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3. READER, WRITER, GAMER

Online Role-Playing Games as Literary Response

INTRODUCTION

Today's youth are increasingly using online spaces to collaborate, communicate, and innovate. In fact, research by the Pew Internet & American Life Project indicates that 80% of adolescents use online social network sites, 38% share original creative work online, and 21% remix their own creative works, inspired by others' words and images (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010; Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, Zickuhr, & Rainie, 2011). This is particularly evident within online fan-based affinity spaces, where young adults come together around a shared interest. These fans see the Internet as a tool to share their creative work that is often inspired by books, films, and games.

Over the past three years, I have conducted research on *The Hunger Games* affinity space to gain insight into how fan culture can support the literacy practices inherent in writing stories, creating art, producing songs, and playing games. Drawing on traditions of online ethnographic research, this study seeks to understand the culture of affinity spaces (Gee, 2004), which are the physical, virtual, or blended spaces where young people interact around a common interest. There are three types of *portals*, or entry points, to affinity spaces (Magnifico, Lammers, & Curwood, 2013): (1) root websites specific to *The Hunger Games* affinity space, including HungerGamesRPG.com and HungerGamesTrilogy.net; (2) archives of creative artifacts that include transformative works from multiple affinity spaces, such as FanFiction.net and DeviantArt.com; and (3) social media tools that promote interaction within and beyond the affinity space, including Twitter, Facebook, and Tumblr. Within the affinity space, participants move across and through portals as they engage with the novels, films, and other fan-created work.

In this chapter, I analyze how Georgia, an Australian teen, engages in the *Hunger Games* affinity space, particularly how she uses Tumblr as part of a literature-based online role-playing game. I ask: How do role-playing games promote engagement with literature? Within a role-playing game (RPG), players assume the identity of a character in a fictional setting. The core of the game is guided by rules, and players typically have full control of decision making for their characters (Tychsen, Hitchens, Brolund, & Kavakli, 2006). There are many

J. S. CURWOOD

forms of role-playing games, including computer role-playing games, massively multiplayer online role-playing games, pen-and-paper role-playing games, and live action role-playing games. While the RPG in this study takes place online, it does not involve a game engine nor does it require players to complete quests or engage in synchronous play, such as with popular MMORPGs. Instead, Tumblr's microblogging platform allows players to write dialogue and share multimedia, which can occur asynchronously.

Drawing on the concepts of Multiliteracies and affinity spaces and using the Designs of Meaning as an analytical tool, I begin by considering how Georgia's developing knowledge of game design facilitated her participation in Tumblr-based role-playing games as multiple characters from the *Hunger Games* novels. I then analyze how her offline work on character development shaped her understanding of the characters' experiences, motivations, and beliefs. Finally, I examine how her literary knowledge of *The Hunger Games* enabled her participation in the role-playing games. In closing, I discuss how teachers can draw on Multiliteracies in order to promote young adults' close reading of literary texts as well as their creative and multimodal writing practices.

MULTILITERACIES AND ONLINE AFFINITY SPACES

The New London Group (1996) argued that in a culturally and linguistically diverse world where multiple modes of expression and diverse forms of textual representation are available, a common framework is increasingly important. As a result, they proposed a metalanguage of Multiliteracies based on the idea of Design, which could "identify either the organizational structure of products or the process of designing" (New London Group, 1996, p. 73-74). By applying the concept of Design to any meaning making activity, they identified three key elements: Available Designs, Designing, and The Redesigned. The New London Group (1996) stated, "Together these three elements emphasize the fact that meaning making is an active and dynamic process, and not something governed by static rules" (p. 74). The process of Designing, then, involves the transformation of Available Designs in order to create and articulate meaning. Consequently, the New London Group emphasized the socially situated nature of meaning making by locating this activity within a metalanguage of Multiliteracies.

