
Editor Breanne Kirsch’s collection of 12 essays that make up the major content of this book explores research on the effectiveness of gaming and game-based learning in an educational context, and discusses ways in which librarians can use gaming in their own library skills teaching. The contributors are all interested in how games can be adapted for learning or other library purposes, such as orientation and promotion. Case studies are described in interesting detail.

Kirsch is the founder and current chair of the Game Making Interest Group with the Library and Information Technology Association of the American Library Association. She introduces herself as an academic librarian who is particularly interested in game-based learning and ‘gamification’ and how her students can learn information literacy skills through games. But how does it work? And what does it mean for librarians?

The essays inform us that game-based learning is an interactive approach to teaching, where students explore relevant aspect of games in a learning context designed by teachers. The underpinning theory is that to progress in a game is to learn; when we are actively engaged with a game, our minds are experiencing the pleasure of coming to grips with (and coming to understand) a new system. Teachers and students collaborate to design games that draw them into virtual environments that look and feel familiar and relevant. Understandably then, game-based learning is very popular in teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools with high levels of success.

While similar, ‘gamification’ is a different type of learning experience. It takes game elements (such as points, badges, competitions and achievements) and applies them to a non-game setting. According to its exponents, it has the potential to ‘turn routine, mundane tasks into refreshing, motivating experiences’. But we are cautioned about poor designs and points-driven motivation that detract from the intrinsic value of real learning outcomes. While ‘gamification’ has a place in the educational sector, it poses some potential challenges to educators and librarians. As one of the case studies notes: ‘just because you offer awards like badges, it does not motivate students intrinsically.’

The last essay, entitled Game-making Resources for Librarians A-Z and Beyond: An Annotated Bibliography is essentially a comprehensive resource toolkit with numerous resources for implementing gaming gaming strategies. The content focuses on a variety of game-making sources that are useful in academic, public and school libraries. Key topics include understanding game culture, game making to create interactive library orientations for new users and overall best practices for digital game making and game promotion in libraries.
In summary this is a very interesting book which discusses innovative and unique ways of designing and using games in libraries for reasons of engagement, deeper learning, variety and fun. It is definitely a worthwhile purchase for library staff and teachers.

Cheryl Tinney

*RMIT University*