Online Community Scan for Scholastic Esports and Game-Based Learning

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Introduction

The Online Community Scan for Scholastic Esports and Game-Based Learning dives into the vibrant world of online communities within this exciting educational technology area. The goal is to understand what's been done to build these communities and what makes them tick. Drawing on insights from Social Media Today, we examine the distinction between social networks and online communities, focusing on how these spaces facilitate genuine engagement and collaboration (Social Media Today, n.d.). Examining the successes and challenges these communities encounter, the goal is to gather practical insights to help educators and developers create supportive and dynamic environments that enhance student learning through esports and game-based learning.

Web Sources of Online Communities:

1. **Digital Promise Playful Learning Discord Channel:**
   - **Author(s):** Kelly McNeil and Nick Schiner
   - **Publisher/Organization:** Digital Promise
   - **URL:** https://discord.com/invite/8vVAhB7M
   - **Number of Members:** 103 Members

Goals: The Digital Promise Playful Learning Discord Channel fosters a dynamic community where members can learn and socialize in a positive, inclusive, and engaging environment. The goals are to maintain a space characterized by respect and professionalism, where all interactions are courteous and constructive. They prioritize inclusivity, welcoming diverse perspectives to create an open-minded atmosphere. Confidentiality is key; they emphasize the importance of privacy in discussions. The focus on knowledge sharing, particularly in the context of educational games, encourages meaningful and relevant exchanges. The aim is to uphold a supportive and respectful community by adhering to ethical standards and platform rules.

Highlights: The Digital Promise Playful Learning Discord Channel boasts several highlights that make it a thriving hub for educators and enthusiasts. The community is vibrant with its dedicated General Chats, where members engage in lively discussions and build connections through respectful and professional interactions. The Media Sharing channel provides a platform for members to exchange resources and insights, enriching our collective understanding of games in education. The Games in Education channel is at the heart of the focus, offering a space where members can delve into the transformative role of games in learning environments, sharing expertise and innovative strategies. The AI Education channel is a burgeoning area of interest, facilitating discussions on the integration and impact of artificial intelligence in educational contexts. Additionally, the Exchange and Feedback channel enables members to share their ideas and suggestions, fostering a collaborative spirit and promoting continuous improvement within the community. These channels underscore the commitment to inclusivity, knowledge sharing, and ethical engagement, making the

Digital Promise Playful Learning Discord Channel a cornerstone for those passionate about educational innovation.

2. **Games for Change Learn:**
   ○ **Author(s):** Mary Elizabeth Pearson
   ○ **Publisher/Organization:** Games for Change
   ○ **URL:**https://app.participate.com/communities/games-for-change/b88dafb3-80f4-454c-895b-f8ebe57d0d51/announcements/92c62ae2-dbc8-4bb7-b3d6-da196fbbc855
   ○ **Number of Members:** 941 Members

Goals: The Games for Change community utilizes the Participate platform to establish a dynamic Community of Practice, bringing together peers worldwide to collaborate, share resources, and explore specific interests and themes. The primary goal of this community is to promote meaningful engagement among educators and learners, mainly through its Participate channel, which provides the necessary tools and resources to support involvement in the Games for Change Student Challenge competition. The community is enriched with features such as a feed, courses, discussions, and resource sharing, all designed to foster a comprehensive learning environment. Members are encouraged to connect and gain insights from the community admin, ensuring a supportive and enriching experience for all participants.

Highlights: The Games for Change community stands out with several key highlights that make it an indispensable resource for educators and learners passionate about educational innovation through gaming. Hosted on the Participate platform, the community fosters collaboration among members by providing a wealth of resources and support to enhance participation in the Games for Change Student Challenge competition. Its robust structure includes features such as engaging feeds, comprehensive courses, interactive discussions, and extensive resource sharing, all designed to facilitate a rich learning experience. Members benefit from the diverse insights and expertise shared within the community, as well as the opportunity to connect globally and exchange ideas and strategies. This dynamic interaction promotes a culture of continuous learning and innovation, making the Games for Change community a vital hub for those eager to explore the transformative potential of games in education.

3. **Learn Unreal Engine:**
   ○ **Author(s):** EPIC Dev Community X Fortnite
   ○ **Publisher/Organization:** Unreal Engine, Fortnite & Creative
   ○ **URL:** https://dev.epicgames.com/community/unreal-engine/learning
   ○ **Number of Members:** 21,711 Members

Goals: The Learn Unreal Engine community is dedicated to empowering developers, educators, and enthusiasts with the skills and knowledge needed to master Unreal Engine.

