Power Up: Exploring Gaming in LIS Curricula

Aaron J. Elkins[1][0000-0001-6237-118X] and Jonathan M. Hollister[2][0000-0001-5383-7347]

[1] Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX 76204, USA
[2] Pusan National University, Busan, 46278, Republic of Korea
aelkins3@twu.edu
hollisterjm@pusan.ac.kr

Abstract. Given their educational potential, increasing accessibility, and growing, diverse user base, games are fast becoming integral parts of library collections and programming. Previous research has found that few ALA-accredited programs offer courses specifically on gaming in libraries, potentially leaving pre-service librarians unprepared to implement games in their libraries. This research study will survey LIS educators to identify factors that promote or inhibit the inclusion or exclusion of content related to games and gaming in their courses and curricula. The findings will be used to provide recommendations for curricula and best practices to better prepare LIS educators and, ultimately, pre-service librarians to engage with games and other new interactive media as part of the transforming universe of LIS education.

Keywords: Curriculum, Pedagogy, Andragogy, Gaming, Surveys

1 Introduction

Research has shown that games help players develop useful skills and knowledge, such as digital literacy, problem-solving, and pro-social and other skills needed for success and social progress in the 21st Century. Online games create informal and organic environments in which play supports incidental learning of 21st Century skills [1]. Players in online games work collaboratively, think scientifically to develop strategies and theories, and develop tools to facilitate play [2]. Steinkuehler [3] observed a wide variety of literacy practices in how players teach each other, tell stories, and use data to solve problems. Information literacy skills are required for success in online games because of the large amount of information needed for effective play [4]. Online games have tremendous potential for teaching media literacy skills, because the mix of learning and play create an environment where learners can engage in the creation and analysis of messages, and these skills may be transferred to the real-world [5].

Libraries in the United States have supported gaming since the mid-19th Century and around 77% of public libraries currently support gaming of some kind; this support has continued to grow with digital recreational games [6-7]. Children who are socioeconomically disadvantaged are falling behind in 21st Century skills because they do not have a comparable level of access to digital media that more advantaged children have; libraries should provide access to digital media and facilitate the mentoring necessary

for these children to fully engage with these literacies [8]. Learners develop a sense of cognitive self-efficacy in formal and informal environments; school librarians can capitalize on the inquiry strategies and skills learners are developing in informal learning environments like games and use those abilities to develop learners' information literacy skills [9]; gaming and technology also promote a lifelong love of learning and reading [10].

2 Problem Statement and Research Questions

Andragogy, or adult learning theory, describes how adult learners are more interested in a topic when they perceive it to be relevant to their interests or when they understand the importance of learning about a particular topic [11]. When pre-service librarians were exposed to the educational potential of games of all sorts during coursework focused on gaming, they viewed gaming as a valuable part of the library and curriculum [12]. Yet, a previous study of gaming-related curriculum at ALA-accredited programs showed that there were not many courses dedicated to gaming offered in LIS curricula: only three ALA-accredited institutions offered course content explicitly related to gaming [13]. As for the content offered, there was one special topics course on developing programs with games in libraries; one course regarding the consumption of games and other media; three courses on game design, with one focused on serious games and games for learning in particular; and one course that focused on narrative structures and included games and interactive digital media as venues for exploring those narratives. Three other courses referred to game related content, (specifically, game-based approaches, games with a purpose, and game-based learning), but it was unclear how gaming was being addressed in the courses. Of the nine courses offering gaming-related content, seven were special topics courses. While content related to gaming was not completely absent, neither was it well represented.

Higher education programs need to overcome the negative notions of games, demonstrate their educational value, and show future teachers how to gain support from their administrations, among other strategies, in order for teachers to integrate games into their classrooms [14]. As such, the researchers wonder why, given the popularity of games and gaming in libraries, there are seemingly so few LIS courses dedicated to the topic, how else gaming might be present in LIS curricula, and what factors may promote or inhibit the inclusion of gaming. The research questions for this study are:

1. How do ALA-accredited Library and Information Science (LIS) programs in the United States address gaming in their curricula?
    a) What factors promote the inclusion of games in LIS curricula?
    b) What factors inhibit the inclusion of games in LIS curricula?

3 Research Method

To better identify factors that promote or inhibit the inclusion of games in LIS curricula, this research study seeks insights from LIS educators regarding their inclusion or exclusion of content related to gaming in their courses and other potential barriers to updating LIS curricula. Survey questions will explore participants' preferences and experience levels with games as part of their personal and professional lives as well as ask about their own experiences with or without games as LIS students. Additionally, for participants who have not incorporated gaming in their curricula, we ask about potential barriers, such as lack of experience, funding, or student demand or perceived interest, as well as what types of resources might be helpful should they choose to consider building content about gaming into their courses and curricula.

This study will use an online survey with a purposive sample of LIS educators from ALA-accredited programs. In the context of this study, LIS educators include any individuals employed at ALA-accredited programs who provided graduate level instruction, including teaching assistants, teaching faculty, adjunct faculty, tenure-track, and tenured faculty. Additionally, the survey is equipped to compare iSchools and more traditional LIS schools to explore any potential epistemological and/or pedagogical/andragogical differences between the two around the topic of gaming in libraries.

Following pre-testing, IRB-approval, and any subsequently approved modifications, the survey will be distributed via appropriate professional and academic listservs and social media outlets, such as the JESSE and Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) listservs and the Games & Gaming Round Table (GameRT) of the American Library Association.

Survey participants will be incentivized with a random lottery for an Amazon gift card. Participants will be asked to optionally share any syllabi, assignment descriptions, or related curricular materials; contact information from those wishing to share materials or participate in the follow-up interviews will be collected using a linked survey. Consenting participants will be solicited for follow-up interviews for the third phase of the research project; the interview questions will be informed by issues and trends emerging from the survey responses.

4 Limitations

Due to the narrow scope of ALA-accredited programs, survey design, and the potential for low response rates and small sample size, the findings may not be generalizable. However, inter-coder reliability testing will be used to ensure the reliability of the findings. Additionally, the results of this survey will be compared with the findings of a concurrent study to be conducted on LIS programs in South Korea, where gaming and e-sports are considered a national pastime [15].

5 Next Steps

This poster reports on the research methodology and preliminary findings of the second phase of an ongoing study. The surveys will be distributed during the 2017/2018 winter season. Survey responses will be analyzed and preliminary findings will be presented at the 2018 conference. Time-permitting, this will include any interview findings as well. The findings will be used to provide recommendations for curricula and best practices to better prepare LIS educators and, ultimately, pre-service librarians to engage with digital and analog games and other new interactive media as part of the expanding and evolving universe of LIS education.

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