USING MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ONLINE ROLE PLAYING GAMES IN EDUCATION

by

Andrea Nugent

An Abstract
of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development
University of Central Missouri

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Massively multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPG) are a complex type of video game that offers many educational benefits. This study, done in the form of a literature review, will show some of the educational benefits that MMORPG games offer to students. It will examine questions that were brought up by the research in order to help show that MMORPG games have a place in the classroom or library.
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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Since being invented, video games have been the subject of controversy in education. Some believe that video games do not have a place in the classroom while others see the educational benefits that they bring. However, with the advancements in technology, video games are becoming more complex and are quickly becoming a popular source for unintentional learning. The unintentional learning that video games offer has begun to catch the attention of researchers and educators as more research is appearing on the educational value of video games.

One type of video game that is quickly becoming popular is the massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG). This game is unlike any other game as it gives players the chance to interact with players from around the world in real time. This is not the only reason that it is very popular; it is popular with players because they are allowed to make their own path through the game meaning that not every player has the same experience within the game.

The complexity of the MMORPG game also allows for many educational benefits. MMORPG's are a virtual learning environment where players acquire many important skills that will help them in the real world. With the popularity of this type of game and the different skills learned within, it can be said that MMORPGs have a place within the classroom and the library.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to review what kind of impact MMORPGs have in education. The study is a review of the literature about what video games bring to education, the characteristics of the MMORPGs and how MMORPGs can benefit education. The study also looks at how MMORPGs fit with the American Association of School Librarians Standards for the 21st Century Learner.

The results of this study show that MMORPGs provide many educational benefits to both teachers and librarians. MMORPGs reflect many qualities of the traditional learning environment while allowing players the ability to learn and grow in ways that are more common in the 21st century. MMORPGs show that they provide the best of both worlds when it comes to combining traditional skills and values while introducing the values that are needed for the technological advances in society.

Research Questions

With the advancements in technology, video games have become more complex. They require more critical and higher order thinking skills than ever before, and the MMORPG is the most complex game that is available to players. Because they promote critical thinking and other high order cognitive skills, researchers have begun to look at the types of educational value these games might bring. The three questions below guided this study when it came to determining the educational value of MMORPGs:

1. How do video games support new styles of learning and information gathering?
2. What is the connection between decision making skills and MMORPG’s?
3. Does the social component of MMORPG’s make video games better for learning?

**Limitations of the Study**

One of the main limitations of this study was the lack of peer-reviewed literature about MMORPGs and education. The scope of the materials used in this study were from books, peer reviewed articles, professional resources and other web sites about the *World of Warcraft*. There were articles about different topics when it came to MMORPG’s but it was hard to find resources that focused on just the educational qualities that MMORPG and other video games possess. Since this is a literature review, the lack of peer-reviewed resources on the topic made it hard to find research. The findings are based on the available resources.

**Definition of Terms**

In this section, terms that are present in the study are defined. These are mainly terms that are associated with the MMORPGs.

Avatar: The character that players create in a MMORPG.

Expansions: Additional content packs released after the original game to give players more things to do within the game.

Guild: A group of players in an MMORPG that help each other complete activities within the game.

Level up: When a player gains enough experience through quests for their avatar to move up to the next level.
Massively multiplayer online role playing game: The type of game that the study is focused on. It is a game that is played online and players play in real time. The abbreviation is MMORPG.

Quest: The activities that players complete within MMORPGs such as World of Warcraft.

Profession: The skills that players build within the game to help their avatar become stronger.

Raid: A more complex quest that takes groups of players up to six hours to complete.

Role playing: Where players of MMORPG behave as their avatar by creating a backstory for it and then speaking and interacting with others as they think their avatar would.

World of Warcraft: The most popular MMORPG. The abbreviation is WoW.

Research Design

The idea behind the research was to conduct a literature review based on the topic. Research was obtained from various books, online journals, and other websites. Books on the topic were found first from the Thomas Jefferson Library at the University of Missouri St. Louis, the Jack C. Taylor library at Fontbonne University, and the Webster-Eden Library at Webster University. All books were located using the MOBIUS website.

Articles were found using the databases provided from the James C. Kirkpatrick Library website at the University of Central Missouri. The databases that were used were Education Journals and Library Literature and Information Science Full Text.
Search terms included “MMORPG AND education,” “MMORPG AND library,” “video games AND education,” “video games AND learning environment,” and “MMORPG AND learning environment.”

