Digital Literacy and Dragonborn: Observing a World Within *Skyrim*
Keri Frazer
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Dr. Parsons
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My sister, Lindsey, has been interested in video games for the past eight years. I have observed her characters, her quests, and her battle skills, all the time wondering what intrigued her so much about these role-playing games. Her interactions with the gaming world started to become a serious hobby of hers when she entered high school. Lindsey would save money for the next Elder Scrolls video game, talk to boys about Call of Duty (even though she barely played it), and frequent the local GameStop stores just to see what they had. Lindsey is incredibly comfortable with the knowledge of technology and ability to problem solve. She is what you could call a digital native, someone bred in the age of technology (Norton-Meier, 2005, p. 430). Norton-Meier (2005) talks about the complications of being a digital immigrant, essentially the counterpart of the digital native, and how much of a struggle it can be to become accustomed to the age of technology (p. 430). The idea of digital immigrants may explain part of the reason that so many teachers seem resistant to using the new technologies we have, it's not that they don't want to, but rather they may not know how. On the other side, digital natives are learning in completely different ways from their teenage counterparts twenty years back. Richard Van Eck (2006) writes, “One could argue, then, that we have largely overcome the stigma that games are ‘play’ and thus the opposite of ‘work’” (p. 17). There are games that can help students learn and grow as readers and writers in this new age, the question is how can we separate those from the ones that may not benefit students?

We don’t need research to tell us that the advancement in technology has increased vastly over the last two decades. What happened to the CD player I loved when I was seven? Well, like most technology from the 1990’s, the CD player has been replaced by smaller and more convenient technology. Steinberg, Parmar and Richard (2006) state,
"Driven by MTV, clubbing, music, video, advertising, television, video games, Manga and Anime, instant messaging, cellular phones, the World Wide Wed, Disney, and the relentless kinderculture of adolescence, today’s youth are experts on the operation and purposes of media" (p. xvii). The question that remains in the midst of all the change is how can we make this technology work in our classrooms? Norton-Meier (2005) says, “Players actively create new virtual worlds; participate in complex decision making; and think reflectively about choices that were made, including the design of the game” (p. 430). Norton-Meier makes the case that gamers learn to think cognitively and socially by playing these games (p. 430). Students work on decision-making skills, creative thinking skills, and cognitive skills every day. Understanding how we can relate those skills to the technology we have, as educators, can help us build better classroom communities. Students are not studying the content because they’re not interested in the textbook version of the American Revolution, but maybe they’re playing Assassin’s Creed III, a historic adventure game set in before, during, and after the American Revolution. If we understand why students will spend hours playing a game that is its own form of literacy, then maybe we can do the same thing in our classrooms. For those who are less inclined to understand technology, the task becomes that much more difficult. But even for those of us who do belong to the digital native culture, there is a discrepancy between how we want to utilize technology and whether our students directly benefit if we do so.

I did not set out to uncover some great truths about video games. I really wanted to analyze YouTube© video usage in the classroom after I had gone into a school district that had banned the use of YouTube (even from the faculty). The reason I was so interested is because I remember my teachers in high school using YouTube as a resource. I thought it
was strange that something so useful would be banned in school, though school districts
definitely have legitimate reasons for wanting to block access to that particular site. I
started to think about the kinds of technology we use and whether the use of technology
helps students. Diane Oblinger and James Oblinger (2005) write, “The ability to use nontext
expression—audio, video, graphics—appears stronger in each successive cohort (p. 2.2).
Teenagers are using technology to create websites, post videos, update their statuses, and
these are all forms of literacy. Shin and Huh (2011) write, “While people of all age groups
play video games, game playing is especially more prevalent among the youth” (p. 946). It
is clear that teenagers are the ones who are most interested and engaged in this form of
literacy. Diane and James Oblinger (2005) refer to this generation, those who gravitate
towards visual literacy expression and social interaction via technology, as the “Net Gen”
(p. 2.7). The research I worked on with my sister would show, through my own
interpretations that she is at ease with technology and expresses herself through visual
literacy (Field notes, 12/8/2012, p. 1).

