without Libraries." *Library Journal*. Apr. 15, 2005. www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA516033.html.

¹³Helmrich, Erin. and Neiburger, Eli. "Video Games as a Service: Three Years Later." *VOYA*. June 2007.