CHAPTER 6

Gaming in Libraries

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Key Summary Points

1. There are about 120,000 libraries in North America with representation in almost every community. Libraries reach a wide variety of different demographic groups, so a gaming program in a library can reach audiences not easily accessible to game designers.

2. Libraries have supported games since the 1850s in a variety of forms as a resource relevant to their communities. The concept of playing in libraries is not new, and most libraries are open to games that make sense for the communities of patrons they are funded to serve.

3. There are opportunities for game developers to partner with libraries to create games to help patrons learn how to use library resources. In addition, many libraries are adding services such as makerspaces that focus on the creation of resources instead of just the consumption of resources, which opens the door for partnerships to build a local community of those interested in game design.

Key Terms

Libraries
Communities
Gaming in public spaces
Informal education
Game facilitation
Game design
Makerspaces

Introduction

Libraries have served as one of the few free physical locations for informal learning in United States communities since the late 1700s. Libraries serve the information needs of a specific community and may be public or private, may be attached to a school or college, or may be affiliated with another institution such as a company, a museum, or a foundation. Because of their widespread popularity, there are about 120,000 libraries in the United States (American Library Association, 2013). As a point of reference, this is larger than the number of outlets of the ten largest fast food franchises combined (Oches, 2012). Since there are so many libraries servicing different aspects of society, libraries represent an excellent partnership opportunity for those who create games. This chapter describes some of the history of gaming programs in libraries, presents some results from studies about gaming in libraries, discusses the current state of educational games in libraries, and explores opportunities for those in game studies to partner with libraries.

To set the stage, it is important to distinguish between game collections in libraries and gaming programs in libraries. Just as they do with books, videos, and other forms of information, many libraries have built up collections of digital or analog games. These collections may be developed alongside toy libraries, where parents can check out games for their children, or may be developed with collections of other forms of media, such as DVDs and computer programs (Library Success, 2011). There are services such as Overdrive that allow libraries to circulate digital games using the same platform used for electronic books. Some academic libraries have collections of games to support a degree program in game studies, education, media, or art, and other libraries have collected a subset of games to preserve them in a special collection. This activity of building a collection of games is a natural extension of the activities associated with accumulating a shared collection of resources.

There is another way that games have entered libraries, and that is as an activity. Some library services and programs are designed to allow patrons to play games in the library. For example some libraries run tournaments where players come together to play board games, such as *Scrabble* or chess, or video games against each other (Neiburger, 2009). Other libraries run open gaming events, where participants come together to play both digital and analog games in an open and friendly environment without the tournament structure (Czarnecki, 2011). This concept of recreational gaming programs in libraries is the primary focus of this chapter. These programs represent an opportunity for partnership, as many of them thrive off of volunteers passionate about games assisting librarians with the facilitation of games.

This concept of gaming programs in libraries is not new; in fact, it has existed in the United States for at least 150 years. The oldest chess club that is still in existence in the United States continues to meet in the Mechanics' Institute library in San Francisco. This chess club was started during the gold rush in 1854 (Donaldson, 2011) and is representative of thousands of chess clubs that meet regularly in libraries all over the country. Along with chess clubs, many libraries host other gaming clubs that support traditional and modern board and card games, roleplaying games, or trading card games (Library Success, 2012). Tabletop gaming groups fit well as a library activity as they bring together different people from a community using a resource most libraries have—an activity room with tables and chairs.

Libraries also have a history with digital games. When the New York Public Library first got computers in 1983, they installed games to make it easier for people new to computers to learn to use them ("New York Library System Offers Computer Time", 1986). As CD-ROM-based educational software became popular, many public libraries made it possible for users to put on headphones and experience these multimedia adventures in the library. Some school libraries have computer centers that serve double duty as recreational areas during breaks and lunch (Gibbons, 2013). For example, I have fond memories of winning a *King's Quest* contest that was hosted at my high school library in rural Oklahoma.

