

GAMES & LEARNING

INTE 5830

[illegible]

INTRODUCTION



Rhosyn is my main character in World of Warcraft, a game I play on average 15 hours a week. Read more about my experiences playing WoW in my play journal on page 3.

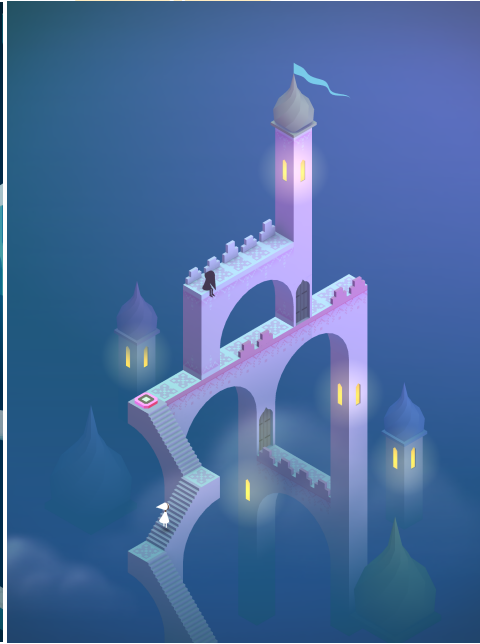
This semester, I also had the opportunity to be a mentor for classmates who played WoW during our shared play session. Read my reflection on page 8.

-James Paul Gee

I love to play games, and I would definitely call myself a gamer. Although I would claim this label, to describe how important games are to me is still a challenge. Over the course of this semester in Games & Learning I had the opportunity to not only examine and reflect on what it means to be a gamer, but also explore what it is about games that keeps me engaged and motivated to continue playing.

As an instructional and learning experience designer, gaining an understanding of how games can engage learners and support specific learning outcomes has been invaluable to the direction of my work. My experiences and interactions have demonstrated how some principles and features of games can contribute to the development of an individual's identity as well as promote interaction with others and development of social relationships.

In a way, games are the sandbox in which we learn how to be; how to be our selves, how to be a learner or a teacher, and how to be a member of a community that shares passion and inspiration. These experiences allow players to understand themselves and others in a safe environment, and this is truly a powerful thing.



My weekly play journals proved to be helpful in synthesizing what exactly about games and play contributed to learning, and more specifically how my gameplay impacted my ability to make authentic connections to the course readings and the learning principles in games.

The first journal I selected was based on Monument Valley. This journal is significant as I began to experience how my learning in-game could connect with my learning in-world and transfer across multiple media formats. This journal was also interesting as I began to investigate how gamers were represented in popular media and what it truly means to be a gamer.

MONUMENT VALLEY



La Dawna's Play Journal - Monument Valley, House of Cards, and GamerGate, Oh My!

La Dawna Minnis

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Monument Valley is a mobile game for the iPad and iPhone, and was the receiver of both the Apple Game of the Year and the Apple Design Award in 2014. The game asks the player to navigate an avatar named "Ida" through a series of puzzle-like environments featuring fiery chasms, floating castles, and other architecturally stunning worlds and structures. Ida's movement is facilitated by tapping an area of the pathway, and the environment hosts several controls for manipulating the pathway to get to a doorway. Entering the doorway will lead Ida to a new environment, and after multiple environments are successfully navigated to a final platform, the level is complete. There are 10 levels in the main version of the game (Monument Valley \$3.99), with an additional 7 levels plus a bonus level in another version available for an purchase in game (Forgotten Shores \$1.99).

The mysterious and surreal environments are extraordinarily constructed with increasing complexity which requires the player to think multiple steps ahead. It is not possible for Ida to fall off the pathway so exploration of the landscape is encouraged. Although other characters are introduced, the emphasis is on Ida's navigation and there is no real conflict with the other characters aside from an occasional crow who will caw if you are too close. New elements, controls, and obstacles are introduced in each level. The design of the game is simple but beautiful and the mechanics are smooth and appeal on not only the visual level but also auditory level. Each environment features a corresponding soundtrack which emphasizes the visual qualities and mood of the level. When manipulating the environment, a series of harp-like notes are played in scale, resulting in a pleasing strumming sound.

Although this is a single-player game, there are features which encourage social sharing. There is a built in setting for taking screenshots during gameplay, which can easily be zoomed, cropped and either saved to your photos, emailed or shared on Twitter. The menu also features options for Facebook, Fanart, Prints/Merch, and the Monument Valley website www.monumentvalleygame.com. I was however inspired to play after learning about the game through a popular media source.

