Scripting Their Stories:
Parents' Experiences with Their Adolescents and Video Games

by

Leanna Madill
Bachelor of Arts, University of Victoria, 1997
Master of Education, University of Victoria, 2005

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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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This study explores the experiences of parents around video games and their adolescent children. Nine parents participated in individual and focus group interviews which asked them to reflect and consider their interactions, opinions, and beliefs about video games and their adolescent children who are gamers. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis the data revealed themes of power, fear, and judgment. The analysis is best represented by ethnodramatic scripts. These scripts depict parents' concerns of video games, perceptions of their adolescent children, their beliefs about parenting, and the influence of societal messages. The complexities and sometimes contradictions available in the scripts suggest that more conversations are necessary about how parenting, video games, and gamers intersect so that many of the fears can be overcome and more critical approaches can be adopted.

Key words: Video games, parents, adolescents, ethnodrama, critical discourse analysis, violence

Table of Contents

List of Figures

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Dedication

To my husband Steve and my mom Donna who convinced me I could do it.

Thanks for believing.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In only three decades video games have become an integral medium in the lives of many young people. Parents are on the forefront as observers or participants of adolescents' gaming experiences and have an important opportunity of guiding youth in their interactions with video games. At what point are parents asked, or given time or space, to talk about the experiences their children have had with video games and the effect this has had on or with the parents? Why are we not hearing from parents? What benefits exist for the experiences of parents to be heard?

The questions for this research emerged from examining adolescents' video games experiences in private spaces (Sanford & Madill, 2006), in a camp-like setting (Sanford & Madill, 2007) and in a school setting (Sanford & Madill, 2007). Our previous research revealed that our interview conditions allowed adolescents to communicate with us about what they were learning, and express opinions they had about video game content and play; since these were thoughts that were rarely shared, the interview space would often be the first time they had reflected on the negative media comments, fears from their parents, and what they knew about their experiences themselves. I considered how adolescent video game players could be offered more spaces to dialogue about video game play and content; the realization occurred to me that parents are on the forefront of this existing or potential space. Although the experiences of video game players are beginning to be researched increasingly (de Castell & Jenson, 2003; McDougall, 2007; Pelletier, 2006; Taylor, 2003; Taylor, 2006; Thomas & Brown, 2007), I wondered: about parents' experiences with their adolescent children's video game playing? What do the parents experience? What are their perceptions about those experiences? These questions

led me to inquire further about parents' experiences and the central research questions were formed:

Central Research Questions

How do parents perceive video game content and video game play?

What are parents' experiences regarding their adolescent child's video game playing?

What are the parents' perceptions of learning with regard to video games and school?

Background

I was met with many negative comments about video games in the first community video game workshop I led: "I hate video games, but my son loves playing them," "I don't allow video games in my home but my child plays them at his friends' places," "I'm personally worried about video games but my son is starting to ask for them." I was intent, in the face of this hostility, to still teach them all about the potential benefits of video games and how to analyze the video game screen shots, but to no avail. They interrupted me at various times with questions about the potential addictiveness, the effects of violence, the downside produced by lack of time playing outdoors or reading, the proposed possibility of attention deficit disorder behaviours, and isolation. I glimpsed a bleak future in educating parents.

Other negative comments about video games that I have heard from parents and other educators (including a university researcher) included the following statements: "You might as well give your child a cigarette if you are going to bring video games into your house; it's the same thing for their health," a comment made during a talk about active living for preschoolers at a parent meeting, and "My child is so addicted by the

games, he won't even listen to me, so I can't have them in my house; they are just evil things" which was shared by a parent of young children at a preschool parent meeting. These comments stem from a place of assumptions, limited knowledge and experience with video games, and influence by comments made in the public media.

These parents often overlook active video games such as *Dance, Dance Revolution*, *Wii* sport games, or *Rock Band*; often the parents have not recognized the focus and intensity needed in order to be successful at these games. They have not reflected on how similarly the brain or body reacts when playing video games compared to when reading a great novel, or thinking out a strategy in a chess board game; they are also often unaware of other reasons for playing video games, such as gaining social capital, being successful at something that verifies the player's achievements, making social connections through games, or improving literacy abilities needed with technological endeavours. The only positive comment about video games that parents frequently mention is the often-reported, most apparent skill of improved hand-eye coordination.

My reworked video game presentation to parents reflected the understanding that parents have more willingness to learn about video games if they are first able to express their concerns; they then experienced reassurance from research that shows the learning potential involved, and they also experienced relief in the knowledge that they can play an interactive role with their child around setting boundaries, encouraging dialogue, and even playing video games with them.

Purpose

I began this research wanting to know more about parents' experiences around their adolescent children playing video games. Not only were those experiences revealed, but questions and perspectives arose about how parents view the world of their children and how those thoughts and ideas create the world that the parents' see and experience.

To describe the purpose of this research study I share the following story which highlights one experience of an adult and a young gamer and the complexities that surfaced. I was looking after my four-year-old nephew and I needed to keep him occupied for a while. That was my motivation for having him play *Finding Nemo* on the *Game Cube* in another room. A simple puzzle game, the chosen game involved a father fish completing puzzle tasks to then get closer to saving his son; the instructions were visual and oral.

I was guilty of sending him off on his own to play video games, to be babysat by the media giant while I made lunch. Meanwhile he was so excited to be able to play a new game that he kept coming downstairs to tell me what he was doing and to ask for my help. I would go back upstairs with him, watch what was not working for him and would either give him a suggestion or he would pass me the controller and have me complete a section.

Through this process I ended up learning that he was not paying attention to the oral instructions or clues provided within the game. I was also surprised that he would snatch the controller out of my hands. I also realized that he really wanted to end the game and play a new game instead of being challenged by problem solving because he did not understand how to pay attention to the instructions. Each of these aspects enabled

me to guide him: teaching him how to listen or watch for instructions more clearly; suggesting how to share a controller and take turns more appropriately; and sharing with his mom how the 101 games cartridge he has right now is encouraging him to skip around games too easily and not persevere through a challenging part. What became interesting to me, and relevant to this project, was that my experience stemmed out of the stereotypical, often guilt-ridden practice of shuffling a child off to play video games. My guilt stemmed from not paying attention to his learning process, his interests, and his abilities. But once I paid attention, I realized that there were numerous benefits within that scenario; in viewing video games as opportunity rather than a trap or dangerous path, I was able to view the experience differently, rather than accepting the prevalent belief that video games are negative and that my sole responsibility as an adult is to deter my child from using them.

The purpose of this research study was to therefore find out more about what parents' experiences are and what happens for parents as they reflect upon, or pay attention to what is occurring between them and their adolescent children around the use of video games. The focus on parents of adolescents was significant because of the lack of research with parents and this age level of gamers. Another reason for choosing parents of adolescents is because much of my past research has been with adolescent gamers and what their knowledge and knowing is from gaming. The role that these gamers' parents played was not easily accessible. Parents' experiences around video games and their adolescents has been a useful lens through which to view the complexities involved in relationships between parents and their adolescent children.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review considers the research that addresses parents' perceptions of video games, their experiences with video games, and their perceptions of learning with regard to video games. There is limited research about parents' involvement with their children and video games. This lack of research suggests either a lack of interest in parents' views on video games, or that the views of parents are simply negative and therefore unhelpful to video game research; perhaps this lack of research about parents' experiences reflects that researchers feel that exploration of video games and gamers is more critical at this time. In any case, parents' perceptions and experiences with video games has not been well researched.

Video Games

Video games are a phenomenon that began in the 1970s with simple computer screen moving pixels like *Pong* and "the computer upholding the rules of the game" (Juul, 2005). Later these pixels evolved into more cartoon-based graphics but still with simple game features as was evident in a game like *PacMan*. Arcade games, computer games, and then consoles for home media centres emerged and video games moved into the home space in the 1980s. Video gaming is a multi-billion dollar industry today and games offer significantly more sophisticated graphics and play strategies.

In this paper, video games are considered to be any sophisticated, or advanced digital game played either on the computer or console system; parent participants in this research project mostly referenced entertainment-driven, popular video games that are played on the computer, on personal hand-held systems like *Nintendo DS* or a *PSP*, or on home console systems like the *XBox*, *Playstation*, or *Wii*. All of these systems allow

multi-player gaming, resulting in gamers upholding some rules of the game. The development of video games emerged primarily out of the entertainment industry, but educational games and serious games continue to be developed. The main audience for entertainment video games has been boys and men (deCastell & Jenson, 2004); however, there are video games intended for use by a wide range of ages, from toddlers to the elderly.

Video games have not enjoyed a reputable journey into society and they have been referred to as either simply a toy or worse – as addictive demoralizing machines; however, Shaffer, Squire, Halverson, & Gee (2005) suggest that video games are much more sophisticated and meaningful than the generalized, fear-based comments imply:

> Look at video games because they create new social and cultural worlds – worlds that help us learn by integrating thinking, social interaction, and technology, all in service of doing things we care about…we argue here for a particular view of games – and of learning – as activities that are most powerful when they are personally meaningful, experiential, social, and epistemological all at the same time. (p. 105)

In order to consider video games as powerful and thoughtful, perspectives of learning must also shift away from the traditional school learning environment that situates the teachers and texts as primary holders of desirable knowledge. "Gaming's ability to mobilize and sustain a culture that immerses and fully absorbs its participants makes it threatening to many parents and teachers. And in many ways, it is" (deCastell & Jenson, 2004, p. 384).

In his book *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy,* Gee (2003) outlines 36 learning principles that are embedded in video games. He suggests that these teaching approaches and learning principles are guides in how to approach learning beyond video games and into other learning spaces. These learning principles address ways of thinking, communicating, and socializing that are encouraged and supported in video games. Gee's (2003) research of video games has been shared and read widely in the research world, but positive approaches to video games are not as widely spread with the general public.

Parental Perceptions

Parents appear to be situated between frightening and guilt-inducing media reports of doom on the one hand and knowledge of their own child, his/her abilities and potentials on the other. Media reports such as "Virtual Worlds threaten 'values'" (BBC news, 2007); "Violent youth crime rising, statistics show" (Mandel, 2007); "Hooked on games: battling a cyber-addiction" (Rocha, 2006); "New video games sell sex instead of mayhem" (Svensson, 2006) sensationalize video games and highlight the dire state of violence, health related problems, isolation, and addiction reportedly 'caused' by video game play.

Marc Prensky (2006) begins his book for parents of video gamers titled *"Don't Bother Me Mom – I'm Learning!"* by writing:

> "Since pretty much all the information that parents and teachers have to work with is a lot of speculation, conjecture, and overblown rhetoric about the putative negative aspects of these games, plus a few scary images glimpsed over their kid's shoulder, it's no wonder they're in a panic!" (p. xvi)

However, Prensky (2006) wrote his book without doing research about or with parents; he made the leap from what he assumed was limited information that parents have access to about video games and began to inform them about video games and gamers through his book.

Bone (2003) researched from a psychological perspective the practices of eight mothers monitoring video games of their adolescent sons. Seven of the eight mothers noted benefits to their sons from playing video games, such as improved hand-eye coordination, increased memory and concentration, a helpful physical therapy for a disability, and better skills in reading and problem solving. Isolation, addiction, disengagement from reality, and exposure and reactions to violent content were concerns expressed by these same mothers (Bone, 2003).

Drawing on Bone's (2003) research and Prensky's (2006) emphasis on media influences, this section of parental perceptions of video games will address some of the main concerns that parents might perceive as true from what they have heard or can observe from watching their adolescent play video games. The concerns to be addressed are passive viewing of video game content, the lack or disregard of face-to-face social skills, and the disconnect from 'real life.'

Passive Consumption

Media messages about video games suggest that gamers are passive consumers of the content: "Virtual worlds threaten 'values'" (BBC, 2007); "Games of Hate: Racist groups and others with political agendas harness power of video games to promote their views" (Lewis, 2005); "After watching the popularity of video gaming grow into a $9

billion business last year, the U.S. military is launching a video game with an eye toward recruiting" (San Miguel, 2002).

These news articles report concerns of brainwashing potential, manipulating values based on an assumption that games are passively played and that the messages in games go unquestioned or considered by players. The media articles also highlight the violence, sex, and racial stereotypes that are often included in games. Parents will often see evidence of these issues in the video game screen shots that supplement a news article and parents will also see these issues in their adolescent's video games. In order to create fear, media reports imply that gamers will be affected by the content of video games, but there have been no studies to date to prove long term effects (Prensky, 2006). In his book to parents, Prensky (2006) addressed the fear about violence and video games quoted by political leaders and media reports:

> The question of whether playing violent video games is causing any individual child – yours, for example – to become more violent is actually too complex a question for any researchers to decide – at least in the kinds of projects that are currently possible.
>
> Yes, it's easy enough to find studies that show correlations between exposure to violent media and aggressive behaviour. Or experiments that show rises in averages. But could playing violent non-electronic games like football or rugby have the same effect? Highly likely. (p. 17)

Video games continue to be largely misconceived by the general public (Gee, 2003; Jenkins, 2000; Prensky, 2006). McRobbie (1994) clarified how moral panic is

created and sustained: the purpose of enabling moral panic, such as the "problematic practices of video game content and play", is to maintain social control by the elite in society who believe that their privileged, almost sacred culture enables and maintains their hierarchical position and this status quo is corroborated largely through mass media:

> Moral panics in society act as a form of ideological cohesion which draws on a complex language of nostalgia. Instead of seeking to understand the dynamics of social change, and thus encourage people to be in a better, more informed position, the mass media employ a variety of strategies, many of which owe more to the conventions of popular entertainment than to those of analysis or critique. Pearson shows how the recurrent representation in the popular press over the last hundred years, of rowdy youth as animalistic and subhuman, paves the way for a more coercive state apparatus and harsher sentencing policies. (p. 206)

Like most new forms of media, the general content of video games is not aimed at a collective or widespread society and is especially not aimed at people in societal power positions, such as politicians, doctors, lawyers, business owners, etc. Often new media is initially created in order to provide voices and spaces for the more marginalized groups in society. Some examples of these media include weblogs, fan sites, MySpace, e-zines, and video games.

On the other hand, research has revealed that gamers are not passively consuming video games content. Instead, there is evidence that gamers are thinking critically about games. Squire (2003) argued that video games are fertile spaces in and around video games in which to practice critical thinking because "children are not just passive consumers of popular culture, but they reappropriate its symbols and forms and integrate

it into their own play, as well" (p. 9). Video games are non-linear, offer choices to the player, and have the potential to reflect complexity of issues (Gee, 2003; Johnson, 2005; Shaffer, 2006; Squire, 2003). Lemke (2002) is hopeful about the possibilities that new modalities like video games are able to offer, i.e., multiple voices and perspectives, and ways of disrupting hegemonic language by incorporating sounds and images. Lemke (2002) particularly heralds the meaning-making process of these new mediums in which readers are encouraged to produce their own interpretations distinct from the author and author's intentions.

In an age of burgeoning technologies and multi-modal representations and communication the definition and understanding of literacy has expanded (Kress, 2003; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; New London Group, 1996) to include reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and representing across the curriculum. Video games are therefore understood to be a powerful and meaningful literacy text within this broadened view of literacy. In the case of video games, the literate person is able to function using the skills to navigate through the text (Green, 1997). The literate person understands the signs and symbols of the game well enough to communicate within the context of the text. Signs such as graphs, angles, colors, music, symbols, language, actions, gestures, movements, and artifacts are also apparent in other screen-based texts as well, such as websites, weblogs, podcasts, and social networking sites (Gee, 2003). Humans have been using symbols and images for eons to convey meaning and tell their stories; the difference today is that instead of a cave wall or scrolls, the stories are being written in virtual space. In order to use the medium of virtual space effectively, the grammatical, spatial, and representational options need to be understood. Adolescent gamers are

engaging in these kinds of challenging and sophisticated literacies which requires them to be active participants and not passive consumers (Gee, 2003).

So much of video game learning involves a social dynamic. Part of what Gee (2003) classifies as active learning depends on forming new affiliations during the learning process. He argues that learning a new semiotic domain requires commitment to the culture and an assurance of acceptance; this may be one significant reason why parents may not get involved with their child's video gaming enough to understand and appreciate the culture:

> People cannot learn in a deep way within a semiotic domain if they are not willing to commit themselves fully to the learning in terms of time, effort, and active engagement. Such a commitment requires that they are willing to see themselves in terms of a new identity, that is, to see themselves as the *kind of person* who can learn, use, and value the new semiotic domain. In turn they need to believe that, if they are successful learners in the domain, they will be valued and accepted by others committed to that domain. (p. 59)

The media would like to instil fear about video games as demanding passive consumption of the messages and ideas; however, research is suggesting that video games require sophisticated literacy skills that demand active and critical thinking. One way that video games create spaces for critical thinking is within the social dynamics of game play.

Social Skills Inhibited

A long-standing myth about video games is the isolation factor. Media reports question the ways adolescents use technology to communicate differently, as in other than traditional face-to-face conversation: "Technology engrained in lives of young: Web, cellphones not even seen as separate entity, survey finds (Reuters, 2007); "Survey finds many youth putting themselves in unsafe situations online" (Huber, 2008); "Young people find posting can come back to haunt them" (Irvine, 2007); Pre-teens multi-task in digital world" (Steffenhagen, 2006). These news headings suggest that adolescents communicate differently, but also that they communicate with ignorance and lack of regard for their own safety. Research suggests that communication is not as simplistic as these articles imply (Jenkins, 2004; MacGill, 2007; PEW Internet & American Life Project, 2006). Parents are involved in the online lives of their teens by regulating game play (MacGill, 2007), or using protective software (PEW Internet & American Life Project, 2006); meanwhile, teens also prefer their online identity information to be vague and private (PEW Internet & American Life Project, 2006). Adolescents require sophisticated literacy skills in order to communicate in online settings (Gee, 2003) and complex ways of thinking are also developed during the process of navigating and creating different technologies (Jenkins, 2004).

