

“I’m not afraid to die, Mom”:

Parental perceptions & stories of their adolescents gaming

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

Media reports such as “Virtual Worlds threaten ‘values’” (BBC news, 2007); “Violent youth crime rising, statistics show” (The Vancouver Sun, 2007); “Hooked on games: battling a cyber-addiction” (Times Colonist, 2007); “New video games sell sex instead of mayhem” (Times Colonist, 2006) sensationalize video games and imply a dire state of violence, health related problems, isolation, and addiction caused by video game play. Parents appear to be situated between these frightening and guilt-ridden reports of doom and knowing their own child, his/her abilities and potentials. What are parents thinking or feeling about video game content and play for themselves and for their adolescents? How do they interact with their children and video games? What do parents want to know more about? What are their stories?

Context

In the last two decades, new technologies and media have enabled innovative and meaningful teaching and learning to flourish. Parents of adolescent video game players have likely not experienced these same learning opportunities in school, and if they have experienced inventive, technological learning outside of school, they likely do not recognize the value in the meaningful learning that video game researchers (de Castell & Jen son, 2004; Gee, 2003; Shaffer, Squire, Halverson, & Gee, 2005) are finding. However, parents are on the forefront of their children’s gaming experiences with consoles found more commonly in the living room, family room, or child’s bedroom; parents funding or buying games directly; parents observing or listening to their adolescent gamers’ gaming experiences.

Children and adolescents are rapidly becoming experts in this digital, global form of communication, ahead of many of their parents. There are two perspectives of this emerging relationship says Jenkins (2004a): “Myth of the Columbine and the Myth of the Digital Generation,” one perspective

triggered by fear, the other by simplistic hope. He suggests that there is a middle, grey area that needs negotiation and exploration. Researchers (Delpit, 1988, 1993; Freire, 1987; Gee, 2003) have raised the point that we should value all forms of knowledge and communication, even outside of our own cultural affiliations, yet I would argue that many parents and others in our communities, such as politicians, policy makers, and educators will need education on how to best approach acknowledging and valuing alternative ways of knowing since much of their own educational experiences will have promoted specific knowledge and valued particular skills. Parents will need to know more about the learning happening in video games and how to support their children as they become producers of cultural artifacts (Gee, 2003; Jenkins, 2000; Squire, 2003, 2005; Prensky, 2001, 2006).

Study

This research project explores the experiences that parents have encountered around video games and their adolescent children. Approximately 9 parents will have participated in 3 individual interviews and a focus group interview in which they identify and examine their concerns about video games, their perceptions about their adolescent’s gaming practices, and question the legitimacy of video games in their adolescent’s life. This research project aims to contribute to understandings about parental awareness and knowledge of video games, the role of parent/child relationships in regards to video games, and parental concepts of learning and literacy when considering adolescents’ video gaming practices.

Author Keywords

Video gaming, parents, learning, adolescents,

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