I was picking up my sister from class one day and she immediately hooked up her
iPhone to my car stereo. She began to play a song that at the time seemed so outlandish to
me that I couldn’t imagine anyone ever creating a song quite like this, “Whose rapping?
Dovahkiin! Dragons? I’m not over keen... my dragon shout flow is sweeter than a soda
stream” (Bull, 2011). The song was created by a YouTube sensation, Dan Bull, who creates
many different gaming raps, the lyrics based on the actual games themselves. I started to
think about what it was that made someone want to create a rap based on a game. I began
to be more interested in how this world of gaming functioned both inside the game and
outside the game. In my mind, I was beginning to stumble over a form of digital literacy,
one that I never would have considered as anything literate, at least not in my reality.

Young kids and adolescents were engaging in their own form of literate culture that perhaps outsiders couldn’t understand. I figured that my sister was a part of this phenomenon, something that I didn’t even necessarily understand, and so I began my quest to learn more about the world of gaming as a form or digital literacy.

Researchers like James Paul Gee, Lori Norton-Meier, and Constance Steinkuehler support the idea that video games can act as a form of literacy (Gee, 2003, p. 4) (Norton-Meier, 2005, p. 430) (Steinkuehler, 2010, p. 61). There may be teachers and adults (or those who are digital immigrants) who are not comfortable with the idea that this type of technology has changed the way literacy functions. Darby (2011) examines the ways in which students have had to adapt to the changing technology and literacy, “The ability to interpret, analyse, select and decode multiple messages simultaneously to create meaning, is key for 21st century students” (p. 23). Students who are familiar with technology, those digital natives, are required to function with visual literacy and higher level thinking in order to participate in the world they enjoy (Sheffield, 2007, p. 2). This world includes YouTube, Facebook, Tumblr, E-Books, video games, and all forms of entertainment. I can’t turn on the television without seeing a box in the upper right hand corner of my program with a hashtag and a twitter address (#thevoice). Smagorinsky (2000) writes about idea of the purposes of literacy as able to “construct, preserve and document frameworks for social practice--- and to enable communication within those frameworks” (as cited in Darby, 2011, p. 23). Darby (2011) suggests that the purposes of literacy haven’t changed, but the skills required to be considered literate have, as far as the 21st century is concerned (p. 23).
Sanford and Madill (2007) researched a group of adolescent boys and found that they participate in literacy that they enjoy (p. 434). The boys in that study were all adolescents who were reading and playing Yu-Gi-Oh, reading science fiction and fantasy, and found interest in graphic novels (p. 434). Similarly, my sister finds solace in playing her games, namely Skyrim (an Elder Scrolls game), and connecting her gameplay to the characters she creates in the fiction books she writes. She is currently working on writing a book that doesn’t directly relate to Skyrim or her gameplay, but offer similarities between the two. For example, her story sequence is based on a long time lore that extends further than the actual book itself. Skyrim is also based heavily in lore and fiction that is not just present in the game. This lore that Lindsey has created has nothing to do with the game she plays in Skyrim, but I interpret that the fact she wrote the lore means that she wants some congruency in her game play and her novel writing.

Gamers who appreciate or follow the Elder Scrolls stories know that they are based on a world set in Tamriel, a fictional country that has struggled through war and conflict. The video games come with maps of Tamriel that help players locate the villages and townships that they will eventually play through. I have included a map of Tamriel below to offer a visual aid as I explain the history and lore of Skyrim. Squire and Jenkins (2011) write about how gamers aren’t just learning through the games (as in the rules of the game), the gamers are learning a whole system, lore and history included (p. 5). Squire and Jenkins write, “Video game players develop a feel or intuition of how systems works” (p. 5). This intuition may be what leads gamers, like my sister, to develop their own understanding of the game through writing, reading, and other forms of visual literacy. I can’t explain the excitement that my sister has when she begins to talk about the lore
behind *Skyrim* or how the last Elder Scrolls game, Oblivion, relate to the newer games. I observed my sister playing and connecting *Skyrim* to her own reading and writing.