Prensky (2006) identified adolescents who have grown up with technology skills as digital natives, and he described their social skills as developing differently from those who did not grow up with technology as digital immigrants. He argued that digital natives communicate differently, such as texting with close friends and meeting with online-only acquaintances and friends (Prensky, 2006). He also argued that digital natives

share differently: passing on information such as photos, personal feelings, news, videos, or any other desired information that they can. This sharing also includes 'exchanging' music, applications, movies and websites, with which digital immigrants take issue for economic and copyright reasons. Prensky (2006) carried on to describe how digital natives buy and sell differently, create differently, meet and coordinate differently, and develop numerous other skills and abilities that have evolved differently because of technology, not least of all gaming.

Video games create social spaces and encourage social ways of being (Gee, 2003; Prensky, 2006). "Solo games, which were the norm in the period before computers became networked, have mostly been supplanted by multi-player games, involving anywhere from two to over a million players" (Prensky, 2006, p.47). Gee (2003) described an adolescent gamer who was inherently social in his video gaming: he demonstrated team play with various people, shared skills and knowledge for game play, and created a web page about the game for other game players.

One reason these communities are forming is the need for more people to be heard, to count, to be part of making meaning in society (Leadbeater, 2005). Authentic audiences are more readily available for video game players to have a voice and express their ideas. Adolescent learners come from multiple communities and they need to be viewed as people who can contribute valuable knowledge and skill to communities and families – not just wait until they graduate or reach adulthood before contributing. Video games enable players to be challenged and honoured in thoughtful and meaningful ways. Adolescents who play online in multiplayer video games might as a regular occurrence be found leading a one hundred person guild: he/she leads players in organizing,

recruiting, strategizing, communicating, and designating other players from around the world.

One adolescent male video game player, (Madill & Sanford, 2009) conveyed that online video games enabled him to meet other people with similar interests and this opportunity did not limit him to hanging out with his school friends who often did drugs. Another adolescent male who attended a video game learning workshop (Madill & Sanford, 2008) commented that – for someone like himself, who was not outgoing in groups – that online experiences gave him an opportunity to develop confidence in talking with others. Psychologist Eric Erickson would define this online space as "a psychosocial moratorium – that is, a learning space in which the learner can take risks where real-world consequences are lowered" (as cited in Gee, 2003, p. 62).

Social worlds in a physical or digital space will still carry belief systems and values that individuals will accept in order to belong. Gee (2003) refers to cultural models which "are images, storylines, principles, or metaphors that capture what a particular groups finds 'normal' or 'typical' in regard to a given phenomenon" (p. 143). These cultural ways of being (i.e., cultural models) reveal the abilities of gamers to understand, communicate, and belong with others which includes gaining skills and resources for future learning in various social settings (Gee, 2003; Green, 1997). These cultural ways are informed by individuals and also inform the individual identity. This complex relationship reflects Prensky's (2006) comment about how parents cannot be sure of the effects gaming will have on their adolescent because of the numerous factors that influence the identity of an individual.

Adolescents are Disconnected

Media messages suggest that video games are making adolescents more and more disconnected: “What are video games turning us into?” (Mayor, 2005); “Hooked on games: battling a cyber-addiction” (Rocha, 2006); “Is video-game addiction a mental disorder?” (Tanner, 2007). These articles suggest that video games have the potential to hard wire players’ brains and make them disconnected.

From what are they presumably being disconnected? The arguments include suggestions that video game playing disconnects players from the ‘real world’ [which refers to the valued aspects of society such as traditional economics, friendships, family, and personal safety], creativity and imagination, and learning. Parents will likely observe their adolescents engaged in a digital world that appears unreal, repetitive, and a far cry from traditional school learning. However, much research suggests just the opposite. Video game players learn about the ‘real’ world; they are immersed in imaginative worlds that require them to be creative; learning is sophisticated and challenging (Gee, 2003; Prensky, 2006; Shaffer, 2006).

Downes (2005), a Canadian researcher from Information and Communications studies, suggested that opinions about cyberspace either focus on the changes and disembodiment that the internet evokes, or alternatively, perspective can be focused on the pluralism, and relationships between people and technology as “we engage in practices of identity formation, community building, and the experience of place” (p. xiv). He suggests that the computer and the consequential cyberspace such as video games are tools involved in the world we create: “Tools are not simply the application of

knowledge to extend human capabilities. They are also material with which we build the physical and symbolic worlds we inhabit" (p. xvi).

Identities are complex, multi-layered, fluid and socially constructed; our identities affect and are affected by how we perceive the world and subsequently, our perceptions influence society. Identities shift depending on the context: time, place, people, culture, age, experiences. Representing selves through communication technologies includes photos, writing, symbols, names, voice, and multiple layers of these aspects. Identities can overlap, such as being a son and video gamer at the same time, yet these overlapping identities can also experience conflict, such as being a friend and playing online as a hit man avatar.

The postmodern self is always changing and influenced by its environment as well as influencing its environment. The postmodern self is recognized as the self that is understood within the present time and present conditions and includes the multiple and often conflicting perspectives of class, race, gender, profession, and other affiliations (Creswell, 2007). In contrast, the modern self is understood as singular and separate and determined by the time frame in which it existed. The modern self was determined by the individual and not by others. On the other hand, the postmodern self is ever-shifting since the understanding of self is affected by language, power, and relationships to others and objects (i.e. culture, people, beliefs, values) (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

Gee (2003) writes about how identities are influenced by their social environments:

> Semiotic systems are human cultural and historical creations that are designed to engage and manipulate people in certain ways. They attempt through their content

> and social practices to recruit people to think, act, interact, value, and feel in certain specific ways. In this sense, they attempt to get people to learn and take on certain sorts of new identities, to become, for a time and place, certain types of people. In fact, society as a whole is simply the web of these many different sorts of identities and their characteristic associated activities and practices. (p. 44)

Through various communication technologies people can 'try on' different identities in a way to understand themselves, problem solve issues in their lives, and perceive through multiple perspectives (Turkle, 1995); for example a woman might pose as a male avatar in a video game and negotiate her role through masculine perspectives and in the process confirm or disrupt her understanding of how males play video games, or even how they choose to behave and make choices in daily life.

Baudrillard (1997) suggests that image and identity are interchangeable notions, and calls identity the "label of existence." We choose to represent ourselves in many symbolic ways: our dress, hair style, walk, talk, spaces where we spend time. Cyberspace has enabled more spaces and more choices for how we might represent our identities. The personas or avatars that are assumed in cyberspace become "mediators between personal identity and social life" (Taylor, 2006, p. 110). The identities that are created for exploring or performing begin to influence the culture of communities, online and off-line. The cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1997) wrote, "Culture, it is argued, is not so much a set of things – novels and paintings or TV programmes and comics – as a process, a set of practices" (p. 3). The practices involved in many online experiences include producing and exploring background experiences, developing new characters/online users,

establishing the virtual environment (settings, rules, music, texts, images), and making choices.

Digital communications and cyberspace have complicated understandings about identity; researchers are only starting to recognize the various ways that people interact with these new spaces. Taylor (2006) and Downes (2005) both acknowledge that people refer to 'real' and 'virtual' worlds as two separate spaces, but they suggest that the online world is simply part of the real world we experience, that it is another space in which to experience other aspects of ourselves – our multiple, everchanging identities. Gee (2003) suggests that a tripartite play of identities occurs during online exploration: a virtual identity, a real-world identity, and a projective identity. The complexities among these three identity roles arise in that the online world is "not a tidy, self-contained environment but one with deep ties to value systems, forms of identity, and social networks, and always informed by the technological structures in which it was embedded" (Taylor, 2006, p. 18).

The effects of 'real world' verses 'not-real world' is too simplistic a perspective. This space where identity development occurs is referred to as a 'third space' (Winnicott, 2005): the time and space between real and digital where gamers negotiate roles and beliefs and values. Winnicott (2005) celebrates this third space as a place of identity formation, a space where creativity and risk-taking helps form how we perceive and behave in the world, a place where play of the mind can be encouraged.

Embodied learning in these third spaces is being explored because of the new experiences occurring with digital communication. Alternative senses are now being acknowledged and encouraged instead of considering only language which had long been

understood as the only influence by which to formulate our realities. Ellsworth (1997) described her own embodied learning in the third space of creativity and experience: "When my self and what I know are simultaneously in the making, my body/ brain/mind is participating in an event that exists outside the realm of language" (p. 2). Ellsworth (1997) advised how there is a need to move "away from the strict binary of discourse of self/other, real/virtual, reason/emotion, mind/body, natural/artificial, inside/outside, thinking/feeling, irony/humor" (p. 3) so that we can understand experiences as complex and interconnected instead of separate and in opposition to one another.

Spaces between 'real' and 'virtual' bring to light the notion of multiple realities, instead of the traditional one 'true' reality (steeped in the dominant culture of that particular society) that classrooms and educational texts tend to promote:

> The rich potential of learning from games and play has not been entirely unrecognized in education, which has largely reserved play-based teaching approaches to the child's earliest years of schooling. For the most part, and for many teachers and parents, playing is the opposite of "school," and it is probably safe to say that few teachers would embrace the idea that game-based learning offers a useful and appropriate medium for their students. (de Castell & Jenson, 2004, p. 385)

Video games offer this third space where gamers play and in so doing, mediate the inner and outer worlds of gamers through constructing social worlds (Winnicott, 2005). Researchers (Gee, 2003; Jakobsson, 2007; Mitchell & Clarke, 2007; Taylor, 2006) continue to document how authors/users/players experiment and perform alternative realities through various representations, such as graphics, sound, and text. Virtual worlds

like *Second Life*, *World of Warcraft*, *Guild Wars*, *Sims*, *NBA online*, provide spaces where truth and knowledge can be questioned, experimented with, and transformed. Gamers try on identities, explore new spaces, experiment with relationships, and question rules from their lives. A broader base of experiences can occur and be drawn as virtual spaces; these are acknowledged as legitimate spaces. Digital forms that offer spaces to move between real and virtual enable all ages (parents and adolescents) to engage in a play space where identity development can continue for anyone who takes part.

Although media and societal messages may suggest that adolescent gamers are disconnected, research has shown that video gamers are connected through their active participation, critical thinking and their social networking skills; they are also connected through the play and development available in third spaces where identity is cultivated.

Media plays a major role in forming the public perception of video games. The messages are frequently rampant with fearful concepts and generalizations. Research is disrupting many of these messages and uncovering the complexities involved in video game play and content. Parents will need to gain access to this kind of research though at the present time this sort of research which considers the depth of video game play is not all that accessible to the general public.

Parents' Experiences with Video Games and their Adolescents

There are still very few research projects that address the experiences of parents around video games. Current research emphasizes the impacts of computers and video games with young children and their families, while a few studies address the relationship of parents and adolescents as related to the use of video games such as Bone's (2003) research and the PEW International report about youth and media practices (Macgill,

2007). The monitoring of games by parents, their knowledge about games, and shifts in power between child and parent has been studied (Aarsand & Aronsson, 2009; Bone, 2003; Piotrowski 2007). The notion of whether a parent is involved or engaged in their child's video gaming is discussed in relation to these studies.

Parental Involvement verses Engagement

Parents are involved with their child's video game playing by monitoring their child's online experiences, observing video game play in the same room, establishing rules around video games, or talking with them about their video game play. Pushor (2007a) refers to parental involvement and engagement in terms of parents' relationship with school. Her definitions are a helpful way to consider a parent's relationship with video games. Involvement is defined as "those activities in which parents are invited to serve the school's agenda, to do the things educators deem important" while engagement is considered "activities which are mutually determined by educators and parents to be important for children and are lived out in a respectful and reciprocal relationship" (2007a, p. 6).

In the same way that schools only 'allow' parents to help out in the school in very specific ways (Pushor, 2007a), so too, do parents feel that video games only 'allow' them very few ways to participate as a parent – which may find them resorting to monitoring as a way to ensure that appropriate behaviours and rules are followed. However, parental *engagement* in schools enables parents to consider school rules, to think about and voice the needs of their children, and to work cooperatively with the school community to create those environments for their children (Pushor, 2007a). Similarly, parents can take a role with video games in which they too can question and discuss the experiences of the

gamers. They can play the games alongside them, and they can consider and work to create the best environments for their adolescent; that is, parents can be engaged in video game play with their adolescent children.

Research studies of parents and video gaming have examined parental involvement with video games, such as monitoring, rule making, and negotiating (Bone, 2003; Desmond & Bägli, 2008; Piotrowski, 2007). Monitoring to check for 'proper' behaviour relates with Pushor's (2007a) definitions of parental involvement compared to parental engagement. In a study of 935 parents and youth 12-17 years of age, Macgill (2007) reports that: "teens are more likely than their parents to say digital technology makes their lives easier." This same study reports that "the majority of parents are trying to stay involved with the online lives of their teens" (p. 5) but the explanation reads:

> Despite the stereotype of the clueless parent, parents of today's online teens are staying involved in their children's online lives. Some 65% of parents report that after their child has been on the internet, they check to see what websites he or she viewed. In addition, almost three quarters of parents (74%) can correctly identify whether or not their online teen has ever created his/her own social networking site profile that others can see at sites such as MySpace or Facebook (p. 5).

Involvement here represents monitoring, not trusting, and maintaining power hierarchies.

In both Piotrowski's (2007) and Bone's (2003) studies all the parents had rules surrounding video game play in their household which included the amount of time to play, content of the games, and whether chores or homework were completed first. This

practice of monitoring was categorized as parental control and implied an importance about parents having control over their child's playing practices.

Aarsand and Aronsson's (2009) research focused on observations of "children's and parents' embodied activities, and not only their self-reports" (p. 499) where they observed family members in the same room, or social space, but they did not all necessarily take part in the video gaming occurring. Their research referred to parents acting out identities as *involved parents* (p. 500); this description aligns with Pushor's (2007a) definition of involved parent. Examples of involved parents included deciding where game technology was located in the home, time restrictions on its use, and the process of making game choices, etc. (Aarsand & Aronsson, 2009). One way parents could play out the "involved identity was by playing the video games: Bone (2003) reported that *some* of the mothers in the study were comfortable playing the video games with their sons [only male children in the study], but most of the mothers did not play video games at all because they did not understand how to play certain games. Another way parents were able to play out the 'involved' identity was in easing the social pressures their adolescent might experience: Bone (2003) noted that three of the mothers in his study "described video games as a method of 'fitting in' at school and were afraid their sons would not be 'connected' with the other children at school if they were not aware of the most popular video games" (p. 106).

Parents' knowledge and awareness of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) ratings is a common research question to determine how involved parents are in their child's video gaming practices by hearing how knowledgeable they are about the ratings (Bone, 2003; Piotrowski, 2007). Bone (2003) found that seven of the eight parents

felt knowledgeable about the ratings but were unable to provide much information about them. This is similar to Piotrowski's (2007) research of children's home video game practices where the parents varied in how familiar they felt with the ESRB ratings.

Just as some parents might refer to the ratings on the back of a video game, parents also rely on other sources for their ways of finding out information about video games. In Bone's (2003) study 7 of the 8 parents reported referring to another person (another parent, video game store clerk, etc.) for information to determine whether the game was appropriate. Video games then become a mysterious object only to be deciphered through the eyes of an 'other.' To parents, these 'others' are not always trusted sources. For example, in Piotrowski's (2007) study, the parents described at least one person in their child's life whose video game practices made them uncomfortable and this stemmed from their "belief that this other individual's video game habits adversely affected their child or had the potential to adversely affect their child" (p. 141). These unidentified and/or unseen other gamers were adults, peers, or non-peers who were in most cases older than the parents' child.

One of the ways to examine parents' involvement around video games is to find out about the rules they establish around gaming. Rules included limiting the content that could be played, restricting online play, using games as a reward, determining the amount of time played, and not playing the games in front of younger siblings (Bone, 2003). In considering regulations for when and how children and adolescents spend their time, especially when considering video game play, Aarsand and Aronsson (2009) explain, "The tension between appropriate and inappropriate areas involves a politics of time and space, dealing with regulations concerning when, where and with whom children are

allowed to be" (p. 497). Another expectation that reveals parents' experiences around video games and their children is the location of video games in the home.

The location where video games are played within the home has been an ongoing stereotype: in the dark, isolating basement, away from family members. However, according to many reports, video games are found in "communal media landscapes of the families" (Aarsand & Aronsson, 2009, p. 504). In surveys conducted by PEW Internet and American Life Project, since their first study done in 2000, 70% of computers are located in an open family area (2006, p. 8). These family settings include areas such as living rooms, dens, hallways, and playrooms where gaming was more public than private and therefore enabled more parent involvement in the gaming.

Monitoring video game play is often a way that parents experience video games. In a study of 24 children and their parents on library computers that hosted video games, researchers Desmond and Băgli (2008) were interested in knowing more about how parents monitor and guide children's use of media. They found that:

> while parents offer support and actively play with their children in non-school computer sessions, there is no mediation comparable to that documented in research on families and television. When children have more computer expertise than do their parents, parents exhibit categories of behaviours designed to re-assert their dominance. (p. 2)

Some of the behaviours Desmond and Băgli (2008) noted were as simple as parents giving compliments and support, providing information and advice, helping their child [male and female children] through conflict (even with surrounding children), and determining the end of game time. Watching or co-viewing were ways the mothers in

Bone's (2003) study monitored video game play; they also reported discussing some of the game content with their sons; six of the eight parents reported having played video games with their sons. These ways of monitoring helped parents establish rules and expectations with their children and provided numerous experiences for them around video games.

