Chapter 5
A Socio–Pedagogical Reading From Video Game to Game Learning

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ABSTRACT

The video game, a phenomenon less than a century old, is relatively recent compared to the millennia-long history of "analog" gaming, its natural predecessor. In recent decades, digital play has emerged as a prominent expression of contemporary culture, possessing exceptional social, cultural, and technological value. It stands as the leading global entertainment sector in terms of time spent and budget, surpassing the revenues of the film and record industries. Digital games are not only a central economic force in the entertainment and technology industries but also foster new cultural and social narratives through their participatory and collaborative nature. This chapter will explore the evolution from traditional games to video games and their effectiveness in enhancing knowledge and learning.

INTRODUCTION

Despite being a relatively recent phenomenon (less than a century old), video games hold significant importance, especially when compared to the millennia-long history of "analog" gaming, their natural predecessor, which has been extensively reflected upon by thinkers such as Caillois (1981) and Huizin-

ga (2002). In recent decades, digital play has emerged as a crucial expression of contemporary culture due to its exceptional social, cultural, and technological value. It represents the leading entertainment sector globally in terms of time spent and budget. Moreover, thanks to its participatory and collaborative properties, it contributes to generating new cultural and social imaginaries. As the central economic force in the entertainment and technology industries, video games generate revenues that surpass those of the film and record industries.

In the past, the video game industry experienced long periods of prosperity interspersed with a few downturns. For example, between 1983-1985, there was an industry stall called the "video game crash". Immediately thereafter, there was an upswing, and for the next 20 years, the market remained almost crystallized within a worldwide bubble of enthusiasts. Consoles followed one another, progressively building user loyalty; however, there was not yet the phenomenon that today we might call transgenerationality, that is, the ability to capture the attention of several generations all interacting with the medium at once. In essence, for every new gamer the market acquired, there were some who, as they grew up, moved away from the market.

The new millennium marked the beginning of a meteoric rise for video games, with significant milestones including the release of the Nintendo DS (2006), the Nintendo Wii (2007), and particularly the launch of the iPhone (2007). During these years, the gaming audience expanded enormously across various age groups and genders, significantly increasing the overall pool of gamers (Juul, 2010). With the advent of the iPhone and later smartphones, everyone had the opportunity to carry an interactive device with them at all times. This new era saw the proliferation of downloadable apps, both free and paid, leading to a surge in gaming experiences. App fever drove people to compulsively download new games, and even those who had never played a game before found themselves immersed in titles like Candy Crush, Angry Birds, and Temple Run. These simple, accessible games, although different from the more complex video games of the previous 20 years, provided a significant boost to the video game market through their ease of access rather than through grand cinematic experiences or technological marvels of photorealism.

According to recent data, the Coronavirus Pandemic further pushed up the number of video gamers worldwide (Amendola et al., 2023). Nowadays, in wealthier countries, at least two-thirds of the population dabble in this hobby, which for some has now become a real job (just think of the streamers and pundits who populate platforms such as YouTube and Twitch).

In the entertainment industry, gaming is now unrivaled and has surpassed movies and music, proving to be a well-rounded pastime that can incorporate so many different aspects. Film-like experiences such as God of War and The Last of Us have transcended the limits of video games, in the last case also becoming successful TV series. In earlier eras, it was movies that became video game experiences (often very basic and of lower quality) while today it is the exact opposite.

Given the enormous popularity and widespread adoption of video games, the next major push to capture a larger market share will likely come through increased accessibility, especially considering the significant role of smartphones. Large companies like Sony anticipate that this could be achieved through virtual reality (VR). Sony's efforts to popularize PlayStation VR headsets have been notable, with the company focusing increasingly on creating tailored experiences that appeal to the general public. Conversely, the concept of the metaverse, which has gained traction in recent years, is facing setbacks due to structural limitations that are not yet easily surmountable.

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