(Eldeer Scrolls Wikia, 2011)

It was evident from the moment my research began that I was going to be observing a world completely unfamiliar to me. My sister handed me the book, *The Infernal City* by Greg Keyes, a novel that is based on the Elder Scrolls series.

Lindsey is nineteen years old and is a couple years older than the students that I will be teaching. It may not seem like a couple of years would make a difference, but I would argue that she has a unique insight that many fourteen-fifteen year olds would not have. For example, Lindsey once spoke to me about the racism that she has seen within the game. There is a lot of conflict in Skyrim, the biggest of which resulting from two races who do not get along. Lindsey suggests that there are times where the game mentions the tension
between the races and this really serves as a type of social commentary (Field notes, 09/16/2012, p. 3). There are many ways that video games represent and perpetuate stereotypes and various stigmas, but they can also defy those stereotypes.

_Skyrim_ is not my first interaction with digital literacy. I played video games growing up, more of the likes of Super Mario Bros than an intense role-playing game. I remember one game in particular, _Assassin’s Creed_, where the main character (whom you are controlling) stops the antagonist from burning books. What message is this sending to our students? Does the scene in this game act as a political statement, and if it does, are the gamers thinking critically about games they are playing? In my own research I found that Lindsey did tend to think about the critical aspects of the game (Field notes, 09/16/2012, p. 3). I think that this speaks to Lindsey’s own personal ability to connect critically to the game in a way that many adolescents may not. However, it may also have a lot to do with the material she reads about _Skyrim_ that is not necessarily a part of her gaming experience. When I began reading _The Infernal City_ by Greg Keyes, I was really confused. I began looking up maps of Tamriel, the continent that Skyrim is set on, because most of the language is similar to what I was finding throughout the video game. I started thinking that for Lindsey to be able to read and comprehend this book, she would have had to put a lot of time into learning and understanding this whole other world. _Skyrim_ is more than just a game; it’s a whole other reality.

In the gaming world there are a lot of preconceived notions about what video games entail: sex, drugs, violence, and revenge. Bijvank, Konijn, and Bushman (2011) did a study on boys and video games and the findings showed that boys in the lowest educational groups found violent video games more appealing compared to in higher educational
groups (p. 158). These outcomes are concerning because we want our children to surround themselves with positive role models and examples, and to be honest, the violence that presents in some video games is just downright scary. The study also tried to determine whether the lower educational group also showed signs of higher aggressive behavior (Bijvank, Konijn, and Bushman, 2011, p. 154). Bijvank, Konijn and Bushman broke up the video games into three different categories, “Stand-alone games, Local and Wide Area Network games (LAWJN), and Massive Multiplayer Online (Role Playing) Games (MMORP(S))” (p. 154). 

Skyrim would be considered a Stand-alone because it does not involve more than one player or give the player the ability to connect to the Internet. However, categorizing games so simply wouldn’t be correct in this case, because of the diverse and expansive technology that we have, which allows players to play and enjoy the game together through social communities, YouTube play-throughs, and forums where gamers can interact. Below I’ve included a recent post from Lindsey’s Tumblr page where she interacts with other people, most of them she does not know, to talk about Skyrim and the rest of the Elder Scrolls games.

**ANOTHER Skyrim Confession?**

Yes.

I never ever use the housecarls. I like the idea that they just sit in my houses, eating food that was miraculously placed in my homes just because I bought tables. Plus I feel awkward having someone follow me around, fighting for me and carrying my stuff because they were assigned to me.
It also helps that I pretty much despise Lydia...seen in an earlier post from, yesterday? I think.

And side note, yes, I’m totally comfortable having my character pay 500 septims for a friend, so long as that friend is one by the name of Marcurio (who I may or may not be in love with...as in I definitely am).