The primary goal is to facilitate learning and creativity by providing comprehensive resources, tutorials, and support for creating immersive experiences using Unreal Engine in Fortnite and Creative modes. This community aims to foster a collaborative environment where members can share innovative ideas, techniques, and solutions, thereby enhancing their expertise and deepening their understanding of game development and design.

Highlights: The Learn Unreal Engine: Fortnite & Creative community thrives due to several key factors. Firstly, it offers a wealth of comprehensive resources and tutorials that cater to both beginners and advanced users, making it accessible and valuable to a wide range of members. The community is driven by collaboration, where members actively share innovative ideas, techniques, and solutions, creating a dynamic and supportive environment. This sharing and mutual support culture encourages continuous learning and skill development, making it a vibrant hub for anyone interested in game development.

On the other hand, the community faces its unique challenges. One significant issue is keeping up with the rapid advancements in Unreal Engine technology, making it difficult for members to stay current. Additionally, the diverse skill levels of members pose a challenge in ensuring that resources and discussions are relevant and beneficial to all. Balancing the needs of beginners with those of more advanced users requires careful moderation and curation of resources to ensure a seamless experience. Despite these challenges, the community's commitment to fostering creativity and learning enables it to adapt and evolve, thereby maintaining its status as a thriving and essential resource for Unreal Engine enthusiasts.

4. **Level Up: A Game in Education Community | Powered by Digital Promise:**
   - **Author(s):** Kelly McNeil, Amanda Wortman, and Nick Schiner
   - **Publisher/Organization:** LinkedIn: Level Up: A Games in Education Community | Powered by Digital Promise
   - **URL:** https://www.linkedin.com/groups/13016006/
   - **Number of Members:** 314 Members

Goals: Level Up is a dynamic online community where educators and game enthusiasts converge to explore the compelling intersection of games and education. The community's primary goal is to facilitate in-depth discussions on topics such as integrating games into the classroom, scholastic esports, and game design. Designed to accommodate newcomers and experienced practitioners in educational gaming, Level Up provides a platform for networking, sharing insights, learning, and professional growth. The community is publicly accessible, allowing anyone, whether on or off LinkedIn, to view posts. However, group members have the exclusive ability to add comments and create posts, thereby fostering a collaborative and engaging environment.

Highlights: The Level Up: A Games in Education Community thrives by serving as a vibrant hub for educators and game enthusiasts, uniting a diverse group of individuals with a shared interest in the educational potential of games. This diversity fosters a rich exchange of ideas and perspectives, enhancing the learning experience. The community's focus on a wide range of topics—including the integration of games into the classroom, scholastic esports, and

game design—ensures that there is something of interest for everyone, which keeps members engaged and encourages continuous participation. Powered by Digital Promise, the community benefits from the organization's commitment to innovation in education, providing credibility and valuable resources to support members' endeavors. The platform's structure, which allows public visibility of posts while reserving commenting and posting privileges for members, increases awareness and fosters a sense of exclusivity and belonging. This emphasis on networking, sharing, and professional growth fosters an environment where members are encouraged to contribute and collaborate, driving the community forward as they learn from one another and build upon shared knowledge to advance their understanding and application of games in education.

5. **Minecraft Education Ambassadors:**
   - **Author(s):** Minecraft Education Administrative Page
   - **Publisher/Organization:** Facebook Page: Minecraft Education Ambassador
   - **URL:**https://www.credly.com/org/microsoft-education/badge/minecraft-education-ambassador
   - **Number of Members:** 1.0k Members

Goals: The Minecraft Education Ambassadors community is a private Facebook group of global educators passionate about transforming classrooms through Minecraft Education. The primary goal of this community is to empower educators by providing a platform for sharing innovative teaching practices and resources related to Minecraft Education. Members of this exclusive group receive "Expert" status on their Facebook profiles within the Minecraft Teacher's Lounge and a Credly badge redemption. They can blog, speak at webinars and conferences, judge competitions, write lesson plans, and create world and video content. This community fosters a collaborative environment where educators can network, share their expertise, and contribute to the growing field of game-based learning.

Highlights: The Minecraft Education Ambassadors community thrives due to its vibrant network of passionate educators committed to transforming classrooms through game-based learning. The exclusivity of being a private Facebook group fosters a sense of belonging and encourages open sharing of innovative teaching practices and resources related to Minecraft Education. Members benefit from the recognition of "Expert" status, which enhances their professional profiles and motivates active participation. Blogging opportunities, speaking at webinars and conferences, judging competitions, and creating educational content further engage members and provide platforms for professional growth and visibility.