One website used was found using previous knowledge of the *World of Warcraft* game. The other was used in a Google search with the search terms “*World of Warcraft* fan sites.”

**Conclusion**

This study contains three chapters related to how MMORPG games have educational benefits. The first chapter was the introduction. The second chapter will be the literature review. The third chapter will focus on answering the questions that were introduced in the first chapter. MMORPGs provide many educational benefits; it’s up to the teachers and the librarians to figure out how to add them into the curriculum.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The usefulness of video games in education has been debated since their inception. Some believe that video games have no place in education while others believe that video games have a lot of educational potential. However, research is starting to show that video games have more potential in an educational situation than was thought and can be beneficial to education. The research covers the educational benefits of different types of video games, particularly one type of video game that research has proven to have educational value, the massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG). The possibilities that MMORPGs have for education make these games a positive addition to the classroom or library. This research will explore the characteristics of the MMORPG’s as well as the benefits that MMORPGs offer for education. Finally, the research will show how MMORPG’s fit in with the skills identified in the American Association of School Librarian standards.

What Video Games Bring to Education

As research on the educational value of video games increased, new ideas on how to use video games became known. These include the benefits that video games bring to education. This section will explore some of these, such as increasing critical thinking skills, increasing skills in reading and interpreting text, and enticing reluctant readers. Also discussed are how the differentiated levels in a game motivate students.

Through the research it was found that one of the biggest benefits of video games is that gamers are experiencing new types of literacy as they play their games.
According to Eli Neiburger, video games require literacy beyond just reading a text. Instead they require a literacy that contains ideas that are more valuable to our “multithreaded society.” Neiburger suggests that the literacy that video games bring to their players is one that combines information processing, pattern recognition, multitasking, and physical coordination (Neiburger, 19). The skills suggested by Neiburger are critical thinking skills that students today need in order to survive in the technological rich world that they live in.

One critical thinking skill that video games teach students is the ability to make decisions. Video games require players to make decisions within the game in order to advance. The research suggests that video games require players to analyze situations, weigh the evidence that is presented, and review the long-term goals within the game (Levine, 13). With the decision making capabilities, video games are easily the most cognitive engaging form of pop culture (Levine, 13). These new critical thinking and literacy skills are evolving in the same ways that technology and access to information are evolving. Research shows that the ways in which students learn are changing to support the new technology and the endless supply of information at their fingertips. In the book *A New Culture of Learning*, Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown, mentioned that learning now takes place “without books, without teachers, and without classrooms” in environments that still have boundaries but allow for freedom of action within those boundaries (18). Video games provide the framework for the new learning that Thomas and Brown mention. Students who play games are learning in an environment that has boundaries but at the same time they are completely free to do what they want within the environment.
While they provide students with new types of skills that are needed for success in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, video games still draw upon the traditional form of literacy, reading text. Certain types of video games contain a lot of text that players need to be able to read and understand. However, according to the research most gamers tend to jump into video games and read the manuals to go along with the game after they gain some experience. Gee suggests that the texts associated with the games (manuals, walkthroughs, and strategy guides) do not make sense to players until they have spent some time in the game world. Gee compares this to reading a regular textbook because sometimes a student might not understand the reading until he or she has spent some time with the concepts discussed (Gee, 98-99). Besides the official game materials, the more intense gamers read and write fan-made material about their favorite games (Neiburger, 19). Players do not have to pick between reading and playing video games, with video games they do both.

With the ties to literacy, video games have the potential to spark a reluctant reader to read more. Students have a hard time looking past the entertainment value that video games provide; but with guidance, students can begin to see that the interest they have in certain types of video games helps them with other aspects of their lives, one of those aspects being reading. One way that video games inspire students to read is to have texts based on a popular video game world. Video games frequently include rich science fiction and fantasy elements. With these two elements featured in both video games and novels, teachers can make connections to books of the same genre (Jolley). However, Kristie Jolley found is that students who are fans of video games
often do not know that novels based on or similar to the video games exist, meaning that students need to be guided to these novels.

