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# Introduction

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Gaming has been a part of libraries since the mid-nineteenth century. In Great Britain, some libraries used billiard halls and parlors for games as a way to lure people out of the pubs and into a more “socially beneficial” lifestyle (Snape, 1992). The oldest chess club in existence today was started in the Mechanics’ Institute Library in San Francisco in 1854 (Donaldson, 2011). During the Great Depression, toy and game libraries appeared to help provide a relief for children while the parents used library resources to find answers to enter national contests for cash prizes (Chudacoff, 2007; Elrich, 1955).

As the interest rose in gaming in society as a leisure activity, so did the interest in gaming in libraries. Chess clubs were joined by Scrabble, bridge, and Mahjong clubs. As summer reading programs gained in popularity, games were commonly used as a key activity, so many youth grew up playing at the library. When early computers appeared in libraries, one of the ways patrons learned to use them was through installed games (Moses, 1983). Some libraries built collections of digital games to accompany their collections of traditional games and other forms of media. As free Web-based digital games became more popular, patrons could play games on library computers without requiring the library to install software.

Libraries have struggled to draw in teen populations. In the mid-2000s, Jenny Levine at the American Library Association (ALA) began to write about the use of video game programs in libraries to draw in teens (2006). To better understand the role of gaming in libraries, in 2009, I surveyed 400 randomly selected public libraries and learned that more than 70 percent allowed some sort of gaming in their libraries and about 40 percent had formal gaming programs. Common outcomes of gaming programs are that the reputation of the library increases among participants; participants who attend the gaming program return to the library for other,

nongaming services; and users improved their social connections with both friends and previously unknown members of the community (Nicholson, 2009).

Other librarians, such as Eli Neiburger (2009) and Beth Gallaway (2009), have written about their experiences, empowering librarians to create gaming programs. In 2008, I founded the Games and Gaming Members Initiative Group at the ALA to connect these programs using all sorts of games for all ages. This group connected with interested groups in the Young Adult Library Services Association and the American Association of School Librarians to create the ongoing event called ALA Play, which brings together librarians on the Friday night of the ALA annual conference to learn about and celebrate games, graphic novels, costume play, and similar activities.

During these gaming programs, patrons from different demographic groups come together around shared challenges to socialize, engage, collaborate, and compete. In my book, *Everyone Plays at the Library: Creating Great Gaming Experiences for All Ages* (2010), I created a model for the library gaming experience that brings together players, the game world, spectators, and library staff and explores how each interacts with the others. On the basis of this model, I developed a set of five Game Experience Archetypes that provides the organizational structure for the book and a basis for librarians to assess the usefulness of games of all types in meeting the goals of their libraries. Librarians looking to create a gaming experience can start by selecting an archetype based on their goals and then choose games that will bring about that game experience. This ensures that the chosen games meet the goals of the gaming program and fit into the mission of the library.

Each of the five archetypes—Social, Narrative, Action, Knowledge, and Strategy (SNAKS)—focuses on a different area of this model. Specific game titles can fit with more than one archetype, so librarians seeking to use games to meet different needs for different audiences should select games that span a variety of archetypes. *Social* game experiences are those that focus on facilitating social interactions among players; they are useful when a library uses games to forge connections between different groups of patrons. *Narrative* game experiences are those that immerse players in a story and can be useful for libraries wanting to connect games to literacy. *Action* game experiences reward physical skill, either with the use of a digital game controller or the manipulation of something in the physical world, and can create a lively game experience that generates excitement in players and spectators. *Knowledge* game experiences are focused on the knowledge that players bring to the game table and are a good match for libraries meeting educational goals. *Strategy* game experiences emphasize the decision-making processes that challenge players; these game sessions

tend to be quiet and create opportunities for players to engage with a few others at a deep level.

The goal of this special issue is to take a close look at different library gaming programs. Authors who wrote for the issue were challenged to explore the impact of gaming programs in their libraries. In each of the articles, the author presents a different way of bringing gaming into the library and then explores the impact of these library gaming programs. In "The Fusion of Literacy and Games: A Case Study in Assessing the Goals of a Library Video Game Program," Brown and Kasper take a look at a video game club for youth in two branches of a public library to understand how the club built community and improved the academic lives of participants. On a related note, "Tales from 'Play It Loud,'" by Maluck, explores how a video and board game program in a public library built bridges between youth participants and their families, communities, and other library services. For librarians wanting to develop a gaming program, in "Bringing Them in: Developing a Gaming Program for the Library," Werner chronicles her tales as a youth librarian introducing different types of digital and tabletop gaming programs at a public library.

Not all gaming programs are in public libraries; academic and school libraries can also be a home to them. In "Brawling in the Library: Gaming Programs for Impactful Outreach and Instruction at an Academic Library," Vanden Elzen and Roush first talk about the challenges in planning and finding partnerships for a gaming program at an academic library and then explore the impact their gaming program has had on both participants and the library. In "No Muggles in the Library Tonight! Harry Potter Night at an Academic Library," Broussard explores an annual program she created for college students centered on games and activities based on the Harry Potter books and films. For those interested in gaming programs in school libraries, "Three Different Paths for Tabletop Gaming in School Libraries," by Copeland, Henderson, Mayer, and Nicholson, present several shorter explorations of different ways that non-digital games can be used in that particular library setting.

At the heart of games is the concept of play. In "Get in the Game: Encouraging Play and Game Creation to Develop New Literacies in the Library," Powell starts with concepts of play and uses those ideas to create playful experiences based on well-known games for the library. In these live-action games, players are personally immersed in the game experience instead of watching avatars on the screen. Bringing games to life in this way sparks creativity and interest and represents an exciting frontier for library gaming programs that go beyond games living only on the screen or the table.

Taken as a group, these articles demonstrate the wide variety of gaming possibilities that are available to libraries. No matter the age of the

patrons, the budget of the library, or the space available, there are creative ways that gaming can be used to bring people together to collaborate or compete and help them improve their relationships with communities, family, and each other. Gaming can improve understanding of other topics and kindle interests in related library services. Most importantly, libraries that engage in gaming programs are demonstrating their awareness of gaming as a new form of media that is as important and relevant as books, magazines, music, and film.

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