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Teton County Library Gaming Statement

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The Teton County Library offers access to a wide variety of games in various formats to its patrons through patron check outs and/or for use at the library during open hours and during library programs. This includes video games, gaming consoles, computer games accessible on public computers and laptops, board games, and role-playing games such as Magic, the Gathering.

Library staff and associates have fielded questions from the community regarding the provision and use of video and computer games in the public library setting. We are providing this gaming statement to inform the public of our rationale for gaming.

Video and computer games have been shown to hold educational value. In a post for School Library Journal's Teen Librarian Toolbox blog, Karen Jensen contends that, "although it is easy to dismiss gaming as a superfluous activity, the truth of the matter is that there are a great number of education benefits that come from engaging in gaming"(Jensen, 2013). Some of these education benefits include computer literacy, basic literacy skills such as multiplatform storytelling, supporting student success in general education curriculum that is becoming increasingly more game-based, and developing some 21st Century Education skills such as coding. Regarding the latter, the author specifically cites Minecraft as "a game that was designed to help teach kids coding in a fun, game like environment" (Jensen, 2013). Minecraft is a game that is available to play on youth wing laptops and desktop PCs. For more information regarding these points please see the following web article: <http://www.teenlibrariantoolbox.com/2013/08/geek-is-the-new-black-benefits-of-electronic-gaming-in-the-library-a-defense/>

According to Buchanan and Vanden Elzen (2012), "[...] video games have distinguishing traits as a medium: they are visual, interactive, and based on simulations. These traits require and reward some traditional and new literacies" (p. 22). For more information about how video games require and reward various types of new and traditional literacies, please see the following article, published in *Education Libraries*: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ989511.pdf>

Finally, education value lies in video games in that playing them have shown to provide cognitive benefits. Some of these cognitive benefits include improving coordination, problem solving skills, memory, attention and concentration, brain speed, multi-tasking, and social skills. For more information regarding the cognitive benefits of video games, see the following opinion piece:

<https://www.engadget.com/2017/02/09/8-cognitive-benefits-of-playing-video-games-for-kids/?guccounter=1>

As stated, the library provides video games in our collection for patrons to check out. However, only patrons that own their own gaming console can use these resources in their homes. In order to foster

equal access to all the resources that the library provides, we supply video game console systems in the library space so that those patrons who may not be able to afford to own their own gaming console can still use these popular resources. Providing this access helps to bridge the gap known as the digital divide. “In a time where more and more information is moving to a technology based environment, an increasing number of kids are learning that they suffer from what is known as the “Technology Gap” or the “Digital Divide”. Children and teens growing up in low income homes do not have the same access to technology as their more affluent peers and they suffer from this lack of access” (Jensen, 2013). At the public library we’re offering free and equal access to our resources by providing gaming console systems in our library space for our patrons to utilize while they visit.

Video games bring community members into the public library and connect them with people of similar interests, while exposing them to the wide variety of other resources and materials the library has to offer at the same time. Video games are a resource that library staff continue to recognize something that children and teens in our community want and need. Providing patrons with what they want and need helps the library remain relevant and useful to them. “You cannot alienate a generation of library users by denying them access to a key component of their technology needs and expect them to later come back and find the library both viable and relevant. By eliminating gaming in the library we will communicate to today’s youth that we do not have what they need and want, that we are not a relevant community resource, and we will be hard pressed to convince them otherwise at some later date” (Jensen, 2013).

Additionally, when young library users come in to use video gaming systems at the library and check games out, we are getting them in the space and providing them with a window to see what other resources we have available to them. Getting patrons into the library with video games will ultimately expose them to the many other educational resources we have, like books that are just right for them! Library Staff are always available to guide patrons to appropriate resources. This includes video games as much as it does books.

In conclusion, the library supports gaming of all kinds for the patrons of the Teton County Library. We support the provision of video games for check out and use in our library because of their educational value, their provision helps to bridge the digital divide and providing them helps the library remain relevant to our patrons and exposes them to all the other great resources we have to offer.

Bibliography

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