I learned about Monument Valley through a Netflix series "House of Cards" (Spoiler alert for those who haven't watched Season 3!). Kevin Spacey plays the President of the United States who has had a relationship with video games since the beginning of the series. I recently came across this [article](#) from Forbes, which makes an excellent point about how the series features a non traditional portrayal of a gamer in popular media. This article was especially significant for me this week, as it also references GamerGate and the corresponding "Law and Order" episode.

Monument Valley inspires curiosity and experimentation with the environment without the penalty of a limited amount of time or number of lives. This is reflective of the Sandbox mentality, where the gameplay is without major consequence. If the game was not as aesthetically pleasing, or the puzzles not presented in increasing complexity, without the challenge of time or number of lives the player might not be motivated to continue playing. However, this game is beautifully designed and rewarding to play so I was motivated by the simple challenge of solving the puzzle without



Here is my Druid, Rhosyn (center), posing for a photo with two friends, a Paladin, Crotchrock (left) and a Priest, Kalma (right). Click the photo to go to Rhosyn's character page.

WORLD OF WARCRAFT



La Dawna's Play Journal - Social Sharing and Team Conflict in World of Warcraft

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La Dawna Minnis

This week I wanted to write about World of Warcraft (WoW), a game I have frequently played for the last 6 years. I haven't been able to play as much due to work and school, and with a couple recent updates to the game I took this opportunity to use my time playing for my play journal. WoW is a MMORPG, or a massive multiplayer online role playing game that hosts many styles of play. As a new player, you choose a faction (Alliance or Horde), a race (13 options), a class (11 options), and your sex. After making decisions on your physical appearance, including your skin color, hair color/style, facial features, and earrings, you name your character and enter the World of Warcraft. There are many more customization features built into the game, and with over 10 million subscribers there is a wide variety of players from around the world you encounter in gameplay.

A player's first experiences in the game center around questing in order to earn levels and additional spells, talents and abilities, up to level 100. Along the way, additional options for gameplay are added. This includes both PvE (player vs environment) where you join dungeons and work with a group to defeat NPC's (non-player characters), and PvP (player vs player) in battlegrounds and arenas where you work with a team to defeat another team of players. As you complete quests and participate in dungeons and battlegrounds, you earn experience points toward leveling up. End level play includes challenging dungeons with progressive difficulty settings, and competitive ranked battlegrounds and arena competitions.

The game includes many social features, and the game designers continue to add more ways to communicate and share. A chat box shows multi-colored dialogue from varying sources, including a channel for general proximity chat, a trade chat, private messages from other players, a party chat, and special chats when you are participating in dungeons and battlegrounds. If you participate in a guild, there is also a guild chat. A guild is an organized group of players, with an internal ranking system and specific goals, achievements, and events that only guild members have access to. The game also rewards you with access to special features and rewards when you are in a guild.

Taking the time to reflect on a game that I regularly play was also valuable in my learning. Two main themes relating to games and learning were present in this journal: social interaction and the construction of identity.

My gameplay relies heavily on the social relationships formed in-game and in-world. Social options are built into the game design and I have made friends with players around the world. WoW is a hobby shared by my husband and brother-in-law and we frequently set up to play together.

My main character Rhosyn is an extension of my identity, and my gameplay is a way for me to reflect on and learn about my relationships with others.

RESPONSES TO PEERS



La Dawna Minnis

Apr 12, 2015



Jennifer,

How often do you and your husband play games together? Shared gameplay with my husband has been the hobby we share the most, and it our experiences and goals in-game are an ongoing conversation between us. I am wondering if you played an ongoing game together, do you think you would see a change in how you and your husband play? For example: if playing a long-term game together where you were not directly competing with each other, do you think your husband would be as cut throat as he is in a shorter game where you are in direct competition?



Jennifer Laughlin

Apr 13, 2015



We actually met on Everquest so we played that together a lot in the early years. We don't play it anymore. I found that we worked together pretty well in that game since it wasn't direct competition. However if I let his character die he didn't tend to go easy! Haha. I found that when we played EQ a lot together we missed out on doing other things together and we actually disconnected. I think a good balance is pretty good. We do like board games and we have a bunch but we have a new baby so it's been difficult to find time to play games together.



La Dawna Minnis

Apr 16, 2015



Ahhh yes, my husband also seems to take it personally if I accidentally let him die ;) typically he gets over it quickly though!



La Dawna Minnis

Feb 12, 2015



Hi Mitchell,

Wow that's really interesting about class selection, does it give a description of the potential classes at the beginning or is it all a surprise? Is it determined solely by your in-combat actions or also by how you control character movement and respond to the dialogue? Thanks for sharing!



