

Hidden benefits of computer games

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X-Box One will be a popular game console this Christmas.

Computer games can be a popular item on many kids' Christmas wish list. But for some parents, gaming has been linked to a range of negative connotations, from time wasting to promoting violence.

Edith Cowan University (ECU) Associate Professor Mark McMahon, an expert in gaming, said research has found that games offer a range of social and educational benefits to gamers.

The key is to ensure the game is appropriate, both in terms of age restriction and game content.

A social tool

Rather than being anti-social and time wasting, Professor McMahon said gaming can actually build social skills in children.

"Gamers are reaping the social benefits when their friends come over and they play computer games together. They're often strategising, managing complex tasks and forming and managing teams," he said.

Stimulating, relaxing and educational

The benefits of gaming don't end at social development. In the recent Digital Australia 2014 report, 91 per cent of respondents said games are mentally stimulating. Around 85 per cent said they reduce stress and 83 per cent said games can be educational.

These views are not solely from young people either. Professor McMahon said 76 per cent of gamers are over 18.

"If you think about what people do during screen time, they can be writing, creating images or videos, communicating, looking up information and so on."

"Playing games is one of those activities and gameplay itself is complex. A strong reason young adults play games isn't for escapism but for social interaction."

Beware hidden content

Professor McMahon said parents should be aware that many games and apps encourage users to spend money to progress in the game.

"The business model of many free-to-play games is built around external purchases through micro-transactions within games. Gamers can get hooked into the game for free before being encouraged to spend money to 'level up'," Professor McMahon said.

These games and apps are often linked to an iTunes or Google Play account and parents can be in for a nasty surprise when they receive their credit card bill at the end of the month. Professor McMahon advises parents to limit their child's access to their accounts, or ensure their children seek permission before making a purchase.

Popular games this Christmas

Professor Mark McMahon said the new PlayStation 4 and Xbox One consoles will undoubtedly be popular choices this Christmas, but consumers shouldn't discount the Nintendo Wii U and the hand-held 2DS, particularly if you're buying for younger children.

"Wii U by Nintendo has a large volume of content aimed at children. Games such as Mario help build hand-eye co-ordination, and the new 2DS is designed specifically to hit a price point that will appeal to families."

Professor McMahon said there are great benefits from playing transformational games which are designed to create engaging and immersive learning environments for delivering specified learning goals.

Often referred to as 'Serious Games', "Transformational games are designed for social impact and are being used in areas such as the military, education, training and public health. The deeply immersive experience of gaming can be a powerful tool for engaging people, giving them opportunities to make decisions and see the consequences of those in compelling ways. Simulation games, in particular, can produce

learning that has relevance beyond the [game](#) world and can be much more interesting and authentic than sitting in a classroom," he said.

Provided by Edith Cowan University

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