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WHAT KEEPS BRINGING THE KIDS BACK? AN EXPLORATION OF HIGH SCHOOL VIDEO GAME CLUBS

by

NICOLAS LENK

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

2017

**MAJOR: EDUCATION LEADERSHIP AND
POLICY**

Approved By:

Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

To my soon-arriving children; I have not met you yet, but I am eagerly waiting to spend
the rest of my life with you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most importantly I feel compelled to convey my sincere gratitude to my advisor Dr. Carolyn Shields. Her unwavering support for my research interest cannot be understated in its importance throughout this process. Furthermore, she has patiently guided me to explore important issues within k-12 education, and her thoughtful dialogue and debate has been a constant, appreciated, escort along my journey toward being a better educator.

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Thank you, Andy Hester, my best friend. You're the best younger brother a person could ask for. You've taught me so many important lessons in life, and your reliable

kindness and friendship has carried me through some of my darkest moments. I often find myself looking up to you, for you have deserved my admiration. I love you, man.

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Lastly, I'd like to thank several people who have mentored me directly and indirectly, some people who have been role models that have gotten me to this point in my life, and others who deserve to be mentioned for their general impact on me.

Thank you to the people of East Side Des Moines. I had no idea what I was getting myself into when I got hired at East High School, and that community brought me in and welcomed me like family. I will always be appreciative of your support and encouragement when I created my first video game club. If it was not for you, I would not have originally pursued this interest of mine.

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Doooit!

ABSTRACT

With the current trend of K-12 student interest in video games increasing, schools have a responsibility to take measures to meet their students' passions that fall outside of state curricula. Extracurricular activities have historically filled this need; therefore, an after-school approach with video games is an appropriate way to address this student interest. The purpose of this multiple case study was to identify the qualities that students and teachers participating in high school after-school video gaming clubs report as being important to their experience. Using a theoretical framework of student engagement, this study explored the experience of the participating students and faculty. Through one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and survey results, the findings from this study suggest affective and behavioral engagement benefits from attending a video game club in which the teacher sponsor focuses on building strong relationships with the participating students. The affective engagement benefits include students reporting much deeper connections to their peers, teachers, and to their school. Specifically, students reported their deep appreciation for having a vector through school in which they could make high quality friends, and how they are able to have a relationship with their teacher that is more familiar and has the effect of making teachers feel less intimidating. Behavioral engagement benefits included student desires to behave in more prosocial ways, and students approaching school work in positive ways like spending more time on work and seeking academic help from their peers more frequently. The significance of this study resides in its potential to pair schools interested in connecting to their students through their new gaming interests, with the empirical data that reflects the positive and unknown effects of video game clubs. Recommendations include structural advice for practitioners of video

game clubs, such as how to design effective video game clubs based on the desires of the students. Further research propositions consist of the exploration of a connection between video game club participation and academic achievement, and if sites with differing demographics and leadership choices also express similar student engagement benefits.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The video gaming industry is big business; their \$46.5 billion earned in 2014, dwarfed the earnings of big industries like the NFL (\$11 billion in 2014) and the global movie industry (\$39.1 billion in 2014) respectively according to statista.com (2015). By the end of 2014, there were many world championships for various video games with prize pools well over a million dollars. Viewership of some of these events, like the 2014 League of Legends final hitting 27 million viewers, was trumping conventional championships like the NBA finals sitting at 18 million during their final game (Associated Press, 2014; Riot Games, 2014). This huge footprint on our society has become pervasive in our teenagers' lives. However, all too often schools have no response to the use of video games by their students. This response is being left completely up to the students' guardians. Hence, it appears that schools are missing a large opportunity to connect with this generation of students through their passion for video gaming. In this study I explored the importance of looking into ways schools can organize themselves to embrace this generation of students' interest. Specifically, I investigated how schools employ the use of extracurricular activities to endorse kids' passions.

It was within the extracurricular niche that schools potentially have room to start video gaming clubs. Video game clubs do not have an obvious educational standard that meets state education requirements, so placing video gaming in a classroom setting would seem inappropriate at this time. However, many valuable lessons can come from after-school programs, and it is through this model video games may have their place.

Video gaming is becoming an ever-increasing part of many students' lives (Ogletree & Drake et al., 2007), having schools connect and build a relationship with them

allows the schools to guide the students to more traditional study topics that they can then relate to their experiences in games. Slattery et al. (2013); says in the context of the history curriculum,

The Linear model divides time into the past, present, and future, and as a result removes any autobiographical connection to the historical events being discussed in textbooks or classroom lectures. In short, history has been decontextualized by the modern curriculum. (p. 46)

Essentially, schools do not focus on curriculum that is related to the students' lived experiences. Slattery argues we should embrace and nurture children's personal stories and allow them to connect content to those stories. Schools have the infrastructure in place for after-school programs, and often it is through these programs that the most diversity of student-led interest education takes place. From sports, to drama, to debate, and chess club, after-school programs often offer children a place to share their interests with others in the school whom they may not know share the same passions while in a safe, adult-led, environment. This embraces student learning through their autobiographic experiences, as they can learn through their own guided interests that they then often take back into the classrooms.

The literature was replete with research on student engagement, and many researchers have studied how participation in extracurricular activities have affected various parts of student engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). I used the lens of student engagement as my conceptual framework for this dissertation. I am curious how students perceive their high school experience since being influenced by their participation in a video gaming club. I explored how this participation has affected the students towards school, about themselves, or how their behaviors have changed since entering the club.

Purpose Statement

In this study I investigated how video game clubs affect the lives of students, and why they keep coming back to the club meetings. *The purpose of this multiple case study was to identify the qualities that students and teachers participating in high school after-school video gaming clubs report as being important to their experience.* I wanted to know, through interviews and surveys with students and sponsoring faculty, the following questions:

1. How do students describe their experiences in the video game clubs?
2. What qualities, activities, and experiences enhance or detract from their enjoyment of the club?
3. What are the norms of the clubs that contribute to students' persistence?
4. What affective and behavioral engagement benefits are the students and staff perceiving for those who are part of the club?

The cases for this study were the club I built in Michigan - and a club in British Columbia, Canada fundamentally different from the club I created, but founded on a similar philosophy wanting to create a safe space for students to socialize without the pressure of feeling like their interests are nonproductive. Each was an example of a highly attended club in a K-12 setting.

Rationale

The research has shown that benefits of students' participating in an extracurricular activity, even though each club type has its own nuances, can be generalized to say that all types of extracurricular activities have benefits for their participants (Barber & Eccles, et al., 1999; Broh et al., 2002; Fredricks & Eccles et al., 2008; Feldman & Matjasko et al.,

2008; Lipscomb et al., 2007; Bradley et al., 2012). The evidence was overwhelming regarding non-academic factors associated with extracurricular participation; the research suggests prosocial behaviors increase quite dramatically with participation in extracurricular clubs. (Barber & Eccles, et al., 1999; Broh et al., 2002; Fredricks & Eccles et al., 2008; Feldman & Matjasko et al., 2008; Lipscomb et al., 2007; Bradley et al., 2012). What was more, the literature regarding the benefits of extracurricular clubs has been consistent throughout the last 20 years, which leads to the initial conclusion that while school education policies have evolved throughout these few decades, the benefits of engagement in an extracurricular activity have not changed. There exists a need to add to our understanding of video gaming clubs. Do the attractions of video game clubs mirror the conclusions of previous research on historically known clubs, or are the perceived benefits different, and if so, how?

Situated Self

I am a high school science teacher in a Michigan public school district. I have been a video gamer for most of my life; starting with playing at friends' houses who owned video gaming systems, to eventually being able to purchase my own and play what I wished. In high school, my desire to play video games often trumped my motivation to complete homework or study, and I consistently suffered academically because of this. As I grew older I have developed much healthier habits towards managing my video gaming interests. It was through this personal struggle I have had the desire to create video gaming clubs; I hoped to be able to be a positive mentoring voice for students who also struggle with managing their video game passions.

Therefore, I entered this PhD program with a determination to find if video gaming clubs see an increase in academic performance. I was aiming to incorporate, at a minimum, some pieces of quantitative analysis trying to associate participation in a video game club to an increased academic performance. As I have evolved throughout my coursework, I have realized the questions I seek to answer should be investigated using qualitative tools, instead. I seek to explore the phenomena of video gaming clubs, and in turn I hope to gain understandings of how they might be the same or different than more conventional clubs. I have run two clubs, one I no longer run due to personal relocation, and one I am currently running. I have a deep relationship with the students in my club. Conversely, I have no relation to the club being run in Canada. I have a formal relationship with the two teachers running that club, and zero relationship with any of the students that attend their events. It was of critical importance to me to gain their perspectives on their club, and relate it to the experiences my students and I have to our club.

Simply put, for the majority of K-12 schools in the US and Canada there is no structure in place to facilitate the hobby of video gaming for their students. Since so many students participate in video gaming, it seems neglectful for schools to continue this trend of doing nothing. Therefore, I want to examine what kinds of things some schools have done as a response.

Definitions

In this paper, particularly in the literature review, I use the term “club” in a broad sense to include all after-school sports, drama, band, debate, GSA, etc. My use of clubs refers to all organizations that meet before or after school time and engage students in anything that was or was not explicitly covered in the state mandated curriculum. When I

use the term clubs I am purposely grouping after-school sports such as football, baseball, basketball, etc. and after-school programs like theater, chess, science clubs, etc. into one large group that I call “clubs”. I am grouping these together for the purpose of seeing what effects engagement in children outside of the purposed scholarly curriculum creates, regardless if it was a sports team or another type of clubs.

When I refer to extracurricular video gaming clubs, I am describing an environment where students bring their own gaming equipment to a club meeting, and play games of their choice. The students are welcome to organize their own tournaments, or just play casually taking turns between one another. There are never any significant monetary awards for tournament victories, only bragging rights. Depending on the different games being played, as reported by myself and the two faculty advisors of the other club, the environment surrounded each game can range from hyper-competitive to exceedingly relaxed and jovial.

Limitations and Delimitations

Each one of us carries our own bias and interpretive lens when experiencing events. The same limitation applies to myself when analyzing the data I collected. Through the sharing of the data with others, inviting as much collective coding as I could, and listening to feedback given to me I hope to limit this bias.

As with any survey tool, I am limited to the quality of my questions, and the types of students who volunteer themselves to take the survey. It was not a true random sampling of the students in the clubs, it was a sampling of the students with enough motivation or an opinion they hold strongly enough to inspire action to take the survey.

Regarding delimitations, I chose the Michigan and Canadian sites because their structure, size, and demographics are quite different from each other yet they are both successful and well attended video game clubs. I could not investigate all the video game clubs that are popping up around North America right now, so with these two seemingly different scenarios I hoped to get an initial understanding of the qualities their members find most valuable. If these two seemingly very different clubs have common themes, other clubs that fit in the middle of these clubs may find common ground, too.

Significance of the Study

Deep within the driving soul of schools is a desire to help students, and this reality spawns all kinds of manifestations of schools doing everything they can to engage and educate the children who walk through their doors. With the formalized organized sports and their large stadiums for high schools, to the extensive lab equipment and chemicals they purchase to expose kids to the mysteries of science, all these things are motivated by a desire to have kids learn and help them realize their passions. Times and interests progress, and the challenges and tasks schools must climb also progress. This generation of students, including many of their parents, are gamers. Gamers play games in their free time for leisure. Schools have a new challenge to engage and relate to these students, and this challenge is brand new.

However, even though this challenge is brand new, old approaches can work to create positives out of the emergence of gamers. Schools have the infrastructure to promote extracurricular activities. These activities do not take time out of the day for the state-required education. The students end up guiding their own education, during after school hours, based on their personal interests. Schools have an opportunity to create space within

their walls for this generation's passions, and harness that passion to build relationships and explore all other topics of the world. The significance of this research is game-changing in that it could provide empirical support for schools to take the initial risk of starting gaming clubs, which in turn may lead to large gains in student engagement in school. This study was justified in the context of seeking to understand and explore the details in these clubs that makes them seemingly successful. The goal was to further our knowledge in this arena, and since there was extremely limited literature addressing this specific problem, I felt a hole in our understanding had presented itself and I aimed to start filling that hole. It was of critical importance to embrace, validate, and nurture those students who are interested in these games. Video game clubs have a lot more than spent leisure time to offer. It all comes back to the deeply held conviction of helping students in any way possible.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Up up down down left right left right b a b a start, this was the classic cheat code for some original Nintendo games. This was the qualifying exam for how much of a gamer someone was from my generation, you ask them for what games that code belongs to; if they cannot tell you right away that it was from Konami games, then you know you are dealing with someone who was not a true gamer. Now terms like Buffs and Nerfs, PvP vs. PvE, Vanilla WoW, grinding, oom, DLC, Wombo-Combo, and genres like MOBA/MMORPG/RTS/FPS all have their own meanings to the modern gamer as they develop their own passionate opinions and expand the language of gaming.

Video games are becoming an ever-pervasive leisure activity in our society, and I argue schools have an opportunity to foster students' interests through this hobby. Schools seek to gain a medium that promotes academic achievement and other beneficial qualities. In this literature review I explore what the current research documents regarding the value of extracurricular activities. Specifically, I explore the strengths and weaknesses of their impact on students. I describe the goals and potential problems that these programs create. Furthermore, I examine the research about varying club types, to determine whether, while they each contain their own nuances, findings can be generalized to say they have similar benefits between all types of extracurricular activities (Barber & Eccles, et al., 1999; Broh et al., 2002; Fredricks & Eccles et al., 2008; Feldman & Matjasko et al., 2008; Lipscomb et al., 2007; Bradley, Keane, & Crawford, 2012). Lastly, I explore the literature on how extracurricular clubs can serve as an apparatus to improve student engagement by improving their attachments to school, their peers, and their behaviors in and out of school (Finn & Rock, 1997; Finn & Zimmer, 2012, Van Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth, 2009; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

Video games are still growing in popularity even though they are already massively popular (Statista.com, 2015); and going off the data provided by Lenhart et al. (2008), playing video games in-person with peers does provide prosocial benefits and does increase civic engagement. Schools have an opportunity to connect with these students, harness their passions, and use it as a means to engage them academically as well as civically. With schools trying to be as innovative as possible, creating a gaming club is a new strategy school districts can employ to engage their students.

I detail the benefits of extracurricular clubs, as measured by the mostly-quantitative researchers who have sought this answer over the last forty years. The main focus by those researchers has not been to only look for academic achievement gains (although this was a common theme), but it was to see if they can find prosocial benefits as well, and if so in which ways are clubs helping or hindering their participants. There is also evidence on how clubs affect the parents of students who participate in them.

Then, I discuss the importance of the club being run properly, listing what research has found to be the day-to-day norms higher quality conventional clubs employ. It can be said some clubs are better at engaging kids effectively (Barker, 2003), and many researchers have made efforts to identify the qualities effective clubs possess. It is important to understand in what ways video game clubs share similarities, and in what ways do they differ, from their traditional club counterparts.

Third, I explore the financial restrictions that are placed on club formation. While there are very few laws that govern how clubs exactly spend their money, the few laws that are in place are quite strict. I examine the nuance of financials between the different club

types, and how those relate to video gaming clubs specifically. Tied into this are some hurdles that arise while creating video gaming clubs.

Next, I spend time discussing what the literature offers regarding what makes a club effective for the students. Different authors define what effective means, but for this dissertation I examine effective clubs that support my conceptual framework of student engagement. I highlight specifically which researchers have studied extracurricular clubs through the lens of student engagement.

To finalize this literature review, I explore the literature of student engagement, and develop it as the conceptual framework for this dissertation, showing how student engagement pertains to video game clubs. Specifically, research demonstrates that there are three indicators of student engagement: affective, cognitive, and behavioral. It also demonstrates that student engagement is malleable due to pedagogy, how engagement is a direct pathway to learning, and how student engagement is distinct from students' motivations. While the biggest influencing factor with student engagement for video game clubs seems to be affective and behavioral engagement, it was important to know the qualities of cognitive engagement and how it relates to the other two.

Benefits of Extracurricular Clubs

There are many benefits that fuel the creation of clubs; some of these benefits are more relevant than others. It was important to first look at the benefits as a whole, and how they are thought to impact children. Barker et al. (2003) summarizes most of the positive effects of clubs quite nicely. Barker et al. (2003) studied six different clubs in England ranging from inner city, suburban, and rural communities with a range of demographics from all white to a mix of nearly all minority populations. The total population of students

in these six clubs was 120 students; the age ranges of five of the groups was 4-11 years old, and the 6th group was comprised of students aged 11-14. The students were given cameras to take pictures on their own to highlight what they liked and disliked, and were encouraged to draw their perceptions of how the service impacted their lives. Additionally, there were group discussions about how the club was impacting their lives. These methods were used to explore the children's experiences in the club, and their perceptions of the quality of the club itself. In addition, the research team interviewed and gave out questionnaires to parents, having 74 returned (51% acceptable response rate). On top of these questionnaires, parents were included in group discussions and individual interviews coded thematically to identify the role the club provided for the child and parent's daily life, the parent's evaluation of the child's experiences in the club, and the impact of the service on the lives of the parents, children, and families. In total, 55 parents participated in these group discussions and individual interviews. Lastly, interviews with the people running the 6 clubs were conducted to provide context to each club, and gain information about the purpose of the club and the methods each club was using to run their club. The Department for Education and Skills in England commissioned the Barker et al. (2003) publication. The following qualities found in clubs was congruent with the aggregate results of the studies of extracurricular clubs here in the United States (Barber & Eccles, 1999; Broh et al., 2002; Fredricks & Eccles, 2008; Feldman & Matjasko, 2008; Lipscomb et al., 2007; Bradley, Keane, & Crawford, 2012), with the expected nuances that different studies have.

Through this research, Barker et al. (2003) determined that properly run clubs have a positive impact on children's social development. Clubs provide children a place that was

dedicated to their interest, and was held in a safe place for them to explore and play freely. For many of the students, these opportunities are not available in other places for various reasons. Clubs offer the participants a chance at gaining new friends and enrich friendships that already exist. Clubs offer the chance for kids to mingle with new kids from different schools, ages, and walks of life. These new interactions are guided by supervising adults who can ensure that the new interactions are happening in a positive manner. Clubs are given credit for rising a child's self-confidence and social skills, and helping students think more positively about school in general. Clubs have proven to be an excellent avenue to promote acceptance of a wide cultural diversity, and immigrant children often find great acceptance through them. Clubs can also be beneficial for the student, by affecting the parent's work schedule; the parents have more time to work without worrying about their child after school, possibly improving the student's at-home life. The reasons a student joins a club varies by student; for some, their passion for the club's focus motivates them to join, for others, it might be just to make some friends. Regardless of the reason, as Barker et al. (2003) has summarized, clubs give many advantages to students that they would not otherwise have if these opportunities did not exist.

An often-silent quality of clubs was that they allow parents to stay longer at work. This does not mean that the parents of children who are not participating in clubs do not have the option of staying at work, it just implies that clubs can relieve that choice parents might have to make (Halpern et al., 1999). Clubs give an advantage to the parents as well as the students; parents know that their child was spending time in a targeted and safe learning environment after school instead of being at home in an unsupervised role that can promote anti-social, and problematic, behaviors (Durlak & Weissberg et al., 2007).

Additionally, this unsupervised time is exacerbated for students who come from a low-income environment, as shown by Halpern et al. (1999). This can also provide a very cheap, sometimes free, form of child care for the parent. Most clubs do not have a cost of inclusion that comes close to the cost of child care. Although, some clubs do have costs associated with participation that might exclude some families from entering the club (specifically sports clubs may require physical examinations and equipment purchases, and video gaming clubs might implicitly require the purchase of technology to participate).

As well as parents, communities benefit from students' club participation. It was shown in the research that crime goes down in areas with higher club activities; particularly crime committed by the students involved (Farb & Matjasko, 2007). Crime was defined from theft to violent crime, or exposure to drugs and alcohol after school; if a student was in a club during this time they have a much lower chance of spending their time doing these activities.

Financial restrictions and club formation hurdles

The promotion of clubs by K-12 schools was a curriculum expansion to engage children through their interests in hopes that they also spend more time focusing on their education. Many, but not all, of the clubs have grade requirements, stressing the importance of academic studies. Although the grade requirement was not required to achieve gains in academic achievement, the results found by Gerber et al. (1996) show that among the 11,000 students she studied, any participation in extracurricular activities was positively correlated to higher academic achievement. It is often up to each school to decide what clubs it can offer, and that decision is always related to funding, as coaches and club leaders often get a stipend for their efforts. However, if the school club does not require any

financial investment from the school, schools who offer at least one type of club are required to allow all types of clubs to exist (U.S. Government, 1984). The stipend is different depending on each school district and state around the country. Essentially it boils down to the money; if schools have enough money for a club, it will exist, if not, it will be cut. More often than not, clubs are viewed as less important than standard curriculum and can often find themselves being the first items to be cut during budgeting decisions (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). For this reason, the target population clubs are seeking is essentially all of their students. Because clubs are so wide reaching, and accessed through K-12 public schools, all kids can theoretically have access to clubs. As was often the case, the school districts with more money tend to have more variety of club access than more urban or rural school districts with less funding (Glennie & Stearns et al., 2010). However, certainly the main options of sports clubs are available almost everywhere with sports clubs accounting for nearly half of the total clubs a school offers (Glennie & Stearns et al., 2010). Furthermore, there are many smaller clubs that do not require money to operate; so even if a district is under financial hardship the schools can offer a club; video game clubs are an example of where the school needs to provide no additional funding for it to exist. The payment structure for the sponsors is up to the principals in these situations.

High school clubs, sports or non-sports, are not regulated in their day-to-day operations by the federal government; the only regulations the federal government places on school clubs is if the school allows one type of club it must also allow all types of clubs unless they present a financial burden upon the school (U.S. Government, 1984), and money spent on extracurricular activities must be equal between the sexes (U.S. Government, 1972). Other than those two strict regulations, clubs are mostly financially

unregulated by the states and local school districts. Essentially, it is up to the schools and school districts to decide how much of their budget will go towards the various clubs. If a school is short on funding and wants to add another teacher, they are more than allowed to cut the basketball program without fearing any legal penalty. The penalty in this case would be the threat of losing students, as some may opt to change schools that do have a sports program. Clubs can be seen, and are used, as a way to entice students to come to a particular school. Especially with sports, but not limited to them, schools highlight the success of a school club (football, debate, forensics, theatre) as a way to showcase what they have to offer for the children of their area. A tradition in the United States has been the formation of booster clubs, which are organizations that are formed for the specific role of raising money for a specific club. The only legal restrictions these clubs must abide by was the equity in how they distribute their funds. The booster clubs cannot discriminate on how their funds are allocated based on multiple factors as they are considered a 501(c)(3) organization (Internal Revenue Service, (2014).

Smaller clubs such as chess club, anime club, video game club, Spanish club, book club, religious clubs, GSA, and math/science clubs often do not receive any funding or recognition for their impact. These tend to be clubs with fewer participants compared to the larger, higher profile, clubs like football and theatre. Usually, the person running these clubs spends a considerable amount of time without compensation. Most of the research I cite takes into account these smaller clubs, and it was conclusive that these clubs grant the same advantages as the larger clubs for the students that participate, (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Certainly they are not less valuable to their participants, they just do not get the financial support that the other, larger, clubs receive, i.e. the nature of a football program

requires far more funding than, say, the chess club. So, in that sense it was not a matter of unfairness, rather just a manifestation of the costs associated with each activity.

Other Hurdles to the Formation of Gaming Clubs

With no financial impact on a school, there is no legal way a school can ban a video game club, if they offer other clubs (U.S. Government, 1984). The only grounds a school can stand on to ban a video gaming club is if the games are too violent, and the school does not want to endorse that kind of entertainment. As much as teenagers hate this argument, it is a good argument; nearly all the evidence suggests that playing violent video games is correlated with more violent behavior (Anderson et al., 2004).

Some districts are somewhat resistant to the creation of gaming clubs, but none have been completely obstructionist. In one particular case at a public high school in southern Mississippi, an administrator's response to League of Legends was, "most cartoons and the Bible are much more violent than what I was seeing," (R. Humphreys, personal communication, March 24, 2015) and then they allowed the club to be formed. Each school will need to determine what game is palatable to them based on their communities and that of the parenting body they interact with. However, with a wide range in game types available, schools have many options beyond violent games.

Strategies for effective clubs

Different clubs have different values they are trying to teach their members. Most of the time the clubs strongly, or loosely, stress the importance of academics. In sports clubs, often the values stressed are hard work, perseverance, and sportsmanship. In non-sports clubs the message can change to one of more self-confidence building, or simply just rejoicing in each other's talents and interests. This focus is backed up by the research,

showing that students who do participate in sporting clubs have higher academic peer relations, greater civic engagement, greater psychological competencies, and a positive peer context (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). The value of funding after-school clubs touches all of the values that the clubs themselves generate. Universally, it can be agreed that clubs are trying to engage and support kids in their own unique way. Clubs give the freedom to their leaders to determine the culture of the club. This advantage measured in traditional clubs, can be translated to video gaming clubs.

“Kids play too many games, and are not focused on school” is a common attitude we have heard for a while now. Yet, more and more parents are buying and playing video games with their kids (Ogletree & Drake, 2007; Lenhart et al., 2008), it is starting to become pervasive in our culture. Ogletree & Drake et al., (2007), in their study focusing on gender differences in video gaming, found that men were twice as likely as women to spend two or more hours playing video games, as well as to report that video game playing has impacted their sleep and school participation. Lenhart et al., (2008) found that 97% of teens ages 12-17 play computer, web, portable, or console games; additionally, they found 50% of teens reporting to have played within a day. Schools have a real opportunity to capitalize on their students’ interest, while using this interest to communicate time management strategies to help the students manage their game playing and their school responsibilities.

The impact of a club has been found to be tied to the effectiveness of the leader, as the more skilled leaders generate a greater impact on academic achievement (Metz, Goldsmith, & Arbretton, 2008). There are strategies to run a successful club; Metz et al., (2008) outlines the main components: leader’s clear vision for the club, proper allocation

of time for the club, having the leader in a constantly personal evaluative state seeking to improve themselves, and having parental involvement.

After-school clubs are most effective when they are following a general guide; with the first step being the adult running the club must have a clear and defined goal and skill set they want to impart upon their members. Clubs that have failed are often too broad and lack the focus needed for sustained growth (Metz et al., 2008). They found that clubs that try to achieve too many goals, as a result, do not achieve any of them. They equated the focus of the clubs akin to effective teaching strategies focused on specific outcomes.

The second important quality was having the club attain enough hours to properly engage the student. Specifically, how many hours per week is the club engaging the student? While there is no set amount of time that yields the highest results, Metz et al., (2008) found that the amount of time a club needs per week is dependent upon the goals of the club. Clubs that do not meet often, regularly do not have their desired outcomes. However, a club cannot demand too much time where it would start to interfere with other time requests. An important part of clubs is to give the student the space to try out other activities as well; so, a balance is necessary here.

Third, having the person or people running the club constantly evaluating themselves in how effective they are at teaching the club's desired goals. A stale club that does not change is often ineffective; meanwhile a club that starts off well but does not adapt to the advancement of their members will also collapse. Proper training of the staff is critical to the success of a club or program. With all clubs this was the same; so it should be expected that the person running the club is constantly trying to better themselves for the sake of the club members. The assurance of a highly capable club leader can be ensured

through many of the leadership metaphors provided by Morgan et al., (2006). In the context of constantly trying to better themselves, and the club, the brain metaphor applies directly with the viability of long-lasting clubs: he states:

When change threatens the status quo, defensive routines “kick in,” diluting or diverting the attack on established practice. For successful double-loop learning to occur, organizations must develop cultures that support change and risk taking. They have to embrace the idea that in rapidly changing circumstances with high degrees of uncertainty, problems and errors are inevitable. They have to promote an openness that encourages dialogue and the expression of conflicting points of view ... As has been shown, a “top down” approach to management, especially one focusing on control through clearly defined targets, encourages single-loop learning but discourages the double-loop thinking that was so important for an organization to evolve. (p. 91-92)

In this instance, Morgan’s metaphor parallels the club literature on the need of the organizational structure to be constantly adaptive. Continuing in this light, the student interest in genres of video games evolves throughout the years, and can even change rapidly and unexpectedly in a year. Again, the onus falls upon the club leader to build a structure that can adapt to the quickly changing climate of student interest in varying video game types. For example, it might be explosively popular to have a club designed around tournaments of one game, but after a few months the club may see rapidly dwindling attendance due to students wanting to play other games, but the club only offering the tournaments for the one game.

Finally, having the parents of the students involved can provide important benefits, including fund raising and administration duties (Barker, 2003). Regular attendance to the club, and parental support, helps kids stay engaged in school and in the club. This parental involvement can range from simple discussions to provide program information to the

parents during pick up and drop off, offering or requiring parents to be actively involved in the activities, or offering support for them in the context of the club.

Underappreciated benefits of clubs

It is safe to say that there is value in clubs; nearly all of the research suggests that students who participate in clubs have a lower dropout rate, higher attendance, higher grades in school, better interpersonal skills, higher self-esteem, improved race relations, and we are now seeing that they may tend to pursue higher levels in education after completion of the 12th grade (Fredricks & Eccles et al., 2006; Fredricks & Eccles et al., 2008; Marsh et al., 1992).

Regarding the higher grades, higher perception of school value, higher self-esteem, improved prosocial behaviors, and a reduction in “risky behavior” Fredricks and Eccles et al., (2008) sampled over 1000 students, with two thirds being African American, and the remaining third classifying as European American. Their study collected data over three years, starting with students participating in 8th grade clubs, and measuring their growth at 11th grade. They argue,

Extracurricular activities are ecological contexts with distinct ‘opportunity structures’ for developing personal and interpersonal skills. School and community-based organized activities provide a context for middle school youth to use their leisure time in productive ways, connect with supportive adults and prosocial peers, and learn competencies and skills. (p. 1042)

They go on to note, that when they separated the data from the students who participated in sports, and only focused on traditional clubs, there was a higher than expected school value in terms of higher grades, higher psychological resiliency, and better prosocial peers. Also, singling out traditional clubs from sports teams, the students did not exhibit risky behavior increases like participation in sports clubs exhibits. However, they

find that the associations between participating in clubs and sports and associating with “risky peers” was lower than the students who do not participate in any club, sport or non-sport (Fredricks & Eccles et al., 2006).

Lastly, an overlooked and more abstract purpose for clubs is that they center on the student’s personal interests. This is a learning environment in itself, and as Grumet (1995) argues is the best way for curriculum to be taught. The following is her argument of the importance that curriculum adheres to the histories of the students learning them, and how teaching to the interests of the students matters:

In later years what was basic cannot be reduced to the Great Books or American History, to world geography or geology. It was the relation of these histories of human action and interpretation to the lives of the children studying them that was essential. Those connections are not merely motivators, clever intros to trick a group of students into interest. Those connections are the source of the questions that support research, of the desires that seek expression, of the choices that constitute values. What was basic was not a certain set of texts, or principles or algorithms, but the conversation that makes sense of these things. Curriculum was that conversation. It was the process of making sense with a group of people of the systems that shape and organize the world that we can think about together. (p. 3)

Through clubs, the learner is choosing their own path of education. They get to pick what they want to get better at, and thus it becomes a part of their autobiography. It is nearly irrelevant that the topics being learned have little to no relation to any standards in any state, the important factor here is that the learner is exploring topics which are interesting to them, and to this point the school facilitating this extra learning makes it a part of their curriculum. Grumet (1995) highlights this importance, of the need for the learning to relate to their lives. These settings provide an opportunity for the students to demonstrate persistence, concentration, and effort in activities that they are intrinsically interested in (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Larson 2000). This

curriculum simply does not deal with standards, it operates more in interpersonal relationship building, goal setting strategies, and comradery; and most of all it operates in relation to the child.

This is precisely where video gaming clubs reside. A video gaming club gives students an option to choose a club that is in their wheelhouse of interests. Commitment to a club that is highly interesting to a student provides a stronger bond to the club and increases the chances of that club's effectiveness (Fredericks et al., 2006).

Student Engagement

The spirit of student engagement is grounded in all educators' wishes to make instruction more effective and enhance student learning. Student engagement can be viewed as the hook that inspires further effort. EdGlossary.org (2016) defines student engagement as follows, "Student Engagement refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education." As Reschly and Christenson (2012) put it, "Student engagement is the glue, or mediator, that links important contexts—home, school, peers, and community—to students and, in turn, to outcomes of interest. Engagement not only drives learning, but is considered a predictor of success (p. 4)." Student Engagement is often considered to be such a powerful tool because, compared to other very strong statistical predictors of success like socioeconomic status, which language a student speaks natively, or race, student engagement can be modified by the teacher, the school, or the community. It is simply something that, as educators, we have direct control over.

Throughout the research, student engagement research has a few core assumptions. First, student engagement is adaptable and able to change (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Changing a student's engagement can be done through a plethora of pathways. The most researched pathways are pedagogical approaches to influencing positive changes in a student's engagement. The first strategy assumes that no matter what their living conditions are, humans are not completely walled off to learning, and that engagement can be sparked by the right influences. No students are ever deemed as unable to be motivated, or unable to be inspired (Lawson & Lawson, 2013).

Second, student engagement is viewed to be a catalyst to long-lasting learning. The purpose of this assumption is to document that the moment student engagement is present, efficient and long-lasting learning follows in the direction of the teacher's desired learning outcomes (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012; Finn, 1993; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Jimerson, Campos, & Grief, 2003). Engagement is generally viewed as the outward manifestation of student motivation. The right kind of stimulation has documented effects on positive learning outcomes. Finn et al., (1993) found, when examining the association of participation in school and classroom activities with academic achievement in 15,737 eighth-graders nation-wide, that participation and academic achievement were positively related even after controlling for gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. When specifically analyzing at risk students, Finn et al., (1993) found that of the 5,945 eighth-graders he classified as at risk (based on home language, race, or socioeconomic status), the students who achieved the most were exhibiting positive behaviors regarding in-classroom participation, out-of-class participation, and interactions with parents.

The third assumption goes that student engagement is recognizably different from the student's own motivations (Reeve & Tseng, 2011). Essentially, engagement represents the moment the student chooses to actively participate in something other than his or her own initial interests. While often student motivations align with prosocial behaviors and classroom commitment, engagement is thought of as certain facets within that child pushing these motivations. These facets: affective, behavioral, and cognitive, are the core segments current student engagement research identifies and describes. To study this, student engagement researchers have a basic model viewed through these three pathways. They are considered the indicators of engagement (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008), and I outline where affective, behavioral, and cognitive student engagement fall within the student engagement framework.

Affective Engagement

Affective engagement, or sometimes referred to as emotional engagement, describes the student's emotional, psychological, and social bonds to their schooling experience. This subset within student engagement is focused on the feelings and emotional attachments of the student. When looking at these feelings and emotional attachments, affective engagement studies distinguish themselves into two generalizable categories. The first exploring the student's feelings of inclusion, attachment, identification, and relation to their school and their teachers and peers; the second category measuring interest, happiness, worry, and enjoyment of academics in general (Lawson & Lawson, 2013).