Both tabletop and digital gaming programs continue today in libraries. In 2007, I did a survey of 400 randomly selected public libraries and learned that over 70% of public libraries support gaming in some way. Most commonly, this is through allowing patrons to play games on public computers, but about 40% of public libraries also put on some type of structured gaming program. The primary reasons for these programs, as reported by libraries in a follow-up study, were to provide a service for those not currently using library services (most commonly teenagers), to provide an activity for members of the community to engage with each other, and to provide a service alongside other library services for current library users (Nicholson, 2009).

Key Frameworks

One of the questions that is commonly posed about gaming programs in libraries is "What do games have to do with books?" Many people are surprised to learn that libraries are supportive of gaming and host gaming activities. Each library supports a specific user community that funds the library; therefore, each library has different goals and outcomes that can be supported by gaming activities. Here are a few different reasons why libraries support gaming programs:

1. Gaming is a form of recreational media that is culturally significant.
2. Gaming is a method of supporting the role of the library as a community hub.
3. Gaming programs can support other existing library programs.
4. Game creation programs fit well with the changing face of libraries as places of creation.
5. Games can be used to teach information literacy.

Gaming is a Form of Recreational Media that is Culturally Significant

Over the decades, libraries have added on to their offerings to support the desires of the communities that fund them. Originally, libraries did not support fiction, but as the interest in recreational reading grew, libraries added fiction to their non-fiction collections (Harvey, 2013). Music on albums, cassettes, CDs, and now in downloadable form can be found in most public and many academic libraries. Movies on laserdisc, videocassette, and now on DVDs are very common circulated items in libraries. For all of these forms of media, libraries offer ways for patrons to engage with the content within the library. As consumers are now spending more on game-based content than on any other single form of entertainment content (NPD Group, 2013), libraries strive to adjust their collections to reflect the changing content desires in their communities. Gaming in libraries has gone from something that raises eyebrows to just another library service.

Gaming is a Method of Supporting the Role of the Library as a Community Hub

Many libraries are striving to be a non-commercial community hub. In many rural communities, there is a need for a place that is not home and not work, known as a third place, for individuals to gather (Saltwater Connections, 2011). Gaming is an activity that allows members of the community from different demographic and cultural backgrounds to come together and engage with each other. An anecdote supporting this comes through a gaming program that ran over a summer at a public library in Fayetteville, NY. The gaming program ran right after the seniors' computer program, so the seniors were invited to try out the games. As the summer progressed, the teens and the seniors in the community engaged with each other and got to know each other by name over the game tables.

This role of libraries as a community hub is not new. In the 1850s, libraries in the United Kingdom added gaming rooms and billiard parlors to bring people out of the taverns and into the libraries instead (Snape, 1992). For libraries looking to serve their community by providing a social hub, gaming activities in the library are a perfect match.

Gaming Programs Can Support Other Existing Library Programs

Many libraries have discovered that gaming can provide a way of engaging patrons more deeply with existing library programs. The most popular program in public libraries is the summer reading program, which targets children out of school to encourage them to explore reading. Many libraries have found that games work well to generate interest in books; interestingly, the opposite also occurs, where books generate interest in games (Neiburger, 2009). For example, the Pima County Public Libraries has started a role-playing game club based on *Lord of the Rings* (The Escapist, n.d.), 20).

Game Creation Programs Fit Well with the Changing Face of Libraries as Places of Creation

As libraries change along with shifts in society, many libraries are developing makerspaces, which are places with shared resources such as 3D printers, green screens, video equipment, audio recording and podcasting tools, or even wood and metal shops, to encourage members of their communities to come together and create instead of consume. In communities where living space is a premium, the library can provide a valuable service for those wanting to create (Kenney, 2013). Game creation programs fit well within this makerspace movement in libraries (Nicholson, 2013). To create a game, a designer needs to bring together different forms of information and create an engaging experience through a combination of game mechanisms and interface design. Game creation workshops for teens struggling to find potential career paths can help them get interested in careers such as programming, art, and writing (Donald Dennis, Personal Communication, Dec. 12, 2012).

In sum, libraries are about more than books; rather, they offer services that their local community needs. Some libraries become points of access to the Internet for the many people in this country without regular Internet access at home. Other libraries, especially those in urban areas, have developed special

services that support small businesses and entrepreneurship. Some libraries seek to support those doing home schooling, while others focus on strengthening their role as one of the few points of free education after high school. There is no generic template of what a library looks like, as it is dependent upon the needs of the local community. Therefore, while gaming is an excellent fit for some libraries, it is not appropriate for others. Those wishing to partner with libraries on a gaming program need to first understand the goals of the library in relation to the community it supports.

