

Life Online: He Just Plays and Plays



The educator's guide for the video He's just playing

Introduction

He's just playing is a story targeted at students in secondary school or older. It's a story about a teenager, Eppu, who plays computer games several hours a day. In the video Eppu reflects on the benefits and harms of playing games, how his parents feel about it, and his own future as a gamer. The story covers the topics gaming as a hobby, moderate and excessive gaming, and the attitudes of his parents regarding gaming.

The Pelitaito project

The educator's guide is produced by the Pelitaito project of Ehkäisevä päihdetyö EHYT ry. In addition to digital games the project also covers gambling among children and youths.

The project's activities are targeted at children and youths, as well as their interest groups, e.g. parents, school staff, and other professionals or volunteers working with children and youths.

More info about the project

www.pelitaito.fi/en





Goals

- The students understand that it's important to remember moderation and to maintain a good balance between gaming and other aspects of life, such as school, hobbies and family.
- The students see games and gaming as parts of life management
- The students gain better understanding in the sociality of gaming and its effect on ones own gaming
- The students are better prepared for evaluating the effect of gaming on ones own wellbeing

Start of the lesson

It's good to start off with some related questions.

Discuss with the students:

- Pelaatteko itse digitaalisia pelejä? Kuinka paljon pelaatte?
- Miten nuorten pelaamiseen teidän mielestänne suhtaudutaan?
- Onko teillä kotona sovittuja sääntöjä pelaamisen suhteen?
- Tunnetko jonkun, joka pelaa mielestäsi liikaa?

The video: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SI85NXXU7X0>)

Watch the first part of the video, and then pause it. Discuss what you saw, and then proceed watching

When is too much?

I'm Eppu. I play on the computer quite a lot. My mom and dad say I play too much. But I don't think so.

I play DotA 2 in the MarjaTerTTU team and we are pretty good, on the Finnish level. It feels really great when you notice you are able to do well and be the best. It is so awesome to hammer the other players or be the richest guy on the server.

I play about 3 to 6 hours at a time, sometimes more. I have friends who play even more than that. I think you only play too much if other parts of your life begin to suffer. There are a couple of guys on our team I know don't always go to school or do anything else but play..

I think people should pay more attention to WHY some people play so much and not spend so much time counting the hours, fixated on how much someone plays.

One older guy I know just sits at home and plays all the time. There are only one or two guys like that, though. Most of us maintain a balance. For me, school has been easy and I usually do my homework before I sit down to play.



Discuss with the students:

- Who defines what is too much gaming? How do you define excessive gaming?
- Is there a specific time limit for when you have played too much?
- Do you think Eppu plays too much?
- Why do people play digital games? Can any of these reasons lead to some sort of problem?

The family dynamic

When mom and dad complain about my playing, I say, 'Well, you two stare at the TV all evening.' What's wrong with me doing something of my own? I have friends there too.

I sense that mom and dad would want to do more things together as a family, but they are tired and can't be bothered. I think they are more frustrated with themselves because they can't think of anything in which we would all have a shared interest. They just nag about my playing, even though they blame it on themselves somehow.

My parents think that at least when I play, I'm not messing around with alcohol and that kind of stuff. But then they worry if I want to have a gamer party or go to a gamer boot camp or something with my friends. They probably think that we'll just drink. But for the most part we just hang out and play. If we drink, it is mostly energy drinks.

The truth is that we all have lives outside our games. Everyone on our team does the same stuff a player on a hockey or football team does; some more than others.

Discuss with the students:

- What is the difference between watching TV and gaming? Which is more harmful/useful?
- Is playing digital games something children and parents can do together?
- Can gaming be a hobby?
- What other important things should you be doing besides gaming?
- What could Eppu do to help his parents understand his hobby a little bit better?

Plans for the future

I don't think I would ever want to be a competitive or professional gamer. You can't maintain that level very long, and even if you earned half a million in a short time at a tournament, you still don't have a profession or training, so the money isn't really enough to live on. So I don't plan to build my whole future on gaming because big wins are so random and uncertain.

But it would be rad to find a job in gaming: to become a game developer or a producer for a gaming company. After all, I've learned so much about the games and I've learned English well. You need social skills too. If you can manage to work as a team with others on a conference call for 12 hours a day, you can't be a total dickhead..

So I think I will try to find work someday in the gaming industry, but I figure that I've got to do my homework and finish school first so if my gaming ever falls to the wayside, like it sometimes does, I won't be completely up the creek without a paddle.



Discuss with the students:

- Can gaming become a profession?
- What can you learn by playing?
- In addition to gaming, what other forms of learning are necessary?

Finding a balance

Devoted gamers can sometimes have a hard time maintaining a balance between gaming and the rest of life. I believe that big-time gamers like myself are the kind of people that do everything 100%. Sure, you see guys that disappear for three or four weeks at a time to spend more time with their partners, but then they are back again and the girls have to wait. So finding the right balance is hard. Some of the gamers' partners play too, so that is obviously a different story.

