

Game of the Moment: Constructed Game Playing in Young Children's Classroom

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Adopting the perspective that games are social practices and focusing on how participants “actively collaborate in constructing the game of the moment” (e.g., Goodwin, 1995), this study investigates game playing in a first-grade classroom. The phrase “the game of the moment” highlights the fluid and co-constructed nature of game playing that results in different forms of the game being constructed by different users in different settings. I am interested in the following questions: What is game playing intended by design and by the teacher's rules? What kinds of “game of the moment” are constructed? How do participants construct these games of the moment?

This year-long study was conducted in a first-grade classroom at a public school located in a Midwestern town. I applied interaction analysis (Jordan & Henderson, 1995) and the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in data collection and analysis. Videotaping, field notes, interviews, and artifacts were the main data sources. Videotapes were annotated and classified in accordance with interaction analysis procedures. The grounded theory approach was then applied to create emergent theories and schemes to deal with the annotated video. The individual interviews with the students and the teacher were also annotated and analyzed according to grounded theory. Field notes were used to triangulate emerging theories about the data and validate the final models.

Based on the single-user-oriented computer design and the teacher's rules, the intended practice at the classroom computer should have appeared: there was only one computer with two students who had legitimate turns and who could sit in the two chairs in front of the computer. According to teacher's rules, the student in the left seat was designated as the official player, while the student on the right was supposed to be watching. Despite the intended use of the computer, a variety of forms of the game of the moment emerged. (1) Playing a single-user game as a group became the actual practice around the computer. (2) To reach their own goals of playing the game and having fun with their peers, the students streamlined their turn-taking system through social negotiation and by transforming the meaning of the two computer chairs and the space on either side. (3) The whole group evolved as a unit of knowledge holders with each member learning and improving their skills. Everyone contributed to the common goal of the group playing the game to the highest possible level.

The variety of games of the moment can be seen as the results of negotiation between children's goals and the affordances of the game and the teacher's rules. The social goals and game playing goals were formed and continued to evolve in the process of playing at the computer. In addition, these goals were affected by the affordances of the environment and by the teacher's rules, yet at the same time these goals motivated the children to take different actions to achieve their goals. They actively negotiated their social practice to achieve their game playing goal and generated different forms of games of the moment.

This study demonstrates the importance of analyzing the interaction between the tool and the sociocultural context. The analysis of the process in which the games of the moments are negotiated and co-constructed offers insights for the adaptation of educational technology in classrooms. This study also has potential implications for game and computer designers. A computer design that allows multiple input devices would be helpful for young children's collaboration. It is also important for software designers to build social scaffolding into the program and have it become technical scaffolding.

References

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