Aarsand and Aronsson's (2009) research reveals engaged parenting around video games. Although Aarsand and Aronsson do not use the terms 'involved' or 'engaged' in the ways mentioned here, they note that power relationships are negotiated and shift more when parents get involved in the gaming, either physically playing the game or verbally cooperating and problem solving:

> In a number of ways, the parents could be seen to make gaming a part of family politics. First, gaming was integrated into the media landscapes of the families as a communal affair in that the game technology was located in public areas, such as living rooms and hallways. Second, as shown, the parents were involved in their children's gaming, making gaming a part of family politics in that they recurrently tried to limit the children's time for gaming or the type of games that were to be played. Third – on the level of everyday practices – the parents recurrently got involved in gaming, aligning with the children's gaming in that they took the initiative to play games or to talk on gaming. (Aarsand & Aronsson, 2009, p. 509-510)

Aarsand and Aronsson (2009) noticed in their research that children negotiated power through their knowledge about video games, and sometimes the parents and grandparents would also give over power around video games in order to align with their

child. “Power has traditionally been ascribed to the parents, while the child has been seen as less powerful. This does not mean that children are not able to control family territory or challenge adult control,” (p. 500) and they draw on Prout who suggested that ICT practices can destabilize “the boundaries between public and private spheres, and between generations (children and adults)” (as cited in Aarsand & Aronsson, 2009, p. 500).

On the other hand, as gamers shift power in their favour, parental power is threatened. How the players negotiated power for themselves is seen in this example of a young male child in the midst of gaming:

> Through his body posture and his gaze, fixed on the screen, Anton is excluding his mother from the gaming space. They are both located in the same physical place, but his main activity is located in a space that is not accessible to her or others, unless he so chooses to let them in by talking about what he is doing to by allowing them to play. By ignoring his mother, he manages to sustain his gaming space as a private space in the house. Ignoring thus works as a strategy for excluding others, a resource for creating and sustaining private gaming space. (Aarsand & Aronsson, 2009, p. 510)

However, young children and adolescents are aware that power roles are flexible. Desmond and Băgli (2008) cite a highschool student they heard on the radio who was asked

> if he thought that knowing more than his parents about computers was a problem for him and his parents. He replied, “No. They still know more about lots of things than I do, and their experience in life is important to me. (p. 12)

Especially as children develop into adolescents, parental control will naturally shift, yet the shift away from direct control may prove challenging for parents if they continue to foster fears of video games. Bone (2003) concluded that before parents can be educated about video games there needs to be more knowledge about "parental attitudes, behaviours, and the nature of their close relationships as these impact the ways in which they guide and monitor the behaviors of their offspring" (p. 3). On the other hand, Desmond and Băgli (2008) concluded that "this shining new technology, the computer, is just another way for parents and children to be together and to express the full range of emotions that run through other aspects of their lives" (p. 13). Whether we consider the relationship between the parents and adolescent first, or consider video games first and then uncover the relationship through this lens, it stands to reason that neither can be separated from the other. Likewise, understandings and perspectives of learning play a critical role in how parents and adolescents engage around video games.

Theories of learning

As discussed, video games involve meaningful learning that is social, challenging, and complex. Parents' perceptions of learning will reveal how they perceive and interact with video games. This section will address the theories of learning tied to play, schooling, and new digital media. Play is an aspect of learning that parents often value when their children are young; school learning is an aspect of learning that parents have come to value due to societal expectations and influences; digital technologies are a growing aspect of learning that is still often unknown to parents.

Play and Learning

Video games involve play: social play with others, imaginary play, problem solving play, and game play. Video games also involve identity play and exploration – play experiences. Educational philosophers have emphasized that experiences are of utmost importance to learning (Dewey 1938; Ellsworth, 1997; Friere, 1970; Winnicott, 2005). Ellsworth (1997) argued that experiences make us into beings and that pedagogy is therefore lived, embodied experiences. She concluded that we do not *have* an experience, but instead we *are* the experience.

Basic characteristics of play include fun, personal meaning, and focus, while an optional feature of play is social interaction of peers or adults; the purpose of play is to afford "children opportunities to develop physical, social, and cognitive abilities that will serve them well later in non-play situations" (Christie, 1995, p. 1). Play is of utmost importance to Winnicott (2005) and her work in psychoanalysis. Winnicott proposes that everyone has an outer reality (where others set expectations and we makes choices to conform or not), an inner reality (where we can be calm and fulfilled or not), while the third space is called 'experiencing'. This is the space where the person moves from illusion occurring within their own inner reality to a more outer reality. This third space is extremely important as a space of identity construction and wellness. Experiencing is a creative space where dreaming, art, religion, recreation, music, dance are produced or enacted (Winnicott, 2005). She clarified how play and identity connect: "It is in playing and only playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self"

(p. 72). In the following quotation, Christie (1995) described the physical immersion in play, similar to Winnicott's description of the psychological third space:

> Play events are characterized by a "play frame" within which personal meaning takes precedent over external reality. The usual meanings of objects are ignored, new meanings are substituted, and actions are performed differently than when they occur in nonplay settings. (Christie, 1995, p. 2)

However, play continues to be an undervalued aspect of economically driven societies. The irony, as Christie (1995) states, is how play is so easily dismissed, but that play would enhance most learning environments: "The features that make play seem to be trivial and inconsequential – the fact that it is fun, involves make-believe, and focuses on activity rather than outcomes – are the same factors that make play an effective learning medium" (p. 1).

> When children play, their attention is focused on the activity itself rather than on the goals or outcomes of the activity. In other words, means are more important than ends. This is why children often knock down block constructions right after completing them and sometimes abandon dramatizations in midstream. The act of building or dramatizing is of primary importance, not the structures being built nor the stories being enacted. (Christie, 1995, p. 3)

These main features mentioned about play are evident in video game play. The goal of killing another avatar, or exploding a building, or winning a race, are not where gamers' attention usually stays; their attention is on the present moment in the game, which is why they can go off on other missions, create their own game within the game, and sometimes create a different avatar and begin again. In fact, this aspect of play is similar

to Csikszentmihalyi's theory of "Flow" in which people experience full immersion in an activity and time seems to disappear (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

The social aspect of play that Christie (1995) references is also reiterated by Shaffer, et al. who defend the notion that the power of learning is found in social interactions:

> But *to know* is a verb before it becomes a noun in *knowledge*. We learn by doing – not just by doing any old thing, but by doing something as part of a larger community of people who share common goals and ways of achieving those goals. We learn by becoming part of a community of practice and thus developing that community's ways of knowing, acting, being, and caring – the community's situated understandings, effective social practices, powerful identities, and shared values. (Shaffer, et al., 2005, p. 107)

Video games enable multiple types of experiences to occur; many of them also embodied experiences. As Jenkins (1999) reflected on his nostalgia for the outdoor play of his childhood, he also recognized how outdoor play spaces are limited in urban centres for multiple reasons, such as less physical space to play and adults choosing to have fewer children; more spaces are less welcoming for children, and there is more fear for children being without supervision. He described how video games help alleviate this lack of play space by moving it to a virtual space:

> Video games constitute virtual play spaces which allow home-bound children like my son to extend their reach, to explore, manipulate, and interact with a more diverse range of imaginary places than constitute the often drab, predictable, and overly-familiar spaces of their everyday lives. (Jenkins, 1999, p. 263)

Play is an acceptable and valued part of the learning process when children are young. However, as children enter grade school, play is reserved for outside restricted recess and lunch time, desks are the norm, and inside time is where serious 'work' happens; in fact, if children are 'caught' playing during work time, there are often consequences for that behaviour. School replaces play time and creates 'work' time.

School and Learning

Knowing more about how parents perceive learning in relation to schooling can shed light on how parents approach video games in their homes. The concept of school and learning embrace a different philosophy than play and learning. Parents are expected to accept school philosophies because societal beliefs suggest that schools are places of valued learning: students receive diplomas and can graduate into being contributing members of society. What beliefs about learning do schools promote?

In the last century or so, education moved relatively intractably from homes and families to institutions called schools, and these structures have been a source of tension with regard to understanding about learning, power roles, and societal influence and effects. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) explain that:

> until recently, education was regarded as a universal welfare right under a social democratic model. It has now been reconstituted in instrumental and commodified terms as a leading contributor to and subsector of the economy… attention has moved from aims, values, and ideals to a new focus on 'means and techniques for obtaining [optimally] efficient outcomes' (p. 163).

Shaffer, at al. (2005) add that Dewey had argued a century ago that schools are too focused on facts and information and yet this approach to learning is still being practiced

today. Very few skills are being taught or learned and instead, the goal is "the pursuit of content" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 158)

Dewey (1938) does not use the word *learning* in his chapter "The Need of a Theory of Experience" because, in his opinion, experiences that create growth are equivalent to learning. Experiences are not all equal, he argues. A genuine or educative experience must connect with further experiences, and enable growth. In 1938 Dewey understood that schools needed to be disrupted and transformed, but he acknowledged that change would take time.

Dewey (1938) claimed that the role of an educator, and therefore of a parent, is to promote genuine and educative experiences for learners and to prevent mis-educative experiences which inhibit growth of further experience. He argued that traditional schools – which today's parents will most likely have experienced themselves – will have shaped their perceptions of learning and enabled mis-educative experiences to happen that inhibited further growth. He asked:

> How many students, for example, were rendered callous to ideas, and how many lost the impetus to learn because of the way in which learning was experienced by them? How many acquired special skills by means of automatic drill so that their power of judgment and capacity to act intelligently in new situations was limited? How many came to associate the learning process with ennui and boredom? How many found what they did learn so foreign to the situations of life outside the school as to give them no power of control over the latter? How many came to associate books with dull drudgery, so that they were 'conditioned' to all but flashy reading matter? (Dewey, 1938 p. 26-27)

These same students are the grandparents of today's adolescents. Without having experienced meaningful learning in schools, parents either believe in the right of schools to continue education in this same way, or parents can question teaching and learning and find a few alternatives for their child, such as homeschooling, or alternative schools. Pushor (2007b) adds,

> While there is an extensive body of literature on teacher knowledge, there is no corresponding body of literature on parent knowledge… How can what parents know, given that is it different from what teachers know, enhance schooling experiences for children? (p. 9)

Freire (1970) also critiqued traditional educational systems, particularly in regards to the role of language and literacy and the shifts in power. Freire's (1970) perspective of educators included parents who he believed should act as guide and learner with students to reflect on the world so that they can act and consequently transform the world.

The self-determined learning referred to by Dewey and Freire belongs in a theory of learning known as constructivist learning. Constructivist learning is understood as a search for meaning and the learner constructs their own meaning from their perceptions of the world. Their perceptions are created from how they interpret the world to work, which in turn forms mental rules or particular understandings about things, concepts, and people. Consequently, learners' understandings of the world can differ from each other greatly or slightly. These mental rules and internal representations of the perceivers' world inform how the learner interacts with future experiences in their lives; further experiences continue to inform and adjust these mental rules and internal representations.

Constructivist learning believes in supporting students' prior knowledge and promotes student-centered inquiry in a rich, nurturing environment which includes home life.

However, in many cases the involvement of parents with their child's education process has been limited to getting students to school and supporting the school faculty (teachers, administrators, school board) in teaching them how to be successful according to the school's expectations (Pushor, 2007b). Pushor (2007b) has researched the role of parents in relation to school communities and she described the power hierarchy that exists:

> Educators, as holders of expert knowledge of teaching and learning, enter a community, claim the ground which is labelled 'school,' and design and enact policies, procedures, programs, schedules and routines for the children of the community. They often do this in isolation of parents and community members, using their "badge of difference", and their professional education, knowledge and experience, as a rationale for their claimed position as decision-makers in the school. Educators assume this claimed position with the best of intentions – intentions to enhance student achievement and other educational outcomes, intentions to provide a safe and caring place for children, and intentions to prepare children for their roles as citizens in a broader society. (p. 2)

Parents therefore are pushed into a position of 'not knowing' about learning, teaching, or about what is in the best interest for their own child's education.

Once students are in school, the school faculty works to keep students achieving the prevailing societal and political expectations. de Castell & Jenson (2004) argued that schools have done an excellent job in the past of maintaining students' attention:

> In schools, attention has been "traded," both by students and their teachers, whether for marks, for disciplinary action, or for praise. Attention is captured and held by compulsory schooling laws and, more traditionally, by fear: fear of failure, fear of corporal punishment, and fear of disapproval. Furthermore, teachers have typically positioned themselves as the center of attention, at the front of the class, "all eyes forward," and as the central figures in the distribution of information (textbooks, worksheets, library) and knowledge (subject matter). (p. 382)

Learning and teaching in schools are tied up in political and economic agendas.

In the meantime, technologies have enabled meaningful and engaged learning experiences to happen more frequently, particularly out of school more than in schools. This experiential learning is highlighted in the types of learning students do when they use technology for their own websites, video games, Facebook sites, or mobile devices: their experiences connect with related aspects of their lives, such as friends, entertainment, and skills for communication that they will continue to use after school has ended, either later that day or the following week or next year. The very essence of school philosophy is being questioned and shaken because of these new digital mediums. Shaffer, et al. (2005) argued,

> classrooms have not adapted. Theories of learning and instruction embodied in school systems designed to teach large numbers of students a standardized curriculum are dinosaurs in this new world. Good teachers and good school leaders fight for new technologies and new practices. But mavericks grow frustrated by the fundamental mismatch between the social organization of

> schooling and the realities of life in a post-industrial, global, high-tech society. In the push for standardized instruction, the general public and some policy makers may not have recognized this mismatch, but our students have. School is increasingly seen as irrelevant by many students who are past the primary grades. (p. 110)

Students are already using technologies like video games to understand and represent their worlds, and yet they remain silenced by the dominant class of traditional educators and parents who fail to acknowledge the voices of youth; meanwhile, adolescents need guidance in reflecting and critiquing the dominant class in order to experience praxis by way of digital communications.

Digital Media and Shifts in Learning

Learning remains the complex, critical aspect of human existence that it has always been, but whether educators, including parents, can shift their philosophies, positions of power, and approaches to learning enough to stay relevant is being questioned. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) get to the core of today's educational shift: "More profoundly, the entire epistemological base on which school approaches to knowledge and learning are founded is seriously challenged and, we think, made obsolete by the intense digitization of daily life (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 155).

Teachers are faced with a growing demand to address the learning of students in a digital era:

> Structures of perceiving, thinking, and feeling that kept students attentive to teachers, test, and texts are being challenged both directly (students attend, as they always have, to something other than the teacher – writing notes, sending text

> messages, making faces at each other, staring out the window) and increasing, indirectly through popular cultural media that satirize or disregard altogether the importance of "paying attention" in school. What is different here is children's sense of entitlement: whereas under earlier conditions students had to earn, to merit, to "deserve" their teachers' attention, nowadays increasingly the tables are turning, and it is the teacher who must earn or deserve the attention of her students – or her students will turn it elsewhere. (de Castell & Jenson, 2004, p. 382).

The need for interactive, authentically driven settings for learners to practice and acquire digital media skills is needed. de Castell and Jenson (2004) described how these kinds of digital learning abilities and knowledge can disrupt school communities and their learning philosophies:

> Pervasive cultural shifts toward progressive, "learner-centered," and, more recently, constructivist orientations to education have invited parents and students to challenge school-based norms, and the legitimating principles that once regulated a stable universe of authoritative texts and authoritative teachers are losing their hold on public sentiment about education. (p. 382)

Parents and educators need to know more about how adolescents learn in digital environments in order to value the learning and to be confident in their child's progress and development. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) use the term 'Digital Epistemologies' to describe how knowledge and truth are learned about in a digital world. These modes of knowing about the world will influence the perceptions that parents have about learning:

either parents will disregard the value in these practices or they will see the value and begin to question traditional school learning.

Students are already navigating digital worlds and experiencing and creating multi-modal truths through blogs, fan sites, podcasting, Facebook, websites, and Multi-Massive Online Role Games (MMORG); they are learners who are 'knowers' and not simply 'content carriers' – people who are filled with facts to send back out to the world when asked (like on a test). 'Knowers' are people who figure out how to learn something, who know how to acquire facts and create something productive and personal with that information (Gee, 2003; Jenkins, 2006; Johnson, 2005; Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Lankshear and Knobel (2003) include virtual social knowledge, multi-modal truths, gaining attention, and performance abilities as 'Digital Epistemologies'. Virtual social knowledge is the ability to create, live in, and negotiate virtual worlds which will necessitate personal and interpersonal knowledge (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Multi-modal truths means knowing about merging photo, print, sounds, to create many meanings (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003).

In order to participate in the digital mediums it will be necessary to navigate and learn how to produce something that will garner attention. Lankshear and Knobel (2003) refer to an 'emerging attention economy' in which digital knowers learn how to communicate and interact by gaining attention. The audience is limited to human bodies, but the amount of content that can be produced because of digital progress is endless: "It is difficult to get new attention 'by repeating exactly what you or someone else has done before'. Consequently, success in the attention economy calls for 'endless originality, or at least attempts at originality' (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 170-171).

'Performance epistemology' is another digital epistemology and refers to knowing how to use the vast tools of the digital age without always having examples to follow, and using the tools to break rules in order to create something different. This is a much different approach to learning than traditional schools support:

> Social practices that are evolving beyond the school within digitally saturated millieux seem to be privileging modes of knowing that are more performance- and procedure-oriented than propositional, more collaborative than individualistic, and more concerned with making an impact on attention, imagination, curiosity, innovation, and so on, than with fostering truth, engendering rational belief, or demonstrating their justifiability. (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 175-176)

This performance-oriented knowledge and ability disrupts many expectations of traditional schooling where the teacher holds knowledge that gets passed to the students, who then repeat that same knowledge usually in the same space.

> To that extent, the subject-based curriculum founded on texts and academic teachers as authority is in trouble. So are procedures that assess *individuals* as the personal bearers of knowledge, and that approach pedagogy in terms of trying to get knowledge into individual heads. (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003, p. 176)

The relevance of school is already being considered by students, and parents could benefit from considering the function and importance of learning philosophies; parents' relationship with their adolescents and the role of video games would be greatly affected.

Shaffer, et al. (2005) weighed in on this educational debate with the suggestion that sophisticated video games, if developed and used effectively, can address this gap

and shift in education. They argued that video games develop effective social practices where students need to work cooperatively and competitively across various platforms and communities, and video games encourage players to experiment with new and multiple identities (Shaffer, et al., 2005). They also figured that video games help learners "understand complex concepts without losing the connection between abstract ideas and the real problems they can be used to solve" (p. 106) which they term 'situated understanding'. And finally, they argued that video games require shared values from the players, which means they work towards developing similar abilities, habits, and ideologies to be successful at each game (Shaffer, et al., 2005).

