Chapter 16
Digital Games for Online Adult Education: Trends and Issues

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ABSTRACT

Digital games are a strong motivating and engaging factor in adult learning. When students are engaged in the learning process, they learn and retain more. Engagement can come through emotion, relaxation, and especially through fun. This chapter provides guidance to online adult educators searching for ways to use digital games more effectively in their practice and give an overview of pedagogical approaches to digital games in online training and learning. In addition, benefits and pitfalls associated with using digital games in online adult education and general attributes of digital games are provided. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the potential of digital games in online Adult education. Therefore, it will be a useful reference for teachers with an interest in the use of digital game based learning for online Adult teaching and training. It is expected that this chapter helps educators make the most effective use of the electronic games available today, offering expert guidance on digital games to serve the needs of all Adult learners.

INTRODUCTION

A series of dramatic innovations in information society has transformed twentieth-century society more than expected (Lubar, 1993). Rapid changes in computer-based technology have provided educators with the potential to transform adult learning. The ubiquitous use of information and communication technologies is leading to changing ways of learning. Recent studies show that electronic games are widely used as an educational tool in schools and becoming more a part of students’ social lives. Many educators think that electronic games are suitable only for children. However, a current surprising statistic by ESA shows that 62% of video gamers are 18 years or older (Mature). 32% of parents play games with their children weekly (ESA, 2006). Electronic games are commonly used
with adults in their daily life for both educational and entertainment purposes.

There is no certain age for learning. Learning doesn’t end with school graduation. It is more than just education and training beyond formal schooling. Learning encompasses throughout the life cycle, from birth to death in different learning environments.

Teaching adults is considered a difficult, tiresome and stressful job not only because they are aware of what they are doing, but also they already use cognitive strategies more effectively. However, these can be also considered advantages. Making use of the characteristics of adults is necessary for effective teaching. In this respect this chapter is helpful as an introduction for the field by giving adequate information on the process of using computer games in teaching for adults.

Information and communication technologies offer learning experiences which can effectively engage and educate adult learners. Game supported online learning environments are used dynamically, in many different settings, giving access to a broad range of uses and situated learning activities. Nowadays, researchers and teachers are beginning to wonder whether this powerful new medium could be used to support student’s learning. Rather than shutting the door for the new technologies, teachers are asking the question: “how can this powerful tool be adopted in the learning environment?”

Unlike other learning environments, the digital game-based online learning environments are expected to provide adults with increased engagement in their learning experiences, as well as greater convenience and flexibility. Now undoubtedly we can say that computer games have been recognized as an important alternative or supplement to traditional in-class, face-to-face teaching to help both adults in learning new concepts, acquiring expertise and practicing knowledge and to immerse in real-life simulations.

Current Perspectives on Adult Education

Computer games are today an important part of our leisure lives and increasingly a vital part of our culture and the way we interact the content as whole. In the past, digital games have been dismissed as a tool to teach and learn. However, game-based learning in online learning environments has gained great interests in recent years throughout the world and there is every indication that the trend will continue. Particularly in adult education the role of educational digital games is just beginning to evolve.

The past researches indicated that game-based learning attracts and motivates the learner. Furthermore, digital games allow the learner to take part in an immersive activity. Likewise, in this safe environment, activities such as role playing increase the ability to judge the effectiveness of actions taken. The main characteristics of digital games are having goals, rules and winning states that give users structure and motivation making it easier for students to stay with the game in order to learn the concepts. Furthermore, they also are very interactive, providing users positive and negative outcomes and feedback throughout play. Other features of digital game are the challenge for adrenaline, the problem solving for creativity and the representation and story for emotion.

Digital games are a strong motivating and engaging factor in adult learning. When students are engaged in the learning process, they learn and retain more. Engagement can come through emotion, relaxation, and especially through fun.

Adult Education

Adult learner is a term used to describe any person socially accepted as an adult who is in a learning process, whether it is formal education, informal learning, or corporate-sponsored learning. Adult learners are considered distinct from child learners due primarily to the work of Malcolm Knowles,