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The objectives of this unit are to help students:

- evaluate both the positive and problematic aspects of video games

- recognise the problems generated by the overt sexuality and violence presented in many video games and assess societal efforts to address those problems

- identify some of the educational opportunities that video games offer

- construct logically consistent arguments

RIGHT NOW, if we look at the way the games industry defends itself against its critics, its core argument seems to be "hey, we're not as bad as you think we are". All of the energy, by and large, is spent arguing a negative – trying to prove that games do not cause real-world violence – and very little time gets spent making an affirmative case for games: that the world is a better place because we have games in it.

There are plenty of very good reasons why we should be promoting the educational value of games – after all, they are the preferred medium for the current generation that is working their way through schools; there is more and more compelling research showing the pedagogical value of many different aspects of current game designs. By now, we can all make the argument but so far, the games industry is running scared of the L Word (learning).

– Henry Jenkins, former Director of Comparative Media Studies Program, MIT

Educators today certainly do not need to be told that video games are a part of teenagers' lives, and studies indicate that 92 per cent of those younger than eighteen play them regularly. Most of us are also aware of the continued debate about the value of video games. As Henry Jenkins points out, the video game industry is most concerned with disavowing any link between itself and societal violence, while avoiding much discussion of video games as learning tools.

This unit will discuss the violence prevalent in many video games. It also asks students to examine the use of video games for learning positive attitudes, behaviours and skills. In the process, students are allowed to praise games for offering salient social discourse. At the same time, students must come to terms with some of the more problematic aspects of video games.

Education by Video Game

As an introduction to this unit, read this quote from Henry Jenkins. Jenkins is a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States.

> *There are plenty of very good reasons why we should be promoting the educational value of games – after all, they are the preferred medium for the current generation that is working their way through schools; there is more and more compelling research showing the pedagogical [educational] value of many different aspects of current game designs. By now, we can all make the argument but so far, the games industry is running scared of the L Word (learning).*

1. Jenkins says that the people who make video games are afraid of their games being labelled as educational – they don't want to say that players can learn from playing games. Do you agree with Jenkins? Do you think that the video game industry does not want people to see video games as educational? Explain why or why not.

2. Think about the subjects you are taking at school. Which of those subjects do you think will be the most useful to you in life? Explain why.

3. Which of the subjects that you are currently taking do you think will be the least useful to you in life? Explain why.

4. Explain why you think the school decided that it was important for you to take the class that you identified in question 3.

Whacked Out on *Warcraft*

JERALD BLOCK is a psychiatrist who published an editorial in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* in March 2008. In that article, he argues that "Internet addiction" should be recognised as a new illness that psychiatrists need to be able to diagnose and treat. One of the forms of Internet addiction that Block identifies is excessive gaming.

Block lists four signs of Internet addiction:

• excessive use, often associated with a loss of sense of time or a neglect of basic needs

• withdrawal, including feelings of anger, tension and/or depression when the computer is inaccessible

• tolerance, including the need for better computer equipment, more software or more hours of use

• negative repercussions, including arguments, lying, poor achievement, social isolation and fatigue

Block says that although little research on Internet addiction has been done in the western world, research has been conducted in South Korea. South Korea considers Internet addiction to be a serious public health issue, especially among school-aged youth. The South Korean government estimates that about 210,000 South Koreans between the ages of 6 and 19 are addicted and need treatment, including medication or even hospitalisation. South Korean officials note that the average South Korean student spends around 23 hours gaming each week. Because of this, officials believe that another 1.2 million South Korean secondary school students are at risk of addiction. South Korea has trained more than 1000 counsellors to treat Internet addiction, and the government is introducing preventive measures in schools.[4]

Of the people Block treats, he says that computer gamers tend to be the hardest to help. This is in part caused by shame that addicted gamers often feel. Block says that more research has been done with children and teenagers than with adults because of adults' shame about being hooked on games.

1. South Korea estimates that between 2 and 3 per cent of students there are addicted. Do you think the percentage in Australia is higher, lower or about the same? Explain.

[4] http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/165/3/306

2. Look at the four signs of addiction that Block identifies. Do you know anybody who you think is addicted to gaming based on Block's signs? Explain.

3. Do you think that there are students at your school who are addicted to gaming? Explain.

4. Symptoms are effects, not causes. What do you think might be some of the causes of gaming addiction? List three, and explain each.

   Cause #1:

   Explanation:

   Cause #2:

   Explanation:

   Cause #3:

   Explanation: