Acknowledgements

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Educating for a video game culture – A map for teachers and parents is the work of Alessandro Soriani, member of the Council of Europe's Digital Citizenship Education Expert Group.

Contributors

Summary

A digital citizen is someone who uses technology safely, ethically and responsibly and who has the ability to engage positively, critically and competently in the digital environment drawing on the skills of effective communication and creativity, to practise forms of social participation that are respectful of human rights and dignity, through a responsible use of technology.[1]

Being a digital citizen, in other words, means creating, working, sharing, socialising, investigating, playing, communicating and learning with competence and positive engagement in a society that is profoundly influenced by digital technologies. Today, more than ever, it has become important to participate actively and responsibly in the communities around us: local and global communities and even online communities, which offer users infinite ways to interact with each other and to share information and opinions.

With the ubiquity of new technologies, children, teenagers and young people are plunged into a world of technology and digital media. It has become almost impossible not to come into contact with mobile phones, tablets, laptops, console games and other forms of technology, whether for educational or entertainment purposes. Being a digital citizen also means being able to benefit wisely from the different forms of entertainment that technologies allow, and properly balancing your own "media diet" in order to avoid overuse or misuse.

One such technology, which has unfortunately been identified with overuse and misuse, is video games. Video gaming is one of the most popular entertainment industries in the world. It is possible to play almost everywhere, at almost any time, on almost any kind of device: sitting on the couch with a home console plugged into a television, riding the bus or metro with a mobile phone, sitting in the back of a classroom toggling on a smartphone, or even while falling asleep in bed with a portable console or a tablet.

Video games have been around since the 1970s, so they are not exactly a new phenomenon. In recent years they have grown extremely fast in terms of popularity, relevance and mechanics. They are fun, engaging and designed to capture players' attention, and these factors bring new opportunities but also new challenges in the education of children and young people.

The aim of this guide is to make teachers and parents – or, in general, adults with educational roles – aware of the complexity of this medium, as well as the potential risks and opportunities that come with it. This publication will also provide readers with some useful strategies to help choose the right video games or simply to be more informed about the topic so as to create space for talking to and engaging children or students in more opportunities for dialogue.

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1. www.coe.int/dce.

Digital Citizenship Education means working to nurture a video game culture in tomorrow's citizens. The more aware future generations are of the economic models, the structures, languages, risks and opportunities of video games, the more it will be possible to build a society that is open to recognising the beauty of this medium, to benefit from the act of playing, to build better games and to minimise the dangers that video games, as well as other media, inevitably have.

Promoting a video game culture means generating a pedagogical reflection around video games: thinking about it as a cultural tool able to offer many incentives not only to having fun, but also to thought, learning and development of the person. It also means considering the video game worthy of being the object of study and of an accurate and careful analysis of its characteristics, its mechanics, and its languages.
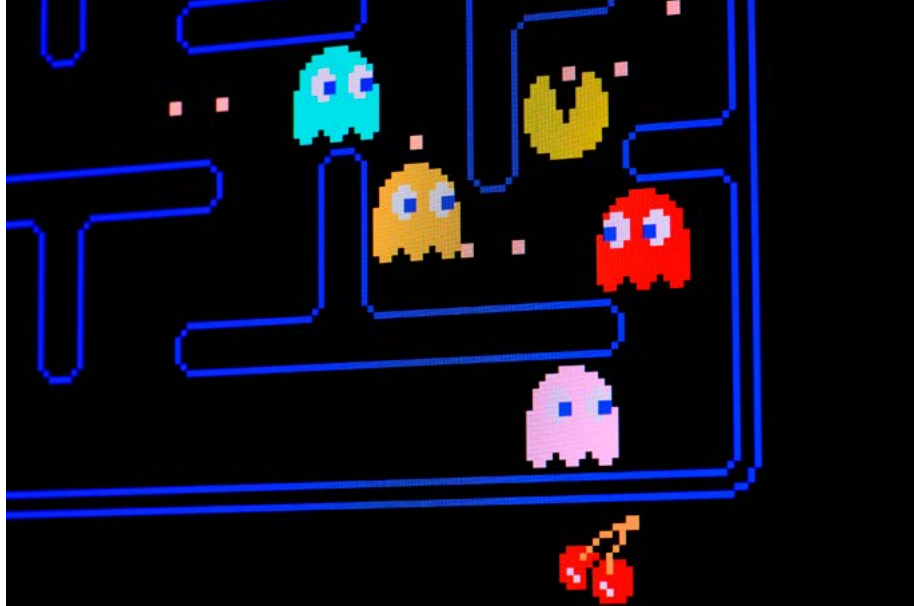
Introduction to this guide

