

VVG's

VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES

ARE YOUR STUDENTS TUNED IN TO A VVG WORLD?

Is there any connection between your students' behaviors and VVG's?

School administrators, teachers and parents are truly in the vanguard when it comes to the education of our youth. While establishing curriculum-appropriate objectives, teachers try to protect their students from those outside influences that might have a major negative impact on their well-being. Can vigilance be enough when it comes to the challenges of the video game industry expanding all around us? More than ever before, video games enthusiasts are on a superhighway of exposure to violent video games. All concerned citizens need to be proactive in turning our youth away from this superhighway, while leading them to become selective in their pursuit of entertainment. To paraphrase Isaiah, let us transform "these swords into plough shares and these spears into pruning hooks," as we journey life's path replacing VIOLENCE with compassion, love, justice and peace.

As educators and parents in our Catholic schools, be assured that you are not alone, and that a very supportive organization stands by your side. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility has been communicating with major retailers of video games, regarding their video games sales and marketing practices in order to bring to the fore the moral imperatives that will enable the protection of youth.

The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) is a thirty-three year-old international coalition of 275 faith-based institutional investors including denominations, religious communities, pension funds, foundations, healthcare corporations, and dioceses with combined portfolios worth an estimated \$100 billion. As responsible stewards, they merge social values with investment decisions, believing they must achieve more than an acceptable financial return. ICCR members utilize religious investments and other resources to change unjust or harmful corporate policies, and work for peace, economic justice and stewardship of the earth. ICCR members examine their company portfolios for social and environmental performance. They sponsor shareholder resolutions, meet with management, screen their investments, publish special reports and sponsor actions such as writing campaigns and consumer alerts. (1) The combined faith-based and financial assets enable members to have a strong voice for corporate social responsibility in a very complex world. ICCR has been at the forefront of many issues of serious concern for our global community and continues to develop strategies that will address numerous challenges such as the growing culture of violence in our country and our world.

During this past year, we have become more deeply aware of the influence and power that the video industry and the culture of violence are having on our society, particularly on our youth. Through negative images and all forms of violent interactive media, our youth are exposed to behaviors that are morally, emotionally and socially inappropriate and unhealthy. A recent report published in Media Education Foundation (2) revealed that by the time the average child is eighteen years old, he/she will have witnessed 200,000 acts of violence and 16,000 murders

through the media. In her speech to the National Press Club Conference, Cathy Rowan, Corporate Responsibility Consultant for Trinity Health, stated that: “Years of research have shown that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behavior, particularly in children. Research on violent interactive media, such as video and computer games, indicates that this media has a strong and lasting effect on behavior outcomes.” (3)

Research by Grace Shin (4) indicated that “almost a third of children in their early teens played video games daily and that 7% played for at least 30 hours a week.” This study also pointed out that some of the games being played, for example, Mortal Combat, Grand Theft Auto, Marvel Vs. Capcom, and Doom are very interactive and require the player to be part of the violent slaying of the opponent. Another study by Dr. Jeanne Funk, (5) indicated that “49% of 7th and 8th graders preferred to play video games involving violence.” Most of the top-selling video games (89%) contained violent content, almost half of which was of a serious nature, with 40 out of the 47 top-rated Nintendo video games having violence as a theme. Studies done by Anderson and Dill (6) indicated that violence toward women is prevalent. In many games, women are usually depicted as persons who are acted upon rather than as initiators of action; in extreme cases, they are cast as victims. Thirteen of the 47 games were based on a scenario in which a woman is kidnapped or has to be rescued. This leads us to further question the social content of these games and how children’s gender roles are influenced.

A study done by Bernard Cesarone (7) indicated that there is also a growing body of evidence that many video games “stress autonomous action rather than cooperation.” According to Cesarone, “an anonymous character performs an aggressive act against an anonymous enemy and fights to win or to kill.” The superhighway of video games appears to have little sense of community values that Catholic educators espouse, and few team players, with most games not allowing more than one player.

Research done by David Walsh, (8) pointed out that “exposure to violent games increases physiological responses, aggressive thoughts, aggressive emotions, aggressive actions and exposure to violent games decreases positive actions.” Reading Jane M.Healy’s (9) report, we note that “frequent exposure to ‘mindless’ television or video games may idle and impoverish the development of the pre-frontal cortex, or that portion of the brain that is responsible for planning, organizing and sequencing behavior for self-control, moral judgment and attention.” Dr. Leonard Eron, (10) indicated that there are longitudinal studies which found “that 8-year-old boys, who viewed the most violent programs growing up, were the most likely to engage in aggressive and delinquent behavior by age 18 and serious criminal behavior by age 30.”

The above sampling of research indicates clearly that violent interactive media can have serious effects on youth and ultimately on classroom behavior. That is why ICCR is asking you to join us in our mission to promote a healthier, happier world where peace and non-violence become a daily reality. We have written to the nation’s largest retail companies to seek dialogue and promote accountability in this crucial area. As members of ICCR, we have asked many companies to share their policies prohibiting the purchase of any violent entertainment products by minors. In our communication with retailers, we have noted that voluntary industry guidelines are not being adequately monitored or enforced. We are working with the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) to seek further significant changes in video game labeling and rating information. It may be helpful for teachers to know that the membership of

the ESRB Advisory Board is mainly from the education profession.

We believe that there are several ways that members of the educational community can assist us in our work to enlighten, educate, and empower our youth as they become more exposed to violence in real life and technology. We, at ICCR congratulate and commend you for the wonderful ministry that “instructs others unto justice,” and we will continue to journey with you to surf those relevant domains that will bring a positive outcome to the whole electronic game industry and ultimately to our youth.

As partners in this endeavor we suggest some of the following ideas for use with youth at various stages of development:

- * Begin by actively listening and modeling good communication skills. (11) As Saint Francis said: “Preach the Gospel and if necessary, use words.”
- * When a conflict arises, remain neutral and find a neutral zone that rejects both verbal and physical violence.
- * Be alert to any use of violent language among teachers and students.
- * Become familiar with possible references that your students are using that may have some connection to violent video games and make it a teachable moment.
- * In religion classes and social science classes elicit student responses to the possibilities of living in a non-violent world. Move to role playing situations that are resolved through all forms of reconciliation and peace making.
- * Expand your use of educational video games that involve group interaction, cross ethnic, race, and gender stereotypes and lead to creative interaction.
- * Use educational experiences that promote non-violence at home, at sports venues, and in the school environment.
- * Alert parents regarding this very important topic through PTA meetings and educational gatherings.
- * Read Colman McCarthy’s book: I’d Rather Teach Peace. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 2002
- * Since 85% of all these video games are sold at many well-known retail stores, check on their policies with regard to guidelines. Go to: www.iccr.org. for a letter and a listing of retailers and video developers. Use English class to develop letter-writing skills and write to one or more of the retail stores.

References

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