Within this first category studies find the factors of students' feelings of inclusion and attachment to the school and self-esteem do contribute to overall student engagement (Finn & Rock, 1997; Finn & Zimmer, 2012, Van Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth, 2009). These

studies conclude that a feeling of acceptance, and support of their peers, their teachers, and their community lead to successes in school through elevated engagement. Wentzel, Caldwell, and Barry et al., (2004) found that the number and quality of friends is linked to several positive factors, including academic achievement, prosocial behaviors, and lower emotional distress. Furthermore, research has shown that teacher-student relationships nurture prosocial behaviors, interest in school, and academic achievement (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986; Roeser & Eccles, 1998). Clubs provide a direct vector to the students to build an extracurricular relationship with teachers, and the previous research suggests this indeed does nurture higher interest in school. A goal of this study was to see if these historically proven relationships between teacher and student also applied to video game clubs.

The second category within affective engagement focuses on the students' feelings during academic activity. By feelings, typically these studies measured students' levels of happiness, boredom, worry, enjoyment, inquisitiveness of the subject matter, pride, anger, etc., specifically when the students were conducting the activities (Ainley, 2012; Pekrun & Linnenbrik-Garcia, 2012; Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). For example, students often feel emotions of despair before an exam due to the unknown questions, and the stakes associated with the exam. These feelings can have profound effects on how the student performs on the exam. Student engagement is nestled within the spaghetti bowl of cultural and environmental contexts; the same input into one student may not have replicable results for other students due to outside-of-the-classroom conditions. Typically, students who start out with high engagement see their engagement sustained as they progress through K-12 schooling, meanwhile the other side of the coin is antithetical, students who do not have a

high engagement early on in schooling typically see that problem get worse as they progress (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, Kindermann, 2008). So it is with this knowledge, that we have an understanding of the importance of engaging students in any way possible. Bored children tend to pay less attention to school and become more bored, or students who are more engaged tend to garner more teacher interaction, with the opposite being true that disengaged students more often than not find teachers divert their attention away from them (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Additionally, the research is quite strong in suggesting that students who are attached to people at their school are more motivated to complete academic tasks than students who lack these attachments (Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Dornbusch, Erickson, Laird, & Wong, 2001; Smith, 2012; Voelkl et al.; 2012; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). In the study conducted by Wang & Holcombe et al., (2010), they found that their 1,046 urban student sample reported that their school environment influenced their academic achievement directly. Specifically, their students' perceptions of school characteristics influenced their participation, identification with the school, their own use of self-regulation strategies, and thereby lead to an increase in their academic achievement. It was this affective student engagement piece that I was most interested in finding out if video game clubs activate.

Behavioral Engagement

Behavioral engagement broadly focuses on a student's behavior as a predictor of that student being able to achieve a positive educational outcome (Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Griffiths, Liles, Furlong, & Sidhwa, 2012; Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012). There are several ways researchers have begun to unravel behavioral

engagement, some studies look for prosocial behaviors like Gagné et al. (2003), while others look for indicators of behavioral disengagement as predictors such as Rumberger & Rotermund et al. (2012). For examples of prosocial behavioral research, some studies measured the amount of time students were spending on homework (Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008), while others focused on students participating in teacher instruction and generally following school rules (Archambault, Janosz, Fallu, & Pagani, 2008; Birch & Ladd, 1997). Examples of behavioral disengagement revolve around analyzing the rates of students being absent, suspended, or skipping class (Finn & Rock, 1997; Rumberger, 2011). Pervasive in this disengagement, or disaffection, the literature was conclusive that students who behave in non-prosocial ways, and conduct themselves with high rates of suspensions, absences, etc., find themselves experiencing much poorer academic outcomes when compared to their peers that do not exhibit these disengagement behaviors.

It can be safely assumed that students who are expressing these poor behavior engagement tendencies are in need of behavioral remediation. It is through this philosophy that behavioral engagement researchers argue that replacing the poor behaviors with more positive behaviors lead to academic successes. This is where the research hypothesizes that there are several vectors for such behavior adjustments. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris et al. (2004) suggest extracurricular activities have a large positive influence on adjusting behavioral disengagement, along with academic clubs. They further claim that decreasing class sizes, and thus increasing the interaction between teachers and students, also can have an effect on curbing behavioral disaffection. As I have reviewed earlier in this chapter, attending an extracurricular club does have positive effects. The literature suggests this is

because of the behavioral engagement interactions that come with being a part of an after-school club.

Cognitive Engagement

The third branch of student engagement was cognitive engagement, and while this dissertation did not focus heavily on this section of student engagement, it warrants a brief overview. Traditionally these studies focus on student's mental engagement in academic tasks. Generally speaking, cognitive engagement is looking for the effort students are putting toward their homework and tests, and specifically how they handle tasks that become challenging. Cognitive engagement, personally speaking, appears to be the most powerful, and yet also the most personal to a student. Again, speaking personally, unlike affective or behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement seems like it is the hardest to adjust from an outside perspective. Cognitive engagement researchers seek to describe what students are thinking, and *how* they are thinking, at the precise moment they are tackling an academic task. Cognitive engagement researchers are looking to see how students use metacognitive strategies and self-discipline to attain academic knowledge (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2012; Corno, 1993; Pintrich, Wolters, & Baxter, 2000).

From this branch of engagement, we are all very deeply aware of our own personal style regarding our approaches to learning; cognitive engagement tries to categorize and measure these approaches to learning. This research can be quite nuanced, Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris et al. (2004) highlight these nuances of cognitive engagement:

Cognitive engagement can range from simple memorization to the use of self-regulated learning strategies that promote deep understanding and expertise. These qualitative differences within each dimension suggest that engagement can vary in intensity and duration; it can be short term and situation specific or long term and stable. The potential for evolution in intensity makes engagement a desirable outcome. (p. 61)

With all the variation between within cognitive engagement, and student engagement as a whole, often these nuances within cognitive engagement lead to a need for explanatory research. How a student feels about school, can increase their participation which positively benefits their behavior regarding attendance to the club, which can then lead to enhanced cognitive engagement as they are truly thinking about what they are supposed to learn. It is truly multidimensional. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris et al. (2004) find that, “each type of engagement combines constructs that are usually studied separately, which results in detailed information about the constructs (p. 82).” What they are saying is that it is hard to simply study one type of student engagement, like cognitive engagement, because the data will often link the other types of engagement as a cause or effect of each other.

Situating student engagement in the research

Previous research suggests that students who participate in clubs receive academic and prosocial behavior benefits. This relation in the previous research has never been studied in extracurricular K-12 video game clubs, but it was reasonable to hypothesize that the same benefits seen in sports teams, drama clubs, and academic clubs such as forensics and debate, also manifest themselves in video game clubs.

When students are participating in clubs, it is documented that they are possibly receiving social strategies and exposures which advance their affective attachments to their schools along with the behavioral advantages that are associated with academic success (Knifsend & Graham, 2012). These personal human capital qualities they are receiving are as all-encompassing as any social interaction experience brings. Fredericks & Eccles at al., 2005 summarize these qualities,

Several explanations have been proposed for why participation in extracurricular activities was a beneficial use of adolescents' time. First, the more that time adolescents are involved in structured activities, the less time they have to engage in problematic behaviors (Mahoney and Stattin, 2000; Osgood *et al.*, 1996). Second, individuals often choose to participate in extracurricular activities because they are intrinsically interested in the activity, and thus these settings provide an opportunity for them to demonstrate effort, persistence, and concentration, as well as explore their identities (Eccles and Barber, 1999; Larson, 2000). Third, these activities provide opportunities to link adolescents to supportive adults outside the classroom (McLaughlin, 2000). Finally, activity participation facilitates membership in a prosocial peer group (Eccles and Barber, 1999; Mahoney *et al.*, 2005). (p. 507)

When participating in extracurricular clubs, student engagement influences center around the facets of affective and behavioral engagement.

The same level of importance resides in knowing how participating in a video game club is affecting the students behaviorally. It was important to know how participating in a video game club affected the students regarding how much time students are spending on homework. Equally important was knowing if video game club participation increased the students' willingness to follow school rules, and to participate in class. Additionally, I explored if the students find participating in this club has gotten them to change their attendance habits for the better, or reduced their "bad" behavior. While research has never been completed on video game clubs, there has been a large volume of effort to analyze how students interact with extracurricular clubs, and how that participation is related to student engagement. I took a similar philosophical approach as those before me, but applying it to video gaming clubs.

Conclusion of Literature Review

Almost all of the research shows that students who are in clubs trend to success in K-12 schooling (Bradley *et al.*, 2012; Marsh *et al.*, 1992; Farb & Matjasko *et al.*, 2012;

Glennie & Stearns et al., 2010). They show an increase in attendance at school, higher grades, and a significant increase in graduation rate. However, there was a distinct lack of research on the differences between an effective club and one that was not. My research provides insights into which aspects of the two clubs were effective and which were not. Clubs are currently being researched in a macro-view, seeking general trends with clubs and school engagement. The majority of studies on this subject are analyses of many clubs, rather than specifically looking at one or two successful clubs. While there was an agreement on the proper policies for creating an effective club, I did not research on the differences in effectiveness of clubs that adopt best-practice policies for their club, and clubs that do not.

This chapter has outlined some benefits and possible negatives to participation in clubs for students and schools. The value of adding these types of activities into what the school offers to its students was evident in the research. The research shows that students who participate in clubs have a lower dropout rate, higher attendance, higher motivation in school, higher grades in school, better interpersonal skills, higher self-esteem, improved race relations, lower drug usage, practice safe sex, and may choose to attain higher certifications in post-secondary education.

So, now the question remains whether these qualities that previous literature suggests should be present, are in fact manifested in video game clubs. Do the students think that their involvement in the video gaming club helps them avoid problematic behaviors? Do the students feel like the video gaming club was a place where their efforts, persistence, and concentration was demonstrated among their peers, and does participating in the club help them with self-identification? Has the participation in their respective video

gaming club connected them with supported adults outside of the classroom, and if so, in what ways has that adult been supportive? What kinds of good behaviors are fostered in the video gaming club? Have the students found that their engagement with school has gone up, down, or remain unchanged upon joining the video gaming club?

This dissertation contributes to the collective understanding of the value of video game themed clubs. This research sought to better understand how schools can capitalize on their gaming student population.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this multiple case study was to identify the qualities that students and teachers participating in high school after-school video gaming clubs report as being important to their experience. I wanted to understand and explore, through interviews with students and sponsoring faculty, the responses to the following questions:

1. How do students describe their experiences in the video game clubs?
2. What qualities, activities, and experiences enhance or detract from their enjoyment of the club?
3. What are the norms of the clubs that contribute to students' persistence?
4. What affective and behavioral engagement benefits are the students and staff perceiving for those who are part of the club?

The cases for this study were the club I run in Michigan and a club in British Columbia, Canada fundamentally differently than the club I created, but founded on a similar philosophy wanting to create a safe space for students to socialize without the pressure of feeling like their interests are nonproductive. Each was an example of a highly attended club in a K-12 setting.

Within these questions are the following sub-questions that sought to gain insight for how student participation in clubs benefit their affective and behavioral engagement.

1. In what ways does participating in this club make you feel about school?
2. Has participating in this club affected the way you approach school work?
3. Does this club affect your motivation to achieve more in school?
4. Has this club affected your feelings of attachments to your peers and school?
5. Is school less intimidating now that you are participating in the club?

6. Have you noticed you are spending more or less time on homework now that you are in this club?
7. Do you feel an obligation to behave in good ways (i.e. following school rules like not skipping class, etc.), now that you are in this club? Who or what do you feel that obligation towards?
8. What moment or moments have stuck out to you that have shaped any changes in your behavior towards schooling?

For the rest of this chapter I detail how I found the answers to these questions. I discuss my personal ontological and epistemological approaches, my methodological approaches, the processes I utilized for data collection and analysis, the ways in which I authenticated the trustworthiness of the data I collected, and the ethical considerations I explored.

Personal Stance

To begin, I would like to put into context where I was ontologically when I started this PhD program. I am a trained science person, completing my undergrad as an astronomy major, and my education master's degree with a research component focusing on gamma and cosmic ray impacts on the upper atmosphere, and what those impacts can inform us about their origins. In this hard-science world, I did not even have the chance to think about anything other than objectivity. For me, in a science frame of reference, I am very much a positivist. I do feel there are fundamental truths that guide the laws of nature that we are seeking to know through our research.

So, when I came to Wayne State to attain a PhD in education, I brought with me a solid belief that there were certain truths to be attained in the world; I thought these truths

also applied to the world of education. As I progressed through this program, my opinion on this has shifted. In all honesty, I do not know *precisely* where I side all the time in how I view the world; furthermore, I am currently of the opinion that it is OK to have a different ontological view depending on what was being studied. In a scientific context, I am still a realist. Positivism certainly has shown to be an effective tool for sciences such as physics/chemistry/biology/etc., with a highlight being the relatively recent detection of gravitational waves produced by black holes spiraling into each other. However, in the context of dealing with people, I do not believe there are fundamental truths that underlie the interactions between people. What I mean is: how a person perceives a situation is entirely dependent upon a seemingly limitless amount of personal history, resulting in different interpretations of the same interaction for different people. Robert Yin (2014) explains this epistemological difference this way:

In the face of those who might only see the need for a single research method, this book believes that, just as different scientific methods prevail in the natural sciences, different social science research methods fill different needs and situations for investigating social science topics. For instance, in the natural sciences, astronomy was a science but does not rely on experimental method; nor do engineering and geology (Scriven, 2009). Similarly, many studies in neurophysiology and neuroanatomy do not rely on statistical methods. (p. 4)

Therefore, in the context of this dissertation, I took on much more of an interpretivist or anti-positivist approach. When considering human beings, it was important to take a subjective approach. So, for this dissertation, the guiding approach was that of the interpretivist paradigm.

I sought to explore, rather than to explain, the experience of video gaming clubs as told by those people participating in them. Through the narrative of everyone involved, an image and an understanding of what happens at these two video gaming clubs was

captured. Each person participating in the club had their own truthful experience. Through describing the events as told by everyone involved in the video game clubs, others can take these experiences and relate it to their own experiences. Indeed, I can form a localized theory about how these clubs work, based on the data collected by the participants and the previous research about what was understood about extracurricular activities. I do not claim other clubs around the world will find the same things applicable to them, but the people running their own clubs can look at the localized theory I found in these clubs and relate it to their own experiences if they so choose. My goal was to explain what has manifested in the clubs, build a framework that was representative of the data I collect, but stop there. I do not aim to draw conclusions about wider phenomena of all video gaming clubs; I simply encourage those starting their own video gaming clubs to take into consideration what happened in the clubs I research and use what they feel was applicable to their own clubs.

Research Design

The journey a researcher takes when deciding which methodological approach best suits their questions is critical. Their decision to choose correctly, and guide their research in a way that accurately answers the questions they seek, hangs in the balance. The dichotomy between the two major branches of research, qualitative and quantitative, is quite stark. To me, it is like timing speed skaters and judging figure skating as a way to study ice skating. The skaters can be timed and exactly measured to give an idea of proper form, or, one can look at skating as a form of personal expression. It seems hard to argue which is best, as they serve different goals. Qualitative and quantitative research are both fabulous manifestations of the human desire to learn more about something in the universe;

however, both offer different approaches to answering those goals. As Creswell (2014) describes each:

Qualitative research was an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant's setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data.

Quantitative research was an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables. These variables, in turn, can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analyzed using statistical procedures. (p. 4)

Quantitative research relies much more heavily on numbers, and statistical analysis to determine mathematical relationships. Quantitative research excels at determining patterns, especially with large groups of people or data sets. Conversely, quantitative research can struggle with pattern recognition with limited data sets.

Qualitative research seeks different answers. Typically, researchers are looking to ponder the details of a certain limited phenomenon and discuss the experience of it with the people that are directly involved with it. Once deep in the details, emerging themes and new questions arise. The role and biases of the researcher is much more apparent in the data analysis; in fact, the inductive reasoning of the researcher is viewed as a strength of qualitative research. Therefore, with these qualities mentioned, it seemed most appropriate that I choose a qualitative methodology as I was indeed seeking to understand the experiences of the students and faculty advisors within highly attended video gaming clubs.

Multiple case studies fall under the qualitative research design category, with some occasional instances of overlap. As such they are usually investigations into the functioning

and activities of a case as a means to understanding the case more broadly. Stake (2006) describes the approach to studying cases this way:

To study a case, we carefully examine its functioning and activities, but the first objective of a case was to understand the case. In time, we may move on to studying its functioning and relating it to other cases. Early on, we need to find out how the case gets things done, by definition, the prime referent in case study was the case, not the methods by which the case operates (Yin, 1994). Some qualitative studies investigate a collection of events or series of instances. Events and instances can be bounded; certainly they are situational, complex, and related to issues; but they often lack the organic systemicity some of us want in the case study. Each case was a specific entity. (p. 2)

The researcher needs to be involved and witness the case in action first, to see how it feels and what is happening in the case. Then, the researcher can investigate the more concrete functional aspects of a case to further their understanding. This research design chooses to try and extract as many details of a case as it can, to narrate and paint a picture for their readers to fully understand the case for themselves. Only through full understanding of each case can the researcher then compare the cases for emerging themes.

The location where the case resides is a core part of the case. Case study researchers highly value the immersive nature of cases as an important piece of the data. Therefore, it is of critical importance for the researcher to go to the site, and experience the case for themselves for as much time as they can. As Stake (2006) later describes:

The reason for making a fuss about what was and what was not a case was fundamental to qualitative case study. It was an epistemological reason. Qualitative understanding of cases requires experiencing the activity of the case as it occurs in its context and in its particular situation. The situation was expected to shape the activity, as well as the experiencing and the interpretation of the activity. In choosing a case, we almost always choose to study its situation.

Ordinary measurement of the case fails to give adequate attention to the ways the case interacts with fellow cases in its environment, such as its family members or community leaders (Tierney, 2000). The interactions within an entity and across entities help us recognize the case as an

integrated system. It was relatively easy to identify the situation of a person or organization; it was more difficult to identify the situation of a functioning or policy. Qualitative case study was developed to study the experience of real cases operating in real situations. (p. 3)

Due to taking an interpretivist paradigm into this research, this approach precisely aligns with this epistemological view that the experiences of the researcher, and most importantly their research candidates, are truthful to themselves. Their experiences shape the case, for better or worse. The researcher and the subjects *cannot* have an incorrect interpretation of the case, because for them it is their truthful experience of the case. In my research context, I run the case in Michigan. I am intimately involved with the functioning and day to day operation of the club, yet it is still critically valuable to hear how others experience the same club. Contrarily, I had never set foot in the Canadian club. When I visited one of their large-scale events, I shaped the event by simply being there. It was critically important for me to be there to provide myself with context in how to interpret the data I collected from interviewing the students and teacher sponsors.

The decision process of choosing the multi-case study methodology was difficult to pin down, but it fit perfectly with my goals and personal position within video gaming clubs. I have created two well-attended and seemingly successful video game clubs in different cities, and I am driven to better understand why they have been explosively successful. The multi-case study design fits my personal story well, as Yin (2014) describes it:

The simplest multiple-case design would be the selection of two or more cases that are believed to be literal replications, such as a set of cases with exemplary outcomes in relation to some evaluation question, such as “how and why are a particular intervention has been implemented smoothly.” Selecting such cases requires prior knowledge of the outcomes, with the multiple-case inquiry focusing on how and why the exemplary outcomes

might have occurred and hoping for literal (or direct) replications of these conditions from case to case. (p. 61-62)

The choice to delimit this study to two cases was purely practical in nature; I was the only one conducting the research, and having more than two cases was simply too much work for one person. I do believe these two sites were very closely related to each other, but they were distinctly different, contrasting, cases. What I mean by this is that they were both after-school clubs that had the students playing video games for large periods of times, and they were both very highly attended; however, they were fundamentally different from each other structurally, but may have been similar to each other in the ways in which the faculty advisors operate them. Yin (2014) goes on to say about selecting seemingly different contrasting cases in a multi-case study:

You may deliberately select two cases because they offer contrasting situations, and you are not seeking direct replication. In this design, if the subsequent findings support the hypothesized contrast, the results represent a strong start toward theoretical replication – again strengthening your findings compared to those from a single-case study alone. (p. 64)

I considered this high attendance rate to be an initial exemplary outcome indicative of needing more exploration. Furthermore, I sought to understand how these clubs have been implemented smoothly, and I was specifically curious of the club structures, and philosophies of their leaders, that has led to their exemplary status. While these clubs may be fundamentally different, the generalizations that came out of this multi-case study may end up being robust theories about video game clubs. Finally, I had prior and current knowledge of video game clubs, and it was my aim to be able to create replications of these conditions in other clubs.

Theoretical Proposition

Before beginning case study research, the researcher must compose a guiding theory for their case study. This drastically separates it from other forms of qualitative research. Yin (2014) describes it this way:

This role of theory development, prior to the conduct of any data collection, was one point of difference between case study research and related qualitative methods such as ethnography (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Van Maanen, 1988) and *grounded theory* (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Typically, these related methods may deliberately avoid specifying any theoretical propositions at the outset of an inquiry (nor do these methods have to cope with the challenge of defining a “case”) ... The needed theory can be plain and simple. ... This theory should by no means be considered with the formality of grand theory in social science, nor are you being asked to be a masterful theoretician. Rather, the simple goal was to have a sufficient blueprint for your study, and this requires theoretical propositions, usefully noted by Sutton and Staw (1995) as “a [hypothetical] story about why acts, events, structure, and thoughts occur” (p. 378). The theoretical propositions can represent key issues from the research literature or practical matters such as differing types of instructional leadership styles or partnering arrangements in a study of organizations. Such propositions will enable the complete research design to provide surprisingly strong guidance in determining the data to collect and the strategies for analyzing the data ... An exploratory case study should be preceded by statements about what was to be explored, the purpose of the exploration, and the criteria by which the exploration will be judged successful. (p. 37-39)

My theoretical perspective for this dissertation was that of student engagement. In the end, I did find video gaming clubs increase affective and behavioral student engagement. My theory on this, from personal experience, said that it might have had to do with the actions of the faculty advisor running the club; because I have seen successful clubs be handed over to different faculty advisors and the club collapses quickly. So, it goes that my proposition for understanding successful video gaming clubs was that *clubs increase student engagement through actions and organizational structures created by the*

faculty advisors. My theory, different from my theoretical perspective, was what guided me through the data collection phase of this multi-case study.

As with all qualitative research, I found myself in a different place upon data collection, and it was important to explore all information that supports and contradicts my guiding propositional theory. I tried to shed empirical light on this theoretical concept, as I used this theory as a guiding lens to explore video game clubs. It was entirely possible that my theory was incorrect, and during data collection I was presented alternative theories. It was then my duty as a researcher to explore those as well.

Since this multi-case study was exploratory in nature it was not my concern to accurately explain how one event leads to another. Because it was an initial attempt at gathering data on this phenomenon, it was appropriate to report and make generalizations based on the data I collected. As Yin (2014) puts it, “Internal validity was mainly a concern of explanatory case studies, when an investigator is trying to explain how and why event x led to event y ... This logic is inapplicable to descriptive or exploratory studies (p. 45).” My goal was to gather the data, and through my propositional theory lens, develop a generalization for why these two video gaming clubs were successful, and what other video gaming clubs can learn from these two.

Site and Participant Selection

The Michigan site was selected based on my immediate exposure to it. My desire to further understand extracurricular video game clubs started with the club I created, so it made sense that I used the highly-attended club before me as a starting place in my research. Furthermore, as a case study site, it helped that I have already spent hundreds of hours participating and observing the club. That fact helped me when writing my individual

case report for the first site, as well as how I structured my interview questions. This also provided an unduly positive view of student experiences because of the possibly biased nature of my interpretation, and my desire for positive outcomes. I also might have affected the student responses, even with clear assurances that I was looking for their honest and authentic experiences and opinions of the clubs, my power over them as the club leader can have an extended and unintended influence on the students. To try and placate this effect, the one-on-one interviews I conducted with the students were done over a software programmed called Skype. To hide my voice in the call, I used a voice altering software that made me sound like a woman. When I summoned the student for the interview, I told them a researcher friend of mine was conducting the interview for me. I put them in a room with a computer, and said that the researcher would call them when I notified them the student was ready. Judging by how all the one-on-one interviews went, I have no reason to think the students thought it was me on the other end. Furthermore, in the focus group interview I had, the student responses there often mirrored what the one-on-one students said.

The Canadian site was selected based on the recognition the group received on a video streaming site called twitch.tv. This club live streams their events to anyone who wants to watch, and they garner thousands of viewers. After one of their events, a couple of the faculty advisors did an AMA (short for Ask Me Anything) on the website Reddit.com. It was through this AMA that I connected with these faculty advisors. Their club is run by two dedicated teachers, they fit the requirement I had of high (above fifty students) and consistent participation levels, and their club is run distinctly different than my club in Michigan. Since both clubs revolve around gaming, but have totally different

organizational structures and demographics, I decided the Canadian club was a good candidate in this multiple case study. This site's inclusion gave me a broader perspective to view gaming clubs through. Stake (2006) describes three main criteria for selecting cases:

1. Is the case relevant to the quintain?
2. Do the cases provide diversity across contexts?
3. Do the cases provide good opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts?

As indicated earlier, a multicase study starts with recognizing what concept or idea binds the cases together. ... An important reason for doing the multicase study was to examine how the program or phenomenon performs in different environments. This often means that cases in both typical and atypical settings should be selected. When cases are selected carefully, the design of a study can incorporate a diversity of contexts. (p. 23)

I argue that I was able to answer yes to all three of these questions laid out by Stake as a guide for selecting my cases. While due to its infancy, it was not yet known if video game clubs have typical and atypical settings; I did know that both clubs I had selected were distinctly different from each other. In selecting these two sights I had aimed at choosing clubs that differed from each other as much as possible; they had different numbers of people that attended the events, they had a different number of events each year, the clubs are run with totally different structures, and the demographics of both clubs do not overlap. This gave insights into examining how video game clubs perform in different environments. Later Stake (2006) goes on about this topic to say:

Therefore, one of the most important tasks for the multicase researcher was to show how the program or phenomenon appears in different contexts. The more the study was a qualitative study, the more emphasis will be placed on the experience of the people in the program or the phenomenon. ... Putting them together, in context, constitutes the central findings of the multicase study. (p. 27)

I found my two sites to be adequate selection choices for a multicase study. Typically, multicase studies do not use only two sites, but they also typically use more than one researcher. It was therefore understandable that I used only two sites for this dissertation.

Regarding how my participants were selected, most of the participants were strictly voluntary on their part with a few key people being purposefully selected upon their agreement to participate. The few people to be purposefully selected were the faculty mentors of both groups, and some student executive board members of the clubs. I sought out the students and teachers most involved in the club to get their perspectives, additionally, the research came with additional students willing to volunteer their time for an interview and an anonymous survey.

It was important to hear the interpretations of both clubs from members of the clubs in similar positions; faculty sponsors, student executive board members, and casual but consistent members of the club to compare the two clubs more accurately. My intent was to find what the people most involved in the clubs share about its functioning and what it means to them. The goal was to gain the most detailed image possible of each individual case; to help me build that detailed image, I asked to interview the most dedicated participants first, and taking on any other participants that volunteer after that. Due to the large number of students that selected to volunteer to be interviewed. I put them all in list and had Google's random number generator select the names of the students I interviewed.

Data Collection

The primary means of data collection was through interviewing the participants. Additionally, an online anonymous survey was available for all the students to participate

in before and while the interviews were taking place, giving the students a choice of which method they preferred. The online survey left room for participants to give their own feedback, in an open-ended model. In this regard, the survey could be a very structured form of interviewing without allowing follow-up questions. Early responses to the survey helped guide the formal interviews. Robert Yin (2014) discusses in his book on Case Study Research, “You also can use multiple methods in any given study (for example, a survey within a case study) ... To this extent, the various methods are not mutually exclusive (p. 13).” The goal was to paint a picture of the entire case, and it was appropriate to add the data collection format of a survey to the means in which I employed to explore these cases.

All students were invited to complete the survey. If they were involved in the club in any way, they were invited but not required to complete the survey. Coal Hill Secondary School, the school in Canada, had 34 students complete their survey, while Deffry Vale High School had 89 students. Those numbers are both around 80% of the total regular weekly attendances of each school’s club. The surveys were given to the students in a room without the teachers present, and the students were given an unlimited time to complete them. For the Deffry Vale students, a cart of laptops was set up in a different room than where the club meets; the students were asked to take the surveys if they felt comfortable doing so, and upon completion were told to find another person in the club who had not taken the survey but would like to, to go into the other room and take it. The Coal Hill students took their survey in the same computer lab that Mr. Harkness teaches in, but he said he was not in the room during their administration.

The following table outlines the people who participated in the various types of interviews, and their pertinent information:

Table 1

Overview of Participants

Assigned Name	Grade	Sex	Focus Group	Faculty Sponsor/ Executive Board Member	Site
Mr. Tennant		M		<input type="checkbox"/>	Coal Hill
Mr. Harkness		M		<input type="checkbox"/>	Coal Hill
Rose Tyler	8	F			Coal Hill
Ood	11	M			Coal Hill
River Song	9	F			Coal Hill
Davros	10	M			Coal Hill
Strax	12	M			Coal Hill
Wilfred	11	M			Coal Hill
Rory	11	M			Coal Hill
K-9	9	M	<input type="checkbox"/>		Coal Hill
Angel Bob	10	M	<input type="checkbox"/>		Coal Hill
Rassilon	11	M	<input type="checkbox"/>		Coal Hill
Ace	9	M			Deffry Vale
Vincent	12	M			Deffry Vale
Stormageddon	11	M		<input type="checkbox"/>	Deffry Vale
The TARDIS	10	M			Deffry Vale
Mickey	10	M			Deffry Vale
Sarah Jane	12	F		<input type="checkbox"/>	Deffry Vale
Martha	10	F			Deffry Vale
Donna Noble	10	F			Deffry Vale
Nardole	11	M		<input type="checkbox"/>	Deffry Vale
The Face of Boe	12	M	<input type="checkbox"/>		Deffry Vale
Jenny Flint	12	F	<input type="checkbox"/>		Deffry Vale
Amy Pond	12	F	<input type="checkbox"/>		Deffry Vale
Capaldi	12	M	<input type="checkbox"/>		Deffry Vale

The interview data I have gathered comes from a variety of sources, as can be seen below:

Table 2

List of Sites

School	Students interviewed	People in focus group	Sponsor Interviews	days observed
Deffry Vale	13	4	0	26
Coal Hill	10	3	2	2

The interviews were split between mostly one-on-one interviews, and one focus group per site. The questions from the survey were used as guides for the interview, additionally I had the option to ask follow-up questions based on responses I got during the interviews. This semi-structured interview style gave me the ability to ask an interviewee to go further into detail about a response they gave. If I could tell a respondent was particularly passionate about a short response they gave, I gave that person time to go into further detail into this possible emerging theme. Furthermore, I sought to get the opinions of each member within the focus group, specifically seeking to avoid letting the conversational nature of the focus group having a corroborating nature of feedback, and to seek dissenting opinions from the majority.

Even though I was conducting the one-on-one interviews with the participants of the club I run, I shielded my identity from the students. As mentioned earlier, I sat the students in a private room by themselves with a computer waiting for them. I told them the person interviewing them will be calling them on Skype and to be prepared to answer their call. I then went to a different room and made the Skype call myself. I used a voice changing program called Screaming Bee MorphVOX to shield my identity. The program has several settings, but the most authentic sounding adjustment made me sound like a middle-aged woman. I received no feedback to suggest the students interviewing perceived my voice to be inauthentic. The purpose of shielding my identity was to allow the students to feel like they could share any critiques or praises of me or the club without their opinions being traced to them.

I audio recorded the interviews for later transcription. The identities of the interviewees have been kept completely anonymous, to anyone other than myself. Due to

the fact that I conducted the interviews for my Michigan club, I am able to identify all the students responding. However, their identity has been shielded from anyone else. I have given the respondents a nickname that nobody might guess. The purpose of the study was explained to them beforehand, along with all procedures I took to keep their identities unknown. I have stored the audio recordings on a password protected computer at home, and a cloud storage facility that was also password protected. Upon the completion of this dissertation, I will delete the audio recordings.

Data Analysis

I have applied the analysis method of explanation building as laid out by Yin (2014). In it, he explains how the explanation method can be used for exploratory case study research, “A parallel procedure, for exploratory case studies, has been commonly cited as part of a hypothesis-generating process (see Glaser & Strauss, 1967) but its goal is not to conclude a study but to develop ideas for further study. (p.147)” As I mentioned before, I used the theoretical proposition that *clubs increase student engagement through actions and organizational structures created by the faculty advisors*. Since this research field is in its infancy, this case study was exploratory in nature, with hopes of finding a general explanation that fits both cases. Yin (2014) explains it this way:

In a multiple-case study, one goal was to build a general explanation that fits each individual case, even though the cases will vary in their details. The objective was analogous to creating an overall explanation in science, for the findings from multiple experiments. (p.148)

The process of explanation building is repetitive in nature, starting with my theoretical proposition and comparing one case to that proposition. Then, further refinement of that proposition is made, and more comparisons of the newly formed proposition are conducted with further details of the case. Finally, the proposition is revised

once again, and then compared to the details of the second case in the same way until a final revision is made to the theoretical proposition. In this scenario, it is appropriate that the final explanation to be different than the original theoretical proposition.

One potential problem with this analysis method is a creeping bias from my perspective throughout the reiterative process. Researchers who choose this analysis method must be careful not to gloss over critical data. To avoid this bias creep, Yin (2014) suggests, “You should check frequently with the original purpose of the inquiry, use external colleagues as ‘critical friends,’ and continually examine possible alternative explanations.” I kept in close contact with my advisor to help me stay focused on my original purpose; she provided additional perspectives on data I initially found to have low significance but pertained significantly to my original purpose.

Ethical Considerations and Authentication of Data

I utilized the works of Thomas Schwandt et al., (2007), Yvonna Lincoln, and Egon Guba et al., (2007) for this dissertation when considering research ethics and authenticating my data. The hallmark works are Thomas Schwandt’s et al., (2007) titled *Judging Interpretations*, and Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba’s et al., (2007) *But was It Rigorous? Trustworthiness and Authenticity in Naturalistic Evaluation*.

At the heart of qualitative research was the idea of interpretation. These two papers focus on ideas about interpretation that I share, with one core tenant being that you cannot experience or understand something outside of your own interpretation and life experiences. Who you are shapes how you interpret the world. Your entire lived experience is shaped by that very experience, and someone else with a different life story invariably

experiences the same event differently. The kinds of questions I asked in this research required an interpretivist approach to attaining the knowledge I hoped to gain.

