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The Seriously Educational Value of Virtual Reality Serious Games

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ABSTRACT.

Game creators had early on recognized the power of gaming factual content to create engaging educational experiences. The history of serious games goes way back before the term was coined by Clark Abt in 1970, and only became popular in the early twenty first century (Wilkinson, 2016) and was adopted to indicate a game based on factual content with the aim to educate, and entertain. Documentary filmmakers also started recognizing the power of serious games to create non-fictional interactive narratives that entertain, educate, and have an embedded call to action resulting in games like Darfur is Dying, Gone Gitmo, and Syria project and many more being made. Two decades later and with the increased accessibility and popularity of Virtual Reality (VR) technologies, the idea of making more immersive serious games that can engage the younger generations in educational material creates new opportunities and new challenges. This paper examines the benefit of applying virtual reality technologies to the serious games genre to the quality of education in a digital future. The paper argues that by using virtual reality to immerse users in factual narratives, we are creating a virtual contact zone (Pratt, 1991) capable to create a bond between the audience and the actors. This bond in the virtual space, combined with the presence created by the immersive power of VR, can increase the educational value of serious games bringing a new wave of immersive educational games implemented using virtual reality technologies.

Keywords: educational tools; immersive media; serious games; virtual reality.