



# VIDEO GAMES IN EDUCATION, a TIMELY TOPIC

The American Library Association's (ALA) **TechSource Gaming, Learning, and Libraries Symposium**, held during the summer of 2007, featured academics Henry Jenkins, the Director of the Comparative Media Studies Program at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and James Paul Gee, the Mary Lou Fulton Presidential Professor of Literacy Studies at Arizona State University—both advocates for learning in video games. Their excellent presentations about the nature of learning and how video games fit in with learning principles are archived on the **ALA Techsource Wiki** and worth a listen.

At Stanford University during the summer of 2007, Gee and a team from the University of Wisconsin–Madison led a week-long institute on *Using Videogames in Education*, stressing that it is not enough to merely give students access to tools. Educators—including librarians—must provide support in the form of instruction and debriefing. As with other forms of media—books, television, music, and film—games are not meant to be consumed in a vacuum.

There is no question that using games for educational purposes is a trend that is only going to get more popular as gamers grow up and move into the teaching profession. Until that happens, those of us who might not feel comfortable enough to talk about games will find an excellent resource in David Hutchinson's book, **Playing to Learn: Video Games in Education**.

## PLAYING . . . TO LEARN?

**Playing to Learn** offers more than one hundred ideas for gaming-related activities with curriculum tie-ins. Nearly all are fully fleshed out as classroom activities. Others provide writing and discussion prompts or ideas for modifying and adapting other activities. Although aimed at elementary, middle, and high school educators, this book offers immensely useful programming information for school, public, and academic librarians.

Hutchinson proposes that no matter what area is under study, from astronomy to zoology, creative instructors can link it to video games. Writing a review or strategy guide for a game becomes an exercise in composition, while comparing and contrasting reviews can be practice for note-taking and analysis. Studying national or classroom leader boards is a fun way to run through statistics and basic arithmetic. Debating controversies



LIBRARIANS COMPETE FOR A WII WITH BIG BRAIN ACADEMY: WII DEGREE AT GAMING, LEARNING, AND LIBRARIES SYMPOSIUM 2007.

surrounding gaming, such as the portrayal of women and minorities, violence in games, and gamer ethics, could hone skills in research, rhetoric, and elocution.

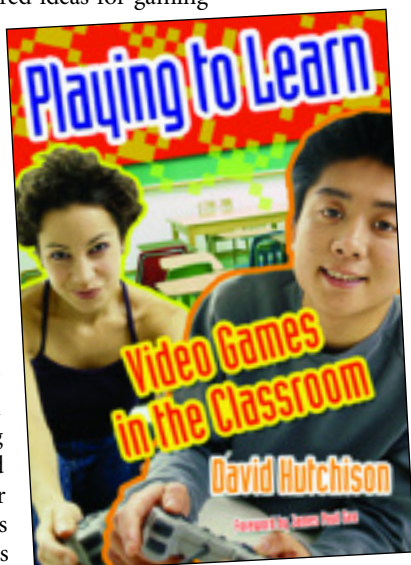
Several projects are cross-curricular, such as “Fitness Regime,” in which students invent exercises for superheroes, presenting their written work to peers. This particular exercise can be extended by performing and recording details about the activity, thus bringing physical education and math together.

One exercise is not what it seems. “Battleship” is revealed to be more than just practice in coordinates and mapping. **Battleship** is a turn-based game (just like the popular historical action-adventure video game **Civilization IV**) that can be played with pencils and graph paper. Playing something considered “old school” becomes an opportunity to discuss game history, genres, and design. Discussion prompts on these and other topics are included as part of the activity.

Specific games are not always mentioned. For example, the “Music Critic” activity invites students to examine a game that incorporates licensed commercial music to study both the process of legally procuring music for use in a game and to determine if the music is appropriate for each scene. Rhythm games like **Guitar Hero II** immediately come to mind, but there are many others. In fact, getting a song on a video game soundtrack can make or break a band today as games have become a new vehicle for unknowns to get their music heard. Unfortunately there are no reproducible materials, such as leader board templates, for use with any of the exercises, but there is an opportunity to extend resources on the companion Web site.

The vast majority of activities do not require fancy or expensive equipment. In fact, low budget is the assumption. “Artistic Rendering” asks students to draw, paint, or sketch artistic interpretations of real-life places. The author suggests that if the software is available, students can generate 3-D models of a historic or fictional building. Hutchinson does not make any recommendations for specific software to complete the activity; indeed one of the book's flaws is the oversight of what software to use. It should be noted that this omission makes activities incredibly open ended, as the instructor can choose to model a game like **The Sims** or other similar software. Another way that the book embraces low tech is that the library or classroom does not have to provide games to play for any of these activities.

**Playing to Learn** serves as a primer for those new to the idea of gaming for education. Articles by such luminaries as Henry Jenkins lend additional



## GAME RATINGS



**E:** Everyone: Suitable for ages 6 and older.

**E10+:** Suitable for everyone ages 10 and older.

**TEEN:** Suitable for ages 13 and older.

These age ratings come from the independent Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). For further information on the content of games with each rating, or to search game ratings by title, visit <http://www.esrb.org>. The ESRB ratings are registered trademarks of the Entertainment Software Association.

academic credibility. His unabridged piece, *Reality Bytes: Eight Myths About Video Games, Debunked*, addresses concerns raised by those who assume that all video games are socially isolating, that no girls play games, and that violent games lead to youth aggression. A list of the top-ten reasons to use video games in the classroom comes early in the book, providing excellent justification for game incorporation. A book review exercise, with a list of titles about gaming, makes an excellent resource list for educators unfamiliar with games.