Multiliteracies are nonlinear, multimodal, and firmly rooted in social practices (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000). While these practices may occur within school, young adults' meaning making practices extend "beyond the classroom walls and into the borderless world of Internet resources" (Luke, 2000, p. 82). Consequently, Multiliteracies can be traced within and across affinity spaces. They contain multiple portals that offer diverse interest-driven trajectories, opportunities to learn with others, and paths toward becoming an authentic participant (Squire, 2011). Youth draw on a variety of modes and semiotic resources as they engage with their common passion in online affinity spaces (Curwood, 2013a). While the field continues to theorize

affinity spaces (Hayes & Duncan, 2012), further research is needed to shed light on the nature of literacy development and social interaction within online contexts.

Recently, several colleagues and I have argued that an update to Gee's (2004) initial categorization of online affinity spaces was necessary (Lammers, Curwood, & Magnifico, 2012; Magnifico, Lammers, & Curwood, 2013). We posited that contemporary affinity spaces have nine defining features: 1) A common endeavor is primary; 2) Participation is self-directed, multi-faceted, and dynamic; 3) Portals are often multimodal; 4) Affinity spaces provide a passionate, public audience for content; 5) Socializing plays an important role in affinity space participation; 6) Leadership roles vary within and among portals; 7) Knowledge is distributed across the entire affinity space; 8) Many portals place a high value on cataloguing content and documenting practices; and 9) Affinity spaces encompass a variety of media-specific and social networking portals.

Online affinity spaces offer fans a way to come together around a shared interest, across time and space. Many fan-based affinity spaces either emerge from games or include games as a part of the fandom. Prior scholarship has indicated that games support complex forms of learning that include collaborative inquiry, the development of situated identities, and participation in a common discourse (Gee, 2003; Squire, 2006; Steinkuehler, 2006). Moreover, games often involve complex literacy practices (Black & Steinkuehler, 2009). By conceptualizing game design, social networking, and creative writing as Multiliteracies, this chapter seeks to add to this growing body of research.

METHODS

Research Context

To understand the literacy practices inherent in affinity spaces, I have taken a sociocultural and situated approach by observing and participating in the space associated with *The Hunger Games*, a young adult trilogy. Since 2011, I have examined fan practices in various portals where young people write fan fiction, create art, produce videos, compose music, and design games (Curwood, 2013a; Curwood, 2013b; Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Lammers, Magnifico, & Curwood, 2014). Role-playing games, in particular, offer youth an opportunity to deepen their content knowledge, participate in social interactions, and develop their creative writing skills.

The Hunger Games, *Catching Fire*, and *Mockingjay* are part of a growing number of dystopian novels written for young adults. From 2008 to 2012, Suzanne Collins' trilogy sold over 50 million copies worldwide. Set in a post-apocalyptic world, Panem includes an affluent capitol, surrounded by thirteen impoverished districts. In the Dark Days, the districts rose up against the capitol. To remind the citizens of Panem that such a revolution must never happen again, they are subjected to the Hunger Games each year. The protagonist, 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen, becomes a tribute within the Hunger

Games, where she has to fight for her survival. Not only must she struggle against the Gamemakers who control the treacherous environment, she must also be ready to kill the Career tributes who have trained their entire lives for the Hunger Games.

As part of my wider study of the *Hunger Games* affinity space, I have found that the multiple portals offer young adults a way to comprehend, analyze, and critique the novels and films. More than that, they create a valuable space for fans to transform the plot, characters, and themes. Whether they choose to be active participants, designers, moderators, or lurkers, young adults have the opportunity to develop online identities as readers, writers, and gamers. For instance, 13-year-old Jack is actively involved in online discussion boards related to the *Hunger Games*; here, he critically analyzes the novels, collaboratively constructs a character index, and discusses global issues (Curwood, 2013a). Meanwhile, 16-year-old Cassie writes news stories and reviews books on a popular portal; she also acts in fan videos available on YouTube and manages a Twitter account with over 50,000 followers (Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013). Affinity spaces allow young adults multiple pathways for participation; consequently, it also encourages them to cultivate diverse literacy practices and engage with an authentic audience.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection began with *systematic observation* to gain insight into the dynamics of communication and semiotic production in the online affinity space. I conducted multiple *interviews* with thirty focal participants via Skype, email, and private messages. Participants ranged in age from 11 to 17, and they represented a variety of countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. These interviews sought information about the factors that shaped their literacy practices, participation in online affinity spaces, and engagement with *The Hunger Games* novels. I also collected *artifacts*, including discussion board rules, online profiles, and creative work.

