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Education and video games are no longer enemies

Educators say some games develop skills

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By Ann Doss Helms
ahelms@charlotteobserver.com

Posted: Monday, Jan. 07, 2013

People who worried that the technology boom would lead to kids playing video games in class were right.

In North Carolina and around the country, students are playing such games as "Minecraft," "World of Warcraft" and "Angry Birds" – and their teachers are encouraging it.

"Video games are not the great evil that people make them out to be," says Trish Cloud, technology instructor at Huntersville's Torrence Creek Elementary, where she created a popular "Minecraft" club.

Cloud is part of a community of educators who love gaming and want to share that passion to help students learn. Those educators say that good video games can help students develop an array of skills – from writing and physics to teamwork and problem-solving.

Lucas Gillispie, a former biology teacher in coastal Pender County, is a leader in this national movement. He helped to create a language arts curriculum tied to "World of Warcraft," and he launched a grant program for local teachers to incorporate "Minecraft" into their classes.

He notes that the fast-paced, globally connected world of digital learning lets educators create new career paths and emerge as leaders, no matter where they work or what their job titles are. And that is exactly the kind of versatility teachers are trying to spark in their students.

What about parents, who may feel clueless and confused? Cloud and Gillispie say the

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The prospect of having a therapy icon next to "Angry Birds" is stirring as much dread as hope in some quarters. Jeff Siner - jsiner@charlotteobserver.com

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- Gamers Advancing Meaningful Education: g.a.m.e.shivtr.com.
- Marianne Malmstrom on games and learning: aplatformforgood.org/teachers/blog/entry/game-to-learn.
- Upcoming N.C. Technology in Education Society conference on gaming in education: www.netcies.org/conference.
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answer is simple: Play the games with your kids.

“Just pay attention and be willing to set aside those tired stereotypes,” says Gillispie, now an instructional technology coordinator for Pender County Schools. “We’ve come a long way since ‘Pac-Man.’”

Learning in Azeroth

Gillispie, 37, grew up playing computer games. He enjoys talking with his high school students about gaming, and it was a student who introduced him to online role-playing games such as “World of Warcraft,” often known as “WoW.”

“WoW” players create an avatar who completes quests in the fantasy realm of Azeroth. They choose a profession, join guilds and ally themselves with one of two warring factions – the Alliance or the Horde – then face creatures such as dwarves, orcs and trolls. Players interact with others around the world.

Gillispie’s love of gaming led him from the classroom to the district technology job, where he created a “WoW” club for at-risk middle-school students in 2009. He teamed up with a New York teacher launching a similar club, and the two schools created a guild.

That experience evolved into the “WoW” curriculum, which is designed to meet the standards set in the new Common Core curriculum. For instance, one “quest” requires students to study riddle poetry and share their notes within the guild. They write their own riddle poems based on Azeroth, edit and critique each other, then take their riddles into the wider game world to challenge outsiders.

The free-form nature of gaming creates unexpected lessons, Gillispie says. Once, he says, a group of his students figured out how to cheat another player out of gold coins. The kids were triumphant until Gillispie confronted them about their ethics. They agreed to return the money and write an apology – and they were delighted when the other player commended their honesty.

“It was a moment for us to teach some morality in the virtual world,” he said.

Virtual Legos

While “WoW” isn’t graphically violent, it does involve battles, which may make it inappropriate for younger students.

Enter “Minecraft,” a game that pops players into various environments and requires them to construct shelter from roving “creepers,” spiders and zombies. There’s also a creative mode that lets players build without attacks.

“It is an infinite sandbox made up of Lego-like blocks,” says Cloud, who learned about the game from her students and her own children, ages 10 and 13.

Cloud, a self-professed “Star Wars” geek, started playing “WoW” a couple of years ago – at age 50 – and grew to love it. A teacher’s assistant, she was assigned to run one of Torrence Creek’s two computer labs. When the PTA bought 60 iPads, Cloud says, “It was love at first sight.”

When she announced the “Minecraft” club at the start of this school year, the 60 slots were filled in two days – with almost 40 more students on the waiting list. It’s an after-school club, but Cloud is talking to classroom teachers about ways to use the game in lessons. For instance, she has her older students research N.C. landmarks and build them to scale in “Minecraft.” Sam Gilbert, a fourth-grader, has built a model of the Cape Hatteras lighthouse.

