

## Digital Gaming & Education

Larry Banner, Director of Digital Media, Portico Publications, Charlottesville, VA  
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I came to this page topic by way of a recent conference I attended called "Digital Tools for Information & Democracy." Hosted by the Jefferson Institute and attended by those involved in digital information leadership at places like the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, the Knight Foundation, the Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies, the National Archives, and the Library of Congress, our final session on education ended with some enthusiastic discussion about the possibilities of using digital games in education. The discussion was motivated by our recognition of the significant value of the vast amount of information stored and publicly accessible on-line at these institutions, the challenges associated with communicating this value and its impact on knowledge and democracy to a young, but digital-native, generation, and the struggles in education to bring to students an understanding of the context and constraints of history.

It was the opinion of the group that digital games can help in this. Why? If you are parent of a child of any age growing up in the past 20 years, you'll certainly be aware of the ever-increasing role that digital gaming has played and continues to play in your child's life. It is also true that through digital game play children can learn lessons of content, perspective, critical thinking, assessment, collaboration, and problem solving. Asked one conference participant, however, "How do we incorporate history into a game environment? How do you use games to engage on serious topics?"

Pursuing this question, I discovered some recent studies done on this topic from both the academic and commercial realms. It is clear from these studies that there is a strong awareness of the ever increasing role of digital gaming in the lives of our children, and that many of the digital games are 'social' in nature, either played collaboratively on-line, played within the constructs of an on-line, social world, or shared through social networks such as Facebook. With this awareness is also the shared desire to tap into these student energies toward gaming to create game environments that enhance learning, but also the recognition that, in fact, learning is already occurring within common digital game play and on-line social interaction, and the question is asked, how can educators recognize the skills learned here and tap into that?

These studies also share perspectives on some of the challenges to the incorporation of digital games in education. Two primary roadblocks exist: acceptance by the education community of the legitimacy of using games in teaching, and technology hurdles, both the investment in the required hardware and software itself and the varied technical ability of educators.

With the goal of encouraging your further research, I have provided here the three studies along with their web sites. Two of these studies also provide informative "teacher" supplements. I encourage you to read and consider these studies and hope they provide inspiration toward innovation and improved student engagement in learning.

I. *Moving Learning Games Forward: Obstacles, Opportunities & Openness*: Eric Klopfer, Scot Osterweil, and Katie Salen: The Education Arcade, Massachusetts Institute of Technology [2009] (<http://www.educationarcade.org/>)

II. *Teaching with Games: Using commercial off-the-shelf computer games in formal education*: Richard Sandford, Mary Ulicsak, Keri Facer and Tim Rudd, conducted in the UK by education innovator Futurelab with support from three of the world's leading interactive entertainment software companies; Electronic Arts, Microsoft and Take Two, as well as the Interactive Software Federation of Europe (ISFE) [2006] (<http://www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/teaching-with-games>)

III. *Game Changer: Investing in Digital Play to Advance Children's Learning and Health*, Thai, A., Lowenstein, D., Ching, D., & Rejeski, D. New York: The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop. [2009] ([http://www.joanganzcooneycenter.org/pdf/Game\\_Changer\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.joanganzcooneycenter.org/pdf/Game_Changer_FINAL.pdf))