Besides providing opportunities to gain important critical thinking skills and reading skills, video games provide differentiated skill levels so that the game can change based on the players ability. Research suggests that one of the qualities of a good video game is the game’s ability to adjust to different levels of play in order to reward any type of player. Allowing for differentiated levels of play also allows players to feel like they have achieved something no matter what the level of their play (Gee, 60). Having the differentiated levels of play encourages players to use higher order thinking skills in order to succeed at a given game level or in a different environment within the game. Besides the different levels of play, players can experience different environments and story lines within the game, possibly making it a different game each time it is played. According to Levine, these make video games beneficial to education: the flexibility of the game environment and story line of the game (10).

Characteristics of MMORPG’s

As video games have gained popularity and the technology has advanced, different types of video games have been developed. MMORPGs allow players to play in real time with other players across the country and even the world. This characteristic gives MMORPGs a highly social component. According to Krisal Curry, more than thirty million people worldwide play MMORPGs and half of them are boys and girls under the age of seventeen. Having this many people playing MMORPGs gives players the opportunity to meet and collaborate with many different people inside the game.
MMORPGs provide the chance for gamers to work with people they might not have encountered otherwise. This section will look at the characteristics of MMORPGs that make this type of game unique, such as avatars, role-playing and being in a guild. This section will also look at the research on how these characteristics benefit student gamers.

MMORPGs are known for the role-playing concept that is offered within each game. Role-playing offers players a component to the game that is not openly advertised by the game companies. Role playing, in games like World of Warcraft (WoW), takes time. WoW is used in this section to illustrate the affordances of MMORPGs.

It takes time to build a back story for the role the player chooses, and then it also takes time for the player to role play with others. According to the research, role-playing requires an almost complete immersion in the game (MacCallum-Stewart and Parsler, 228). This means that players spend time looking into the lore for the game and building back story for their role.

Players role play using an avatar. An avatar is a character that the player creates at the beginning of the game and is the character that the player will be throughout the game. In a MMORPG a player creates a back story for an avatar and then acts and talks to other avatars in the way that they believe their avatar would talk.

Through the use of avatars, MMORPGs allow people the opportunity to collaborate with others in real time. At the beginning of every MMORPG, players make their avatars. In most MMORPGs there are different classes or different races that a player can pick, and each race and class has their own specific traits (Dickey). For
example in *World of Warcraft*, there are two different allegiances players can choose from, alliance and horde. On the alliance side are races such as humans, night elves, gnomes, and worgens, which is a werewolf type character. On the horde side players can choose to be a blood elf, goblin, tauren, or a forsaken, which is an undead character ("Beginner’s Guide"). Each race has its own quirks, values, and skill sets that players take into consideration as well. Besides picking whether to be a member of the alliance or the horde and what race to play, players on both sides pick from a variety of classes depending on if they want to be something like a spell caster or a warrior within their allegiance. Spell caster classes include mages, priests, druids, and shamans while warrior classes are paladins, hunters, warriors and death knights ("Beginner's Guide").

The avatars become the players’ “virtual identity” as they play the game. The virtual identity allows players to become someone else entirely within the game. The creation of the avatar at the beginning of the game allows the player to start out with the basic personality maintained throughout the game play; the game choices that are made and the social interactions that the player engages in will shape the identity for the avatar in the game (Curry).

MMORPGs are highly social games that allow for collaboration between groups of players. The social aspect in *World of Warcraft (WoW)* takes place within a ‘guild.’ Guilds are groups of players who do activities together. Guilds provide a social element where players can interact with other members in role playin situations and in non-role playing situations (“Beginner’s Guide”). Role playing situations include quests, discussed later in this section, and gathering resources and talents. An example of a
non-role playing situation is where guild members interact with each other outside of the game, as who they are in real life not as their avatar.

Guilds are group of players. They lend support to each other particularly when increasing standing in the game. Standing in WoW is measured through the player's profession within the guild. Professions involve activities that players can do to earn game 'money' and perks, or to help their avatar or guild in another way. Professions are things like cooking, tailoring, first aid, fishing, and leather making.

According to Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown guilds might be the most significant learning environment within the game (109). Guilds offer something different to every player. Some guilds are serious players with goals to succeed, while others are more interested in having fun while playing the game. The more serious guilds could have 100 or more players and provide some sort of leadership structure where guild members are ranked depending on how involved they want to be in the guild.