> Video games have the potential to change the landscape of education as we know it. The answers to the fundamental questions raised here will make it possible to use video games to move our system of education beyond the traditional academic disciplines – derived from medieval scholarship and constituted within schools developed in the Industrial Revolution – and toward a new model of learning through meaningful activity in virtual worlds. And that learning experience will serve as preparation for meaningful activity in our postindustrial, technology-rich, real world. (Shaffer, et al., 2005, p. 111)

If parents continue to be positioned by society (schools, media, government, religion) as ignorant about educating their child they will continue to look to the school system to know best; however, as research shows, schools are not in a position to observe or understand the learning that happens for students involved in digital media. Consequently, both parents and educators are disadvantaged when considering the learning adolescents experience with video games. Many of these digital practices and

spaces, where exploratory and experiential learning is happening, are in the home where parents are. What sense parents will make of these digital shifts and how they interact and support their adolescents is yet to be determined, but is critical to consider since how learners are viewed and how they view themselves is developed through their engagement with digital media and virtual places spaces such as video games.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative Research

Since very little has been researched about parents' experiences involving adolescents and video games, this gap presents a researchable issue that is most appropriately addressed by examining it qualitatively. Cresswell (2007) provides a definition of qualitative research that helps guide this study:

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the research, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action. (p. 37)

There are many reasons why this research topic should be examined qualitatively. First, there is a need to have a "complex, detailed understanding of the issue" (Cresswell, 2007, p. 40), and this complexity can best be explored through conversations with the parents and adolescents involved in this social issue. A second reason for conducting qualitative research in this particular case is because I want to "empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study" (p. 40). A third reason to use a qualitative approach is because the participants' contexts need to be considered and the interactions

between people are more appropriately studied through qualitative methods such as interviews and observations (Cresswell, 2007).

Theoretical Perspective

Inquiring with my own eyes.

Research is undertaken by a certain perspective – that of the researcher. Therefore, making clear how the researcher views the world allows the readers of the research a more honest insight into how and why the research was conducted. I view the world as constructed by language. Language creates what we see and how we come to understand others. I understand language to include thoughts, symbols, and words. Language develops and shifts and therefore, so do experiences develop and shift. It would seem fitting then that in a postmodern world, fraught with ever-changing technological involvements and advancements, that I considered a postmodern theoretical perspective when studying parents, video games and adolescents.

Postmodern Theoretical Perspective

"The core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, any discourse or genre, or any tradition or novelty has a universal and general claim as the 'right' or privileged form of authoritative knowledge" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 961). A postmodernist perspective views the world as complex, full of multiple and contradictory perspectives, and understands that people are influenced by their contexts in many varied ways. McRobbie (1994) explains that in the 1980's postmodernism began to be understood

> as an anti-foundationalist form of anti-social theory – that is, a form of criticism which interrogated and exposed the (cruel) foundations upon which modern social thought had been based. This approach, which became more familiar in the late 1980s, suggested that there could no longer be one theory of society, no one 'big picture'. At best there were a number of snapshots of the same view, each aware of the limits of its own field of vision. (p. 4-5)

As a researcher in the field of education, a postmodernist perspective allows me to address the complexities and multiple perspectives that are experienced and observed in knowing and learning scenarios. Knowledge and ways of knowing need to be considered from their contexts; a multiplicity of perspectives need to be considered and a recognition that these contexts or perspectives are wrapped up in "hierarchies, power and control by individuals in these hierarchies, and the multiple meanings of language" (Cresswell (1997, p. 25) is critical. These layers can be seen in people's Discourses.

Discourse theorist James Paul Gee made the distinction between lower case 'd' and capital letter 'D' discourses which is well referenced in the field of Discourse Analysis research. The lower case 'd' is the close examination of the grammar, or language parts; Discourse explores more than just using language to discourse about something (Gee, 1989, 1999): "Discourses are distinctive ways people talk, read, write, think, believe, value, act, and interact with things and other people to get recognized (and recognize themselves) as a distinctive group or distinctive kinds of people" (Gee, 2004, p. 39). These Discourses are sociocultural practices, meaning that these distinctive ways of being are learned and adapted as people join various groups of people and cultures, or affinity groups (Gee, 2003). Parents will belong to multiple affinity groups, including

being an adult member of their family, their work environment, and social groups with which they participate.

Postmodernism critiques and analyzes the hierarchies and power embedded in grand narratives: the key stories or beliefs about the world that keep groups of people acting and reacting appropriately in relation to the belief. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) explain how the grand narratives provide a starting place for understanding the complexities and contradictions entwined in a culture:

> Postmodernism suspects all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural, and political struggles. But conventional methods of knowing and telling are not automatically rejected as false or archaic. Rather, those standard methods are opened to inquiry, new methods are introduced, and then they also are subject to critique. (p. 961)

This practice of unmasking truths or revealing restrictive and misguided grand narratives with the participants is not always a purpose of postmodernism research; however, this practice of further inquiry into the discourses and perspectives offers a possibility of praxis which is a major aspect of this research project.

According to Creswell (2007), by examining perspectives such as gender, status, or race, postmodern research includes

> the importance of different discourses, the importance of marginalized people and groups (the "other"), and the presences of "meta-narratives" or universals that hold true regardless of the social conditions. Also included are the need to "deconstruct" texts in terms of language, their reading and their writing, and the examining and bringing to the surface concealed hierarchies. (p. 25)

In the field of video games, parents play a role of "other". Not made by them, nor made for them, video games still occupy much of parents' lives. What hierarchies are embedded in the narratives they live? Gee (1990) stated that "language is a creature of change and history" (p. 77) and because language is a form that is given cultural meaning is it ever-shifting. In order to maintain certain forms of language and particular meanings, people in positions to benefit from that language will defend that the language is "'natural', 'right', 'necessary', 'rational', or intelligent'" (Gee, 1990, p. 77). Language therefore, becomes a way to keep people as 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Gee, 1990).

Parents adhere to many of the dominant discourses and meta-narratives that the media and general society have created about parenting, video games, and learning. This is the language they are expected to use, the meanings that fit with their social identity. It is also the language that keeps them as outsiders to the experiences of adolescents, the culture of video games, and the institution of schools. Delpit (1992) suggested that 'outsiders' can become successful in these cultures that attempt to keep them out and they can take this journey through and with language. Parents can be aware of their own language, but also learn "to add other voices and Discourses to their repertoires" (Delpit, 1992, p. 301); those voices and Discourses would be those of the adolescents, of research that offsets media reports, and of parents who are experiencing and able to articulate the complexities of parenting in regards to video games.

Purpose of postmodernism.

Not only are video games a complex tool in our society, but parenting and being an adolescent are also extremely complex ways of being in this world. A postmodernist

perspective enables exploration of the subtleties, overlaps, and contradictions in these identities and practices.

Enabling parents to examine the language and discourses that create and shape their perspective about video games enables them to think more critically about their role as a parent and the role of video games in their adolescent's life. A postmodernist perspective enables people to view the power balances and imbalances that occur through societal and cultural mediums and consider how the discourses we create and enact lead to these positions and practices: how we represent ourselves in these societies and cultures in which we belong. Representing ourselves and understanding who we are in the complex web of relationships and information is critical to identities. Learning more about parents' identities in relation to their adolescent and the video gaming by that adolescent makes apparent the values, beliefs, and ways of knowing that parents adopt in relation to video gaming. Parents' discourses revealed how infrequently they had talked about video games or even reflected on their parenting role in general. This opportunity to speak and be heard appeared to be empowering for the parents:

> The more important issue might be the one of who gets to be able to express their fragmentation, and who is able to put into words or images or sounds, the language of their private, broken subjectivities. In short who can contest, who can represent and who gets to be listened to? (McRobbie, 1994, P. 29)

Viewing this research through a postmodern lens made the interviews and observations with the parents a place to question the identities that are at play and to notice how complex these identities are. As McRobbie (1994) points out, the process of identity acquisition is unclear:

> On the one hand, it is fluid, never completely secured and continually being remade, reconstructed afresh. On the other hand, it only exists in relation to what it is not, to the other identities which are its 'other'. Identity is not the 'bourgeois' individual, nor is the personality, the unique person, but neither is it the psychoanalytical subject. As it is used in current cultural discourse it implies a combative sense of self, but one which makes sense in terms of a broader over arching category, such as race or sexuality, or indeed, class. Identity, therefore, is predicated on social identity, on social groups, or populations with some sense of a shared experience and history. And yet it is also a category doomed to dispersal and fragmentation, committed to anti-essentialism, to anti-absolutism. (p. 58)

Postmodernism deflects attention away from the singular scrutinizing gaze of the sociologist and asks that this be replaced by a multiplicity of fragmented and frequently interrupted 'looks' (McRobbie, 1994, p. 13). This research study was designed to examine the layers, the contradictions, and the complexities of parents' experiences or involvement with their adolescents' video gaming knowing and practices. In trying to understand this everyday relationship between parent, child, and technological tool, perceptions, identities, and beliefs were examined. Critical Discourse Analysis as a methodological framework and approach will enable these overlapping concepts to be examined more closely.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodological framework that understands language to be part of and constructive of social practices. "Discourse analysis is as much (or more) about what is happening among people out in the world

(sociology) than it is what is happening in their minds (psychology)" (Gee, 2004, p. 38). Gee (2004) explains that social practices "always have implications for inherently political things like status, solidarity, distribution of social goods, and power" (p. 33).

Rogers (2004) argued that when Discourses shift, social transformation and learning are evident in the "intertextual (within domain) and intercontextual hybridity" (p. 69) of the Discourses:

> If literacy learning involves, as the new literacy scholars argue, shifts in knowing, participation, and identity, then teachers and researchers need to become proficient in looking for and documenting shifts in interacting, representing, and ways of being within multiple, and sometimes competing, Discourses. (Rogers, 2004, p. 69)

Discourses are seen to shift when there are spaces of conflict, contradictions, pauses, and synthesis to other concepts. Gee (2004) also supports this approach to Discourses and learning as he defines the connection between learning and discourse analysis as "one that defines *learning* as *changing patterns of participation in specific social practices*" (p. 38). Learning, as defined by Gee, can happen unconsciously, but for social transformation to occur, I believe that awareness of the learning, the 'changing patterns of participation,' needs to be evoked. Lewis and Ketter (2004) suggest how this social transformation through CDA framework is possible:

> If we view learning as the appropriation and reconstruction of one's social world, it stands to reason that interdiscursive language would be critical to this process: It is through the presence of one discourse in another that a generative rather than a fixed appropriation becomes possible. In this vein, the members of our study

> group take up each others' genres, discourses, and voices over time in ways that create rather than replicate, thus opening spaces for new ways of constructing a teaching and learning self. (p. 140)

This practice of bringing the Discourses to a higher level of awareness and playfulness is the 'critical' aspect of CDA; noticing the various Discourses and how they represent people is not enough. Gee summarizes the role of critical in relation to critical literacy practices:

> I would argue that critical literacy involves using discourse analysis in such a way that we see that language is always fully situated in social and political context. It is always caught up with the ways individuals must, in using language, give voice to Discourses in interaction, now and throughout history, with each other. These interactions are the sites where power operates. They are also the sites at which humans can make and transform history. (Gee, 2004, p. 47)

This approach to parents' language as they described their experiences with video games and their adolescents is helpful in understanding how the parents situated themselves ideologically, their children, and video games in relation to learning. Providing spaces for parents to focus on their Discourses around video games shed light on the complex and contradictory ideologies about parenting, learning, and play that occurred for them.

Research Design

Figuring out how best to examine parents' experiences with their adolescents around video games was a challenge. Observing parents in their homes in connection to video games would be too time-consuming for the scope of this project. Asking parents to simply tell stories they have experienced around video games and their children would

likely not establish very thorough data and I wanted parents to experience the interviews as people with valuable experiences and knowledge. I kept this purpose in mind as I drafted questions that would enable parents to answer many of the questions with ease (see Appendix A): there were many stories that parents would be able to tell me about their adolescent child concerning aspects related broadly to video games, such as what the child looked like when they played, who they played video games with, how they learned, what their concerns were about video games, and their role was as a parent in these scenarios.

I contacted seven middle school principals from around Victoria to see if any of their parent membership would be interested in participating in this research study, or if they would be willing to announce in a newsletter the invitation to be a part of this study; five of the schools were able to assist me in telling parents about this research opportunity. I also contacted a local public librarian that promotes video game borrowing and she left participation invitations (see Appendix B) at numerous library branches in town. 12 parents contacted me about participating and nine remained interested. Two of those participants also brought their spouses to the two focus group interviews which made a total of 11 parent participants.

Data Collection

The parents' contexts were considered in order to demonstrate how they had come to have particular perspectives about video games: information about their class, race, gender, and education experiences allowed for an examination of how they "story" themselves and others (Whelan, Huber, Rose, Davies, & Clandinin, 2001). The variation in their backgrounds reveals how even though they had different influences in their lives,

they still had similar perspectives about video games. There were nine parents who volunteered for this study: seven were female and two were male. They were mostly middle class families. Six were of Caucasian/European decent. Two were of First Nations heritage. One parent was Asian. They ranged in age from their 30s to 40s. Three of the participants were single parents. All of their children who video gamed were sons; eight of the nine sons were the oldest in the family or the only child; they ranged in ages from 11 to 16 years old and all attended public schools. Not one parent described their child as 'a typical adolescent'; there were health reasons, variation in socializing ability, a wide range of activities they liked to do, and a wide scope of school performance with reference to grades that made each child unique to the parents.

Although two of the parents had played video games in the past, most parents did not describe themselves as having gamed 'regularly' before. All of the game systems were located in a family space in their homes. All of the parents' biggest concern was the violence in video games.

The parents and their children have been given pseudonyms according to the ethics regulations. The parents are described individually below; these participant descriptions are also used in the findings to describe them as characters at the beginning of each script.

WANDA – Married mother of 16 year old son (Saul). The son struggles in school. He has one older brother. Mother and father both work. Mother works in health care and has limited computer experience.

TABATHA – Married mother of three children: two daughters and one son. Son (Jacob) is 13 and the main video gamer in the family. She works as a nurse.

JANICE - mother of 11 year old son (Shawn). Mom is a single parent but with a supportive ex-husband. She works as a counsellor and is taking Master's level classes. The son is quiet and gentle.

RICKI – Single mother of 16 year old son (Ethan). She is unemployed at the moment. Son struggles in school. They live in a basement suite. She is very keen to reflect on the psychology of issues.

MIRANDA – Married mother of two children. 13 year old son (Troy) and younger daughter. She works as a university administrator in Computer Science.

SCOTT – Single father of 15 year old son (Caleb). He manages his own IT company. Son struggles in school and father is keen to reflect on broader societal beliefs to understand issues.

HOWARD – Married father of 14 year old son (Nathan) and younger daughter. He is a retired teacher and practicing journalist. He is involved in much of the downtown community organizations and they live in a condominium.

JASMINE – Married mother of 13 year old son (Mathew) and five year old son. Born and raised in Hong Kong, she reflects on how to merge the different cultural beliefs while raising her sons. She works night shifts in health care.

CAROL: Married mother of 12 year old son (Jason) and nine year old daughter. She is a stay-at-home mom and has previously worked as an Early Childhood Educator.

The interviews were first conducted in February 2009. As each parent contacted me I set up our first interview which ran approximately 50 minutes to one a half hours depending on the individual. The first interviews occurred either in their home, their work place, the local library, the university library, or in the housing unit's meeting room. The second one-to-one interviews occurred in the family's home or for two participants in the university library. Both focus groups took place at the university in a reserved classroom. Since they were unable to make the designated focus group time, four parents experienced the first focus group instead as an interview (in their home, at the local library, or in a UVic classroom); they seemed keen to hear the information that was shared with them about video game learning.

The first interview.

There were multiple purposes of the first interview. The questions (see Appendix A) were to learn more about the parents' beliefs and concepts about video games and to understand how they viewed their child in relation to video games. The interview questions were formed from my previous experiences with parents in regards to video games. Other intentions of the interview were to establish a relationship with the parents;

to enable them to recognize that I was keen to listen and value their opinions and ideas; to give them confidence in being able to answer the interview questions; and to share with them my passion about video games and the values of gaming. During this interview, I held back my opinions and thoughts about video games until after the very last question, when I was able to try to ease some of the fears they had raised in the interview and let them know what they would learn more about at the upcoming focus group.

The first focus group.

The initial plan for this research project revolved around the concept of this first focus group. I had presented a community talk about video game learning to many previous parent groups and I had imagined giving this presentation to parents as part of my research project and following up with them about their experiences post-presentation. However, as the research project came to fruition I realized that I wanted to know more about the parents and where they were coming from before I provided them with information about video game learning. I wanted to have some sense of what parents initially believed about video games before I provided research that might sway their perspective. I also wanted to have some sense of how effective the video game PowerPoint presentation was in disrupting or adding to parents' knowledge about video games, so it was helpful to know more about the parents' perspectives and opinions before introducing new information. Therefore, after the initial interview I asked the parents to participate in a group interview that I would hold at the university and revealed that I would share a PowerPoint presentation about research that had been done about video game learning and adolescents.

The benefit of focus groups for the participants was the opportunity to learn more about their own and other parents' perceptions and understandings about video games and the role of parenting that intersects with this medium. The focus group interviews also enabled a dialogue that highlighted the various contexts (such as school, single parenting, news reports, careers, and parenting) that are interwoven throughout their ideas and opinions.

The focus group was audio recorded and video recorded (for transcription purposes only). Five of the parent participants attended and two of them brought their spouse along to participate. The eight of us talked for over two hours about video games, adolescents, and learning. Parents were keen to share their stories about their own children and video games, and to hear other parents' similar or relevant stories. The PowerPoint became a secondary source of information in relation to the parents' stories and conversations back and forth.

