Preface

Recently, considerable interest has been devoted to the pursuit of learning through, and with, digital games. Many studies have highlighted the potential of computer games to support immersive, situated, and learner-centered learning experiences. Proponents of the educational use of games see them as a means for active construction, rather than passive reception, of knowledge and as prime opportunities to practice the kind of soft skills considered crucial in the knowledge society, such as problem-solving, decision-making, inquiry, multitasking, collaboration, and creativity. Such abilities can be trained in different ways and can be acquired in different educational contexts.

A fundamental distinction with regard to the context of the educational use of digital games regards formal and informal educational settings.

To date, much of the attention has regard the use of games in informal settings where learning results are not necessarily obtained through the guide of a teacher or an educator; thus, most cases are spontaneous and unintentional from the learner’s perspective.

Nevertheless, the widespread pervasiveness of games has encouraged many teachers to look at their use in classes and, helped by the simultaneous bottom up push from students, games are more likely to become a part of the curriculum over the coming years. A growing body of experience is already being accrued in the deployment of digital games within formal education settings, and, in light of these experiences, it is also recognized that their adoption for learning purposes calls for a radical rethinking of pedagogical approaches so that their potential can be fully exploited and their effectiveness maximized.

In an effort to lay the foundations for more effective use of digital games in formal educational contexts, this book focuses on the major issues and challenges of Game-Enhanced Learning.

It pays particular attention to pedagogical aspects to support teachers and educators in the adoption of the new pedagogical approaches needed for successfully introducing games into the curriculum.

It is intended as a mean to provide fresh perspectives on how to guide and sustain a pedagogically effective use of games. In this light, it explores a broad spectrum of pedagogical issues in light of influential contextual factors such as target population, subject, roles, methods, curricula, place, time, objectives, skills, and the specific type of technology involved.

On the one hand, the book looks at how games are currently being employed in education by presenting relevant best practices in different educational areas. On the other, it examines key theoretical issues and proposes innovative ideas related to their adoption for learning purposes.

In most of the chapters the issue of curriculum integration is explored by paying particular attention to the new role that the teacher/educator assumes in games-based learning environments, namely that of “teacher as coach.”

The book’s intended target audience encompasses both researchers in the fields of Game-Based Learning and Technology-Enhanced Learning and educators, teachers, and educational practitioners interested in exploiting the potential of games for educational purposes; game designers and developers will also find matters of specific interest for them in this book.