Video games are pervasive in the lives of almost every child. More than 80 percent of Canadians between the ages of 6 to 17 play these games regularly (Entertainment Software Association of Canada, 2011). As video gaming is often regarded somewhat negative by the general population, there is growing concern about the effects of playing video games on children’s development. However, contrary to stereotype, game-playing was shown to promote prosocial behavior, enhance problem-solving and visual attention skills.

Playing video games can increase prosocial behaviour. The result of a study conducted by Greitemeyer and Osswald (2010) demonstrated that participants who played Lemmings, a prosocial game, were more likely to help when the researcher knocked out a box of pencils and more willing to volunteer in future experiments than those who played a neutral video game Tetris. Furthermore, playing violent video games was related to increased prosocial behavior. Subjects who played violent video games that encouraged cooperative behaviours such as helping or guiding other players were more likely to exhibit helping gaming behaviours than those who played nonviolent video games (Ferguson & Garza, 2011).

Video games may facilitate learning by promoting problem-solving skills. For example, one study found that children who spent more time playing video games performed better on mathematics reasoning tests (Suziedelyte, 2015). Moreover, the positive relationship between game-playing and children’s ability to solve mathematics questions decreased as the number of hours gaming decreased (Suziedelyte, 2015). The results of a long-term study also showed that compared to participants who lack video game experience, children who played strategic video games across many years reported greater increases in their problem-solving skills (Adachi & Willoughby, 2013).

Playing video games has been associated with improved visual attention skills. Researchers in one study measured the ability of children to indicate the direction of a target quickly and efficiently, the number of objects they could pay attention at once, and the amount of time required for them to bring back their attention after locating the target, and found that kids who played video games performed better on all three areas than those who had minimal gaming experience (Dye, Green, & Bavelier, 2009). Similar results were found in another research experiment. After playing “Cut the Rope” for 20 hours, participants demonstrated better concentration and could alternate between different tasks faster (Oei & Patterson, 2014). These results supported the idea that video games could be used to enhance visual attention skills in people with visual deficits in the future.

The positive effects of video games show that video gaming can be beneficial to a child’s development.
References