;D

(L. Frazer, personal communication, November 29, 2012)

Lindsey’s post on Tumblr how she doesn’t use housecarls (those characters that are given to players to help them through the game). Gamers have a choice to take the housecarl (for free) or to pay for a mercenary to follow you and help you in battle. Lindsey had mentioned the racism that she sees within Skyrim, but she never mentioned the use of housecarls or mercenaries (Field notes, 09/16/2012, p.3). Housecarls have no choice but to follow the characters, they act as soldiers to the Jarl (the mayor/king), and have given their loyalty to protect whomever. Could this be considered a form of servant or slave? Through my own game play experience I would not consider this one of the forms of racism shown in Skyrim.

Bijvank, Konijn, and Bushman (2011) showed that lower educational groups were attracted to more violent games, which happened to be the Stand-alone games (p. 157). I believe that there are people who play Skyrim solely for the purpose of slaying dragons and killing thieves. After examining my sister’s gameplay, a gamer’s connection with the text, in this case the game, is deeper than just the surface level violence, especially in a game like Skyrim.
Observing Lindsey play this video game was unnerving for me. Lindsey plays the game in almost complete darkness, which I was not fond of because of my tendency to get frightened by what is happening on screen. At first, I was really interested in the choices that Lindsey makes throughout the game; her character’s name, what “race” she chooses to be, and what special powers she upgrades throughout the game. Lindsey typically focuses on sneak abilities because she likes to pickpocket, something that I categorize as her natural instinct to just “be bad.” When Lindsey is choosing her character, she thinks carefully about what she wants to be and who they are as a character. I interpret this as from the part of Lindsey that is more of a writer than a gamer, but I imagine that they are interrelated. From my own field notes, “After much deliberation, Lindsey chooses the name Ysobel for her Imperial character” (field notes, 09/16/2012, p. 2). I think that it’s interesting that she spends so much time on a name that I didn’t even remember after that particular day. The game won’t mention the character’s name and it isn’t really important for any other reason. Lindsey spent so much time looking up names to determine how they might be spelled depending on her character’s race. She spends so much time during this process because she is invested in the game and her character. She is, at this moment, relinquishing her control in reality and creating her own identity in the game. Gee (2003) suggests that all people will take on new identities during learning, “It requires taking on a new identity and forming bridges from one’s old identities to the new one” (p. 51). Gee explains this by saying that a child in science class, who is actively engaged, is not passively learning, but rather, that child is becoming a scientific thinker (p. 51). My sister, while creating her character, is not passively playing the game, she is creating a new identity out of what she already knows about Skyrim as a world.
Gee (2003) also identifies how different identities are evolved throughout role-playing games (RPGS) like *Skyrim* (p. 54). The field notes that I have from when I created my character were much different because I had less understanding of the game itself. For example, I took more time to get familiar with the controls on the game and I was constantly asking Lindsey what each race meant, what their strengths were, and at one point it was so bad that I just told her to pick a character for me (she refused). Below are actual game play notes that I recorded throughout my first attempt at *Skyrim*.

- The first thing I notice about my own game play is that I don’t work the controls as smoothly. That, I suppose, is not the worse issue to have.
- Took time to read a book about the history of *Skyrim*
- Became the dragon born by fighting a dragon and gaining the “shout” power.
- I’m a lot more skeptical about what I do and where I go within the game
- I do not understand the inner workings of the game as well as Lindsey
- I learned how to “fast travel”

(Field Notes, 09/16/2012, p. 3)

Lindsey chose an Imperial character, those who look like humans and are a part of the Empire. There is a website that helps a gamer choose their name in *Skyrim*, which shows that there is definitely an importance for making your character match the game in almost every way. Bijvank, Konijn, and Bushman (2011) named an important feature of their study as the video games ability to present wishful identification to the user (p. 155). Hoffman & Buchanan (2005) state, “Wishful identification is the player’s desire to emulate the character in the game...” (as cited in Bijvank, Konijn & Bushman, 2011, p. 155). The idea
of wishful identification connects back to a conversation that I had with Lindsey about her need to relate to her character and her character being what she wants to be. More interesting is that Lindsey had created a male character for the first time in her own *Skyrim* game play. I asked what characteristics she wanted her male character to have and her reply was that she made him the perfect guy. She stated, “It’s weird...he’s actually my version of what I want in a man” (Field notes, 2012, p. 8). I think it’s very interesting that Lindsey thinks about how her character relates to herself as a real person. It makes me wonder if other gamers also subconsciously choose characters that fit their own personality or the personality they want in a partner.