Mitchell Woll

Feb 13, 2015



I'm not sure if you can change your "class" through just dialogue alone. But since my post, I discovered that the Companions have special powers ("spoiler: highlight to see [REDACTED]), and I'm very much wondering if I can get those powers too! I'm expecting to do a few more jobs with them before they let me know the secret. Otherwise, yes, your "class" is determined by how you fight. I have so far leveled-up my One-Armed Weapon skill, my Blocking skill with my shield, as well as my Light Armor and Heavy Armor skills. I assume that if you decided to throw some fireballs, you are able to level-up your Destruction skills too. I like this model in that it gives you some more of the play expression that we talk about with a single character. For example, maybe after getting to level 30 as a Warrior, maybe I suddenly want to be Mage. I can then start incorporating some magic into my fighting style without having to start over as another character. Also, your character's race also determines some special abilities. Orcs, for instance, have extra ability with Heavy Armor, and have a special ability called Bezerker Rage. These are outlined here [\[REDACTED\]](#).

In my responses to the play journals of my peers, I began to make connections between my own experiences and their gameplay reflections. While continuing to explore social interactions and the construction of identity, I also began to discuss and learn about how the design of games could have an significant impact on a player's experience .

Jennifer's experience playing Dragonheart with her husband aligned with some of my experiences playing with my husband, and allowed me to reflect on what effect playing games together can have on real world relationships. Roles played within the game would have an impact on how relationships evolved in world. Both Jennifer and I had the opportunity to share our experiences and discuss the impact of playing games with our spouses.

Mitchell's reflection on his experience playing Skyrim allowed me to further explore the concept of the construction of identity through gameplay. My response to Mitchell regarding how a player selects a class promoted a discussion about how identity is constructed in-game through a series of interactions and based on the actions you choose and behaviors you exhibit. For me, this interaction represents a philosophical discussion about identity and an understanding of how identity can change over time and be impacted by interactions, relationships, and cultural norms.

RESPONSES TO PEERS



La Dawna Minnis

Feb 7, 2015

Hi Laura!

I've played this game before, and I also didn't find it very engaging. Not nearly as fun as Sonic on SEGA anyway! I also played a mobile game this week (on an iPad) and one aspect of the game that I saw an opportunity for learning in was the development of motor skills, recognition of patterns, and practicing memorization when playing the same level over again. Do you think that Sonic Dash could provide some of the same learning opportunities or were the movements and processes of playing just not that engaging?

Reply



Jennifer Laughlin

Feb 7, 2015

I could see this as a problem solving game for younger generations. They might be able to learn when to jump, when to crouch, when to move left, and when to move right. It could help their reflexes to be able to move in the right direction without losing.

Reply



Laura Mita

Feb 8, 2015

La Dawna, it really didn't have established levels like that. Each time I played, it was different than the previous time. I actually appreciate games that use the same organization for levels each time because I believe that it does help my memory. Yes, it does help certain motor skills because I had to see a "bit" ahead in order to know whether to swipe up or down and if I swiped the incorrect way, then I would run into the obstacle. Still, for me, this was not terribly educational or engaging. Even as far as motor skills are concerned, I believe there are better games that incorporate motor skills along with more learning.

Jennifer, I agree, but as I said in my response to La Dawna, I think there are much better games which could do more than simply teach that. Plus, it is similar to *Temple Run*, but *Temple Run* will help with memorization since each level is the same.
Edited by Laura Mita on Feb 8 at 4:34pm



La Dawna Minnis

Apr 12, 2015

Ed,

Thanks for sharing your experience, and in particular the 20 minute "cooldown" for missions. I find this an interesting approach to encouraging players to explore other parts of the game. If there was no wait time, would you have completed all of the missions straight through? Or would the monotony of the play style get boring after 2 or 3?

Reply



Ed

Apr 13, 2015

La Dawna,

You are right, the time limit does help keep the campaign interesting, the waiting does instill a little suspense. The game play does get old after a while, and the designers used this approach on purpose. The story is also fairly entertaining.

Reply

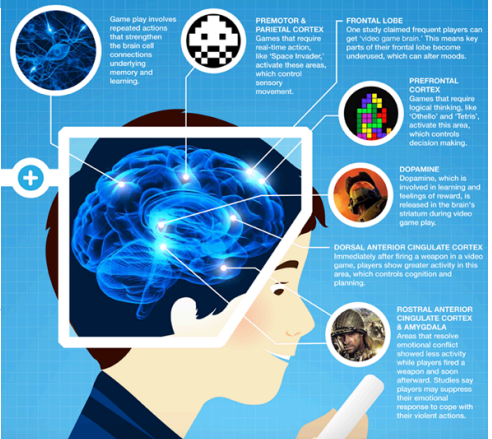
PLAY JOURNALS

The Neurology of Gaming

Video games have both positive and negative effects on the human brain. They can be used to educate through repetition and feedback, but they also have some less-positive side effects.

