

Video gaming and learning

Is your child learning anything while playing video or online games, or are they are just having fun? They ARE having fun, but they are at the same time deeply engaged in learning. If you doubt it, try to play the games your children handle with ease and you will discover you lack the basic skills and knowledge they have. Video games are long and challenging. Most games take between 50 and 100 hours to play, and your child will usually complete the game. When they get stuck, kids know where to look for the hints to continue making progress in the game. This is true for the youngster playing Dora the Explorer or the preteen playing Sim City.

Children learn a number of skills while gaming, ones that are useful for learning in school: pattern identification (useful in learning to read and write), eye hand coordination and small motor skills (needed for writing), attention to important detail (needed for word problems) and a range of problem solving strategies, such as trial and error or using data (skills used in math).

Educational researchers suggest video gaming may illustrate how to help kids learn lots of hard material, and to have fun while doing it. Features of video games that have connections to school learning are: learning at one's own pace; doing or active learning, including role playing; structures that provide hints when the learner gets stuck; a clear end goal; natural shared interests among groups of kids; making connections among different sources of text and web based information; working collaboratively; learning facts in a meaningful context.

Parents shouldn't despair when their kids play video games. Good resources to learn more about gaming and learning are James Gee's book *What Video Games Have to Teach us About Learning and Literacy* or the just released report of the Summit on Educational Games, available online at <http://fas.org/gamesummit/Resources/Summit%20on%20Educational%20Games.pdf>

Sandra Mathison

Professor of Education, UBC and McBride parent
sandra.mathison@ubc.ca