Games Can Be Used to Teach Information Literacy

One of the concepts that libraries of all types teach is information literacy, which is the ability to search for information sources, select relevant resources from search results, and evaluate the trustworthiness of the resources. While attempts have been made to teach information literacy skills through games, most of these educational games have fallen short. The default form of library game is a scavenger hunt, where players travel around the library using clues to find library resources. Many libraries have used the scavenger hunt model in either print or online form to attempt to add fun to a library instruction class, but many of these hunts lack the depth to make them engaging. One reason for this failure is that these games typically manufacture a superficial reason for the players to perform a quick search. Without having any knowledge about a topic area, it is difficult for a player to find relevant resources in the short timeframe that most games allow. Markey (2014) has found that for a library game to be successful, it needs to be based on authentic information needs of patrons.

In addition, there are a variety of online games that have players organize books onto shelves and meet the needs of library patrons, but these games are more arcade-like in nature. The claims of *I'll Get It* and *Within Range*, both on the Carnegie Mellon Libraries website, are that they "develop research skills through entertaining and easy-to-repeat activities" (Carnegie Mellon Libraries Games, n.d., para. 1). *Within Range* involves a shelving activity where players have to find the correct place to put books in a Library of Congress-based shelving system (Carnegie Mellon Libraries Games, n.d.). *I'll Get I*t is a *Diner Dash* clone where the player searches the library catalog by clicking on the Library Catalog computer to meet the needs of patrons. The player does have to choose one of several possible resources, so it is the better of the two games for teaching something about matching sources to needs.

Markey, Leeder, & Rieh (2014) created a game called *Bibliobouts* that encourages players to analyze the quality of information resources. To play the game, which lasts over several weeks, students are assigned a broad topic and are tasked with finding high-quality information resources, such as peer-reviewed articles and books. Each student selects five resources to serve as the members of his or her team. Resources from different teams are picked to battle each other, and other students in the class analyze and compare the two resources to decide which is better for the topic. Throughout this process, students become more critical in analyzing information resources, and multiple tests demonstrate that students who play the game end up using more high quality resources when writing papers after playing *Bibliobouts* (2014).

Figure 1: *I'll Get It* from Carnegie Mellon Libraries (used with permission)

Frameworks for the Library Gaming Experience

To explore gaming in libraries, I have developed several frameworks that guided the writing of my book on the topic: *Everyone Plays at the Library: Creating Great Gaming Experiences for All Ages* (Nicholson, 2010). The first framework, shown in Figure 2, is of the elements in a facilitated gaming experience in libraries, focusing on points of engagement. It is important to consider more than the game; library staff must consider the entire gaming experience, which consists of the players, the game, and the context in which the game is played.

Each player joins a game with a different external knowledge base. Players interact through the game world by manipulating the game state, they verbally interact with each other to carry out in-game activities like trading and negotiating, and they interact socially about non-game topics. In addition, gaming in a library usually takes place in a public space, where spectators can interact with the players, library staff, and library resources. A librarian setting up a gaming program needs to take all of these aspects into account (Neiburger, 2009).