The parts of the brain impacted by games

Different gaming scenarios and situations affect different areas of the brain by provoking certain reactions:



In my responses to Laura and Ed's play journals, I began to consider how the design of games could impact gameplay experiences and learning opportunities for players. Through our interactions, we discussed critical elements in game design that could lead to a different type of experiences and levels of engagement.

Laura's reflection on her experience with Sonic Dash inspired me to identify the learning potential in a game designed for entertainment. Although we were able to identify some potential for learning, a discussion of how the game failed to inspire motivation for extended engagement demonstrated how critical game design can be to learning..

Ed's summary of how Dead Trigger 2 was organized also supported the concept of how inspiring motivation for extended engagement could be included in game design. In this case, Ed and I were able to identify how a particular game mechanic contributed to his extended gameplay and how this impacted his experience with the game.

GAMERGATE

— Months of drama continue to dominate industry —

- In August, ethical breaches in gaming industry were alleged.
- Breaches involved game developers and gaming journalists.
- Gamers were upset about this and talked about it a lot online.
- Actor Adam Baldwin 1st tweeted about #GamerGate 8/27.
- 8/28 a series of articles discussed the end of "gamer" identity.
- Online discussion turned on feminist bloggers and YouTubers.
- Death threats targeted female gaming industry members.
- GamerGate supporters say their majority is not making threats.

— NEWSFEATHER.COM —

(UNBIASED NEWS IN 10 LINES OR LESS)



Based on my established interest in the representation of gamers in media and my developing investigation into identity construction, I chose to facilitate the discussion on #gamergate. Laura and I initially developed our questions independently, and upon sharing them found that our questions were similar in they focused on the bigger picture of how this discussion and conflict related to gender roles in society, censorship and oppression, and connections to history. We were also interested in discussing what the potential learning outcomes could be as a result of this controversy.

Each response to our questions stimulated a rich discussion that resulted in the creation of an open environment where ideas were contested, debated, and related to in a supportive and safe environment. This challenging topic gave the opportunity for vulnerability and ultimate contributed to a greater trust and understanding between classmates.

FACILITATION



Week 7 (Mar 2 - 8): Learning from Controversy: #gamergate

Remi Holden

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Note from Remi: Thank you Laura and La Dawna for having these questions vetted and posted early - greatly appreciated!

1. Simon Parkin suggests that #gamergate "is a movement rooted in distrust and fear." What are the supporters of #gamergate afraid of, and why?
2. How does the #gamergate controversy relate to broader issues relating to gender and stereotypes in society? What does Arthur Chu suggest about female stereotypes in "Your Princess Is in Another Castle: Misogyny, Entitlement, and Nerds?"
3. Imagine the potential outcomes of this conflict and discuss how it might evolve or be resolved. What are the potential learning outcomes of this discourse?
4. Does #gamergate remind you of other moments in history when women were discriminated against? As with those moments in history, how can we use #gamergate as a lesson in classrooms and/or with our children?



Alicia Hill

Mar 4, 2015



Misogyny is a strong word. It's often misapplied. Hatred of women isn't the case here (objectification...definitely). I'm not sure that #gamergate is rooted in fear and distrust. Men like scantily clad (or naked) women. They're hardwired for it. Sarkeesian's videos seem to condemn this feeling in men. She also sends mixed messages. In one of her videos, she complains about how the male and female characters in games like Pacman/Ms. Pacman look the same except for bows, lipstick and pink found on the females. All the while, Sarkeesian (the narrator) sports some lipstick, big hooped earrings, and a very feminine hairdo (is that a bow?). Her point, of course, states that women are deeper and more complex than that. But, let's face it, Ms. Pacman (a superficial character if ever one existed) is no Jane Eyre. Nor is she meant to be.

Sarkeesian's videos reveal some harsh truths found in certain games and our culture. This is hard medicine that inevitably creates "sides". The evolution of such an approach results in greater fission with no productive end. A better resolution is infiltration. Women need to become consumers and designers of excellent games that present them as the profound and significant people they are. Create the world you want by entering and changing it.



Bryan Graham

Mar 4, 2015



I think that any time somebody goes to the extreme of fear mongering that some of the #gamergate participants have gone to, that it is clearly rooted in fear and distrust. Many participating member may not recognize it as such, but I think the proof is in the pudding. Anytime someone threatens to kill hundreds of people at a university just because they have a speaker that they disagree, there are obviously some fear based emotions involved. I agree that misogyny is a very strong word, and that some of the #gamergate participants are probably not misogynists. However, whenever there are death threats involved, I think you can comfortably use a strong word. In terms of Sarkeesian's dress in the video, isn't there a separation between feminist thought and feminine dress? I think that she can still argue the virtues of objectification of women while wearing lipstick and earrings.



