

“eSport Should be played in School”. The Project “eSchool” by DGS Dialogue Lecture

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In an interconnected, free and global world, eSport is steadily gaining momentum. Unlike Sweden, the US and Asia, Germany has so far been hesitant to declare eSport as an official sport as well as recognizing its societal benefits. The “eSchool-project” aims to bring awareness to the games potential and added value for education system, as future competitiveness in a peaceful digital community relies on education and a sportsmanlike mind-set. The DGS (Deutsche Games Schulmeisterschaft UG) Hamburg serves as an initiator to create a better understanding of eSport beyond commercial intentions. In order to give more insight into the general idea of “eSchool” J. Peter Lemcke will be holding a presentation in dialogue with Dr Ina Weh about its operative aspects, research background and prospects.

Keywords: Attribute of Play, Education, eSport, Schools Championship.

Figure 1. ESL Arena (German Schoolmasters 2017 on the Right)



Source: W. Lehnert.

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Introduction

Our kids spend so much time playing computer games – why should we offer those esports at school? There are reasons: Playing promotes the development of competences as self-confidence, the ability to orientate in difficult situations or fair play. Schools mission is to support young people to establish these competences as a premise for learning processes and to navigate in daily life. Therefore, we have to get these kids out of their insulated digital “echo-chamber” at home up on a cultural stage for familiar faces. We should integrate the passion for esports into the daily routine of education.

J. Peter Lemcke

The photographic collage you see gives an impression about the passion and force of free, globally-networked play. The particular of this picture is that it includes non-professionals: the German Games Schools Champions 2017. The final round was held during the Gamescom in Cologne, at the Cologne Polytechnic game lab. And there is no difference in cheer and enthusiasm!

This is an encouraging fact where energy and regeneration are concerned for the society that has grown out of this movement. Anyone observing esports can only notice how games have their own particular seriousness, to which generations of young people are dedicated – effortlessly and with a high degree of technical and communicative complexity. Hence this sport should be played in school too!

Complex societies have complex games. This is borne out in the genealogy of games. They are always a manifestation of their times and their mutual interaction can only cause a win-win situation for humanity. And it is an unchallenged fact that we all benefit from interaction in games and sports in everyday reality, because the reality of the game opens the door to "paradoxical interventions" in actual areas of conflict – i.e. they make it possible to approach actions from a new and unexpected perspective. This dialogue of antagonism equilibrates and opens humans to pass our daily games in a fair play – according to Arthur Schnitzler's words: “We always play – to know this is wise.”

Also it's the Motto of the Deutsche Spiel museum - the German Games Museum – that I founded 1986 in Hamburg. It was the first place in the world where the public could play traditional and electronic games every day.

In 2002 I was invited by the South Korean Football Association and the Goethe Institute to exhibit my collection of historical and modern football games during the World Championship. A journalist dragged me to a full soccer stadium with 30,000 spectators, all under 25. A platform had been set up on the pitch, surrounded by TV cameras filming two players in combat for the 2002 Fifa World Championship. In all four corners of the stadium there were gigantic video split-screens, on which fans could follow every move of the games. It was just like soccer, but the spectators cheered every good move the two players made. As a spectator, player and sportsman, this impressed me.

As a convinced ambassador for cultural awareness of games it reminds me of the way soccer developed: it lost its stigma after being introduced as a school sport and issued a change of image. Nowadays all generations and cultural backgrounds are united in their enthusiasm. Therefore in 2006 I founded the first amateur championship in Germany, the German Games Schools Championship. With the support of ESL/Turtle, they are running since 2007. Over 1,200 schools from the whole of Germany have participated since then. Students register online at their own initiative. Relatives, friends - even whole schools share the thrill and cheer them up online when the games are staged. This raises the number of contacts to 4.5 million per annum. We promote to establish this non-commercial movement in the school sector to attach more values for cultural and educational aspects. We are requested for Regio-games from all over Germany, but further implementations calls for more personal aid and sponsorship.

On the other hand we still face scepticism and confrontation: particularly from the schools authorities, partly from teachers and parents, sometimes even from politicians. The main arguments to avoid esports in schools are the following:

1. Encouragement of consumer behaviour, especially triggered by war games and combat sports sectors.
2. Accompanied educational measures are lacking.
3. Influence of advertising, especially by commercial games.

For the most part it leads to the maxim: "In school at least, students should be learning something rational."

Ina Weh

And that shouldn't come as a surprise: As educators, we should create a foundation of reason and knowledge that can be measured by behaviour.

Games are not particularly suited for that purpose. Research has shown this again and again. Even cats don't catch fewer mice when they are being kept from playing. But the example of a teenager with pronounced ASS (autism) – let's call him Tom – shows what games can achieve:

Despite the optimum of individual support, he remained cut off from the outside world – he even had trouble with non-verbal communication. And because teenagers aren't prone to talk about their passion for gaming at school anyway, it only came out by coincidence that it was him who moderated online tournaments. A competence - nobody at school- would have deemed possible with Tom.

Games and normal life are two different realities that are for sure. Gaming is reality without meaning – that's the result of my empirical studies (Weh 2010). And it may be comforting to know, that because of this the respective experiences are attributed to different neurological networks of communication. But it is not senseless.

Intuitively, we already know this at school. Quite naturally, we use it for "reasonable" learning because it recharges the battery with energy, confidence and

curiosity. In other words, always when blockades need to be overcome and when interest for a new subject needs to be piqued, when we need to build a team or simply when the students need to wake up.