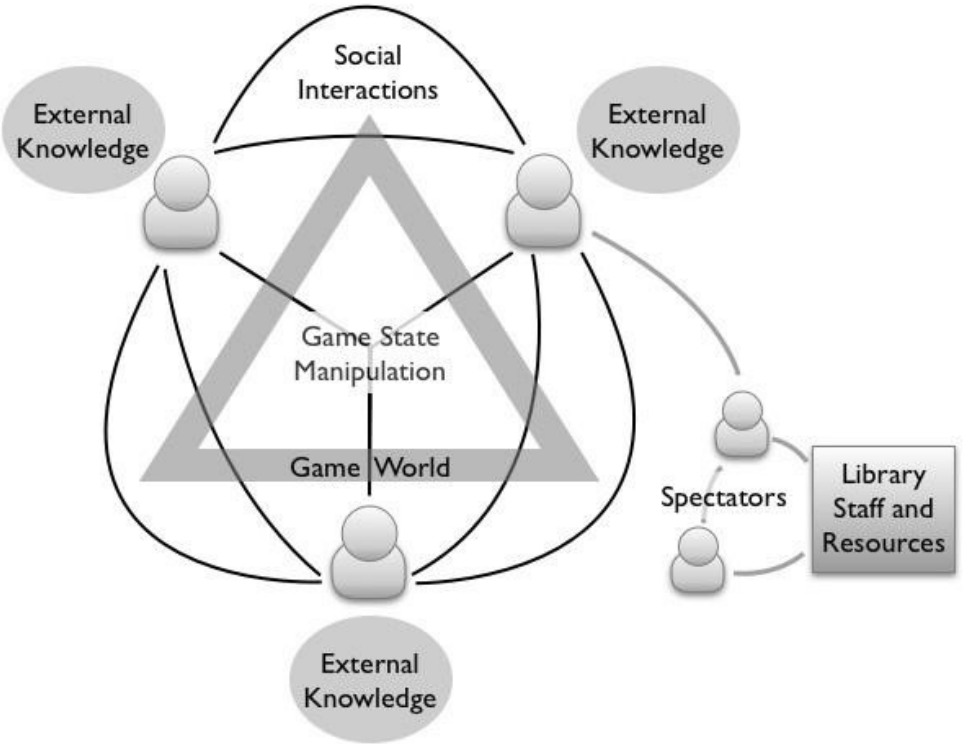

Figure 2: Framework for the library gaming experience (Nicholson, 2010)

This framework can be used in any gaming setting that is facilitated. In the classroom, the teacher may have some students playing a game while other students observe, reflect, and engage with other resources (including the teacher). This happens in chess tournaments, where a chess game in one room is broadcast to another room where attendees can discuss what is going on. In a sporting arena or a video game competition, the spectators are part of the event, as they cheer, boo, and yell advice from the stands. This fishbowl approach can be valuable when resources prevent an instructor from having enough copies of a game for everyone in the class to play.

Framework of Game Experiences

To help library staff with the process of choosing the correct game, I developed a model of game experiences known as SNAKS, which is an acronym for:

1. Strategy: Games that emphasize the decisions players make
2. Narrative: Games that focus on storytelling and roleplaying
3. Action: Games that require dexterity, hand-eye coordination and quick reactions
4. Knowledge: Games that explore outside information a player posseses
5. Social: Games that create moments of social engagement between people

This framework is developed from several common points of engagement that are important to libraries, and can help library staff make the transition from library goals to the selection of games (Nicholson, 2010).

Here is the SNAKS framework, consisting of five major types of gaming experiences:

1. **Strategy:** Strategy game experiences predominantly depend on the decisions that the player makes in changing the game state. *Chess* or the *Civilization* series fit here. Strategy games are good if the goal is to develop decision-making or analytical skills, and can serve to deepen relationships between players who come for a strategy game program on a regular basis.
2. **Narrative:** Narrative game experiences emphasize the story of the game, and allow players to deeply engage in a shared narrative. Tabletop roleplaying games like *Dungeons and Dragons* or *Mouse Guard* fulfill a narrative goal much better than most digital role-playing games. If the goal of the program is to improve literacy, then games that have a strong narrative component are a good choice. These games do not scale as well for many players and usually require more time to prepare than other choices.
3. **Action:** Action game experiences mainly rely on the ability of the player to change the game state quickly. Many digital games, such as *Mario Kart* or the *Halo* series emphasize this aspect of the game experience model. Action games tend to attract a younger and more competitive audience, so if the goal is simply to bring players into the library, action games work well for this. Many of these games can be set into a mode where multiple players compete over a few minutes, so this type of game can work well with a second social environment where players can engage with each other and library staff when they aren't playing.
4. **Knowledge:** Knowledge game experiences mainly take advantage of the external knowledge that the player brings to the table. Recreational games like *Scrabble* and *Trivial Pursuit* and many educational games fit in this category. These games can work well as family or classroom activities. If the librarian customizes the questions, then a trivia game can meet an educational goal as well. These games fit well in school libraries as they can easily support the activities of the classroom.
5. **Social:** Social game experiences emphasize the direct engagement between players. Most party games, such as Dixit, bring about this goal, as do team-based games such as Werewolf (Nicholson, 2010). Social games can serve to break down barriers between different patron groups, especially if teams are created with the goal of representation of different groups on each team. They also can handle large groups, and adapt well to situations where players come in and out of the gaming sessions.