Michelle Dame

Mar 4, 2015



Alicia,

I agree that women need to become designers and consumers of games in order to change them, but I also think that exposing the stereotypes found in games is very appropriate. Too many times we take them for granted. In her video *Damsels in Distress* she talks about the fact that women are not seen as the character that can create and lead the adventure but one who must always be saved or rescued. What does this teach our children especially our girls who already receive distorted images in the media?



Laura Mita

Mar 4, 2015



I tend to agree with Bryan. When someone threatens with death or rape, I think "strong" words should be used. According to the *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, misogyny is the "hatred of women" going back to 1656, and the term misogynist is a term meaning "hater of women" dating back to 1620. So, misogyny is about the hatred of women, not really about fear and distrust. How is threatening a woman with rape and death --because she is "pushing back" and thinking critically about video games--not misogyny?



Alicia Hill

Mar 5, 2015



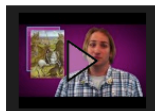
I knew my post wouldn't "read" right. :-). The gamergate "movement" originally started as a reaction to a perceived favoritism of women in gaming journalism. It was then hijacked by the violent leaning individuals that we all know about now (or at least that is my understanding of it). I was considering the term "misogyny" with regards to the creators and players of the games not the internet trolls. I'm definitely not defending the actions of obviously emotionally immature individuals. And, really, I don't think the discussion is about the action of the trolls. They have now hijacked the whole debate on female stereotypes in games and that is a pity.

I do, however, think that Sarkeesian's videos should also be critiqued. I think overall she did a nice job. But, many of her arguments are petty and undermine the presentation of the very ugly part of video games. Does the theme *Damsel in Distress* promote a negative stereotype of women? Twenty years ago I would've bellowed a resounding "Yes!" but, now I'm not so sure. Here are a couple of interesting and legitimate responses to Sarkeesian's videos:

an article <http://victorsopinion.blogspot.com/2013/10/damsel-in-distress.html>

a video

Response to Anita Sarkeesian Damsels in Distress Part One - Tropes vs. Women in Video games





Through my contributions to class discussions, I began to outline my thoughts on how learning could occur through game based experiences. The process of having the experiences, communicating about them, making connections to multiple disciplines, and figuring out how to apply what was learned to my own goals began to crystallize.

Formulating my own argument for the learning potential in games allowed me to synthesize the readings and course materials into my own words. My understanding of this potential continued to evolve through my efforts to clarify the difference between gamification and gameful learning.

Later in the semester, my vision for the learning potential in games continued to grow. A developed understanding of game based learning as a venue for a collaborative and participatory culture resulted in a broader perspective about authentic learning experiences.

CONTRIBUTIONS



La Dawna Minnis

Jan 29, 2015



"Games are a waste of my time. Why would I ever play a (video) game?"

I know you think that games are a waste of time, but consider these questions when thinking about how games can support learning. Think back to a time when you were challenged to learn something. Have you ever felt unmotivated to continue when faced with an obstacle, or felt that you did not have a choice in how your learning progressed? Have you ever felt that a class moved too quickly or too slowly, or been afraid to try something new or different because the risks were too great? A well designed game addresses these potential issues in learning environments because they build in choice from the beginning and allow the learner to have control over his or her pace and pathway. Games also offer a safe place for the learner to examine how their choices can impact a situation or system, and self-assess his or her own mastery of a concept allowing the learner to make decisions about how to progress. All of these learning principles can be addressed in a well-designed game, where the learner is not only gaining an understanding of often complex ideas and systems, but they are also having fun! When compared with a traditional system of schooling, games allow for the learner to engage with information in a unique way. This can lead to the learner gaining motivation to continue engaging, experimenting and learning far longer than they would with in traditional educational environment.



La Dawna Minnis

Mar 31, 2015



The concept of gameful learning seems to be a much more holistic and authentic approach to applying gaming behaviors to learning. Well designed educational game experiences can immerse the learner into a more complex interaction, with multiple connections and the potential for learning beyond the curriculum. With a focus on inquiry, gameful learning allows for students to have a larger part in directing their studies. In contrast, gamification is simply a translation of content into a system. By applying the mechanics of games to curriculum, you can create a game. In both gameful learning and gamification there may be game-like activities, earning of points/badges etc...but the content is more student led in gameful learning.

Schools could promote game-design instruction in classrooms by modeling professional development with the same learning principles as gameful learning. Instructors could work in teams to research and present on related subjects; for example, teaching strategies that support inquiry based learning. Guest speakers with experiences in games and learning would also be beneficial.