Drawing on descriptive case analysis (Yin, 2003), I created case studies from focal participants in *The Hunger Games* affinity space. Using a thematic analysis framework (Boyatzis, 1998; Saldaña, 2009), I performed several repeated rounds of qualitative coding, gradually consolidating and refining the participants' discussions of their literacy practices into several broad patterns. To understand the relationship between Multiliteracies and affinity spaces, I drew on the New London Group's (1996) *Designs of Meaning*, which represents "the 'what' of literacy pedagogy" (p. 11). Consequently, it offered a way to conceptualize focal participants' literacy practices related to three elements: Available Designs, Designing, and The Redesigned.

In this paper, the *Designs of Meaning* concept is used as an analytical tool to understand the process of meaning making. Within *The Hunger Games* affinity space, there are a number of Available Designs for developing writers, designers, and gamers to draw upon, such as narrative traditions and game strategies. They are then able

to use these within the process of Designing, which involves actively transforming available semiotic resources. The resulting text, such as a fan fiction story or a role-play game, then becomes The Redesigned. Given the dynamic and public nature of affinity spaces, each Redesign has the potential to become a new Available Design. In order to trace this process, I drew on interviews with young adults to understand how they accessed, made sense of, and employed Available Designs in order to engage in the creative and transformative act of Designing. By analyzing artifacts, such as artwork and dialogue integral to a role-play game, I was then able to gain insight into the ways in which the Redesigned are part of the wider affinity space.

Focal Participant

In this chapter, I offer a case study of a 17-year-old from Western Australia. Georgia is in her final year of high school and plans to attend university. She explains, “I’m an arts student, so I don’t take any math or sciences because I find them unnecessary, and also quite stifling – there is no room to create, or to see things from a peculiar perspective. I prefer subjective, creative subjects with deep analytical possibilities such as literature.” While she fondly recalls her teachers introducing her to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *1984*, and *Macbeth*, she reports feeling frustrated by the prescriptive assignments that she often encounters in school. In Year 12, Georgia said that she was “exceptionally fortunate to have been assigned a wonderful literature teacher. Her methods are engaging, and she encourages her students to interpret the text in their own respective ways... She understands, from reading my work in particular, how strongly I respond to certain texts emotionally – so she takes care to encourage my emotional responses.”

Georgia is a fan of dystopian literature and she first read *The Hunger Games* in 2009. Georgia explains that the trilogy was not popular with her friends at school, and she wanted to “seek out like-minded people with whom I could converse and fangirl – people who would share my excitement and passion.” Over the past four years, Georgia has been an avid participant in *The Hunger Games* online affinity space, and she used all three types of portals to engage in the *Hunger Games* affinity space. While Tumblr and Twitter are social media tools and TheFandom.net and Hypable.com involve diverse fandoms, Mockingjay.net is a root website unique to the *Hunger Games* affinity space. These various portals allow Georgia to engage with other fans and deepen her understanding of plot and the genre. More than that, they encourage Georgia’s creative response to literature; she shares, “I like my creativity to flow, and I like to be inspired to read or write.”

