



Games, Geeks and the Parent's Dilemma - Audio

Introduction

Key:

AS: Angela Saini
B: Boy
G: Girl
F: Female
VC: Victoria Cooper
KS: Kieron Sheehy
PS: Phil Stuart
TF: Tia Fisher
J: James
C: Caroline
V: Vicky
Fel: Felicity
Ba: Barney
DH: Dawn Hallybone
Mi: Miranda
Ma: Martha
H: Hamish
JPG: John-Paul Gayford

B: I think I was 7 when I got a Wii and that was Mario Kart and Sonic.

B: I played FIFA, skateboarding games.

G: I used to play Sims. You get to, like, create houses.

G: RuneScape, adventurous and set, sort of, in the medieval times – very cool.

B: Recently I've been into this game called Super Paper Mario.

B: I like sporty games like FIFA 12 and Wii Sports.

B: And there's Assassin's Creed.

B: Where you are going around Rome or Constantinople assassinating people.

G: Angry Birds. Best thing to do in your free time, to be honest. You never really stop; it's very addictive.

B: I was probably about 12 when I got an Xbox and I got Call of Duty.

B: Everybody was playing on Call of Duty. It's a cult, it really is.

AS They play them on Xboxes and PlayStations, on Wiis and Smartphones, on PCs and with each other over the internet. Video games are very

firmly part of our children's lives. And they are for more and more of us. In 2011, UK game sales beat film and TV for the first time. The average age of the British gamer isn't somewhere in the teens as you might expect; it's about 37. My name is Angela Saini and, yes, I play the occasional game. I am also a science writer and in this podcast we are going to explore some of the reasons why the subject of children playing video games is such a potent one.

Hardly a week goes by without some news story warning about the health concerns and social dangers of video games. They say the sedentary nature of gaming puts children at risk of obesity. They warn how games are addictive, violent, unsociable, dangerous. There are fears about e-safety, the risks of online gaming. It's little wonder that when they are in the hands of our children, games can provoke powerful anxieties in parents, like this one.

P: With boys, it's really, really difficult to get them to stop. When they do stop, they are quite aggressive and, actually, we have awful temper tantrums. And I find that actually what it does to me is it makes me feel incredible negative towards the whole area of computer games.

[Child argues]

AS: The battle over screen time is a familiar one for many parents.

Child: My turn, my turn.

AS: According to one recent report, the average young adolescent in Britain spends just over six hours per day in front of screens. However, many adults believe that video games can have huge benefits for children, so long as they not played excessively.

Child: Jump, jump, yeah, that's it.

AS: They are exciting worlds offering unlimited imaginative play with huge educational and social benefits and the capacity to improve skills like strategic thinking, co-operation and creativity.

There are so many ongoing debates about the disadvantages and benefits of video games for children. It's a rich field which researchers at the Open University's Faculty of Education and Language Studies are currently exploring.

VC: So in terms of working with children and young people, I was very interested in exploring...

AS: At the Faculty's centre for Childhood Development and Learning, qualitative researcher, Dr Victoria Cooper, is working on getting to the heart of the gaming experience from the child's perspective.

VC: Children and young people are now choosing to interact and engage with new technologies including gaming and it's, sort of, presented a shift in how children appear to play and to interact. So there are a number of dilemmas and debates and it's quite a rich field and everybody seems to have opinion on gaming – parents will have opinions, researchers, educators, designers.

We all have different opinions and they all seem quite different and diverse so it's very interesting in exploring that.

KS My research area is looking at inclusive education and inclusion and the way in which new technologies can support this.

AS: Dr Kieron Sheehy is also at the Centre for Childhood Development and Learning.

KS: I am interested in ways that new technologies can create affordances that allow groups of children who might previously have been excluded from certain activities and interactions from engaging with them. So those barriers might be ones of age, it might be ones of ethnicity, it might be ones of gender, it might be due to physical impairment or having learning difficulty. Now each of those factors can be addressed by the use of these new technologies.

[Music]

AS: Over the next few tracks, we'll be finding out more about this work at the Open University. You can also hear some first hand accounts from a number of perspectives.

Mi: It's quite hard to get a child off a game that's really into the game.

AS: Children tell it like it is.

Mi: It's like pinching a lollipop off a little tiny child -

[Laughter]

Mi: - it's probably going to be impossible.

AS: Parents talk about the pluses and minuses.

V: It's important that they are able to treat it with the respect that it needs, you know, have fun with it, but there are other things to do in life.

AS: A games designer outlines the power of this developing cultural medium.

M: What's really exciting about the, kind of, team audiences is it's a hugely exciting area to be working to an audience that is so passionate about that content itself.

AS: And teachers explain why, for them, games go to the top or the bottom of the class.

F: They come into school and we do creative writing. Some of them, really, have not got anything to write about. "What did you do in the holidays?" "Well, I played on the computer."

AS: And we'll find out just what a geek is and how to tell if you have one on your hands.

Ma: Everybody knows what a geek is. They are just someone who is quite nerdy and like glasses and like, "Oh, I just killed your dragon," and just like that really.

AS: And in the final track I'll be discussing what we have heard with Victoria Cooper and Kieron Sheely, along with psychologist Mark Griffiths and a seasoned gamer. In the next track, a games designer shares his insights into the way children play video games and how he designs them. And we hear about one vital aspect of children playing online, e-safety.