La Dawna Minnis

Apr 16, 2015



To me, Squire's concept of connecting learning to the outside world involves much more than just using mobile technology to connect with it. The practice of going out into the community, conducting research, and reflecting on genuine conflicts and problems that are faced in students' communities can be an incredibly authentic learning experience, and doesn't necessarily rely on using a mobile device to do so. Conversations with community members and local business owners in combination with analyzing primary documents and studying local history can all happen in the "outside world". These are genuine, authentic experiences that can create truly memorable moments for the students. With their pervasive nature, mobile devices simply become a helpful tool that the student can use to coordinate these experiences, access information, and document reflections on-the-go. This "breakdown of the walls of the classroom" is a learning concept that was addressed significantly in my undergraduate study of Art Education. Guided immersion into the nature of society, culture, and humanity is a stronghold of authentic learning experiences. Squire references this concept, which was outlined by John Dewey in 1927:

"Both Saving Lake Wingra and Mentira attempt to realize a century old ideal of breaking down the walls of the classroom so that participation in the *curriculum* is not *preparation for life* but rather *participation in life*."



La Dawna Minnis

Mar 21, 2015



This week I chose to play World of Warcraft. I was motivated to suggest and play this game because I really enjoy playing and I wanted to share the experience with others who might not play otherwise. The social aspects of the game are very rewarding, but at the beginning there are so many features so it is difficult to focus on some of those elements before understanding how to control your character, pick up a quest, etc. One major social aspect of the game relative to my gameplay is the Guild feature. I have participated in the same guild for about 2 years, and have made quite a few friends. One player in the guild turned out to live only a half mile away from me, and my husband and I met her for coffee a couple months ago. I also now have made friends from Qatar, Oregon, Canada, Connecticut, and Australia, male and female, who range in age from 16 to mid 40s. After playing together and working together for a significant amount of time, we have even added each other on social media sites and exchanged phone numbers.

On a more personal note, I have a brother named Jake who lives in Macon, Georgia. We are about 7 years apart and have different fathers, so we did not grow up in the same household. It has been challenging to maintain a relationship with him due to the geographic barriers and the limited opportunities for interaction as children, and as adults with work and school, telephone conversations are superficial and feel a bit forced. About 3 months ago, I convinced my brother to start playing World of Warcraft again. I invited him to our guild, and now we have begun communicating through our gameplay much more frequently. Our interactions are more genuine, and for that I am truly thankful.

REFLECTIONS

Playing World of Warcraft is one of my favorite pastimes, and has allowed me to build a social network of friends across the world and build relationships with family and friends. In addition to my positive experiences playing, I also see the potential in the game for learning through social interactions and collaborative efforts. So, in anticipation of our shared play session for March's video game, I hopefully proposed WoW as an option. Despite the fact that it requires installation of a significant size, there is a free option to play. Imagine my excitement when several of my peers chose to play! I was eager to play the game with everyone, and when asked to "take the lead" for the shared play session I was happy to share my knowledge.

The morning of our shared play session I sent out game guides for new players and instructions on how to download the game. About an hour before we were scheduled to play, I discovered that my account had been hacked! The emotional turmoil of this experience reinforced the idea that my characters are really an extension of my self. Fortunately, after getting ahold of the support team, my account and all of my characters were restored right on time for me to join the session.

The experience of guiding my peer's navigation through the game was incredibly rewarding. I quickly realized how complex the game was for new players, and reflected on how many of the features I had grown so accustomed to over the last 6 years of playing. Although the specialist language of the game came to me easily, in describing the features to my peers I acted as a translator. I had the opportunity to see the game in a new lens through my gameplay with others. Through their questions, I also saw the design of the game in a new way. I could see how a new player could quickly become overwhelmed without a mentor, or at minimum access to information on-demand and just in time.

SHARED PLAY



For our shared play session, we all created new characters on the same realm. This is Jinpa, a Pandaren Mage.

Playing with my peers allowed me to step outside of a game I was already familiar with and see it from the perspective of a new player. After this experience, I reflected on which of James Paul Gee's learning principles I felt were most present in World of Warcraft.