It is important to note that games can fulfill multiple categories. Wits and Wagers, for example, is a trivia game where players bet on which player gave the best answer to a question. This game facilitates both a Knowledge and a Social game experience. Many fighting game and real-time strategy games combine both Strategy and Action. The framework is designed to help librarians select the type of gaming experiences they want to provide (based upon the intended audience and goals of the event), and then use that choice to select appropriate games. This flexibility is useful for a librarian looking to build up a collection of games that can be used in multiple types of gaming programs. My aforementioned 2010 book is organized using these five categories and helps the librarian make the connection between library goals and specific game titles.

Case Study One: Game Design Workshop

In rural South Carolina, Donald Dennis, a librarian who also has experience working in the game industry, created a series of game design workshops for young adults as part of the BYTES (Bunnelle Youth Technology Experience Series) program. This program targeted middle and high school students through four different public libraries in Georgetown Country and drew many disadvantaged students from the area.

Some of the goals of the project were to increase literacy, to develop new skills, to encourage creativity and innovation, and to help participants see some potential future career paths. Many of the participants had little ambition or vision for their future. A goal of this program was to help these students find their passion and learn how to use that passion to build an educational and career path.

The students engaged with many forms of media creation, one of which was game design. Participants started by playing a variety of tabletop and digital games to increase their awareness and knowledge of different game mechanisms. Students then worked with basic game creation toolkits such as MIT's *Scratch* and Microsoft's *Kodu*, which provide the basic components needed to create a game. Students can select different components, add their own graphics, sound, and logic, and create games. As they do this, they learn programming concepts, logical thinking, testing and revising, and the overall process that goes into creating a game. Over the course of the program, the library worked with 560 participants and 75% of these participants completed the program. This program was so successful that it has since been opened up to adults as well.

Throughout the course, Dennis worked with the students to help them not only create games, but also to understand where their skills might be useful in the gaming industry. Dennis shares an anecdote that many of these participants did not have college plans, but by the end of the workshop, they had discovered areas of interest and were starting the process of applying to the local community college. By tapping something that these students were passionate about—gaming—the library helped them take a step toward a career, even when they previously saw no future for themselves (Donald Dennis, Personal Communication, Dec. 12, 2012).

Key Findings

It is easy for a library to have a gaming program that is fun. It is more difficult for a library to have a gaming program that is justifiable to skeptics and funders. To have a program that is resilient to critics, the library needs to make sure that their program meets the goals of the library. One of the challenges for a librarian setting up a gaming program is deciding which games to use. A temptation is for a library staff member or volunteer to choose a game that he or she is enthusiastic about and build a program around that game. The problem with this method is that the game may not be the best match for the players and the context of the gaming program. For example, some libraries have run programs around *World of Warcraft*. While this is a popular game, it requires considerable effort to install, patch, create accounts, and get participants involved. Those who are experienced with the game can get frustrated using a computer without their favorite game modifications. Because of everything involved, *World of Warcraft* is not usually the best choice for a library, regardless of goals, patrons, or playing context.

Instead of starting with the game, libraries should start with their mission statement, goals, and target communities. By designing a gaming program to meet the reasons why the library is funded, it is easier for a librarian to justify its existence to skeptics in the community. Once the library has determined which of its goals a gaming program addresses, the library can look at the framework above to decide which interactions of the facilitated gaming event model are the most important. They can then choose games that emphasize those types of interactions. For example, if the library wants to use the gaming program to break down barriers between patrons of different age groups, then the game should emphasize social interaction instead of strategic brilliance. One way of creating opportunities around quiet strategic games is by providing other spaces that facilitate the desired outcomes. For example, creating a chess club where players are not allowed to speak loudly while games are going on will hamper players in developing new connections, but creating a second space where discussions are encouraged and even facilitated can make up for the lack of social engagement in gameplay.

