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# Games as Information Literacy Tools:

## An Odyssey

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As librarians strive to make their sessions more memorable, applicable, and interactive, many experts have proffered a variety of tools and methods, including think/pair/share method, Second Life, and games to teach. About two years ago I began exploring the possibility of incorporating a game into teaching information literacy skills at B. Thomas Golisano Library. In preparation for a presentation at ACL, I created a wiki on *WetPaint*, <http://gamespedagogy.wetpaint.com>, incorporating a wide range of articles, games, and software. However, after a presentation which focused on the issues about games and Information Literacy at ACL, the next step was to set up some research with a possible game at Roberts Wesleyan College.

What has followed has been a mix of frustration and excitement as we have endeavored to bring this effort to fruition by developing an orientation style quiz/game. Since we are still tweaking our strategy for that game and haven't performed enough assessment, an article about that particular effort will have to wait. And yet, as I have worked with games, I have come to the following conclusions which I hope will assist you in determining if you want to add this method to your instruction. This article will focus on three benefits and four problems related to games as educational tool.

### Benefits

1. The use of games in learning is not a fad. The literature shows games in use from corporations to preschool. I noticed that while students usually respond to their use with either excitement or disgust, most will at least attempt the game which can be more valuable given that many of the activities we do for students are viewed as too juvenile. It is not viewed as makework as some library assignments. In addition, using a challenge provides a sense of cohesion in a collaborative venue not usually found. One faculty member thanked me for the challenge we did with two classes as they had been looking for

a way to have the students feel like they belonged in a group. Games can do this quite easily while still providing some instruction.

2. The interactive nature of games automatically provides good interactions student to student and student to teacher. As I worked through games for this research, I discovered that I sought information from other students about solving small problems in the game. There seemed to be less self-consciousness about not knowing something as might be when confronted with a topic in a traditional class. Everyone seemed to work more together to solve the problem rather than judge each other. If information literacy concepts and skills could be approached this way as has been tried in various library games already, the adoption of the skills might be easier. This is an area where research is still developing.
3. A good game encourages repetition of skills as well as adding new skills and tasks as the player takes on increasing challenges. Reporting on the National Summit of Educational Games, Jenny Levine (2007) commented: "Games offer attributes important for learning – clear goals, lessons that can be practiced repeatedly until mastered, monitoring learning progress, and adjusting instruction to learner level of mastery, closing the gap between what is learned and its use, motivation that encourages time on task, personalization of learning, and infinite patience"

### Problems

1. The restrictive nature of the academic calendar and schedule is prohibitive to developing a good time-frame for games in a class. Few complex games readily fit within 40-50 minute or even 90 minutes of one class schedule. Indeed the nature of a game may mean students should delve into it for several hours at one sitting. Academic traditional instruction

will have to significantly change if games are to be used in greater measure. Most of the research I read identified the time constraints of education as the most problematic ( Egenfeldt,2004, p. 18). Academic faculty often have their class sessions so packed with material that adding a new untried format – even if valuable – is next to impossible.

2. Creating a game from scratch is labor and time intensive, but a ready-made game may not be an easy fit. Even using PowerPoint games requires hours of planning. The main reason I haven't written a more scholarly article is that as noted earlier the game we decided to create is still unfinished and more assessment is needed. The tweaking to add an e-mail application has not been finished after 6 months for many reasons.
3. Administrators and other teachers may not see creating a collection of games as worthy of instructional budgets. Many adults have a built-in bias against games as edutainment. (Corti, *Games-Based Learning* 2006, Kirriemuir & McFarlane, *Games and Learning*, 2004, Buckingham, *Beyond Technology* 2005)
4. Assessment is problematic, and I have not found research showing that the complex critical thinking skills have transferred from the game to other Information Literacy pursuits.

## Some Conclusions

1. Games are part of the array of learning tools at the library instructor's use. If you are familiar with games and their use in education, you can provide some advice to other faculty as well as save time choosing the best methodology for a session. You may avoid the fate of students saying "I've heard this instruction before."
2. Business, health science, and education have many appropriate games and research. Don't be afraid to try games which are not library oriented per se. In addition, many commercial games, such as *Professor Layton* series, have critical thinking skills embedded in a story line

attractive to many age levels. As a teacher, you should be able to find ways to transfer those skills to other problems.

3. Consider developing a collection of popular games such as Nintendo DS or Nintendo Wii games for students and faculty to borrow or rent. While there is a wide array of platforms for games, these two seem to lend themselves to library oriented instruction.
4. A significant amount of current research on games and learning exists for anyone interested in pursuing more background reading. For instance, Alice Mitchell and Carol Savil Smith ( 2004) produced a 93 page literature review about research in computers. Since that year, more research has been published. I am attempting to collate this material on my wiki. This research allows those interested in the possibility of using games to discover best practices.

These problems and advantages present challenges in using games and a temptation to abandon the whole pursuit, but games are here to stay and the wise instructor/librarian can utilize them even if they are not a panacea. ☙

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