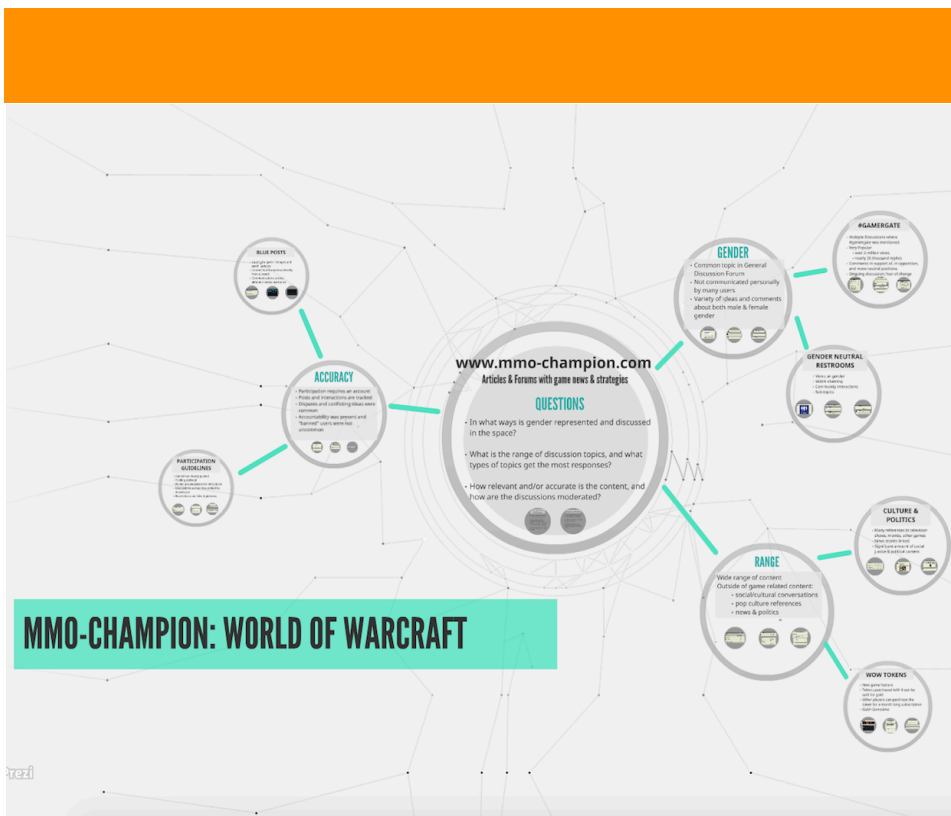
- 1 They build in choice from the beginning.** A new player has many choices to make, from what realm to play on, what race or class to play, and lots of customization options for the physical appearance of your character.
- 2 They ensure there is a smooth transition between tutorials and actually playing.** The game is designed with the beginning levels operating as an unsupervised sandbox for new players to explore the environment and practice building basic skills.
- 3 They ensure that learners have and use an affinity space wherein they can interact with peers and masters, near and far, around a shared interest.** In addition to the guild feature built into the game, several online communities exist for players of all experience levels to share knowledge and make use of distributed and dispersed knowledge.

AFFINITY SPACE

While my own learning was guided by my questions as I began my research, I also observed how others interacted and learned from each other within the space. This informal learning setting allowed for players to seek out specialized knowledge from the community and identify areas of improvement through self-reflection. Players could choose what they wanted to learn about, and decide how they interacted with some only consuming information, and others producing it.

In contrast to traditional learning environments, this space required more self-directed learning where the learner is more proactive and failure is a unique learning opportunity. The space is a vast resource of distributed knowledge, where content is created and contested by thousands of members. Dispersed knowledge was also common, and making connections and links to outside resources was the norm.

Overall, my affinity space research project was a culmination of my play journals, the course readings, group discussions, and my own experiences and interests. Examining this space from within not only helped me to understand what an affinity space was and what it was for, but it also contributed to my synthesis and understanding of the concepts outlined by James Paul Gee & Elizabeth Hayes, and enriched my interactions with my instructor and peers.



MMO-CHAMPION: WORLD OF WARCRAFT

MMO-CHAMPION

I selected MMO-Champion for my Affinity Space project for a number of reasons. Initially, I was interested in a space that would support my own learning and gameplay in World of Warcraft. Although many other online communities exist for WoW, I was the least familiar with this space but had frequently heard other players refer to it in game. After taking an initial look into the space, I had 3 main questions that drove my research and participation.

- 1 **In what ways is gender represented and discussed in the space?** As a female gamer, I am interested how gender roles and ideas are reflected on the affinity space in comparison to my experiences in-game. Our group discussions and reflections on #gamergate were a significant influence.
- 2 **What is the range for discussion topics and what types of topics receive the most responses?** I am also interested in how discussions and topics can evolve throughout a thread and curious what types of topics players are most interested in. Is a shared passion for the game the only reason members participate in the space?
- 3 **How accurate and relevant is the content and how are the discussions moderated?** In consideration of the significant amount of users on the site, I wanted to investigate how this impacted the accessibility and accuracy of information. If a user contributed content that was inaccurate or incomplete would the community or moderator correct or build upon it?

