Reader, Writer, Gamer:
Designing Affinity Spaces to Support Student Literacy Achievement

The Games+Learning+Society 9.0 Conference begins Tuesday, June 11, 2013 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Memorial Union with the Educators Symposium programming featuring innovation, inquiry, and imagination in games-based learning. The GLS Educators Symposium promotes professional development opportunities to celebrate and deepen educators' use of games in various educational settings, and foster collaboration among teachers, designers, researchers and others throughout the elementary to higher education continuum.

For a second year, the GLS Educators Symposium is excited to offer participants day-long specialized professional development opportunities. GLSES attendees accepted to participate in a specialized PD track, such as the workshop outlined below, will learn from an experienced facilitation team and work alongside a small group of colleagues throughout the entire GLSES event. After attending the morning keynote, participants in specialized PD tracks will meet from 10:00 AM to 4:30 PM (sharing the same lunch hour as general GLSES attendees).

General questions about GLSES and this year's specialized professional development tracks may be directed to GLSES Chair Remi Holden at remi.holden@gmail.com. Specific questions about the Reader, Writer, Gamer workshop may be sent to Jen Scott Curwood at jenscottcurwood@gmail.com.

Why Reading, Writing, and Gaming?
Research by the Pew Internet and American Life Project indicates that 80% of adolescents use online social network sites, 38% share original creative work online, and 21% remix their own transformative works, inspired by others' words and images. As a result of greater accessibility and affordability of Internet-connected devices, young people are increasingly using online spaces to collaborate and communicate. Moreover, digitally mediated practices like playing videogames, constructing game guides, writing fan fiction, remixing videos, playing videogames, modifying wikis, and creating podcasts are seen as *literacy practices.* Rather than being static, linear, individually created, and print-based, these texts are fluid, dynamic, nonlinear, and collaboratively constructed.

In order to understand the culture of the online, offline, and blended spheres that adolescents inhabit, this workshop builds on the concept of affinity spaces. According to James Paul Gee (2004), affinity spaces are sites of informal learning that often spread across many sites including face-to-face meetings, message boards, blogs, and websites. Affinity spaces offer multiple interest-driven trajectories, opportunities to learn with others, and paths toward becoming a participant (Squire, 2011). In our recent work (Lammers, Curwood, & Magnifico, 2012), we proposed that an update to Gee's initial categorization of online affinity spaces was necessary, and we argued 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.

As researchers, teacher educators, and former classroom teachers, we draw on our ethnographic research of adolescent literacies in online and blended affinity spaces, including ones associated with *The Hunger Games* novels, *The Sims* videogames, and the *Figment* writing community. We suggest that online affinity spaces motivate young adults to read and write because they offer multiple modes of representation, diverse pathways to participation, and authentic audiences. In addition to the literacy learning potential outside of school, we also believe that these spaces can offer youth new purposes, modes, and tools for their school-based learning.

Overview of Workshop
In this workshop, we invite teachers, librarians/media specialists, technology coordinators, and administrators to explore how affinity spaces can foster student learning in middle school and high school. Specifically, we focus on how affinity spaces can be used to support literacy learning across the secondary curriculum and address the Common Core State Standards. Prior to the Games, Learning, and Society Educator Symposium, workshop participants will be asked to read selected material on literacy, affinity spaces, and the Common Core State Standards, as well as to join and introduce themselves on the workshop Ning. The following is an outline of the schedule for this day-long workshop:

10:00 to 12:15 pm
Introduction
Framing discussion and presentation on affinity spaces
Breakout groups to explore specific affinity spaces

12:15 to 1:45 pm
Expo and lunch

1:45 to 4:15 pm
Connecting affinity spaces to the Common Core and classroom practice
Introduction to Ning workshop community
Action research planning

4:15 to 4:30 pm
Workshop evaluation

Learning Objectives
This workshop has three primary objectives: 1) Enhance participants' understanding of literacy across the curriculum, drawing on situated and sociocultural perspectives on literacy; 2) Investigate how affinity spaces can support content area literacy and implementation of the Common Core State Standards; 3) Cultivate a professional learning community of secondary educators and university-based researchers who are interested in designing online affinity spaces, conducting action research, and sharing resources within the education community.

Technical Needs
In this workshop, participants will need their own laptop or tablet, with wifi access. Workshop facilitators will need a screen and projector. To organize and disseminate materials, this workshop will use a Ning. Not only will this online platform embody many features of an online affinity space, but it will encourage participants to engage with the ideas and each other before, during, and after the workshop.

Workshop Facilitators
[Jen Scott Curwood](#) is a lecturer in secondary English and media studies at the University of Sydney in Australia. Her research focuses on adolescent literacy, technology, and teacher professional development, and her recent work has appeared in the *International Journal of Learning and Media*, *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy,* and *E-Learning and Digital Media*. Jen is a former middle school language arts teacher and high school English teacher who completed her Ph.D. at the University of Wisconsin. Email: js.curwood@sydney.edu.au

[Jayne C. Lammers](#) is an assistant professor at the University of Rochester's Warner School of Education, where she directs the secondary English teacher preparation program. Jayne studies adolescents' literacy learning, especially in online and game-based environments, with the goal of shaping classroom practice for 21st century learning. She conducts her research in *The Sims* affinity space, in FanFiction.net, and in schools. Jayne is a former middle and high school English teacher who completed her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction at Arizona State University. Email: jlammers@warner.rochester.edu

[Alecia Magnifico](#) is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. Her research focuses on adolescent writing and literacies, technologies, and relationships among young writers' literacy learning and their communication with readers and audience members. She has investigated such topics in classrooms, extracurricular writing spaces, and online affinity spaces. Alecia is a former middle and high school English and language arts teacher who completed her Ph.D. in Learning Sciences at the University of Wisconsin. Email: aleciam@gmail.com

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[Applications are online](#) and due by 15 March 2013. Participants will be notified of acceptance within two weeks.