The more involved a player is in a serious guild, the more of a chance that player has to earn a leadership role within the guild (Thomas and Brown, 109). In World of Warcraft, the highest level and most serious guilds might require an interview with guild leadership in order for new members to join. Even if the guild is not considered a serious one, most guilds encourage their players to participate within the guild to help the guild grow and earn more guild perks (Thomas and Brown, 109). Some guilds within World of Warcraft offer membership to players without an interview because they want more players. Larger guilds in World of Warcraft are generally more respected by players.
Activities in MMORPGs involve the completion of both individual and guild quests. Quests in MMORPG’s usually “consist of warlike activities such as slaying monsters, battling hordes of opposing forces, or collecting trophies from slain enemies;” but they can also be peaceful for example going on diplomatic missions (Curry, 250). The point of quests is to gain experience for the avatar so that a player’s avatar will reach the next level when enough experience points are gained. Besides experience points, quests also give rewards, like money, that players can then use to buy supplies to level up their skills or they will receive armor or other virtual equipment to help boost the defensive statistics on their avatar (Friedline and Collister, 196). To level up means that a player has gained enough experience to reach the next level for their avatar. The higher level the avatar, the better gear and perks the avatar acquires. As players work to level up their own avatar, guild members work together to level up their guild to gain more perks for the guild members. The more guild member’s work together on in-game activities such as raiding, the more experience they earn for their guild. When certain guild levels are reached, guild members benefit from special perks that only occur from being in a guild (“Beginner’s Guide”).

The main collaboration in WoW takes place during raids. Raids are essentially complex quests. Raids can have up to 25 players and depending on the complexity of the raid, takes players a minimum of six hours to complete (Thomas and Brown, 108). Raids are also designed for the players who have reached the maximum level on their avatar (“Beginner’s Guide”). For example, the highest level a player can reach with their avatar in WoW is 90. Once a player reaches 90, raids become available to the player. Players can accomplish a raid in stages; they do not have to do it all at once as it can
take some time to complete. The biggest benefit of the raids is that defeated monsters within the raid drop “loot” that usually consists of gear for the player’s avatar (Thomas and Brown, 109). This gear received from the raids is usually the best the game has to offer until a new raid comes along. Players who succeed in the raids have proven that they have mastered the skills required of them throughout the game.

**MMORPG Games and Education**

MMORPG games are popular with video game players, and the educational benefits of this type of game are starting to become known as more research is conducted on these games. This section will provide research to show the benefits MMORPGs bring to education. In addition a modified version of a MMORPG, that was done for research purposes, is described and shows how classroom friendly MMORPGs can be.

**Benefits of MMORPG’s to Education**

The first thing that MMORPGs bring to education is the capability for the players to create fan-made stories, art, and videos to go along with the game. This is educational because it encourages students to be creative and gives them the ability to share their own ideas. MMORPGs tend to have a whole back story complete with lore from the game developer before the players even begin the game, and then as they progress through the game, players will develop stories around their own character. In role playing games “players often love to write stories and songs or make videos about
their characters’ exploits” (Neilburger, 38). World of Warcraft, especially has many fan-made stories, videos and artwork that adds on to the lore and experience of the game.

A quick Google search for World of Warcraft will retrieve many player-made sites about the game. These sites present strategies, offer notes about how to play the game, provide areas where players debate about the lore or the game play, and even whole sites devoted to role-playing stories for certain guilds (Pirius and Creel). One of the biggest fan-made sites about World of Warcraft is called “WoWWiki.” This site is similar to Wikipedia, where anyone can add information and edit information that is already on the site. Since the website’s launch in 2004, it has expanded to include information from every aspect of the World of Warcraft universe. On this site players will find information on all the World of Warcraft expansions, meaning that they will be able to find out how to win quests and where to obtain certain gear and items. The site alos provides links to other fan made sites that players can view and see other fan-made work (“WoWWiki:About”).

In addition to fan-made items, World of Warcraft encourages players to take their gaming experience a step further through game manipulation. Blizzard, the makers of World of Warcraft encourages players to make add-ons or modifications to the game through the use of Web 2.0 tools (Bainbridge, 12). Add-ons can help enhance the game play and can be included in any aspect of the game. There are add-ons to help with raiding, role-playing, and bidding in the auctions for gear within World of Warcraft. These add-ons to the game range from simple to complex: but the idea is clear, that players have the opportunity to create software programs and code to help enhance their game play.
World of Warcraft players use their knowledge of the game and Web 2.0 tools to make the game play better as well as to create more of a sense of community among players. Web 2.0 tools are something that students need to learn to use in order to be successful. While it is good to teach students how use Web 2.0 tools in the classroom, it is often best to let students discover how to use the new technologies themselves. With World of Warcraft players, Web 2.0 tools are being used to help the players create a sense of community by making videos and fan fiction. Making add-ons for the game is also a good use of Web 2.0 tools as it requires the players to get creative with computer and game code. Allowing players to get creative and make add-ons and fan-made items helps spark the creativity of the players and gives them the community that shares their passion for the game.

