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Gaming as Youth Work: Exploring the Role of Gaming as a Creative Tool for Fostering Social and Emotional Learning among Socially Isolated Young People

The aim of this interdisciplinary, design study is two-fold. Firstly, it will explore if and how gaming can be used to build relationships between youth workers and young people who are socially isolated due to communication, learning or mental health difficulties. Secondly, it will evaluate the degree to which gaming can contribute to these young people's social and emotional learning (SEL). Drawing on Human Centred Design principles, and working collaboratively with youth workers and a targeted cohort of 20 young people from the Carlow/Kilkenny region, the research will determine the specific SEL needs of the participants, identify a range of digital and non-digital games that can potentially address these needs, design relevant modifications to the games, and then customise them accordingly. Finally, it will evaluate the games' capacity to support the SEL needs of young people through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods including focus groups, observation and youth-centred, self-administered metrics. The research will make a significant contribution to knowledge. Although research on game-based learning suggests that gaming can help foster the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for SEL, there is a paucity of empirical studies on the link between the two. Further, while 'digital youth work' is gathering increasing policy, practice and scholarly interest, to-date, there has been no academic research on the role of gaming in youth work in Ireland and digital gaming remains an under-utilised modality in Irish youth work. The research will result in a much-needed resource for the youth work sector and significantly enhance youth workers' knowledge on the role of gaming as a tool for practice. Finally, the research is aligned with and responds to key social policy priorities, such as *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (2014) which seek innovative ways to promote the wellbeing of young people.

