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WHY SCHOOL LIBRARIANS SHOULD EMBRACE GAMING IN THE LIBRARY

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PLAY!

This summer you should play some video games to get ready for the upcoming school year. Games aren't just for young males and have tremendous potential to enhance 21st-century literacies, including critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Playing games will not only help you see how these skills can be developed, but also give you a shared experience that can lead to deeper interactions with your patrons.

You Might Be a Gamer If…

Although in popular images gamers are typically presented as young males, the demographics are changing; currently, more adult women play games than do young males (Santovec 2011). With the rise of mobile technology, games are more accessible than ever; your smartphone or tablet likely came with several games installed. Games are also available through social media sites like Facebook. You may have played some of these games, such as *Bejeweled*, *Candy Crush*, *FarmVille*, or *Mafia Wars*, or helped friends who play by giving them "life" or gifts, or watering their virtual crops. Although those games may not have the kind of rich complexities that foster 21st-century literacies, they do still have the potential to change behavior; research has shown that people who play games in which they help others are more likely to help other people in real life (McGonigal 2011).

Games Facilitate Learning

Libraries have a long history of including games, puzzles, and toys in their collections (Nicholson 2013). Learners develop skills in both formal and informal learning environments (Moline 2010). Games are some of the oldest instructional media, and digital games provide engaging and information-rich environments in which players can work with a variety of information objects; these game environments typically include learning supports, allowing players to focus on developing their understanding (Neuman 2011). Games encourage learners to be actively engaged rather than passively receiving, and with a low price for failure, gameplay allows learners to gain experience by taking more risks at lower cost than in real life (Gee 2008).

Online games can encourage the development of 21st-century skills (Galarneau and Zibit 2011), including critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and information and media literacy. The ability to play and learn in an online environment fosters the creation and analysis of media (Hobbs and Rowe 2011). Multi-player gaming develops players' abilities to work collaboratively. This collaboration also extends outside of the game environment as gamers work together to create mods (modifications of the original game to add or enhance content or gameplay), develop tools and

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strategies to facilitate play, and even write strategy guides (Gee 2003, 2005, 2012; Gee and Hayes 2010). Gamers also engage in creative writing and storytelling, and even develop mathematical models centered on their gameplay (Steinkuehler and King 2009). Additionally, gamers—only because of their love of gaming—have used information and technology literacies to create countless hours of gameplay videos and thousands of wiki pages.

Incorporating gaming into your school library program can help foster a love of reading and learning (Mashriqi 2011). More importantly, providing gaming in the library program is a way to help socioeconomically disadvantaged children who may not have the same opportunities as more affluent

students to develop 21st-century literacies. James Paul Gee has argued that just as school libraries provide access to print materials to foster traditional literacy, libraries should also provide access to these digital media—as well as the mentoring to be able to fully engage with them—to foster 21st-century literacies (2012). In short, to better serve their patrons, school librarians should get their game on.

What to Play?

Many games can be used to enhance 21st-century literacies, but not all are easily accessible to a novice gamer. Playing the games may require a console (such as an Xbox One, PlayStation 4, or Wii U), and games can be somewhat expensive to purchase, even if players already have the required platform on

which to play. The following list of games may be more accessible to a new gamer; they don't require a console to play and are either free or inexpensive to purchase. They also address a particular aspect of 21st-century literacies and are games you could recommend to (or play with) children and young adults. Available gameplay videos can give you an idea of what the game is about; you can decide if you're interested in playing. Also, if you get stuck while playing, you can watch to see how to navigate through a difficult part of the game.

The Cave (2013)
ESRB Rating: T
Platform: PC ($15), Android ($5), iOS ($5)

You choose three (out of seven potential) adventurers to explore a mysterious cave, in the process testing your critical-thinking and problem-solving abilities. Each adventurer has different abilities (like breathing underwater, hacking terminals, or phasing through barriers), and the adventurers you choose also determine which areas of the cave you can explore, a feature that builds in replay value.

Cogs (2009)
ESRB Rating: E
Platform: PC ($10), Android ($3), iOS ($2)
Demo: Available on Android and PC

A virtual take on classic slider puzzles, you'll need to use critical-thinking, problem-solving, and spatial-reasoning skills to

manipulate tiles into their proper places in order to turn gears, ring bells, or inflate balloons. The levels become progressively more difficult as the number of surfaces you have to play on increases.

Monster Loves You! (2013)
ESRB Rating: unrated
Platform: PC ($10), Android ($3), iOS ($3)

You direct the life choices of a monster as it grows from a morsel in the spawning vat through adolescence, adulthood, and the end of its life. This game allows you to be an actor in a moral universe: the actions you choose as your monster grows up and develops have implications not only for your character but also for the entire monster and human communities. You can replay the game many times, making different choices for your monster each time.