Despite its strengths, the community encounters particular challenges. One potential issue is ensuring consistent engagement and contribution from all members, as varying levels of participation can affect the community's dynamism. Additionally, hosting the platform on Facebook may limit access for educators who do not use or have access to this platform. Moreover, keeping up with rapid developments in educational technology and Minecraft updates demands continuous learning and adaptation, which can be demanding for members.

Nonetheless, the community's strong foundation of collaboration and shared passion for innovative education enables it to adapt and continue flourishing.

6. **Minecraft Teachers' Lounge:**
    - **Author(s):** Minecraft Education Administrative Page
    - **Publisher/Organization:** Facebook Page:
    - **URL:** https://www.facebook.com/groups/232685223605349
    - **Number of Members:** 1.1K Members

Goals: The Minecraft Teachers' Lounge is a welcoming community space where educators, leaders, parents, instructional and curriculum coaches, and the Minecraft Education team come together to discuss all aspects of Minecraft Education. Members are encouraged to introduce themselves in the Introduction Post and share interesting projects or questions while benefiting from the guidance of knowledgeable Minecraft Education Ambassadors who moderate the group. Those interested in becoming a Minecraft Ambassador can find information and application details at aka.ms/mceduambassadors. For technical inquiries, the Support Center at aka.ms/mcedusupport offers the most current assistance. The community hosts various events, including Play Alongs, which are interactive sessions open to all and promote collaborative learning; Block Parties, offering more profound insights into specific topics through community speakers; Panel Discussions, providing a setting for sharing personal experiences with the Minecraft education product; and Cole's Corner, designed for enthusiasts looking to enhance their Minecraft skills with advanced techniques. These events aim to create a collaborative and enriching environment for all participants.

Highlights: The Minecraft Teachers' Lounge thrives due to its inclusive and welcoming atmosphere, which encourages active participation and collaboration among a diverse group of educators, leaders, parents, instructional and curriculum coaches, and the Minecraft Education team. With knowledgeable Minecraft Education Ambassadors as moderators, the community benefits from expert guidance, fostering trust and connection. Members are invited to introduce themselves and share projects or questions, creating a supportive environment where everyone feels valued. The variety of hosted events further contributes to the community's vibrancy. Play Along promotes collaborative learning, Block Parties offer in-depth exploration of specific topics, Panel Discussions provide personal connections through shared experiences, and Cole's Corner caters to enthusiasts eager to enhance their Minecraft skills. These diverse events cater to a wide range of interests and learning needs, keeping the community engaged and inspired. Resources like the Support Center provide up-to-date information and assistance, enhancing the community's effectiveness and member satisfaction. This combination of a supportive environment, expert guidance, diverse events, and accessible resources creates a thriving community that continues to evolve and grow.

7. **NASEF Community Discord Channel:**
    - **Author(s):** James Wood

- ○ **Publisher/Organization:** Network of Academic and Scholastic Esports Federations
- ○ **URL:** https://discord.com/invite/nasef
- ○ **Number of Members:** 1,686 Members

Goals: The Network of Academic and Scholastic Esports Federations (NASEF) Discord aims to create a respectful, inclusive, and safe online community where members can engage in discussions and activities related to academic and scholastic esports. Participants must adhere to the NASEF Code of Conduct and Discord Community Guidelines, ensuring respectful and considerate interactions at all times. Specific rules include avoiding harassment, using appropriate profiles, and managing personal promotions and role assignments appropriately. The server emphasizes safety, reminding users that NASEF staff will never request personal information such as last names, phone numbers, or addresses. Members are encouraged to set up their profiles, edit nicknames in the specified format, and assign the correct roles to access channels, fostering a secure and welcoming environment for all participants.

Highlights: The NASEF Discord community thrives on its foundation of respect, inclusivity, and a shared passion for academic and scholastic esports. Clear guidelines and a strong code of conduct create a positive atmosphere where members feel safe and supported, encouraging open communication and collaboration. The community's structure, with designated channels and roles, helps organize interactions and ensures members can easily find relevant content and discussions. However, challenges may arise in maintaining consistent adherence to the rules, as the dynamic nature of online communities can lead to misunderstandings or breaches of conduct. Ensuring all members respect the guidelines, particularly regarding appropriate behavior and the sharing of personal information, requires ongoing moderation and vigilance. Managing the influx of new members and ensuring proper orientation and integration can also be challenging as the community grows. Despite these potential challenges, the emphasis on respect and safety helps maintain a thriving and engaging environment.

