

A Framework For Understanding Academic Writing Connections in Fandom Spaces

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This poster session presents a framework for understanding academic writing connections within fandom spaces when coupled with the use commercial-off-the-shelf (COTS) videogames. When students engage in writing in fandom spaces they often do not see the connections with their school-based writing practices or the acquisition of valuable twenty-first century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and leadership which we have deemed crucial to investigating adolescents' complex meaning-making and writing development. We posit that, when examined within the Game-Based Writing Framework, students (and teachers) will more readily see connections between literacy practices at home and in school.

Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinnings

Framed within connected learning theory (Ito et al., 2013), this research explores the connections between academic writing and fandom writing through COTS videogames. Connected learning incorporates today's interactive and networked media to make learning more interest-powered, peer-supported, and academically oriented. Connected learning posits that learning environments (a) are populated with people who have shared interests, (b) are focused on production where learners not only produce their own media but also comment on others', and (c) are openly networked to include multiple institutions and groups from popular culture to educational institutions and beyond.

Youth often engage in the creation and adaptation of multimodal literacy practices through videogames and online fandom spaces to further their knowledge in, or about, the game; this is known as metagaming (Consalvo, 2007). Through metagaming, adolescents create paratexts (artifacts and texts that support the main publisher created game) and engage in complex literacy practices, such as fanfiction (Black, 2008; Gerber & Price, 2011; Lammers, 2012; Magnifico, 2012; Steinkuehler, Compton-Lily, & King, 2009). In fanfiction writing, youth create and extend the existing story by either recreating the storyline, extending the plot, or introducing new characters. It has been reported that students may not perceive or understand the connections between their in-school literacy practices and their out-of-school literacy practices when examining videogames and the related writing activities (Abrams, 2009; Abrams, Gerber, & Burgess, 2012; Gerber & Price, 2011).

Of particular interest is the examination of supportive roles youth take in fostering their fanfiction writing, the methods and negotiations that they take in the peer collaboration stage, and the subsequent leadership roles and critical thinking in which they engage. Collaboration, leadership, and critical thinking have been noted as vital skills for the 21st century (Gee, Hull, & Lankshear, 1996). Videogames offer many opportunities for players to gain leadership skills (Childress & Braswell, 2006; Collins & Halverson, 2009; Steinkuehler, 2006) and critical thinking skills (Gee, 2007; Squire, 2008) akin to those needed in real-life situations. Additionally, gaming environments offer learners collaborative and cooperative experiences (Gee, 2007; Gerber, Abrams, Onwuegbuzie, Benge, 2014; Squire, 2003). We posit that the elements of leadership, critical thinking, and collaboration can be used to form a Game-Based Writing Framework for analyzing students' fanfiction writing, as well as used as a framework for planning in-school writing lessons, thus creating a bridge between in-school and out-of-school writing activities and providing opportunities for students to develop and enhance vital skills necessary for success in the 21st century.

Research and Discussion Questions

- How do youth perceive the connections between their gaming writing practices in and out-of-school?
- How do leadership, collaboration, and critical thinking enhance fan-related writing activities?
- How do youth perceive these three elements in relation to academic writing?

Methodology

We are in the beginning stages of our collective case studies (Stake, 1995). We will have ten participants age 12-24. Artifacts collected will include interviews and screenshots of fanfiction writing. The qualitative data—as a set—will be analyzed via a constant comparison analysis using the a priori codes of leadership, collaboration, and critical thinking (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in a form of hypothesis coding (Saldana, 2013). In conducting constant

comparison analysis, the researchers will examine (a) how youth perceive the connections between their gaming writing practices in and out-of-school (b) how the three elements of leadership, collaboration, and critical thinking enhance their fan-related writing activities, and (c) how they perceive these elements in relation to their school writing.

Findings and Discussion

We purport that using the Game-Based Writing Framework (see fig. 1) when planning class writing activities, will allow teachers to more readily understand the depth of how their writing lessons reflect the various levels of leadership, collaboration, and critical thinking, as well as allow them to examine factors such as time and space that need to be reconceptualized to foster connected learning in classroom environments. Further, we posit that when writing lessons are planned within the framework, the connections between in and out-of-school writing practices will become more transparent to students.

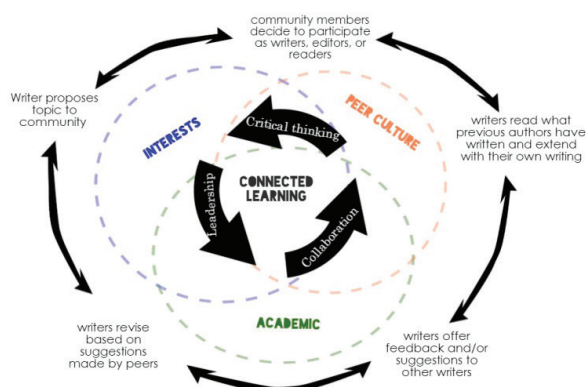


Figure 1: Game-based Writing Framework.

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