MMORPGs and Learning Environments

The environments within the MMORPGs have similarities to a classroom learning environment. In a learning environment students need opportunities for exploration and manipulation of information in order to gain new knowledge. One of the key components in a learning environment is that there is conversation and collaboration occurring. According to Montiel-Overall collaboration can work in many different formats (online, in person, etc.) but the main idea of collaboration is that there is a working relationship between two or more participants. These participants share ideas and come up with ways to solve problems together, which is something that MMORPGs provide players. MMORPGs provide social interactions that allow students to share information, test understandings, and reflect on learning (Dickey). As was
mentioned earlier, MMORPGs are highly social in nature and collaboration between players is going on constantly. The only difference is that it happens within a fantasy environment. Players of MMORPGs communicate, collaborate, plan, strategize, and socialize just like students would do in a classroom (Dickey). With *World of Warcraft*, players can communicate with each other through the various chat channels as well as within their guild, giving it a social component like a regular learning environment. The quests and the raid components of MMORPG games provide the chance for players to collaborate and strategize with one another to get to the goal they are trying to accomplish.

A learning environment provides opportunities for interactive challenges. For students this means to synthesize, analyze, and compare different modes of information. Students in a learning environment use critical thinking skills such as forming strategies and solving problems (Dickey). While forming strategies and solving problems are some components to critical thinking, Glaser shows that critical thinking skills can be more than that. According to Glaser, critical thinking requires that when faced with a problem students develop strategies to overcome the problem, find the answers that they need, and then apply the new knowledge to what they already know to change their view on the subject (“Critical Thinking Defined”). MMORPGs offer all of these opportunities within the game environment.

In a learning environment that is similar to a MMORPG, students might have a chance to choose what they want to do or to learn about. This keeps them motivated. With MMORPG games there is often more than one quest line presented to the player, and they have a choice of which quest activity they want to do (Dickey). Offering
different quest lines keeps players motivated during the game because they are able to experience different stories and interact with different characters. Most of the MMORPG quests also allow for the player to complete the task in whatever way he or she wants. There is no specific way to complete a quest (Dickey). This is similar to an inquiry based learning environment where students are given the chance to come up with their own ways to complete research or to come up with answers to their questions.

**Teamwork and Collaboration**

According to Keating and Sunakawa MMORPGs can bring to education is the promotion of teamwork and collaboration. As it was mentioned previously, collaboration is a component to succeeding in reaching the higher levels with an avatar in an MMORPG game. Keating and Sunakawa also suggest that the more a group of players play together, they establish cues on how to interact both in the game and outside of it (332). Besides having the ability to collaborate, MMORPG games foster an environment where cooperation is required for success (O'Connor and Menaker).

One of the reasons that the MMORPG environment is so good for building cooperation is because of the MMORPG’s involve a participatory culture. A participatory culture is “a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship” (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotm, Robinson and Weigel, 3). A component of the participatory culture is collaborative problem solving, which MMORPG games employ. The reason that MMORPG games fit so well into the collaborative problem solving portion of the participatory culture is because as the player progresses
through the game, the quests get harder; and the player needs the help of others to move on. In a way this game design forces players to work together and communicate with one another. In MMORPG games people learn how to participate as active members of a group and how to actively collaborate with the people around them. Players take the collaboration skills they learned within the game and apply them to aspects in everyday life.

**CMPRPG: A Classroom Modified MMORPG**

While MMORPG games bring good factors to education one study made some modifications to the MMORPG format. The Classroom Multiplayer Presentational Role Playing Game (CMPRPG) is a variation of the MMORPG game format. It takes all the essential components from an MMORPG game with a couple of modifications. The CMPRPG involves all of the students interacting in a physical classroom rather than online, and the students play together at the same time (Susatea, Jimenez, Nussbuam, et al., 258). This is the main difference between an MMORPG game and the CMPRPG. Instead of being played with people from all around the world, CMPRPG games are limited to the students in the classroom. The game community that is created is from the students’ interactions within the class and the game.

