Online gaming with Max Toper

Part one: Positive influences of online communities

Hello, and welcome to the Home Education Hub. My name is Max Toper, author of "Why is He Still Here?" And I am thrilled you will be joining me in the exploration of online gaming.

I'd like to begin by sharing some of the positive influence online games and communities can have on a young person. But firstly, I'd like to note that I will be focusing on the latter. Because there are more games and individual communities than either of us can count.

So, what exactly is a community? And how can a virtual community possibly exist? It is after all made up of screens, and a dependence on the holy grail that is the internet. Well, the reality is, there is no one type of online community, each one is bespoke.

For instance, it could be made up of thousands of different users from all over the world. Or could quite simply be a few friends who decided to communicate or play a game together.

In the context of these videos, an online community is established when say three or more people come together over the internet. Keep in mind that, as I said, this is in the context of these videos. Online communities range from simple, to vastly complex. In some cases, they can only be understood by the users within them.

So, why might someone want to join an online community? If they wanted to socialise, surely they could go to their local park and join a runners club? The answer to this question is always, bespoke to the individual. But universally speaking, it is much easier to join an online community, especially for young people who struggle with social interactions in the physical world.

There's no eye-contact over the internet, you don't need to brush your teeth, I can play in my pyjamas and nobody would see. I can also control what games I play, and who I interact with. It's important to understand that said level of control is impossible to obtain in real life.

Okay, we've established the ease of joining a community. But why stay there? I'm going to refer to my own experiences here. Because I believe there are some aspects within them that translate to many online communities. During my early teens, I was leader of a vast online community with over 1500 users.

We were what you'd call a war clan or guild. Simply put, our purpose was to compete with other guilds and communities and become the most powerful guild in that particular game.

In a way running a guild is like running a company. I had to ensure my high-ranking officers were loyal, did their duties, and weren't corrupt or abusing their power. The

last point is one I want to focus on, because it's a really great example of the decision making my parents couldn't see.

I had officers who were great at keeping people engaged. But these same officers could often be abusive toward members of my guild. In one instance, one attempted to seize control of the guild by deposing me. Thus as a thirteen-year-old I had to make very difficult decisions to prevent the guild from collapsing.

And it wasn't always clear cut either. On one occasion a member of the guild had a problem with a senior officer. But given that they were one member, and that this officer was well-liked and kept parts of the guild going, I couldn't afford to lose him. So although this member had a valid grievance, the officer was simply too for me valuable to lose. And were he to leave, more members would follow, given that he was so popular.

The point being, I could exile one officer and lose tons of members. Or lose one member and the guild would remain mostly unaffected. But inaction would have been cruel, and against my principals. In the end, a compromise was reached.

Why does this matter? Well, in the real-world similar situations do happen. And a young person learning to navigate said situations is in my opinion extremely important. Can all this high-level decision making and complicated management become stressful? Yes, absolutely, but that's a topic for another day.

For now, I'd like to close off with one more point. In school, I didn't see the value of Romeo and Juliet. I was vulnerable, without friends, subject to being pushed around and knocked over on the stairs all day. My guild, an online community I and others created, gave me a sense of empowerment, a way to make friends.

It taught me valuable lessons about myself, and through my running of the guild, these benefits extended to other players, in similar situations to me. In essence, we had created a haven to learn and flourish in. And though my parents didn't understand it, I was making positive memories, whilst learning important lessons for life, along the way.

That is all for today, join me next time, as I explore some of the more negative aspects of online gaming.