

Postsecondary Play: The Role of Games and Social Media in Higher Education

William G. Tierney, Zoë B. Corwin, Tracey Fullerton, and Gisele Ragusa, eds. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. Acknowledgments, glossary, contributors, index. 336 pp. \$44.95 cloth. ISBN: 9871421413068

In this anthology, educational researchers, game theorists, and learning-assessment experts reflect on the technological and cultural changes shaping higher education and how games and social media are contributing to this evolution. The volume affords a thorough consideration of the benefits, timing, challenges, and concerns that accompany this massive transformation in traditional institutions.

The editors give primary importance to the need for a common language to connect practitioners and academics of the educational and game worlds, so *Postsecondary Play* both draws on the expertise of established voices and offers a readily accessible text. Their inclusion of a glossary marks a step forward for the emerging field of games and learning. The book plainly defines play, gamification, and social capital and establishes that the discourse about these topics involves a growing consensus. Audiences seeking to develop their knowledge of how games, social media, and higher learning intersect would do well to take note.

The volume is divided into three connected parts. “Part I: What Is the Current Landscape of Higher Education?” outlines the complexities of college admission, transition, and social life. Although sta-

tistics regarding access to higher education are explored in depth by this grouping of authors, there is faint mention of how a socio-cultural perspective relates to low-income students. Given that more than half of students attending public schools in 2014 came from nonwhite backgrounds, the inattention seems like a missed opportunity.

Those unfamiliar with the market forces at work in higher education will benefit from reading this section. Laura Perna’s chapter explores the socioeconomic disparities in the pathways to higher education and to training in technology. David Conely and Mary Seburn’s essay focuses on students’ use of social media to navigate the transition between high school and college. They conclude that while the transition process still requires “privileged knowledge,” well-designed technology could help open college doors to underrepresented students.

“Part II: What’s In a Game?” gives readers the opportunity to consider games and social media in the context of higher learning. Game experts will likely recognize descriptions provided of the goals, systems, assessment, engagement, and feedback embedded in games. The risks of preserving outdated pedagogies form a key message here. Employing technology to replicate textbooks or maintain top-down, lecture-based teaching methods will not help institutions. Instead, the authors encourage stakeholders to think of learning as a cocreation. Henry Jenkins and Adam S. Khan, for example, explore the potentials of networked learning, collective intelligence, demonstrations of student mastery, and radical shifts in testing protocol.

Katie Salen takes readers back to the

analog origins of basketball, illustrating how engagement is rooted in the power of play. She describes game-like learning environments as socially situated, challenge based, and student centered. Readers familiar with James Paul Gee will recall his enthusiasm for the promise that games offer as learning tools. He argues that passion will be the driving force behind institutional success or failure in the expansion of “e learning.”

“Part III: What Do We Know about Games and What Do We Need to Learn?” asks readers to consider the impact such technologies will have in higher education. In this section, Valerie Shute, Matthew Ventura, Yoon Jeon Kim, and Lubin Wang turn their attention toward the assessment of competencies that can be embedded in well-designed games. Readers tempted to enlist games to evaluate factual retention should pay close attention to the authors’ definition of learning and note that it involves systems thinking, causal reasoning, complex problem solving, and divergent thinking.

In subsequent chapters, Nicole Ellison, Donghee Yvette Whon, and Carrie Heeter examine the social interactions embedded in and surrounding games, and they make the most explicit connection between social-media activity and gaming in this book. Gisele Ragusa explores the role of gender as it relates to gaming and social media in the college landscape. Her chapter is especially poignant, given the expressions of misogyny that surfaced during the #gamergate controversy of August 2014. Future work from editors regarding the intersection of gender equity, gaming, and higher education will prove invaluable to scholars and practitioners.

The final chapter by Steven Weiland (titled: “How Much Technology Is Enough?”), questions how we will fund, organize, store, and apply knowledge in the coming digital era. Cautionary tales abound throughout the book, but I wish they all were as transparently stated as Weiland’s. Although *Postsecondary Play* does not overtly (or impolitely) ask institutional stakeholders if they are up for the challenge of accepting the new role of students as active agents or “players” in the game of higher education, the implications of this radical change in practice run throughout the volume.

Overall, *Postsecondary Play* summons a chorus of experts and articulates their varied and informative perspectives through clearly written and well-organized essays. Those hoping to understand better the state of higher education and the role that games and social media will play in its development should certainly read this book. Readers should also consider playing the games referenced in this volume. Specialists can often explain motivation, failure, scaffolding, and assessment in context to higher learning quite eloquently, as they have here. But unless readers engage on a visceral level with game play, they will not understand the big picture. Find and play: *Application Crunch*, *The Sims*, *Mission: Admission*, *Foldit*, *Civilization*, *Newton’s Playground*, *Whywille*, *Futurebound*, *Portal 2* and more. One does not need to become a hard-core gamer to grasp the intensity of learning that occurs within and surrounding games. Please, just go play!

—M. Kristana Textor, *University of Rochester, Rochester, NY*