Therefore, the problem quickly becomes evident of how do researchers conduct “good” research that does not dismiss this interpretivist quality of humanity, yet still provides reliable and *trustworthy* information. The analogy Schwandt et al., (2007) gives regarding how his brother was handling the decisions of his health-failing parents highlights the different ways research can approach understanding the situation. Moving from questions such as, “Do I have the facts of the matter straight? Have I witnessed enough interactions to feel confident in how they are communicating? Have I asked others what they think of the situation?” to equally important questions such as, “What do my parents think? Have I taken into account my own ways of thinking about what was right to do in this situation? Have my brother and I come to a better understanding of the situation through discussions between us where we appreciate each other’s point of view?” It was paramount to consider your own position in the research setting.

As Lincoln and Guba et al., (2007) explain in their chapter, the first important axiom was the following:

The axiom concerned with the nature of “truth” statements demands that inquirers abandon the assumption that enduring, context-free truth statements—generalizations—can and should be sought. Rather, it asserts that all human behavior was time- and context-bound; this boundedness suggests that inquiry was incapable of producing nomothetic knowledge but instead only idiographic ‘working hypotheses’ that relate to a given and specific context.

Indeed it was my aim to understand more clearly what pieces of video gaming clubs should be present to increase their helpfulness to students; but this aim was always guided by what the students and staff report what was important to them. From these comments, I

found it appropriate to build an understanding of video gaming club qualities that most frequently stood out. However, I am not saying that my findings *are* the qualities that must be in successful clubs, nor am I saying that they cannot change over time.

Next, I address the axiom concerned with the nature of the inquirer-respondent relationship. It claims that the relationship between the respondent and the inquirer must be of mutual and simultaneous influence. The goal was to have both parties benefit from the research, not simply the inquirer. It was of utmost importance to let the respondents in on any notes I took and any conclusions I made. The relationship was a two-way street, so it would be unfair for me to listen to their opinions while not letting the respondents in on my opinions. They must have equal control over the data they are providing, and I did not create a situation where I was in a position of power over them. I tried to make my notes and conclusions readily available to the respondents by contacting them, or giving them the means to contact me, upon completion of my analysis and seeking their input on whether or not my characterization of their experience was accurate. If there was a misinterpretation on my part, they were able to identify it and give further input.

Trustworthiness

There are two families of trustworthiness Lincoln and Guba et al., (2007) lay out: Parallel Criteria of Trustworthiness, and Unique Criteria of Authenticity. To begin, I start with parallel criteria in the context of my research.

Credibility. The essentials of attaining credibility are distinguished into six strategies:

1. Prolonged engagement – I was in contact with my respondents in the field for a lengthy amount of time. Certainly for the Michigan site I was in contact with them

for hundreds of hours. The contact time in the Canadian site was the entire duration of one of their large events (~10 hours), The two school days I spent observing their school, and the interviews I was able to conduct.

2. Persistent observation – in-depth pursuit of elements found to be salient through the prolonged engagement. The Michigan club had persistent involvement since I run it. Due to the cost of traveling to Canada I was only able to visit it one time; however, I was in contact with the faculty advisors over a year getting updates and more details. There was the possibility of me observing their events virtually, through a video stream. A major drawback to this was that I would only be able to see what they choose to have their camera pointed at, and I would not be able to interact with their members. However, this was still a valuable observation tool.
3. Triangulation of data – I used online interviews, individual interviews, focus group interviews, and my own observations as different data sources to satisfy the need of triangulation.
4. Peer debriefing – While most of the data analysis was done by myself, I was also in contact with disinterested peers to help me develop working hypotheses, develop and test the emerging design, and obtain emotional catharsis. This was done primarily by my advisor.
5. Negative case analysis – I actively sought students who have attended my Michigan club but do not come back. It was important to me to know why they have not come back. I tried to do the same for the Canadian club.
6. Member checks – I shared my reconstruction of the data with my respondents to record their reaction and input to it. The data I collected from them are ultimately

their data, so it was up to me to give them the ability to adjust any misinterpretations I may have had with it.

Transferability. Thick descriptive data – It was my explicit goal in the data collection process to make sure I had a thick and robust description of my observations. A driving factor to do this research was to help others learn from it, so what I report was of a quality that it was helpful to others.

Authenticity

Fairness. Lincoln and Guba et al., (2007) define fairness as “a balanced view that presents all constructions and the values that undergird them.” It was of critical importance to let everyone contribute during the data collection phase, and through this making sure all mentioned accounts of video gaming clubs are represented in equal places on the final document. The values of the respondents came through in their responses to the questions. Their experiences revolved around what their values are, so it was important to ask questions that elicited responses that shed light on the club and the students’ and staff’s values.

The process of fairness does not stop once the data collection phase had ended. Lincoln and Guba et al., (2007) say, “the second step in achieving the fairness criterion was the negotiation of recommendations and subsequent action, carried out with stake holding groups or their representatives at the conclusion of the data-gathering, analysis, and interpretation stages of evaluation effort.” I gave my respondents a chance to review my analysis to make sure I reported their experiences correctly, as recommended by Lincoln and Guba et al., (2007), and I honored their input. I made recommendations, as my

analysis includes commonly reported features of the clubs that students and staff felt most valuable, in the aim of transferability.

Ontological Authentication. One way to reach satisfaction in this kind of research is to notice if there was “an improvement in the group or individual’s conscious experiencing of the world” (Lincoln & Guba, 2007). Everyone who participated in this research had their own interpretation of the data collected. And, it was important to keep in mind the philosophical stance qualitative researchers must take in their endeavors here; we recognize that each person has their own lived experience of the same events. So, in this context it seems only natural that the best way to measure authenticity was if each person is experiencing the world in an improved way, as defined by themselves. Regarding video gaming clubs, the final stage of this dissertation required me to ask if the research, and discussion about the research with the students and staff involved, have improved their understandings of the club and its place within their lives.

Educative Authentication. I made available ongoing discussions about the data collected to give the people who participated in this research the chance to see where their respondent peers are coming from. If anyone contacted me about my findings, it was my duty to distribute them. Understanding is clearly defined differently than agreeing with the findings, and a discussion of values and interpretations can begin from there to achieve Educative Authentication as closely as possible. However, other than minor measurable details like where and when something happened, the feedback given to me from the respondents was that my analysis depicted their experience accurately.

Catalytic Authentication. This called for all involved, particularly the powerless, to be involved in coming up with solutions from the start of the research. Ultimately, the

entire point of this research was to learn as much as we could and use that information to change things for a better future. Trust was built between everyone involved; the most influential person in this project must have their opinions equally valued as the less involved folks. Letting everyone partake in solutions, and letting them feel confident their opinion was heard and understood; therefore, letting their recommendations come through. After completion of the research and sharing of the findings, I looked for improvements in the structures of the clubs.

Tactical Authenticity. Through all this discussion and effort at fairness and emancipation, the final result must be empowering to the powerless. When I looked for tactical authenticity in my research I looked for video gaming clubs popping up more and more. We can discuss how they should be run all we want, but if they exist at all was the tactical authenticity I looked for. For I felt their existence does give the students who play video games a safe place to express their hobby and learn many other beneficial life lessons. Their existence empowers their feelings in a climate where they were told they should not like what they do.

Summary

In selecting the multicase study methodology I have chosen an appropriate method to investigate the qualities of video game clubs that the participants find most meaningful to them. In this study I used this approach to conduct focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews, and online surveys. Coupled with my own observations I portrayed a detailed and informative narrative on two well-attended video game clubs. Through my conviction of necessitating strong ethics, I have meet the authentication criteria.

CHAPTER 4: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND VIDEO GAME CLUBS

Coal Hill Secondary School

The first thing we really want to try and show was that it was very inclusive. We want it not bound by social or friend groups or grade levels. We really wanted to create a positive community. (Jack Harkness, Coal Hill Secondary School Teacher, and video game club faculty sponsor)

School Overview

Coal Hill Secondary School is located in British Columbia, Canada. While the school district does not record demographics data, the national census data has the city's demographics listed as:

Table 3

Demographics of Coal Hill

Group	Population	% of population
South Asian	1,675	2.50%
Chinese	1,575	2.30%
Black	695	1%
Filipino	820	1.20%
Latin American	385	0.60%
Arab	50	0.10%
Southeast Asian	545	0.80%
West Asian	310	0.50%
Korean	605	0.90%
Japanese	365	0.50%
Other visible minority	35	0.10%
Mixed visible minority	255	0.40%
First Nations	735	1.10%
Métis	1,065	1.50%
Inuit	10	0.00%
European Canadian	58,970	86.50%
Total	68,095	100.00%

Coal Hill has an enrollment of just over 1000 students. You do not have to apply to get in, it is a normal neighborhood school that everyone is expected to go to that lives in the area, but the district has open enrollment so any parents who do not want to have their student attend Coal Hill can have their student attend a different secondary school in the area.

The structure of the high school is unique. It started out 25 years ago with no courses whatsoever, the students would meander throughout the building, visiting teachers they wanted to earn credit through. It is an open format school, meaning that it was designed for the students to be self-guided. Since its creation, it has slowly crept towards a more structured format. Currently three of the five grade levels have 1/3rd of their day for classes they must attend (those classes range throughout the week, as each teacher only sees that student once a week). The remaining 2/3rd of the students' day is open time for them to work on whatever assignments they choose. Because of this, Coal Hill has many open spaces where students are typically sitting in groups working on their various assignments, or just chatting. According to the several teachers I talked to while visiting, the general feeling was that the school does not generally function properly, while still working well for students who are already highly motivated. Interestingly, the school has a 60% female to 40% male ratio. Several staff members reported they find the females tend to be more successful at Coal Hill due to their elevated self-discipline compared to their male classmates. They also suspected parents of male students wanting their kid to go to other secondary schools with words like "technical" in their titles.

The school website describes itself as follows:

The school design and the instructional model anticipates the needs of future students and the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed by future

citizens. A set of principles is identified and used to shape the personalized instructional model and the design of the building. The principles that shaped the redesign of curriculum delivery were that:

- all students learn at different rates and in different ways
- students will learn better if they take some responsibility for their own learning
- current learning should support students' life-long learning
- all students can learn and want to learn
- schools must be safe and orderly
- the building should support, not hinder, innovation

The school is organized around a Teacher Advisor System where one teacher takes responsibility for approximately 25 students. The Advisor becomes the prime advocate and contact for these students and forms a triangle involving the home, the student and the Classroom Teacher and Teacher Advisor. Each part of the triangle has a key part to play in the success at school. If any of the parts fail to be an active participant the chance of success is greatly reduced.

The school is organized so that grade eight students follow a “conventional” timetable in structured classes but at the same time are introduced to the concept of learning guides and self – directed learning. When students enter grade nine, each day they create their own timetable daily in conjunction with their teacher advisor. Each course is typically made up of 20 learning guides and students are required to design and plan their year, their week and their days working at a reasonable pace to complete in the year. The flexibility allowed to focus more time on curricular areas where the student may be struggling allows all students a greater chance of success.

Each grade 10 – 12 student has a partial timetable where approximately 1/3 of their time (more for grade 12's taking government exam courses) scheduled with 2/3 of their time wide open for self-direction.

The risk the school district took 25 years ago, to allow the pursuit of an alternative approach to education, was still supported by the community and school district. This school was a significant member of its community because it preaches the self-guided, life-long learner, habits that help make people successful throughout their life. Instead of forcing kids to do things, this school took a lighter approach while still accomplishing similar goals shared by their traditional counterparts.

About the Club

The video game club is one of many clubs that the two teacher sponsors offer to their students. The video game club meets every Monday, and sees attendance around 30 kids each week. They use the tech lab as their meeting space, as it has plenty of room and capable computers the kids can use. This room is Mr. Harkness' regular teaching room. Each computer already has most of the games they play loaded onto them due to software companies allowing multiple local installations of already-purchased games, and so when the students come in on Monday afternoons they can just sit down and get going. The sponsors also run two other clubs: The Dungeons and Dragons club, and the board game club. Throughout the interviews the students would recall different stories from the different clubs, including their experiences in those along with video game club. Some weeks participating students would go to one of the clubs, and the next week go to a different one, or some weeks they had attended all three. It was clear to me that the students grouped all of these together as one experience, and through my interviews, it became quite apparent that the students who came to video game club frequently go to the other clubs that the two teacher sponsors offer. In the tone the students were talking, it appeared that every student automatically grouped the other clubs together with video game club. After initially trying to get the students to separate their experiences and just talk about their video game club experience, I stopped because I realized that all the other clubs were gaming clubs as well and fit into the students interests just like video game club.

On top of these weekly club meetings, the two teacher sponsors held special events that happen once or twice a year depending on how much energy they have. The event I was not able to see firsthand was their LARPing even. LARP stands for live action role

play, and in these kinds of events you typically take an entire day, or weekend, and play out a fantasy story where everyone involved is playing a fantasy character of varying skills, and together they must defeat some threat. It could be described as Dungeon and Dragons but with everyone acting out their roles, and some people acting as the bad guys. LARPing is usually considered the ultimate nerdy thing to do, often perceived as *too* nerdy for your regular every-day gamer. That being said, it is wildly fun and involving if you can get over your ego hit of LARPing for a day. Many of the students I talked to at the video game club participated in the LARP events, and several of them were involved in the planning aspect of it. A theme of a previous LARP event had been Star Wars, and while I was there, the staff members were planning a Vikings style fantasy adventure with a pig roasting on a spit, Viking re-enactors, an animatronic dragon, and having the teachers dress as trolls, hags, townsfolk, and bar and inn keeps.

The other special event was the one I had traveled specifically to see, their LAN party. LAN stands for Local Area Network, and it is typically used to connect computers in a building. LAN parties started in the 90s, when the internet was still too slow to have lag-free online play, but computer games came with network capabilities, so you could play with your friends if you were connected in a LAN. Gamers would gather at someone's house and buy all the equipment they needed to create a local area network for them to play on. This was essentially the only way PC gamers could play a game with their friends. With faster internet speeds becoming commonplace, LAN parties are not as common, but there is still a great amount of fun to be had. Being in the same room as a friend while playing the same game together is a real treat. Even though you can do the same thing online, there is always something missing by not having that person sitting next to you. So, the two

teacher sponsors, being children of the 90s, decided to bring their joy of LAN parties to their school. They hold one to two LAN parties a year, and participation has ranged from 100 to 200 kids in attendance.

IDS and Industrial Design

The two teacher sponsors of the club each teach a class that has varying involvement with the video game club. One was a course called Independent Directed Studies, or IDS. This class can be taught by any teacher, so long as a student reaches out to that teacher. The students I interviewed frequently had Mr. Tennant as their IDS teacher, and a few of them had Mr. Harkness in Industrial Design. The IDS class was a self-directed experience opportunity for the students to pursue something they would like to get more experience with, while earning elective, or core credit (depending on the experience used for IDS). Through the interviews the students made frequent references to both courses and how they enhanced their experiences in the gaming clubs. The students discussed having the sponsors in a classroom setting vs seeing them after-school, and how that affected their experiences. The Coal Hill website describes the IDS program like this:

IDS program is a great opportunity to develop your passions and interests into a course of credits. It is a method of developing a focus of interest, and documenting that personal growth in a manner that supports academic growth. IDS allows you to shape and follow your own course or courses, with a teacher/IDS coordinator. You may choose to add a specialist from outside of the school community. IDS course credits count as electives toward graduation.

To qualify for IDS, you need the approval of the school principal to expand on one or more learning outcomes from any Ministry or Board/Authority Authorized course. Then you will need to find a teacher to supervise your studies before you initiate your own course. You will work independently and your teacher will support you and assess your performance.

A couple of examples of the types of IDS projects students had were one student recorded voice lines as a voice actor for a video game, another student worked with friends to create a map, or level, to play in, in one of their favorite games. Other students run large tournaments at the LAN parties. Some students program different things that suit their interest. Depending on the project, they can get elective credit, and credit for a core class that their project aligns with.

The industrial design course is a tech course. The students use computers to design robots, boats, bridges, or really whatever they had like. The school's course selection booklet describes the industrial design courses as follows:

INDUSTRIAL DESIGN 11 - Fusing computer aided design and hands-on skills students will create and compete in a variety of different challenges. Builds include: sumo Robots, boats, rockets, bridges, siege weapons, gliders and more. Students will learn how to use graphical design and 3D modelling programs to interface with a CC laser cutter/engraver and the CC router.

INDUSTRIAL DESIGN 12 - Fusing Computer aided design and hands-on skills students will create and compete in a variety of different challenges. Builds include: sumo robots, boats, rockets, bridges, siege weapons, gliders and more. Students will learn how to use graphical design and 3D modelling programs to interface with a CC laser cutter/engraver and the CC router.

The class does not specifically have a tie to the video game club, the other clubs, the LANs, or the LARPs specifically, but the class is taught by one of the club sponsors, Mr. Harkness. Through this course, he has recruited many of the members of those clubs. In my interviews, many of the students spoke of their involvement in this course as a way of initially hearing about the clubs. Some students have earned credits in their IDS course through the LAN parties by running technical necessities for the LAN to run smoothly. Furthermore, many students in the industrial design course, and also in the video game

club, said being a part of the club has helped them in their industrial design course now that they are more connected to the teacher.

My Observation Days

I spent two days at Coal Hill Secondary School; the second day had their LAN party after the normal school day schedule concluded.

Day One

The school did not strike me as overly chaotic, with the students taking up so much of the open space. Most of the time the students seemed to be just socializing with each other, with some work on their table in case a teacher walked by, they could pretend to be working. I sat in a meeting for a new course proposed for 11th graders designed so the teachers could check in with the students to see how their academic progress is going. The room was completely full, and after a brief description of the course the teachers asked the students why they were interested in signing up for this check-in type class. The vast majority seemed to agree, and chuckle, when a couple students offered that they are only interested in it because it seems like an easy class. I get the feeling that the staff fights severe lack of student motivation at the school, and staff members reported that they experience this as well. However, I would be remiss if I did not include that the time of year I was visiting was not an end of a semester, but a mid-semester card marking period. There was some urgency from several students to have that grade reflect positively upon them. I was told that the students were focusing more heavily on their grades during my visit than they normally do. I was assured by some teachers that as the end of the year approaches the students “burn the midnight oil” to get caught up in their classes. The

students with great motivation do seem to benefit from the school's design, and rarely fall behind compared to their less motivated peers.

It was clear to me that the school was full of incredibly nice, caring, students and staff. I did not witness any negative talk between students, or overhear any trash talking by one group of students about another group who was not there. The school had posters everywhere about being careful of the words you say about others, and the thoughtfulness you must take when talking to and of all types of people. The students I talked to throughout the day seemed to be eager to share their passion for inclusion and social justice. Students seemed eager to inform me of their high transgender student population, and their well-attended GSA-like club. The diversity of the school seemed to represent the demographics of the city overall. The overall city population consisting of 86% European Canadians, I saw that same heavy representation in the school with a representative smattering of the other races represented.

Overall, aside from Canadian colloquialisms and other small general language differences such as students and staff talking in quotes, the students at this school struck me as another good group of suburban kids at a reasonably well funded high school you might find in the United States of America. They had the normal range of family life problems, and there appeared to be a typical spread of kids who were into sports, nerdy kids, the extremely social, the socially intimidated, etc. I did find that, in classic Canadian fashion, the students were a bit friendlier than those in the US. The students felt quite comfortable coming up to me and starting up a conversation, particularly when I was not introduced to them. One instance sticks out where I am just entering the building for my first time and several students noticed without my prompting that I looked like I did not

know where to go, and they escorted me to the right spot all while striking up a positive and inquisitive conversation. Normally when I walk as a stranger through a new school, students look with a more stoic facial expression, while in Coal Hill the students would look and then respond with a smile and a nod.

The students and staff reported that they do receive a fair number of unknown adults that come to the school to do whatever it is they are interested in checking out. This does not come as a surprise to me, as the structure of the school was so unique, I would expect there to be a lot of centralized interest in keeping track of how the school was performing. I would not be surprised if this quality of the school has helped the students seem more comfortable with unknown adults. The students here seemed to be very comfortable around me almost right away, often quickly giving me a well-natured “America is terrible and Canada is the best” kind of ribbing. I also quickly felt comfortable and welcomed to be around the students; and in turn they seemed to reciprocate that feeling and opened up to me rapidly.

As I walked around the halls, I would hear the typical high school aged discussions. Frustration with chemistry seemed to be the most common complaint about the previous night’s homework, along with wishing they had not procrastinated so much on their other various assignments. This was a Thursday, the students had until the next day before their report card marking was finished and their grades were final. So, there was a particular sense of urgency among everyone at the school to get things done and have received credit for it. People told me it was not usually this hectic. I did not perceive things to be overly chaotic, but people were apologizing to me about the abnormality of the students’ stressful

natures today. They seemed perfectly normal to me, perhaps they are extremely relaxed on normal days!

I sat in on one of the senior level social studies courses, and very quickly I found myself being incorporated into the lesson on Canada's involvement in WW2, being asked to give details of the US' involvement at similar times throughout the lesson for perspective. Just like most classes, the course I sat in on only met that one time each week. It felt like a perfectly normal class, but the teacher was only able to cover a normal amount of information with the required context. It was then up to the students to learn more on their own for the rest of the week. Work often was never done, or as one student put it in an interview when discussing how his project did not get done in his IDS class, "Just that Coal Hill lifestyle. It is just like here it is like open blocks, no one gets to their work. No one really does their work. As soon as it gets handed out." I thought to myself how horrible I would have been in this school environment when I was in high school. I know the sentiment of the lazier student population at Coal Hill regarding school would have been echoed by myself at that age. The clear majority of the teachers I watched during my time at Coal Hill seemed quite enthusiastic about teaching when they got their chance. Even though there was a diminished teaching time, one might guess the school would attract teachers who do not like standing up in front of the students and teaching; however, from what I could see, the opposite was the truth. The teachers seemed to relish in their chance to get in front of their students.

Day Two

The following day was a normal school day, but what followed it was the school's LAN party. The students were clearly a bit more energetic this day. The stress of the

previous day, due to the ending of the grade marking session, seemed to have lifted from the students. I observed that the students seemed to be seeking out their teachers with less tenacity. Perhaps I just missed all of that side of the teacher's life today.

The LAN started an hour and a half after school ended, so the school day progressed as a normal day, and there was little to no preparation for the logistics of the LAN during the day. All of that happened as soon as the last period of the day ended.

When school ended at 3:00pm, it was a Friday, so most of the students left the building with an added sense of jubilation. The logistics of setting up for the LAN party were on, though. Even though students were instructed to wait until 4pm to set up, students were already pulling out their computers and gaming systems, trying to claim the best spots or start a bit early. The staff who were helping (the two teacher sponsors, and six or so additional teachers who just came to help) were running around laying down power cabling to make sure all the computers had power (The entire lunch room [rotunda] was on one circuit breaker unfortunately, so to ensure power would not cut out for everyone they had to run extension cords from all over the building to spread out the power use.

A district IT person, a grad of the school himself, came to start laying the cabling for the network. There were 5 large switches placed throughout the rotunda for students to connect their computers to for internet. The IT staff were switching some things around in the firewall, and the main internet infrastructure (the main building switch), to accommodate the students playing games on the network. After about two hours, everything was set up and ready to go with only a few instances of having to reroute power and use differing equipment for certain scenarios. Overall, I would say the LAN, logistically, ran smoothly. The students were able to connect to the internet, and play,

within the LAN's first hour of going. That was pretty good for a large LAN all things considered.

The LAN consisted of student-run tournaments involving the games of *counterstrike: Global Offense*, *Super Smash Brothers 4* (doubles tournament), and *Starwhal* tournament (A silly game promoted by the teachers that got a lot of buy in [around 15 students participated]). However, there were many other games being played, mostly with players on the same team as each other. *League of Legends*, *Super Smash Brothers Melee*, *Guild Wars 2*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Overwatch*, and *FIFA 2017* were the most represented games that were not being played in a tournament, particularly *Overwatch* and *FIFA 2017*.

There were two interjections by the teacher sponsors for a special event. The first was a keyboard toss, where around 50 students went outside in a competition to see who could throw old keyboards the furthest. The winner got a new keyboard, and bragging rights. I participated in the competition as the judge who determines who threw their keyboard the furthest. The students really loved this game, cheering each other on. Once one kid really threw his keyboard a distance that was not going to be topped, the remaining students took up rejoicing at the varying joking styles a student would try to throw their keyboard with. Toward the end, students were generally running around being happy. This was a total hit.

The second of the two interjections was not a competition but a group game that around 25 people played. The game was brought by the teacher sponsors, and it was called 2 rooms and a boom, where the participants gathered in two groups, each with an identity that was unknown to everyone else. As the game progressed, each person has goals they

are trying to achieve, and the identity of each person may be revealed to achieve various goals. At several stages of the game the group leaders send over members to swap with the other group, in an effort to win. The game was very light hearted, and the students worked together quite well to get things going. Various students gathered at the beginning of the game to chant “Hail Santa,” as a means to fire everyone up. It seemed like classic teenager nerdy boy silliness to me, where I cringed a bit listening to it, but it was so great that they all felt safe enough to be ridiculous like this together. The two teachers also participated in the game including myself, with one of the teachers running the game but not playing it.

Upon winning the various tournaments, the teachers would announce the winners to the entire LAN party through their connection to the speakers in the rotunda. This was generally how the students would hear major announcements. Furthermore, the teachers started to stream the finals of the student tournaments on their club’s twitch.tv account, which allows anyone in the world to check in and view the events as long as you are streaming it.

The students had achievement cards in the style of the game *Overwatch* in which they had to complete all the tasks to get qualified for small and medium prizes at the end of the LAN. These achievements were mostly about participating in the various options the LAN provided. One was to buy something from their store, others were to participate in the various tournaments or trivia competitions happening. A large portion of the attending students were participating in trying to complete the achievements.

One of the rooms was dedicated to video game trivia. It was in the band room, in Greek theater stadium-seating like orientation. The trivia was run by one of the students, and it was in the style of a game show. I was actually rather humbled, as the students knew

the trivia of many games from my generation, and they knew a considerably more of it than I did. The student running the trivia was receiving credit in their IDS course.

A few international students were there (3 or 4). They seemed like they were not into all the nerds being there, and kind of kept to themselves, but they did seem to be having a good time together. A teacher told me he got them to come by saying to them, “What else are you going to do on a Friday night in this sleepy town?” I guess that was all the convincing they needed. I am glad they came, because they did have a better time than they expected.

During the counterstrike GO final one of the teams had a student who was not listening to the commands of the team leader, going off on his own, and getting killed. It was interesting to watch how the team responded to that frustration. But I was impressed with the niceness of the students when approaching the one kid who was frustrated and going off on his own. After a short period of time talking to him nicely and asking him to play again as a group, he eventually did. Unfortunately, it did not help them enough to win the tournament, but they did better when he joined up with the group again. Seeing their interaction really made me feel like these were very kind kids, choosing not to yell at their friend, but talk to him nicely in a pressure-packed scenario. This niceness may also be a manifestation of playing in a LAN environment rather than being all at separate homes. Being in the presence of the other people typically drives less toxic behavior, whereas when a person is just a name on a screen people tend to be much more critical of each other.

I counted about 10 girls in the just-over 100 students who came. The percentage of the girls playing games was 6/10, and I would say 4 of them were there hanging out socializing with everyone instead of there to play the games. I am not sure of the ratio for

the guys, but I do not think I saw more than 1 or 2 boys who were there and choosing to primarily socialize instead of playing games.

Upon completion of the even, the cleaning up started. Most of the students left as soon as it was over, but a good 20 students stuck around to help with the cleanup process. Mostly students just chatted, while they slowly moved tables and stacked chairs. The adults were doing more of the deconstruction of the network and organizing of the cables. It took about 30 minutes to clean up to the point where it looked like when we started, but the cleaning continued for another 30 minutes or so making sure they got it cleaner than when they found it.

Emerging Themes

In this section I report the results I found connecting to many of my research questions and subquestions. I also include themes that emerged during my data collection that were not initially included in my research question. I present data collected from the interviews as well as survey results.

Shared Experiences with Peers

My opening interview question of simply, “Do you like the club?” followed up by “Why?” when they invariably said yes, received the most thorough response from the interviewees. Based off the survey I gave to the club members before I arrived, I was expecting most of them to say they liked it.

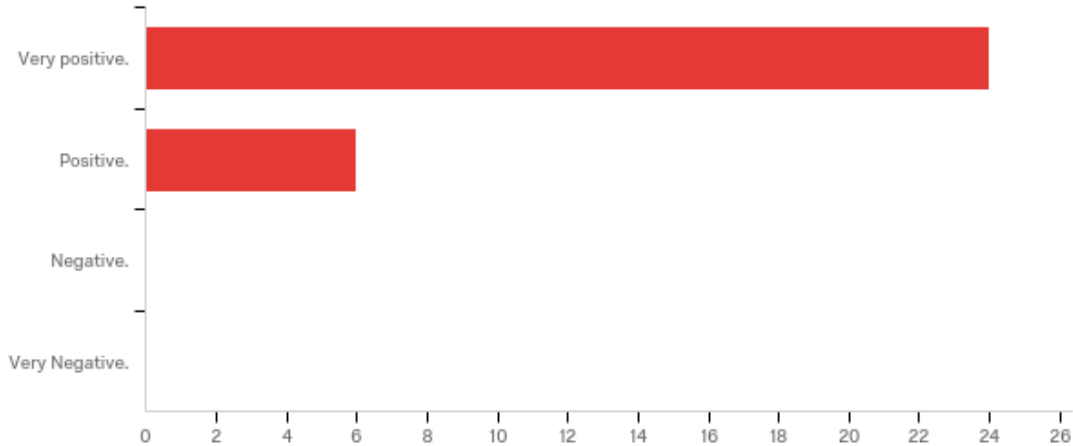


Figure 1: If the members like the club.

Of the 30 students that took the survey, 24 rated their experience as very positive, and 6 rated it positive. No student rated it negative or negatively. I was expecting this data to be swayed towards the positive range; why would someone persist in coming to a club if they did not like it? However, I was also expecting at least one student to have reported a negative experience.

Of the varying responses, a couple themes emerged regarding why the students liked the club. Six of the ten students interviewed said in this question that the best part for them was that they can do what they were going to do at home, but at school with friends. Responses were quite similar to each other, with an example from the focus group being,

***Rassilon:** The video game club was kind of a way to do things I am probably going to do at home anyways, and it was like a fun social way to do it with a group of other people. I think to have experiences with the video games that are harder to have with, you know, alone by yourself, even if you are like over chat or voice chat it is; I think it was a different experience when you are around a group of other people who share interests with you.*

It seemed important to the participants that a highlight of the club was to be around their peers, and play together. Six of the six participants who reported this said that social aspect

of the club was also important when asked why they like the club. Playing with friends was described as

K-9: *I like the kind of, community of somebody walking over and saying, “Hey do you want to come play? You know, Screen Cheat with us.” Or something like that. Because someone asked that, “Do you want to come play Screen Cheat?” and they ran out of controllers and I had to play with a keyboard and mouse and destroyed them. They thought I was cheating using keyboard and mouse so I switched and still won. So, there was the kind of competitive edge to it as well.*

Angel Bob: *You actually get to see their reaction as they slowly devolve into chaos.*

It was apparent that there was an added sense of enjoyment to see a person’s reaction to the gaming experience. The students noted that this sense of enjoyment struggled to be achieved over an online voice chat system.

Connected to the School

Starting with the survey data, I had in mind that the students may feel a certain way about going to school, and how their attachment to the school has developed since joining the club. 22 of the 30 students said coming to the club had made them feel better about going to school, with 8 saying it had no effect. None of the students surveyed reported that this club has made them feel worse about going to school.

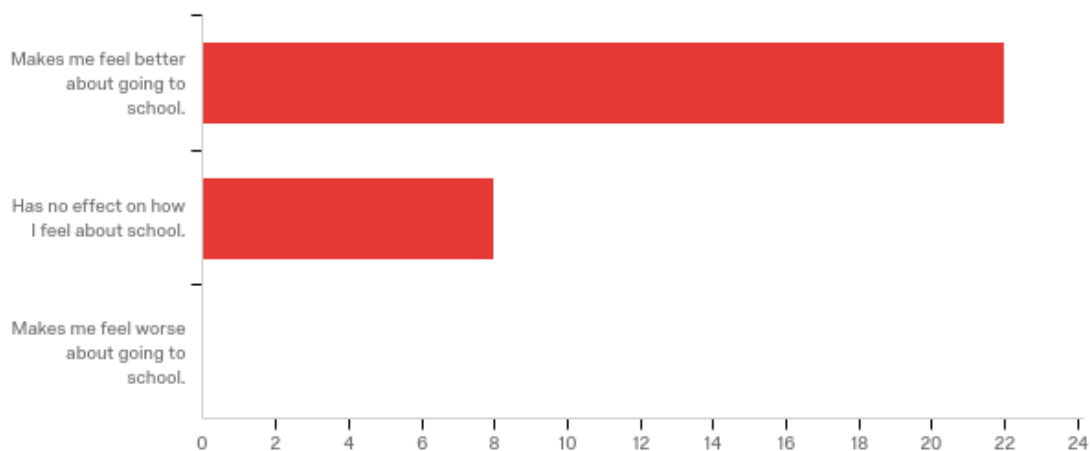


Figure 2: How the club has made the students feel about going to school.

With student engagement being influenced by how students feel about their connection to their school, a question I asked all the students was how this club has made them feel more connected to their school. Eight of the ten students reported their participation in the video game club to have increased their attachment to the school. The ranges of increase went from “Marginally but definitely an increase” to “100% increase” to “A lot of people say, like, ‘Oh are you excited to come back to school after break?’ I always used to say, ‘Ehhh, not really.’ And now I say, ‘Yeah! I am because of all these fun things you can do around the school at lunch and after school.’” A common way the Coal Hill students would describe a manifestation of their pride for their school was how they have noticed an increase in how much they brag to their peers about how their school has several very exciting things happening, and other kids’ schools in the district do not have any of it. Strax said it this way, “I have invited my friends from other schools to the LARPing events and stuff and been like, ‘Hey we have this really cool event going on.’ So, it was kind of something you can talk about that not a lot of other schools can talk about.”

In several of the interviews, students related how their feeling of connectedness to their peers has made them feel more connected to the school. They use phrases like, “It feels like I am a part of a family now,” “I have a place at the school now,” and, “It makes me want to be here more.” One student described his connection to the school like,

Rory: *I mean before like, if you do not really do any after-school events, or anything like that you do not participate in anything you just like go to this school and you like go home. But if you start participating than you start to like, I guess, have a lot more fun during school. You see school a bit different, right? ... I remember I did not really feel too comfortable being around this school. Then after, I sort of started participating as much as I could. [Long pause] It was just*

like, I do not really know how to explain it. Sometimes you do not feel really comfortable with something, but once you spend more time with it, you get more comfortable.