Parents were asked a couple of initial questions to initiate the focus group. (see Appendix C). Information shared from the PowerPoint (see Appendix D) consisted of understanding video games as literacy practice that demanded many sophisticated literacy skills. Parents were asked to consider literacy as including reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and representing, which means that video game symbols, graphs, music, maps, colours, signs, creating characters, online strategic planning or texting, and problem solving are ways in which gamers practice literacy during game play.

During this focus group I challenged the notion of isolation with video game playing and I asked the parents to consider how video gaming could be seen as social. The varied learning, including problem solving that video games require, was addressed

as was the creativity involved in gaming. Parents were then asked to observe their children during the next month as they engaged in four important aspects that video games encourage: technological capabilities, literacy practices, social aspects, and the game content and play ideologies. The term "ideologies" is being used in this project to mean the value messages embedded in video game content and game play. At this point in the PowerPoint we discussed briefly the ideologies in different games such as *Mario Brothers* games and *Crash Bandicoot*, [children and ages 10+ problem solving games] and *Grand Theft Auto* and *Max Payne* [ages 17+ role playing games]. All the game examples used in the PowerPoint included messages of violence, beating someone else to win, cheating as problem solving, and so on, yet they looked different because of the graphics [cartoon or realistic graphics]. Parents were asked to discuss and ask questions of their adolescent children who game. A page of sample questions were provided for them (see E). Only two of the parents attempted the questions from the sheet.

The second interview.

This interview was intended to find out what parents' experiences around video games and their thoughts and opinions were after hearing more about the learning involved with video gaming. There was an expectation that parents would have heard new information about video game learning at the first focus group and I wanted to know what difference this information had made on their perspective towards their adolescents and video gaming. The questions were compiled after transcribing the first interviews and having had the focus group interview. Since the focus group conversation dwelled on the participants' perspectives and experiences with learning in the school system and out of school learning, the interview questions were created to learn more about their individual

concepts of play and learning (see Appendix F for the second individual interview questions).

At this stage of the research I continued to be surprised that the parents were still actively participating. I assumed that they volunteered simply to help me and sooner or later they would find something better to do with their time. I felt like I was keeping my fingers crossed that they would still respond to my emails asking for another interview. I had not considered that they would appreciate a space to talk, consider, and share their thoughts and opinions. Not only did they set up second interviews, but seven of the nine invited me to their homes at this stage. I had underestimated the potential and power of interviews to provide a safe space to slow down and have participants find an opportunity to have their ideas and experienced both heard and valued.

The last focus group.

The intention of the last focus group was to share some of the initial findings with the parents and to get their feedback on the seeming contradictions that were emerging. I created a PowerPoint presentation (see Appendix G) of the initial findings. Again, the focus group was audio recorded and video recorded (for transcription purposes only). Seven parents attended: five parents from the interviews and two of their spouses (the same spouses from the first focus group). The PowerPoint information was shared, after which discussions emerged around various aspects, such as definitions and explanations of play, violence, physical activity and the conflicts in language between themselves and their children around the use of video games.

Analysis

Questioning and witnessing the emergence of themes in the data was a layered and cyclical process. Analysis was integral to each stage of the process: analysis that occurred during the interviews, the transcribing, the coding, the organizing of codes into emerging topics, writing the scripts, and recognizing the underlying themes in all the data.

During the analysis stages the following terms guided the coding and examination of the Discourses used: Discourses, Socially situated identities, and Cultural Models:

> *Discourse* –big "D" Discourse in the tradition of James Gee to mean ways of reading, writing, acting, valuing, addressing, and so on to be recognized as having specific identity and belonging to a particular affinity group a certain sort of person (Peyton Young, 2004, p. 147).

> *Socially situated identities* – as defined by Gee (1999) to mean the different social positions that people enact or perform in particular settings. *Identity* is usually associated with a stable, internal state of being. Adding *socially situated* to the term foregrounds the fluid, socially constructed notion of identity… (Lewis & Ketter, 2004, p. 117)

> *Cultural Models* – cultural models serve as an analytical tool or thinking device during Critical Discourse Analysis. Cultural models are story lines or folk theories that tell members of a particular Discourse as to what the relevant and typical

ways are for being or doing. An example of a cultural model such as *boys will be boys* is prevalent within many different Discourses of masculinity. Cultural models do not just exist in peoples' heads, they are shared through interactions with other people, media, and texts (Gee, 1999).

All the interviews were transcribed verbatim. The 28 transcripts ranged in length from 14 pages to 27 pages each. Major themes were noted during the transcribing. These transcripts were then entered into NVIVO 2 and coded. NVivo is a software program designed to "manage, access and analyze qualitative data" (Bazeley & Richards, 2000). This software enables the analyzer to import the transcripts and then code sections of language into categories that allow the researcher to see comparisons or intersections of ideas or experiences. More specific categories can become evident through coding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Once the transcripts were coded, the codes were reviewed and the main categories being raised were noted. These main categories were compared back to the main research questions of this study. The three main categories aligned with the research questions:

Parents' perceptions: the positives and negatives of video games

Parents' engagement around video games: playing games and other interactions

Parents' understandings of learning: concepts of school, video games, and play

While coding, I continued to read and reread the transcripts for each participant's main messages about their experiences; Peyton Young (2004) described this process of reading and re-reading as part of the analysis process of CDA that involves "moving back and forth between the micro analysis of the transcripts to the macro analysis of the social

practices and cultural models" (p. 169). I focused on one of these main categories/research questions and browsed all the related coded data from the transcripts.

These quotations were analyzed further into sub-categories: for example, with 'Parents' perceptions: the positives and negatives of video games', the data related to this topic was re-read to determine what specific positives and negatives parents were perceiving. Sub-categories emerged, such as physical activity, social interactions, violence, time addiction, etc. Once these categories were organized more complexities and contradictions began to arise from the data.

At this stage, I prepared the organized quotations into subcategories with some comprehensive commentary to introduce and explain the sections as a findings chapter. Themes were emerging but the findings were reading too linear, too simplified; the words of the participants could reveal the theme, but they seemed out of content from the depth and complexity from which they had emerged initially in the interviews. Identifying the theme and providing evidence from the data was limiting the power of the research findings. I decided to take the data analysis one step further in order to share the findings as ethno-dramatic scripts. The intention of writing the scripts was to reveal the emerging themes in the complexities in which they existed: overlapping, complicated, and sometimes contradictory.

Representation - Ethnodrama

Ethnodrama is the practice of representing collected data, usually observations and interviews, into performative, theatrical scripts. Ethnodramas are unique to other forms of research representations because the intention of the text and performance is to give voice to people and scenarios that often go unheard, and subsequently educate a

broader population about the issue(s). Ethnodramas in differing forms are also referred to as reader's theatre, dramatically scripted narratives, performance ethnography, performance texts, and playwriting as critical ethnography (Sparkes, 2002). Saldaňa's (2005) belief of the primary goal of ethnodrama is:

> *...neither to educate nor to enlighten. Theatre's primary goal is to entertain - to entertain ideas as it entertains its spectators.* With ethnographic performance, then, comes the responsibility to create an entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative. Ethnotheatre reveals a living culture through its character-participants, and if successful, the audience learns about their world and what it's like to live in it. (P. 14)

Scripts were appropriate for this study for a number of reasons. Eisner writes, "[your] task is to do justice to the situation and yet to recognize that all stories, including those in the natural sciences are fabrications – things made" (as cited in Kramp, 2004, p. 121). Understanding all stories, including dialogues, to be creations of people's perceptions of the world meshes well with studying Discourses since people's language is based on their beliefs, experiences, and values which they form from the worlds around them. The ethnodramatic scripts and Critical Discourse Analysis enables the stories to be viewed and critiqued within their interwoven, multiple connections and meanings, and not dissected in a seamless, unified format which would lessen the complexity and depth of the findings.

Interview questions were constructed and framed to encourage parents to tell stories of their involvement with their adolescent gamers. Telling stories is a skill set in

its own right, never mind encouraging and trying to draw stories from another person. Full narratives did not emerge from the interviews and yet the parents' voices begged to be heard. They were sharing the opinions, thoughts, and ideas that other parents, educators, and gamers would be interested in hearing and knowing more about. These were the voices of parents who *did* want to talk about the issues and interrelationships of video game usage by their adolescents and yet needed a specific space and time to do so. They found this place of discussion in the interviews and focus groups. Spaces like a kitchen, a car ride, or at an intimate gathering with friends were spaces I imagined that these conversations could happen, spaces in which they could review and consider beliefs, values, and opinions about video games. This is important because of the numerous spaces that conversations about video games do not occur for parents. A script allows more symbolism to be included, for example in the setting, sound, and lighting. These symbolic additions enabled me to highlight the layers that emerged from the parents' language.

Parents had differing opinions and a wide range of experiences with their adolescents and video gaming. All these voices needed to be heard; sometimes the parents contradicted themselves or had difficulty addressing a question. All these complexities can be 'shown' in a performative piece more than in an expository text. Richardson (as cited in Sparkes, 2002) described the purpose of ethnodrama further:

> Drama is a way of shaping an experience without losing the experience…it can reconstruct the "sense" of an event from multiple "as lived" perspectives; it can allow all the conflicting voices to be heard, relieving the researcher of having to be judge and arbiter; and it can give voice to what is unspoken…When the

> material to be displayed is intractable, unruly, multisited, and emotionally laden, drama is more likely to recapture the experience than is standard writing. (p. 129)

The multi-vocality of the parents' thoughts and ideas that can be written into a script to reveal the layers and dimensions at play more clearly than hearing one parent's account at a time.

Finally, the most critical reason for representing this study as ethnodramatic scripts is to be able to share this work with a wider audience. This study was conducted to learn more about parents' experiences with a further intention of sharing parents' experiences with other parents, librarians, and educators. Making the experiences of parents more accessible to a wider audience serves to bring more attention to the subtle, yet significant ideologies at work in our society that can be viewed through encounters around video games. Parents are more likely to relate to these dialogues as language that they might think, or speak about with regard to video games, and by relating in this way, their engagement with these scripts might lead them to notice the complexities and contradictions that can be and should be questioned more deeply. Ethnodramas are meant to evoke more questions and commentary: "…it is their overt intention…to be a form of public voice ethnography that has emancipatory and educational potential" (Mienczakowski as cited in Saldaña, 2005, p. x).

Creating the scripts - analysis process.

I drew upon Sparkes (2003) and Saldaña (2005) in creating the ethnodramas. I reread the first main research question and the congruent findings section: Parents' perceptions: the positives and negatives of video games. The coded data was grouped together in categories over 27 pages. I organized by hand in the margins which quotations

should be joined together in a single script and then in what order. When a setting and characters seemed appropriate for the evolving scripts, I jotted that down in the margin as well. Then I began piecing a script together in a computerized text document. Once the quotations were cut and pasted into a script, I then deleted much of the unnecessary dialogue, such as unfinished sentences, 'ums,' stutters, etc. and interspersed comments that did not seem appropriate to the topic or the character, or that distracted from the flow of the dialogue/monologue. Saldaňa quotes a folk saying about theatre: "A play is life - with all the boring parts taken out" (p. 16) and he advised how an ethnodrama should also create a dramatic effect, but is the result of "a participant's and/or researcher's combination of meaningful life vignettes, significant insights, and epiphanies." Saldaňa (2005) also suggested that:

> a playwright of ethnodrama is not just a storyteller; she's a story-*re*teller. You don't compose what your participants tell you in interviews, but you can creatively and strategically edit the transcripts, assuming you wish to maintain rather than "restory" their narratives. (p. 20)

The settings are fictional and imagined based on parents' implied involvement with others through information shared during the interviews. The characters are based on the participants, sometimes those parents play the role of the 'other' parents that they describe in the interviews – parents who might judge them, or parents of their child's friends, or 'imagined' parents to which they make reference in a general sense. Some scripts are written as dialogues and some as monologues. Many of them have voice-overs which symbolize the parents thinking to themselves and not sharing the thoughts out loud with any other characters. The commentary in the voice-overs was determined from what

information the parents shared in the focus groups versus what they shared in the individual interviews. Much broader societal commentary and questions arose during the focus groups, while during individual interviews parents would share more about their own specific stories with their children. If they did not mention or expand on these individual stories in the broader focus group I decided to keep it as italicized, symbolic of the character's private thoughts.

Most importantly, as these scripts emerged and were created, I kept in mind my purpose in providing a voice for parents whose stories are often not told or heard in relation to adolescents and video games. Ethnodramatic scripts provide the potential to

> represent lived experience, from multiple and contested perspectives, to a much wider audience than other forms of representation. Furthermore, ethnodrama does this in ways that are more authentic, evocative, and engaging. (Sparkes, 2002, p. 137)

The next chapter includes the nine ethnodramatic scripts that were inspired from the analyzed data of this project. These scripts attempt to reveal the complexities that Sparkes (2002) references. The scripts are also meant to create meaningful and memorable connections for readers so that as they witness the issues and perspectives of the parent participants, they may also feel the depth in the participants' stories.

Chapter 4: Findings using Ethnodramatic Scripts

Introduction

The findings are organized by the three main research questions: 1). Parents' perceptions of video games; 2). Parents' engagement with video games and their adolescents; and 3). Parents' understandings of learning. For each of these three sections there are two to four scripts written to represent the analyzed data and reveal the themes that have emerged. The particular scripts were chosen to provide evidence of the main themes and show how the themes were revealed for each research question.

The main themes of 'not knowing', tensions, and fear weave throughout the Findings sections and each of the scripts. The theme of 'not knowing' signifies parents' uncertainty or lack of knowledge about video games. This theme was evident in parent's perceptions of video games, in their engagement with video games and their adolescents, and in their understandings about learning. The theme of tensions represents the pressure and conflict parents experience about video games and their adolescents. This theme was evident in parents' perceptions of video games; their engagement with video games and their adolescent;, and in their understandings about learning, particularly school learning. The third main theme of fear signifies the concerns and apprehension parents have about many aspects connected to video games and their adolescents. This theme was evident in parents' perceptions of video games, their engagement with video games and their adolescents and in their understandings of learning. These themes are intertwined in all of the following scripts.

The scripts are written as a representation of the data. Each script is introduced and summarized with some observations and interpretations. The scripts offer the reader

the opportunity to hear and visualize the parents' experiences for themselves and make their own multiple meanings from what they witness. As Saldaňa (2005) points out, "The goal is to capture both the essence and the essentials of a particular individual's worldview and culture" (p. 37). Therefore, hearing each character's own voice as it appeared in the data, but rearranged to make sense as a script, enables the reader to hear the various perspectives while also noting the similarities. The scripts also reveal the many ways that video games are spoken about. Critical Discourse Analysis of the scripts occurs after the Findings chapter, in the chapter titled *Discussion,* and in that chapter a more thorough consideration of specific words, phrases, and analysis transpires.

Part I –Parents' Perceptions of Video Games

The first question that emerged for this research study was 'What do parents think and feel about video games and where do these ideas and feelings come from?' The interview data revealed a strong perception of video games as negative; this was so primarily because of time involvement, concerns about socialization, violence, and health issues. The multiple interviews helped to highlight more about what parents really know about video games rather than the simple surface level, stereotypical, gut reaction answers. Parents were able to articulate positives about video games, and sometimes it was their first time voicing such a realization. Parents considered hand-eye co-ordination, activity benefits, social aspects, and intellectual learning to be positives. These parents had experience knowing and thinking about video games and although their answers were sometimes steeped in unexamined fears, they also had many experiences or knowledge about video games that disrupted common myths about video games. The following three

scripts share the participants' experiences and shed light on the complexities in the perceptions of video games.

Parents' Perceptions of Video Games: Socialization and Isolation

This first script highlights the fears parents have over the social aspect of video games and ultimately the effects of video gaming on their child's future. During the first interview parents were directly asked about their concerns about video games and what they thought might be positive about video games. They were also asked about their experiences with video games and media in general.

Some sample questions from the first interview that encouraged the parents to share their judgments about video games included:

- What are your concerns about video games?
- What positives do you see around video games?
- How do video games compare to other media your children engage with?
- What kind of participation emerges around video game playing between you and your child?
- What kind of talk emerges around video game playing between family members – you and your child, siblings, your partner and children?
- What has been your experience with video games? (first seen or heard of video games; thoughts about them; getting them for your child; which games do you know about; which consoles do you know about)

Throughout all the interviews parents shared comments or opinions they had about video games. There were considerably more negative comments made directly about video games than there were positive comments.

Every parent spoke about how video games occupy their child's time, sometimes for minutes a day and sometimes for hours a day. When asked what they did not like about it using up time, the parents responded that they would rather have their child participating in something different than video games. Each parent commented to some degree about their preference of having them outside and being active. Another main concern that emerged was the fear of isolation affecting their child, and the effects on their socializing. Often the media portrays the stereotype of the lone gamer, sitting in a dark corner of the basement, in front of his computer or TV screen for all hours. Parents are often confronted with this stereotype and worry about the effects that isolated video gaming might cause for their child. These concerns of addiction and lack of socialization intertwine throughout many of the scripts and are brought forward in the first script.

Script #1 - Keeping Company.

Setting: Kitchen in middle of stage. Dining room table off to stage right. Television and gaming console system at stage front right. Oversized pillow in front of TV. Adolescent boy is sitting on pillow playing video games. Mother and Father are in kitchen preparing dinner.

Lighting: lights are on the parents; dim lights on the gamer.

The sounds from the video game are in the background (car racing, gears changing, hip hop music playing, avatars talking).

Characters:

MIRANDA – Married mother of two children. 11 year old son (Troy) and younger daughter (Jenny). Miranda works as an university administrator in Computer Science.

DAVID – Husband of Miranda. Works full time shift work at retail store. Plays video games with his friends on weekends and plays video games with his son.

TROY – Miranda and David's son and adolescent gamer.

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MIRANDA: He only gets to play with the sound on for maybe half an hour because I can't stand the sound.

DAVID: Yeah, but he thinks that he's good at it… so another place in his world where he has some pride.

MIRANDA: It's all consuming, it's obsessive …it's crowding out a lot of other opportunities… it limits his social activity…that's all he wants to do.