A synopsis of each activity is provided in the table of contents, making it easy to refer back to an

activity if one can't recall the title, and a subject guide at the end simplifies locating exercises by topic. The index includes game titles, subjects, game genres, names of authors, and game designers, with only a few typographical errors.

## TAKING THE PULSE OF GAMING IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Why is this book so important? At that fantastic **Gaming, Learning, and Libraries Symposium**, Scott Nicholson, faculty member at Syracuse University, revealed the results from a telephone survey that included a random sample of four hundred libraries, which sought to answer the question, "What does gaming in public libraries look like?" In this survey, games meant anything from traditional card and board games to Web-based and console games. The data might surprise you. When asked, "Do you support gaming in your library?" 77 percent of libraries said yes, while 43 percent report running formal gaming programs, 20 percent circulate games, and 82 percent allow patrons to play games on library computers. Nicholson points out, "When contrasted with the first question, at least 5 percent of the libraries surveyed allowed patrons to play games on computers in the library but did not see that as supporting gaming in the library. This points to a need for advocacy to help libraries consider gaming as a significant service they can offer patrons." A survey of video games in school libraries is planned.

Are you inspired to try some of the activities? There may be new funding available to actually incorporate these ideas—with game play! Because games are a part of media literacy, keep an eye on The MacArthur Foundation, which has recently set aside \$50 million for a digital media and learning initiative. MacArthur's award, whose deadline has unfortunately passed, aims to help determine how digital technologies are changing the way young people learn, play, socialize, and participate in civic life—and it's something that should be on the radar of libraries as well. Perhaps the foundation will repeat the initiative next year. ■

*Beth Gallaway is an independent library trainer and consultant and co-chair of the Teen Gaming Interest Group for the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA). Visit her avatar, Cerulean Vesperia, in Second Life at the library on Info Island (128, 128, 27) and urge her to get back to work on her book about gaming and libraries, forthcoming from Neal-Schuman in 2007.*

**IF THE IDEA OF** supporting gamers in your library is compelling, but you're not quite sure where to begin and the idea of plugging all those cables together terrifies you, please come to the Young Adult Library Service Association's (YALSA) program on non-controller programs for gamers at the American Library Association's (ALA) 2008 Annual Meeting in Anaheim, California. The session, sponsored by the Teen Gaming Interest Group, will include presentations by Elizabeth Saxton, YA Librarian at Columbus Public Library in Columbus, Ohio; Amy McNally, Teen Services Librarian at the Ridgedale Branch in Minnetonka, Minnesota, with two of her teens; and Craig Davis, from the Youth Digital Arts Cyber School. Information on registration is forthcoming.

## RESOURCES

**Gaming, Learning, and Libraries Symposium Wiki.** ALA TechSource. July 2007.

[http://gaming.techsource.ala.org/index.php/ALA\\_TechSource\\_Gaming%2C\\_Learning%2C\\_and\\_Libraries\\_Symposium](http://gaming.techsource.ala.org/index.php/ALA_TechSource_Gaming%2C_Learning%2C_and_Libraries_Symposium). Accessed September 26, 2007.

Gee, James Paul. "Libraries, Gaming, and the New Equity Crisis." ALA Techsource Gaming, Learning, and Libraries Symposium. Chicago, July 2007.

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Hutchinson, David. **Playing to Learn: Video Games in Education.** Teacher Ideas Press, 2007. 256p. \$30 pb. 978-1-59158-492-6. Index. Illus.

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<http://www.pbs.org/kcts/videogamerevolution/impact/myths.html>. Accessed September 26, 2007.

Jenkins, Henry. "What Librarians Need to Know about Games, Media Literacy and Participatory Culture." ALA Techsource Gaming, Learning, and Libraries Symposium. Chicago, July 2007.

[http://gaming.techsource.ala.org/index.php/What\\_Librarians\\_Need\\_to\\_Know\\_about\\_Games%2C\\_Media\\_Literacy%2C\\_and\\_Participatory\\_Culture](http://gaming.techsource.ala.org/index.php/What_Librarians_Need_to_Know_about_Games%2C_Media_Literacy%2C_and_Participatory_Culture). Accessed September 26, 2007.

The MacArthur Foundation. **Digital Media and Learning Competition.** 2007.

<http://www.dmlcompetition.net/home.php>. Accessed September 26, 2007.

Nicholson, Scott. **The Role of Gaming in Public Libraries: Taking the Pulse.** July 2007. White paper available online at <http://www.boardgameswithscott.com/pulse2007.pdf>. Accessed September 26, 2007.

**Playing to Learn: Video Games in the Classroom.** 2007. <http://www.playingtolearn.org>. Accessed September 26, 2007.

## GAMES

**Battleship.** Milton Bradley. \$14.99.

**Guitar Hero II.** Harmonix, 2007. (PS2; Xbox 360). \$49.99. ESRB Rating: T.

**Sid Meier's Civilization IV.** 2K Games. (Windows 2000; Windows XP) \$39.99. ESRB Rating: E10+.