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DON'T BOTHER ME, MOM — I'M LEARNING

by MARC PRENSKY
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INTRODUCTION

> ### "Today's kids are not ADD, they're EOE: Engage Me or Enrage Me"
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> **— Kip Leland, Los Angeles Virtual School (LAVA) Los Angeles Unified School District**

Let me begin with a warning: You are about to hear a message that— while absolutely true—will fly in the face of the prevailing wisdom about computer and video games. Summed up in a sentence it goes like this: computer and video games aren't as bad as you probably think they are— in fact, there's good reason to believe that they do a tremendous amount of good. To give you an example of just how against-the-grain this message is, before Paragon House bought the rights to publish this book, more than 30 other publishers turned it down - some more than once. Many prospective editors claimed that "parents simply won't believe it." In other cases, the rejections came from in-house marketing and publicity people, who said the message would be too hard to deliver, especially since I am not a well-known psychologist or professor. In some ways, all those editors and publicists have a point. A lot of parents - perhaps even you - will have some trouble buying the argument that video games aren't as evil as they're made

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out to be. That's largely because most of the information you get about video games comes from writers, politicians, psychologists, and lawyers, who don't play video games. (The one writer for a major paper who does, the reviewer Charles Herold of The New York Times, is very positive about these games.) Neither do most professors play (pretty much the only one who does wrote the Foreword to this book.) So computer and video games are causing just about everyone a great deal of frustration and concern. Parents worry about the large amount of time their kids spend playing these games, and fear that all that time in front of a screen will wreak havoc on their children's academic and social achievement. Teachers worry about the increasing competition of exciting games and other media for their students' attention, and about students' declining interest in schoolwork. And the kids themselves, of course, are frustrated by the wide gap between their exhilarating experiences playing games and their slow-paced lessons in school. Since pretty much all the information that parents and teachers have to work with is a lot of speculation, conjecture, and overblown rhetoric about putative negative aspects of these games, it's no wonder they're in a panic! It also shouldn't come as much of a surprise that the people who actually *do* play and make video and computer games have a very hard time getting their positive message heard. This is especially true for game-playing kids, who are totally frustrated by their parents and teachers' uninformed attitudes, and who, given half a chance, would be happy to explain why video and computer games are an important part of their life, and why they spend so much time playing them. But kids do not have a voice in our society. Although they are empowered in many areas of their life, they still have a hard time getting their story out. So I am

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doing it for them. While not a psychologist or professor by training, I do have a background, both academic and professional, that prepares me for this. I attended Oberlin, Harvard, and Yale, I have three masters degrees, including one in education and a Harvard MBA. I have taught at all levels from elementary school to college, have worked for some of the top firms in the country, and have had my own company for 10 years. I published a book, *Digital Game-Based Learning* (McGraw-Hill 2001) which was the first to talk about electronic games and learning, and which spawned an entirely new field, "Serious Games," now just getting off the ground. I have written over 50 articles, several of which have been published or reprinted in well-respected academic journals and in school newsletters all around the world (all posted on my web site www.marcprensky. com/writing/) and designed over 50 computer games for learning, for children and adults. And I speak regularly to educators all over the globe. But mostly I observe. And what I see is an almost total inability for most parents and teachers to relate to understand, or communicate with their kids on the subject of computer and video games. This is an extremely unhelpful (and unhealthy) situation for everyone.

Why This Book Is Important

No one seriously argues—and I certainly don't—that kids should be allowed to play computer games to the exclusion of everything else. Part of our responsibility as adults is to make sure our children lead healthy, balanced lives. And by the time you finish this book, you'll understand why electronic games can—and should be—a vital part of

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that balance. In Chapter 5, for example, I'll tell you about some important—and too often ignored—studies that suggest that game-playing is as beneficial to children's development as reading.

What You Will Learn

In writing this book, my goal is to give you new perspective and insight in two important areas. First, I will give you a peek into the hidden world into which your kids disappear when they are playing games. Second, I will help you as an adult—especially if you are a concerned parent or teacher—understand and appreciate the many positive things your children are learning while they're playing video and computer games. Once you realize the enormous teaching power that games have for your kids, you will begin to respect the learning that is taking place. You'll be able guide your kids (and be guided by them), and possibly even work with them to create tools and situations that are directly useful for their success and learning. In the few short hours it takes to read this book, I will show you: What it *feels like* to be in the world of computer and video games; How to appreciate the breadth and depth of modern computer and video games and the ways they cause your kids to learn; How to understand the various *useful* skills your game-playing kids are acquiring; How to understand your own kids better and build better relationships using games as a base. But perhaps the most important lesson you'll learn is how to augment and improve what your children are learning, by having conversations that they want to have about their games. I strongly believe that there is great benefit to all parties, young and old, from understanding more about this phenomenon that so engages our young people.