

# Video Game-Based Learning: An Emerging Paradigm for Instruction

Kurt D. Squire

Over the past decade, eLearning has been a dominant paradigm for the electronic development, management, and distribution of learning materials. But as many critics have noted, most eLearning is nothing more than online lectures or course notes, and the basic organizing metaphors of traditional classroom learning—knowledge as discrete and abstract facts, learning as “acquisition” of content, and therefore instruction as the organization, dissemination, and management of that content—have gone unchanged (cf. Bednar, Cunningham, Duffy, & Perry, 1992; Fodor, 2000; Sfard, 1998). The promise of eLearning, to make customized, accessible learning experiences, has given way to more mundane pursuits such as free online content. In the words of Cross and Hamilton (2002):

Corporate eLearning is a powerful paradigm, but it has strayed from its inspired beginnings. Poised to become a driver of business performance, eLearning lost its way as vendors reached for quick economic gains at the expense of long-term strategic position. ... eLearning devolved into quick-to-sell IT-only content libraries, bland Web course designs, and unfocused, minimally tailored portal solutions. This was a boon to the training department, but not the business as a whole, and the value of hassle-free turnkey campuses and trainer-empowering LMSs [Learning Management Systems] became the low hanging fruit in the marketplace. (p. 1)

In short, many eLearning leaders recognize that publishing content online is not synonymous with improving learning or performance. In fact, so-called content (i.e., declarative knowledge in the form of information bits

Interactive digital media, or video games, are a powerful new medium. They offer immersive experiences in which players solve problems. Players learn more than just facts—ways of seeing and understanding problems so that they “become” different kinds of people. “Serious games” coming from business strategy, advergaming, and entertainment gaming embody these features and point to a future paradigm for eLearning. Building on interviews with leading designers of serious games, this article presents case studies of three organizations building serious games, coming from different perspectives but arriving at similar conclusions. This article argues that such games challenge us to rethink the role of information, tools, and aesthetics in a digital age.



PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT QUARTERLY, 21(2) PP. 7–36

© 2008 International Society for Performance Improvement

Published online in Wiley InterScience (www.interscience.wiley.com). DOI: 10.1002/piq.20020