On a recent afternoon, second-grader Ross Dorfman was tunneling deep into his world, while third-grader Maddie Kester built a house of diamonds. Maddie said when she’s waiting for dinner at home, she asks to use her parents’ iPad to play “Minecraft.”

“It makes time go by fast,” she said.

Cloud calls that “flow,” a total absorption that characterizes people playing challenging computer games.

“If we can turn this in a way to take it and make it our own, there’s no limit to what they can do,” she says.

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- Conservative on social issues and conservative on economic issues
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The best games, whether digital or physical, motivate players to master skills, says Tim Chartier, an associate professor of math at Davidson College. Classroom math, on the other hand, can seem painfully abstract.

Chartier taught a session on math and pop culture for the Charlotte Teachers Institute, which brought together K-12 teachers from public and private schools. During one class, he mentioned that "Angry Birds," a popular video game that involves catapulting cartoon birds at pigs, uses a parabola without air resistance for the red birds' trajectory.

Kristianna Luce, a math teacher at North Mecklenburg High, seized that remark and started working "Angry Birds" into her algebra classes. Chartier built on her work to create a blog and a webinar on "Angry Birds" and algebra.

The dynamic nature of video games entices students in a way that simply working toward a grade may not, Chartier says. "Self-motivation does a lot to keep people moving forward," he added.

Sharing ideas

As Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools works toward expanding digital access, the district has formal groups and central-office staff dedicated to sharing the best ideas about technology in the classroom. Cloud says a CMS technology specialist helped her develop the "Minecraft" club and ideas for linking the game to lessons.

But avid gamers are just as likely to be sharing ideas with online communities. Gillispie has a Web page devoted to the use of "WoW," "Minecraft" and other games in education. Cloud ticks off a long list of websites and blogs she visits to check in with other educators using games. There's even a "WoW" guild, called Cognitive Dissonance, made up of educators who share classroom tips while they play, she says.

Valerie Truesdale, who recently took CMS' top technology job, says she's fine with the array of alternatives to the traditional chain of communication.

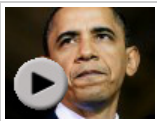



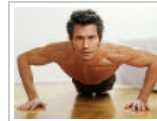
"I think that digital learning and mobile devices are shaking up how everybody learns," she said. "It's all-the-time, everywhere learning. Everybody's a teacher, and everybody's a learner."

Helms: 704-358-5033

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 **fedupmom** • 22 days ago
For what you people are paying Truesdale, I'd think you could get more than a two line response. S!

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wasn't lock-step in Beaufort. It won't matter though, she's just taking your money until she can recr
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 **blufftonmom** → fedupmom • 22 days ago
If you really want to know about Valerie Truesdale, read the education stories and blogs in Beau
leave Beaufort because of a great opportunity in your district. She was about to face new boa
very, very, very disliked person in Beaufort.
8 ^ | v * Reply * Share >


 **hhgolfer** → fedupmom • 22 days ago
Truesdale left our district in a complete state of conflict. So bad was she and her loyal board me
members. Of the four returning, one wasn't up for reelection, two ran unopposed (won't happ
(redistricting). There are so many conflicts, lawsuits, and outright embarassments, it will take q
7 ^ | v * Reply * Share >

 **seahawknation** → fedupmom • 22 days ago
She is a liar and manipulator. Do not trust this woman. She thought moving on so quickly wou
Justice will follow you, Valerie.
6 ^ | v * Reply * Share >


 **hotinbluffton** → seahawknation • 22 days ago
We are going to be dealing with the results of Valerie's stupidity and ego for years to com
5 ^ | v * Reply * Share >


 **hiltonheaddad** → fedupmom • 22 days ago
With Truesdale in your district, "Angry Birds" is the least of your problems. Hold on to your tax
for yourself.
4 ^ | v * Reply * Share >

 **Thank You Comrades!** • a month ago
Hey did anyone see the story where the Father and Mother in Japan, tired of their 23 son living off o
hit man.
This hit man is a group of exceptional players who are alerted when he goes online and they kill off h
This makes playing the game no fun and if he gets on other games the same thing will happen.
This young man has recently said he is thinking about going back to work.
6 ^ | v * Reply * Share >

 **Jena2** → Thank You Comrades! • a month ago
Not sure what your point is, but they sound like fun parents.
1 ^ | v * Reply * Share >