Rory expressed his slow growth of attachment to the school. To him, the club represented the help he needed to be able to calm his uneasiness about school, and turn it school into a positive experience for himself. He talked about how he was able to gain familiarity with the club members, and teachers at the club, which helped him buy into the school. A common theme when answering this question was for the students to describe how they feel like they now know more people at the school, and how that has made them more connected to Coal Hill. Rose Tyler put it this way,

I am, um, very antisocial and introverted. I have panic attacks when I am in large groups of people. So, I have not had the best year at this schools so far being so many more people that I am not used to. It just made me feel really uncomfortable and I felt like I was not a part of the school, which I wanted to be. Like I do not want to be afraid of people but I just kind of am. But I felt like I could not really connect with anybody, but when I heard there was dungeons and dragons going on, and video game club, I felt like if I maybe joined that I could get to know people who are like me, better. A lot of the people who go there are also antisocial like me; some of the people that I have talked to, and I have made really good friends from there. Yes, it has made me feel more connected to this school.

They do not feel like a stranger in the school, so Coal Hill does not feel strange them. The next section discusses the students' attachment to their peers.

Connections to Peers

When exploring how the students have responded towards their peers, I asked if the club has made them feel more connected to each other. In the survey I gave the students distinguishing options to describe changes in their feelings of attachment. What emerged throughout the exploration of this question was that students liked having a vector to meet new people they might normally not interact with. Spending more time with more peers

helped them create connections to their peers. Students also reported feeling more connected to their school.

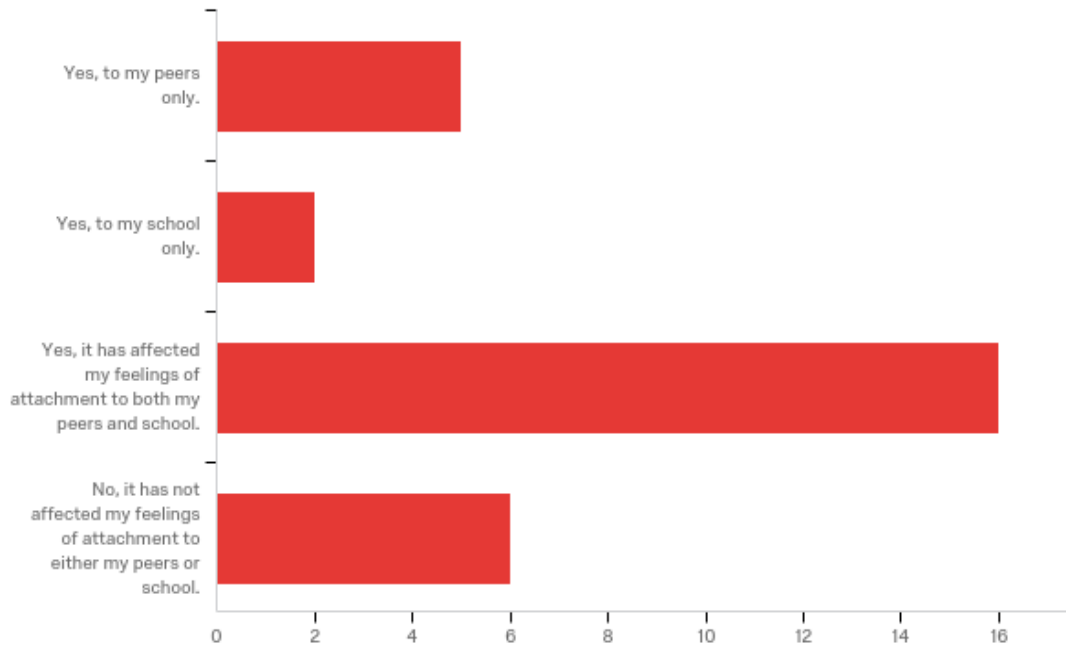


Figure 3: If the students feel a difference in connection to their peers.

Of the 29 surveyed, 23 reported that participation in the club has helped them feel more connected to their peers, school, or both their peers and their school. Six of the students said it has not changed how they feel. I had a similar ratio of responses during my interviews as well. Furthermore, I also asked if the club has helped them make new friends.

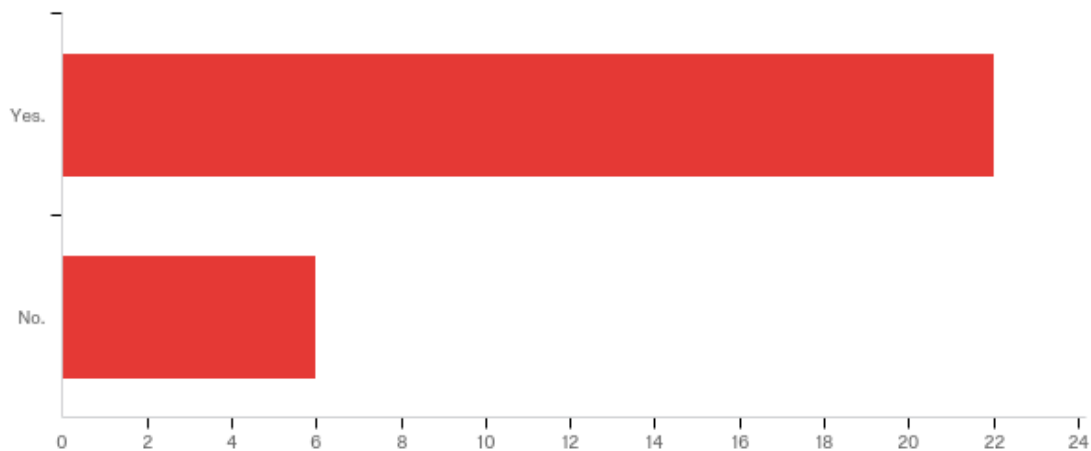


Figure 4: If the students made new friends through the club.

22 of the 28 students said participating in this club did help them make friends, while six said it did not. Some of the students said they were already friends with everyone in the club upon joining it, and that was why they put no. However, there were a few that genuinely had not made friends in the club.

During my interviews, eight of the 10 interviewees speaking about the increased peer connection quality of the club, caused it to strike me as possibly the most significant benefit to the students. Many spoke of the opportunity it has given them to become friends with people they normally would not interact with. Strax' response of, "It has helped build relationships with certain people that I would not usually interact with. Just cuz the friends groups do not really collide," and Rassilon's description of, "It was like, it was a way to meet with people and have new experiences and like, meet with different people in the school that I might not otherwise meet and talk to" are similar to the sentiment many students echoed during their interviews.

One of the students interviewed was identified as having a learning disability, and therefore spends most of his day in a support room away from other children. This student reported the video game club being quite helpful to him as a vector to making friends that he otherwise would not normally meet with.

Wilfred: And, a lot of my connections with friends were either made there or deepened there because I was able to interact with those people in a space that I was not normally because I am in the support room working away all day and it was secluded. I can interact with other people in the support room but I do not want to always interact with those people.

Other students reported the use of the clubs as a way to use their projects in IDS to get closer to group mates, Davros describes, "Well the people that you organize the group with,

you tend to spend more time with them. Yeah, so there was more time to become closer friends and stuff.”

Most commonly agreed was the sense of getting comfortable around their peers, and finding a place they belonged in the school. Several students described this feeling in different ways; some said it was like a little family, some said they are relieved they are no longer around kids who push them to do negative things, some are appreciative they have found a place to be themselves. The following excerpts are examples of how the students talked about these things.

Rose Tyler: *Well, if you do not know anybody you cannot really get involved in anything. If you are just some random kid who was been at this school who has not really socialized that much and you find something that you want to do, it was going to be hard to go up to those kids who are also doing it, or those teachers who are also doing it, and saying “hey will you let me join this?” But if you know them they are probably going to welcome you in it before you even ask.... I actually like the presence of being with somebody, just having their presence there. And actually, getting out of my house to go to an event where there is. ... Like, online you are not actually with someone, you are talking to them, but them being with you it just feels more lively, it feels better ... Anybody can go home and just play online with a bunch of people, right? But some people are a bit anti-social or introverted, where they cannot go out and they cannot really find anyone who was the same as them who enjoys video games as much as them. But if there was a club or something going on like this, it was a group of people who you just find who all love what you love, and then you guys can gush over video games. It was better.*

Rassilon: *100%. That was what I was saying. It feels like a community more than just a school.*

River Song: *I have not really like questioned it, or like tried to figure out why... Now I am in with my nerd little groups and they are harmless. They are not into drugs or anything like that. They are not going to steer me in the wrong path. They are not keeping me from my fullest potential.*

It was a good sign that this was what the students reported so thoroughly as a benefit to them for participating in video game club. The club sponsors expressed in their interviews that this was one of their main goals, to give students a place in a school, and to help them make friends. In this endeavor, they have succeeded.

Connected to the Teachers

This section was not based on a question that I asked the students specifically. Not in any of my interviews did I start out a series of questions specifically designed to get at a student's increased connection to their teachers. However, many of the students brought this topic up themselves, and I asked them to go into more detail about it.

Seven of the ten interviewees described their connections to teachers have increased since joining the video game club. Like their connections to their peers, the students seemed eager to express how much better things are now that they have built a connection to the teachers that help out at the club, and even many that do not participate in the club.

An example of the latter was this part of my interview with Rose Tyler:

I like doing extra projects and fun things where the teacher gives you a new project that was different from the curriculum but still educational. But like, if you do not have a good connection with your teacher you cannot really do that. ... I feel like if you have a good connection with your teacher, they will allow you to step outside of the rules a little bit and do other educational things. Which has proved to be true in some of my classes... Mr. Harkness was my tech teacher in one rotation, so I got to do some cool things there. And Mr. Book also, he was not in that club, but he knows I am in it. So, I am actually making an RPG game for my class in socials. Which was getting me extra marks.

The most common description regarding connections to the teachers was just that they felt closer to them. The students would describe their relationships with the teachers they spent time with going from a professional connection to something resembling friends. It was the seniors who most often described their relationships this way, but other students talked

about it in similar fashion as well. This was evidence of the effort the club sponsors make in trying to build the connections with the students. Ood describes his experience this way, “Yeah he was (Harkness) one of them, and so there was a bunch of classes I feel like yeah I can talk to the teacher now. I feel better about talking to the teacher.” Davros echoed the sentiment this way, “In these kinds of classes (IDS) you tend to become more like friends with the teacher and stuff. You guys get a bit closer and stuff.” Strax described his experience this way, “It (The club) has brought me a lot closer to teachers. I have a very good personal relationship with Mr. Tennant and Mr. Harkness.” And Rory describing his feelings of connectedness this way. “I mean yeah, definitely for sure. Like after that tournament I kind of felt more connected towards the teachers at school. So, I was a bit more comfortable with them.” The best description of how the connections to the teachers was improved can be found in the focus group with an exchange between the students Rassilon and K-9

Rassilon: *This may not specifically be about the video game club, it was kind of all the clubs, which video game club was a part of, it makes you feel more connected to the teachers. So, your teacher does not feel like a teacher, he feels like someone you have a personal relationship, a friend, with. Then I feel more like, instead of wanting to do the text book thing, maybe I will say to a teacher, “Hey can I do this instead? I think this will be a cool project.” And he will say, “Oh yeah sure, that was pretty cool” I think the whole LAN, and just being connected with the teachers and the students on a more personal level has all helped with that.*

K-9: *Yeah I would agree with what he said, connecting with teachers.*

Rassilon: *On top of that I think I am less shy around the teachers. I do not necessarily treat all the teachers like a teacher. You know, they are like, superior to me. They tell me to read this question, I read this question. It was more like, they tell me to read this chapter and I feel more equal to them.*

The comfort of the students, when interacting with teachers, was reported to increase. The students feel more able to make special requests of teachers, or open up to them, and in turn that has helped them gain a healthy relationship with an adult.

Changes in Approach to School Work

I was curious if being a part of the video game club was going to affect the students in their approach to academics. When asked if the club affected their approach to school work, seven of the ten students interviewed said there was no effect on them. This mirrored the responses I received in the survey I sent the students beforehand.

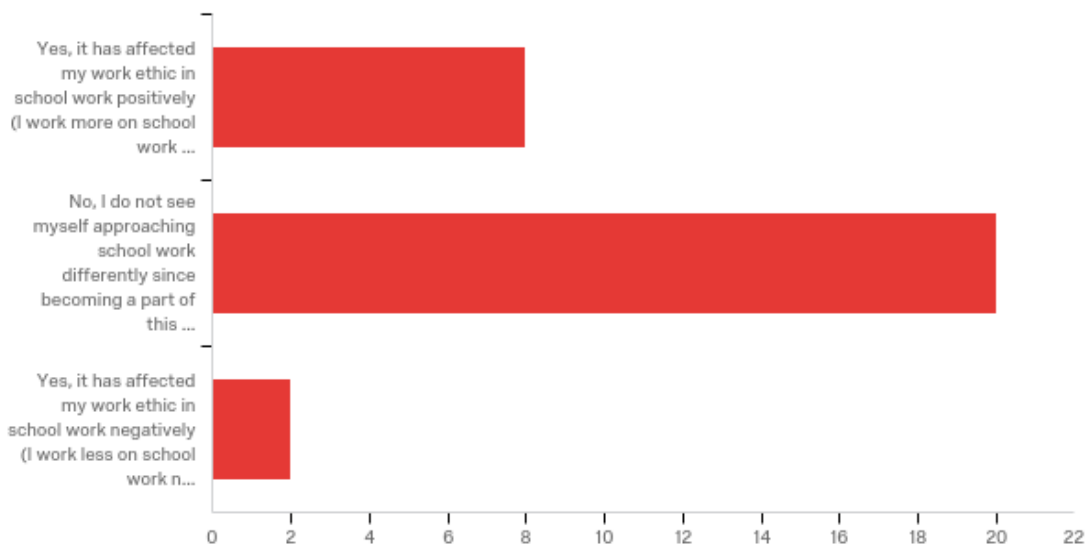


Figure 5: If being a part of the club has affected the students' approach to school work.

It appears that the majority of students had either no effect on their school work, or even some negative effect with 22 of the 30 students responding this way. The responses stayed consistent when I asked about homework habits, as their responses are nearly identical.

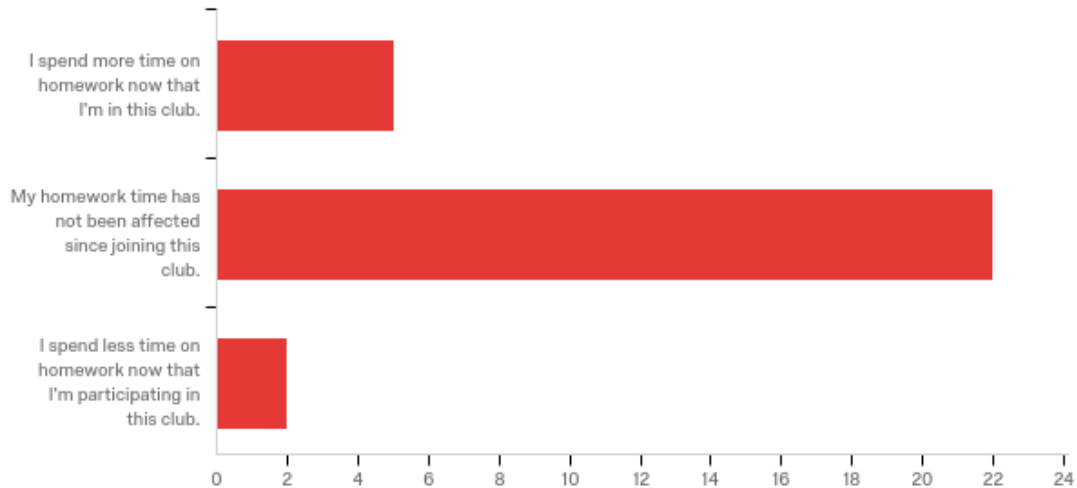


Figure 6: If the students spend more time on homework.

One student changed his mind once another person in the focus group brought up a point. The remaining two said they do not think they are approaching school work differently, but if they had to guess a way that it would affect them, it would be simply due to the increased connection they have with the participating teachers. Due to their increased relationship, they described not wanting to turn in less-than-adequate work. That interaction was as follows,

Rassilon: *I want to show this person what I can do, because it was now a more personal relationship. It was not like a nobody. Some of my teachers, like my English teacher, I hand in the work and I just go home. There was no connection there. I do not talk to them that much about it, but especially the teachers around video game club, I am more in that community, so when I hand in work I want to talk, I want to show this person all the funny things I have done and can do.*

K-9: *Yeah, I have a tech class with Harkness, and I really enjoy when I hand something in. His response was always, "Oh this was cool how would you do that?" And I tell him. In the one case I said, "I did not do that it just looks cool. I did not do anything special." But I just like the communication. Where, with my socials teacher I would hand in a project and it was done, and she had maybe asked me a question to make sure I understand it.*

Angel Bob: *Yeah, you want to do more for the people you know.*

Rassilon: *If you have a personal relationship with a person you want to show them the best you have got.*

It was clear to me that in this club, the students generally do not feel an increased motivation for completing school work, or a change in how they approach school work. Most of the students had a hard “no” to this question, and the previous example was the only positive affirmation of a change in school work. That being said, it only pertained to the teachers they had built a connection with, and does not apply to the teachers they do not know. That qualifier limits the scope of any claim that this club changes how students approach school work.

Intimidation of School

All but one of the interviewed students did not feel a change in their fear of school, when directly asked about it. Some have implied through other questions that their level of comfort has increased due to the connections they have built with their peers and teachers, but when directly asked if school was more or less intimidating since joining the club, the resounding answer was that nothing has changed for them. This result in the interviews came as a surprise to me, based off the survey results to the question of “Is school less intimidating now that you are participating in this club?”

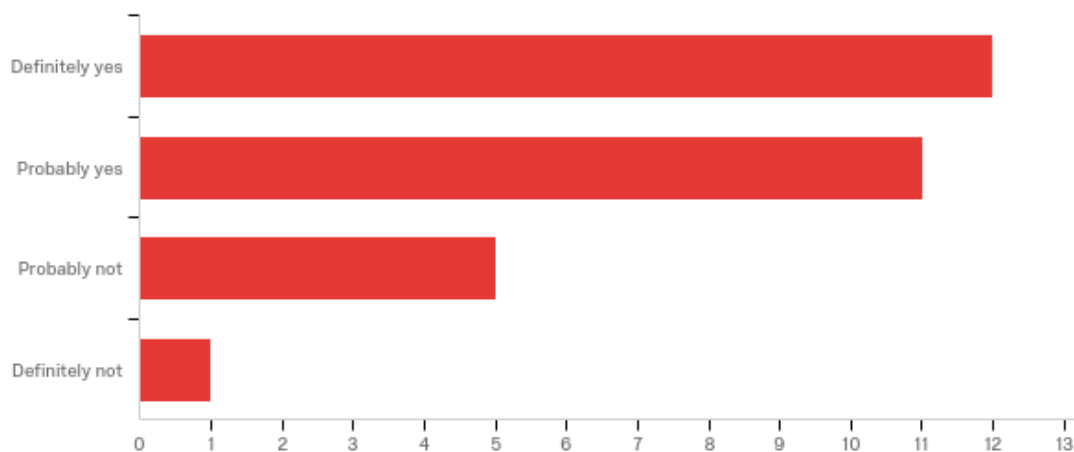


Figure 7: If school has become less intimidating since joining the club.

From the survey, it appeared that the club participation had an effect on their levels on intimidation. With 23 of 29 reporting either definitely yes or probably yes, their intimidation levels had gone down since joining the club, I was not expecting to get to the interviews and have nearly all the students report the opposite. Face to face, the students at Coal Hill seem to be unintimidated by school. The only confirmation of a feeling of decreased intimidation was from Rory, who in the interviews said his decrease in intimidation was due to his, “exposure to people that I previously thought were intimidating and they are not so bad so you feel more at peace with them.” Other than this one confirmation, my conflicting results stand at odds with each other. The survey suggests strongly that the students are feeling less intimidated, but the students who were interviewed do not feel that way. The students chosen from the interviews were taken from a list of students who said they had be willing to be interviewed, a response recorded at the end of taking the survey. Therefore, the students I interviewed all took the survey; yet I had more students in the interviews say their feelings of intimidation are unchanged by the club than there were students who answered “probably not” and “definitely not” in the survey.

Achievement in Life

Similar to the responses I received from the students about their fear of school, students in the Coal Hill video game club generally did not report gaining extra motivation to achieve more. Nine of the ten interviewed said it had not changed their motivation to do more; some just saying simply that it has not changed their motivation levels, or some citing they already knew what they wanted to do beforehand. Ood was the only person to report a change, and his experience was tied to his project through his IDS course. In Ood’s

words, “It was actually this class that made me realize what I want to do when I grow up. Yeah, I want to be a graphic designer. And, me designing my levels last year made me feel like, “Oh I like designing levels and I like designing things.” It seems like the courses offered at Coal Hill are giving kids perspective in life to a greater degree than participating in the video game club.

But once again, like the intimidation result, the survey data was not corroborated by my results from my interviews. When asked, “Does this club affect your motivation to achieve more in school?” the responses were as follows.

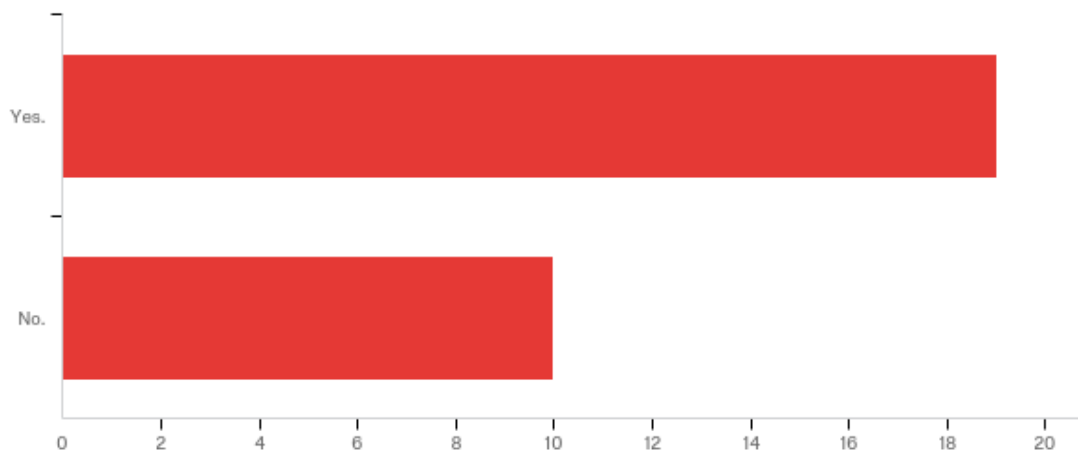


Figure 8: How the club has affected the students’ motivation to achieve more in school.

Having 19 of the 29 students report they do feel a motivation to achieve more in the survey, but then face to face have the students tell me the opposite was surprising. In the survey, some of their responses for why they feel added motivation, the students would list things like, “By having positive friends, the club makes the school more welcoming and enjoyable,” “It keeps me coming to school regularly and gives me a positive environment,” “I want to be as funny and as likable as Tennant,” and “Quenches my constant thirst for video games.” However, none of those responses came out when specifically asked the

same way. Many of those responses did come out with other questions, but not when framed about academic achievement in my interviews.

Feelings about School

When asked how participation in the club affected how they felt about school in general, the responses were split 50/50. Five of the ten students reported feeling more comfortable about school, and the other five said it had no effect on them. Just like in previous questions, students who reported feeling better about school often connected it to their increased connections to their peers and teachers. River Song reported that before meeting her good friend in the club, she would hang out with kids that got her to smoke and do other things she doesn't approve of. She said she feels better about school now because her new friends have had a positive impact upon her, and steered her away from acting like that. She appeared grateful to the club for that reason.

Parental Opinions

The survey results were surprising to me that a clear majority of the responses were affirming that their parents supported their participation in the video game club. Of the 26 students who answered this question on the survey, 25 of them said their parents supported them participating in the video game club, with one student saying their parent did not know about it. I am certain part of this result was that I am surveying kids who are already in the club and therefore most likely have gotten their parents' approval, but I was expecting more than zero parents who might have had a problem with it.

When talking with the students about it in the interviews, of the 16 parents the students lived with, seven supported their participation fully, six thought it was weird but went along with it eventually, and three were described as indifferent to the whole thing.

Of those 16 parents, six of them needed some convincing by the students to the point where they understood why it would be valuable to their kids. Most of the concern from the parents seemed to stem from them assuming it was a course where the students would simply be playing video games. One mother was concerned that her child would be “consumed with magic and wizardry,” but her fears were describe as being placated through the student reassuring that the teachers were normal and the kids were quite nice. Overall, I would say the parents of these students kept an open mind, even in their initial disagreement, and I could get the sense that the parents seemed to want what was best for their kid.

Structures in the Club

The survey data confirmed that the students had thought about what parts of the club they liked. 22 of the 28 kids had something that they could think of as far as routines that the club did that they enjoyed.

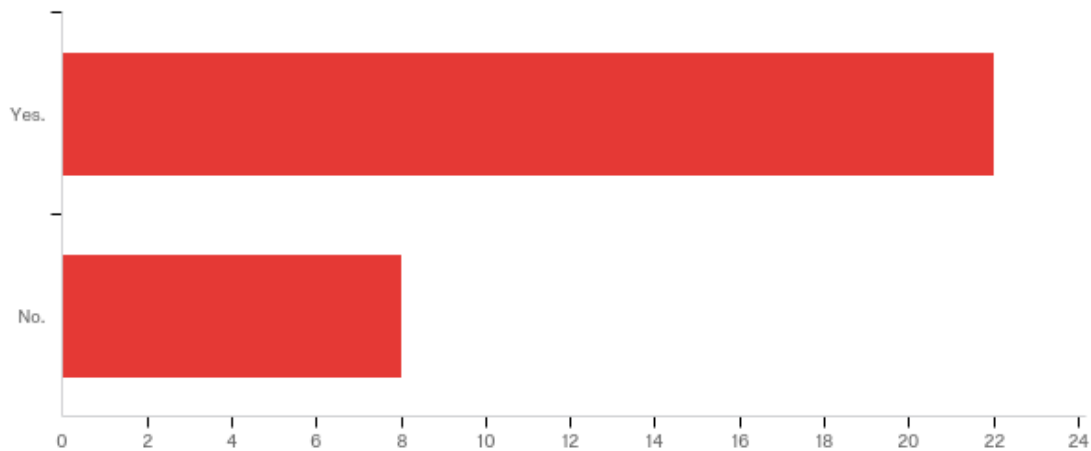


Figure 9: Routines the club uses to affect their enjoyment of the club.

Some of the routines were: they can play which ever games they want, there are board games as well as video games, it is always after school, their virtual reality setup, and having LAN parties regularly with tournaments that have prizes.

During the interviews, my question was formed in a way to keep it open to their own interpretation. I might ask, “What kinds of structures have the club sponsors put in place that you find to be very important to the club?” or “What are some structures, some details, of the club that Tennant and Harkness have implemented that you think are important to the club?” I received a larger range of responses than I was expecting. The endorsements range from enjoying the open format of the club, to the personal effort of the teacher sponsor to include kids.

Starting with the open format structural choice by the teacher sponsors, Strax says, “So it was open-tech-lab. So all the computers are free and people can just play whatever games they want” and Wilfred adds, “They try and organize the chaos, kinda. LAN parties inevitably get kind of hectic” and finally Rassilon describes how he appreciates the freedom the students receive, “Nothing was super structured. Like someone would say, “Oh, I have a fun idea for a tournament.” “Go ahead, if you can get 10 people to sign up we are having that tournament.” Angel Bob echoed these sentiments with his opinion on the matter

***Angel Bob:** There was times where the reason this type of club works so well in this school was because you do not have to wait for the club to actually talk to the teacher about something you want to happen in the club. So if you are like, “Oh I want this tournament.” Done. You are the one planning it, so you are like, “Ok, let us try to get this done.” So you do not have to wait until Monday, you can just go up to a teacher when you know he was around and you are like, “Hey I want to do this.” And then he was like, “Ok.”*

Many of the students appreciated the looseness of the club, but several were eager to reassure me that the club did not delve into chaos due to the lack of rules. Many would giggle, and discuss some things that might have been inappropriate out of context, but they would quickly come back and say it was not as bad as they are describing, and in fact there

are quite a few unwritten rules that everyone complies with that keeps everything positive and fun.

One student discussed her enjoyment of being given tasks for the club. River Song describes, “When I put the posters up, people will ask me about it when I am putting them up. There was literally no one I do not know that was in any of the clubs. It has helped me gain connections to the students.” As I have mentioned earlier, other students have reported enjoying being put in charge of tournaments and trivia games. It appears the students in this club appreciate the teacher’s willingness to trust them with important workings of the club.

Many of the students reported their appreciation for both Mr. Tennant and Mr. Harkness’ effort at making sure nobody was alone, and everyone feels they have been given an opportunity to become a part of the club. Rose Tyler put it best:

But, one day I had no video game interests and I just kind of wanted to sit there and do nothing. So I was drawing and Mr. Harkness came up to me and he saw and liked what I was doing and he said, “You know we have one of those digital sketchers.” So he got me on that, it was not a video game, but he introduced me to something that was connected to my passion even though he did not have to do that. He showed me something that I like that was technology based and now he said I was welcome to do that even outside of video game club... They will always find something for a kid to be interested. They will not let anybody sit alone. They will always make someone’s day and make sure they are having fun in club.

I had several students endorse the teachers’ efforts to include everyone that shows up, into something in the club. Rose Tyler’s story was the most detailed, but others shared similar accounts of that effort. It appears the teacher sponsors have chosen to focus on including every person that comes through their door. Deciding to try and incorporate everyone into their club was a structural decision, as well as a reflection of who they are. They have decided that in their club, everyone will get the opportunity to feel like they belong.

Importance of the Club Sponsors

From the survey data, I determined that the students in the club find the teacher sponsor to be of high importance and I was expecting the students to have details to share. On more than one occasion, when asking about their importance to the club, the student being interviewed would interrupt me and just start talking about how great they are. From the survey, all 28 students surveyed reported the teachers to be of varying level of importance to the club, but none listed them as being not important.

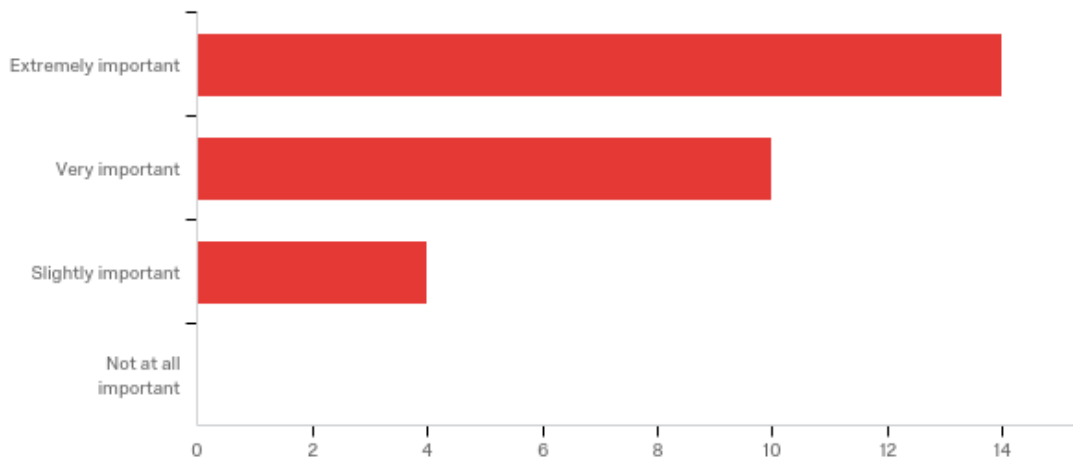


Figure 10: How important the teacher sponsors are to the club.

The way I typically framed the question to them in the interviews had me asking if the club would be successful if any other teacher would be put in place of Mr. Tennant or Mr. Harkness. I would then ask why those two are important upon them all saying it would not be the same without them.

The pervasiveness of their effort was shown through the accounts of stories that stood out to each student. Rose Tyler recounts a time that they were missing one person in their Dungeons and Dragons game, and Mr. Harkness subbed in for missing student. She appreciated him getting into character, and never once getting out of the character. “He really gets into the role and he acts like the character and he makes it hilarious how he acts

like that person and you just add emphasis to the game.” It was a validation of what they are doing, and the students appreciate it. She further described their efforts to include everyone as, “making sure someone’s included into something.”

Ood was also particularly enthusiastic about the efforts of Mr. Tennant and Mr. Harkness to include everyone. His recounted his experiences this way

I would say a good amount of kids in this course are not the most sociable. Umm, but Tennant was a sociable person. He loves talking to people. He was uh, since his personality is like that. I would like the structure to go towards that a little bit more, but still stay on the same as ... Oh, this person does not have a group can he join your group? And people say yeah (with hesitation). I would like it to be more “yeah sure you can join” (with excited tone). Then you can make a friend. They have started doing that.

This story of how the two sponsors make efforts to include everyone came up in nine of the ten interviews. This makes sense to me, as before the club was described as a family, and a tight community of people. It seems their efforts to include everyone has been felt by the students, as their choice of words for the connectedness of the club describes a close group of people.

Another large recurring theme was the students recognizing the club sponsor’s efforts into the club. The students frequently report how nice it was to have them available, and how nice it was to have them put so much effort into the organizational process. Rory’s description of

It was just the way they are. I do not know, it was hard to explain, but just like the more motivation they have for it, that like really like sorta motivates people to organize tournaments. Cuz they have a passion for gaming, and that was what it was all about ... Yeah, because you get excited about everything.

frames their efforts as a motivational mentor. Several students described their excitement for anything the students wanted to contribute as contagious. It was a common thing to

have the students say they get excited when they share an idea they have with Mr. Tennant or Mr. Harkness and they get a full endorsement of it. The students valued the validation of their ideas, and the structure of the club to implement it. In fact, more often than not, the students would describe when their ideas did not go successfully. They felt obligated to share those experiences as a way to show how much they learned while running a frustratingly ineffective tournament. For many of them, it was not about winning the tournaments, it seemed to be more about spending time together. Judging by how friendly the students were toward each other during the counterstrike tournament, I would say I left Coal Hill thinking this was how the club works. One player was off doing his own thing, and typically in gaming culture that person gets castigated severely for not working with the team. I was expecting the same thing to happen to this kid, and upon seeing his teammates talk to him in a positive way, the kid came around quickly. It seems the teachers have created a safe space for the students to take risks without being judged harshly by their peers.

The final, component of the students' descriptions of why these teachers are important to the club was best said in the focus group of K-9, Angel Bob, and Rassilon. In this excerpt, they discuss the relationship dynamic between them and the two teachers, and why being close was important.

Rassilon: *It was not that nobody can do it, but you have to be this specific type of person. Even before they were doing the club they were the kind of teacher who always have the lesson plans that are active and they are trying to get their students involved. If you are the type of teacher, like some math or English teachers, you have a presentation and you read it and you tell them to do this, and that was that. They will come to you if you want help, but you have to be the kind of teacher that wants to have a connection with the students. Because they want that connection, the connections can exist ... Because Tennant, even during lunch and stuff, if he was not marking*

he will have people come play board games with him during lunch. Which means he was doing it because he wants to. He was not doing it because he was obligated to because it was his job, he was doing it because he wants to have the connection with his students.

