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Topic: Digital Technology

The following texts deal with digital technology and its use by young people.

Text A: This is an edited article from a British newspaper describing recent research into the effects of using digital technology.

257 minutes: the time teens can spend on computers each day before harming wellbeing

Parents should worry less about the amount of time their children spend using smartphones, computers and playing video games because screen time is actually beneficial, the University of Oxford has concluded.

The rise in technology in the past decade has led to fears that teenagers could be damaging their social skills and mental health by spending increasing amounts of time online or immersed in a virtual world.

Yet when researchers at Oxford University quizzed 120,000 15-year-olds about their wellbeing and compared it to screen time, they found the use of gadgets had a positive impact.

In fact, wellbeing peaked at four hours and 17 minutes of computer use a day before starting to dip again, suggesting devices have a Goldilocks* Zone where the amount of screen time is 'just right.' For smartphones the 'sweet spot'* was around two hours and one hour 40 minutes for video games.

The researchers say that digital connectivity may enhance creativity, communication skills and development and conclude there is little to support fears that spending time on digital devices is harmful.

"Previous research has oversimplified the relationship between digital screen time and the mental wellbeing of teenagers," said Dr Andrew Przybylski, of the Oxford Internet Institute.

"Overall we found that modern use of digital technology is not intrinsically harmful and may have advantages in a connected world unless digital devices are overused or interfere with schoolwork or after school activities.

"Our research suggests that some connectivity is probably better than none and there are moderate levels that as in the story of Goldilocks are just right for young people."

However the study did not take into account whether physical health was affected by spending too much time staring at screens, or calculate the cumulative effect of using multiple devices.

In 2014, researchers in China found that too much internet use caused brain shrinkage, while psychiatrists say children can become hyper-aroused by gadgets, a condition dubbed 'electronic screen syndrome.' Studies have also shown that using computers, smartphones or tablets before bedtime disrupts sleep.

Sir Anthony Seldon of the University of Buckingham said screen time was a 'very significant concern'.

"Intelligent use of computers can enhance the life of teenagers but overall they are spending vastly too much time online," he added.

“Real people, real exercise, real environments and above all real relationships in the flesh are what young people need to develop into healthy adults. I’m extremely worried by the extensive and indiscriminate exposure of adolescents to computers. It should be a very significant concern.”

The researchers of the new study agreed that electronic devices could be harmful if youngsters were using them to avoid exercise, sleep or avoid making friends. But they also said they could actually be beneficial for development.

Co-author Dr Netta Weinstein of Cardiff University said: “There have been theories that digital use is disrupting more satisfying pursuits. However, the role of digital technology has a central role in everyday life and online gaming is now a shared way of playing.

“There is good reason to think digital technology used in moderation is not disruptive and may even support development.”

Glossary

**Goldilocks* – a character from a children’s story who sits on chairs that are too big and too small, before finding one that is ‘just right’

*‘*sweet spot*’ – the perfect time

Text B: This edited newspaper article, published in the U.S.A., investigates the growing popularity of video gaming as a competitive school sport.

If you think about what constitutes a sport, the contest that took place recently at Robert Morris University checked many of the boxes.

Did the competitors put in many hours of practice? Yes. Did they possess physical and mental gifts? Affirmative. Was teamwork a crucial ingredient for success? Absolutely.

The only thing missing, really, was perspiration — it's hard to break a sweat when you're sitting in a climate-controlled room, moving little more than your fingers.

This was the second High School Esports* Invitational, a video game competition that serves as an unofficial regional championship for many Chicago-area schools. Sixteen teams flocked to the computer-packed gaming arena at Robert Morris' downtown Chicago campus to sort out who was best at the online fantasy game "League of Legends."

But for some, the event offered more than the chance to win a trophy and a \$1,200 first-place prize. It was another step toward making video gaming a mainstream sport on par with baseball, football or auto racing.

"NASCAR's* a sport, right?" said Tony Pape, who coaches the esports team at Burbank's Reavis High School. "They're sitting in a chair, they're using controls, same as these kids here. (Gaming) is not as physically demanding but it's mentally demanding. It demands a lot of teamwork, coordination and practice. I consider it a sport, absolutely."

While competitive gaming has been around since at least the early 1970s, the latest iteration, driven by wildly popular online titles, has reached unprecedented heights. Professional gamers sell out arenas and have their matches broadcast, while a growing number of colleges offer athletic scholarships to top players.

Still, the high school scene has remained quiet even though teens are a prime audience for video games, but the groundwork has begun as more schools create esports clubs.

Cameron Wilson, a senior at Chicago's ACE Technical Charter High School, has been a part of his school's program for three years, preferring esports to basketball and baseball.

"To me it's more fun," he said. "You really have a fun time bonding with your team out there. It's less physical but more mental. It's really strategy-based, and that's what I love about it."

Coach Terrel Mahoney said a few students had hung out in the school's downtown campus to watch the live stream, a hopeful sign of the growing spectator appeal of scholastic esports. He said he'd like to see games other than "League of Legends" become part of the scene, and for competitive gaming to achieve parity with traditional high school sports.

"For people who are not athletically gifted, this is a way for them to form camaraderie* doing things that they love," he said. "And it's just something fun to do. You're playing video games with your friends — and for your school."

Glossary

**esports* – multiplayer video games played competitively

**NASCAR* – a popular motor racing sport in the U.S.A.

**camaraderie* – a feeling of trust and friendship amongst people who have shared an experience or spent a lot of time together

Text C: This is an edited article from an online technology magazine, reporting on a Norwegian high school that has included esports and gaming on the school timetable.

Most of us have tried to sneak a quick game of Minesweeper in during our computer classes at school, but for students at Garnes High School in Norway, playing games won't be something they'll have to hide. Garnes Vidaregåande Skole, a public high school in the city of Bergen, Norway, is to start teaching esports to its students starting in August. The elective class* puts esports on the same footing as traditional sports such as soccer and handball at the school. 30 or so students enrolled in the program will study five hours a week during the three-year program.

Students on the program will not simply spend five hours a week playing games at school. While gaming skills are important, the classes will include 90 minutes of physical training optimized for the games in question, with work on reflexes, strength, and endurance. Each class will be split; 15 students will play while the other 15 perform physical exercise. In an interview, Petter Grahl Johnstad, head of the school's science department, says that the students will have their performance graded, with game knowledge and skills, communication, cooperation, and tactical ability all being assessed.

The school will have a dedicated room for the program with gaming chairs and high-end PCs with Nvidia GeForce GTX 980 Ti video cards, according to its Facebook page. Students will provide their own mice, keyboards, and headsets, to accommodate the wide variety of personal preference that exists.

Garnes has not yet decided which game or games its students will study. Two will be offered in the first year, with Dota 2, League of Legends, Counter-Strike: Global Offensive, and Starcraft II all under consideration.

In offering this course, the school is embracing a growing trend and no doubt appealing to a lot of kids who'd just love the chance to play games when they should be studying. But that's not all; Garnes is also playing catch-up with its neighbors. A school in Sweden announced last year that it was embarking on a similar scheme to offer esports education.

Glossary

**elective class* – a class students choose to take



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Sources taken/adapted from:

Text A:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2017/01/13/257-minutes-time-teens-can-spend-computers-day-harming-wellbeing/>

Text B:

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/highschool/>

Text C:

<https://arstechnica.com/gaming/2016/01/norwegian-high-school-puts-e-sports-and-gaming-on-the-timetable/>

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