Why not create a publication just for teachers or one just for parents? The choice to address this handbook to adults in general and not to specific targets has been made with the intention of helping everyone (be they teachers, parents, educators or practitioners) to better understand the world of video games – an extremely popular medium characterised by a diversity and complexity which is unique. This "complexity", which must not be interpreted as "difficulty" or "complication", comes with a variety of potential risks and challenges but also with opportunities and benefits in pedagogical matters. Another reason that this guide is for everyone is to try to change the way in which adults perceive video games. Most of the ideas that teachers or parents have about video games are connected to simplistic and stereotyped images of this medium: a violent and useless source of distraction which is dangerous for children. Considering video games only as a mere distraction means missing an opportunity to initiate dialogue with young people as well as missing the chance to foster children to be better digital citizens. The act of video gaming needs more attention from adults and educational practitioners in general, although this does not mean that everyone must become a player. The medium must be approached with discernment, curiosity and optimism.

This handbook can be seen as an orientation map that aims to support parents and educational practitioners as they navigate what is often considered unfamiliar and frightening territory. Creating pedagogical alliances between families and schools is key to building a video game culture able to break the strong resistance – composed of stereotypes, misconceptions, mistrust and fears – that adults have when they think about this kind of entertainment.

Promoting a video game culture means generating a pedagogical discourse around video games. This is fundamental in order to move away from oversimplistic ideas of video games which seem to relegate the medium to the status of mere entertainment – entertainment that exerts evil powers over young people or that has magical effects on the development of children. Video gaming is an extremely complex and multifaceted medium: a deeper analysis of its mechanics and characteristics is necessary to uncover its problematic elements and its risks, but also the opportunities it provides.

What are the risks that children can encounter while playing video games? What can we do to limit these risks? Are games a mere waste of time or can they promote significant and meaningful reflection and interaction? What are the educational possibilities?

This guide is an attempt to answer these questions. It is divided into three sections, three metaphorical video game worlds: "things to know", "potential risks" and "potential benefits". Each section presents short reflections called levels, just like in old-fashioned video games.

World 1 – Things to know about video games: This section provides an overview of the video game as a medium. It contains information about the video game industry, about its complexity as a medium, about online practices linked to video games, and about the tools that adults can use to monitor children while they are playing.

- ▶ Level 1.1: A multifaceted medium
- ▶ Level 1.2: A strong market
- ▶ Level 1.3: The video-gaming community
- ▶ Level 1.4: Gaming devices
- ▶ Level 1.5: "Flow" and gaming
- ▶ Level 1.6: Online stores and online services
- ▶ Level 1.7: Age and content ratings
- ▶ Level 1.8: Parental control tools

World 2 – Potential risks of video gaming: This section provides insights about some of the potential risks inherent to the experience of play. It addresses addiction to gaming and issues related to online money transactions and violent and stereotyped content.