DAVID: He has a group of peers that do that as well, which is good. They all can play together. [takes cutlery to the dining room table, comes back into the kitchen] If you don't know what is going on in a particular game *you* are out of the group… I guess it's like any clique or group.

MIRANDA: But socially I find it's a big problem because if they do have a friend over they just want to play video games and so they're not really interacting together. So many parents all say the same thing: "It's all they want to do is play video games…it's all they want to do is play video games."

DAVID: …he has X-Box on line…

MIRANDA: It's a time bandit. If they didn't have that to do, I assume he would be much more …saying "Hey, Mom, can I have my friend over?" or "Gee, Dad, I want to go do something." Or "I want to go to my friends' house"…so it worries me that it takes away from social time. [pause. Looks at David who has friendly raised eyebrows] Why do I think social time is valuable? I don't know, I guess I just do.

DAVID: It's something for him and his friends to do together and boys are, you know, they don't tend to be as engaging as girls and they don't find, I think, ways to be in close proximity to each other so it's a way for him to bond with his "buds" and it's a cool dialogue they have going on around video games that are out…
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MIRANDA: and he does say 'when are we going to get together and play them?' So I think that it's something… It's a support network.

DAVID: …he's kind of a shy personality, so he's not prone to social engagement, right? But he has lots of friends because they know he is good at playing those kinds of video games. Any strong, connected group of peers when you're going through puberty in your teen years, is a good thing to have…

MIRANDA: I'm trying to talk to him about social skills… like at that last dinner at your Mom's I told him, "You can ask how your Aunt's doing?" and "You can ask another question," and "You can listen and you can respond with more than one word."…but to him, it's easier to just pull out the PSP and sit in the corner rather than engage, 'cause I'm there, you know, I want to visit when I'm there. I want to visit and I want to pull him into it.

DAVID: Well how about with Jenny?

MIRANDA: Right, right… like the two…they talk about it together… even though Jenny doesn't play as much as Troy, he'll go… "Jenny, I got blah, blah blah," and she'll go, "Cool Troy" [DAVID goes through dining room and puts out napkins on the table. Miranda still talking to David, but louder]. You know, so they talk about it which is nice, because they don't typically interact a whole lot just 'cause they're so different… So it's kinda nice that that they do have that in common.

[David then enters the living room and stands and watches the TV.]

MIRANDA thinking to herself [can either do a voice over recording while she works away in kitchen; or Miranda can step forward and speak to the audience]: *The very first thing that jumps into my head is the relationship between Troy and his Dad. Their mode of communication: when they can't talk about anything else, they can go into very in-depth 6 hour conversations about the action that one character's arm does in a specific level of a game. It's ridiculous! But they can really connect and that is a huge positive because they have other father-son struggles. So that's always their common ground.*

[David re-enters kitchen]

MIRANDA: Sometimes I hear parents say, "Oh, my son is limited to a half-hour a day…and we do this…and we do" and sometimes they try to sound like they're superior or something like that but…well…does that make your kids better than mine or

something? You know what I mean? So I kinda get annoyed by that 'cause I think for god's sake!

DAVID: We watched tons of TV…soooo much TV.

MIRANDA: That's a good one. You're right……..he's fine…you know what it is? I worry about the future. The future him, it's not the him now, I think. Maybe it's, when I look at him… my vision is, he's going to be an adult…his house is going to be a mess and he's going to be so lazy, he's not going to be able to cook and not going to have any social skills….he's going to be glued to this [points into the living room at TV] and he's going to miss out on life…I think that's what it is. It's about the future, I think that's what it is.

[Lights fade]

Socialization and isolation discussed.

The husband and wife having a discussion is an appropriate scene; in the interviews the married participants mentioned having had brief conversations with their partners about video games. Also in line with their interview descriptions is that the parents are talking alone about the issues and the adolescent gamer is not part of the dialogue, and in fact, does not even overhear the conversation much. In this script the husband is knowledgeable about video games and enjoys playing the games himself. He is not adamant about their positives but he is able to consider enough ideas to reveal the tensions in the wife's concerns. There were more female participants in this research project, so it tended to be more females who voiced concerns while the fathers were more often able to empathize with the adolescent gamers' needs or behaviours with either needing masculine play time or being curious about technology. This gendered perspective of adolescent males' needs seems to affect perspectives about video games.

Parents often were unable to articulate their unease about video games. Some examples in this script are: "I don't know, I guess I just do," and "I think for god's sake!" One of the comments by a female participant (not in this script) was by Wanda who

commented, “Do I see any positives? [Pause] I’ve never thought about it…I’m so engrained into the negative. Do I see any positives about video games?” Her repetition and pausing highlights how much the concerns govern thought patterns around video games. Some of the parents would even respond unintentionally with more negatives to the questions about positives. However, all the parents did mention positive attributes about video games during the first interview and subsequent interviews. Then, during the first focus group and afterward, parents were even more receptive to and verbal about the positives.

During a couple of interviews, Miranda (from this script) also considered the differences between males and females around technology and gaming. She pointed out the differences in time spent gaming that she witnessed at her job in the Computer Science department at the university, but she ended her description with the recognition that although this amount of time is concerning, she also understands that her son is learning from the games so she tended to overlook the time commitment:

> I don’t quite understand what that obsessive draw is to them, but my husband has it too…like I see many guys actually, some girls too, I’m in this department you know, computer science right? So I see girl gamers but it’s definitely…to me I see a gender difference and the boys are just obsessed with it and that concerns me a bit.

Parents noted how the sons seemed more drawn to play video games than their daughters. However, most reasoning for this discrepancy came from hegemonic descriptions of gendered roles, such as boys like to experiment and try dangerous activities more than girls. Parents did not express any concern over daughters not playing video games as

much; granted, all the daughters were younger and may not have played video games as much as they might going forward. Research has examined the lack of interest from girls to play video games (Jenkins, 1999; Jenson, deCastell & Fisher, 2007; Kafai, 2008) due to male driven content, and ideologies embedded in the play; however, as video games continue to provide multiple learning opportunities and preparation for careers in the 21st century, females will also continue to be positioned as 'outsiders' to this digital potential unless they gain more access.

The concern of socialization is addressed in this script. Miranda, expresses a typical response of the parents who valued the face to face, physical presence of interacting more than the verbal interaction of online game play. Throughout the interviews they had opportunity to question what was valuable about different kinds of socializing, such as play, communicating, and problem solving between people. Not once did a parent question the developmental age of the son and his ability to socialize as a consideration of their awkward socializing abilities, which begs the question, 'What comes first ~ not knowing how to socialize or the video games that seem to inhibit socializing?' As many of the parents attested to, video games create different ways to socialize; whether these new ways to socialize are valued or not is another question.

Parents also complained about video game play taking away from other activities; again activities meaning 'adult preferred' social activities, such as sports, physical activity, going to the playgrounds, or academic learning. Video games, due to their engaging story lines and requirement for skill building, demand solid amounts of the gamer's time. The social interaction involved with the games is different and less valued than the social interaction of other game play, such as athletics, game boards, and

dramatic play (i.e. dress up or with figurines). Play with video games looks much different than the play the children displayed when they were younger. However, like the father, David, in this script, parents were often able to consider what video games provided for their son in a social arena. More game systems have moved to creating and supporting multi-player games both online and in the same room. Some players organize land parties where they hook up their consoles at the same location and can have numerous players playing together in the same location. All of the parents recognized that there were social aspects to their child's video gaming practices, whether that be within an online community, with friends at school, or with family members. All the parents saw aspects of these social interactions as positive.

That playing video games can bring families together is something that many of the parents expressed, especially when they spoke about their own personal experiences with video game playing. Monica described the positive connection between parent and child that video games can enable. Scott also spoke about how he and his son rearranged the furniture and rooms of the house so that the video gaming occurred in the main part of their house; that way he could still participate in his son's playing even if simply by observing the game play and being able to talk to his son about the game concept or ideologies. Other parents reiterated this same purposeful house layout. Howard, although more reluctant to play or even watch the video game play of his son, still acknowledged and supported his son's interest to meet up with and visit an online gaming friend when they went on a holiday to San Francisco. Howard was a journalist and believed his son was modeling his example of meeting with and learning about people. Parents were hesitant about the loss of certain ways of socializing as they observed their adolescent

engaging in video gaming, but otherwise acknowledged many of the social interactions created by gaming as positive additions in their children's lives.

Parent's perceptions of Video Games: Inactivity and Health Concerns

A major concern for parents about any popular media is the replacement of active outdoor time with screen time. One parent was able to share their school newsletter with me and the message from the public health nurse was a warning to parents about the harm screen time was causing for children, while the second half of the message was about how to encourage a healthy lifestyle for their children. These messages are prevalent for parents and cause a concern as parents explore the realities of their child being engaged in video game playing.

This script combines three parents who consider the concerns and benefits of video games on their adolescent gamers' health. Their comments and thoughts are juxtaposed with the setting of a soccer game because parents mentioned sports many times throughout the multiple interviews. Three of the nine parents had their sons enrolled in organized sports [hockey, water polo, and swimming lessons], and many of the other parents gave value to sports even if their sons were not involved in a sport at the time of the interviews.

Script #2 - Keeping You Safe and Healthy, Boys!

Setting – 3 lawn chairs at a boys' soccer game. Weather is overcast. Two mothers and one father of different players are sitting in the chairs. Two of them are holding reusable coffee mugs and one has a Starbucks coffee cup. The two mothers share a blanket over their laps.

Background - Sound of the soccer players yelling at each other on the field. Referee's whistle blowing. Cars driving by on the main road near by.

Extra for the stage – see only the parents' backs – watching screen on stage that has a soccer game happening – highlighting the kicking, falling, shirt grabbing, referee's penalty card being held up.

Characters:

TABATHA – Married mother of three children: two daughters and one son. Son (Jacob) is 13, the oldest child, and the main video gamer in the family. She works as a nurse.

WANDA – Married mother of 13 year old son (Saul). The son does satisfactorily in school. He has one older brother. Mother and father both work. Mother works in health care and has limited computer experience.

SCOTT – Single father of 13 year old son (Caleb). He manages his own IT company. Son struggles in school and father is keen to reflect on broader societal beliefs to understand issues.

*Note – *italics* are used when a character speaks to represent them speaking to themselves – recommend a recorded voice over to be used on stage or character faces the audience and speaks to them.

TABATHA: Wow – I barely got Jacob here on time. I couldn't get him to quit his video game. I don't quite understand what that obsessive draw is to them.

WANDA & SCOTT – [laugh politely]

WANDA: Yeah, Saul doesn't naturally want to do active things so it takes some kind of work to get there but as soon as it is me telling him to do it, it is not something he wants to do at all. So how to figure that one out is really challenging.

Player falls down. Referee blows whistle.

WANDA: He did play on the basketball team this year, so he got, you know, two extra days a week outside of gym to do something, and he does walk to the bus stop and walk home from the bus stop. So there is a little bit there. But it is still sort of barely enough…

SCOTT: Well, especially teenagers, they need to have a physical outlet, or whatever, they can't be just sitting there. I read things that say it's not necessarily good if they only play video games because they get the emotional and the adrenalin stimulation, but they're not physically doing something so there's no physical outlet, so I don't like that…

Time out called for a penalty. TABATHA talks across to another parent to find out what the penalty was about.

WANDA: *My husband likes to run and he will invite Saul to ride his bike with him and sometimes Saul will say yes and sometimes no. So it depends on what else is going on. Saul is just not one of these active kids. He did join cross country running when he was younger and he has tried a few different sports, but nothing has really been anything that he loves to do so far. It's not like he won't join things at school that are going on but he just isn't interested, and he's not an athlete either. And so I think that is part of it too. I think he knows that maybe he's not the best star player on the team. They don't encourage kids to, well even to grade six, they don't really encourage kids to do that sort of thing unless they are really good at it. You know it's more competitive and more for boys. You know, I think there are things he would still do at school, but…*

Game is back on. TABATHA's son is on the bench.

SCOTT: No, it's just, I talk to other parents and they said "Yeah, they should be out doing something"…they should be out golfing or riding their bikes, or doing something but video gaming's all they want to do. It's just sad...almost obsession with it. But then I talk to my sister and she said, "But we watched tons of TV in my generation", and I think about how much…

TABATHA: Yah, that's an unhealthy amount of time to be stationary with your eyes focused at six feet away… Jacob complains about headaches, about eye strain, you know, other sort of physical things that you know are connected to it and all you can say is, "Well…maybe you should stop now". It's a big negotiation thing…like a power and control issue.

WANDA: I just think "That is so violent… it's awful… oh my God… and it drove me so crazy because Saul would come home from school and just want to play it all the time…

Parents are quiet. The one team's players line up in front of the goal, hands cupped in front of their shorts protecting their goal. Penalty shot is prepared and taken.

WANDA: …so what I have done is he's not allowed to play any violent games through the week. He can play other video games... he likes hockey…and then on the weekend he can play *Call of Duty*.

TABATHA: I understand that there is some hand eye coordination something that is supposed to be quite good. No, I would way rather come here to the field or see them swimming and handling the ball in the pool for water polo and that kind of thing. So no quite honestly, if I hadn't have caved in on the Play Station, I'm not even sure I'd have gone with the Wii, but my husband, you know, he's a bit more into that than me.

WANDA: I do like that there's sort of a physical component to the Wii and that there isn't as much smashing (embarrassed laugh), you know, blood and gore stuff.

SCOTT: that's personally why I picked the Wii because then you're actually physically doing something and you're interacting and stuff. My friend likes to do the Wii Fit and he'll do the boxing and stuff. *And that's partially why I did want him playing video games was because of his coordination problems. They say that's a place where it can help. Because he doesn't have the fine motor skills when he's writing so that's what the computer is for - he should be able to improve his skills.*

In unison parents shift quickly in their chairs. Player does a sliding check right in front of them.

WANDA: Saul's brother does all sorts of physical things on the Wii, and he has some health issues so he can't do a lot of sports so that's one way for us to get him active. *One of his preferences is to not be outside and do things. So in consideration of the health issues just anything we can tie into the video games is really helpful. And for him video games have been a sense of pain relief. When he is in pain or in the hospital, the video games just make everything better. In the hospital in Vancouver they have little control systems that can roll into the room and they can….those things, they are amazing. He can get an IV put in, if he's got a game controller in his hand. So, they're such a security for him…*

TABATHA: …especially on a sunny day I think, 'Oh my God, they're cooped up down there and lazy,' and you know, the typical things and he should be outside rather than inside.

WANDA: But if you look at all the playgrounds, where are the children?

SCOTT: Playing on the internet!

TABATHA: They should be there morning to night. I know I used to go out and I would leave in the morning and come home at night and I'd come home and my parent would

say, 'You didn't come home for lunch,' and I'd say, 'Well, okay, I was out playing outside.' And they don't do that any more.

SCOTT: But they're afraid too. They'll say 'well what might happen to me when I'm out there' and I'll say 'well not much, go.' Myself, I've always been pressing "Go. Go. Go." Walk to the corner store. Holy Smokes it's going to be alright. "Nah I don't think it's going to be alright." I don't know. I don't know how much of that I put into them and how much they soak up. But they're more afraid, it's out of proportion with the risk, let's put it that way.

TABATHA: I don't know if you notice video games have shifted from being the Mario type of you're interacting in an environment that's similar with what your life could be. So that's where I think they take those steps, like 'I can't go to the store because I just went into that car and stole that car and drove down the street. And killed a guy to get another car and then - Oh my god that could happen!' Maybe they don't think it could actually happen but …

SCOTT & WANDA: Exactly, yeah.
[whistle blows. Player is injured and referee is running over to him. Lights fade.]

Inactivity and health concerns discussed.

This script brings attention to the concept of parents' default choice versus video games: sports. Many of the parents described their son as 'not a typical boy' referring to their absence in competitive sports, or even physically active lifestyles. Hegemonic gendered expectations played a role in how parents described their son, or rationalized his behaviours; for example, the male gamers were described in relation to their athleticism or interest in organized sports; the male gamers were considered unique or different if they practiced kindness, or gentleness; if they showed disinterest in school, the cause was suggested that schools are not supportive of boys' learning; or guessing that they play violent video games because as males they are inherently drawn to dangerous activities. These generalizations and stereotypes occur because as people try to make sense of something they do not understand, generalizations and stereotypes provide quick

answers. Gee (1990)'s theory of language as serving to maintain beliefs and values supports the idea that people will tend to believe that particular male behaviours or practices are normal, natural, or necessary. Celebrating or valuing only particular male behaviours, such as athleticism, competitiveness, and boisterousness, maintains the status quo that upholds a small percentage of hegemonic males in power positions.

Only two of the adolescent gamers in this study participated in competitive sports at the time of the data collection (hockey and water polo). The emotional guilt of not having their sons as active as possible was evident in these parents' language and although they all had different reasons why keeping them active was a challenge (schools do not encourage it for all kids, health reasons, disinterest, etc.), video games were described as definitely not helping the situation. It is important to question this value on sports as the ultimate activity for adolescents to be involved in. Therefore, in this script, the juxtaposition of the three parents watching their sons playing competitive soccer while expressing concerns about video games is used in order to show that the ideologies questioned in videogames – such as violence, safety, physical health, and morals – are all present in a sports game. A perspective of competitive sports for parents is the benefit of their children being physically active and participating with a team, but the ideologies of winning, aggression, injuries, and moral choices are also present and not challenged by parents. Video games could also be viewed with an eye to team work, problem solving, social connection, and literacy learning but the ideologies of winning, aggression, competition and inappropriate content, such as misogyny, violence, and racism are also present.