The other component to CMPRPG games that is different is that the game stops when the players stop playing. Unlike MMORPG’s where the game exists online and continues to go on after a player logs off (Susatea, Jimenez, Nussbuam, et al., 258). Besides the difference in community and that the game stops when the players log off,
everything else is similar to MMORPG’s. Players make avatars at the beginning of the game, and quests are used to advance the players through the game.

The big idea behind the CMPRPG is to help students make connections to the real world. Unlike MMORPG games, the CMPRPG game scenario is modeled on things that could occur in real life, and students have to figure out what they can do to prevent these things or see how they play out. After seeing a certain situation in a game, students then put the knowledge they learned within the game into practice in the real world (Susatea, Jimenez, Nussbuam, et al, 258).

**MMORPG Games and the AASL Standards**

While MMORPG games have many benefits to education, the question for librarians is how they are tied to the school library to help increase their benefits to education. Aspects of MMORPG games meet the American Association of School Librarians *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner*, showing that these games also help students in the library. This section will explore research that describes how MMORPG’s can meet the AASL standards.

The first AASL standard aligns to concepts and ideas from MMORPGs. The focus for standard one is the ability to “inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge” (AASL). MMORPGs offer opportunities for players to gain experience in these areas. One opportunity that has already been mentioned is the fan-made art and stories that players create to go along with their favorite games. When players make fan-made items, they are testing their creativity; but in order to show this creativity they first go through a process of inquiry and critical thinking to come up with their idea. An idea to
help connect the library with the fan-made items from MMORPGs is for the library to offer to display items that students make based on their favorite fandom. Displaying students’ work not only shows the creativity of the students, but it might also inspire others to make their own fan-made items.

Another way that MMORPGs meet standard one is by the similarities between the MMORPG and the learning environment. The learning environment requires students to think critically and use higher order thinking skills in order to succeed (Dickey). MMORPGs require players to think critically and strategize in order to complete quests and raids so that they can progress through the game.

Another component of the learning environment that can meet AASL’s standard one is giving students the ability to choose how they want to accomplish tasks within the classroom. MMORPGs give this option by offering multiple quest lines throughout different levels of the game. Giving students the ability to choose how they want to complete an assignment or what quests they want to complete gives them a chance to practice inquiry based learning. While the beginning of inquiry based learning is touched upon in standard one, the rest of the process is described in standard two.

Standard two is all about drawing conclusions, making informed decisions, applying knowledge to new situations, and creating new knowledge (AASL). The skills required for this standard are those that MMORPGs build. Within MMORPGs, players make decisions all the time about how they want to proceed within the game and even about how they want their character to act. This is done by gaining the knowledge from the game and applying what they know to decide on a course of action.
As was mentioned earlier, the MMORPGs offer a flexible design that allows players to experience choice, control, collaboration, challenge, and achievement (Dickey). It is because of the flexible design that activities practiced in MMORPGs support standard two, as they offer the players the chance to test out their strengths and improve themselves by gaining new knowledge. A way to help foster this standard with MMORPGs in the library is to prompt students to conduct an inquiry based search on a certain quest or quest line they are planning to take within the game. They could write about how they came to certain decisions as well.

The last AASL standard that MMORPGs address is standard four. This standard is about pursuing personal and aesthetic growth (AASL). People play MMORPG games because they are fun. By playing a game that they are excited about, they are pursuing a chance at personal growth.

Many people who play MMORPG games do not realize how much educational value they have. Games like *World of Warcraft* require a lot of reading on screen to understand what is going on. Players can read fan-made stories and strategy sites where players can go for inspiration and to publish their own fan made items. Having such a prominent fan base and a highly social component within the MMORPGs provides players with a way to collaborate with others and gain new knowledge about the game. A good way to use MMORPGs in the library is to play off the highly social component. Students like to play games with people they know, so it could be in the library’s best benefit to have a gaming club after school. This would give students an environment where they can play the games with their friends and collaborate with one another both in the game and in real life.
Conclusion

MMORPGs are complex and offer players many educational benefits. Schools and libraries especially can incorporate MMORPGs into the curriculum or offer the chance for students to play in the library after school. This type of game can teach valuable real world skills to the students. With the nature of the MMORPGs and how they are structured, they would be useful for those students who do not have motivation to do class work but do like to play games. MMORPG games also have the capability to bring students together with the highly social environment that they offer. Librarians and teachers who figure out ways to bring MMORPGs into the classroom and the library support student learning.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research has shown video games can be very beneficial to education. However, the complexity of the massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG) provides the most benefits to education, making MMORPGs a positive addition to the classroom or the library. The following questions about the benefits that MMORPG games and other types of video games can be asked:

4. How do video games support new styles of learning and information gathering?
5. What is the connection between decision making skills and MMORPG’s?
6. Does the social component of MMORPG’s make video games better for learning?

