

Advocacy in Reach. Game On in the Library

Gaming has become a popular activity in both school and public libraries in years. I recall purchasing a video game system for the program at my first high school library job. Many teachers and administrators reacted with mixed responses when they saw crowds of students totally engaged around the console and television. Fast forward many years later and I specifically asked for a small gaming room in our high school library renovation. Even nearly a decade later, some adults question the gaming room.

Our Game Room

While redesigning the old spaces that would become the new high school library, I asked that a small conference room be converted into a game room. I wanted to give our students that enjoyed gaming their own space. When I was asked why we wanted a game room, I explained to stakeholders that gaming is where the kids are. Video game systems in a safe space would be a great place for students to come before school and during lunch. I also suggested that the technology could be used for computer science classes to try out their programs and games on our big screen televisions. It makes sense for libraries to be a resource for coding activities. Gaming is also a great way to draw students and teachers into the library. We should all share photos and stories of students that connect with gaming. When stakeholders see school libraries building communities for learners that enjoy gaming, it makes the program even more valuable.

Diverting Prohibited Gaming

How many times have you intercepted students using school computers for gaming? At our school, this activity is prohibited. However, when we catch students playing games at inappropriate times, perhaps we can divert them to more beneficial activities like Hour of Code and MIT's Scratch coding tools. These sites teach students to code in game-like environments. We have made an annual event of inviting students to complete Hour of Code learning activities each December during Computer Science Education Week. This is an annual advocacy opportunity for school libraries! Be sure to take photos to post on social media and send to the local newspaper.

Virtual Reality in the Curriculum

More tools are being released to provide immersive experiences using virtual reality and augmented reality. While this isn't always considered gaming, it is a wonderful service that school libraries can provide. If you can't afford an expensive virtual reality setup, consider collecting old smartphones and iPods. These can be repurposed as virtual reality devices using Google Cardboard and ViewMaster Virtual Reality viewers. Simply opening the YouTube app and searching for "360 Virtual Reality Videos" will reveal a multitude of possibilities for using these devices. We have used this technology many times with both ELA and science classes. When you utilize innovative technology like this with classes, don't forget to share photos on social media and invite administrators. When our high school principal saw our economical VR viewers, he wanted me to purchase more. Such activities make the library a safe place for teachers to try new technologies.

Minecraft Adventures

We have noticed that Minecraft is very popular with students of all ages. If you aren't familiar with this tool, it is a virtual game world where students can build just about anything. While we haven't had the opportunity to get Minecraft on our school computers, we have embraced students using it in the library on their own computers and other devices. Through some examples that our learners have created, teachers are now open to students using Minecraft to create various research products. This past school year, one group of eighth grade social studies students created a music video about slavery and harvest life to illustrate what they had learned about the topic. They used Minecraft on their own in a collaborative fashion, and I watched them work on their project simultaneously for several days in the school library during the maker event the teachers had scheduled. We posted photos and video clips about the event. One administrator even visited the library while the students were working.

Final Thoughts

Gaming is here to stay. The school library is a safe environment for students to explore gaming and coding for the classroom and for personal uses. When we encourage coding and gaming in the library, we should strive to promote the activities so that others can see how innovation can be supported within our programs. Be sure to share your library gaming success stories with us at @SLC_Online.

About the Author

Stony Evans, MS, is a teacher librarian at Bethel Middle School in Alexander, AR. He earned his master's in library media and information technologies from the University of Central Arkansas. Stony received the Arkansas Library Association's Retta Patrick Award in 2017. He was a finalist for the AASL's 2017 Sensational Student Voice – Social Media Superstar award. He was selected as the Arkansas Association of Instructional Media's Library Media Specialist of the Year in 2013. Visit his blog at librarymediatechtalk.blogspot.com, email him at stony12270@gmail.com, or follow him on Twitter @stony12270.

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