A digital game is a play-based, well-designed, problem-solving experience meant to create motivation, engagement, and often creativity. Humans learn best from well-mentored, guided experience centered on interesting problems to solve, clear goals, copious feedback, and a relatively low cost for failure. This is what good games supply.

Digital games can be virtual worlds, augmented reality, alternative reality, or collective intelligence in format. But the game itself—as a piece of digital media (or even transmedia)—is only part of the equation. People interact socially around games. They play them collaboratively or competitively, discuss them, read about them, consult strategy guides, share strategies, and "mod" (modify) them in various ways. These social interactions around a game—all the sorts of social interactions inside or outside a game that the game inspires, encourages, or enhances—is often call "the meta-game".

Good game designers design games to enable good social interactions and they reflect on the possible positive synergies between the game and the meta-game. For example, Nintendo enabled kids to share Pokemon in their Pokemon games via a connection between their games devices to encourage social interactions around the games, interactions which can take on a life of their own.

Today, interest-driven, passion-fuelled, "affinity spaces" on the Internet are one crucially important part of the meta-game around games. These are sites where people with a shared passion for a game and its problems organize themselves to take the game further. Such affinity spaces are learning spaces where people of different ages and abilities mentor each other, develop and share expertise in various areas, and invite anyone with an interest in the game to learn more and possibly flame an interest into a passion.

Affinity spaces engage with discussion, co-mentoring, tutoring, critique, reflection, "theory crafting" (explicating the technical underpinnings of the game as a rule system), modding, designing, writing, and relating the game and its problem-solving space to other interests and real-world issues. Affinity spaces are well-designed, social learning spaces that can lead people to different forms of mastery which they can then share with others. They are a form of collective intelligence fueled by a game. They enable people to form a bond with others based on their shared affinity for a game, a bond that can transcend divisions based on age, race, class, gender, ability, or life experiences, while still recruiting the knowledge stored in each of these differences.

Good game designers design not games per se, but a system made up of a game, a meta-game (various and sundry social interactions around the game), and affinity spaces that organize the meta-game explicitly for learning and mastery.

Designers of games for impact (e.g., for learning, health, civic participation, training, etc.) think deeply about how to distribute different aspects of learning across the game,

the meta-game, and associated affinity spaces. They design a whole integrated, interacting system made up of the three elements. This three-element, integrated, interacting system is what I (and others, such as David Shaffer) call the big "G" Game, to distinguish it from the game as a piece of digital media. Designers of games for impact are, in reality and at their best, designers of big "G" Games for impact.