In review, the process of creating a gaming experience for the library starts with library staff determining which aspects of the library mission and goals and which community groups will be served by the gaming program. The staff then considers the model of library gaming experiences and selects the type of engagement that they want to emphasize. They also determine other aspects of the program, such as if it is a tournament or for open play, if they want a cooperative or competitive environment, if they want to focus on analog or digital games (or both), and what age groups are going to be involved with the games. With all of these decisions made, the library staff is then ready to select the games for the program.

Some of the common outcomes that libraries doing gaming programs have reported can be found in Table 1. This list of outcomes can help a library designing an assessment for a gaming program as to what types of changes other libraries have found in patrons. This is not a complete list, and each library should create outcomes based upon their larger-scale mission and goals.

Table 1. Outcomes of gaming programs commonly reported by libraries (Nicholson, 2009).

Outcome	Percentage Reporting
The reputation of the library improved with participants.	77.97%
Users attended the gaming program and returned to the library another time for non-gaming services.	76.27%
Users attended the event with friends and improved their social connections with those friends.	73.45%
Users attended the gaming program and also used other library services while there.	68.36%
Users improved their social connections with other previously unknown members of the community.	65.54%
Users improved their skills/knowledge.	38.98%
Users requested new and changed services.	38.98%
Users attended the gaming program, but did not return to the library.	14.69%
Users not involved in the gaming program indicated annoyance regarding the activity.	9.60%

After spending years refining the information literacy game *Bibliobouts*, the authors wrote a book on how to make successful information literacy games. Some of their best practices include:

1. Integrating the game into the Learning Management System for a course.
2. Providing players with information literacy instruction before putting them into a game space.
3. Integrating the game into the course assignments and grading systems.
4. Creating opportunities in the game for students to reflect upon their learning.
5. Ensuring the new players to the game have a forum to get assistance (Markey, Leeder, & Rieh, 2014).

These findings enforce a key lesson for librarians looking to use games for information literacy—the games need to matter. Most information literacy games present the player with an information need instead of creating a game experience around an information need that the player already has. They are designed as "just-in-case" information literacy training. When players believe they already know how to search, presenting a training activity for an information need that they don't care about leads to unmotivated players. Taking the lesson from *Bibliobouts* suggests that library games for information literacy need to be thought of as "just-in-time" training. When users are seeking something and are frustrated, a game that builds its learning objectives dynamically around the topic area of interest to a user is more likely to succeed.

Case Study Two: Gaming in an Academic Library

Academic libraries are also interested in using games to engage patrons. Elzen & Roush (2013) report on a gaming program they created for outreach and information literacy instruction at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin. To avoid upsetting students who wanted to use the library during the semester, they created programs that ran during the weekend before finals as a study break activity. Students would take a break from studying, play a few recreational board or video games, and then go back to work. The librarians also put out carts with games, puzzles, and other game-related items from the library collection and found that this increased awareness and circulation of these types of items.

Marketing gaming programs at an academic library proved to be a challenge. The library's marketing channels, typically used to convey information about academic resources, were not very useful in conveying information about gaming events. They started with Facebook, but realized that most of the likes to their event pages were coming from library staff and colleagues. They found that more traditional word-of-mouth marketing and flyers in the residence halls proved to be the most effective of the different marketing channels explored (Elzen & Roush, 2013).

The authors also reported the usefulness of partnering with student organizations on campus. They worked with the *Magic: The Gathering* club on campus to host an event for students to come and play out of a shared pool of cards. They also worked with the Lawrence University Gaming Club to plan a large-scale *Super Smash Bros. Brawl* tournament during National Library Week. In both of these events, partnering with student groups allowed the library to reach new groups of attendees and gave the library the opportunity to raise awareness of other library services in a playful environment (Elzen & Roush, 2013).

The authors noted that students who attended these events developed new social connections with others, so they decided to do a survey to collect some data about the impact of the gaming programs. They learned that about 77% of the students who attended the gaming program reported that they came away from the gaming event with a stronger sense of being part of the University community. About 46% learned more about library staff members, and about 30% reported feeling more comfortable in the library. Only about 23% reported that the gaming program did not affect their previously-held views about the library (Elzen & Roush, 2013).