The parents do not express all of their thoughts about video games out loud in this script. Often, other parents' blatant binary judgments about video games, such as how much time they should be played, which games are appropriate, or other opinions, often intimidate nearby parents who then are nervous to mention how video games are played in their own home. Parents are not keen to speak about video games with other parents for fear of judgment and they can feel alone in how they feel about video games; these perspectives are evident in the research data through the relief parents expressed at speaking and listening to each other at the focus group and the relief they expressed after hearing some of the research findings about video game learning. When asked what stood out to him from the focus group, one parent participant, Howard, commented:

> It was nice to actually meet other parents and listen because you know it comes up in conversation and slides into another conversation that was focused on, you know, what was being talked about. In a neutral group as opposed to in somebody's home because I find, ok I have to go back in time, when we were expecting Neil, we had a parenting, birthing group, right? "Oh how much did you gain," "I gained 14 pounds," "oh we gained 16 pounds." It was all competitive. It was Toronto: lawyers, doctors, insurance people, administrators, you know. Then, of course, the children are born. "Benjamin is 22 inches and so many pounds," and "did James walk first," and it was all very, very competitive.
>
> But when it came to things that were bad, nothing was… nothing. Certain things were not talked about. And I guarantee if we were still with that group there would either be a sizeable increase in the amount of times that kids were reported to other parents who, "Johnny X, he's always on the computer." Right, and then

> somebody else would be, "Really?!" And then, of course, the other one would feel badly and … because there's a family fiction that goes on, each family only presents to the rest of the community what they want to present.
>
> It's a long way of saying, you know, that even amongst here [focus group] I am sure there are things that are sort of not talked about because you don't want to seem different, or "Oh John plays," "Don't worry George does too." You know? So now you are part of the same team. All parents have the same problems.

Howard reveals that parents will often have had enough experiences with other parents to want to avoid judgments as about their own parenting. Even though Howard was still suspicious of the other focus group participants as withholding some information that might discriminate their child or their own parenting, he did end with feeling like the other parents at the focus group were mostly honest and made him feel like he could voice the problems he was having with his son around video games.

Another issue that this script raises is the negotiation of power that parents experience. Power will shift between parent and adolescent. Knowledge and skill of video games often shifts power to the gamer, while house rules and concern for the adolescent's well-being are areas that parents can shift power back to themselves. Tabatha speaks about not being able to get her son off the video games. This is a very common parental complaint. All of the parents in this study commented in some way about the negotiation of getting them to stop playing the games, and they commented on the negotiation that occurs over the types of games they play.

Another flux of power implied by parents was the knowledge that media provided them about video games: references to "they" or "I read things" seemed to provide

parents with authority about various aspects of video games such as violence, social networking, or safety online. Wanda questioned the reports about violence but did not have anything to confirm or debunk the media messages:

> …the violence I don't like, although I've heard studies that say that violence in video games don't cause people to become violent if they….you know, who knows…you hear that stuff right? And they say if the kid is violent to start with they might exaggerate that violence…so it crosses my mind but I'm not seriously too concerned maybe about that.

Rarely did parents get information about video games from their adolescent sons, and none sought out more informed information; although one parent learned from her son that there were settings on one of the violent cartoon games that could control whether weapons could be used or not. Instead, parents relied on community hearsay or folk wisdom: "you hear stuff right?" or "you know, the typical things." This reliance on others' advice or 'knowing' dictated many concerns parents had about video games.

Parents' Perceptions of Video Games: Violence

As mentioned in the last script, parents often get much of their information about video games from the media. This script reveals a father reading the newspaper as his son plays video games. The newspaper is also juxtaposition to the video games. I asked one parent (Howard, the character in this script), "What is the difference between video games and all this other technology, in your mind?" and he responded, "It's repetitive playing, it's the violence, hands down. But then, I say read the newspaper. And what's the newspaper got in it? Murder, prostitution, drugs. It's got street racing, it's got…" The

messages or ideologies in video games that so many parents are concerned about are also evident in our daily lives, especially in reports by the media.

The focus of this script is the concept of violence. During the first interview parents mentioned the violence through out their answers – in describing the games, describing their concerns, or describing their child's video game interests. During the focus group, we briefly considered the comparison between cartoon violence in video games like Mario Cart or crash Bandicoot and more realistic games like Grand Theft Auto, Need for Speed, or Max Payne. Parents were not asked specifically about violence in the video games until the third interview – the second individual interview. The questions asked of them at that point included:

- What is violence? What is different between 'realistic' violence and cartoon violence?
- What about societal issues, such as violence, gender/race portrayals, consumerism, etc. – how do you address these in your family?
- How can you/we know what our children are learning/picking up/taking up from video game violence?

Parents expressed their thoughts on violence around video games which ranged from the visual nature of the scenes in the games, to the choices the game player made within the games that could lead to violence and sometimes the violent behaviour the actual gamer expressed during game play.

Script #3 - "I Read Somewhere…"

Setting: Father reading newspaper silently at dining room table, watching his son, Nathan, playing video games in the living room. The video game is *Halo 3*.

Newspaper article is about video games. [Newspaper article is transcribed from an article in the Times Colonist June 25, 2010.] Optional staging is to have a background screen and have the newspaper article projected onto it.

Character:

HOWARD – Married father of 14 year old son (Nathan) and younger daughter. He is a retired teacher and practicing journalist. He is involved in much of the downtown community organizations and they live in a condominium.

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Article headline: *Video games harmless for most kids: study.*

HOWARD: *Finally!*

Reads on: Violent video games can increase aggression and hostility in some players but they can also benefit others by honing their visual and spatial skills and improving social networking ability, scientists said.

HOWARD: *I always found video games to be fun, because there was something about the way that you're moving your hands in association with your brain, and timing and it was sort of just this concentration…and challenging, fast paced sort of thing.*

Reads on: …researchers said the games can also help to control diabetes and pain and work as a tool to complement psychotherapy…

HOWARD: *Right now they still seem very frail and there they sit in front of their video game watching endless amounts of violence. What I've heard about Grand Theft Auto… the portrayal of women and degradation… I had concerns about that. I don't know, there's always that speculation out there regarding violence in video games and those kids who - a very graphic example like Columbine, right? Playing whatever video games they were playing. I guess there's that fine line between you see it enough and you become sort of anaesthetized to it, so you're not thinking that this is real and my son gets so locked into it - that does concern me.*

Reads on: Violent video games are like peanut butter … they are harmless for the vast majority of kids but are harmful to a small minority with pre-existing personality or mental health problems"…

HOWARD: *He's actually learning to deal with stress and failure and when he's participating online, learning that you're not always best…that's always been a problem*
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for him too. I think it's that perfectionism, that really wanting to think that you're really good at everything.

Picks up his coffee. Watches the screen.

HOWARD: *I don't like the violence in lots of the video games so I told Nathan that he's not allowed to play Mature rated games, but he does sneak play them. I don't approve because even in some of the teen rated, like "Tony Hawk's Underground" they have a part where there are strippers - what's the point of that? I don't think the games are necessarily rated appropriately, but as a parent, I don't have all the time in the world to go through every level of every game with my child to see is someone getting slaughtered, or is there a massacre in this level? I don't know half the time what's going on.*

Nathan raises his hands, controller in one hand, over his head in a cheer. His dad goes back to reading the article.

Reads on: …in a study of 118 teenagers that certain personality traits can predict which children will be negatively influenced by video games.

Father: *Many of our friends were in technology in Ottawa. They seem to all validate the gaming thing: "it is the way of the world". Those who can blackberry, those with the faster thumbs will win.*

Reads on: If someone is easily upset and depressed or is indifferent to the feelings of others, breaks rules and fails to keep promises, they may be more likely to be hostile after playing violent video games.

Father: *My sister was telling me about my nephew. Say 8-9 times out of 10 within half an hour of being on the video game he would push or hit one of his sisters which is very unlike him. He's a very sweet kind hearted sensitive kid so I found that really upsetting that he would do that. But then she also has him playing Rep hockey.*

Nathan leans quickly against the back of the couch and curses under his breath. His father watches the screen for a little while.

Folds up paper and leaves stage.

Violence discussed.

Parents are aware of the violence portrayed in the video games and are unhappy about their child's exposure to it through this medium. Although Tabatha is the only parent to witness aggressive behaviour in her son during game play, the rest of the parents voiced concerns about the long term effects on their children and video gamers in general.

When asked during the second interview about how they described violence, they all expressed their own low tolerance for violent images or actions – from either closing their own eyes, not watching television shows, or verbally telling their children about their view against violence. They all defined violence as people getting hurt or something getting destroyed, which ranged from killing, to shoving, to an avatar hacking at grass. Two parents mentioned dominance as being violent, while only one parent described verbal abuse as violence, and only one parent described violence as taking from others, crossing boundaries, and not respecting another. Parents' definitions of violence were brief mostly because they had not had an opportunity to express their description of it before and because violence is a complicated and varied action or response. There are some actions that parents did not identify as violent while other parents identified any act of dominance as violence. This broad range of perspectives about violence will greatly affect how someone perceives video games.

Some parents were certain that cartoon violence is the same as realistic violence because the messages are still there, while other parents acknowledged that they grew up seeing cartoon violence, like the Road Runner or Tom and Jerry and self-report that they were not affected negatively. One parent explained that she felt that the repetition of

violent images was her concern more than the violent images themselves. Desensitization was quite a concern not only for the parent participants' own children but other people's children. Desensitization is questioned in this script by the parent's own practice of reading mainstream current events news reports.

Two very common topics associated with video games in the media are Grand Theft Auto and Columbine shootings. These two topics were raised by parents during the interviews and are aspects of video games that the media has dedicated much time and space toward. Columbine was the city where two high school students took guns into their school and shot and killed numerous students. They are reported to have played first-person-shooter video games. They were also reportedly bullied by other students at that school and had made weapons in their locked bedrooms. Grand Theft Auto is a popular video game series about gangsters in different American cities. The main character is given missions to accomplish and gains respect as a gangster. Murders, breaking laws, and interactions with criminals are the focus of the game; however, the game is reportedly a satire of American life and meant to have layers of political, societal, racial, and humourous meanings within it (Thompson, 2008). This news event and particular video game appear as representative of the entire video game culture and leave parents so concerned that other perceptions of games are often shadowed.

Some parents were quick to define violence, especially after talking about their opinions of video games, while other parents recognized that defining violence was challenging, and others still recognized the arbitrary, personal perspective of violence that exists which makes choosing someone else's tolerance of violence a questionable if not arbitrary issue. During the first focus group, other parents agreed with how timid their

adolescents seemed in comparison to how independent and unafraid they were at the same age. Scott suggested that video games might contribute to making the players more fearful of the world around them than they might otherwise be. His example was that he believes his son thinks that on his walk to the corner store someone will jump out and rob him or attack him because that is what he is witnessing in the video games.

This script also displays the living room setup that parents described where they could still see the video games from a nearby location. The practice of monitoring or being available to their adolescent children while they played video games is a critical theme discussed more in the next section about parents' engagement with video games. However, also important in this script is the fact that the father and son do not communicate verbally even once during their time together. Parents were asked what the conversations between them and their adolescent looked like, or what was said. The parents usually shared what they themselves might say to their child but didn't say much about what their child said in the conversation. This response is typical when the conversation is more about the parent teaching their point of view to the child, and less about listening to what the child thinks or believes.

Part I – Summary of Parents' Perceptions of Video Games

The post modern theoretical perspective of this study considers the complexities of perceiving video games as simply negative or positive; the contradictions, gaps, and interconnectedness of parents' beliefs and values are apparent in the overlap between the scripts, such as the screen time stealing precious activity play time from the gamers, while the active video games enabled some of the gamers to be more active; or that the

video games kept them from having play dates after school, and yet playing video games also kept them social within their peer groups.

Not knowing or feeling confident about their knowledge about video games was apparent in the parents' dialogues. Parents hesitated on many of the interview questions, said "I don't know," contradicted themselves in an interview, and sometimes were not able to answer the question directly, often providing general comments about society or referring to their own past experiences rather than their children's experiences.

Parents recognized that video games are not all bad, but they still needed time to practice how to counter those nagging blanket statements about the evils of video games that they will continue to hear from other parents and the news media. The next section explores how parents engage more personally in and around video games with their child. The research question of "What are parents' experiences regarding their adolescent child's video game playing?" will be shared in the next findings section.

Part II – What are parents' experiences regarding their adolescent child's video game playing?

The underlying intent of this question was to find out if parents played video games with their adolescent children. Although some parents have played video games with their adolescents, the parents' involvement around video games is much broader than simply playing video games. Some of the questions that helped explore parents' experiences were in relation to their child's play or learning experiences and to explore what role the parents played in those scenarios; parents were asked about positive experiences for them around video games and their child; parents also talked about their

beliefs of what a parents' role or responsibility should be around video games (see Appendix F).

Parents' Engagement with video games and their adolescent: Establishing a Role

Even as parents shared and described their interactions around video games, they seemed unsure as to what role they play in relation to their adolescent and video games: gatekeeper, setting rules, monitoring health, maintaining values, fellow gamer, and/ outsider. This script shows three parents shopping for video games for their adolescent gamers. They each share thoughts or dialogue about their experiences with video games while the store clerk also shares her own experience as a parent with video games. Some of the dialogue is a voice over, which again suggests the lack of places or environments in which parents may have for talking about video games. Without a chance to dialogue in any depth with another adult, parents are sometimes stuck in the same narrative with the same commentary and beliefs that do not have an opportunity to become disrupted.

Script #4- Browsing for a Connection.

Setting: Department store – electronic section – wall of video games. Two parents not together but in the same isle looking through the glass cases, shopping separately. A checkout counter is located in the corner stage.

Very faint lights are on the checkout counter and the video game aisle. The lights shine down on the parent who is speaking at the time.

A voice over is used while the lighting is on them and they are looking at video games – picking some up and turning them over, or scanning through the rows of them with their eyes.

Music: Department store music playing in the background is Wide Open Spaces – Dixie Chicks.

Characters:

SCOTT – Single father of 13 year old son (Caleb). He manages his own IT company. Son struggles in school and father is keen to reflect on broader societal beliefs to understand issues.

CAROL - Married mother of 11 year old son (Jason) and nine year old daughter. She is a stay-at-home mom and has previously worked as an Early Childhood Educator.

MIRANDA – Married mother of two children. 11 year old son (Troy) and younger daughter. She works as a university administrator in Computer Science.

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SCOTT: *No shopping cart or basket. Pulls a list out of his pocket* (Voice over to show that he is thinking, not talking out loud*):* When he was very young we played together a little bit because we like to play these older style games which are really just more fun than they are aggravating or challenging…. the typical "Mario" Nintendo type games. We played a little bit of Wii together when that first came out. I found it fun, but he didn't really, so…Then he started to get into the newer style of games which…don't interest me.

(Pause. Picks up an Xbox game.)

SCOTT: He will tell me everything. A lot about the characters in the game, and the characters he can create too. I couldn't repeat it because there's so much information …in fact, I probably don't listen all that well because it's just too much. (Shakes his head. Heads to the checkout counter with Xbox game.) I guess that's sort of the transition from playing together as family and now games he plays on his own.

(Lights fade off adult male and onto the other shopper. A female – mid 40's – shopping basket in hand. Basket has a couple of household products in it. Dressed in her work outfit – nurse scrubs. Standing in front of the collection of Wii games)
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CAROL: (Voice over to show that she is thinking, not talking outloud*):*
We've had fun playing on the Wii. The children usually ask over and over and then we "yah, OK…sure". It's not something we're very interested in doing. Mario Cart is one they like us to play with them…sometimes we'll do that… that's kinda nice that we can all do together…and then, we've done the bowling together, we had quite a laugh about that, and then Wii Ski was one that we laughed a lot about too. The racing ones seem to work the best. I just laugh at myself because I really don't have a clue what to do and I end up in last place …every time, (laughter) and my children are in first and second so they think that's pretty great! The other one they have is Super Smash…Mario Super Smash…Brothers or something. I've played that…They like us to play that, but I just totally don't get it. (laughter) I just press buttons. I don't even know what I'm doing…

(Checkout Counter person comes over to offer assistance)

CHECKOUT PERSON: One of the games that my son really likes is Super Monkey Ball, which is for *Gamecube*. And so the monkey ball has a bunch of different choices for what you can do with it. And he got one, I think it is some ski jump. And so the monkey and the ball rolls down the ski jump, but it isn't skiing, it is over water. Then the thing flies over the water and then you have to sort of quickly roll it down the ramp, fly it over the water and somehow make it land on a target that is floating in the water. And these targets are next to impossible to land on. I'm playing this with him and I had no idea how to make these things land on the target, it was just impossible. I played it several times and sometimes I was lucky and most of the time I just crashed into the water and died. So I never did figure that one out.

(Both women laugh.)

CHECKOUT PERSON: Oh yeah it was funny. It made me laugh a lot, they always make me laugh because I just have no success what so ever. And I just think 'oh this is crazy'.

(Both women laugh.)

CAROL *nodding*: Well...it's usually me asking him to slow down and asking him to show me again, and again, and again and he thinks it's funny how much of a klutz I am with this system. (Checkout person: 'Right') But he really likes when I play with him… so we try and …we play other games together. We haven't… we still have a pile of board games that we play together...so that's more how we relate.

(Pause)

I've played games with him on the Wii. It was fun because my dad is sooo into it right, it was kinda fun right? There's three generations and we're all sitting around playing this

game: you've got this steering wheel and I can't even remember now, you either push a button on the back or on the front and you can jump over certain things and you jump up and hit certain things and if you hit these things in the air you get points. So you know, like my dad's yelling "Jump, Jason, Jump!" and I mean he's just so into it, right? It was just fun because you pick out these different cars, vehicles and you pick out the different characters. It was just a lot of fun.

(Lights fade off these women. Lights go onto another woman, late 30's. Picking up a video game and reading the back of it)

MIRANDA: (Voice over to show that she is thinking, not talking outloud)*:*
I try to teach him what goes in behind it. So that he's not just like 'I'm king of the world because I can do this game,' but look at the programming in behind that. Look at the different things that have gone into creating this game so that he's not just like… it's not just made for us to rule the world; there's work in behind it and education.

(Picks up another video game.)

