

Chapter 41

Gaming in Adult Education

Lesley S. J. Farmer

California State University, Long Beach, USA

ABSTRACT

Egames have drawn attention in adult education, particularly as the majority of adults play egames. Adult education is increasingly incorporating serious games, mainly simulation games, but other forms such as RPGs are being considered. In addition, adult education is also incorporating game design into curricula. In terms of learning theory, gaming as a learning mechanism is usually associated with activity theory. Many commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) game combine solid content and concept along with good game play that engages adult learners. The gaming industry has increased focus on developing games for mobile instruments, mainly smart phones. Specific applications of egames for engineering education are discussed. Recreational aspects of gaming impact educational use of egames. Future trends of adult education use of egames are noted: platform, workplace gaming, and industry development.

INTRODUCTION

Gaming in adult education? Be it board games or computer games, such activities have drawn attention in the professional field. Where educational settings used to ban any games on the Internet and eschewed collecting game guidebooks, educators are now reconsidering their policies, and locating core gaming collection lists to help them purchase viable titles and even equipment (Nich-

olson, 2007). Not every institution is jumping on the band wagon, but the adult education world is certainly talking about gaming.

Of particular interest now are egames: video, console, and computer games. For this reason, the term “egaming” will be used to differentiate these electronic forms of games from their more traditional print counterparts. While egames technically predated Web 2.0, the convergence of Internet interactivity and increasingly popular MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games) has led to an almost inevitable

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consideration by adult educators. Rather than fight the technological flood, educators are trying to figure out ways to embrace the phenomenon. Specifically, education is increasingly incorporating serious games; that is, games that are not developed with the sole intent of entertainment, but also have educational or other communication objectives. Most adult education effort has been made in the area of simulation games, but other forms such as RPGs (which in themselves can assume a simulation model) are also being considered. In addition, adult education is also incorporating game design into curricula.

BACKGROUND

As noted above, egaming includes a variety of digital formats: video, console, portable game devices, cell phone, and computer-based. Additionally, several genres of games exist. In their study of teen gaming, Pew Internet & American Life Project (2008) classified fourteen genres that teens play in order of preference: racing, puzzle, sports, action, adventure, rhythm, strategy, simulation, fighting, first-person shooting, role-playing, survival horror, MMOG (massively multiplayer online game), and virtual worlds.

GAMER CHARACTERISTICS

At this point, egames have substantially penetrated U. S. households. For console games alone, 71 percent of households with boys or girls owned video consoles, and 80 percent of households with teenagers owned consoles (Nielsen, 2007). The majority of adults play video and computer games, and about a fifth of them play daily, usually on computers, according to a 2008 study (Lenhart, Jones, & Macgill, 2008). The researchers also found that gaming decreases with age (the average age of the RPG player is 26 years old), but senior citizen gamers play the most often

because they have more free time. About 55 percent of gamers are male, and the percentage of urban players slightly outnumbers suburban and rural players. Gamers generally have more education and are more likely to be parents, but no significant difference was found for ethnicity or socio-economic status.

Today's college student is likely to have played computer and video games, and increasingly role-playing games (RPG). According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project survey (Jones, 2003), these games have become an integral part of college daily life. One-fifth of those surveyed stated that gaming helped students make and keep friends, and that it comprises part of a larger multitasking environment. These students see gaming as a break from studying, another form of entertainment. These students are also seeking college majors in gaming so they can get paid for what they like to do recreationally (Farmer, 2005). Increasingly, universities are offering such programs, particularly in light of industry demand for such trained employees.

In educational settings where games are integrated, males may have an unfair advantage in since they are more likely to have practiced with them outside of school, thus feeling more comfortable with the technical requirements of the game. In a 2003 study, the National School Boards Foundation found that boys tend to use computers mainly for entertainment, while girls tend to use computers more for education and communication. In addition, girls tend to dislike RPGs because of the violence that often occurs in them. Also, girls prefer open-ended computer venues, such as instant messaging (IM) and authoring tools (American Association of University Women, 2000). These trends in youth usage lay the groundwork for adult gaming behavior, so adult educators need to consider these realities as they design learning activities that incorporate gaming.

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