

# Literacies Lurking Around Every Corner: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and the Games Young Adults Play

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ALISE 2013 Youth Services SIG Panel

“The Beauty of Subversion: Asking the Difficult Questions  
in Youth Research, Teaching and Practice”

January 24, 2013 | Seattle, Washington



# The Game(s) of Life

- Like everyone, young adults are engaged in a world flooded with **information, media, and new technologies**.
- To be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, young adults must have an array of digital literacy skills.
- **Gee (2009)** argues that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, individuals need:
  - [E]mbodied empathy for complex systems, ‘grit’ (passion + persistence); playfulness that leads to innovation; design thinking; collaborations in which groups are smarter than the smartest person in the group; and real understanding that leads to problem solving and not just test passing. (p. 4)
- How can we as information professionals help young adults develop the digital literacy skills needed to excel?

# Redeeming Value?

- **Johnson (2005)** argues that the increased complexities of popular culture and new media types (video games, the internet, television) may actually improve cognitive abilities.
- Additionally, **Gee (2009)** states that play through the complex systems of good games can help users learn problem solving skills, model-based thinking, teamwork and collaboration skills, and numerous other skills.
- Popular media and narratives that appeal to young adults may aid in the development or provide examples of critical learning and literacy skills.
- Some YA literature and Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) allow Young Adults to interact with content and environments that they actually have an active interest in and may potentially be more effective and interesting than traditional instruction.

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Survival Skills

## Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2011)

- The Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning outlines the skills, knowledge, and literacies needed for students to be successful.
- Information, Media, and Technology Skills
  - **Information literacy** – the ability to access, evaluate, use and manage information as well as understand the ethical and legal issues pertaining to these activities.
  - **Media literacy** – the ability to analyze media for its actual purpose and meaning , to effectively create suitable media products, and understand the ethical and legal issues related to the use and access of media.
  - **Information Communication Technology literacy** – the ability to effectively use technology to research, organize, evaluate, create, and communicate information as well as understand the ethical and legal issues related to the use and access of such technologies.

# Odds in your favor...

- In the dystopian future of Suzanne Collin's *Hunger Games* Trilogy, all types of resources are tightly controlled by an oppressive government known as "the Capitol."
- In what sense are these books "subversive"?
- Katniss, the protagonist, exhibits information and media literacy skills in surviving the Hunger Games and igniting a revolution against the Capitol.
- Info literacy: Real or not real?
  - Gathering and managing information
  - Evaluating and interpreting information; not accepting everything at face value
  - Using (manipulating) information
- Media Literacy: The revolution will be televised
  - Understanding media messages
  - Creating (manipulating) media messages
  - Accepting her role as the Mockingjay, the symbol of the revolution
- Katniss serves as an example to readers that information and media literacy skills can mean the difference between life and death.
- Young adults battle through their own games in life and can see themselves in Katniss's struggle for survival.

# Literacies at play...

- Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs), such as World of Warcraft (WOW) and Guild Wars 2, are immersive and interactive virtual (often 3-dimensional) environments through which players navigate and fulfill a chosen role while also competing against, or cooperating with, other players and the artificial intelligence of the game to achieve goals, explore game content, collect materials, and myriad other activities.
- Research suggests that learning and literacy skills are associated with MMORPGs.
  - **Steinkuehler (2004, 2007)** observed a “constellation of literacy practices” and social learning through activities such as storytelling, instruction, establishment of cultural norms in a 2 year ethnography of Lineage I & II players.
  - **Oliver & Carr (2009)** mapped the learning behaviors of WOW playing couples to Wenger’s Communities of Practice
  - **Martin & Steinkuehler (2010)** developed a framework for collective information literacy in WOW based on 8 months of ethnographic data
- Further research is needed to better understand the social aspects of these information behaviors, the use of media and communication technologies, and how these skills transfer from the virtual world into the real worlds of the players.

# Opportunities for Research

- Reader response studies and content analysis using books that inscribe games within their narratives.
- Analysis of discussions about such books, and good games on social media.
- Phenomenographic and ethnographic studies on social information behaviors and critical literacies in MMORPGs.
- Longitudinal interviews, surveys, and focus groups to gain further insight into overlapping information worlds and learning through play over time.

# Significance for Practice and Teaching

- Implementing Video Game Player's Advisory
- Sponsoring gaming sessions/interest groups
- Including materials on gaming in collections
- Promoting books that depict games (and IMCT skills in general)
- Helping YAs see the literacies and literacy practices within popular media and narratives

# Conclusion

- Digital literacies and literacy practices are embedded within popular media and narratives.
- A better understanding of how these “embedded literacies” facilitate digital literacy development in young adults can help information professionals in promoting such development.
- With strong IMCT literacy skills, young adults are better equipped to ask and answer their own beautiful questions.

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# Questions or Comments?

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Thank you!