Spaceteam (2012)
ESRB Rating: unrated
Platform: Android (free), iOS (free)

You collaborate with one to three other players, and each player has a console with different controls displayed on the screen. You need to carry out the commands that appear as the ship flies itself through space, but the necessary actions may not be on your control console, so you'll have to call out what to do as you and your partners work together as a space team. According to the developer, accessibility features to control the difficulty and support for ESL learners are coming.

World of Goo (2008)
ESRB Rating: E
Platform: PC ($10), Android ($5), iOS ($5)
Demo: Available on Android and PC

This game requires critical thinking, problem solving, and spatial reasoning as players are challenged to build structures out of a variety of goo balls with the goal of getting other goo balls to the collection pipe. As you progress through the levels, you begin to understand more about what is really happening in the story as it is being told by the mysterious sign painter.

What's Next?

If you're ready to incorporate gaming into your school library program, there are a few things to consider when getting started.

What kinds of gaming materials do you want to add to your collection?
In addition to the games themselves, consoles, controllers, and even strategy guides could join your school library collection. Game consoles can cost hundreds of dollars, and games and accessories are typically between $20 and $60 dollars. Each platform (Android, iOS, PC, PlayStation 4, Wii U, and Xbox One) has its benefits and drawbacks, so you'll need to do some research before deciding which you'd want to offer.

cogs

monster loves you

spaceteam

Strategy guides related to gaming are somewhat cheaper and more in line with the traditional fare offered in libraries, so they may be a good entry point for you if you want to add some gaming materials to your collection. These guides might also be a good way to draw in some reluctant readers and gauge interest in programming related to gaming.

How will you circulate these materials?

Being printed materials, strategy guides probably won't require any special circulation policies. If you do choose to incorporate games, accessories, and/or consoles in your collection, you'll need to figure out what modifications your circulation policies will need, including loan periods, transportation (must parents come in and pick up the materials?), and liability in case of damage or loss.

What kind of programming can you support?

A variety of different options could be offered to your patrons, from simply providing space for game enthusiasts to meeting and discussing games to organizing and hosting gaming

tournaments. As with any other element of your library program, what you may choose to offer will depend upon the resources at your disposal and the needs and interests of your patrons.

How can I learn more?

While several aspects must be taken into consideration, incorporating gaming into your library program doesn't have to be an insurmountable challenge. You can start small and work your way forward as you give gaming the opportunity to flourish in your school library. If you're really serious about incorporating gaming into your library but aren't sure how to take that first step, here are a few great resources to help you learn more and get started.

Game On! Gaming at the Library by Beth Gallaway. Gallaway's is a well-rounded guide that details nearly every aspect of starting up a videogaming program at your library, including recommended collections and sample forms.

Gamers…in the Library?! The Why, What, and How of Videogame Tournaments for All Ages by Eli Neiburger. Although primarily oriented toward gaming tournaments, this book contains some practical advice on several other important topics like marketing and setting up technology.

Everyone Plays at the Library: Creating Great Gaming Experiences for All Ages by Scott Nicholson. Another useful guide that includes information on how to set up gaming programming for all types of games in addition to video games.

Capitalizing on Learners' Interests

Gaming isn't just for young males and is a great way to enhance 21st-century literacies. School librarians should familiarize
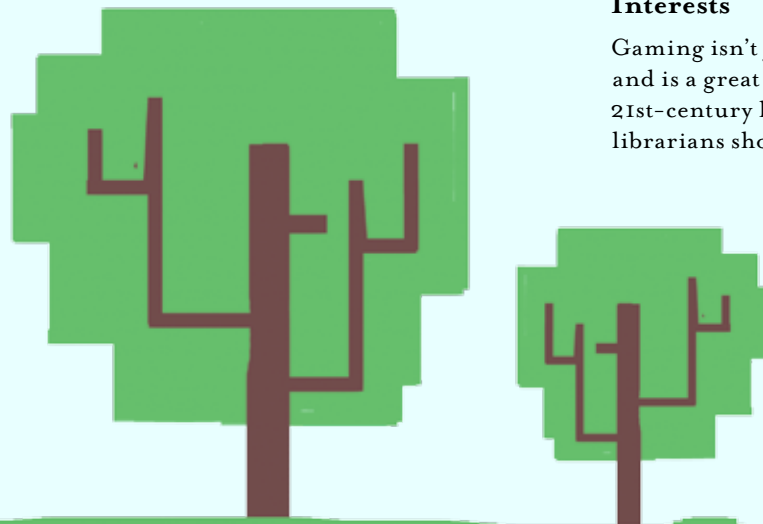
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themselves with what gaming has to offer by playing some games themselves. By playing games, school librarians can share common experiences with some of their patrons, and use this shared experience to develop stronger relationships with them. Gaming may also help school librarians understand how to capitalize on learners' interest in these highly motivating informal learning environments to further develop those learners' information-literacy skills.

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