K-9: I see that with Mr. Tennant as well. I see him in the English hallway doing mark (grading) and I will see him always finding a new board game that he was playing with his students who are all caught up in it. It was hilarious. Sometimes I will come over and say, 'What was this?' 'Oh this was the game _____' I like the sense of humor.

Angel Bob: He has that personality that makes it so what he was doing, it almost seems acceptable for him to be running around the school causing havoc. But, he was also trying his absolute hardest for that type of stuff. You can tell he was trying. There was one instance where he was supposed to be teaching a law class, but he runs into the other room and says, "Ok, you get a game ready and I will be back in 5 minutes and the game better be ready by then." I was like, "You are teaching a class right now!"

K-9: To me, Tennant was the face of what this school was supposed to be. Years ago, before I came to this school. My sister was here and she brought me in to shadow her for a day because she was in grade 12, and she loved it and said it was the best year of her life. So I came with her one day and we were walking through the halls and we saw Mr. Tennant there, and he was telling someone, 'Hey you, you have work to do.' 'Shut up Mr. Tennant!' It was just that interaction of being able to tell a teacher to shut up, shows that teachers and students have a better connection. I think that was because he runs these clubs after school.

Rassilon: Yeah, and I think to run a club like this you have to have a relationship, between the teacher and the students, that was more on a friend level than was more of an instructor to pupil level. They have to be closer to equal for this whole thing to work.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Rassilon: Well, I think it is. For example, on a sports team, you have a coach. He was telling you what to do. With Tennant, it was more like a community. Everyone's kind of just doing what they want to because it was fun, it was less so you are doing something because you are told to. Even with the club, or the education afterwards, it creates a relationship between the student and the teacher where you are doing things for them because you want to show them how you are doing well, you are not doing it because he was telling you to. I think specifically the board game club, you want to have a teacher who wants to have a personal relationship with the students that does not necessarily need the type of respect where it was like, "You have to address me formally, you have to do this this this." That kind of stuff. It was like how he said, his sister was comfortable enough to tell Tennant to shut up. Like, there was a lot of teachers

that if you told that to them you are going to the office right now. It was unacceptable to have that kind of thing. But I think you need that kind of relationship to have that sense of community where you feel so comfortable as to do that. You have to be that comfortable with the teachers.

Angel Bob: *My opinion on why it was important to have that relationship between student and teacher was because if you would have a really good relationship with your teacher and you can almost call them a friend, you kind of want to do more for your friends. If your friend's like, 'Oh hey, you want to do this?' You are more likely to be like, 'Oh yeah, of course I want to do that.' Because you kind of feel that connection and you want to try to impress them.*

Through my interviews it became clear that the students valued the mutual respect the students received from the teachers. They could tell that these two teachers were trying their hardest, and out of respect for that person's efforts, the students responded by trying harder for them. When building a successful club, these students would recommend the teacher to be available and engage their students as much as possible. Building a relationship was critical, and mentoring youth from that relationship was appreciated. For the video game club at Coal Hill, it was more than just starting a video game club and letting it grow on its own. The teachers have had to pour their hearts into it, and the students have reciprocated.

Final Thoughts

Perhaps the most powerful responses I got in my interviews was to my final question. I posed the question of, "Is there anything you want me to take away from Coal Hill? Is there anything you want me to make sure I understand about this whole thing so when I write about it a certain feeling rings through? So, when you read it, you are like, "Yup, this guy gets it."? I left it open to the students to tell their story in their own way. Several of the students talked about how nice it was to have a home for their interests at the school, evoking a comparison of how the students who are into sports get to have their

sport represented at the school, but the kids who are not into that kind of thing are no longer left without anything. Rose Tyler framed it this way:

A sports club, lots of people like sports. People join a soccer club, and you know, everybody knows that there was the football club and football team. People like it. There was the cheerleading team, the choir. But there never really has been a spot for kids who do not sing, who do not do art, who do not cheerlead, who do not play sports. Like, in the 80s, they did not really have a video game club. But now, we have a club where people who do not really do a lot can do something with what they like to do. Usually, mothers will drag their kids outside to get some fresh air because they have been spending their whole time on gaming. But, maybe they do not have any friends to go play outside with? Maybe they do not have a soccer ball they know how to use? But now there was a place where kids can go and they can do what they have been told was weird, have been told not a lot of people like it; and they can find a bunch of other people who like that, and they can explore new games that they will find more interest in ... It was really important to me. I am not good at a lot. I like games, and I like learning about games because there was different tactics and methods and stuff. It was not just wasting your life playing Minecraft. You can learn about other things.

The most emotionally evocative part of her statement was when asked if it was important for students to feel like they belong, she replied with emotion that it was really important to her. Her elevated investment into that statement stood out to me. I could really tell it was important to her. This lonely child who has been intimidated by social situations her whole life has a group of people she can go to and feel comfortable with early on in high school. To her, this was invaluable.

Wilfred, the student who shared he has a learning disability recounted a similar sentiment of not caring he was not into sports, and how important the connections to his fellow classmates are:

I am looking around at all my classmates and thinking, wow someone from this generation was going to be running the world around me some day. And those people need to know how to interact with other people. They need to know how to have those social bonds. They need to feel accepted. Because people who do not feel accepted will not develop in a healthy way, and we

need the world to be a healthier place more now than ever. But even in a school you get kind of weird, well, all the nerdy kids might get portrayed as being the weird people nobody talks to, but when you bring them all together they are not the weird person anymore. I do not know if it was that we are all being weird together, but if we are being weird it was work out because we are all happy. At the end of the day, I think happiness was worth more, happiness was one of the few things you can ask for in life. Where happiness was something we can really feel. So, more connectedness ... Knowing how rare a video game club was right now, I would say it was almost necessary if you want to have a healthy group of students in a school. Because you cannot just have nerds be that left out group everywhere. I am going to become a marine biologist, adamantly, and I am able to use ideas of game design and how to convey things to people in a meaningful way that I am learning here, in that. It goes a really long way. I do not think my lack of sportsball skills will get in the way.

Wilfred, who spends most of his day in a support room, appreciates the value of being able to interact with his peers in this setting. He was passionate that groups that bring people together are required for healthy social skill development. Those connections were important to Wilfred. However, they are not limited to Wilfred; Rassilon, K-9, and Angel Bob also had a great deal to share regarding how the connections they build in this club are critical,

Rassilon: *I thought that was the most important thing, the community thing, and that that directly affects academics as well because of the more comradery between the teachers and students that creates a situation where you are doing something for a friend because you want to, than you are doing something for a teacher because you have to. It creates, I think, just knowing everyone around you more makes you want to do more things and less you feeling forced to do it. Which I think not only increases your willingness to work, I think it increases your quality of work, because you are more focused, you are enjoying yourself, and I think it also makes you want to strive for bigger goals, you just want to do more ... Because of all the connections you are making. It does not even have to be video game club, I think just all clubs in general do that. Especially a video game club, especially one run like this, because even a lot of sports club you have a coach who tells you what to do. In the video game club it was that whole breakdown of structure where everyone's equal, that even most other clubs do not have ... There are not rules. With a sports club you are here at this exact time, you do this thing, now*

you are doing drills, now you are doing this, now you are playing a game, which does not allow you to have that sense of community, especially with the teachers, because that teacher was now your coach. He was still your superior. Here, Tennant, if I am playing a board game with him, I am playing a board game with a friend, I am not playing a board game with a teacher. Same for with video games, same with everything.

The common theme that links all these final thought testaments are those built connections to their peers. The students reported that those were in fact of critical importance to them. The uneasiness and loneliness of high school was changed into a place you belong, and a place you have friends and acquaintances.

Perceptions of the Club Sponsor

This section is split into two segments, one for each teacher sponsor that runs the video game club at Coal Hill Secondary School. The two teachers are both quite different from each other, but similar in their vision for what the club should be and how to make it successful. During my time at Coal Hill, and during my interviews with the students, Mr. Tennant was often assumed in conversation to be the head of the game clubs. I do not think Mr. Tennant shares this opinion of himself. He certainly feels like he shares the responsibility with his coworker, Mr. Harkness. The theme of hearing students, particularly the older students, mention Mr. Tennant's name before Mr. Harkness in all things concerning video game club, was a manifestation of the fact that this was Mr. Harkness' first year at Coal Hill, while Mr. Tennant has been teaching there for far longer. That being said, Mr. Harkness has been an active leader concerning the video game club responsibilities, as he was simply doing the same things in the other school in the district that he worked.

Mr. Tennant's Vision

When I asked what caused him and Mr. Harkness to start hosting LANs and running a video game club, he recounted how insufferable one of his coworkers was about hockey, and generally all sports. His friend, the insufferable hockey fanatic, would brag about the provincial championship banners that hang from the ceiling in Coal Hill's gym. On a drive together to their master's classes, he and Mr. Harkness thought it would be a great joke to have a banner put up regarding video game champions of some sort. As I grew to find out later, in great Mr. Tennant style, his best ideas start out as a joke he wants to pull off. They decided, "Let us just play some games and see what happens." He and Mr. Harkness thought the best way to do this was to host a district-wide LAN party.

Working in separate schools allowed both teachers to recruit students from a wide base around the area. Their first LAN was their biggest success of all of the 3 LANs that have happened, where they had over 200 students come. The buy-in from the 10th graders (Now 12th graders) at Coal Hill was tremendous, where the students were able to get corporate sponsorships for prizes, they brought their games and equipment for people to use, and they put in a huge amount of work running the tournaments. For this reason, Mr. Tennant looks for the most amount of effort from his 10th graders, as he has found that by 12th grade they are checked out and thinking of other things by then.

He recalls seeing that year that students were not necessarily interested in the casual gaming experience, noting the rise in esports. Furthermore, they had one classmate move to Texas because he was offered \$80,000 a year to play video games. They also had a student win a \$380,000 prize in a Smite tournament. So that particular year was unique in

showcasing to their student body what particularly unique situations can be like for students who are good at certain video games. Every kid seemed to be interested in trying their hand at the competitive video gaming scene. When envisioning the LANs early on, Mr. Tennant thought it would be casual gaming, where people play games they have never tried just to have fun with others. However, he speculates that shifted with these two students' stories, and the fact that many kids can get the casual gaming experience at home, and that they were coming for the tournaments to have a special experience.

Mr. Tennant explains how that transition was challenging for him, as someone who likes to tease and mock everyone around him. He said he had to learn to take the students seriously. It was difficult to continue mocking someone when they are pouring all their efforts outside of school to gain corporate sponsorships for a LAN you are putting on. This seriousness contrasted with Mr. Tennant's nature. He describes himself as someone who prefers to see the other person win games, because to him it means they are having fun and he gets the most satisfaction out of that experience. He gains a lot of pleasure creating opportunities for people to have fun, and he thinks that this quality of himself has probably helped him with the club. He does not care about a lot of things that others might, because what he was interested in was creating a situation where the kids are having fun.

Mr. Tennant is not a video gamer, which came as a surprise to me. He made it clear to me that he normally does not play that many games, but he does this for the students. Mr. Tennant does enjoy playing board games, but video games are not among his major interests. What is important to know about Mr. Tennant, however, is that even though he is not active in playing video games, he still takes part of his day to educate himself on video games so he can properly communicate with his gaming enthused students.

When asked about the differences between himself and Mr. Harkness, Mr. Tennant describes how Mr. Harkness was much more of a purist than himself. Mr. Tennant describes himself as someone who likes to break the rules and be imaginative with what was possible, whereas Mr. Harkness was the type who likes to stick to the rules, stick to established cannon in fantasy, and compete in video gaming on a serious level. Mr. Tennant speculates that was probably why they work so well as a team, because they each cover totally different personality types and their reach was so broad. He was also grateful for Mr. Harkness' technical expertise, something that shouldn't go understated. When forming their video game club, a lot of heavy lifting had to be done from a technical standpoint. It was Mr. Harkness' background in competitive gaming and LAN events from his younger days that helped a great deal with the early stages of the LANs and club. That, coupled with the IT department having graduated from Coal Hill, and hosting their own LANs there when they were students, helped smooth over their early technical challenges of pulling these events off. That being said, Mr. Tennant notes a great deal of growing pains at the first LAN, with power going off constantly and network cables being a complete mess.

The LAN parties have had varying entry fees, with the first LAN, the largest, costing students \$10 to enter. The second LAN, the smallest, was free of charge. The third LAN, in the middle, was \$15 to attend. There does not seem to be any relationship to the amount charged and the levels of attendance from the students.

With the success of the first LAN, being over 200 students, Mr. Tennant and Mr. Harkness went on a self-described tour. They put together a slide show, and went to conferences and to other schools promoting their success. Parents would come up to them afterwards and say things like, "Oh, what you do was amazing because it reconnects my

kid to school and also people in the room at the same time.” Mr. Tennant, at this point, said that made him feel really good because his original goal of the club was to connect kids together that have the same interests, even if it were under the guise as a joke to put up a provincial championship banner in the school’s gym. On top of connecting kids together, Mr. Tennant and Mr. Harkness decided to focus their club on inclusiveness. Part of that effort includes their purposeful recruitment of female gamers into the club, as well as efforts to make the club more diverse.

When asked about why his second LAN was so poorly attended, even when there was zero cost of entry, Mr. Tennant said it was because he was on paternity leave. He said his replacement teacher was a great candidate who shared his values of connecting with students. However, Mr. Tennant described her failed efforts because, while she was dedicated to making connections with the students, she was not a gamer and did not put as much time into getting to know the games as he thought she might have needed. Mr. Tennant described that the students did not trust her for some reason, and so enthusiasm fell sharply. He said he came to the school several times that year to help promote the LAN. He said the 10th graders who were passionate the year before, boycotted the LAN this time around since he was not teaching at the school that year. Mr. Tennant was honestly surprised that the momentum of the first LAN did not carry itself, especially considering the fee was waived.

Even with less than a third of the people showing up for the second LAN, Mr. Tennant described it as a success in many ways. While there were far fewer people, there was also far fewer technical problems this time around since they were prepared to handle previously manifested glitches. He said it was much more relaxed for him and the other

teacher volunteers. There were “fewer fires to put out,” and he was able to play more games with the students.

Mr. Tennant went on discussing the types of games he sees most suitable for a video game club, or a LAN. First, it usually was a game that they are interested in playing already. However, not all the popular games are the best for large or small events. Games like *League of Legends*, the most popular game in the world, are a 5v5 game. That requires 10 players to play one game in a LAN. That means you had need 20 players to have a simple 4 team tournament, and those rarely end up being that much fun because it becomes pretty clear from the beginning which team is just going to dominate the others. Counterstrike, another highly popular competitive game, was 6v6. The LAN I attended had a counterstrike tournament going, and it was only between 4 teams. It was not that competitive, as the top team just rolled through the others without much drama. This was also with the assumption that all the players on each team are not having technical difficulties, which was rarely the case.

Mr. Tennant describes the best types of games are 1v1 games, or games that scale with the amount of people playing them. Super Smash Brothers was a game that can have a team mode, or a 1v1 mode. Typically their tournaments are 1v1, and that community has a successful track record. Furthermore, it can be played quite casually for the people who are just trying it out. Other games Mr. Tennant thinks suit themselves to video gaming clubs and gaming events are those that scale with the number of people playing in them. Games like *Left 4 Dead* are often cooperative, where the game gets more difficult with more people that join, so it was constantly balanced and challenging.

Mr. Tennant talks about the trap that teaching can sometimes leave teachers in, the trap of constantly needing more and more of your time. Mr. Tennant pours a huge amount of his after-school time into his clubs, but he says there is always a demand for more of his time and a difficult thing for him to do is say no. He recalls a particularly difficult time this year with one student, which led him to thinking about what it takes to be a successful teacher in a school club like this.

We were talking about that one girl, I have had to say no this year because I cannot, I have to refer you to someone else. I have to go home to my kids. You hope that there was enough people in the chain that it works itself out, but sometimes you are the last link in the chain. I have had my name in suicide notes. Going back to the LAN, it was one of the reasons why we do it, right? It was one of the reasons why I originally was interested in it because specifically a couple kids I had encountered in that year who I really liked had stopped coming to school because they became this video game shut-in. I have always been fascinated with how that happens. What was going on? How do you feel so cut off from everyone else? was this because this was the only thing for you? Honestly, I am a super social person. Every minute of my day was being social. I love being social. I love hosting parties. I basically have never been alone my entire life which was weird. But I do not think everyone experiences that, haha! So, I have always been interested in that kind of thing. Social anxieties and that kind of thing. Plus, I have been told that I am pretty good at drawing kids out. But I do not understand it. I suspect Mr. Harkness gets the same reporting. I think there are a lot of teachers that are great with kids and they have a completely different personality type than me and you; we are all, for whatever reason, we are extraverted and sarcastic and sometimes a little mean but in a joking kind of way. I see teachers that are successful and they are not like that.

Going back to the club, Mr. Tennant then talks about his disappointment that there has not been a banner that was hung in the gym. Mr. Tennant comments that he feels it was a very important component of running a successful club, the part of acknowledgement and celebration. While I was touring the school during my own time, I found dozens of posters on walls and lockers celebrating video game club achievements and available

activities. Mr. Tennant thinks it is critical to make visible all the good things taking place in the club.

Discussing his efforts to make sure everyone was included in the club, Mr. Tennant thinks it starts by getting to know the students' interests. Once you know what they are into, you can recommend something for them within the club. Mr. Tennant was thrilled about the overwhelming volume of simple games available, with a wide range of themes. He was convinced there was a game for nearly everyone, and Mr. Tennant tries very hard to scour the extremely cheap or free games to recommend to his students. Furthermore, he has set a culture of kicking kids off of games they have been hogging, to include students who are sitting alone. Mr. Tennant chooses to use his upper classmen to set an example for the younger students about how to treat students who are alone.

When probed about how he sets these behavior expectations all year, all he said he did was have a conversation with everyone at the beginning of the year about his expectations, and the kids have followed that since. My impression when viewing him interact with students was that perhaps he does not realize he sets his expectations every time he sees them, in his own way. For example, in the class lessons I saw him teach, he seemed quite well prepared. The students see him preparing for the various clubs, and spending so much time with them after school. He puts a lot of effort into the things he cares about, and since the students look up to him they may emulate his behaviors in some ways. He was open about his desire for social justice, and the kids ended up being quite open about their desires for social justice as well. He has the expectation that anybody can play any game he was playing, and the students emulate that behavior by also being more open towards incoming new people into their games. The only things he was aware he

makes a specific effort towards curtailing the homophobic and racist talking that gamers often see online, but in the club. He said he has not had to set a strong tone often with that, but when he did it was pretty clear to everyone who heard him. With all his efforts to include everyone Mr. Tennant hinted, and explicitly said, several times that he does not think he was doing enough.

I probably should be including people a bit more; like if there was a kid on their lonesome kind of thing and grabbing them and saying.... But we are so tapped out with everything else going on. I would like to say that we do! We tap the kid and say, "Hey what are you playing? Let me play a round with you? Maybe he was playing that too? Maybe you should play with him?" But it just does not happen.

I got the sense that Mr. Tennant has a sense of guilt of never being able to do enough for his students.

When questioned about academic expectations for the club, he said he and Mr. Harkness do not set academic requirements for participation. Furthermore, he noted that he was not even sure that was possible at the school they teach at, due to the nature of how the school operates. With the school work being solely responsible to be done on the kids' schedules, it is not rare to have one kid who has everything completed, and another to have nothing completed, but by the end of the mark period, both will have adequate grades. He said holding them accountable throughout the term seems unfeasible. He was able to come up with exceptions to his academic rule, being that if a parent or another teacher approached him and asked him to refuse a student into the club on academic grounds, he was pretty clear he was comfortable supporting a parent's wish for their student not to come.

When asked for his concluding thought about his video game club, and what I need to understand about it, he had a particularly compelling description about his vision and critiques of himself.

I want more women, I want more gay gamers, I want the kids to be confronted with those situations. I do not want to do it at the expense of having kids have fun. I want the kids to feel connected, I want the kids to feel connected together; the reason I got into it in the first place was to help those real shut-in, real anxiety kids, which I still do not understand but I am here to help in whatever way. And, I do not even care about video games. I really do not. I am surprised I have gone this far. I have played story games. I am not a competitive guy. I like Civilization, I like games like that. Like I said, this seems to be a real need and want from parents and the outside community to connect these kids somehow. So I think there really was something there. I do not even think I am even at the proper path. There was a destination of getting these kids connected, and to feel included and happy and satisfied in their lives and hobbies, and whatever else they do and who they are. I do not even think I am nearly half-way to that goal of figuring that out yet. Because I do not really understand the path I guess maybe, but I think I just keep seeing over and over again the want for that to happen. The parent that was completely confused and say, "You do something that I cannot do for my kid." I have even considered doing a summer camp and things like that for this kind of thing. I think there would be a demand for it. I think we really could make it happen. I went to this conference. It was a Dalai Lama heart and mind conference. It was a fairly big conference, there was a thousand professional educators. And I remember I went to a small breakout session and I told them what I did. "Hey I play video games with the kids. I try to make them more connected to each other." These two mothers there talked to me afterwards and were like, "You need to do more with this, we need more of what you do!" and I do not even know what I do.

Mr. Tennant is not a competitive person, he is not engaged in gaming culture, but he is passionate about engaging students and creating a space where they feel welcome. That drive is what motivates him to improve his club. He spends a great deal of time self-evaluating his decisions in the club, and is critical of himself to gain improvements. Before meeting him, I would not have said it was possible for a person who is not interested in gaming to run a successful video game club in a k-12 setting. Meeting Mr. Tennant has changed my opinion on that, he has shown that it takes a dedication to connecting the kids together that sew a successful club.

Mr. Harkness' Vision

Mr. Harkness opens his interview admitting that he was a prolific gamer in high school, and quite successful in his own right, competing at the highest levels of the most popular game at the time, *Counterstrike*. However, he also shared his reluctance to share his success with anyone during his high school years for fears of them ridiculing him. There was too much pressure on him to be cool for him to be able to open up about his video gaming passion. His history was what drives him to create an inclusive club, so others do not experience the kind of self-imposed shaming he felt about his gaming interests.

When talking about his goal of his club, he quickly said, “The first thing we really want to try and show was that it was very inclusive. We want it not bound by social or friend groups or grade levels. We really wanted to create a positive community.” He was committed to making his club inclusive of all types of people, and before bringing up anything about video gaming, or including gamers in their own place, he brings up creating a positive place for kids. When asked to go into further detail he said

So that was something that we try to break down; we also wanted to [long pause] A lot of these students we have noticed were kind of ... we wanted to get them interacting socially outside of school, right? And so, you know, you kind of get them out there talking to people in a social setting and not just in the classroom but where they are in a comfortable zone because they are playing video games but they are all together socially interacting; we really want to try and foster that community, that physical community not just a purely digital community. That was the purpose of the clubs and the LANs, right? To get there, to talk to these people face-to-face and kind of break down the attitude on the internet that it is, you know, you are anonymous on the internet and you can say whatever you want, you know? Which leads to a lot of vile interactions in the video game community, right? So we wanted to show connections and faces behind these avatars by putting them in the clubs and the LANs they are together and they are interacting socially.

There are several things Mr. Harkness considers his top priorities with the club, including social justice, curtailing anti-feminist comments, and creating a community among the students by giving them a venue to interact and develop positive social skills with each other.

As I mentioned, one of the particular social injustices he was particularly passionate about fighting was the anti-feminist movement he sees in gaming culture. He prides himself modeling the correct way to game with women. When I asked him what some of the signs of the anti-women culture he sees gaming culture to have, he brings up instances when a girl states that she is a gamer, the boys are quick to ask her for gaming credentials. He says the boys discount her gamer status when she shares she is into games that have a more female directed feel to them. He sees boys saying they are not “real” games, like the ones they are into. Mr. Harkness was focused on fighting that narrative within his video game club.

Mr. Harkness echoed Mr. Tennant’s experience of being supported by their administration and the school staff and parents. Mr. Harkness talked about how the Parent Advisory Council, a group of parents who are given tax revenue from the province’s legalized gambling to allot how they please to clubs they see valuable, has supported them nearly from the get-go. They have provided him with the funds necessary to waive some students’ LAN fees, and to purchase gaming equipment that broadens what was available to the students to play.

When I asked him how he approaches connecting to the students, he explains it this way,

I just ask them how their day was going. What they are doing, how they are, and I just listen. I do my best to actually get interested in what was going

on in their lives, right? And following up on that even if I do not teach that kid directly I try to make the time if possible to at least give that kid a few minutes every day. If they come see me, or even if I just see them in the hallways, just saying hi, just smiling, and just trying to be positive as much as I can regardless of what was going on in my life or anything like that. I try to put on that persona when I am out here at work.

He gives the students his time, which he feels validates them and helps them to trust him in building a relationship. Mr. Harkness is committed to exporting positivity into his surroundings. When I pressed him on how he deals with students who sit alone or are reluctant to socialize on their own initiative, he described a similar strategy that Mr. Tennant uses. He goes after the kids that are sitting by themselves, and introduces them to a group, getting that group to willingly play with the new kid. He said he has worked hard at creating a culture of inclusion for the new students, where the existing members are actively trying to be welcoming to those taking the risk of showing up. He said he does target the upper classmen as groups he can break up to include a new person, because he says they are the most used to having that happen, and they are good at being positive with the newcomer. Mr. Harkness said he only needs to set his behavior expectations once in an explicit speech at the beginning of the year, and after that the behaviors are reminded through context of how he deals with everyone individually.

When I told him in the interview that most of the students said they appreciated their efforts of including everyone, and had personal stories of how both Mr. Harkness and Mr. Tennant have gone out of their way to make them feel like they belong, Mr. Harkness had a teary reaction to the news

It makes me feel really good hearing that actually, umm. You always wonder what kids take out of the time you spend with them. No, I, I work really hard trying to spend a lot of time with these kids, and um, regardless of the club it was just ... I see it as really important. I see it more important than what I teach them, was just to teach them that someone cares about them and

uhhh; I do not know that was great that the kids said that because I, I, it was not just the club it was just as a whole, it was an important thing for me that they know they have a safe place they can go to and that there was adults in their life that do care and take a genuine interest in their lives. That was something that I wake up every morning and I try to do. That makes me happy to hear it. Thank you. Thank you.

I could see the impact of the news hit him. It was a validating moment for him; he felt his work was seen by others and it was appreciated.

I asked him the same final question I asked Mr. Tennant and most of the students. What was the one thing he wants me to understand leaving Coal Hill knowing about his club. He said it was all about the connection to the kids, “It was more important than anything,” he pleads for teachers to get to know the kids and make connections. He started recommending things to teachers who might be interested in starting their own club, telling them to get administration, other teachers, and parents involved as much as possible. He suggests not hesitating giving ownership of the club to the kids, and have them carry a heavy load. Make the kids feel that it is as much their club as it was your club. He echoes Mr. Tennant’s story that it was not important if you do not know anything about games, the important principle is “It is about spending time with youth and doing something positive with them.” He says all it takes is for you to sit down with kids and play a game with them, have them teach you the game if you are totally ignorant of it. Even that builds a strong bond between the two people. He says simply showing an interest in them has them recognize your efforts causing them to respond with reciprocation.

Summary of Coal Hill

The students at Coal Hill report to value their relationship with their teacher sponsors, and they are definitive in their appreciation for how the club as positively affected their lives. The sponsors’ visions for the club, of being inclusive and giving the students a

place to explore their interests with likeminded individuals in an emotionally safe environment, was being realized.

At Coal Hill, the students positively described their experiences in their video game club. The students reported their appreciation for the inclusive nature of their various clubs; specifically remarking how the sense of community helps them get excited about coming to school, and their added network of friends and acquaintances. I could not identify a structural norm of the club that contributed to the students' persistence other than the charismatic and positive nature of the two club sponsors. Their role modeling sets the tone for how the club is run, with their focus on inclusion of all types of gamers, social justice, and creating a community within their school.

Deffry Vale High School

One of my favorite parts of the club was the community. We all feel like family, we all treat each other like family, and that was just amazing. It was an amazing feeling to be able to walk into a room on a Friday afternoon and be greeted by 70+ people who all know you by name, who you know by name, who all care about you; it was just really nice. (Mickey, Deffry Vale High School Video Game Club student)

School Overview

For the first 70 years since its creation in 1907, Deffry Vale was this city's only magnate school, where entrance was determined based on an entrance exam. Since 1977, it has not been the only magnate school, but still retains the most respect from the community. Deffry Vale's student attendance last year was 93.9%, and it had a graduation rate of 98.3%. With a population that hovers between 2300 and 2500 students, Deffry Vale is within the top 10 largest high schools in Michigan. The ratio of female to male students is 60% female, 40% male. The demographic information of Deffry Vale is as follows:

Table 4

Demographics of Deffry Vale High School

	9th	10th	11th	12th	Total
<u>Number of students</u>	722	617	565	450	2354
Gender					
<u>Female</u>	422	380	329	288	1419
<u>Male</u>	300	237	236	132	905
Ethnicity					
<u>American Indian</u>	1	2			3
<u>White</u>	5	5	8	4	22
<u>Hispanic</u>	50	25	21	17	113
<u>Black</u>	602	519	479	382	1982
<u>Asian</u>	60	64	53	43	220
<u>Arabic</u>	4	2	4	4	14
Other Groups					
<u>Limited English Speaking</u>	55	28	17	13	113
<u>Economically Disadvantaged</u>	478	304	287	248	1317

Students who enter Deffry Vale must select a curriculum that they follow throughout their time in the school. The curriculum is akin to choosing a major in college. The students' curricula determine what focus they have throughout their time in the school, with examples being Arts and Communication, Business Management and Marketing, Engineering and Manufacturing, and Science and Arts.

About the Club

The Deffry Vale Video Game Club (VGC) was created in early October 2014. Cyberman, the student who pushed for the club's creation went on to serve as the president of the club until he graduated. The initial teacher sponsor of the club was Mrs. Whittaker. For the first year of the club's existence, the weekly meetings were held in Mrs. Whittaker's

English room. At the end of October, I was hired at Deffry Vale. During my interview, the principal was eager to get me introduced to the video game club due to her knowledge of my prior involvement in Iowa. Over the next two months, the duties of running the club were transferred over to me, and by the start of the 2nd year Mrs. Whittaker had removed herself from the club completely to go pursue her desire to run a different after school club. Therefore, since December of 2014, I have essentially been the only teacher running VGC.

The leadership structure of the club for the first two years was Cyberman and myself running the club. Cyberman, the president of the club, was the clear student leader. Cyberman and I would discuss various ideas we both had, and implement them based on what we thought would work best. This club was Cyberman's idea originally, as the club was formed a month before I arrived at Deffry Vale, so I tried my hardest to honor his vision of the club while giving my opinions on what I thought would work best. I kept a very close eye on how the club was being run, but I regularly forced myself not to try to control where the club would go and instead let the students decide what they wanted to get out of the club. This leadership, focused but not controlling, method seems to have worked quite well for the first few years of the club, as we saw large growth.

After the first two years, Cyberman graduated, leaving a leadership gap in the club. Cyberman and I discussed nominating another president of the club, but instead we opted to go with an executive board of students who attended regularly, and had been in the club for the previous two years. An executive board of 7 members, 5 of which were seniors, 1 junior, and 1 sophomore, was formed. I asked each member to come up with their own vision of the club in the next year, as something they wanted to implement throughout the year and treat it as their pet project. Most of the executive board members bought into that

idea and the quality of the club was improved throughout the year because of their efforts. Judging by the continued growth of the club into the third year, without Cyberman, I took it as a sign that things were going well for VGC.

In the first year, we were capped to only allow 30 kids. The reasoning for this was partly due to a desire to not let it get too big, and a simple logistics problem of having the club meet in an English room. The room was one of the smallest classrooms in the school, and any more kids would have been hard to fit. For the 2nd year of the club, I moved the meeting location to a chemistry room I taught in. This had a couple of distinct advantages over the English room we were previously in. The chemistry room was much larger, allowing us to lift our limit of participants in the club. Furthermore, the lab tables served as perfect places for the students to set up their games. The room has 8 lab tables, each table was equipped with four electrical outlets, allowing up to two game systems and monitors to be placed per table.

The population of the 2nd year increased over our 30-student maximum from the previous year. In 2015-2016 VGC had 82 students come, on average, throughout our 22 meetings. This was an increase of over 50 students, and 273%, from the previous year. In our first few meetings it became apparent to me that the largest bottleneck in the operation was our lack of monitors for the students to play on. The students would bring in their gaming systems, but were not able to bring in their TV sets, so for the first few weeks of our 2nd year, kids would bring their systems to share with their friends but were unable to play them due to a lack of monitors. Early on in that year I solicited the help of my 2500-person-strong neighborhood's Facebook page, for anyone that had any extra monitors they had be willing to donate to VGC. I had a few neighbors give me semi-broken monitors that

worked in a pinch, but were not great. I later went to a large online community for my city on the website www.reddit.com. After making a post requesting help with monitors for the club, a business owner who asked to remain anonymous contacted me and purchased 10 brand new 24'' monitors for the club's use. We have only had 3 or 4 meeting since where we have run out of monitors to use, but typically the 10 new monitors, plus my projector in class, and the TV in the room, suffice in providing enough monitors for the students to use during club meetings.

The 3rd year of the club again saw a rise in attendance of the club. The attendance of the 2016-2017 VGC rose to 110 students per meeting. In 2016-2017 year we switched rooms again, to the physics room I teach in. This decision was not based as much on which room would work better, as the chemistry room was a better situation for VGC, but it was the room I was teaching in that year as I had been switched to teach physics full time instead of chemistry. My room was only slightly smaller than the previous chemistry room we held it in, but it does not have lab tables with the outlets built into the table. Instead, power outlets hang from the ceiling and I have purchased power strips to dangle off each one of those to power each of the 8 lab tables. The students set up their games on the physics lab tables.

Due to the increase in size, we were bursting out of my room. One room simply could not handle that size of crowd, so VGC has spilled over into the adjacent room that is connected by a door. The students can freely walk in between the two rooms as they see fit. The students ended up grouping themselves in the two rooms thematically, where the card game playing kids tended to go to the spare room as there was more room to spread out there, and the video gamers would set up in my room.

Each meeting I am required by administration to have the students sign in, so we can track who is coming to the club. This has given me the added benefit of knowing quite accurately how many students come to the club throughout the years. Below is a chart showing the attendance trends for each year. I have spaced the points showing the meetings to coincide with the time of year they occurred. There are interesting trends of dips and climbs that each year seems to mimic. The dip in week 20 represents the Friday before prom, where there was almost no attendance from the junior and senior classes. 2014-2015 was not affected by this as heavily because the club consisted primarily of freshmen and sophomores. The 8th meeting sees a dip because it is the following meeting after report cards are given. Some students are not allowed to go by either their own expectations for themselves or their parent's rules barring them from attending with lower grades.