As I continued to observe Lindsey every week, I became increasingly aware of my role as an outsider, not only within the game, but also gaming as a culture overall. I decided at that point that I would delve deeper into my own game play and relate some of my own experiences to what I was interpreting about Lindsey’s game play. The first thing that I realized was that my character was extremely different than Lindsey’s character. My
character was a Breton who used magic because that was something I was interested in. As I played the game I realized that I didn’t like playing in the dark. It scared me, made me more susceptible to have minor meltdowns when dragons or other creatures attacked, and just overall made me uncomfortable. I think this had a lot to do with how much I was still outside of the game, in this case not as an outsider, but actually outside of the game, in reality. From my own field notes I talked about my experience, “I get really nervous while fighting, I’m anxious and I want it to be done and over with” (Field notes, 09/16/2012, p. 3). I did not ever let myself get to the point that Lindsey is at in the game. When she creates her new identity, she becomes that character in a way that I haven’t been able to do so.

I also recognized that I did not play the game like Lindsey played the game. When Lindsey plays the game, she is her character. When I play the game I’m still me sitting on the couch freaking out over a dragon. I was not participating as my own character in the game. I allowed myself to get bothered by things that weren’t really happening, or become stressed and worried over the game, which isn’t real. The dichotomy is that the game is not real for me because I cannot relate to it in the way that Lindsey does, however, when I play I treat the game as if I were the one being attacked instead of my non-living character. One example of Lindsey’s ability to suspend disbelief throughout the gaming experience is in a section of my Field notes:

Lindsey is at Fort Graymoore; she has killed all the bandits and is now taking their gold and potions. Lindsey found a torture room where there were burnt people (dead) inside of cages. This is showing lots of violence throughout the game. Also, she ran across an old woman who said that she worked for the bandits,
their Fort and doing what they asked, she seemed like a housewife, but without any benefits.

(Field notes, 10/13/2012, p. 1)

In this section of my Field notes (10/13/2012), Lindsey shows no signs of questioning the fact that she is in a room used for torture or any emotion towards the elderly woman (p.1). While I probably wouldn’t have said much to the old woman, I would have been a little unnerved by the fact that this part of the game was incredibly violent, something that Lindsey bypassed so easily. I also know from my field notes that I’m not always thinking like a gamer and I rely on Lindsey to let me know when I should pay more attention to my own game.

Lindsey talks to the television, the other characters specifically, as if she were her character. In a discussion that we had later on, she admitted that one of the best parts is creating a character and actually being that character.

K: Do you realize you say hysterical things while playing the game?

L: Yeah, I get a little carried away. (Laughter)

(Field Notes, 10/13/2012, p. 1)

Some of my sister’s commentary is warranted, as in her comments relate to the game she is playing. “Did I get everybody?” (Field Notes, 10/13/2012, p.1). In this scenario she is asking if she has searched all the bodies she had killed. This makes sense in the game because many times bodies will carry gold, spells, and valuables that could be useful to your character. I interpreted these comments as inquisitive and relative to the game as a player and as a character. Her comment made sense if she was asking me and also if she
was speaking to herself. Most of the time, Lindsey spoke to herself or talked to other NPC’s (non playable characters), “Hey, you, don’t mess with my follower” (Field notes, 10/13/2012, p. 2). This comment was made when another character was attacking the person who was helping her character fight. She became defensive of her character and started making comments to the other characters in the game (Field notes, 10/13/2012, p. 2).

Most of my field notes are made up of dialogue that occurs throughout the game between the gamer’s character and the NPC’s. What I started learning was that there was more than just a story about a character slaying dragons in *Skyrim*. Lindsey gives a lot of thought to what path her character takes during the game. For example, in the beginning she spends a lot of time leveling up and becoming a stronger character.