TRACING MULTILITERACIES IN ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING GAMES

While Georgia is active on multiple portals within *The Hunger Games* affinity space, this analysis will focus specifically on how she uses Tumblr to support her engagement with literature and foster her literacy development. Within a

Multiliteracies framework, the Designs of Meaning offers a tool to understand Georgia's semiotic practices related to online role-playing games. As a role-player, Georgia was able to draw on Available Designs, which included literary elements, such as genre and voice, as well as common patterns and conventions within role-playing games, like game rules. Georgia used Tumblr-based role-playing games in order to engage in the process of Designing, whereby she took on the role of specific characters, used available modes and semiotic resources, and engaged in meaning making. Consequently, the publicly available game became *The Redesigned*. When other fans read Georgia's Tumblr posts and followed how the RPG unfolded, the game then became a new Available Design. In what follows, I draw on the Designs of Meaning to analyze how Georgia used online role-playing games to engage in literary response.

Role-Playing Game Rules as Available Designs

Georgia and a couple of friends created *The Hunger Games Role Play*, which allowed other fans to propose characters, join in the role-play, and shape the game rules. In constructing this game, they drew on Available Designs, including role-playing practices and Tumblr conventions. Capitalizing on the rapidly growing popularity of the trilogy and the upcoming release of the first film, they used Tumblr hashtags, such as #rp and #katniss, to share their RPG within the affinity space. At its peak in 2012, the game had sixty different players that represented each of the districts within Panem. Within the game, each character had his or her own Tumblr, which was linked from the Follow List page. This allowed each player to have multiple characters and to follow the Tumblrs of all other players within the game.

One of the key Available Designs for Georgia was role-playing game rules. Moreover, Georgia's first foray into sustained role-playing was instrumental in informing her understanding of game design and game rules. Since *The Hunger Games* involves a fight-to-the-death game, it was vital that the rules of engagement and the accepted levels of violence be clear at the onset. For that reason, one rule stated, "Being rude or derogatory to role-players while either one of you is out of character is not acceptable. Save it for the arena, children!" and another noted, "The official rating of this role-play is MA. In keeping with the spirit of the Games, violence is acceptable. However, if you wish to delve into all the gory details, please take advantage of the Read More feature for the sake of readers who may not wish to witness it." This latter rule allowed some players to include violent acts in detail while permitting others to choose to avoid reading such (perhaps gratuitous) descriptions. At the same time, this rule also opened the opportunity to explore romances between characters.

As a game designer, Georgia quickly learned that part of designing a role-playing game is setting expectations for game play. For instance, some players were active daily while others either were not able or chose not to participate so frequently. Consequently, one rule stated, "If you are inactive for three weeks without declaring

hiatus to us, we will option your role for another to fill.” Additionally, role-playing games require clear rules and shared expectations. Part of this entails having a common discourse; with text-based online role-playing games, this extends to grammatical features of the game. One rule specifically addressed this: “Role-playing is fun and easy, but more enjoyable for readers and role-players alike when you use correct punctuation, grammar and sentence structure. Please refrain from “script format” (putting actions in *asterisks* between dialogue). You don’t have to write full paragraphs, but a more professional structure is more descriptive, and reads better!”

While some game rules for the role-playing game were established from the beginning, others developed over time and in consultation with other players. This was particularly evident when the *Hunger Games* narrative, which involved a fight-to-the-death scene, posed issues for the development of the game narrative, which would end following each character’s subsequent death. Consequently, Georgia and her fellow moderators created the Cato rule,

Only if the RPer agrees to the death can the character die. In the instance of the character’s death, the role re-opens for another person to audition for. The character can be cast again, owing to the Capitol’s advanced biological engineering capabilities. This is the only instance where resurrection is possible.

In order to advance the game narrative, the rules had to significantly alter the *Hunger Games* narrative. Georgia said, “After Cato died, we had to ask ourselves: Can he come back to life? Can someone else play Cato? What does that mean for our game?” They decided to imagine that the Capitol had a secret facility that could bring people back to life, thereby allowing characters like Cato to re-enter the game. At the same time, they agreed to allow new players to enter the game through recently resurrected characters.

