

Chapter 71

Gleaning Strategies for Knowledge Sharing and Collective Assessment in the Art Classroom from the Videogame, “Little Big Planet’s Creator Spotlights”

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the notion of videogames as a resource for teaching practice. Games are often used as teaching tools, but not often used as resources for informing pedagogical practice. Media Molecule’s game, Little Big Planet (LBP) for the Playstation 3, is a constructivist game with a niche online community of practice known as LBP Central. The game, along with the community, exemplifies multiple learning strategies in a constructivist environment, lending itself as a potentially powerful resource for studying constructivist teaching/learning strategies. In this chapter, the authors look closely at a community assessment and knowledge sharing strategy known as the “creator spotlight” and, based on the premise that art classrooms tend to be more constructivist by nature than other subject areas and because LBP has strong links to visual art, they suggest ways in which this process could be explored and applied with secondary visual arts students within a constructivist learning environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning about Constructivist Teaching Environments from Videogames and their Online Communities of Practice

As markers of their times – the social, political, cultural and historical products that they are—digital games are well-positioned to allow insight into dominant ideologies as well as to provide the occasional space for challenging those ideologies. (Consalvo, 2003)

We are interested in what we can learn about constructivist teaching from constructivist video games. We are of the mindset that inspiration for teaching and learning can and should come from many places, and videogames are an example of a rich resource for inspiration (Gee, 2003). Video games are hardly monolithic in their nature, so instead of grossly speaking of “video games,” we will focus on a game that we consider particularly relevant to a contemporary learning context. LittleBigPlanet (Media Molecule, 2008), and its niche online community known as LBP Central have much to offer in terms of pedagogical practice. Our research question is: *What can we learn from LBP Central, a constructivist niche online Community of Practice, to inform real-world constructivist learning environments?* More specifically we would like to know how we might apply one of LBP Central’s mechanisms for highlighting quality work and sharing creative processes known as *creator spotlights*, to a high school art classroom context. Through the use of rich description of the creator spotlights, which feature successful creators within the community, selected by members of the community, we will look at how this process works as a collective means of drawing attention to the highest quality work produced by community members. This information will be used to build a proposal for how this could happen in a high school visual arts learning context.

What is LittleBigPlanet and LittleBigPlanetCentral?

Exclusive to the Playstation 3, LittleBigPlanet is a game with the tagline *play, create, share*. As the tagline suggests, it is a game with levels that can be *played* but players can also become creators who build and share levels with other players. Within the game, the player moves a little creature, referred to as a sack-person, through the levels accomplishing various types of tasks and challenges. The game has an “arts and crafts” aesthetic, relying on representations of *traditional art making* materials such as cardboard, paper, and felt. The original sack-boy appears as though he was made by hand, and he can be personalized in various ways. The game resembles a diorama where one can move left and right, up and down, and between planes (referred to as 2.5 dimensional space). LittleBigPlanet has been well received for its unique aesthetic and delighting game-play. In addition, once players gain some experience playing the game, they can gather up parts (levers, pulleys, and the literal nuts and bolts of the game), and enter “create” mode, wherein they can build their own levels. While many games have had level editors previous to LBP, none successfully allowed for it outside of the PC world. A large part of Media Molecule’s success was its development of an easily accessible creative tool, interfaced with a game controller.

Around the game, a thriving community of practice (CoP) has formed because the LBP community is so involved in the creator mode. The concept of a community of practice (CoP) in education was developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1999). A CoP involves a group of people with shared interests revolving around a particular domain. The group, at various levels of proficiency, works together to teach/learn and develop skills. In LBP, community members rate one another’s levels/work based on a wide variety of categories, and they share knowledge and strategies regarding both game-play and game

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