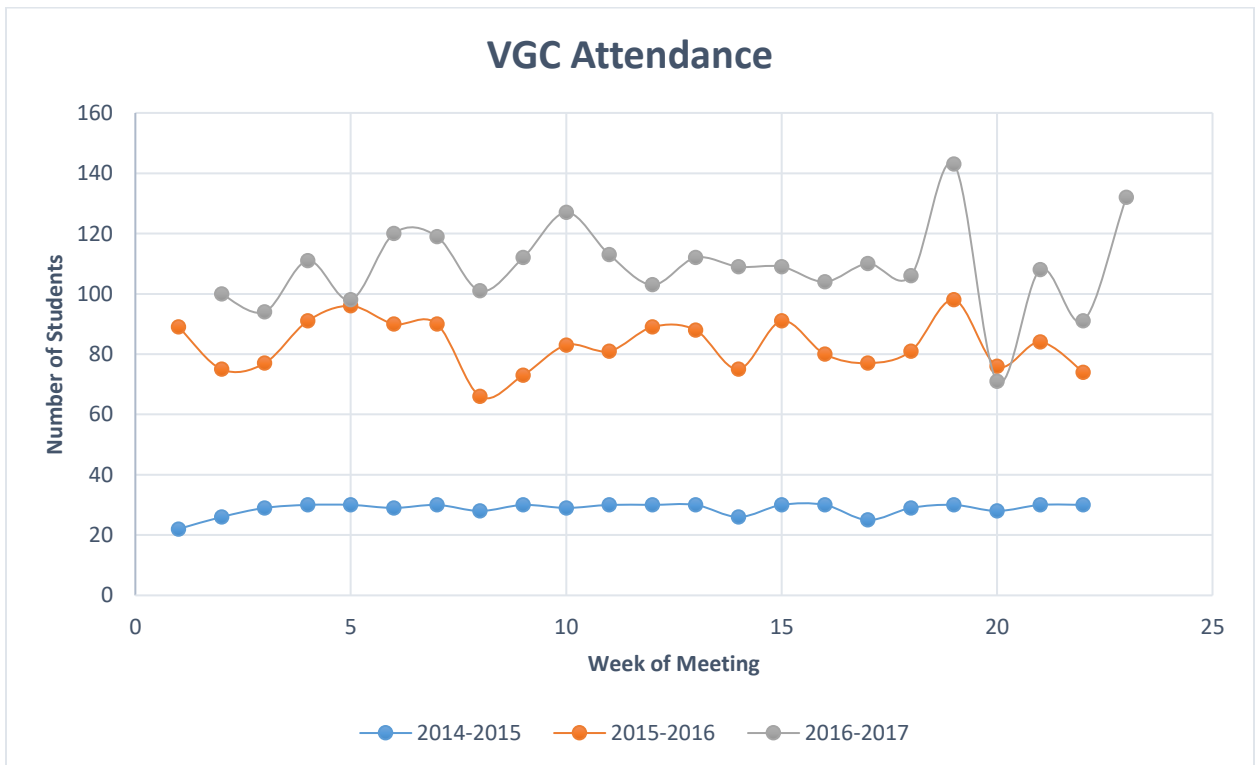


Figure 11: Deffry Vale Video Game Club attendance over the last 3 years.

During the 3rd year, due to the increased size of the club, the school administration requested I find additional help to supervise the club. By the end of the year, I had the help of two other teachers that come reliably to help monitor the activity of the club. Throughout the previous two years, there has been a struggle with administration regarding supervision. The administration was concerned with how I am able to adequately monitor 80-130+ children. I was forced at the end of the 2017 school year to get another teacher to help by sitting in the meeting room and grading papers; the administration was content with that compromise and has been supportive since.

The class schedule of Deffry Vale is split for many students. Classes run from periods 1-8, but students are typically only given class periods from 1-7, or 2-8, depending on what curriculum they have chosen, or a special request from parents to drop their child off, or pick them up later. That being said, the vast majority of the students are scheduled for periods 1-7. 7th hour concludes at 15:15 in the afternoon, and VGC starts up as soon as 7th hour was completed. 8th hour gets out an hour later at 16:15, so the students who are in VGC, but also have an 8th hour, are forced to wait until 16:15 before they can attend the club.

The most significant disruption to VGC meetings is at 16:20. I turn on all the lights, and have the students pause the games they are playing. I then stand up on my desk and give the VGC wave, which is performed by holding both hands up, with elbows in and tight, and waving frantically back and forth with both hands around shoulder height. A large smile is required. It has become the VGC greeting in the hallway among the members, as they pass by each other going to their various classes I catch them doing the wave. After the wave, I greet and welcome them to another VGC. I typically ask if anybody has any

success stories they had like to share with the group, and I allow several students who want to share a school or personal life success with the club. I do not let this carry on beyond 3 or 4 students.

After the students share their successes, I then start my discussion about a theme I choose for the meeting. The themes range between time management strategies, goal setting, self-confidence building, how to learn from failure, conflict resolution, academic strategies, and how to handle depression among other things. I typically talk to them about these things for no longer than 5-7 minutes. After that, I give any announcements about upcoming events for the club, or issues I have been seeing I would like to address. It is at this time that executive board members are free to come up and give any announcements they like to share. During the time I am talking, my expectation for the executive board members is to go around the room quietly and act as role models for the other students regarding listening. I have them go up to students who are not paying attention and ask them to listen. In this respect, the students see the executive board members enforcing the culture.

Emerging Themes

In this section I report the results I found connecting to many of my research questions and subquestions. I also include themes that emerged during my data collection that were not initially included in my research question. I present data collected from the interviews as well as survey results. The interviews were conducted via Skype instead of one-on-one, with my voice being adjusted so as to mask my identity, while the focus group was conducted face-to-face.

Why Students Like the Club

Of the 13 students who were interviewed, all 13 of them spoke of the sense of community they now feel they have since joining the club. Students described their experience most often as a family environment. In his focus group interview with me, The Face of Boe described VGC as “One of the main reasons I come to school.” Furthermore, the overall friendliness of the participants was brought up by the 89 students who took the online survey. Many submitted responses like, “The students are just great people,” “The positive atmosphere here has enhanced my enjoyment,” “Everything is enjoyable,” “I have found that making new friends inside VGC has been very promising,” and “I can talk to people more freely and be able to relate to everyone else.”

Another frequent description of the club in the interviews related their experience of being able to escape the stress from school. Martha said, “It is like, stress from school, I let go of stress.” Donna Noble said, “It was a chance to relax after a hard week, a lot of things could be bothering you and stuff, VGC is that chance to chill, play games, and talk to friends.”

This reporting from the students comes as validation in response to the survey data of how they would describe their experience so far in the club.

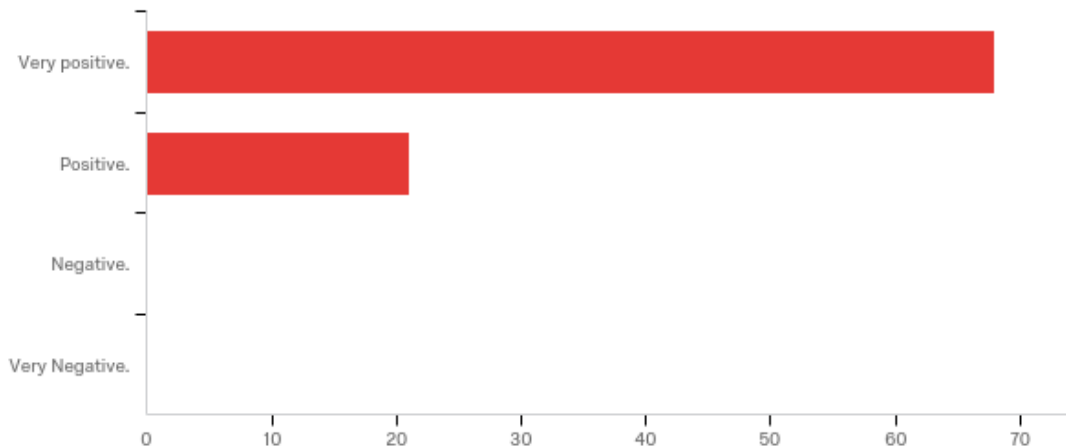


Figure 12: How Deffry Vale students describe their experience in the club.

Of the 89 students who answered this question, not one listed negative or very negative.

Connected to School

Surprisingly, very few of the students interviewed reported feeling an increased attachment to the school. Only two of the students interviewed reported any increase in attachment because of the club, and one of those two made it clear that it was not a huge increase. One student, Stormageddon, made it clear that his experience was a big drive for his pride in attending Deffry Vale, “Oh most definitely. Ever since this club started I have grown a huge emotional support for this school. When I go to tournaments I make sure to put DVHS VGC (Deffry Vale High School Video Game Club) as my gamer tag. If the organizers forget to put it in, I make them.”

The survey data shows many students made a point of saying it has only made them feel more attached to their peers. However, the largest group of respondents are the ones saying it has increased their feelings of attachment to both their school and their peers.

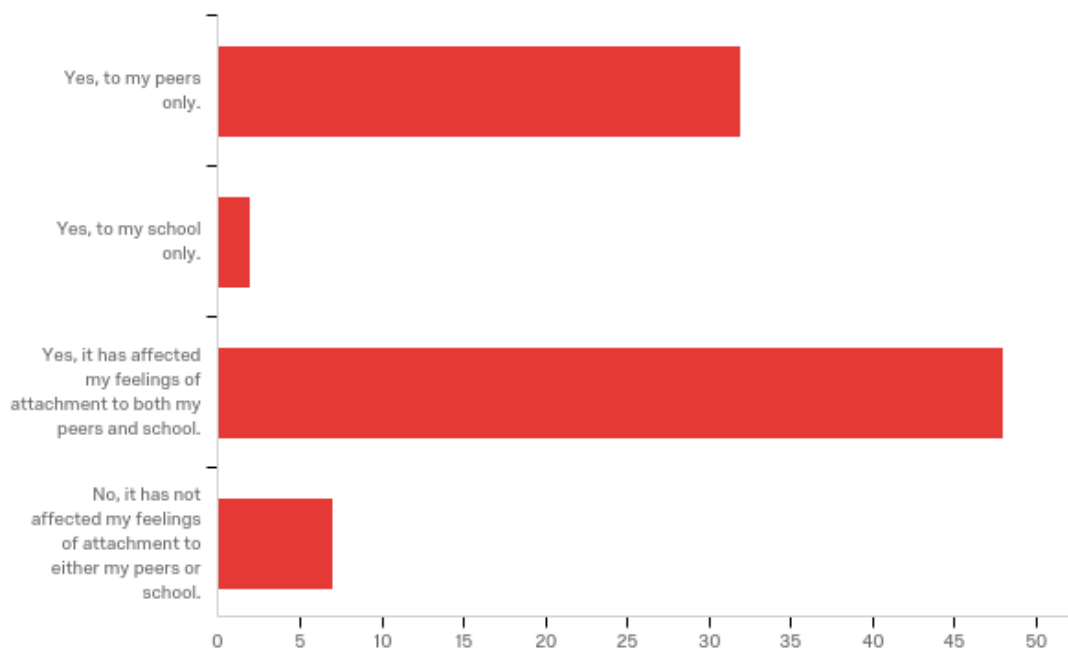


Figure 13: How Deffry Vale students describe their change in feelings of attachment.

So, it came as a surprise to me to see only one student in the interviews that said their feelings of attachment to the school changed by being a part of the video game club.

Connection to Peers

From the graph in the previous section, it seemed like there was a large number of students who did feel an increased connection to their peers. This was corroborated by the question on the survey asking if the club had been beneficial in helping the students find friends.

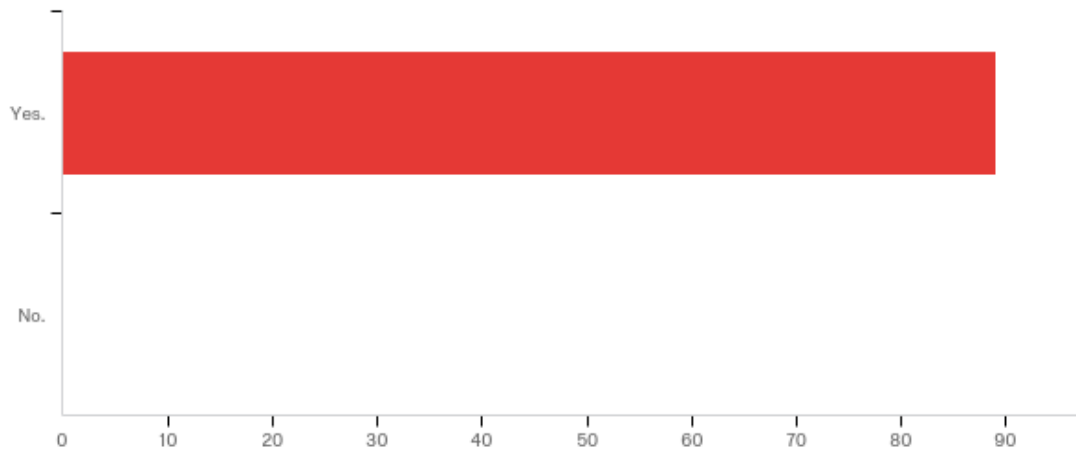


Figure 14: If the Deffry Vale students have made friends through the video game club.

Of the 89 students who answered this question, not one person answered no. I was surprised to not get a single student saying no, but the more I looked through the student responses and interviews I found that overwhelmingly the students spoke about the club in terms of being able to interact with each other.

Furthermore, in the interviews, the discussion of an increasing attachment to their peers was the most talked about. Every student interviewed had something to share regarding the connections they have built. Some people like getting differing perspectives on games. As Ace put it, “Everybody has different points of views on games and that has

just made me feel more attached to different kinds of people. I am more of a shooter type, but my friends at club pay fighting games.” Vincent described his experience from a mentoring perspective, “I like mentoring the younger students, just the thought of helping someone else, especially helping out someone younger than me, someone who was still learning, that always excites me. It helps me build a connection with my peers, with other kids.”

A couple of students talked about how they feel gamers are known to have a checkered past, or that the club was a place for the outcasts. Stormageddon and Nardole describe their connection to peers this way,

Stormageddon: *We are all there for having something in common. We all like video games, and I have noticed gamers, typically, have checkered pasts. Either they have just been a lone wolf, outspoken or whatever, we all have that in common, you know? So I am not saying like I talk to every single person in club, but I am just saying there was individual clicks for everyone. If you were part of the out group, there was a little group of out groups that you can always talk to, that you can always talk to new people in there. They are very accepting. Like, we are all very accepting. I think that was the baseline of my point. I think it just comes from our personalities in general. Granted, there was little drama here and there within VGC, but come on, you put any group of people together and there was going to be drama. But, I would say the acceptance was just from everyone, because like I said us gamers, we usually have typical checkered past of being lonely, so we are always accepting of new people because we love meeting new people. If that makes sense. As far as my peers go, I feel there was a different but not like a huge different. Because it was still video games. People are still going to look at me a little weird, but honestly I do not care. A part of me feels that way, another part of me feels as though people see me and they respect me for what I am doing because this was what I have a passion for and I am utilizing it. We treat this club like we are all one big family, you know? That bond itself just strengthens all the bonds that I have with people that are already in there, you know?*

Nardole: *What I like was that it takes the story of all the outcasts in school and gives them an environment to interact, it gives them an environment to make new friends, create new bonds. That was what*

I love about the club, because I have a tons of friends just from being in this club. Another thing was the fact that along with the friends thing, well actually because of having a lot of friends, I could just go in there and sometimes I do not even play video games I just go around and talk to people. There has been days where I have not played any video games and I just had a ton of fun.

The overwhelming consistency of the students saying they feel closer to their classmates, just because they can share in their interests, prevailed throughout the interviews. It came up a few times where students were not expecting some games to be played by other kids. Students would often describe their surprised that a “cool kid” played a relatively obscure game they were into, and a bond was created from that. Students reported the knowledge that they would be able to see the people they don’t normally get to see throughout the week, at VGC, was calming and made them happy. THE TARDIS and Donna Noble separately phrased it this way,

THE TARDIS: *The club gives me more time to hang out with all my friends and my peers. I feel like the club has really helped me grow closer to a lot of them because I do not have a lot of the same classes with some of the friends that go to video game club with me, so it has given me a lot more time to be around them, and share whatever we like or dislike with each other.*

Donna Noble: *Being able to see friends I do not see on a regular basis. So, I see one friend every day for an hour as opposed to not seeing a friend at all but like talking to them outside of school. VGC gives me a chance to see them and connect, and keep up. So, it helps with connecting to the people I do not regularly see. I think without club I would have like, few friends. I would probably have like two or three as opposed to the many friends I have now because of this club. Because of this club, it kind of reunited me with a friend I knew from middle school and I have just met a whole bunch of amazing people so without this club I would not have them.*

Another description of this manifestation arose in the focus group with me, along with a story about finding out one student plays the same game they do,

Amy Pond: *If I do not have the same curriculum or the same classes with somebody I will get to see them on Friday. Like Tonya, I do not get to see her all that often, but I know where she was on Friday! She was over in that corner watching The Master playing Smash, let me go say hi.*

Capaldi: *I have the same thing to share, me and Jaws, we only had classes together freshman year, but now I get to see him at VGC every Friday.*

The Face of Boe: *That was how I met Dalek actually, in last year of Video Game Club. I did not know Dalek went here, because when I first saw Dalek last year I thought he was a freshman because The Master kept calling him little brother. I was like, "Is that really The Master's little brother?" VGC was how I discovered how some of my friends play Naruto. Because I was like, "Y'all play Naruto?" because I am extremely good at Naruto, so I played against them and now we all right with each other.*

Martha shared his similar experience to THE TARDIS and the members in the focus group, "It lets us connect on another level. Maybe we both like this game so we could say, 'Oh I like this game, and you like this game, too?' so it was another thing I learned about them, you know?"

Students like Mickey spoke about the genuine levels of friendship that were manifesting themselves, "time and time again people that I have met in VGC have been there for me, they have shown that they will always try to be there for me, and that was something that I hold dear and try to return."

I was intrigued to hear more about how members frequently discussed this family feeling. Sarah Jane gave me her perspective that I found to be insightful,

*Well, a lot of people in club, kids that I like actually associate with, which was a pretty good portion of the club. I usually consider them either my kids or *chuckle* my brother or sister because of how much we have in common, or how much we get a long in certain parts of the club, like different games. The main game that I play, Just Dance, a lot of the kids over there are usually younger than I am so I usually consider them my kids so it makes me a little bit more connected to them because they usually come to me with their problems and everything and they try to talk to me about it and I will help them and everything. If I feel I know you are struggling I am going to*

subtly come to you and see if you need any help in anything. If you look down I am going to come over to you and be like, "Hey are you ok? How are you doing? Are you fine? Do you need a hug? You can talk to me. I know you really do not know me like that, but like I will let you talk to me and I can give you advice if you need it." I have always been like that.

Sarah Jane has been in the club from the beginning; she was an outgoing senior when interviewed. In the interview, students would refer to her as Mama Sarah Jane, among other things. Sarah Jane talking about her familial role came out on her own in the beginning of the interview. When I asked her where her behavior like a mother comes from, and she said it just came out naturally. She said she feels an obligation to take care of those in her group. It seems many people appreciate her, and others' efforts in this regard.

Connected to the Teachers

There was very little reporting by the students about an increased sense of connection to their teachers through their participation in VGC. The only manifestation of this was regarding some students feeling a sense of obligation towards me to behave in better ways. Some (four of the 13) students said their connection with me drove them to improve themselves, but I would categorize this as limited, and only a small factor of why the students at VGC come to the club meetings.

Changes in Approach to School Work

Of the 13 students interviewed, only one student reported that they have had a change in their approach to school work. Many students said they appreciate how many peers they can go to for help, and that aspect has helped them do better in school, but only one reported that they are actually working harder. Most students had a firm "no" when asked if their approach to school work has changed.

This finding does not come as much of a surprise to me, given the number of students who, in the survey, reported that the time they spend on homework has not changed since joining the club. Of the 89 students, 66 said nothing has changed for them, and only 21 reported an increase in time spent on homework.

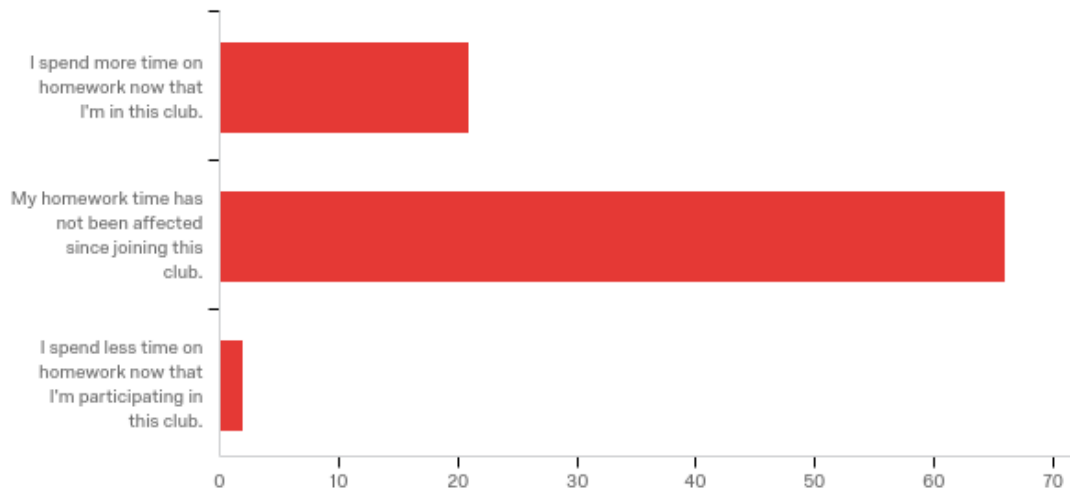


Figure 15: Deffry Vale student homework habit changes.

A quote from the interviews that captures the general feelings of nearly everyone I interviewed on this topic was this excerpt from Donna Noble,

Ummm, yes and no I could say. Yes, because it makes me do more. Like, hey maybe if I achieve higher and stuff maybe I can come here and talk about how much I have achieved and stuff like that. No just because, like I said earlier, I just feel like the same way about school that it was kind of harder than I thought and maybe I do not like it.

When I pressed him on if his strategies of approaching school work has been changed by any motivation through VGC, he said, “No.” Donna Noble, like many others in the club, reported a feeling of competition or pride to talk about their work with their classmates.

The only other factor that students reported on that has changed their motivation was pressure from their parents. Three of the 13 students said their parents enforce a rule about grades for them to be able to attend video game club.

Intimidation of School

Judging from the survey data, of the 89 students who took the survey only 34 students reported a decrease in their sense that school was intimidating. 40 students, the largest group, reported a probable decrease in intimidation, although I am not certain what threshold or capacity that probable rating was met. During my interviews, I had students who said they do not feel a change in intimidation, but also said that they could see how at some points their stress levels may have changed due to the club. So, there was an interesting mix reaction there that one might attribute to less than half my interviewed students reporting a change in intimidation, and more than half in the survey saying they might or definitely have seen a change in intimidation.

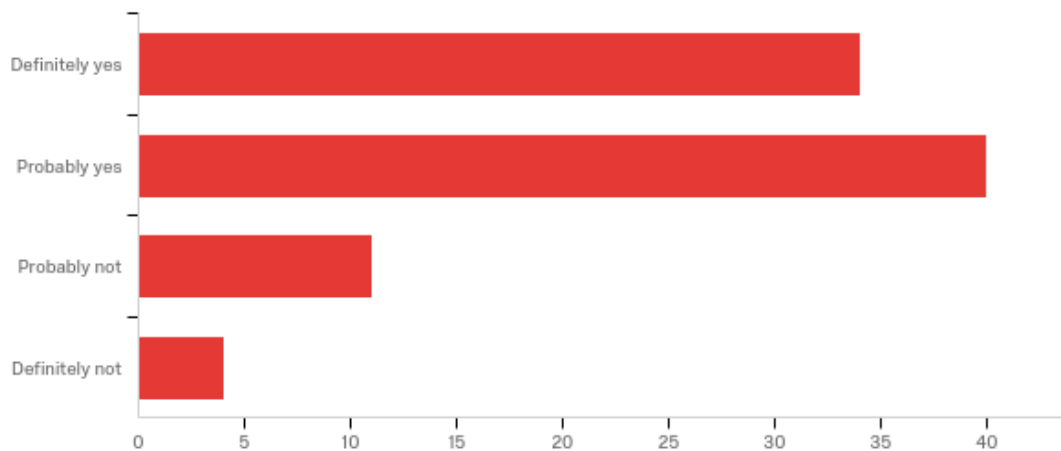


Figure 16: If Deffry Vale students have seen a change in intimidation of the school.

Six of the thirteen students interviewed reported that school was less intimidating since joining the club. The students who did not find a change in intimidation levels all said the same thing, school was not intimidating to begin with. There seems to be a clear split in how intimidation was perceived among the members. The TARDIS and Vincent, during their interviews, expressed a common theme among the students who did report a change in intimidation levels.

The TARDIS: *I think it was a lot more less intimidating, especially during my freshman year, because when I was a freshman I was having a lot of self-confidence issues; but once I started going to video game club and meeting a lot of these amazing people I just started feeling a lot more confident in myself that I could do a lot more things and that I could survive high school. Everybody that goes to video game club are extremely supportive. Just tell any one of my friends, like, I could tell them anything and they will be, “Oh you can do it! It was no problem for you!” or another example was the teacher, the sponsor, Mr. Lenk, he always does these little speeches in between the club, and he always talks about topics like motivation and getting your homework done, and a lot of those are just really memorable and he gives a lot of good life advice through them. At first, I thought that Deffry Vale was a really scary place. I thought that high school in general was kind of a scary place, especially during my freshman year. But as soon as I started going to video game club I just felt more empowered, more confident in myself, and I think that all the motivation that I get from video game club through all my peers and Mr. Lenk really help me get to where I am right now.*

Vincent: *I have had less feelings, especially now being a senior now I have become less intimidated. But the benefit of having this club and all my friends and even Mr. Lenk being there, being supportive of me, it has really lessened any nerves or fears I have had of this school. If I had to guess when this would be my most intimidating, it would probably be freshman year and a little bit of junior year. Freshman year I did not have this club, it was just me. I came from a school that no one really knew; none of my friends came to Deffry Vale so it was problematic finding friends and I guess I am really lucky that the friends I made came together to partake in this club as well. I would have to say junior year was a stressful time for me because of testing and finally going, “OK, I need to start considering being an adult now, more than ever.” And, being a member of this club a while at this point, it really helped that I had other people who were there for me and going through the same problems as me. It was also great seeing my senior friends who were about to leave, who were ready to go, who were done; and seeing them how calm they were, seeing how they were, they looked prepared. It kind of just helped ease my heart on how things were going to go for me.*

The most important theme for the students when talking about how the club has changed their intimidation levels was to relate it to how their friends supported them through tough times. The students, like The TARDIS and Vincent, had stories of feeling

alone and afraid of the size of Deffry Vale. Most often, their stories revolved around entering as freshmen and having nothing. Their answers to this intimidation question were all tied into their feelings of attachment to their peers, or being more familiar with the school as time passed, rather than how the school or school work has seemed manageable or achievable.

Achievement in Life

Six of the thirteen students reported an increase in their desires to achieve more in life due to their participation in the club. Reasons ranged from competing with others in the club, with grades, to having friends they could talk to about their dreams and goals that eventually helped drive them. The students who reported no change in their desire to achieve more consistently reported that they were already interested in achieving their best in life, and the club had no effect on them.

Most of the reasons for their increase in desire to achieve did center around their peers, as The TARDIS put it,

I think that this club has affected my outlook on achievement positively because everybody in the club shares the same passion but everybody also has their own individual goals. when I go to the club and I hear everybody's stories, it kind of motivates me a lot, and it makes me want to focus more on my goals and I really want to achieve my goals.

Similarly, Mickey's input centered around sharing with his peers his own achievements,

Since joining the club, I have wanted very much to do better in school to show to my parents that this club was something that helps, it was a positive thing, and also to show the rest of VGC and Mr. Lenk here was what you helped to motivate me to do.

Judging from the interviews, it does appear that for some of the students this club has helped them shape their vision for themselves in the future. For some, it describes what they can achieve, for others it helped them gain interest in an area that they did not think

they had a chance to succeed in, and for others it simply gave them an avenue to compete with their friends for the best grades. However, just over half of the students that were interviewed did not report any change in their drive to achieve more in life.

Feelings About School

Only two of the thirteen students interviewed said being a part of the club had no change on their feelings about school. The biggest emerging theme from the students was how their connections to their peers helped them feel better about school. This connection appears to support this survey data asking about the students' feelings of attachments to their peers and to the school.

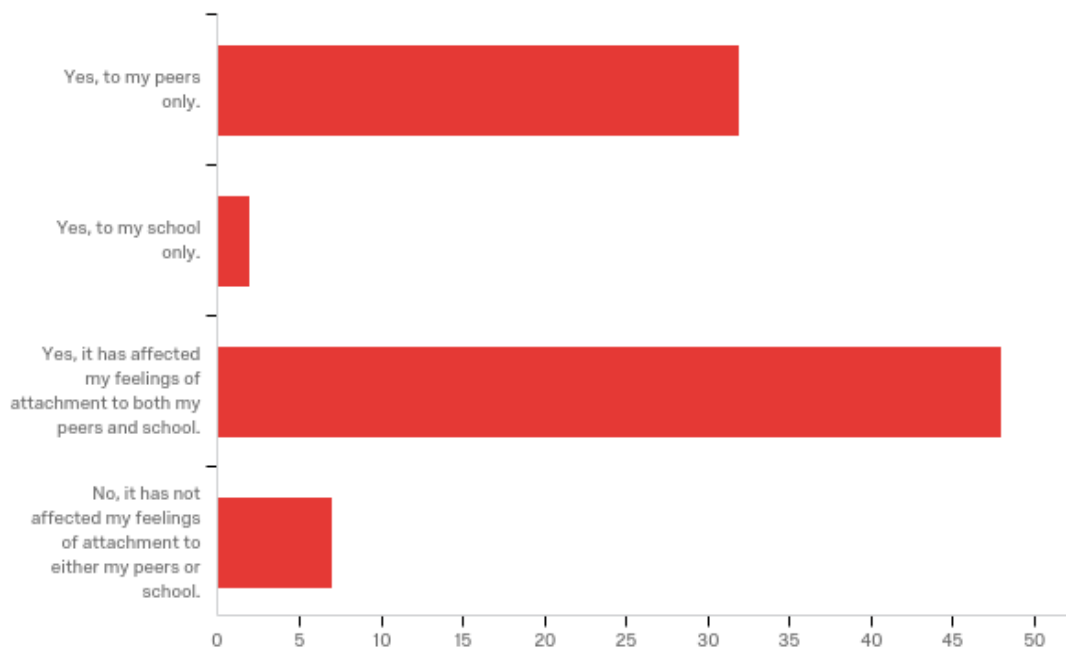


Figure 17: Deffry Vale student feelings of attachment changes.

The students appeared to feel much more closely tied to their peers than schooling by itself. Even with the largest group of respondents reporting it has affected them in both their feelings of attachments to their peers and schooling, through the interviews I found that their feelings of school seem directly associated with their increased connection to their

peers. When we arrived at this question in the interview, the students, particularly the non-seniors, shared these comments that had similar themes.

Vincent: *Seeing my friends. I do not get to see everyone often. I get to see some people often, but not the ones that I made over the connection of 3 whole years. Classes change, I will hang out with this person more this year than I did with someone else last year, or the year before that. That was basically what it is.*

The TARDIS: *Yes, because whenever I, well, Monday was everyone's least favorite day of the week, but video game club gives me a reason to be excited for the school week. I have something to look forward to every single day, and it keeps me motivated and it keeps me pushing forward ... I just really like the atmosphere in the club, and whenever I think about it I just really really badly want to go to video game club.*

Mickey: *Uhh, it has made me feel better in terms of like being at school. Umm, just because it was kind of like that weekly reminder that there are still people in the building who care about you, who are friends with you.*

Martha: *It makes me feel better because knowing that there was somebody here that I can relate to makes me want to go to school instead of actually staying home and doing nothing... It makes me feel better because at home it is, it was not dull, but it was very diving into my personal things. Like, my mom, when she talks to me it was really weird and she does not "talk to me" talk to me like that, and at home I just do not like being at home. So when I go to school, and there was people I can talk to, I feel better and it makes me feel better to be at school where there was people I can talk to instead of being at home and there was people I cannot talk to.*

Donna Noble: *So, before I started coming to club it was more so, "Aww man, this was harder than I thought. Maybe I do not really like it." I kind of still feel that way about the school. But, coming to club it was more like, "This was a nice place, this was 'yeah I do feel like this was a safe space where I can just sit and if I feel the need to talk to friends or even Mr. Lenk about certain things going on'" yeah.*

In my interviews, an interesting split of reactions came between the seniors and the rest of the students. Nearly all of the seniors interviewed talked about their school pride increasing due to the club, whereas the freshman through juniors focused more on their

connections to their friends that have helped them feel connected to their peers. In the focus group with me, of four seniors, this was where the discussion turned

The Face of Boe: *It gives me more school spirit, because like, originally at Deffry Vale, the only thing I was really hyped up for before Video Game Club was the pep rallies... It was always fun, but then Video Game Club came and I was like, "Oh, this is, this was just as good as the pep rally, maybe even better. And it was like every week!*

Jenny Flint: *Yeah, I remember I was in 10th grade and they were talking about VGC and I was like, "Oh there was a video game club?! Can I join?" And they said, "No! There was too many people! You cannot join anymore." I was like, "Really?!" So I had to wait until 11th grade year.*

The Face of Boe: *Because it was me and Cyberman and them sitting at the table and they was like, "Y'all going to Video Game Club this week?" and I was like, "There was a video game club?!"*

Amy Pond: *Yeah, I only vaguely knew of video game club in 10th grade, and that was because Ms. Whittaker had us buy her people shirts. I do not even remember how I got into it in 11th grade, I just know that it happened. "Yup, I am here. I am not going anywhere." because like, Deffry Vale was like the school that I came to just because it had Japanese. I did not care that they were #1 blah blah blah. I was like, it was a school and I am going there for language. And now it was just like, this was like something that was really important so it was like when you look back on something and you have really good memories. Like I probably will not be like, "Yeah, you know I really loved that school work!" But I will be like, "Oh man, video game club!"*

Jenny Flint: *I like talking about video game club to my friends at Revival High (An across-town rival high school) ... They are like, "Oh man, I wish we had a VGC. I wish we had a video game club." I am like, "Yeah. It was so much fun." It was nice bragging to them.*

With Sarah Jane adding in her interview, "I feel like I rep my school more because of video game club because I know not a lot of schools have a video game club." It was interesting to hear consistently from the seniors that they liked to brag about their school to other friends around the city.

Parental Opinions

The entire body of students reported their parents either do not care, or support their interests. There were only a couple examples of parents being skeptical of their participation, but those students said their parents took a wait-and-see approach to how it was affecting them.