FEEDBACK TO PEERS

Through my interactions with peers in regards to their own explorations of different affinity spaces, I began to explore how the structure of the sites impacted the effectiveness of the space. While exploring the different avenues for participation within each, it was discovered that in some spaces with less members, having too many different avenues could result in a lack of interaction and feedback. In Bryan's reflection on Gameful, members were divided into groups with very specific interests, which resulted in low membership and responses to his posts and contributions.

The culture and environment of the spaces also had an impact on member interaction and participation. Some spaces were more welcoming and interactive than others, and had a respectful and family appropriate tone. Both Courtney and Ed found that their affinity spaces truly supported that members of all skill levels and age groups were welcome. The multiple avenues for participation discovered in Courtney's research allowed for newer players to interact through polls, a less intimidating feature.

In Ed's case, the World of Tanks Blitz space encouraged the same collaboration and interaction that was needed in gameplay. The space's organization and interaction supported mentor based relationships that resulted in Ed setting up gameplay with other members from the forums.



La Dawna Minnis

Tuesday



Hi Bryan,

Thanks for presenting on this space, I personally found it really interesting due to the niche discussions about uses for games.

In discussing the observation of your affinity space, you talked about how some of the groups had low membership. What did you think of the structure of the site and the division of groups? How do you think participation would be impacted if everyone was part of the same "group" and the group topics became forum areas?

It is unfortunate that you didn't receive responses to some of your discussions, I wonder if there were any commonalities about the posts that received the most feedback? When people do respond, do they typically respond because they are interested in the niche area of the discussion or are there more broad responses? It seems that for inclusion of all within the same space, encouraging participation across groups would be helpful.

I am personally very interested in some of the discussions about using games in museums, and I will definitely be checking out Gameful! One aspect of the space I think could be both a strength and sometimes a limitation is the range of participant background. One one hand, it is really interesting to have game designers mingling with educators and game enthusiasts, but at the same time the conversations may feel intimidating to those who do not share the specialist language of the field.



La Dawna Minnis

Tuesday



Hi Courtney!

Ooh fun theme for your presentation :) The screenshots of the statistics post-gameplay are really fascinating!

In your observation, you discussed that the majority of the posts were from the moderators and this is how you could tell they were "insiders". I wonder how a member might become a moderator? Do you think you would you be eligible after increasing participation in the space over time?

You did a great job of outlining the different ways of contributing to the space. I also enjoyed the polls feature within my affinity space. It seems the norm for contributions in this space to begin with +1s and commenting on others posts and for some transition into creating a post. Hopefully more members become comfortable enough to create their own posts :)

The strength of this space really lie in the welcoming, open environment produced by the members. The limitations to this space seem to be the lack of new posts and full engagement as well as the limitations of the features within google+. In the space I currently moderate, I've had to get creative with how to create posts with different types of media.



La Dawna Minnis

Wednesday



Hi Ed,

WoT Blitz looks to have great resources for those who are looking to improve their gameplay, and members were genuinely respectful and helpful. Your observations of the open and social nature of the space set the foundation for the development of those norms.

The responses you received on your comments were varied and helpful, and it is great to see they got better over time. Do you think you were able to ask better/more specific questions as a result of your interactions on the space?

Your reflection on the collaborative and social nature of the community really represents the strengths of the space. The community promotes the same collaborative interactions necessary for gameplay, and the site looks really welcoming for newcomers.

The members of the community coming together on this space to solve problems supports learning through a participatory culture. It also feels as though this space is structure for mentored relationships. Members share a passion and a genuine interest in helping other players by sharing resources and knowledge.

Edited by La Dawna Minnis on Apr 22 at 2:09pm



Ed

Thursday



La Dawna,

yes, my responses did get better due to the interactions between the players. What was cool, I become a better player! The things I learned improve my gameplay, thus the affinity space works! The mentored relationships also happened a lot because I played with others that I met in the forums. The forums are just an extension of the game, which is great.

DESIGNING LEARNING EXPERIENCES

My experiences and interactions this semester have resulted in a more complete understanding of what learning opportunities can be present in game-based experiences. Learning experiences designed with gaming principles and behaviors in mind can create the same motivation for extended engagement and passion for learning as is seen in many games.

In my own designed learning experiences, I find value in creating collaborative and participatory environments that encourage students to become producers of knowledge and active learners. A community that can come together to solve problems and overcome challenges can transform how we approach education, and shift the focus away from more traditional methods of instruction to a more learner-centric environment. Each learner can become an important point in a network of knowledge, where information is shared and distributed for the collective advancement of those who share the same passions.



**COLLABORATIVE
LEARNING**