At its core, gaming as a method is an absurd polarisation. But it causes a strong experience of difference (Bette 2011). And that's what gets the neurological system going. There are many methods: distorted norms, changing roles, riddles or artificial resistance. Always with the promise of liberty of everyone that pressing the reset button at the end. This way, one can reinvent oneself, continue down along paths previously thought of, stare into the abyss, and laugh about fear and failure. Sports competitions are so popular because they strongly stimulate our system of rewards (Waelti et al. 2001).

The effect of this on education could be summarised with Francis Scott Fitzgerald:

"Intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function."

A further result of my study shows that people with a lot of gaming experience are able to assess themselves and their environment better. (Weh 2010) Right now we are trying to assess exactly that in the eSchool-project with regards to emotional competence and there is a clear tendency for an increased tolerance range in those who play. The result of a study by the Max-Planck-Institute supports it: Especially video gaming causes increases in the brain regions responsible for spatial orientation, memory formation and strategic planning (Kühn et al. 2013).

In any case, teenagers like Tom use the different reality to experience their hidden strengths. It is a place where they can hold their own. They experience self-efficacy which sets off constructive learning processes.

Now we increasingly find the important opposing ideas in global digital networks. Instinctively, teenagers thus look for the right challenge. But many online games can lead to a problem: The challenge rises over a long period of time and with high frequency. Particularly during the sensitive phase of their youth, players can get hooked by motivation and can no longer find the reset button. In these cases, it's important that the teenagers have an environment in which they feel understood and where their potential is recognised. They need the prospect of alternative success in the other reality and sensitive guidance for a transfer into that other reality – a responsible education, in other words.

There are certainly several reasons why schools are reluctant when it comes to digital games - despite calls for the inclusion of teenagers' living environment: uncertainty due to discussions about "shoot 'em up" games, parental concerns because the children already spend so much time in front of the computer at home, and our insufficient know-how.

Most of our colleagues don't even know what esports is.

J. Peter Lemcke

Facing this we raised a documentation competition at first step together with the Stiftung Digitale Spielkultur (the foundation for digital games as leisure sports). Students can document the process of play: their training and communication about esports with teachers, parents and friends. It targets to make esport more acquainted and demount scepticisms from teachers, parents and specific members of public authorities.

For the DGS, however, it was evident that we have to establish direct contact with the schools, also in order to support those children who aim at playing in teams at school. That's the reason why we set up the PlayeS Regio Championship.

Its first events took place in 2016 in Duisburg – supported by the local youth welfare services there - and in Hamburg together with the BMK (college for media and communications) under patronage of the HIBB (Hamburger Institut für Berufliche Bildung). Both types of championship cause intensive work. But meanwhile the teachers at BMK offer suggestions and ideas, how students could take an active part in the management of PlayeS Regio Championship:

- Developing a brand concept and marketing action as marketing communicators
- Concerning for corporate web and print design, video documentation of events as media designers (both digital and print),
- Systematic evaluations as qualified market or social researchers - for instance relating to levels of awareness for the DGS
- Organising public relations and events at schools, as media agents and media assistants

This framework enables students at school to try out and discover which intrinsic skills they got and might use later for a successful working life. For Gee they become "pro-ams".

Pro-ams are amateurs becoming experts via developing a passion for a certain object (Gee 2008). This knowledge goes deep rather than wide. They are pooling their skills and knowledge with other pro-ams to accomplish bigger or better tasks or to solve larger problems. If society wants to participate from these expertises pro-ams need an entry to the everyday world and their arising challenges. If schools offer an interface for communication between games and everyday – challenges they prepare a ground that can lead to responsible solutions in professional fields.

Ina Weh

Scientists also warn of the following: without challenges, human beings and societies will perish. Societies that gain their strength in diversity, that strive for peaceful coexistence, need internal alternatives as a kind of incubator for new development. The chaotic nature of games especially teaches how to cope with

rearrangement. The more experiences we have available in our neuronal network, the easier it is for our mind to rearrange and manage these changes. So it is less about performance, but rather about competence and resilience. It can be regarded as a root system of perceptions that frees us of other judgements, enables us to learn and grounds us in the face of irritations.

Esport as a part in schools curriculum offers suitable challenges even for those students, who are not that much successful in schools daily life. As we don't know today what will be needed tomorrow, it is important that both worlds remain in contact and in balance with each other.

Peter Lemcke

I would like to make a final, personal comment on violence in computer-games:

Many people are still haunted by an idealistic notion of games – one that is prone to ignore their cruel sides – or disregard them altogether.

In 1945, when I was a young boy, I became an opponent of war while playing with disposed ore concealed weapons by the German Army. We taught ourselves how to handle them, learning in practice how dangerous they really were. At that time, one village gang warned the other not to go into the woods if they were going to practice firing at night. Facing the risk, and uncertainty we learned to value certainty and reliability. Computer games generate similar effects.

I am a follower of Brian Sutton Smith, the American anthropologist and obvious most respected play researcher in the last decades. I invited him to Germany several times and we became friends. He calls these characteristics "dark play". And in his "conflict-enculturation hypothesis" (Sutton-Smith 1997) he calls to learn to deal with conflict by playing through antitheses: clashes between order and anarchy, proximity and avoidance, success and failure. These basic conflicts are insoluble in our daily lives, but within the game framework of games, they can be remodelled through dynamic interaction. It is Brians conviction that humans have to create artificial enemies to detect and set up limits – an essential requirement to defend within the scope of the new person they have to become.

Summary

We stated in this article reasons from two perspectives, why esport can help schools to fulfill their mission. We have to realize: The fascination of young people with esport won't go away. There is no alternative offer for teenagers with an equal amount of challenge, thrill and fascination. On the other hand, we see an open minded next generation of teachers for esport. Digital gaming is part of their lives. They will integrate esport quite naturally in their curriculum for a benefit of

education. It would be wise to use of this energetic potential now and steer it towards an update of our schools.

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