Divergent Design Competence in the RPG Maker Community
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Abstract
The RPG Maker VX Community site provides its more than 40,000 members a space to collaboratively critique and design PC role-playing games. This poster presents preliminary results from a qualitative study of this community. Analysis of interviews and discussions on the RPG Maker site, combined with information gathered through a survey suggest that the RPG Maker Community is scaffolding young game enthusiasts into a deeper understanding of game design and allied digital art perspectives. The study proposes a model for how members join, advance, and develop new literacy competencies through participation in the community.

Conceptual Context
Online affinity communities are increasingly being explored as places where young people are acquiring new literacies (Gee, 2004). Through extensive ethnographic fieldwork into others (2010) found young people “gazing out” in web based affinity communities where individuals are “learning to navigate esoteric domains of knowledge and practice, and participating in communities that traffic in these forms of expertise” (p. 28). Studies of Flickr (Davies, 2006), fan fiction sites (Black, 2005), and Civilization fan-sites (Squire & Giovannetti, 2008) support the idea that young people are acquiring critical new literacy skills in these communities.

The communal and cooperative nature of these informal learning communities suggests that they be understood as communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991). Community members develop competence and scope their skills toward mastery through interaction and engagement, and encourage from expert community members. The RPG Maker community offers a space to further examine these kinds of interest and affinity driven spaces.

Research Design
This poster presents part of a larger multi-method study of the RPG Maker Community. The larger study uses a randomized survey of participants to chart general demographic information and involvement in the community, in-depth interviews with a purposeful sample of ten community members to document participant reactions and understand, and analysis of forum discussions and rules posted on the community site to examine the actual interactions of community participants. This poster reports preliminary results from these three data sets, focusing primarily on articulating a model of community engagement and the competencies community members develop.

Central Questions
1. Who is involved in the community?
2. What is the nature and extent of their involvement?
3. What kinds of skills and knowledge participants are developing through their involvement?
4. How do participants find, join and advance within the community?

Conclusions
Analysis of the interviews and discussions on the RPG Maker site, combined with information gathered through a survey suggest that the RPG Maker Community is scaffolding game enthusiasts into a deeper understanding of game design and art and allied art and design perspectives. This work supports the following theory for engagement in the community. Members join to gain access to the resources, character sprites, maps, scripts, and other artwork. Some then engage in a cycle of critical dialog with other community members. The evidence suggests that those who persist in engaging in this digital develop a range of critical competencies 21st century skills and new literacies in art and design.

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References