The same findings made themselves apparent in the interviews. The students reported their parents not really caring, or being positive about their participation. Some students said their parents enforced a grade requirement to participate in the club, even going as far to say that the grade requirement has helped them in school.

Structures in the Club

Around half of the students surveyed said that there were routines the club implements that help them get excited about the club.

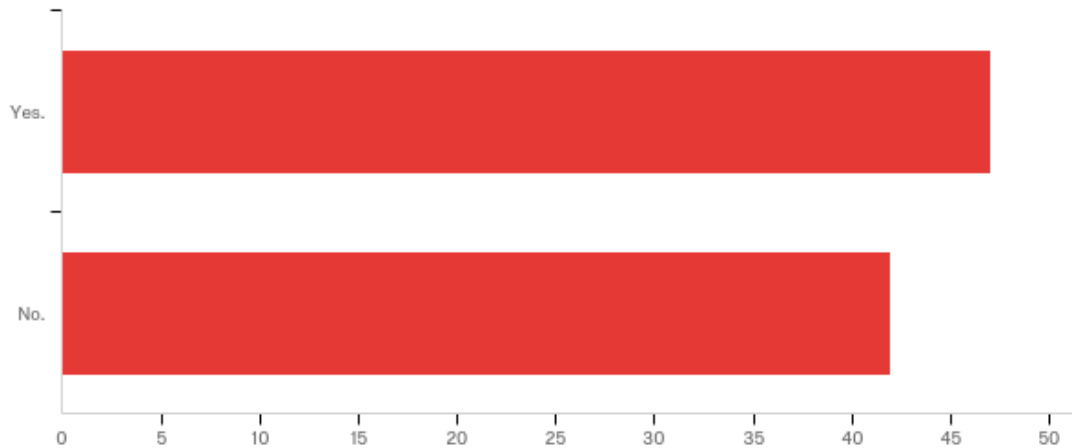


Figure 18: Deffry Vale student appreciation for valuable routines in the club.

Of those students who responded that there were routines that helped them, the responses were wide-ranging. Most often reported in the survey was the part of the club meetings where I have the students pause their games and listen to my varying speeches. Just over a third of the students wrote the speech as their main piece that attracted them to the club.

The most common theme reported by the respondents was the simple fact that they can meet with their friends and play games together. The final largest block of responses centered around the smaller parts of the club, how nice people are even while being competitive, the tournaments the students put on, dancing, and the number of people that show up.

In the interviews, the results were similar to the student submissions in the survey. The majority of the students discussed how positive everyone was to each other, and how open people are at sharing their games. The TARDIS and Vincent respectively put it,

***The TARDIS:** Well, Mr. Lenk and the executive board, they all try to encourage being open and helping others and being open to new people who join the club and making friends and being nice to everyone. But I think that everyone in the club would do that anyway. Mainly just because, well, I cannot really explain it too well, but I think it was because of the club's sense of community that I think everyone feels, not just myself.*

***Vincent:** Someone can bring in something that they like, or something that they enjoy and people can just watch or they can talk about it and it really just, it was like a conversation starter. To put it in the most basic of terms, it helps someone get their foot out, especially gamers, or at least people who just do not know how to start a conversation.*

Other students went back to their feelings that the club feels like a family. Mickey said,

I think it was really inspired by Mr. Lenk. He really wants us to treat each other like family, and he really tries to inspire that in the club. During his weekly speeches he always mentions treating each other well, being there for each other. Mr. Lenk often refers to us as his VGC family. He really pushes a sense of community, he always talks about treating each other well, but also not being afraid of sharing your opinion or saying something to someone else. We even have different names for each other. Like we call Sarah Jane "Mama Sarah Jane." The kid who started VGC, Cyberman, kind of acts like everyone's granddad, he even calls me his son, which was funny. There was always a lot of positivity and this sense that we are a family. And we can kind of see that when we walk in, we all support each

other, and we are all there for each other through thick and thin just like any family.

In the focus group with the seniors, the diversity of the club was brought up, this feeling of diversity among the students was echoed by other students interviewed. Perhaps it was best captured by the four seniors I interviewed at the same time in the focus group.

The Face of Boe: *So, like I just want to say VGC is very diverse. Not in terms of diversity and culture wise, but I mean like, it is not just nerds that come to VGC. It be like, I want to say, the norm. Like, people who do not look as weird as normal? How about that. Some people like that come to club, for example when I first met The Master, I did not think he was into Naruto.*

Amy Pond: *My term of nerd was so loose. I will refer to anybody as a nerd because people think nerds are “Ew, you are into books.” Like you are like that one person who was just like all the little geeks running around. You can be a nerd about anything. You can be a nerd about sports, you can be a nerd about whatever you want. People say, “I am not a nerd!” and I am like, “A nerd was the best thing I could ever call you. It was the highest compliment I will say to you. So, if I call you a nerd, just accept it!*

The Face of Boe: *So, when you come to VGC, like no one was judging you. You can be yourself whenever you want to be. Whatever you want to do in the club, well not whatever you want to do in the club, but whatever you want to do that you would not do in school. Like you could be as weird as you want to be, because there was nothing weird when everyone else was weird. You cannot get weirder.*

Jenny Flint: *It was more welcoming. It was like, “Hey come in! It does not matter what your background was or anything, come in and join us, we are cool peeps.”*

Capaldi: *I feel like the culture, it comes from all of them. Because school, you are not dealing with the people you are usually dealing with, like the cool people or the football players. Because I feel like that was what makes VGC more accepting. You can be yourself.*

The prevailing sentiment from the interviewed students was how the focus group concluded that excerpt; the students reported a deep appreciation for the welcoming culture of the club. Many students expressed gratitude the club attracts many types of people. They recognize that they would not be friends with certain types of people that, perhaps, don't outwardly express their interest in games but whom are actually quite interested in gaming.

The students suggest that through this club they have been able to establish connections with people they would not normally have talked to, and that has made it a special experience.

Importance of the Club Sponsor

Of the 88 students who answered the question of “How important was the teacher sponsor to the club?” no student listed me as not at all important. In a similar spread as the teachers at Coal Hill, extremely important was listed with the most votes, followed sequentially by very important and slightly important.

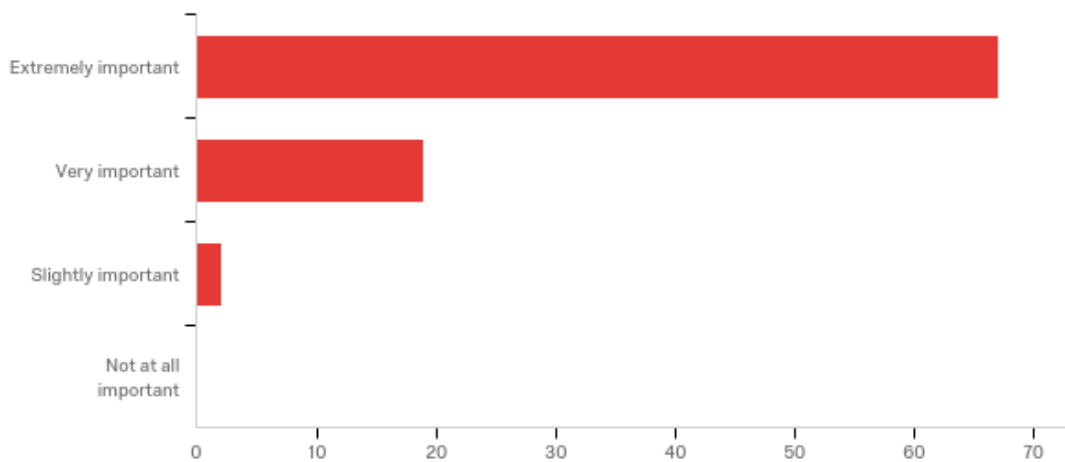


Figure 19: Deffry Vale club sponsor’s importance.

From the comment section for this question, the most common responses indicated that I had a relaxed, enthusiastic, supportive, and funny personality. Some comments were slightly different, mentioning how I do not activate the fear of teachers in the students, or how I bring optimism and positivity to their lives. Some students went as far as saying I was their friend. Finally, one student said I have nice hair, which certainly meant a great deal to me given that I am completely bald; perhaps they meant my arm hair.

From the survey, it appears relationships contribute to my importance. They feel connected to me on a personal level. This phenomena came up in my interviews as well. Many students discussed their appreciation for me coming over and talking about whatever they want to talk about, or relating to them in a meaningful way. Several of the students brought up instances where I would talk to them about their personal problems. The following are their immediate responses to being asked why they think I am important to the club.

Vincent: *No, no teacher could have kept it like this. If it was not Mr. Lenk I honestly think that ... He was a big part of this club as well, he was a gamer. From the first time I saw him in sophomore year, when I was first introduced to this club, even though he was not the club sponsor at the time he felt like one of us, like one of the gamers, one of the members, one of the core members of video game club. Even now, he still feels like that.*

Stormageddon: *Most definitely. Before Mr. Lenk came to Deffry Vale we had this other teacher, she was also into Video Games, Mrs. Whittaker, but as time went on her after school schedule got more busy. Mr. Lenk just took us under his wing and things have gotten so much better. Like, he was a gamer himself, he knows a lot about video games and what not, like I honestly think he was a big impact. Because not only was he a gamer he relates to us on a different level, you know? You expect teachers to act like this certain way, and Mr. Lenk just acts like Mr. Lenk, and we love that about him because like Mr. Lenk, the way he acts, we can relate to it. So yeah, I honestly think he has had a big influence on this club, making us feel more welcome seeing a teacher that acts kind of just like us. Makes us feel more welcome, more welcome, yeah ... Ok one example that comes to mind was how he was always willing to walk around, asking people to play, as them how to play, you know. His outgoingness, he was always putting others first. You can always talk to him about stuff. Like, I cannot really put it into words, you know? But like, how outgoing he is. I think we all see that and I think we all envy that and look up to that aspect of him.*

The TARDIS: *I think that without him to sponsor the club I do not think it would be the same because he was a really ... well, I think it was because he was a young teacher and he understands us young people a little better and he can connect with us a little better than*

some older teachers ... I have noticed a lot that when students that attend the club are having problems, he will personally pull them aside and have talks with them, and he will just listen to their problems. And afterwards I feel like those students feel a lot better about whatever it was they had to say to him. On top of that, like I said, he always gives these short little motivational speeches in between the club and that really, well, for me personally, that really motivated me and got me to be more on top of my responsibilities like I said.

Mickey: *Oh yeah, definitely, I definitely agree with that. Mr. Lenk really kind of pulls the club together from just a bunch of kids who play video games to a family that supports each other and connects through video games. Um, so during club he often walks around and, especially with the Smash 4 players, he interacts with us. He joins our crew battles, he plays Just Dance once a meeting too, which was really fun to watch. He does not act like he was on some higher pedestal because he was a teacher, he really just wants to have a community that was supportive. That has a bunch of people that have similar interests that he can interact with, and that he can help nurture and grow these people.*

(In the focus group with me)

The Face of Boe: *Video Game Club was not Video Game Club without Mr. Lenk.*

Interviewer: *Ok, why?*

The Face of Boe: *Because you are Mr. Lenk. Like, it was just like, basically you do not really see us as children or as students or whatever.*

Jenny Flint/Amy Pond: *Thank you. Yes.*

The Face of Boe: *You see us as your peers. As someone who you can associate with, and sometimes you play games with us and joke around with us and stuff. Plus, even now sometimes how you curse nonchalantly around us, like how you just did. It makes us feel more comfortable around you. We can really open up to and tell you things that we would not really talk to other teachers about. You are like a very, like a very, what was the word?*

Jenny Flint: *He was not intimidating.*

The Face of Boe: *Yeah, you are not intimidating.*

Amy Pond: *He was very tall and intimidating, but not intimidating.*

Interviewer: *At least until I put my goatee facial hair on, then I am scary!*

Amy Pond: *Hahah, yes.*

Capaldi: *You are like the cool boss that everyone wants.*

Interviewer: *Ok, so keep going about that.*

Capaldi: *Because it was like you do not expect a lot out of us, well I think you do, but you also encourage us to go. Like the speeches you give,*

you encourage us, and you also hang out with us. It was basically encouraging. And you give positive feedback too, I like that.

Amy Pond: *It was mostly because like what he was saying, you do not treat us like children per say. Like of course there should always be a level or respect between you and anyone you are speaking to, especially us high schoolers. But when it comes down to it you are not like ... well, especially you are not undermining our problems. So like, if I go talk to my mom about school it was just like, "Oh you know, it was just high school." Where you will be like, "Oh yeah, that pretty much sucks." And I am like, "Yeah! These are the problems, like the biggest problems that I am facing right now, and to have them pushed aside because 'it was only high school' just makes it so much worse." So being able to just talked to you and be like, "Yeah, you know, that was not cool." And I am like yeah.*

Interviewer: *So, are you saying there was a certain level of empathy that I am giving? It was not so much of a "I understand what you are going through" it was more like a sharing in your misery that you enjoy? I am not sure how to describe what you just said, could you try again?*

Amy Pond: *Ok, yeah, give me a second. [A second] There are certain things I would not tell my mom simply because if I tell her she was just going to push it off like blah blah, it was high school, it was going to end. But if I come and talk to you about it, I know that when I say something to you, you are actually hearing what I am saying. You are not just being like, "Oh you are a kid blah blah blah." You are being like, "Oh well, these are problems and I know it must be hard for you." At some point it was just better than simply talking to somebody and them being like "it was whatever" versus talking to somebody and being like, "Wow, I am so sorry."*

Jenny Flint: *Well, you are more accepting of us and inviting. I like that you participate with us in certain things. Like, you do not have to put this in, but my sponsor for Korean Culture Club, she does not interact with us as much as our other sponsor from last year so it was nice coming here knowing that I have a sponsor who will participate in the club with me.*

Jenny Flint: *I know that I started the club, and that I am president, but I am still a kid too. So I would like an adult who was going to help give me ideas and umm, I go to my mom for everything too. She was like, "Oh you could do this, and you could do this." I am really creative too, but I guess it was like having the sponsor who puts in work along with me.*

Amy Pond: *VGC was your child and you take care of us as such. You can tell that you care about us.*

The Face of Boe: *Ok so about the teacher sponsor thing, as children, as us being children, we naturally crave approval from a higher authority. So like, knowing that like we can do things, and you do*

them with us, and that you actually laugh with us and play with us and enjoy your time with us, we feel more accomplished because you are actually ... Vs. having an adult who was not spending time with us. I just want to say that you are the very manifestation of "You cannot get respect unless you give it." Because most adults be like, "Oh, you got to respect me, I am the adult." But the thing was it does not really work like that. Respect goes both ways.

My sense from talking with the students was that I make them feel comfortable around me. I am somehow creating an environment where they feel able to open up to me. I accept that, perhaps through a possible cult of personality, there may be peer pressure from the students to avoid saying negative things about me and instead focus on the more positive thoughts. However, I must reject this possibility based on the reproduced accounts from the students who conducted their interviews without me sitting in front of them. The students who had their interviews over Skype were under the impression that what they say was under complete anonymity. In that environment, their statements about my importance echoed the statements of the students in the focus group. Most of them referred to me as a type of peer, or that I treat them like a peer instead of a student. The way I talk to the students lies in a place of mutual respect, according to The Face of Boe, and many of the other students would agree. Jenny Flint suggested it was that I take the club seriously, and I am not just sitting at my desk grading the whole time. Amy Pond said I treat the club like my child. The personal investment seems to be felt by more than just the students in the focus group, therefore I accept this data as reliable.

Final Thoughts

I once again asked the students at Deffry Vale to share any final thoughts with me to make sure I fully understand why they think the club was so important. I got responses that were similar to many of the questions students answered before. The students feel like

it is important to have a relationship between the sponsor and the students, they feel like it is great to have a place in school for kids who like video games, they appreciate that it is a place they can be themselves, and it is a place that they can work on themselves with many of their faults open.

Saying it for the students misses the passion behind their statements, so I choose to let the students' words conclude this section,

Vincent: *Alright, well, if I had to tell anyone about this club and what they should know going in, it was that everyone has already set up something. They have their little clicks, they have their little hang out spots, and there was nothing stopping you from being a part of that spot. You just have to have some initiative, some courage, to take that first step and say, "Hello," or "What game was this?" or something like that. Yes, from time to time there will be little scuffles between the members. Mr. Lenk does not really say anything about these things, but whenever a conflict was resolved ... I know there was a recent conflict that was resolved in the time spent of a half a week that he just wanted to mention and all I remember ... as soon as he made that announcement we clapped. It just showed how welcome we are to something like this, conflict resolution you know?*

Mickey: *The most important thing about this club for me was the community. That was what really keeps me coming back was this giant supportive community that Mr. Lenk and Cyberman have created.*

Donna Noble: *Ok, here we go. This club was probably, in fact most likely, the best thing that has happened to me since high school started and I appreciate everything and everyone in there. And I appreciate the advice given to everyone on how to strive and succeed and I just really appreciate Mr. Lenk with a passion. Like, if there was anything I could do for him I probably would. Everyone who we have let into the club, everything we have done, organizing events for club, even just getting T-shirts seems to be just the best thing ever. Him getting up and giving advice, like I said on how to succeed and strive and, umm, just like the people are great. I feel it was a natural thing, but I also think it was enforced by Mr. Lenk. Just being like, Mr. Lenk saying, "Hey, you can come in here!" instead of being like, "No! You cannot, get out, go." Another thing to add on was the competitive spirit and how all that ties into like*

sportsmanship and how being nice and still having that competitive spirit was just like a very well combination.

The TARDIS: *I feel like this club has been so great because it was a very unique club. I do not think a lot of schools actually have video game clubs. It was just so great that Deffry Vale was one of the schools that does, because a lot of kids now days play video games because that was what they were born into. I was born in 2001, so a lot of kids that are my age, they were already around when video games were starting to get big. So, to be able to have a video game club where we can go and share our passions with each other, it was really empowering to the students and for me personally it has motivated me like I said. It has really gotten me on top of my responsibilities contrary to what a lot of people believe about video games.*

Summary of Deffry Vale

The students at Deffry Vale High School reported an appreciation for what the teacher sponsor has given to the club. They were definitive in their appreciation for how the club as positively affected their lives by giving them a community at school. The Deffry Vale students positively described their experiences in the video game club. The common theme reported was the students' gratitude for having a place where they feel welcome and free to share their interests without judgement, and their added network of friends and acquaintances. I was not able to identify a structural norm of the club that contributed to the students' persistence.

CHAPTER 5: INSIGHTS FROM THE DATA

When finally settling on studying this topic, before even applying to graduate school, I was inspired by a club I was running in Des Moines, Iowa. I could feel something quite positive happening in the room whenever we had our gatherings. It felt special. I received a great deal of positive feedback about the whole experience from parents, administrators, students, and complete strangers from around the world who were appreciative of the work I was doing for the club. To me, it was a surprise to be receiving such praise for something I felt was not *that* revolutionary. I mean, all I was doing was giving the kids a place to play their video games and interacting with them, how special could that be?

A video about my Des Moines club was made by Riot Games, and during their weekly competitive *League of Legends* live streams the video was shown to a few million viewers. I received quite a large recognition from that experience, but one really stood out to me. A mother from Canada sent me an email. She was the mother of a former professional League of Legends player, a player whom I was quite familiar. In an emotional message, she wrote to me how she wished her son had a place like I had created in Des Moines, so he would not feel alone, or might have engaged in school more. Her message was simply to thank me for the work that I am doing for the students. I had other parents say similar things, but that one stood out the most and I am not sure why; perhaps it was the distance she was away from me or my familiarity with her relatively successful son.

After all this praise, I was convinced that this was something unique enough to consider. As I started trying to find research on these kinds of clubs, I found out that nothing existed explicitly for them. It was at this point that I found the intense desire to be the

person to introduce literature that may help others in the creation of their own club. I wanted to find out what was unique about the club. Why were all these parents giving me their gratitude? It was my desire to be able to understand how this club was so successful, and be able to know it in enough detail to explain it to others in a way that would help them.

The purpose of this multiple case study was to identify the qualities that students and teachers participating in high school after-school video gaming clubs reported as being important to their experience. Using my personal experience as a leader of a couple video game clubs and a conceptual framework of student engagement; along with the literature on affective, behavioral, and cognitive engagement, and with the research on after school activities and their best practices, I set out to understand and explore after-school video game clubs. Through interviews with students and sponsoring faculty, the responses to the following questions I wanted to understand as much as I could about them, and how they were helping or hurting students.

My specific research questions were:

1. How do students describe their experiences in the video game clubs?
2. What qualities, activities, and experiences enhance or detract from their enjoyment of the club?
3. What are the norms of the clubs that contribute to students' persistence?
4. What affective and behavioral engagement benefits are the students and staff perceiving for those who are part of the club?

I had a multi-day visit to a club in Canada, and I used my own club as a case for this multiple case study. I interviewed 23 participating students and two teacher sponsors

in total. 16 of the 23 students interviewed were conducted one-on-one, while the remaining seven I conducted in two focus groups.

In this chapter I draw on my data from both clubs to answer these four questions. In chapter 4 I told the stories of the club sponsors and the stories of many of the students who attend the two clubs. This chapter presents my cross-case analysis, which guided by those research questions help explore the shared themes and emerging patterns from the data. I first unify the data from both cases, and then bring the cases together to answer my big question of, “What keeps bringing the kids back?” Utilizing the research questions, I describe the students’ perceptions of why they like the club, how they are connected to the school because of the club, how the club has helped them get connected to their peers, how the club has connected them to their teachers, how the club has affected their approach to school work, how the club has changed their intimidation of school, how they view their own achievement in life since joining the club, what their parents feel about their participation in the club, structures in the club that have helped their enjoyment, their “final thoughts” to describe to me what the club means to them in their own words, and the importance of the teacher sponsors of the club.

How Students Describe Their Experience

In all of my interviews, I concluded by asking the student or teacher sponsor to describe the club in their own words. I asked them to explain it in a way that they felt confident that I would leave the conversation knowing the important facets of the club. Overwhelmingly the students said the club makes them feel like they are a part of a group.

This relates back to affective engagement of students. As Finn & Zimmer et al., (2012) state, students who report high levels of belonging or identification with school also

display higher levels of motivation and effort than do students who report lower levels of belonging. In both schools, the prevailing message students wanted to make sure I understood before our conversation ended was that their club felt like a community. The students were passionate, sometimes to the point of having quivering voices and asking for time to compose themselves, about the fact that their club has given them people to relate to. As Mickey at Deffry Vale said, “The most important thing about this club for me is the community. That is what really keeps me coming back is this giant supportive community.” Wilfred at Coal Hill worded it similarly, “Clubs like this, where you have got something that draws people together, ... that can bring a community of people that are usually scattered, together, are invaluable.” It became clear through my interviews at both schools that the students were feeling the same appreciation for the club bringing them together with other gamers.

The students at Deffry Vale referred to their experience as somewhat closer knit than the students at Coal Hill, often referring to the club as their family. The students interviewed even went so far as to refer to one of the students as faux mother figure. The sentiment of treating everyone in the Deffry Vale club as family members seemed to work well with them. As Sarah Jane said in her interview,

Because to me it was like a family, like a second family I guess. I can go to people in the club or Mr. Lenk about any problems that I have, or problems at home, or school stuff, and it was also kind of like an escape.

The students at Deffry Vale frequently brought up what Sarah Jane hinted at, that they can come up and talk to each other when they need to. The Deffry Vale students talked about feeling emotionally supported in the club, and it was because of the family environment culture.

Coal Hill students reported similar experiences in the club, but not going quite as far as referring to it as a family. Even without the descriptor of a family-like atmosphere, it was clear to me the students at Coal Hill, especially the younger ones, greatly valued the social advantage participating in the club gave them. They talked about how much better high school was that they have a vector to meet people and get acquainted with their peers. Often the students would describe the club's value from a distance, saying gamers in general are reclusive and struggle with making friends. They say that this club helps gamers meet people and have face-to-face interactions that they would lack without this club. Rose Tyler's story, while more introvert centered, echoed several of her peers in interviews where she discussed how she appreciates the clubs giving her an opportunity to meet people similar to her. She appreciates the opportunity to meet people that have similar interests as her, while in an environment that her particular personality traits are not treated as a negative.

One of the most dramatic distinctions between the clubs was how the students described their relationship to stress and the club. In the Deffry Vale survey, relieving stress came up 22 times as a reason for enjoying the club, while it did not come up once in the Coal Hill survey. My conclusion for this difference was the overall organizational structure of the schools. Coal Hill was intended to be student directed and therefore the students only apply as much pressure to themselves as they see fit. In sharp contrast to that, the students at Deffry Vale are threatened with the possibility that they will be expelled from the school and forced to go back to their neighborhood school if they do not perform well. Therefore, it seems natural that the Deffry Vale students disproportionately generally reported the club being a huge relief for their weekly stress. Martha described why she liked the club this

way, “Stress from school, I let go of stress. It was the social thing for me, because I do not play games a lot, so I can let go of stress and be myself in a place instead of being judged at school.” Whereas in the Coal Hill interview, the students did not report that either the Video Game Clubs, LANs, or Board Game Club relieved stress for them. Perhaps it does relieve stress for them because of the looser nature of their curriculum, but I did not specifically ask about their stress levels. With the Deffry Vale students, they were immediately talking about it on their own from the very first question. Due to this large discrepancy, I would not say this was an emerging theme among video game clubs in general, but due to the pervasiveness in which it was described at Deffry Vale, I would not be surprised if in a larger study of more clubs this facet came up again. It appears the Deffry Vale students use the video game club as a coping mechanism to relieve stress. Skinner & Pitzer et al., (2012) say interactions with competent and supportive social partners (like teachers) can help students reengage with difficult material and eventually develop strategies like problem solving and self-reliance that they can then employ in dealing with (or preventing) subsequent stressors. Many of those themes were described as things the students appreciated about being a part of the video game club at Deffry Vale.

Continuing the differences between the club, the Coal Hill club students often reported that a significant value of the club was their ability to relate to the teachers better. The Deffry Vale students did not report that at all, only discussing their increased attachment to myself rather than the school’s staff in general like the Coal Hill students. It seems to be working quite well for Coal Hill, as Van Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth et al., (2009) would support the claim that increase attachments to teachers was associated with positive affective engagement.

In the end, the most pervasive descriptor for why they like the club was the video games. The students like to play video games with their friends. It comes as no surprise to me, most football players like to play football, most actors like to act, and most video gamers like to play video games. It was clear in the surveys for both schools that the largest category for the question of “Why was this club important to you?” was that the students simply could play video games with each other. When asked what the students primarily do during the club, over 80% of the responses in the surveys was that they play video games. This clear majority was probably an obvious conclusion for the survey, but it is important to point out that the kids do in fact enjoy playing video games with each other. This result found its way into the interviews as well, with students like Deffry Vale’s Ace saying, “Just like, playing video games with all my friends that I do not really get to see on the weekend” or Coal Hill’s Rassilon saying, “The video game club was kind of a way to do things I am probably going to do at home anyway, and it was like a fun and social way to do it with a group of other people.”

It comes down to the small things, like experiencing the same thing with someone while being next to them. Angel Bob said when talking about why it was important to be next to his peers while playing the game, “You actually get to see their reaction as they slowly devolve into chaos.” Rose Tyler phrased her similar feelings this way

Because you are not alone playing it in your room. It was like this, Minecraft, when you play Minecraft alone it was the most boring thing you could ever imagine because you are just building and doing nothing. But if you play it with friends then your friend and go do this, and you can go do this, and you can both build something together and you can have different advice and what you want to do.

The mere presence of other peers makes it much more enjoyable for the students, be it in relishing a victory, or simply enjoying a cooperative experience to a higher degree.

The students in both clubs had nearly identical responses to the question on the survey, “How do you describe your experience so far in the club?” When none of the 120 students taking the survey, and none of the students interviewed, report a negative experience in their respective clubs, it is safe to assume the students are having a good time at video game club.

Qualities, Activities, and Experiences that Affect their Enjoyment of the Club

For both schools, a commonly reported part of the club that the students enjoyed was its competitive nature. Coal Hill’s club was known for running big tournaments that go into the night for various games. In my interviews with the teachers at Coal Hill they talked about how their tournaments were a big draw for the students, noting that the students were already able to play casually with friends, “I guess they get that (casual) experience online with their friends every day if they wanted it, so it was not something we realized at first. So, that was kind of where the tournament thing happened.” The teachers at Coal Hill said they realized that many of the students were more interested in the tournaments than casual gaming. They said they got their original buzz spreading because of the tournaments. The Coal Hill students also talked about it in their interviews, with Rory describing his experience this way

I mean, there was a first tournament when I was in grade 9, 2 years ago. I remember I went to that, and it was really fun. I really liked it, lots of people. A lot of people. I really liked the competitive aspect. I really like to play counterstrike. The fact that you were able to play it after school in a little small type of tournament, that was cool. I find that pretty cool. I think it affects people positively. It was like, being able to do more at school. There was people that go to school and like, they do not really like to do what they are doing. But like a lot of people like video games, so like after school being able to play video games at school was pretty fun, especially in a tournament with a whole bunch of people that you maybe have never met that go to the same school. You can build relationships and I find that really cool.

It was clear that Rory thinks video game club and tournaments are “very cool.” Rory was not alone in his interest in competitive play within video game club. Deffry Vale’s Amy Pond talked about it in her focus group with me this way, “You get here and you can like, challenge people, and the competition was awesome.” Coal Hill’s K-9 recalled his joy in being accused of cheating due to his extreme success, “They ran out of controllers and I had to play using a mouse and keyboard and I destroyed them. They thought I was cheating ... so I switched and still won. There was the kind of competitive edge to it.” A response in Deffry Vale’s survey was “We had parties and tournaments during the past 3 years, and even a Salty/Sweet competition for our favorite video games. I won the first Naruto Salty Sweet!” Many of the students of both clubs relished in the opportunity to compete against each other. At Coal Hill’s LAN, the most active room was perhaps the room full of the Super Smash Bros. people during their singles and doubles tournament. From the tone of the responses, it appears both clubs have set up a positive environment to compete without civil discourse breaking down. I have not experienced any difficulties with the competitive environment in my club, and the Coal Hill teachers only recalled a couple instances that they had to intervene, but overall they described it as a positive experience for everyone.

The next quality of both clubs that became apparent was how each club has created an environment for students to meet each other. Wentzel, Caldwell, and Barry et al., (2004) state that the number and quality of friends was linked to several positive factors, including academic achievement, prosocial behaviors, and lower emotional distress. Furthermore, the literature suggests students who are attached to people at their school are more motivated to complete academic tasks (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). At Coal Hill, the students routinely discussed how the two teacher sponsors went out of their way to

introduce students to each other. They talked about how it was normal and expected for students to make room in their games for interested individuals. While that might not make for the most competitive or highest quality gaming experience, it helps build a welcoming nature to the whole club and from that position you can organize competitions. Mr. Tennant described his approach to including students into various games, a description that was mirrored by several other students in the club as something they really appreciate about the club,

If there was a kid on their lonesome kind of thing and grabbing them and saying, "Hey what are you playing? Let me play a round with you? Maybe he was playing that too? Maybe you should play with him?"

That effort from the teacher sponsor, where they go out of their way to make sure a student was connected to other students, was reported as appreciated by many of their students.

With Deffry Vale the examples are similar. The students like how easy it is to make new friends. Many representative examples from the survey include, "Just the fact that I have the opportunity to meet such amazing people with the same likes and interest as myself was enough to make me come back," "I like the chance to meet a new person every club. Those people share common interests, and may become friends with me," and "I was able to meet new people every time I come." When I set the expectations for the club, we talk at length about limiting how long you play on your own game, and to give other people a chance to play regularly with you. We talked about how best to rotate players when there were students watching and waiting in line to play. The executive board was expected to be role models, going around and making sure friendliness was happening. While I do not personally introduce students as often as Mr. Tennant and Mr. Harkness seem to be, I would say the club's culture was quite similar in the expectation of including newcomers.

Setting behavior expectations was similar for each club. Both my club and the club at Coal Hill have a speech at the beginning of the year for behavior expectations. The Coal Hill advisors talk about taking care of the equipment, being friendly with their peers, and watching their language. Mr. Harkness described their routine this way, and it was quite similar to my experience running the Deffry Vale club,

First day of club we did. Whenever we get new members I always just kind of talk to them casually. Not so much reading them the riot act, just kind of casually bringing it up. Sometimes in a humorous manner; we find humor kind of breaks the seriousness of it but at the same time the kids generally realize we are not joking. And then, you know, if an issue comes up we just tend to deal with it right away in a positive and supporting manner... Yeah, so at the LANs generally in the past we did a quick spiel at the beginning talking about respecting each other's property and behavior, social expectations; it was rarely an issue.

As he said, it is rarely an issue. When behavior problems do become an issue, a quick personal conversation was what was working for both schools. The Face of Boe at Deffry Vale recounted in his focus group interview with me a situation when his behavior got out of hand and I had to intervene with him. This was his response to my question of, "But if I say something when they want specifics, from what I have heard you guys saying very positive things, but someone who might not know what they mean might be considered negative, like, 'You laugh with our jokes, you play video games, you are relaxed about the rules.' That seems like it could be a situation for a bad sponsor too. So, what was the difference between someone who laughs, plays games, and is relaxed about rules in a bad situation, and when I did the same things and you are saying it was good?"

Ok, you keep it under control. You keep the club well-managed. Like, even if something does break out, you will know what was happening. Like for example, last year, me and Serene was talking, and then she play-punched me, and then I play-punched her, and then she took me serious and then really punched me, and then you wondered what was going on. You called me over, and we talked about it. That was one instance that was managed

well with me, that I can think of. Like, if you did not intervene she probably would have taken me really seriously and really tried to fight me.

The situation was degrading between two students who were starting to hit each other. I called one over and had a discussion with them about what was occurring. When the explanation matched what I saw, I asked him to control himself a bit more but I let it go. There was a level of trust I give the students with their behavior. The students respond to me in a truthful way as well. The Face of Boe was appreciative of the respect I gave him, and responded by exhibiting good behavior. The teachers at Coal Hill have similar stories about how they approach behavior situations that need to be addressed. The teachers just said they have a private conversation with a student, and go from there.

Norms of the Clubs that Contribute to Students' Persistence

Both clubs meet once every week. Coal Hill meets every Monday, with board game club and dungeon and dragons club meeting on other days in the week. Deffry Vale's club meets nearly every Friday. A few students in both clubs reported that they appreciate that the club meets every week. As Metz et al., (2008) states, the proper allocation of time for the club was important to running a successful after school activity. The once-a-week model for both of these clubs was found to be adequate for reaching each clubs' goals.

As far as norms and habits of the clubs are concerned, this was the only major structural similarity between the clubs. Other than the mere fact that both schools play video games in an extracurricular environment, and that they meet weekly, I did not find any common structural norms between both clubs. Each club was enjoyed by the students for different reasons by students in both clubs.