- ▶ Level 2.1: Micro-transactions, in-app purchases and loot boxes
- ▶ Level 2.2: Online hate speech and video games
- ▶ Level 2.3: Violent content
- ▶ Level 2.4: Stereotypes, gender representation and attention to minorities
- ▶ Level 2.5: Video-gaming addiction

World 3 – Potential benefits of video games: This section describes some of the educational and pedagogical potential of video games. First, the characteristics that distinguish games will be presented. Secondly, the detailed learning opportunities

that video games provide will be discussed. Lastly, the potential of the videoludic medium in terms of creativity will be tackled, both as regards fostering creativity and coding.

- ► Level 3.1: Characteristics of video games
- ► Level 3.2: Learning from video games
- ► Level 3.3: Using educational video games
- ► Level 3.4: Using video games to stimulate tangential learning
- ► Level 3.5: Using video games to develop critical thinking
- ► Level 3.6: Video games and creativity

Warning!

This publication is not intended to be a full and exhaustive guide to the pedagogical use of video games, nor is it intended to be any kind of handbook about the correct and proper use of this medium. Parents, teachers and children are kindly asked to take these pages as a suggestion: a suggestion to start considering video games from a different, more open and more discerning, point of view.

The 10 domains of digital citizenship

This guide is meant to help teachers and parents to be more aware of the complexity of video games: a medium that needs to be closely observed, understood and which contains many potential risks and opportunities. Digital citizenship education is a key element in fostering a culture of video games in today and tomorrow's learners that will help them develop a balanced media diet, avoid the related risks, live meaningful lives and enrich their gaming experiences.

With the intent to help readers find more information about digital citizenship education, every paragraph (named "level") will be marked with icons of the 10 digital domains: readers will be able to find interesting materials, ideas for activities, theoretical insights and research findings by consulting the Digital Citizenship Education website,[2] the *Digital citizenship education handbook*,[3] or the Digital Citizenship Education – Trainers' Pack and looking for that specific domain.

	Access and Inclusion This domain concerns access to the digital environment and includes a range of competences that relate not only to overcoming different forms of digital exclusion but also to the skills needed by future citizens to participate in digital spaces that are open to every kind of minority and diversity of opinion.
	Learning and Creativity This domain refers to the willingness and the attitude of citizens towards learning in digital environments over the course of their lives, both to develop and express different forms of creativity, with different tools, in different contexts. It covers the development of personal and professional competences as citizens prepare for the challenges of technology-rich societies with confidence and in innovative ways.

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2. www.coe.int/dce.
3. Richardson J. and Milovidov E. (2019), *Digital citizenship education handbook*, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, available at www.coe.int/dce.

	Media and Information Literacy This domain concerns the ability to interpret, understand and express creativity through digital media, as critical thinkers. Being media and information literate is something that needs to be developed through education and through a constant exchange with the environment around us. It is essential to go beyond simply "being able to" use one or another media or simply to "be informed" about something. A digital citizen has to maintain an attitude relying on critical thinking as a basis for meaningful and effective participation in his/her community.
	Ethics and Empathy This domain concerns online ethical behaviour and interaction with others based on skills such as the ability to recognise and understand the feelings and perspectives of others. Empathy constitutes an essential requirement for positive online interaction and for realising the possibilities that the digital world affords. A grasp of concepts such as coherence and understanding others' feelings and reasons is paramount if individuals are to live their online experiences positively.
	Health and Well-being This domain relates to the fact that digital citizens inhabit both virtual and real spaces. For this reason, the basic skills of digital competence alone are not sufficient. Individuals also require a set of attitudes, skills, values and knowledge that render them more aware of issues related to health and well-being. In a digitally-rich world, health and well-being imply being aware of challenges and opportunities that can affect wellness, including but not limited to online addiction, ergonomics and posture, and excessive use of digital and mobile devices.
	ePresence and Communication This domain refers to the development of the personal and interpersonal qualities that support digital citizens in building and maintaining an online presence and identity, as well as online interactions that are positive, coherent and consistent. It covers competences such as online communication and interaction with others in virtual social spaces, as well as the management of one's data and traces.