

Book Review:

The Esports Education Playbook Empowering Every Learner Through Inclusive Gaming

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ABSTRACT

The Esports Education Playbook: Empowering Every Learning Through Inclusive Gaming is a helpful guide to get the reader started with an esports program at a middle school or high school. The book provides a roadmap to get schools started with esports by clearly indicating how schools will benefit from esports. It also provides arguments and strategies for changing the hearts and minds of those who are against having video games in schools. The book articulates how to work with various stakeholders to make esports happen in a K-12 atmosphere. Finally, the book details how to design an effective esports program by providing a plethora of resources, advice, and suggestions.

KEYWORDS

Esports, Esports High School, Esports K-12, Esports Middle School, Esports Playbook, Esports Program

The Esports Education Playbook: Empowering Every Learner Through Inclusive Gaming by Chris Aviles, Steve Isaacs, Christine Lion-Bailey, and Jesse Lubinsky, is an outstanding guide for anyone considering creating or strengthening an esports program in the middle schools and/or high school educational space. The book provides ample resources and tried and true strategies to the forefront. Throughout the book, there are testimonials and advice from various experts in various esports spaces such as collegiate, researcher, and non-profit organizations. Although the book mentions how different nonprofits and organizations are delving into esports, the book was written primarily for educators who are interested in bringing esports to their school or district.

The book is divided into four chapters. The authors were intentional in creating a well-thought-out process in getting started with esports while giving an in-depth look into the world of esports and its terminology. Chapter One consists of engaging the reader on why esports has value in teaching and learning in schools. Chapter Two evaluates how to change perceptions on esports for those hesitant in implementing esports at school or hesitant parents. Chapter Three details how to work with a series of stakeholders who are pivotal in the successful implementation of esports. Chapter Four elaborates on designing an effective esports program. The book ends with a conclusion looking at the implication of esports for the future.

In Chapter One, the authors make a compelling case on why esports belongs to education. Starting with making the case on social and emotional learning (SEL) that happens in esports programs. The authors make a case on how esports can provide students a sense of belonging. For instance, they

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point out how Martoncik (2015) argues that esports is not only about computer games and playing itself, but can also serve as a means of satisfying various needs such as the need to belong by forming friendly relationships through the membership of a team. Additionally, the authors point out the high-demand skillsets students can develop through sports such as leadership, teamwork, goal setting, and communication. The authors also make it a point to cover health and wellness. In order for esports athletes to perform at peak levels, they need to be cognizant of their diet, sleep, and exercise regimens.

The authors point out avoiding burnout and finding a balance. More strategies and particular activities or resources could have been made in this section to ease a reader's hesitation and provide resources to combat burnout with esports players. Additionally, suggesting routines and protocols that different coaches enact to combat rage or titling (learning forward when angered). The authors made comments on self-talk and mindfulness but can connect tried and true resources to support a new coach. Because esports can create a toxic environment (especially when playing online), the authors could have elaborated more on the "keyboard warrior" mentality (Aviles et al., 2020, p. 51). This is an important item to address in detail to empower new coaches to tackle toxicity that is common in the esports ecosystem.

Chapter Two focuses on changing perceptions about esports. Similar to Chapter 1, the authors argue why esports should be allowed in schools. Equipping the educator who is starting the esports program with responses to concerns pundits might have such as violence in gaming or excessive screen time. The authors clearly explain both sides of the coin but ultimately argue how digital citizenship, awareness, and facing problems head-on are key to addressing these concerns. It provides a safe place to discuss and talk about toxic gaming culture, gender inequality, student privacy, diversity, and equity. Making this conscious effort will raise awareness and provide transparency to an esports program and focus on inclusive gaming.

This chapter carried a lot of weight in trying to fulfill the "inclusive gaming" subtitle in the book. Many recommendations were made throughout the chapter that provides guidance. However, the authors could have added links and more resource pages for coaches that they can use right away. These resources could prove helpful in ensuring inclusivity was being done correctly. For example, because the researchers at AnyKey, an advocacy organization, made 12 recommendations for diversity and inclusion, it would have been beneficial to provide resources for each recommendation and provide additional guidance for new coaches (Aviles et al., 2020, p. 64). Funding was also briefly covered in this chapter which should have been elaborated on a bit more, including perhaps examples of letters of support or resources to help ensure funding.

In Chapter Three, the authors focus on working with stakeholders to create an esports program. In order to create buy-in for a successful esports program in a school setting, various stakeholders should be included in developing the program such as administration, teachers, student support services, Information Technology (IT) department, facilities, and parents. The authors provide ample information on the importance of involving each stakeholder. For each stakeholder, specific examples are given and esports protocols are discussed such as opening ports for video games or having the backing and support from facilities to ensure power is provided for the gaming devices.

The authors fell a bit short in providing adequate information on how to provide hard data and results to such esports stakeholders. In an effort to make an argument that esports provide students with more than just playing games, it is important that an advisor or coach is knowledgeable on what to look for and how to present it for stakeholders. This will make it easier for data collection and be able to provide information when requested.

Chapter Four details how to design an esports program. The authors in this chapter broke down the jargon and information using tables, defining terms, and ensuring that the reader understands each step on starting an esports program. One criticism of this chapter was the way the chapter was structured. It felt a bit disjointed and could have used numeration to provide clear directions for starting an esports program. For example, providing steps and sequential numeration with a summary

page that breaks down each step concisely with a checklist would provide an extremely beneficial checklist for the esports program organizer.

In conclusion, the authors created a solid playbook for integrating esports in the educational realm. The book was well written, provided insight from professionals, professors, and different voices, to provide awareness on what to expect and prepare for. It made a strong case for having esports in K12 education and provided the tools to make it happen. Adding more links to resources, worksheets, and more tangible resources would have enhanced the book. Providing a companion manual that breaks down the book in a step-by-step procedural manual in starting an esports program, a manual that can be used by the coach, advisor, or district administrator. Nonetheless, this book presents a comprehensive look at how to jump-start an esports program or refine one.

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