As students use more online resources, they are less likely to physically visit the academic library on campus. Gaming programs can serve as a bridge to bring students into an academic library, help them get to know other students and library staff, raise awareness about collections and services that the library offers, and can make students feel more comfortable in the library.

Assessment Considerations

Given that in some communities, gaming in libraries can be controversial, assessment is an important part of the planning process. If the library staff has followed the process presented here, then they can create assessment tools that measure if the original library mission and goals have been met. One challenge that library staff are always faced with is what assessment questions to ask that might provide meaningful information, so many turn to basic statistics, such as how many people showed up for the program. This data is not as valuable as understanding the difference the program made in the lives of attendees along the lines of the library's goals.

This is the point where programs that come out of the passion of a library staff member or volunteer are problematic. Since these programs were not developed out of the mission or goals of the library, it is difficult to assess them in a way that produces ample justification for skeptics. If a program is challenged by funders and there is no data or anecdotes demonstrating how the program meets library goals, the resulting negative publicity can make it difficult to receive future funding.

Given the importance of assessment, planning for an assessable library gaming program needs to be part of the overall planning process. This may change the games that are selected, what kind of marketing is used, how the games are presented to players, and how the games are facilitated. It can also change how the library staff engages with players and spectators and if other library resources are brought into the gaming program. By planning out how the gaming program will be assessed at the start, choices can be made to increase the likelihood of useful and meaningful assessments.

A typical library program assessment is to count the number of people who attend a program. This does not say anything about the difference the program made. While having many people show up for a program is a good start, it does not tell the whole story. To start with developing an assessment, the library needs to list out the desired outcomes for the program. These outcomes should be written from the viewpoint of the participant, and how the program will change the participant. Statements like "The library will attract 100 people to the gaming program" or "The library will put out 20 board games" are not outcomes based upon how the program changes the participant.

If the library staff cannot think of an adequate assessment, then perhaps that particular gaming program is not an appropriate match for the library. Gaming is not always appropriate for libraries, and following this assessment procedure will help library staff members decide if the program proposed by an eager volunteer is a good match for the library.

Future Needs

Those who are creating games for learning wanting to partner with libraries can use the information presented here to develop a program that can meet the needs of libraries. These models are appropriate in any type of library—public, academic, school, or special (such as hospital libraries, corporate libraries, or museum libraries). By learning more about the mission and goals of the library and the audiences that

the library serves, people seeking to partner with a library can pitch their ideas in line with library needs, rather than personal preference. Library staff members have limited space and resources, and have to decide what programs to promote and what programs to turn away. By making the connection between gaming and a specific library in the proposal, it is easier for a library staff member to understand how a gaming program aligns with library goals.

Case Study Three: Live Action Roleplaying in the Public Library

The community-based outreach program of the Because Play Matters game lab at the Syracuse University School of Information Studies that I run is called the Game Designers' Guild. This group is open to the public, and members create games for community organizations. The Liverpool Public Library in Liverpool, New York, was planning to create a life-size version of *Candy Land* to celebrate the donation of three dinosaur statues outside the library. When I learned about these plans to create a life-size board game where players would draw cards and move to spaces, I volunteered to lead the Game Designers' Guild to design something more engaging.

The target audience was children from kindergarten and up, so we wanted to come up with something that would have different types of activities for different age groups of kids. We also wanted to incorporate information literacy aspects, along with teamwork and narrative, so we used the model of a live-action role-playing (LARP) game. One model for a LARP is based upon a series of stations, where a team of players need to work together to explore the narrative. The initial brainstorming took place at the Game Designers' Guild, and then I wrote up the ideas and fleshed out the game.

The narrative was that a momma dinosaur had lost her eggs, and we needed to go back in time and help her out. The time tunnel that we had was weak, however, and could only send little people through. The plan was to transform the participants into dinosaurs and send them back in teams so they could work together to reunite the mother and her eggs.