She makes sure that when she is on quests, she is prepared for what may come. She assumes that you may need to be a higher level for certain quests. She doesn’t want to be overwhelmed by the quest. It’s important to you to make your own armor.

When she meets new people in the game, she tends to not trust them because most likely they are thieves. She meets Arvel after killing the frostbite spider. Lindsey kills Arvel because she can’t trust him, but the first time she played she chose not to kill him. Lindsey tries not to kill things just to kill them, though much of the time it appears that it is warranted in *Skyrim*. Lindsey is adamant about checking the dead bodies for gold and other items that will be useful to her. Lindsey prefers to take people’s things and likes to sneak around. She tends to talk to herself about the game and what is going on in the game. Throughout the game, the music will change
based on what is occurring. Lindsey tends to comment on what is happening in the
game.

(Field notes, 11/1/2012, p. 1)

In this section of my field notes, Lindsey is taking extreme care in what is going on around
her character. I wrote that the music changes throughout the game depending on what is
occurring, which is something that makes sense to me, because Lindsey pointed it out. It is
clear that she is cognoscente of her game play and what is going on around her.

As I think about some of the conversations that I have had with Lindsey, I realize the
importance that the lore actually is to the game play. Lindsey would argue that knowing the
lore or the back-story doesn’t change the game, which is in part true, but it does change
how a character reacts in certain situations. Toscano (2011) expresses the idea of gaming
as a type of narrative, “Because video games embed gamers into the virtual digital world
much as film embeds viewers into the filmic narrative, they should be recognized as having
a narrative feel” (p. 7). The idea that gamers are literally embedded into their game may
seem strange, but even the relationship between my sister (real) and her character
(unreal) provides evidence that gamers have a serious connection with the games they are
playing.

There are many of websites that help explain the lore to new players. The one I used
for my own purposes was “The Elder Scrolls History” by Sal Basile. Basile (2011) writes,
“The High King of Skyrim has been murdered by the leader of rebels of the Nord civil war,
Ulfric Stormcloak” (p. 1). Ultimately the most important thing to know is that Skyrim is set
in a time that is on the brink of war, and it’s not just any war, this war is one between races
(elves and nords). The character the gamer plays must eventually choose the outcome of
the game by siding with the Empire or with the Stormcloaks. Not only are there websites for the lore behind *Skyrim*, but the Elder Scrolls website also features a community page that allows gamers/users to talk to one another about the games. YouTube offers many outlets for the same type of thing, where players from all over the world can interact and play through the game while broadcasting to thousands/millions of people. These forms of gaming allow players to feel as though they are engaging in social interaction of sorts. While *Skyrim* falls more into the category of role-playing game than social gaming, there are still aspects that allow users other outlets to be their characters. Toscano’s (2011) study shows that these social outlets can leave gamers feeling solitary and social, a deceiving feeling for the gamer who is not, at that point, really socializing at all (p. 19). Lindsey is not socializing while playing *Skyrim* on any level and most of the socializing she does occurs outside of the game through websites and play-throughs done by her favorite gamers on YouTube. Danforth (2009) says, “‘Massively Multiplayer’ gamers share virtual space with thousands of others like themselves, and numerous of these gamers have attested that they often use such games to stay in daily contact with real-life friends and family who might live elsewhere” (p. 50). The truth is that there are many games that allow gamers to connect with their real-life friends while gaming so they aren’t missing that social aspect. *Halo* and *Call of Duty* are set up where users can play using headsets that allow the gamers to actually converse with one another while they play as a team over the Internet.

There is more to the world of *Skyrim* than just violence or decision-making quests. Bethesda, the game makers, have created a world that has its own conflicts, situations, wars, and strife, which makes this game incredibly realistic. Toscano (2011) believes that
the gaming world may feel and seem very realistic, but it is really not realistic most of the time. I thought this was important to my research because that is exactly what I think Lindsey does as she plays the game. She is creating her own story, her own world, by branching out into a world that she has learned so much about. Toscano (2011) says, “Gamers enter virtual worlds with rules that mimic culture and provide entertainment for leisure activities” (p. 6). *Skyrim* mimics our own culture because there are social hierarchies and a conflict that is directly tied to government and worship.

