Despite the blossoming interest in the use of games or game elements in educational settings, I often imagine individual teachers or professors getting a spark of interest in this genre, and then sitting down at their laptop - or standing in their local computer game store - and thinking “where do I start?” or “what do I choose?”

For regardless of the recent interest, and the undoubted fact that many games are in use across the world in educational contexts, concrete examples of successful (or, as importantly, failed) implementations are remarkably difficult to find. Local or national press tend to focus on highlights and shadows (the gleeful school treasure hunt, or the worried parents in uproar over the violent video games in their school), and only the larger, well-funded examples tend to make it through to academic journals, with only brief focus on the practicalities of choosing, amending, and implementing games in a classroom context. Evidence for the general efficacy of games in improving learning is currently weak, although there are a number of compelling studies of other benefits and the potential for greater learning (Gee (2003), Salen (2008), Whitton (2009), McGonigal (2011), Whitton & Moseley (2012)).

Key practical questions, therefore, still remain for those starting out in the field: How do you choose a digital game? Should you adapt an existing, or design a new game? How do you fit it into the curriculum? Will it benefit all students and learning styles? How can you assess it? Is it going to be fun? Will it be worth the effort?

It was therefore a great pleasure to hear about Baek and Whitton’s idea for this case book. Here, at last is a resource which has spread its feelers across continents to find real examples of digital games in use in real contexts, just like yours or mine. In one place, we can compare the design strategies of teachers at K12/primary level, contrast the efficacy of using Wii consoles in class against designing a simple digital game, and find evidence of increased knowledge/understanding as a result of gameplay to take back to our faculty heads.

Many of the cases here might never be found in journals (or at least, not within realistic timescales and around local access limitations) – these are real examples from real institutions like yours or mine, evidenced by full evaluations in many cases, coalescing to form a picture of current practice across the world.
Youngkyun Baek brings his extensive experience in the use of digital games for learning, both in South-East Asia and the US (in particular his study of Second Life and virtual worlds) together with his long teaching experience in both secondary and tertiary environments; Nicola Whitton draws on her extensive study of the use of digital games for learning and their particular benefits for education, in addition to her experience in designing, implementing and evaluating games within a higher education environment. Together they have formed an astute international team, sourcing case studies which evidence such benefits.

Across seven sections, the editors have selected a wide range of case studies to suit all educational contexts - from primary schooling to teacher education, off-the-shelf games to designs from the ground up, across diverse disciplines from physics to gender studies, and covering small and large budgets.

Armed with this extensive volume, educators no longer have any excuse to put off that spark of interest: a quick dip into here, and they will find a familiar context, a shared problem, or just the idea they need to get started. For every case shared here, another hundred will soon be being written across the classrooms, lecture halls, and online learning spaces of the world.

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REFERENCES


