Chapter 1

Playfulness and Seriousness: The Power of Video Games to Teach and Enhance Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

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ABSTRACT

Despite the early focus on the demonizing of video games, in the 1990s some researchers suggested that video games might help in developing some useful skills and might convert in a new method of learning. At the beginning of the 21st century, researchers came to the conclusions that video games are more than a source of fun, relaxation, and distraction, but they are stages for the discourse on cultural, social, and political practices and systems that foster conceptual and critical thinking on a wide variety of issues. The 21st century gamers themselves confessed that games have an impact on the way they think, the way they learn, and the way they see the world.

INTRODUCTION

Video games have transformed the way in which people spend their time. They have become one of the most popular and common forms of entertainment, with a global market value of $135 billion, showing a steady growth of 10.9% compared with 2017 (Global Games Market Report, 2016) For example, League of Legends generated revenue amounting to 2.1 billion U.S. dollars in 2017.

There are more than 2.5 billion video gamers worldwide playing approximately three billion hours weekly. The average male gamer is 33 years old and the average female gamer 37 years (ESA, 2018). Sixty-one per cent of senior executives take daily breaks at work to play digital games (McGonigal, 2011). Sixty-four per cent of the general U.S. population are gamers (Nielson, 2017), most of whom will have spent ten thousand hours playing by their twenty-first birthday (McGonigal, 2011). Of the most frequent gamers, 75% believe playing video games provides mental stimulation or education. In turn, parents see digital media as providing a variety of educational benefits and say video games are a positive part of their children’s lives (Common Sense Media & the Joan Ganz Cooney Center, 2008).

Games are not just played; they are also talked and read about. The most discussed game in 2016 was *Overwatch*, with more than 75,000 online articles mentioning the game (Statista, 2017). *Call of Duty: World at War, Modern Warfare 2, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*, and *Call of Duty Black Ops* count 24.37 million fans (Fan Page List, 2018). Stories have hit the headlines of people dying from dehydration while playing non-stop for more than 50 hours, or a skill from *World of Warcraft* saving the lives of a nine-year-old and his grandparent (in mass media). Video games have also their “and the award goes to ...” events (for example, festival gamesforchange.org).

Modern games are immersive, complex, diverse and engaging, and their influence on society and people is far-reaching. Video games are now “central nodes in the organisation of contemporary leisure culture, computer-mediated interaction, visual culture, and information societies” (Simon, 2006, p. 64). Gamers themselves confess that games impact the way they see the world, the way they think, and the books they read (Bourgonjon, Vandermeersche, De Wever, Soetaert, & Valcke, 2016).

**BACKGROUND**

Back in 1960, Gadamer recognised an interesting paradox about playfulness and seriousness: “what is merely play is not serious” and “play itself contains its own, even sacred, seriousness” (Gadamer, 1960). These digital game characteristics provide learners with authentic learning experiences that organically integrate entertainment and learning (Gee, 2005). As a result, many educators and researchers start wondering what role games play in people’s need to acquire the skill sets needed to succeed in the quickly shifting world whose next generation of jobs is characterised by extensive problem solving, complex communication and technology use.

The various “twenty-first-century skills” taxonomies and frameworks highlight the growing significance of the challenges imposed on society by the rapid rate of technological change and the growing interdependence of the world’s economies, cultures, and populations, brought about by cross-border flows of investment, people, and information (Ventura et al., 2012). The current chapter focuses on the influence video game play, examining how entertaining commercial titles, serious and educational games and simulations can support players in learning and in acquiring skills that enhance Cultural Intelligence (CQ), which is considered to be a twenty-first-century skill. CQ is developed through cognitive, behavioural and motivational means. Consequently, this chapter summarises the research on the benefits of video game play, focusing on three main CQ domains: cognitive, motivational and physical.

**VIDEO GAMES GAMING THREATS AND BENEFITS**

**Demonizing Stage**

The influence of video games on players, in particular, and society, in general, has been studied for several decades. Most of the early research on video games focused on the harmful impacts of playing games. As a result, the negative effects, like increased levels of aggression and aggressive thoughts, addiction, social isolation, gender bias, and decreases in pro-social behaviour received overwhelming publicity. Research on the negative impact of video games has blurred digital game learning outcomes...