There are other video games where stereotypes and hegemonic values are perpetuated throughout the game even if the gamer doesn’t realize it. Toscano (2011) shows how capitalistic values are portrayed in games like *Sonic and the Secret Rings* or *Super Mario Brothers*, where gamers go around collecting golden coins that make cha-ching sounds (p. 5). He continues by saying that even online games such as *World of Warcraft* offer players virtual cash for playing the game more often and leveling up (Toscano, 2011, p. 6). The interesting thing about players of *World of Warcraft* receiving virtual cash for playing is that players of *World of Warcraft* are actually paying for the services that they use. Not only are they paying for the Internet cost, which to be fair most people would pay anyway, but they also pay to use the *World of Warcraft* servers. The game currently costs $19.99 to install on your computer and continues to cost $19.99 a month to continue to play and use those game servers. *Skyrim* may seem different, though the game also features add-ons (for more adventurous quests) and installments that all cost money. The cost of these installments range from $20-$25 depending on what the installment comes with, but this doesn’t include the original cost of the game, which after a year on the market is still
priced at $60 at most retailers. By the time a player has invested in the whole *Skyrim* package, he may have spent well over $100.

Lindsey has transcended the video game world and has already made the move onto digital literacy ground. She incorporates YouTube, Tumblr®, reading, writing, and any other form of Internet sharing to her character and her world in *Skyrim*. I’ve added her most recent Tumblr post below:

**Skyrim 30 day challenge**

Day 3: What was your favorite quest arc?

This is hard. Really hard. Because I have done all quest arcs and didn’t dislike any. But my favorite? Okay maybe not so hard...thieves guild. I’m a stealth character at heart, it’s how I would be if I lived in Skyrim.

I also find the thieves guild really in depth. Maven fascinates me. Although I may be biased as I will go to the cistern just to listen to Brynjolf...

(L. Frazer, personal communication, December 2, 2012)

Lindsey has created her own narrative identity through the identity that she has created as a player in *Skyrim*. Summerfield and Summerfield (1986) say that we represent what our world is like through our own stories and narratives (p. 103). Lindsey is portraying through this post on Tumblr, her own narrative story, and her own character identity. Without having the field notes that I have recorded, I would be able to tell that Lindsey’s character likes to sneak and steal, two traits that are important to her. I’ve already stated that Lindsey prefers to join the thieves’ guild because of her own fascination with defying
what is ethical, because *Skyrim* is just a game. However, Gee (2003) makes powerful statements about the differences between the identities that gamers and learners create (p. 54). The first identity is the virtual identity, the identity that the player creates (essentially the player’s character). Lindsey’s virtual identity is Ysobel, the Imperial character derived from Cyrodiil (Field notes, 09/16/2012, p. 1). The second identity, according to Gee (2003) is the real-world identity, which is actually who the player is in the real world (p. 55). The final identity is the projective identity, which is difficult to define (p. 55). Gee (2003) says,

I will represent this identity as “James Paul Gee as Bead Bead,” where the word “as” is italicized to indicate that, in this identity, the stress is on the interface between---the interactions between---the real-world person and the virtual character.

(Gee, 2003, p. 56)

I think of this as merely the way in which the real-world person interacts with their character. I believe that it is this projective identity that holds me back while playing a game like *Skyrim*. I focus all my energy on my character and when something does go wrong, I turn my energy back onto my real-world person. Lindsey fluidly moves between concentrating on her virtual identity and her projective identity. I conducted a final interview with Lindsey because I wanted to take time to ask her some of the questions that I had really been thinking about as I observed her game play. Below is an excerpt of the interview from my field notes (The “K” stands for Keri, my name, while the “L” stands for Lindsey):

K: How do you feel when you play the game?