 **Thank You Comrades!** → Jena2 • a month ago
Oh I had no point. Everyone else knew that.
2 ^ | v * Reply * Share >

 **marduk** • a month ago
Okay, so Angry Birds uses a little bit of physics in its animation.
Well, I guess that passes for "education" today.
Is that anything like when they finally put "English" on Pong so the paddle would make the ball spin
I want to know because I got a Ph.D in computer animated physics from playing Pong, but haven't
latest computer games.
Before that, I got my BS in physics from pinball and pool (lots of Newtonian action and reaction and
foosball, so some of my gameplaying physics was from the pre-computing age.
My other degree in statistics was earned rolling dice and playing poker, blackjack and roulette.
3 ^ | v * Reply * Share >

 **MyKidsComeFirst** • a month ago
Seven stupid mistakes teachers make with technology
3. Not supervising computer-using students. It is really stupid to believe Internet filters will keep kids
Even the slow kids who can't get around the school's filter, can still exploit the 10% of porn sites the

still send cyber bullying e-mail - maybe even using your email address. Or they can just plain waste t

<http://doug-johnson.squarespac...>

Read more here: <http://obsyourschools.blogspot...>

2 ^ | | v * Reply * Share >



busymom4 · a month ago

Let's get rid of all the teachers and use tech devices and video games to educate our children? Is this limits the amount of screen time my kids have. We actually have conversations with each other, read at the kitchen table. I attribute their success due to the LACK of technology in our lives. Technology clubs after school is a great idea but I prefer an actual human to teach my child during the school day in the classroom, when not being used for a specific lesson plan, is a total copout for CMS, the teachers and more with the above article.

1 ^ | | v * Reply * Share >



Thank You Comrades! → busymom4 · a month ago

I understand your concerns, but humans have such a propensity and wide range of abilities that thirst for knowledge.

Some will lean with new technology, and others will go with the tried and true, but all paths must have the goal of creating a fire to know things like, how a car operates, and not just be happy being a passenger and yet we see all those other solar systems out there just waiting for us to explore them.

Keep in mind we are only using a small part of our brains, and perhaps one day, instead of test tubes we pursue our dreams.

2 ^ | | v * Reply * Share >



busymom4 → Thank You Comrades! · a month ago

agreed, we only use a small part of our brains. That is apparent with the passage of this information on the path of raising anti-social, apathetic, screen induced zombies lacking any moral compass turns out.

1 ^ | | v * Reply * Share >



Thank You Comrades! → busymom4 · a month ago

oh so they will fit right into the society that we have created for them

3 ^ | | v * Reply * Share >



hhiborn → busymom4 · 22 days ago

Busymom4: You haven't seen anything yet. Valerie Truesdale is the worst thing to happen to children. She smiled a lot and lied even more. Keep an eye on what comes out of anything she recommends to her.

1 ^ | | v * Reply * Share >



Axat Tech · 12 days ago

Just the main thing is time schedule. some good games also helps into study also. [play computer ga](#)

0 ^ | | v * Reply * Share >



David Knight · 23 days ago

Hey Ann, I have landed in your blog while traveling in the blog land. I must appreciate your research for sharing. Best of luck. I have tweeted this article to my followers. Basically I am fond of video game reviews - you can visit - <http://www.microwarriorvideog...>

0 ^ | | v * Reply * Share >



Ms. Deborah Goodhead · a month ago

I wrote a grant a year and half ago for my music students at my school for a Wii System and purchased Wii games, that I believe was written for the Elementary Music classroom! Excellent games like 'Pitch Perfect' recognize pitch-high, low, tone color and a variety of other music skills to finish each level. Also can be used around the world plus some silly ones (for the elementary lower grades) "Jam Sessions". Idea for using the Bell Game to prepare to teach 'Tone Chimes' which are a type of Hand Bell. Also use Wii Dance game 'Fun Reward Day' for the classes who are doing a great job!

Encourage Music Teachers to use this technology in their classrooms....my classes love it!

0 ^ | | v * Reply * Share >



msgundam2 · a month ago

Don't see how this is anything new. I learn how to read from play Pokemon and Final Fantasy.

0 ^ | v * Reply * Share >



marduk → msgundam2 · a month ago

Apparently, you didn't learn much about verbs.

1 ^ | 1 v * Reply * Share >

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