8. **NASEF Membership:**
    - ○ **Author(s):** Gerald Solomon
    - ○ **Publisher/Organization:** Network of Academic and Scholastic Esports Federations
    - ○ **URL:** https://www.nasef.org/offers/XKtwPDes/checkout
    - ○ **Number of Members:** n.a

Goals: The NASEF Membership aims to build and support esports communities by engaging more students and cultivating their potential, helping them learn, grow, and thrive. Members gain access to valuable resources, including research from national leaders on gaming and education, a Department of Education-approved curriculum that fosters social-emotional learning and integrates STEM, as well as tools for coaching and mentorship to become effective general managers. Additionally, members receive toolkits to structure and build student clubs, enabling them to engage in the competitive play of popular esports games and

participate in Beyond The Game challenges that develop STEM skills. Membership sign-up is facilitated by an adult advisor from a middle school, high school, or community-based organization, ensuring that students receive proper guidance and support throughout the process.

Highlights: The NASEF community thrives due to its comprehensive approach to integrating esports with education, creating an inclusive environment for students and educators. By offering research-backed insights from national leaders in gaming and education, the community equips its members to leverage esports as a powerful educational tool. The Department of Education-approved curriculum fosters social-emotional learning and integrates STEM, enabling students to develop a range of skills. Robust coaching and mentorship programs empower educators to become effective general managers, fostering leadership skills and ensuring the sustainability of student clubs. Toolkits for structuring and building clubs provide a strong foundation for growth, enabling students to connect with peers who share similar interests and passions. Competitive play and Beyond The Game challenges engage students in popular esports games while building essential STEM skills, promoting collaboration, and healthy competition. The involvement of adult advisors from middle schools, high schools, and community-based organizations ensures firm support and guidance, contributing to the community's continued success. This holistic approach fosters a thriving community that supports student growth and development.

9. **NASEF Scholastic Fellow Community Discord Channel:**
   - **Author(s):** James Wood
   - **Publisher/Organization:** Network of Academic and Scholastic Esports Federations
   - **URL:** Invite Only
   - **Number of Members:** 167 Members

The NASEF Scholastic Fellow Program aims to establish a professional learning community that provides mentorship, tools, resources, and instructional coaching for educators interested in integrating esports with learning in schools and community-based organizations worldwide. By participating in this program, educators become part of a global network, sharing innovative approaches to education and learning. The program's fellows and mentors develop unique curriculum modules that incorporate their lesson plans and activities, enriching the educational experience for students. Aspiring participants are encouraged to express their interest in the upcoming 2024-2025 cohort by completing the interest form provided.

Highlights: The NASEF Scholastic Fellow Program community thrives due to its collaborative and innovative approach to integrating esports with education. At its core is a professional learning community that connects educators worldwide, enabling them to share ideas, experiences, and best practices, thereby fostering collaboration and continuous learning. Mentorship is crucial, with experienced mentors providing guidance and support,

helping fellows navigate challenges and maximize their potential. The program offers a wealth of tools and resources, empowering educators to create engaging learning experiences that resonate with students. Instructional coaching ensures personalized support and feedback for educators as they develop and implement curriculum modules enriched by the lesson plans and activities facilitated during the program. The community's emphasis on innovation and adaptability keeps educators at the forefront of educational trends, making the integration of esports a dynamic endeavor. The NASEF Scholastic Fellow Program creates a thriving community that continually evolves and enhances the educational landscape by fostering connections and providing robust support systems.

10. **Rosebud AI Discord Channel:**
    ○ **Author(s):** Lisha Li
    ○ **Publisher/Organization:** Rosebud AI
    ○ **URL:** https://discord.com/invite/rosebud-ai
    ○ **Number of Members:** 15,763 Members

Goals: The purpose of the Rosebud AI Server is to provide a platform for users to transform game descriptions into playable browser games, ranging from top-down RPGs to AI-powered experiences, all within a few hours. This innovative community fosters creativity and collaboration, providing users with the tools to bring their game ideas to life while adhering to guidelines that prohibit NSFW content and copyrighted material. For technical support, users can efficiently address issues by posting requests in the designated channel and tagging the appropriate team, ensuring swift assistance. Rosebud AI aims to cultivate a dynamic and supportive environment for game developers and enthusiasts through these initiatives.

Highlights: The Rosebud AI community thrives on its innovative spirit, providing a platform where users can transform game descriptions into playable browser games, fostering collaboration and inspiration. Clear guidelines prohibiting NSFW (Not Safe for Work) content and copyrighted material help maintain a safe and respectful atmosphere. However, challenges may arise in ensuring compliance with these guidelines due to the dynamic nature of game development, requiring ongoing moderation and vigilance. Managing technical support requests and providing timely assistance for all users can also be challenging as the community grows. Despite these potential hurdles, the focus on creativity and collaboration maintains a thriving and engaging community.

