

Chapter 11

Knowledge Production in E-Sports Culture: Learning with and from the Masters

Robert James Hein

The Pennsylvania State University, USA

Jason A. Engerman

The Pennsylvania State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Competitive video games, commonly referred to as “e-sports,” are becoming increasingly popular among young adults (van Ditmarsch, 2013). However, unlike more traditional, physical sports, these video games blur the lines between their participants and spectators (Cheung & Huang, 2011), encouraging veterans and newcomers alike to become contributing members evolving, digital affinity spaces. Bolstered by the affordances of live-streaming technology, e-sports culture constantly gathers its experts and novices together to play, compete, and discuss in real time. These inclusive practices help to facilitate the rapid knowledge and skill acquisition of all of its community members. Consequently, this chapter will explore how and why e-sports culture successfully champions participation and mastery learning. Likewise, the authors will discuss what teachers can learn and apply from this culture’s values.

INTRODUCTION

In describing the ever-evolving digital world, Squire (2011) insists that, “to understand how games operate, we need to look beyond the game itself toward the broader cultural contexts in which it is situated. In many game communities, players themselves become the content, making them emblematic of *participatory media culture*” (p. 12). We argue that, via the calculated use of live-streaming technology, the “e-sports” community has risen to become the standard-bearer of that participatory culture—showcasing its aims, methods, and values for increasingly larger and wider audiences. This new era of hypercompetitive gaming is now filling major sports arenas, like Madison Square Garden; e-sports has catapulted gaming into the public eye. Thus, through the mere exposure to e-sports, people are finally

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0261-6.ch011

Knowledge Production in E-Sports Culture

coming to see that video games are no longer the “trivial pursuits” of the 80s and 90s arcades (Prensky, 2006). Rather, the likes of *Counter-Strike*, *StarCraft*, and *League of Legends* are solidifying gaming’s place as a serious, complex, and social activity that requires the strategic-thinking of chess in addition to the lightning-fast reflexes of mixed martial-arts.

More importantly, the online broadcasts of e-sporting events successfully blur the lines between participants and spectators (Cheung & Huang, 2011), a distinct characteristic that encourages veterans and newcomers alike to become contributing members of an evolving, digital affinity-space (Gee, 2005). With the popular live-streaming website Twitch.tv as its central hub, the e-sports community constantly gathers expert and novice gamers together to play, compete, and discuss in real-time. The immediacy of these decidedly 21st century interactions not only facilitates the rapid knowledge and skills acquisition of Twitch.tv users, but it also separates e-sports spectatorship from other more traditional forms of media consumption. E-sports broadcasts are not as impersonal as televised sporting events nor are they as static as content on video sharing websites like YouTube.com. E-sports are thus revolutionizing how we think about video games, peer production, and knowledge sharing.

As we will explore, e-sports culture maximizes the affordances of its affinity space, provides agency to its members, and champions mastery-learning in striking ways that our classrooms can and should attempt to emulate. By shedding light on the learning practices of this emerging gaming subculture, we hope to provide educators with valuable insights and suggestions to enhance their own pedagogy. Anchored by Gee’s (2005) conception of affinity spaces and Brown, Collins, and Duguid’s (1989) notion of “cognitive apprenticeships,” we will distill the best that this culture has to offer and thereby propose a unifying e-sports learning principle. Consequently, this chapter represents our attempt to take up Squire’s (2011) challenge and to “look beyond” the games – to understand why and how e-sports culture harnesses Twitch.tv to simultaneously entertain, include, and, ultimately, instruct its members.

Exploring E-Sports

At their core, electronic-sports (e-sports) are video games that have been either designed or appropriated for head-to-head competition. Given this simple definition, e-sports might not seem like they inject anything new or special into mainstream gaming culture. After all, Taylor (2012) reminds us that video games have always kept score. As early as the 1970s, players competed asynchronously in arcade games like *Asteroids* and *Star Fire*, which could record and display a player’s point-total. Although one could certainly feel a sense of pride and accomplishment by having his initials appear on a machine’s “high-score list,” Taylor (2012) notes that geographic barriers necessarily stunted the growth and development of a more formal and robust competitive scene. The best players in small towns and at local arcades had virtually no way of measuring themselves against other players from around the world. However, the majority of modern e-sports circumvent these spatial constraints by giving players the opportunity to participate in online “ladders,” automatically updating rankings of top players and teams that are published on gaming websites. This not only intensifies competition, but it also places participation and recognition under a global spotlight.

In addition to simply being competitive, e-sports have regularly scheduled tournaments and leagues, draw legions of passionate fans, and feature an emerging caste of professional players. This elevated level of organization, via both grassroots movements and corporate sponsorships, separates e-sports from other video games and gaming communities. From the heyday of *Quake* and its “Red Annihilation” tournament in the late 90s to the modern spectacle of Valve’s “The International,” from the launch of the

18 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/knowledge-production-in-e-sports-culture/157624

Related Content

A Look inside the Current Climate of the Video Game Industry

Vachon M.C. Pugh (2015). *Gamification: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 1965-1974).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/a-look-inside-the-current-climate-of-the-video-game-industry/126153

Playful Experiments: Conditions of “An Experience” in Touchscreen Games by a Non-Hermeneutic Perspective

Felippe Calazans Thomaz and Jorge Cardoso Filho (2016). *Examining the Evolution of Gaming and Its Impact on Social, Cultural, and Political Perspectives* (pp. 343-363).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/playful-experiments/157629

Residential Electricity Consumption Prediction Method Based on Deep Learning and Federated Learning Under Cloud Edge Collaboration Architecture

Wei Wang, Xiaotian Wang, Xiaotian Ma, Ruifeng Zhao and Heng Yang (2024). *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations* (pp. 1-19).

www.irma-international.org/article/residential-electricity-consumption-prediction-method-based-on-deep-learning-and-federated-learning-under-cloud-edge-collaboration-architecture/336846

Identifying Latent Semantics in Action Games for Player Modeling

Katia Lida Kermanidis (2019). *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations* (pp. 1-21).

www.irma-international.org/article/identifying-latent-semantics-in-action-games-for-player-modeling/238743

Diversity and Inclusion in Esports Programs in Higher Education: Leading by Example at UCI

Khaila Amazan-Hall, Jen Jen Chen, Kathy Chiang, Amanda L. L. Cullen, Mark Deppe, Edgar Dormitorio, Doug Haynes, Jessica Kernan, Kirsten Quanbeck, Morgan Romine, Bonnie Ruberg, Jenny Song, Judith Stepan-Norris, Constance Steinkuehler and Aaron Trammell (2018). *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations* (pp. 71-80).

www.irma-international.org/article/diversity-and-inclusion-in-esports-programs-in-higher-education/210645