As a game designer and moderator, Georgia learned how rules shaped players’ expectations and practices. At the same time, she slowly grew frustrated with the “lack of common courtesy and common sense” that some players displayed. While this included minor disagreements and social politics, it also involved the ways in which players portrayed *Hunger Games* characters. For Georgia, fidelity was paramount, “It’s really important to me to stay true to my character, and I wrote to Suzanne Collins’ world. But others used the game as a way to play out silly fantasies, like having Katniss fall in love with a Career tribute.” Consequently, the Available Design of game rules was just as important as the Available Designs of literary elements, including character development. Due to growing frustrations, Georgia and her fellow moderators decided to end *The Hunger Games Role Play*, but to continue playing their individual characters through separate Tumblr accounts. This offered Georgia the chance to continue to explore the *Hunger Games* world, but to do so on her own terms.

J. S. CURWOOD

Role-Playing as Designing

Within a framework of Multiliteracies, role-playing can be seen as Designing. When Georgia engages in role-play, she transforms available resources and makes choices about her mode of communication. In order to participate in role playing games, Georgia needed to have an in-depth knowledge of the setting and characters within Panem as well as the history and purpose of the Hunger Games. At the same time, her interaction with other fans within the affinity space meant that they could readily ask questions and that they would likely correct any of her misconceptions. The role-playing game gave Georgia her first opportunity to embody characters from *The Hunger Games*. To do so, she had to understand each character's motivations and interactions with others within the story. But she also needed to consider how *Hunger Games* author Suzanne Collins used descriptive language and dialogue to advance the plot. Rather than being a passive reader of *The Hunger Games*, Georgia's role-playing offered her the chance to draw on Available Designs. It also allowed her to create three separate Tumblrs and explore the characters of Clove, Cinna, and Cashmere through the process of Designing.

Role-playing games were instrumental in shaping Georgia's experience as a Designer and developing her craft as a writer. Prior to reading *The Hunger Games* or joining Tumblr, she was already passionate about writing, thinking, pondering, and exploring the world around her. But Panem was something else entirely, and as Georgia put it, "You just want to act out what you love. Role playing lets me immerse myself in a new world and hone my skills as a writer." However, not all of Georgia's writing development took place online or in a public space. With each of her characters, she wrote short stories that explored key moments in their lives, and to "imagine bits and pieces from their pasts." While Georgia role-played three different characters, the one that she invested the most time and effort in was Clove.

Clove is a minor character in the *Hunger Games* novels, and Georgia was fascinated by her - a beautiful, strong, and sadistic Career tribute. Clove hated Katniss and murdered young Rue; despite her slight frame, she was skilled in the use of knives and reveled in psychological warfare. Georgia initially chose to role-play Clove for one simple reason: "Careers are bad ass." But through exploring Clove's character in privately-written, third-person stories and publicly-shared, first-person role plays, Georgia gained new insight into Clove's character. As she describes, "I found new meaning through my writing." As a result, Georgia engaged in Designing both outside of and within the role-playing game. This is evident in some of the short stories that Georgia wrote as part of her character development process. For instance, "Julius" explores how Clove's childhood may have contributed to her violent nature. The story begins:

Georgia's Character Development Story

"What does he look like to you?"

"It looks like a dog."

“He, Clove. He. Who does he remind you of?”

Clove wrinkled her nose as she glared fixedly at the animal before her; sleek and bony, with large grey eyes that almost resembled her own. “It’s got a long face,” she finally declared. “Like Julius, from training.”

Her father, a wise young man with impeccable posture, smiled down at her. “Then Julius is what we’ll call him.”

“So it’s ours?”

“He. He is yours.”

“Oh... Why?”

He smiled that same knowing smile; the one he wore when craned over the drawing table, or when he dressed her for the reaping and told her that one day, Clove, your name will be in that bowl. “You have a lot to learn from Julius.”

And without much further discussion, the dog was assimilated into the house.

