## Connected Gaming – What Making Video Games Can Teach Us about Learning and Literacy Yasmin B. Kafai and Quinn Burke MIT Press, 2016 ISBN: 9780262035378

This book presents an introduction to the 'Connected Gaming' approach of using video games for learning, advocating for an integrated methodology that encompasses both an instructionist and a constructionist mindset. Central to this thesis is that for students to maximise their learning it is essential for them to not only play video games but to make them as well. The authors of this book build on the work of the noted gaming scholar James Paul Gee, and indeed the title is itself an homage to Gee's 2003 text What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy. Drawing on their decades of research, as well as highlighting other key studies that support their findings, the authors lay out a comprehensive argument as to how the constructionist approach to learning that comes from making games can complement the instructionist pursuit of playing video games. In developing activities that encourage students to make their own games, they argue that the students can not only learn the fundamentals of computer programming and digital learning, but also the intricacies of the other core subjects that underpin them. To borrow an example from the book, by designing a game that requires a player to calculate fractions in order complete a specific 'quest', the student not only learns about how fractions work but also the foundations of computer programming. If, on the other hand, the student had only played an educational game designed to teach them fractions they would have missed out on a variety of complementary learning opportunities. The authors argue that central to the successful adoption of connected gaming as a pedagogic tool is the role of sharing. For students to benefit from the learning that arises from making (and modding) video games, they also need to be able to share their work, allowing others to comment and mod it accordingly. This concept is assuredly communicated in the book by extending computer science educators Mitchel Resnick and Brian Silverman's metaphor of house building in the development of construction-based kits. Whilst Resnick and Silverman argue for the inclusion of low floors (tools that are intuitive enough to allow easy

acclimatisation for beginners), high ceilings (tools that can still be of benefit to experienced users) and wide walls (tools that allow for a breadth of constructs to be created), Kafai and Burke extend this metaphor to include open windows, i.e. any construction-based kit that involves the making of video games must also encompass a mechanism to share and critique the work with other end users. This feature is exemplified in the sharing community that has built up around the <u>Scratch</u> programming language. Whilst this book is primarily concerned with how a connected gaming approach has and might be used in primary and secondary school education, many of the concepts could be extended to tertiary education and adult learners. Despite the excellence of the research and the clarity of the writing, I had two criticisms of the book, one minor and one major. The minor criticism was that whilst this book serves as an excellent introduction to the concept of connected gaming, there are very few detailed descriptions of how these strategies might be implemented, as such educators must refer to the book's comprehensive bibliography for further guidance. The major criticism was the discussion of analogue and digital gaming in Chapter 5, which appeared under-developed in comparison to the other chapters, and would have benefitted from the authors providing a more in-depth discussion of the competing and complementary learning potential of these different platforms. Despite these two missteps, this book should be considered an essential text, not only for academics working in the interface of learning and play but for all educators that are interested in the learning opportunities that are afforded by encouraging students (of all ages) to **make** and **share** video games.

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