Participants would first learn the need from a scientist in the library. They would then do research to figure out what kind of dinosaur they wanted to be. After this, they would be transformed with face painting, creating a tail, and choosing a special ability that fit their dinosaur such as Flying or Roar. They would then be put into groups, and head outside through the time tunnel. Outside, they would face a series of challenges, such as finding food for the weak (vegetarian) momma, crossing a sticky swamp, and scaring away predators. As they finished, they would end up in the common grounds to roleplay with other "dinosaurs" and enjoy refreshments. This game, Be the Dinosaur, is available online at http://scottnicholson.com/pubs/bethedinosaur.pdf.

This game script was handed over to the library, who began planning the event. As the day approached, I reached out to the library to determine what our Game Designers' Guild volunteers should plan on doing, and learned that the library had changed the event somewhat. They were afraid that the

narrative and game elements would be too complex for the participants, so they replaced most of the challenges with crafting activities. The event shifted from a game-based event to a play-based event, where children could play with dinosaur-themed activities, but the live-action game elements were lost. On the day of the event, the participants still had a good time, got to explore dinosaur books and activities, and the goal of celebrating the dinosaur statue was met.

The moral of this story is that game designers looking to partner with libraries need to realize that the goals and outcomes of the library are more important than the creation of a good game. Libraries have traditionally been more about play, in that they are spaces for a user to explore, instead of games with a specific goal. Recognizing how the play aspects of games can merge with library services can help for a smoother partnership that leads to a program that library staff will be comfortable facilitating.

Best Practices

What follows are some ideas for library gaming events or programs that those who make games for learning could partner with the library to run. As mentioned before, not all of these programs will be an appropriate match for all libraries, but these are examples of ways partnerships between those who make games and libraries have been explored.

1. **Presenting public talks:** The first, and most traditional, idea is for someone who makes learning games is to give a public talk at a library about an aspect of game design, game creation, or the gaming industry. This type of talk can be the first step in a longer relationship with a library, and serves as the catalyst to bring together library staff and library patrons interested in gaming. To those who are passionate about playing games, a peek inside the game creation or publication process can be fascinating. This type of talk can be used to judge interest and to recruit volunteers to help with other gaming programs.
2. **Enhancing existing library programs**: Many libraries have found success in starting with an audience and program that is already successful, such as summer reading programs, and adding games. The benefit of starting with an existing library program is that an audience and desired outcome is already defined. The game designer can work with the library staff to craft a game experience that will enhance the existing library program. The advantage of this approach is that it is less likely to draw scrutiny from those skeptical of gaming in libraries
3. **Developing information literacy games:** Many libraries see a significant challenge in improving the information literacy skills of their patrons. These skills involve defining an information need, searching library or publicly available resources, determining which resources are trustworthy, and combining those resources to meet the information need. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, many of these information literacy games are not well-designed educational games, so an opportunity for those making learning games is to create good educational games to help library patrons with information literacy skills.

4. **Running gaming events:** Another type of event that can be run as a one-time activity or an ongoing event is a recreational gaming event. At these events, analog and/or digital games are presented to attendees, and library staff and volunteers are available to facilitate the gaming experience for players. For this type of program to be successful, it is important to match the games to the age groups and the time available for play. For example, a single-player adventure game is not a good match when the desire is to have an event where people come to play a short game together to get to know each other. There is a temptation when running one of these programs for the gaming expert to choose games that he or she likes, but it is important that the input from the library staff be taken into account in deciding what games will be a good match.
5. **Facilitating game creation activities:** As libraries are adding Makerspaces with 3D printers and other creation tools, they are becoming more comfortable in being a place of creation. A game creation activity, such as a one-day game jam or a longer programming or board game development class, fits well with libraries seeking to encourage patrons to create instead of just consume. These game creation events can be themed by basing the event upon a special event in the community or a topic area of interest. These events can be focused toward children, teens, adults, or families, and can focus on digital or analog games. Someone who creates learning games could be very valuable in helping the library to run a game creation program.

Resources

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Researchers

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Organizations, Online Classes and Podcasts

Games and Gaming Round Table, part of the American Library Association

Nicholson, S. (2009). *Games in Libraries Course* (http://www.gamesinlibraries.org/course): A 30-video graduate level course about gaming in libraries

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