L: I feel empowered
K: How so?

L: Because when I choose to help people...I feel empowered...and I'm a lore whore

K: A what?

L: A lore whore... like I'm kind of obsessed with lore

K: And by lore you mean?

L: Like the story, the world, understanding it

K: Why is that important to you?

L: I can't really say... I don't know I just enjoy... I enjoy engulfing myself in another world...being able to be someone else for a change.

K: Is that a draw for you to be someone else

L: That sounds like I really hate myself...but yeah

K: Why else do you play?

L: I don't know that's a really broad question. Like I know that seems like a question that is an easy answer but it's not.

K: So how about a different question? How are you able to spend so long continuously playing the game?

L: I guess just because I enjoy it?

K: Is it preferable to other things?

L: Yes. I think it all goes back to enjoying playing because I like engulfing myself in these things. It's the same way I feel when I'm writing. It's the same reason you can watch a fantasy movie for two hours. It's because you're experiencing something different.
K: Do you think that you paying attention to the lore makes you a smaller percentage

L: I think Elder Scrolls fans pay attention to lore, but gamers in general maybe do not. I think it’s a hard question to answer because Skyrim is more popular just because of the game. I like gaming, but I love story, which is why I don’t play Call of Duty, because I can’t get drawn in to the story, like *The Sims.*

(Field notes, 11/18/2012, p. 1-2)

In this informal interview, Lindsey is describing why she enjoys the game so much. I asked her what it is about the game that makes her play it for hours upon hours. Lindsey describes her fascination with lore, the back-story, and how it helps her think about the game in a realistic way. I believe that this is what inspires some of Lindsey’s own writing, her fascination with the back-story of her characters. In this interview I was trying to understand whether Lindsey felt like part of a small percentage of people who explore the literate world of *Skyrim* outside of the actual game.

Throughout the game, a character comes across many books, some relevant to gameplay, others are not as relevant. A character can read any of the books he or she wishes. Some of the books help a character (level up) and other books are purely for information. When I began to play the game, I would pass by the books without giving them a second thought. I was definitely just trying to figure out what the game was about at that point. Lindsey, on the other hand, would stop to read the books, especially if they would help her character level up or earn money somehow. As part of my research, I have included a video of Lindsey playing the game to give the reader an idea of what *Skyrim* looks like and what I have been observing. In the video there is some profanity, which may be attributed to the
violence of the video game because my sister does not typically use profanity as much as
she does while playing the game. This is something I noticed over the course of my
observations (Field notes, 10/13/2012, p. 1). Ivory, Williams, Martins and Consalvo (2009)
write “…classic empirical evidence for imitation of verbal aggression suggests at least some
potential for profanity-laced games to increase verbal aggressional and general use of
profanity among players” (p. 459). I could not find much research on the topic of profanity
as used by the players themselves, but the use of profanity is something that I have
observed while watching Lindsey. In the video she even makes a comment (in part three)
about the use of her profanity and how she should watch what she says (Field notes,
12/8/2012). These videos are not the beginning of the game, but rather just clips of
Lindsey playing in the middle of a quest. The link to the YouTube video can be found at
these web addresses:

  Part One: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIt4fPLePuo
  Part Two: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kb4kDcIYCe0
  Part Three: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s-k29mRnqGQ

Through my time spent observing and playing I have learned a lot about how video
games function. Gee (2003) writes:

  “Video games incorporate a powerful learning principle that fits well with inquiry-
based classrooms and with workplaces that encourage workers to think proactively
and critically to build new knowledge in practice for business, but poorly with
traditionalist, passive, skill-and-drill school-based learning”

  (Gee, 2003, p. 194)
Video games may represent one set of digital literacy practices, one that does engage many of our students. There are some situations in which the utilization of video games or the concepts behind video games may be used in a classroom, while at other times it would be inappropriate. Either way, we, as educators, must continue to analyze these games (and other forms of digital literacy) and become more familiar so that we can relate our classroom discussions to topics students can relate to, and so that students can continue to get meaning from our content.
References


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