11. **Take This Discord Channel:**
    ○ **Author(s):** Annie [Discord Mediator]
    ○ **Publisher/Organization:** Take This
    ○ **URL:** https://discord.com/invite/takethisorg
    ○ **Number of Members:** 38 Members

Goals: The purpose of the Take This Community Discord is to provide a mental health-affirming space for individuals who play, make, or love games, as well as those seeking a supportive and relaxing environment. While the server is not intended for crisis support or as a provider of mental health services, it offers a welcoming community where members can connect and share experiences. For those in crisis, the server provides information on contacting relevant hotlines, including the Suicide and Crisis Hotline and the Games and Online Harassment Hotline. Additionally, the community offers access to general mental health information and resources in the #Resources category, encouraging members to begin by introducing themselves and sharing their unique qualities in the intros channel.

Highlights: The Take This Community Discord thrives on its strong foundation of support, inclusivity, and shared interest in gaming, creating a welcoming environment where members can connect and share experiences. Emphasizing mental health fosters a sense of belonging and encourages open conversations about well-being. Even with the community's success, the Take This Community Discord faces challenges such as ensuring members understand that it is not a crisis support space, which can sometimes lead to misconceptions about available support. Additionally, maintaining a balance between providing a safe discussion space and moderating content to prevent misinformation or harmful interactions requires constant vigilance. Despite these challenges, the community's commitment to creating a supportive and understanding environment helps it flourish.

12. **#LevelUpEDU Bluesky Form:**
   ○ **Author(s):** Kelly McNeil and Nick Schiner
   ○ **Publisher/Organization:** Bluesky: #LevelUpEDU thread forum
   ○ **URL:** https://bsky.app/search?q=%23LevelUpEDU
   ○ **Number of Members:** n.a

Goals: The Bluesky #LevelUpEDU thread forum is an open community platform where educators and game enthusiasts engage in live discussions via the Bluesky feed using the hashtag #levelupedu. This dynamic forum explores various topics related to the use of games in learning across different contexts and capacities. The conversations are structured with questions released every 15 minutes, facilitating focused and insightful exchanges. These discussions are mediated by Kelly McNeil and Nick Schiner, who guide the dialogue and ensure a productive and engaging experience for all participants. This forum aims to foster an inclusive space for sharing ideas, strategies, and innovations in game-based learning, thereby enhancing educational practices.

Highlights: The Bluesky #LevelUpEDU thread forum thrives due to its dynamic and inclusive nature, encouraging active participation from both educators and game enthusiasts. By utilizing the Bluesky feed and the hashtag #levelupedu, the forum creates a real-time, interactive experience that keeps discussions lively and engaging. The structured format, with questions released every 15 minutes, ensures focused dialogue and allows participants to delve deeply into specific topics related to games in learning. The mediation by Kelly McNeil

and Nick Schiner provides expert guidance, keeping conversations productive and fostering a collaborative atmosphere where participants feel valued and heard.

One potential challenge within the #LevelUpEDU forum is maintaining consistent engagement, as the fast-paced nature of live discussions may overwhelm some participants, leading to varying levels of involvement. Additionally, the reliance on the Bluesky platform may limit accessibility for individuals unfamiliar with or not using this social media tool. Ensuring diverse representation in discussions and managing differing opinions can be challenging, but it is crucial for maintaining a vibrant and inclusive community. Despite these challenges, the community's commitment to fostering innovative and meaningful conversations about game-based learning enables it to thrive and continue evolving.

Conclusion

Exploring various online communities for scholastic esports and game-based learning reveals several key insights and themes. A typical pattern across these communities is their dedication to fostering collaboration, inclusivity, and innovation. Communities like the Digital Promise Playful Learning Discord Channel and Games for Change emphasize the importance of creating a dynamic and supportive environment for sharing resources and engaging in meaningful discussions. Similarly, the Learn Unreal Engine and Minecraft Education Ambassadors communities focus on providing comprehensive resources and support to enhance learning and creativity. Challenges such as maintaining engagement, ensuring compliance with guidelines, and balancing diverse skill levels are prevalent. Yet, these communities address them strongly, emphasizing respect, safety, and ethical engagement. Another theme is the integration of educational technology and gaming, as seen in communities like Level Up and NASEF, which leverage games to enhance academic outcomes. Despite the challenges of technological advancement and platform limitations, the commitment to fostering a collaborative and innovative spirit enables these communities to adapt and continue thriving as essential resources for educators and enthusiasts in game-based learning and esports.

Reference:

Social Media Today. (n.d.). *Social network vs. online community: What's the difference?* Retrieved from
https://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/social-network-vs-online-community-what-difference