Otherwise I think that my friends in the virtual gaming world are just as genuine as those in the 'real' world. The difference is that you can take a break from your fellow gamers easier than your schoolmates; just shut off the computer and they stay there, behind the screen.

Discuss with the students:

- Why is gaming considered something mainly for boys?
- Can the sociality of gaming affect how much you play?
- How are social relationships online/in games different from face-to-face relationships, or are they different?
- How can you tell that gaming and other aspects of life are imbalanced?
- What can you do if gaming interferes too much with your life?
- Can you interfere with a friend's gaming?

Additional assignments: debate

Panel / debate / quick debate

The debates and discussions are suitable for students of all ages. Gaming as a phenomenon is a great subject for discussions and debates. The topic can be one of the following:

- Is gaming more beneficial or harmful?
- How much is moderate gaming?
- Is gaming a good hobby?
- Should gaming of children be more restricted by their parents?
- Can one become addicted to video games?



Depending on the age of the students, the topics can be covered in different ways:

1. A debate between two teams of 4-5 students. The teams either choose their own standpoint or are assigned one. The other students are the audience and can ask questions. Finally summarize the debate in class. Either the teacher or a student presides over the debate.
2. A panel with speeches from around five students. As with the debate, one can choose a standpoint or be assigned one. Both the panelists and the audience can be asked to read up on the subject beforehand. After the panel (15-20) you can move on to a discussion involving the whole class. Either the teacher or a student presides over the debate.
3. In a quick debate the class is divided into two groups and each group is assigned a standpoint on the subject. The teams will have the floor by turns and the teacher keeps score of their points. You receive a point for a well-presented argument. After the debate you can continue discussing in class so that students will get a chance to present their true opinions

Background information on the themes of the lesson

Gaming is a part of everyday life

Digital games are today a very common hobby, and the majority of youths play at least occasionally. However, educators are often quite concerned about gaming. One common example is worrying about excessive gaming and how it affects a young person's life. Also, much attention is paid at the contents of games, especially violence.

Not all fears are without foundation. Gaming is a fun and captivating activity. It happens that one spends too much time playing games, and the same rule applies as with so many other things: too much is too much. For most people gaming is a trouble-free, normal part of life, and for many it's a good and developing hobby. There are many positive aspects of gaming, and by playing you can learn both foreign languages and social skills.

With regards to gaming, there is still a generational gap between parents and children. Educators and parents are not always familiar with the digital world and its phenomena, which can lead to disputes. Therefore parents and other educators should acquire at least some basic knowledge about gaming.

Pelikasvattajan käsikirja ("The Game Educator's Manual")

The book, written by members of the Finnish Game Educators Network, is intended as support for parents and educators. The target audience includes parents, schools, libraries, youth work services, and anyone else who is in contact with gaming children, young people or adults. The purpose of the book is to offer expert information, which is based on research and experience, on what gaming and its phenomena are really about.

The book (in Finnish) can be downloaded for free at:

www.pelikasvatus.fi





How much is too much?

Sometimes, when gaming, the charm of novelty may lead to hours in front of the machine, but once the early enthusiasm subsides the time spent returns to a normal level. Therefore, spending a lot of time gaming occasionally is not necessarily a sign of a gaming problem. However, if this occurs on a regular basis and starts to have an adverse effect on other aspects of life, a gaming problem may be the case. There is no specific time limit for what is too much, and how much of a problem gaming is for a person cannot solely be measured by the time spent. Control over one's life and well-being are the most central.

As long as gaming is one pastime among others and does not distract from the fundamentals of life, it can have a lot of good to offer. But if gaming becomes compulsive, and adversely affects other aspects of life, one can suspect that the hobby has gotten out of hand.

Signs of excessive gaming:

- One spends too much time in front of the machine and forgets to take breaks
- Not playing causes anxiety and irritation
- Friends outside of the gaming world are neglected
- Other responsibilities are forgotten due to gaming
- Gaming disturbs the circadian rhythm
- Gaming causes absence from school or work
- One neglects other hobbies due to gaming

Gaming as a profession

The Finnish gaming industry has experienced massive growth during the past few years, which has led to more jobs and study places. Study programmes related to the gaming industry are offered all around the country in vocational colleges, universities of applied sciences and universities. The gaming industry organization Neogames keeps track of these programmes (<http://www.neogames.fi/en/education-research/>), and the supply of such programmes has increased rapidly during the 2010's. Some examples include: game design, programming, graphics and animation.

Gaming can also be a competition. Such organized gaming competitions are called eSports, or electronic sports. There are only a few professional players in Finland, and the prize money in domestic tournaments is not very big compared to bigger international competitions. You can find more information on eSports at the SEUL webpage (Suomen Elektronisen Urheilun Liitto) www.seul.fi.

Video script and production

Lemeon

Financing

Finnish Centre for Media Education and Audiovisual Media and the Pelitaito project of Ehkäisevä päihdetyö EHYT ry