Video Games Are More Than a Game

Video games, once thought of as strictly entertainment, have developed into a source for learning a variety of skills for a variety of consumers. The evolution of video games and the gaming platforms on which they are played have pushed technology to new heights. The evolution inspired a multitude of studies to prove both the good and the bad aspects of gaming. One of these studies by Dr. Mark Griffiths titled “Videogames Are Good for You” was published in the Official U.S. Playstation Magazine. Dr. Griffiths established that “in the right context, videogames can have positive health benefits to a large range of different sub-groups, and that adverse effects are likely to affect only a very small subgroup of very frequent players”. (1-3) Benefits from game play have been observed in early childhood development, teens, young adults and seniors. While certain benefits have been documented, there will always be people and organizations that promote the vile nature of video games. Researchers are proving learning skills and health benefits do exist in the expanding world of video games.

Growth and development in early childhood are the easiest to measure. “Developmental psychologists have known for nearly a century that children learn from playing games.” (Shaffer 6) Children are like sponges getting their first exposure to liquid. A child’s caregiver traditionally plays by using books, toys and
creative arts and crafts to help quench their thirst for learning. A modern utensil used to express creativity is the video game or computer game. In video games, children would use an avatar much like a doll or action figure. An avatar is a character representing the player by carrying out commands and tasks of the player. Under supervised play, children of all ages definitely benefit from the many games on the market for both the computer and game console. The obvious benefits are reading skills, math skills, increased vocabulary, improved spelling and even the recognition of color.

A fortunate benefit, unknown to many parents, is that of improved eyesight. “Lazy eye”, which is a condition usually diagnosed in young children, occurs when one eye has poor or distorted vision. If diagnosed before the age of seven, children are being prescribed time to be spent playing video games. This is achieved by covering the good eye with a patch and trying to make their way through simple tasks. The lazy eye is forced to “work” harder; therefore, not relying on the stronger eye. In a Yahoo article, researcher Daphne Bevelier stated

“First-person action games helped study subjects improve their spatial resolution, meaning their ability to clearly see small, closely packed together objects, such as letters…the present study highlights the potential of action-video game training for rehabilitation of visual deficits.” (1-4)

This option of having fun playing games while improving vision is a far better option than an invasive surgical procedure. Young children will reap the rewards of modern technology, ultimately surpassing their parents in many aspects, as they grow into teenagers.
Teens and young adults have never known a time when video game technology was not available. In Marc Prensky’s book, “Don’t Bother Me Mom – I’m Learning!” a section of learners known as the Digital Natives was identified. When speaking of teenagers, Prensky observes, “…the most useful term I have found for them is Digital Natives – the new ‘native speakers’ of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet”. (28) The best way to describe it is a language barrier of sorts. Most adults over the age of 35 don’t understand the good side of gaming because they do not comprehend the language of learning. There are many positive aspects of video games, but the one negative that is considered to be the worst is the promotion of violence. Critics often magnify the violent side of video games. Prensky also reports, however,

“Most video and computer games are not violent – the games that draw the critics’ attention because of their violence (those rated “Mature”) represent less than ten percent of the total bought and played. And even those games are, in the opinion of many psychologists, emotional defusers, rather than inciters.” (75)

Instead of internalizing stress and frustrations encountered in their day-to-day lives, these more violent games can be used as an outlet to release stresses.

As the gaming generation matures into job-seeking young adults, the business community is recognizing the positive side of the more complex role-playing games. By creating an avatar, the player gives commands that are then accomplished either by teammates or his own avatar. Players learn strategy, team building, and success through failure and leadership. Over 2,000 young business professionals were
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studied by two older business experts named Beck and Wade. *Got Game*, a book written by the pair, concludes,

“They claim those with extensive gaming experience were better team members, put a high value of competence and had more potential to be superior executives. Perhaps most important…gamers understand that repeated failure is the road to success.” (Glazer 10-30)

An amazing 81 percent were average to hard-core gamers under the age of 34. In the next couple of decades, the teens and young adults of today will be the heads of corporations, interviewing potential employees. Being players themselves, they will recognize the importance of understanding the complex situations presented in video games. Playing *World of Warcraft* just might be the deciding factor between a gamer and a non-gamer applicant. As senior adults know, time is the true test of merit.

Technology based learning is also being utilized by senior adults. John Dorschner, a writer at the Miami Herald, asserts, “A good way to keep Grandma and Grandpa mentally sharp is to get them playing video games.” (1-2) He investigated the use of video game play to strengthen the mental aptitudes of seniors. Dorschner states that the mental abilities of older adults can be retained as well as improved by playing video games. According to Dorschner, Michael Marsiske, a psychologist at the University of Florida who specializes in the elderly, states that challenging the mind with new tasks that are unfamiliar is more effective than the standard crossword puzzles. Marsiske noted that 10 hours of play provided positive mental benefits for seniors over 65. University of Florida realized more benefits would be
achieved if seniors could play at home. Researchers switched to Crazy Taxi, a driving game, to reduce the need of supervision due to the complexity of other video games. This also helped seniors handle every-day tasks due to increased visual attention.

The emergence of benefits for all generations is forcing public institutions, such as libraries, to incorporate video games into their collection of materials. Libraries are setting up game nights to attract teenagers. Once in the library, gamers are often inspired to check out a book with a related topic. (Glazer 16) Beth Gallaway, a consultant to the Metrowest Massachusetts Regional Library System, states, “No matter what kind of game kids are playing, they come in genres just like the books we’re so familiar with – science fiction, fantasy – and you can pull out these elements from the game.” (Glazer 16) While a small number of libraries incorporate the video games into their institution, the majority do not.

Colleges are on the cutting edge of technology. Universities are taking another giant leap forward. At Drexel University, a simple game has been developed that allows a player to move a manhole cover in the screen just by using the brain’s concentration power. Tom Avril, a writer for The Philadelphia Inquirer, explains, “It’s what the kids are learning in college these days. The video-game industry is coming off a record year with $9.5 billion in revenue – on a par with Hollywood box office receipts…More than 200 colleges and technical schools have a gaming-related study program…” (Avril 1-3)

The world of video games has exploded over the last few decades. Professionals have recognized its importance as a way of learning. Parents, who play games
themselves, utilize the educational games available to help prepare their children for a technology-based society. Educators are re-evaluating old-fashioned ideas of teaching to include technology-laden parameters for their students. Businesses are witnessing the power of a multitude of skills acquired through game play that their applicants are bringing to the table. Senior citizens are regaining and strengthening the cognitive skills that allow them to live happier as they age. It’s impossible to ignore the many relevant skills that video game play has for so many consumers. Pilots are being trained in simulators. Even inexperienced surgeons practice surgical procedures using computer-based simulators. A technology-based society is just getting started. It is time to give credence to video games.
Works Cited