Video Games and New Learning Styles

Students live in a technology driven society. With technology becoming so integrated into the lives of the younger generation, new ways of learning and information gathering have become necessary in order for students to survive and succeed. According to Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown, most of the learning done by students takes place outside of the classroom without books and without teachers (18). Students now do a bulk of their learning in environments that still have boundaries but allow freedom and exploration within those set boundaries. One of the best examples of the new way of learning is video games. Most video games have boundaries but allow players to have the freedom to explore and learn however they want within those set boundaries.
With the provided freedom within the boundaries of a video game, players are exposed to new types of literacy that are more suited to the needs of the "multithreaded society" that people live in today (Neiburger, 19). According to Eli Neiburger, the literacy that video games introduce is one that combines many skills, such as information processing, pattern recognition, multitasking, and physical coordination (Neiburger, 19). With the way that technology has advanced and changed society, the skills required to succeed have to be acquired and can be in MMORPG’s and similar games.

Besides the new skills being developed within video games, the games provide something else that is important to the new learning style. That is the idea of differentiated levels of play. Most video games provide the option of different skill levels depending on the player's ability. Providing differentiated levels of play allows players to feel like they have accomplished something no matter what level they play on (Gee, 60). Having different levels of play allows students to try the harder levels when they feel they have mastered their current level.

**Decision Making and MMORPG’s**

The biggest critical thinking skill that is developed within any video game is the ability to make a decision. Players have to make decisions within video games to advance within the game. Research suggests that video games require players to analyze situations, weigh the evidence that is presented to them, and review the long term goals of the game when making a decision within the game. MMORPG games provide players with the most opportunities to put these decision making skills in to
action, since every decision a player makes within an MMORPG game changes their path in the game.

MMORPG’s require players to make decisions before the game even starts. Players are required to make several decisions about the type of avatar they want to make to play in the game. They must decide which faction they want to play, such as alliance or horde in *World of Warcraft*; what race they want to be; how they want their avatar to look; and if they want to be a spell caster or a warrior. These avatars become the player’s “virtual identity” in the game and will shape how they are viewed by others within the game.

Once in the game the main goal for players is to get their avatar to the highest level, but how they accomplish that is up to the players. Every decision a player makes to reach that goal changes how the game is played. MMORPG games can have multiple quest lines, meaning that a player can have a different experience with every game. Giving players the ability to choose every aspect of their MMORPG experience gives them the chance to create a game that is uniquely their own. The ability to choose their own path keeps players motivated and interested in the game.

**The Social Component of MMORPG’s**

The big draw to MMORPG’s is the social component that the game offers to players. MMORPG’s allow players to interact in real time with players across the country and even the world; and because of this, players are getting the chance to interact with people that they would have never met or interacted with outside of the game. One way that players interact with one another is through role-playing. Role-
playing is when a person becomes the character they are playing in the game. In MMORPG’s players create a background story for their avatar and interact with other avatar’s the way that they believe their avatar would act. The draw to role-playing in MMORPG’s is that it gives players the chance to become someone else. Role-playing gives players the chance to interact with one another as a fictional character. It gives them the chance to get to know people who are interested in the game just like they are.

The biggest social component to a MMORPG game is the guild. Guilds are considered to be the most significant learning environment within the game (Thomas and Brown, 109). Guilds are essentially groups of players that work together to complete activities within the game, such as quests and raids. Most guilds encourage their members to participate in guild events to help grow the guild and in return guild members get a network of people willing to help them play the game (Thomas and Brown, 109). Guilds give every player a different experience depending on what guild they join and how much they want to participate in guild activities.

The social component to MMORPG games makes the game more popular and provides a richer experience. People like to play games with friends and the social component to MMORPG games allows people to play a game with people they have never met. MMORPG’s help fulfill the need for social interaction as well as providing a network of people to help play a game.
Works Cited


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