Georgia continues her story, sharing that the bond between Clove and Julius developed over the years. She writes, “Their partnership was unspoken, fluid, and perfect. Clove learned to trust her dog as her companion and her hunting partner, and, some day presumably around her sixth birthday, as her friend.” But as a Career tribute, she had to harden herself to such friendships. One day, her father ordered ten-year-old Clove to assemble her knives. As the realization of her father’s words hit Clove, Georgia continued Clove’s story:

Georgia’s Character Development Story

It took all of Clove's effort to stand; she tucked her knives into her palm and turned to face her father and her dog, who surveyed her with those round, dark eyes. They were calm and wise, as if he knew that he had been raised for the slaughter. That same calmness dwelled in her father's eyes as he released the dog and stepped aside to give his daughter a clear shot.

Her hands shook violently as she raised her knife.

“Dad, I can’t,” she said weakly. “I can’t hurt him.”

“It, Clove. It.”

She shook her head. “He’s just a dog!”

“Exactly!” Clove's father glowered at her, a fire striking in his features with scorched her. It was debilitating. “A dog is nothing compared to a person. How do you expect to kill anyone at the bloodbath if...”

“You made me name him!”

J. S. CURWOOD

“People have names too, Clove! But a name doesn't matter to a corpse. Now throw the knife, or so help me you'll be stitching your own wounds tonight.”

Georgia's story doesn't end here, with the murder. Instead, she considers what else may have happened to Clove. After killing Julius, Clove tried to put the day's events out of her mind. The next day, she found a note from her father, expressing his pride in her. The note was accompanied by a gift. Georgia writes:

In it was a pair of soft leather gloves, inside lined with sleek, dark fur. Julius' fur. Clove put them on, grateful for the warmth they provided, as she endeavored to seek out her father to give him her thanks.

Outside of the role-playing game, Georgia's short stories, such as this one, were critical in advancing her knowledge of the world of Panem and the characters within it. Moreover, her out-of-game writing helps her with her in-game role-playing and Designing. Georgia's motivation with these stories was not to share her work with a public audience; rather, it was to develop her craft.

Sharing the Redesigned Through Tumblr

While Georgia's main role-playing character was Clove, she also role-played Cinna and Cashmere. By role-playing all three characters on Tumblr, Georgia made *The Redesigned*, or the transformed Available Designs, available online. Georgia was drawn to Cinna, an important character throughout the trilogy, and Cashmere, a minor character in *Catching Fire*, and wanted to explore them more within the context of the role-playing game. While both characters hail from the Capitol, the similarities end there. Cinna is a brilliant stylist and a double agent who plots a revolution. Cashmere is a career tribute and previous victor of the Hunger Games. By role-playing these characters, Georgia was able to delve into their histories, their motivations, and their voices. This can be seen in their Tumblr introductions and design (Figure 1), which are part of *The Redesigned*. Cinna's introduction focuses on his role as a stylist; in her posts, Georgia shared some of her artistic interpretations of Cinna's designs. As Cinna, Georgia's writing is descriptive and poetic; she talks of practical beauty, obscure materials, and raging fires. In contrast, Georgia takes on an entirely different voice as Cashmere; she is confrontational, blunt, and haughty. A minor character in one novel, Georgia's writing as Cashmere allows her more room for exploration and interpretation.

Tumblr promoted Georgia's creative writing skills. Writing in the omniscient third person, she focused on her characters' dialogue with others and her description of their surroundings, actions, and interactions. Role-playing demanded that Georgia be responsive to how others within the game advanced the storyline. For instance, Cinna and Katniss engaged in a lengthy exchange within the game. When another role-player introduced the idea that Katniss felt regret at her perceived weakness and poor decisions, Georgia-as-Cinna immediately responded,



Figure 1. Screenshot from Cashmere's Tumblr.

“You made the decisions that needed to be made. War is war; it is unfortunate that we had to resort to war to reach equality, but it was necessary. And look at all the good work you’ve done, and all the lives you’ll save, the people who’ve liberated; you always were brave. The bravest woman I have ever known. You have never needed me to be brave.” His words were earnest, heartfelt, things that he had always been reluctant to put into words. The line of his stitches and the stroke of his pencil spoke volumes more than his words; but they were all he had, here and now. Katniss needed to understand how she had changed the world.