The Deffry Vale students reported my weekly speeches to be very important to them. Nearly all the responses in the survey to this question revolved around their

appreciation of this moment in the club where I ask the students to be quiet and I talk to them.

The Coal Hill club does not do anything like this. In fact, the teachers who run the club were explicit about how they do not go out of their way to talk about the importance of grades and good behavior, like I do in my club. One teacher was not even sure how the club would function with a grade requirement. To the teachers that run the Coal Hill club, it was much more important to focus on connecting with the students and making sure they can connect with each other. Whereas with my club it has that similar effect, but with a different effort. I do talk about grades and positive behaviors; the teachers at Coal Hill solely talk to the students about whatever the students want to talk about and nurture a relationship that way. I have no data to suggest which approach was better or which was worse; they each provide their positive aspects and negative aspects, and both clubs are wildly popular and successful in their own right.

Affective and Behavioral Engagement Benefits

As Reschly and Christenson (2012) put it, “Student engagement is the glue, or mediator, that links important contexts—home, school, peers, and community—to students and, in turn, to outcomes of interest. Engagement not only drives learning, but is considered a predictor of success.” Student engagement is viewed to be a catalyst to long-lasting learning. The purpose of this assumption is to document that the moment student engagement is present, efficient and long-lasting learning follows in the direction of the teacher’s desired learning outcomes (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012; Finn, 1993; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Jimerson, Campos, & Grief, 2003). Engagement is generally viewed as the outward manifestation of student motivation. The right kind of stimulation

has documented effects on positive learning outcomes. I chose student engagement for my conceptual framework when seeking to understand these clubs because of the nature of focus on the students' feelings toward schooling.

Affective engagement

Both clubs had similar emerging themes with affective and behavioral engagement benefits. The clearest trend in both sites was the students' feelings of inclusion. The Deffry Vale students were prolific in describing their experience in the club as a family. The older members of the club were often called mothers, or granddads, and in turn they might refer to the younger members as their kids. The Coal Hill students did not describe their experience in the club as a family, but they were clear about their appreciation for the friends and community they have because of the club. The literature suggests the more included students feel, with their peers, teachers, or community, the more affectively engaged those students are (Finn & Rock, 1997; Finn & Zimmer, 2012, Van Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth, 2009).

In the survey and interviews the statements were incredibly similar. When asked what qualities of the club have enhanced their enjoyment of the club, some of the submissions were as follows, "The feeling of being welcomed by people who share the same interests as I do," "It has been enhanced by the gamers friendliness towards newer gamers," "My ability to make friends have increased," "Being able to see friends and scream when I lose games enhances my enjoyment," "Tournaments have enhanced my enjoyment," "I have enjoyed the kinship of fellow gamers," "I have made more friends, and had a lot of fun." It was impossible to tell, just from the statement, which club the students belong to. To me that qualifies as evidence that both clubs are accomplishing a

similar goal of creating an inclusive environment where the students feel allowed to interact safely with each other, and grow their relationships.

Some of the most powerful conversations I had in the interviews were about this subject of feeling like they are a part of a community. Mickey, The TARDIS, Vincent, K-9, Rassilon, and Wilfred respectively had the following comments to share about their feelings of inclusion.

I do not think that I would really feel as attached to this school, and as many of the people in it, without VGC. I think most of my friends I have met through VGC.

Well, for one everybody that goes to video game club are extremely supportive. Just tell any one of my friends, like, I could tell them anything...I think it was because of the club's sense of community that I think everyone feels, not just myself.

The benefit of having this club and all my friends and even Mr. Lenk being there, being supportive of me, it has really lessened any nerves or fears I have had of this school.

This school feels more like a community center than a school.

Because I think I have tried more creative stuff, and maybe just simply because I feel more part of the community.

Clubs like this, where you have got something that draws people together...that can bring a community of people that are usually scattered, together, are invaluable.

The data indicate a clear affective engagement benefit of the video game clubs through their encouragement of community building. The students have many more friends, and the students feel they have a place they belong. This sense of community engages them, affectively, into schooling.

The students' feelings of being connected to their peers were one aspect of affective engagement; another emerging theme from both clubs was the students' feelings of

attachments to their teachers. At Deffry Vale the students reported a high sense of attachment to me, but did not list feeling attached to other teachers. While at Coal Hill, the students reported their increase attachment to both Mr. Tennant and Mr. Harkness but also to a few other teachers at the school. Van Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth et al., (2009) show how students become much more engaged when they feel connected to their teacher; both clubs had their participating students make it clear that the connection they have built to their teacher was an important part of their schooling experience, not just their experience in the club.

Sometimes Deffry Vale students would describe their increased attachment to me by expressing how I make them realize teachers are people with their own lives beyond the school, just like everybody else. In my focus group, this was brought up,

***Amy Pond:** Could I say that you had an effect on how I see school because you make me realize that teachers are humans. Because sometimes they are just that teacher ... Mr. Lenk who was like, "Oh yeah, you know, I got like a wife and everything and I am doing my dissertation and my wife is..." so it was really different.*

The comments revolving around increased connections with the teachers usually centered around opening up and sharing personal information. The students feel like they know about my life, and in turn they share about their lives. Their club was not completely separate from school, but it was situated differently. I allow the formality of their normal school day language to change into however they feel most comfortable communicating with each other. The language change signifies a change in behavior expectation from my classroom to my club. I become a bit more relaxed with language restrictions, or students having conversations about normally inappropriate school-time topics. The students

reported observing this shift in behavior expectations, and said it resulted in feeling like they can relate to me more. Stormageddon worded his perception of this in this way,

Because not only was he a gamer he relates to us on a different level, you know? You expect teachers to act like this certain way, and Mr. Lenk just acts like Mr. Lenk, and we love that about him because like Mr. Lenk, the way he acts, we can relate to it. So yeah, I honestly think he has had a big influence on this club, making us feel more welcome seeing a teacher that acts kind of just like us. Makes us feel more welcome, more welcome, yeah.

This more relaxed behavior helps my students connect with me, without them losing respect for my authority as their teacher and a staff member at the school.

Similarly, at Coal Hill the students report their increased attachments to their teachers through the connections they can build with them. Rassilon was eager to share how he gets noticed more by other teachers through his effort in the club, “I think they are trying to make students do things they would not have otherwise done with the teachers. Like, maybe the teacher might notice me because I am trying to help out.” Later on, he went to say something else about the club in general, and K-9 agreed with his statement during their focus group, “It [The club] makes you feel more connected to the teachers. So, your teacher does not feel like a teacher, he feels like someone you have a personal relationship, a friend, with.” Rory discussed his change as, “There were a few teachers that were initially scary but once you get to know them they are like OK.” While Strax worded it similarly to the Deffry Vale students, in terms of the teachers changing who they are in his mind.

It [The club] has brought me a lot closer to teachers. I have a very good personal relationship with Mr. Tennant and Mr. Harkness. I think it was really important that it was brought a lot of these students closer to teachers. Because sometimes you see teachers as people who are just at school, right? You do not realize the expanse of like their existence I never thought doing stuff outside of school with my teachers.

The survey results for both schools mirrored what was found in the interviews. The students feel more connected to their teachers through the club, and they often said that would make them feel better about school as well. Rose Tyler said, “Yes, it has made me feel more connected to this school, and to the teachers, too.” That simple quote captures the essence of what the club has meant to her, and what the clubs mean to many of the students that participate in both of them.

As stated in Chapter 2, research has shown that teacher-student relationships nurture prosocial behaviors, interest in school, and academic achievement (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986; Roeser & Eccles, 1998). Video game clubs provide a direct vector to the students to build an extracurricular relationship with teachers, and the previous research suggests this indeed does nurture higher interest in school.

However, I was not able to find a connection between video game club participation and student interest in school. I am not confident that either school location was a good candidate to answer this question. The Michigan school is a magnet school where the students can be sent back to their neighborhood schools if they are not doing well. The incentive to achieve is often set by the students’ fears of being kicked out of Deffry Vale. Furthermore, as I have experienced while working there for 4 years, it is a part of the culture to maintain an image of success and hard work to your peers. The students often go to great lengths to appear that they are working their hardest. So, when I ask the question in the interviews regarding their feelings of attachment to school, or if they now have greater goals in life due to their experience at the club, it is hard for me to have any confidence that their answers are authentic. Part of their answers always have the Deffry Vale cultural expectation to say positives about your desire to achieve great things.

Meanwhile at Coal Hill, their school structure was so different from other schools it has a completely different culture. From the teachers to the students I talked with, everyone agreed that the most common situation throughout any grading period was that the majority of the students are failing a class due to procrastination, and only in the last few weeks will the students rally and get caught up. The students learn at their own pace, and often that pace was frustratingly slow for the teachers. In my interviews, the students would joke about “The Coal Hill Way,” or similar nomenclature to represent their knack for not getting things done in a timely manner.

Neither of the schools is a typical high school, and hence their cultures, and school structures, make me unable to reach a conclusion about this question. It would be easy for me to conclude, based off the evidence from the interviews and some responses in the surveys, that Deffry Vale students have greatly increased their desire to achieve due to being in the club. Many of the students reported this fact. But it was in their survival instincts at the school to talk about schooling in this way.

Behavioral Engagement

Behavioral engagement is split into two main investigative pursuits. The first seeks to identify behaviors that increase desirable educational outcomes. The second seeks indicators of behavioral disengagement (Lawson & Lawson, 2013). I had several questions in both the survey and the interviews that tried to identify how participation in video game clubs have behaviorally affected the students. The results to the differing questions varied, with some questions having both schools align well with their responses, whereas other questions had wildly different results.

Looking first at a significant result between the two schools, I start by discussing the question on the survey that asked, “Has participating in this club affected how you approach school work?” The result of the two surveys are below:

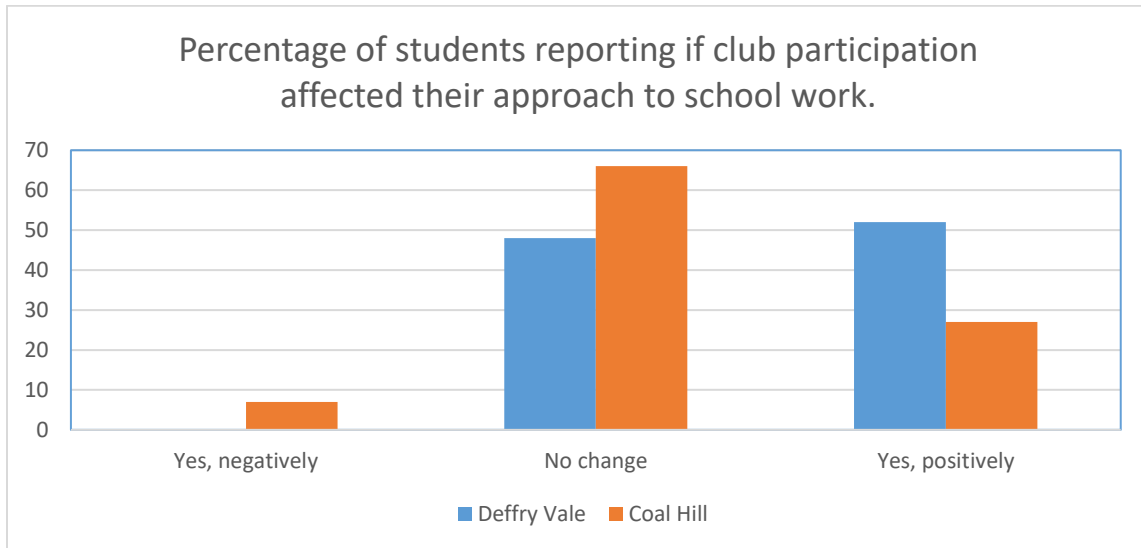


Figure 20: Comparison of the percentage of students reporting if club participation affected their approach to school work.

The biggest change was in the percentage of students who responded that participation in the club has affected them positively. At Deffry Vale, 53% of the students responded that it had affected their work ethic positively; meanwhile at Coal Hill 27% of the students responded this way. I spoke in the earlier section about Deffry Vale’s culture of feeling obligated to have the image that you work hard. This extends to the students often knowing what the adults want to hear. While I would love to say that my club was clearly better at getting the kids to work harder than the Coal Hill club, I am not sure how much of the data are skewed by the nature of the students at Deffry Vale who see a question about how hard they work and may feel obligated to say that they are working harder now. Without that context, the data did show that some of the students in each club are feeling an increased desire to work harder at school. Furthermore, that desire to work harder was supported by the research (Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008).

In the student responses on the survey, I had a follow up question that asked, “What specifically has this club done to affect your work ethic positively?” In the responses to that question there was one clear major theme of responses, their expectation that if they did not have good grades they could not go to the club. When I asked in the interviews about this, half the students said that their parents enforced this rule, but the other half said it was personally installed rules for themselves. In the survey the responses were, “As long as I do well I can continue coming to the club, so that is motivation,” “It made me realize that school has to come first and if that means to push video games aside, then we need to do that,” “To stay in this club I tell myself every day to make sure I keep up my grades so that I can keep attending each meeting,” “It has given me a reason to try harder, and do better. I know if I begin to slack or fail classes I will not be able to come back to club, which is a thought that scares me,” and “It makes me wanna do better not only because I am encouraged to stay at Deffry Vale but because it makes me wanna stay, do better and not disappoint people that have faith in me.” This desire to not be removed from Deffry Vale, or not be removed from attending the club, was a very large motivating factor for the students.

This desire was not nearly as prevalent for the students in the Coal Hill club. Students said they did not know what has positively affected their work, just that they think it has. Some said it was because the club gave them somewhere they enjoy and actively want to participate in, going back to the community aspect of the club. Some students said they actually have free time to work, which did not make sense to me because 2/3rd of the students’ day at Coal Hill was free time. Of the two students who said it has made their

work ethic worse, their reasons were that the club was all that they could think about now, and that the club has distracted them from academics to planning things for the club.

One measure of behavioral engagement centers around seeing how much time the students spend on homework (Finn & Voelkl, 1993; Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008). The more time students spend on homework the better they tend to do in school. I asked a question on the survey directly addressing this question, and both clubs had very similar results. The question was, “Have you noticed you are spending more or less time on homework now that you are in this club?”

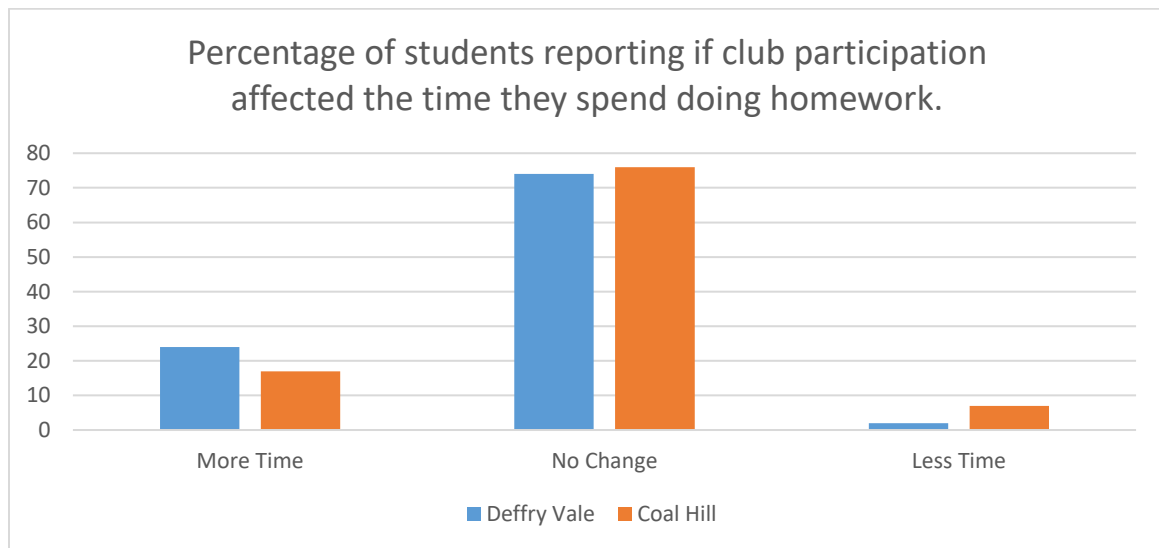


Figure 21: Comparison of the percentage of students reporting if club participation affected the time they spend doing homework.

What was clear to me was how the patterns of each club’s responses were nearly identical. The clear majority, or about 75%, of the responses stated that their homework time has not been affected since joining the club. Around 20% of the students said the club does help them spend more time on homework now that they are in the club, the remaining students reported it has caused them to spend less time on homework.

It appears that generally participating in either of these clubs does not affect the students' work habits. However, of the students it has affected, the majority of those students are seeing a positive effect through the participation in the club.

Moving to the next facet of behavioral student engagement, the concept that students who follow school rules and generally behave appropriately do better in school. I asked this question in the survey, but I did not go into too much detail in the interviews regarding it. The question in the survey was written as, "Do you feel an obligation to behave in good ways (i.e. following school rules like not skipping class, etc.) now that you are in this club?" The results from the student surveys of both school clubs are again remarkably similar.

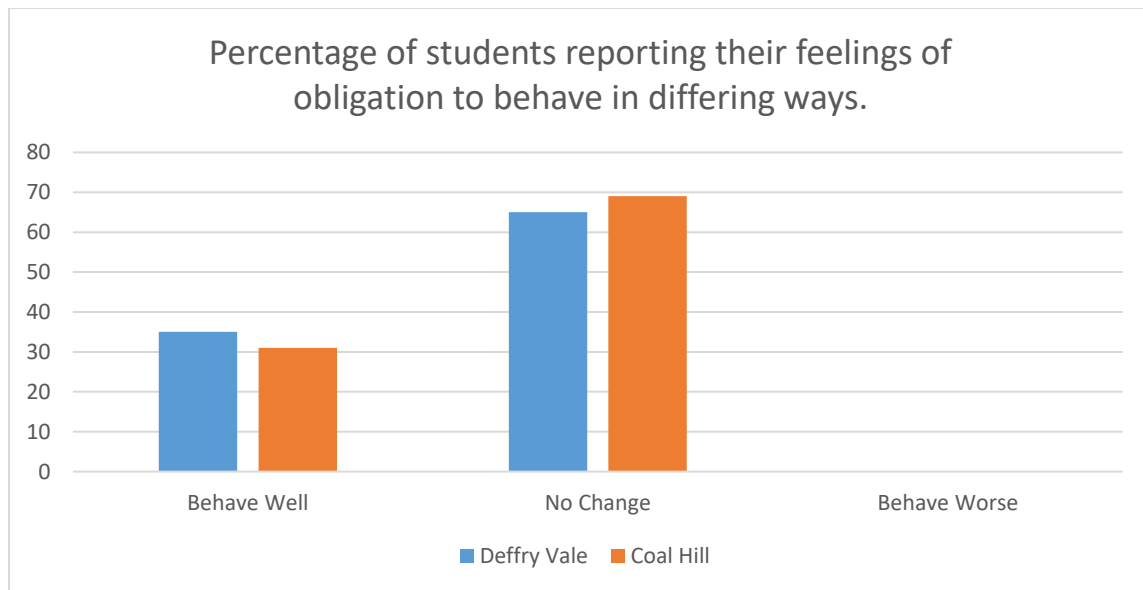


Figure 22: Comparison of the percentage of students reporting their feelings of obligation to behave in differing way.

For each club, 2/3rd of the club responded by saying they behave in the same ways as before joining the club. Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris et al. (2004) suggest extracurricular activities has a large, positive, influence on adjusting behavioral

disengagement. It appears to be the case for these two video game clubs, of the students that were affected by joining the club, every single one listed themselves behaving in better ways.

When considering the follow-up question, “To whom, or what, do you feel that obligation towards?” I found the students giving similar responses in both clubs. The students feel obligations to the teachers, to themselves, to their peers, and to the club itself. Surprisingly many of the students listed a feeling of obligation to the club. Two students put it this way, “If I act disrespectful, it could seem as if all of VGC was disrespectful. I am a direct representation of the club,” and “Out of respect I do my part in being a good student and keep a good image to the club.” This student, along with several others, has an idea that because they are associated with the club, if they act like a fool people assume the club harbors fools. This association to the club, and the desire to not let it down, might be tied to the desire not to let their friends down, but nonetheless, this theme of representing the club in a positive way was a surprise result from the survey.

With that being the surprise result, the most pervasive result was students’ feelings of obligation toward the teacher. Both clubs had that listed as the most commonly reported reason. The students said it similarly, “I feel obligated to Mr. Lenk since he gives us the chance to be happy in school once a week in a really cool way,” “The teachers and myself,” “I feel it toward Mr. Lenk because he has high hopes for the members of his club,” “I cannot disrespect what Mr. Lenk stands for,” “We feel we represent Mr. Tennant and Mr. Harkness in our behavior. If we act out of line people will judge them for our actions and that’s unacceptable.” It was clear to me that many of the students who did report a desire to change their behavior in a positive way, felt that obligation towards me, Mr. Tennant,

and Mr. Harkness. Being the leaders of the club, and setting the examples and the expectations we set, seems to have driven many students to behave in more positive ways.

Reflections on the Research Process

In this section I share what I have learned about conducting research through the completion of this dissertation. I also provide insights to future researchers trying to conduct a similar study. This dissertation has been the most difficult task I have challenged myself to complete; at times I was within moments of throwing it all in the air and calling it quits. However, there were always moments of reward and excitement placed throughout the process that I grasped to keep my motivation going. Probably the most exciting piece of this was finally being able to get out into the field and collect data. The feeling of knowing you are collecting good pieces of evidence, taking it all in, and getting excited about the analysis, was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

Throughout the whole process, even in my darker times, I felt the drive to complete this research for children throughout the world that do not have extracurricular video game clubs to participate in. Perhaps my approach to motivating myself was too idealistic for many, but the idea that my research might be helping kids who need this kind of place helped me push through my unmotivated times. My first recommendation to anyone seeking to conduct research on this scale is to ask them to make sure they are passionate about the topic enough to see it through. There will be days, particularly before you are collecting data, that you cannot see the light; it is in those moments that you need to have the goal of what you want your research to become to light your path. At the start of this process I was ignorant of the task ahead of me, I knew I wanted to help and I had no idea where that desire was going to take me. As the challenges emerged, I found assistance in

the recommendations of others: keeping a focus on the research question, finding the appropriate literature, finding solace in the claims of others and not projecting those claims onto your project, and using the recommendations of the methodology leaders regarding how to approach your research. So much of this process is not reinventing the wheel, but learning how to spin it.

I went on a wild ride exploring the various methodologies I thought fit my project. Initially I was thinking of doing quantitative research studying how video game clubs have affected student grades. Later I swung to being convinced ethnography was perfectly suited for my research goals. I was so sure of the fit ethnography had in my research I remember slapping my hand on a table begging for a lesson from my advisor for why she didn't think it was the best fit. Alas, as usual my advisor and a committee member were right and the learning process continued. In those meetings, I was eventually guided to the multiple case study, and upon educating myself about the method further, I realized it allowed me room to do what I wanted in this study. That was the whole point of my recommendation with the research process, using my frustration to guide me to pursue more knowledge was pivotal. Finishing my dissertation was a long, and at times frustrating, process; that frustration must be used as a signal that more can be learned to make the process easier.

I do not regret the cul-de-sacs I entered throughout my journey. It felt like I couldn't find a through-street. Armed with the mindset that this dead end still provided me knowledge I could move forward, and my frustrations became placated. That being said, I do have aspects of this process I would do differently. First, I wish I had the time to spend adding another case, or possibly two cases, to this multiple case study. I am very satisfied with my selection of the two sites, but they were only two of many around North America.

If I was not working full time as a teacher, I would have no excuse but to include a couple more sites to analyze. I could hit a much larger range of demographics, and possibly leadership styles between the differing clubs and that would have made my conclusions more robust.

Second, I have some regrets with my survey. Looking back on the questions I included, I may have missed a chance at being even more specific with my survey questions with the goal of getting answers to more closely tie to the research questions. Specifically, my third research question regarding specific norms the club has that contributes to the students' persistence. The questions on the survey do address my research questions, but I think there was room to add questions that pushed for more thorough student responses.

Third, I regret not having time to include parental interviews. The only feedback I have received from parents was when they go out of their way to contact me in a positive light. So, like a restaurant manager that only gets negative feedback due to people only talking to them when they are upset, I only received the positive feedback from parents who are satisfied. This research would be more robust if interviews with parents were conducted. It was important for the parents of students who are not allowed to go to the club meetings to be heard. I am quite curious to hear their critiques, or fears, for why they are not letting their child attend the meetings.

Further Research

Through the research process I have started to explore the potential impact video game clubs can have on our gaming children, and I enthusiastically endorse others interested in pursuing their own questions in this arena. I believe this dissertation has established a connection between video game clubs and student engagement, and by doing

so it has helped clear a gap in the literature between our established knowledge about how extracurricular clubs have historically affected students, and how that relates to current video gaming clubs. I believe it is an effective means at engaging students through their interests. In answering my own original research questions, new questions have been raised that I find have merit for further investigation.

1. Does participation in video gaming clubs affect academic achievement?
2. How are video gaming clubs affecting children in sites I did not explore, like rural schools, American suburban schools, or international urban school?
3. Are there gaming clubs that are detrimental to student engagement, and what qualities do those have that should be avoided?
4. How can technology educators utilize their expertise in this field?

Recommendations

In concluding this research, I have found that students feel a large sense of community in the two well-attended clubs I studied. Furthermore, if the students were affected to behave differently, they felt an obligation to behave in more productive ways and they additionally saw a shift in their motivation to achieve more academically. From the findings of my study I present my recommendations to educators interested in starting up their own video game club.

Recommendation for Persons Interested in Creating their own Club

1. Own the club; this is your club. You must put forth your fullest effort into it, or else it will sputter. Do not take running an after-school video game club lightly. This is not the kind of thing that you can just set up for the kids and let them do their thing while you grade at your desk after school. Get in there, play games with the kids,

- talk to them about the games, let them teach you about them, go home and research the games that you do not know about so you can come in next week and chat about them on a more advanced level. These kinds of clubs take work to be successful. Pour your heart into it.
2. Your largest priority needs to be the students. Spend the majority of your efforts getting to know the students and build a relationship with them. You can have a perfect set up of brand new consoles and every game ever created all connected to 4k projectors in a theater, but your club still will not be successful if you do not put your effort into the kids who come. Get to know them, give them a space to let their façade of the normal school day melt away, relax the rules a bit from the normal school day, encourage them to take risks, mentor them when needed, introduce the kid who sits by themselves each time to the other kids. Running a video game club is not a passive endeavor, you need to engage with them.
 3. Constantly look to improve yourself. Never be satisfied with your club, even if it is going quite well. Always look for places to improve upon. This will not only make you a better leader, but it will also have the side effect of keeping your club feeling fresh. Your club will feel your changes and change as you do. It will keep things exciting. This kind of personal work can range from how you, as an extrovert, can improve how you connect with introverted students in the club or vice versa; or it can be related to club business, like wanting to expand your club to include the school's sports game fans. Feel free to rejoice in how well your club is going, but never feel satisfied with keeping everything the same.

4. Do not feel afraid to give the students tasks within the club. Practice letting go of the controls. Let the kids run the tournaments, or plan what will happen at the next club meeting. The best thing is that the kids get invested into the club, and there's no better way than to let them control the parts that mean the most to them. It is perfectly reasonable to guide them in a direction you think is healthy, while they decide what to do. Also, the more the kids are invested in it, the more they'll keep coming back, and the more they will tell their other friends to come.
5. Spend your time mentoring the students. You are a role model for them. In the research I conducted, one theme held true for both sites; the students look to the teacher sponsor as a guide for behavior. If you want your students to not bully each other, model kindness and compassion. If you want your students to work hard at school, talk about personal stories of how you have managed your time well and prioritized tasks that contrast with your personal interests because you saw their value in the long run. As the leader of a club, you get to set the tone. If you are not living by your own expectations, neither will the students.

Know What Kind of Club You Want

This section details the types of clubs that you have available to choose from. It might be important to decide what kind of club you think would be most successful at your school and start in that direction. That being said, I recommend being flexible; if the students who come to your club are thinking a different approach would work better for them, do not feel so restricted to your choice that you cannot adjust to their needs.

1. A club that meets once a week and features only one game. This was probably the easiest type of video game club to implement. You meet once a week, and you only

- need to prepare for that one game. Typically, these types of clubs will be smaller, but often they will produce incredibly tight nit social groups. It does not really matter which game you choose, so long as there are enough regularly attending students in the school who will populate the club. As the person running this type of club, you will need to simply acquire a space to use, monitors or PCs (if it was a PC game) to use, and the game system. Monitors can be borrowed from computer labs. The game, and game systems, are typically provided by the students. On the day you meet, the students can drop them off to you in the morning for safe keeping throughout the day. Then when it becomes time to play you bring the systems out, bring in the monitors, and start playing right away. Bring in some speakers to have music, and feel free to let the kids choose whatever music to play, unless you don't like their choices. Types of games I have seen in clubs like this are *Super Smash Brothers*, *League of Legends*, *NBA 2K*, *Madden*, and *Call of Duty*.
2. A club that meets once a week but features many kinds of games. In this situation, the students bring in all kinds of games and gaming systems in the morning, and the teacher would store them throughout the day for the meeting after school. It helps to provide the monitors and the kids come in and set everything up themselves. Science rooms are preferable but not necessary for video game clubs due to their usually high numbers of outlets. One advantage of this style club was that it has the potential to grow to a much larger club than doing just one game. All kinds of students come and share their favorite games with each other. If your club gets so big you might have to use two rooms at once. I recommend having some speakers ready to go with music, to give it a party feel.

3. A PC only club. These kinds of clubs are typically run out of the computer lab. They install the games directly to the PCs in the computer lab. This way the students come in and play whichever games they like. Most often I have seen *League of Legends* clubs run this way, since it is only one game that needs to be installed, and the IT department only has to open up the network for that specific game. If you are not focusing on one game, the best place to start is through a Steam account. Once a game is purchased on Steam, you can download it to as many computers as you would like, so long as you are logged in to Steam on that computer.
4. The biannual LAN party. This approach can scale quite large, so long as you have the space for it. I have run a club that did this, where I advertised for a month or so before the event occurred and allowed kids from all schools in the surrounding area to come. The students bring their PCs, or their consoles (really, whatever they want to play), to the school on a Friday after school and where you play into the night, or Saturday morning where you play into the night. This set up typically requires the best relationship with your IT department, as many will be hesitant to let students from around the area just come and connect to their network on their own computers and play games. I have seen it done in several districts now, and I have yet to see any problems arise from an IT perspective. You will just need to gauge your relationship with them, because you will need a lot of their help to get this going. However, this can be a big selling point a district may like to advertise about itself.

For Researchers

Finally, for researchers exploring their interest in conducting a multiple case study, I have a few recommendations for you. First, it is critical you include multiple data gathering techniques and sources. A survey alone, only interviews, or solely site observation, will not give you the robust understanding you seek through your case study; so be prepared to collect data in as many ways as you can. Furthermore, be diligent with your method for coding. Finding themes in interviews can sometimes be surprising, and it is important to be as true to your unbiased process as you can. You will be more confident in your conclusions if you trust the process, and it will make your writing easier. For me, themes emerged that I was not expecting to be so important, themes I did not notice until I found it popping up in my coding. This is the most important part of seeking knowledge, keeping an open mind to truths you haven't thought of, and in that regard rigidity will not do.

Conclusion

In this study, I have concluded that there are student engagement benefits associated with participation in a video game club. I am convinced that there is a national place for after-school video gaming clubs in K-12. Humans like to game, and non-video games have historically brought us all together. We are finally seeing this manifest itself through video games, and just like the games that came before them, they will continue to bring people together in friendly competition or cooperation.

As this trend becomes more culturally pervasive, there may be added pressure from the schools to adapt to the desires of their students. My aim with this dissertation was to provide some of the research foundation needed to support interested administrators in

video game creation. In that endeavor, I have succeeded. It was my hope that as time progresses I will continue to see schools adapt after-school programs centered around video gaming. From the two cases I studied, the conclusions were overwhelming regarding the appreciation students gave me for their club. Having a friend, or set of friends, can be life changing at that age; and with an interest like gaming that still garners impressions of not being “cool,” students who like those things may feel like they do not have people or a place to share their interests with. That isolation can be devastating, and through the told stories of the students in these clubs I am confident claiming that video game clubs have helped these kids for the rest of their lives. It is my hope that others will share in this experience.

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ABSTRACT**WHAT KEEPS BRINGING THE KIDS BACK? AN EXPLORATION OF HIGH SCHOOL VIDEO GAME CLUBS**

by

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With the current trend of K-12 student interest in video games increasing, schools have a responsibility to take measures to meet their students' passions that fall outside of state curricula. Extracurricular activities have historically filled this need; therefore, an after-school approach with video games is an appropriate way to address this student interest. The purpose of this multiple case study was to identify the qualities that students and teachers participating in high school after-school video gaming clubs report as being important to their experience. Using a theoretical framework of student engagement, this study explored the experience of the participating students and faculty. Through one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and survey results, the findings from this study suggest affective and behavioral engagement benefits from attending a video game club in which the teacher sponsor focuses on building strong relationships with the participating students. The affective engagement benefits include students reporting much deeper connections to their peers, teachers, and to their school. Specifically, students reported their deep appreciation for having a vector through school in which they could make high quality friends, and how they are able to have a relationship with their teacher that is more familiar

and has the effect of making teachers feel less intimidating. Behavioral engagement benefits included student desires to behave in more prosocial ways, and students approaching school work in positive ways like spending more time on work and seeking academic help from their peers more frequently. The significance of this study resides in its potential to pair schools interested in connecting to their students through their new gaming interests, with the empirical data that reflects the positive and unknown effects of video game clubs. Recommendations include structural advice for practitioners of video game clubs such as how to design effective video game clubs based on the desires of the students. Further research propositions consist of the exploration of a connection between video game club participation and academic achievement, and if sites with differing demographics and leadership choices also express similar student engagement benefits.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I am a 33-year-old first-generation American of Argentine immigrant parents. Born on the East Coast, by six years old I had moved to Fort Collins, Colorado where I spent the rest of my childhood and young adult life. With English being my second language, I spent most of my childhood feeling behind many of my peers in writing and reading. It took me eight and a half years to finish my undergraduate degree, as I took a semester off to travel Europe, I changed my major twice, and I spent several years going to community college part time while I worked. Eventually I graduated with a degree in Astronomy from the University of Colorado. Soon after that, my girlfriend at the time was accepted to medical school in Des Moines, Iowa. I decided I would regret my decision to let such a fantastic woman out of my life, and I dropped everything I had built in Colorado and chased her to Iowa. Four years later she became my wife, and I couldn't have asked for a better partner. I do not regret leaving my home town one bit, for I have grown more as a person due to moving to Iowa and Michigan than I could've imagined all those years ago. While in Iowa I completed my Master's Degree from Colorado State University in Natural Science Education. Upon moving to Detroit, I applied to Wayne State University to pursue my research interest in after-school video gaming clubs.