While Georgia’s literary knowledge fostered her engagement in the role-playing game, Tumblr’s interactive design encouraged her interaction with others and offered her an eager audience for her creative work.

As a digital tool, Tumblr offers writers a powerful opportunity to share their Redesigns with an authentic audience. According to Georgia, “As a writer, I had the chance to work with other writers in tandem. Many of them are really talented, and I need to respond quickly and in character.” By role-playing different *Hunger Games* characters, Georgia was challenged to embody each character’s unique voice

J. S. CURWOOD

and reflect their beliefs and perspectives. While she primarily used Tumblr for her creative writing, Georgia also used it as a way to share her artwork and others' creative work (see Figure 2). In this illustration, Georgia imagined how Cinna would see Katniss; she shared it on Tumblr with the caption, "A concept that came alive on the girl before it could be committed to paper. Katniss Everdeen's hair." Not only does Tumblr provide a collaborative and multimodal platform for fans like Georgia to share their creative work, it also offers a way for them to connect to the wider affinity space and fans across the world.



Figure 2. Illustration from Cinna's Tumblr.

DISCUSSION

Unlike classrooms, most affinity spaces distribute leadership opportunities across many individuals, texts, and tools (Gomez, Schieble, Curwood, & Hassett, 2010). For students who are disengaged with school or resent the prescribed nature of their literary experiences in English classes, online role-playing games offer a powerful way for them to demonstrate their leadership, develop their literacy skills, and engage in self-directed learning. Kalantzis and Cope (2000) suggested that a Multiliteracies pedagogy can shape curriculum design and content instruction. They proposed four related elements: Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice. Situated Practice is firmly grounded in students'

interests and lived experience, thus allowing space for agency and identity to enter into the classroom. To begin, teachers can use surveys and class discussions to uncover students' interests. By incorporating popular culture, for instance, into the classroom, students can engage in Situated Practice.

Overt Instruction makes the underlying concepts and theories of learning that shape curricular content explicit. The aim of Overt Instruction is for students to engage in conscious awareness and control over what is being learned. Rather than using literature in a decontextualized way to teach about literary elements, teachers can ask students to assume the role of a specific character. While role-playing games can take place online, they can also readily take place in the classroom in both small and large group settings. Kalantzis and Cope (2000) explained that a defining feature of Overt Instruction is the use of metalanguages, including those that define the form, content, and function of discourses in practice. Critical Framing, in turn, situates knowledge within a relevant context and fosters reflective learning practices. For secondary English teachers, this means sharing with students how literature is fundamentally positioned in social, cultural, and historical contexts. *The Hunger Games*, for example, draws on myths, symbols, military histories, and classic works of literature. Finally, Transformed Practice emphasizes the importance of applying knowledge, skills, and tools in novel situations.

Georgia's out-of-school engagement in the *Hunger Games* affinity space, role-playing games, and Multiliteracies positively impacted her in-school writing. This was due, in part, to her Senior English teacher who encouraged her emotional and analytical responses to literature. This led to Georgia writing an essay, inspired by *The Hunger Games*, which won a school prize. In it, she made clear intertextual connections,

A close analysis of the socio-political climate of Panem has led me to take under serious consideration the alleged crimes of the Capitol, and to wonder whether the result of Katniss' defiance was really due. Is the Capitol truly as evil as we think it is – or is it just another step in evolution?

For Georgia, role-playing and writing allowed her to experience *flow*. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1996), the context and task are vital to achieving flow, whereby a person is fully immersed in and highly motivated by an enjoyable activity. While creative writing can often be a challenging activity, an online role-playing game offered her a clear set of goals, measurable progress, and immediate feedback. Reflecting on her experiences, Georgia explained, "There's a real skill to it. It's the sport of kings on the Internet."

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J. S. CURWOOD

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