MIRANDA: With the *Pirates of the Caribbean* he was really excited about it and he said "I want you to look at it," and "I think that I'd like to play it," and "I think I should be allowed to." "Well, I'll take a look at it" I said. And usually it takes me a while to get an opportunity to find the time to look at it, so he'll remind me quite a bit: "Have you looked at it yet, have you looked at it yet?" Then I'll take a look and just finally see. I don't like a lot of violence…playing games that have a lot of violence, especially really graphic, gory violence and just not wanting them to be desensitized to that…by seeing so much of it.

(Pause. Puts game back on shelf. Steps back to look at games.)

MIRANDA: How do you determine…it's very hard…it's really difficult. I wish there was a clear way to say "this is fine or this isn't fine".

(Picks up another game. Only looking at the front of the game.)

MIRANDA: It's really un-chartered waters… *(Flips the game over*) You kinda look at it and go "well, uuhhhh, hmmm."

(Pulls game away from herself. Looks surprised. Keeps skimming the back.)

MIRANDA: Oh, my anxiety …whoooo… last week he said "Mom, someone just got *Halo III*." He is very creative. He came up with a little proposal that he could play *Halo III* for

one hour after school and then only play *Call of Duty* a maximum of 3 hours a day on the weekend, so it's all a negotiation…

(Pauses. Puts the game back on the shelf.)

It causes me a lot of stress.

(Walks away from the video game aisle over toward checkout. Lights dim on her.)

I'm at the point now that I'm almost giving up.

(lights fade)

Establishing a role discussed.

Parental involvement with video games and adolescents comes in many forms as does the role parents play in relation to their adolescent and video games. An obvious connection is the act of buying video games for their children. Some parents preview or research the games before they buy them, but most of them buy the games their children ask for, with a few exceptions based on ratings. The parents in this script reveal much of that 'not knowing' that parents described in many ways throughout the interviews. Parents felt that the video games their adolescents played were too complicated for themselves to play or even learn how to play, with some Wii games as an exception. Even with the Wii games, the adolescent gamers were often more skilled than the parents. However, like the title of this script says, parents find themselves making connections with their adolescent gamers by playing video games together and two of the families reported playing with their children and the grandparents.

Parents reported not knowing about games because of their own disinterest in the content of the games, the confusion of the screen, or the annoyance of the sounds of the

game. Some of the not knowing about video games came from a few of the parents who felt technologically incapable, for example one mother repeatedly called herself "a dinosaur" in reference to being behind in technology. Parents were all asked about their understanding of the video game ratings by the ESRB (ratings board). Many of them recognized the symbols 'E', 'T', and 'M' but did not always know what they meant, for example, Wanda said,

> I know that M is probably bad…right? And E is good for littler kids and that my kids will say that they like a game, and they'll say "Oh Mom, that's OK, it's a T…and I go "OK"…or I go that's an M, so what's the story on that one, but I don't really know what the rating actually means.

Parents also commented that they were not always in agreement with what the rating was, questioning who made the decisions for the rating in the first place:

> Well, I know that there are ratings of games! I've seen some rated E that I've gone "uh….really? That's an E? OK" And I just sort of look at them the same way I look at ratings for movies….they are completely random based on the opinions of people who may or may not have children or who may or may not be human…of who I have no idea where they get these from …I think they're probably industry generated by previous sales and things like that…I don't know ...I don't give them a lot of …

One parent solved the issue of not relying on or not knowing about the ratings by encouraging her children to rent the video games first to determine for themselves as a family if the game would be appropriate for them. Carol says,

> So that is one of the reasons why we have encouraged the kids to do that to try and rent games when we can. And it has worked out. I mean they do get bored with it if it is not a very good game. It is helpful that way too. To me the rating system can't be relied upon and I wouldn't rely upon it, and Jason seems to think that I might not get a Teen game and that is not necessarily true, you know we probably haven't talked about that specifically but for me I would actually like to see it, preview it.

Parents are making a connection with their adolescent gamers beyond playing the video games with them. They are making choices with them about which games are best for the adolescent (or for themselves), buying games for them, and watching them play. These connections with their children are not easy and involve lots of negotiating, communication, and understanding – all seemingly typical expectations of parental interactions with teenagers in general.

Parents' engagement around video games and their adolescents: Guidelines

Script #5 - Monitoring the guilt

Setting - Far back corner of stage is a desk and chair – in the dark. Adolescent boy gets up from desk and walks to a living room area and sits on the couch. Adolescent gamers playing Call of Duty in the living room. Two on the couches. Two on the floor. All with controllers in their hands. WANDA busy in kitchen, cleaning up and preparing food. She has full view of the living room from the kitchen.

Sound in the background is *Call of Duty*. She also has faint classical music playing in the kitchen. The different music is louder at specific times to highlight WANDA's feelings.

Lighting focuses on the WANDA. Dim lights on the boys playing video games.

Character:

WANDA - Married mother of 13 year old son (Saul). The son does satisfactorily in school. He has 1 older brother. WANDA and father both work. WANDA works in health care and has limited computer experience.

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WANDA: *What I found is that nobody wanted to come over to our house because we didn't have a system, right? And so I broke down and got it and then about probably, about last year, I broke down and let them have some of the games that I said I would never let them have and I didn't really know much about them. They said "Oh, we play it next door..." "Mom it's not that bad," and "oh Mom." They pestered me and pestered me and pestered me, right? And I thought, Oh God, well, they're all doing it and I started thinking well if they do it when they're 15 versus if they do it when they're 12…*

(Looks up to watch the screen for a minute.)

WANDA: (Outloud to the boys:) Why don't they come up with games where you're shootin' out love and hugs? (Polite laughter from 2 of the boys)

(Back to cleaning.)

WANDA: *I don't understand why you would ever introduce those images to your brain… I can't watch certain movies - I've learned that over time… You have to make certain decisions and everybody has to learn to make those decisions.* (Pause) *Perhaps they need to learn to make that choice themselves… to recognize in themselves what their limit is….*

(Steps into the room while drying a bowl with a hand towel. Watches the boys for a moment)

WANDA: *He has a competitive energy to him and I see it come out when he's playing video games especially if he's playing with other kids. I know that's not his real personality because when I have taken the games away as a punishment, he's really not like that. So I really notice a difference… I felt concerned. I felt like a bad Mom, I guess, I thought he should be... I think it's guilt, you know… I think he should be doing this, he should be doing that. I felt angry at myself for breaking down and getting it in the first place and, yah, I felt just like it was my fault… and my husband noticed it: "Well, if you wouldn't have bought those games…" "We wouldn't be having these problems."*
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(Brings bowls of snacks into the room. Sits down on the arm of the couch. Watches for a minute in quiet.)

WANDA (to the room): What does that, the little things do?

(One boy answers. Inaudible.)

WANDA: Is that the enemy that is showing so you know which way to turn to find them?

("Mhmm" from 2 boys)

WANDA: *(voice over)* They really work together…and the strategies that they come up with, I'm just…

(WANDA walks back to kitchen.)

WANDA: *It's a whole different world of communication than just… you know, I would sit with my girlfriends and we'd look at each other and talk…. they don't look at each other… they look at each other's screens... But they go back and forth and…I don't…it's a different language. It's quite fascinating.*

(WANDA looks at the clock on the wall. Clock reads 4:30pm.)

WANDA: *I usually make sure that he has his homework done. But sometimes that is not possible because he bugs me that he wants to play first and then do homework. He is learning about the Holocaust and he says, you know we have actually learned quite a bit from this game and…he is not an academic type… and he has got A, A, A on all his things about the Holocaust… so I think the video game in that sense has been positive…* (looks over at the screen) OK, guys, how long are you going to do this for?

(no answer)

WANDA: How 'bout we say another 20 minutes?

Saul: Ah at the end of this game?

WANDA: How long is that?

(Pause)

Saul's FRIEND: It might be a half an hour.

WANDA: OK, well at the end of this game it goes off, you go out and play basketball for a while.

FRIENDS: OK, OK.

(Lights dim. Clock shows 5pm. Gamers get up and leave the room together)

Guidelines discussed.

This script is important to include as it addresses the guilt parents feel about their child playing video games and all the interactions and decisions involved with video game interaction. Wanda expressed guilt over her husband implying that any of the discipline challenges they were having with their son around video games was Wanda's fault for having allowed the son to have video games in the first place. Allowing for use of the video games seemed to evoke guilt for many of the other parents who wanted to rationalize why they got the games. One of the main reasons for a number of the parents was for the social connection it enabled their sons to have by owning video games. This guilt over the apparently intrusive use of video games seemed to cause the parents to feel responsible to monitor their adolescent's video game play.

If they were out playing in the street would parents monitor their game play as closely? I wonder. Parents worry about the dialogue that the gamers speak or do not speak when playing video games; however, sports dialogue is not much different. If parents were watching a road hockey game in front of the house would they ask questions about the game during game play? Likely not. Not recognizing the game atmosphere of the video games leaves parents concerned about the gamer's inability to communicate during play. At one point during the interviews one parent commented that "everybody has to learn to make those decisions. Perhaps they need to learn to make that choice

themselves…to recognize what their limit is…" This moment is critical in that it disrupts almost all of the other thoughts and behaviours of the parent in this script. If she really believed that we are all capable of learning our limits then she would not need to monitor as much, or feel guilt, or think of her son's communication as lacking. Instead, she might engage him in broader conversations about limits, violence, choices, etc. The next script examines the dialogue of parents with their adolescent children.

Parents' Engagement with Video games and their adolescent: Conversing

This script was inspired by one of the conversations I observed between a participant and son around video games. The conversation seemed more of a setup for the son than a conversation or an inquiry. Although the parent does not engage the son in much of a back and forth dialogue, the parent still has many thoughts about video game playing and their relationship as parent/child. As in the last script, parents did not report engaging their children in discussions in order to learn more about video games; when they did attempt to engage them in discussion they usually tried to talk with them during game play.

The radio commentator plays a role in this script by representing the 'beyond video game world': the world of community events, recreation centre activities, school or sporting events. "Beyond the video game world' is where parents often wished their child would belong and spend time. Through focus groups and individual interviews parents did come to question what they were searching for in the 'beyond video game world'.

Script #6 - Ideas about the world

Setting: Parent driving car. Teenage son in the back seat playing Nintendo DS game system. Parent looks in rear view mirror at son.

Sound: radio playing. *Cats in the Cradle* song. Radio commentator.

Character:

JASMINE – Married mother of 13 year old son (Mathew) and 5 year old son. Born and raised in Hong Kong she reflects on how to merge the different cultural beliefs while raising her sons. She works night shifts in health care.

JASMINE: It's a war game, right Matthew?
SON: It's a first player shooter.
JASMINE: People die? Do they explode?
SON: Yes.
JASMINE: Do you make it happen?
SON: Yes.
JASMINE: Others do it too?
SON: Yes.
JASMINE: (sarcastically) Great.

JASMINE: *Sometimes I feel sorry about, like this is his enjoyment and I just make him feel guilty to play. I try not to show that kind of feeling. I really think that if there is a certain game time, I just let him play without blaming. You have been playing a lot today why don't you just do something better than this - I wish I would say that to him. I can be really really harsh with what I am saying to him because I'm the one who let him play the game.*

SON: (Explosion sound) Oh you should've seen that one Mom!

JASMINE: *There are video games that I tell my son "I don't want you having anything to do with." I know some of them he's played other places, but I still say no and I explain why and I talk about him making different choices and give him things to think about because you can't ignore the issue 'cause it could become a problem. The military uses certain video games to train them to kill, shooting on impulse without even thinking about the consequences. They use video games to train them to be desensitized.*

RADIO ANNOUNCER: Well school's out for the summer folks! Parks and Rec are offering a week long camp of paint ball, capture the flag, and rock climbing. So sign your kids up at your nearest community rec centre.

JASMINE: *I don't spend a lot of time watching… and I peek here and there…like "what is going on in there." I think one hour is enough and then two hours maybe not. On the weekends, maybe, but during a school day I really say no to two hours. With Playstation*

it was just constant fighting over getting him to shut that off and when he was on it, I guess he's focusing on a task, but even when he came off it he was kinda of like, not quite dazed but he was really out of it for a while, so it was kinda like 'snap out of it' I'm trying to have a conversation here.

SON: I beat the castle! Yes!

JASMINE: *I should have more control on my side to tell him what I like and what I don't like. Sometimes, I feel bad. I shouldn't do it. It's just we have a very good relationship. I can do something more like, 'Hey, lets go for a walk,' let's do something that he will be interested in and he will leave the game. So there is something that I can do.*

JASMINE to SON: What's happening in the game?

SON looks up from game and begins to talk.

RADIO ANNOUNCER comes on for audience: That's a classic song by Stephen Wolf. Head out on the highway reminds me that the new Grand Theft Auto is coming out this Saturday and will be available at your closest box store to be sure!

JASMINE: *Whooo… did they say Grand Theft Auto? He asked if he could get it on DS and I said "no"…. even though he's probably seeing it online…but probably, the thing that really bugs me about that is because it is about a lot of black people. To me that is racial stereotyping, so I think it boils down to your values… I'm just not comfortable with that…And stealing cars is a current day kind of a thing that happens. Yah… I don't know, I don't really like the sound of that…even though I've never watched it.*

Radio Song plays: Kayne West's song *Power* plays in the background

JASMINE: *We talk about the ratings of the games and we talk about what the M rated games mean to me; that means he's going to be watching something or playing something where people are getting limbs shot off or blood spurting out. What is the purpose of that? I've talked about it and he just blows it off. I was very nervous about it when he started playing it. I was watching very carefully, and I was doing my little running commentary and he kept shshsh…yah, yah Mom… "take it easy, take it easy". After seeing him engage with some of those elements in the game, I went, nothing's getting pushed into his head here… he does get his ideas about the world from the world and not from his stuff.*

(lights fade)

Conversing discussed.

Parents often mention the concern about desensitization when they consider what might be harmful about video games. Through the interviews and focus groups parents often calmed their own fears about their son being desensitized by realizing that they do monitor their child's behaviours and thoughts about the world, through observation and conversations. One parent expressed relief in the middle of this study after asking her son about what he thought about violence; he had a level head about him and was very articulate; in the very next breath she swore that she would never let *Grand Theft Auto* be played in her home; this was the same parent whose son plays *Call of Duty*.

This script is titled after the last sentence of the script "*he does get his ideas about the world from the world and not from his stuff"* because the parent realizes that the gamer is not passively taking in the images and beliefs of the game and being brainwashed as many people might tend to think happens from playing video games. The irony of this statement is that the ideas about the world from the world are similar ideologies to the beliefs and messages in video games: war, competition, power, consumerism, domination, gender and racial inequality and so on are all messages from societal institutions such as schools, religions, media, government, and athletics. Video games appear to be scapegoats for the already belief systems that already cause concern for parents in our society.

Athletics has already been discussed as an alternative play activity to video games, but there are other physical activities that parents value and encourage. One parent spoke about how her son's outdoor adventure camp was a moment when he was most successful: overcoming his fear about rock climbing. The Radio Commentator

announces the week long camp of paint ball, capture the flag, and rock climbing to parallel the military games and dangerous activities played in video games; however, these adventure camps are much more valued and preferred by parents because they involve physical activity but they will dismiss video games because of their violent themes.

As revealed in other scripts, parents expressed a lot of guilt surrounding video games – even by recognizing that video games are her child's hobby and being aware that she makes him feel guilty for playing. Parents are also keenly aware of their parent-child relationship: describing their relationship as good and yet also aware that their relationship contained power and control issues that are highlighted by the video game playing. This parent (Jasmine) recognized that her behaviours could be used to model the behaviour that she would prefer for her son, like going for a walk. On the other hand, parents often described their talks with their adolescent as "I've talked about it," "I was doing my little running commentary," "we talk about what the M rated games mean to me": in all these descriptions the parent was involved in trying to instil their own beliefs and values rather than opening up a discussion. In the next script the parents talk among themselves some more about their conversations with their children.

Parents' Engagement with Video games and their adolescent: Advice of Others

Although parents do not often discuss video games in depth, they were willing to speak with me as a researcher about them. As mentioned before, these scripts create possible spaces where parents might talk about video games in other places. In this script Carol is looking for reassurances about her son playing video games. In sharing their own experiences, the parents' stories are very similar to each others' experiences. In this script

the parents discuss their role as gatekeepers of the video games, the conflict and tensions that emerge around video games, and the opportunities they provide their adolescent in regards to video games.

Script #7 - It's Just a Game.

Setting: Adult parents –siblings – discussing video games at family BBQ sitting in lawn chairs. Umbrella up behind them. Lemonade drinks in their hands. Adolescent males and females enter stage occasionally – chasing each other, or a ball, or play horseshoes off on the side stage.

Characters:

CAROL – Married mother of 11 year old son (Jason) and nine year old daughter. She is a stay-at-home mom but has previously worked as an Early Childhood Educator.

JANICE – Single mother of 11 year old son (Shawn). Mom is a single parent but with a supportive ex-husband. She works as a counsellor and is taking Master's level classes. The son is quiet, and gentle.

SCOTT – Single father of 13 year old son (Caleb). He manages his own IT company. Son struggles in school and father is keen to reflect on broader societal beliefs to understand issues.

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CAROL: Anxiety is not the right word…but more…worry about what he's playing at friends' houses because the games we buy are not the R rated games, they are at most T rated… I can't remember what all the ratings are on the *Playstation* games. So it's more just the worry about what he's playing at other people's houses…he doesn't tell me these things any more. So I hope it's not inappropriate, you know, but he's just like, "Okay, whatever Mom".

JANICE: I don't really like it. I don't. But I'm comfortable with knowing that he knows that it's a game…at least we've talked about that a lot. Like he says, "Well, those are WWII guys" so, he's not thinking that those are, you know… If I had just looked at it, and
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hadn't talked to him about it and found out his reasoning and his thoughts on it, I might have a different opinion.

SCOTT: Yeah, usually when he gets a new game he usually tells me what he likes about it or what is frustrating about it. He celebrates that he has reached a level or something like that. I often don't take in the details.

JANICE: Only by talking to them… it is only what they share with us that we know, right?

CAROL: Well… I just picture the conversation…. "Yes, Mom….I know that it's not realistic"… "Yes Mom, I know I shouldn't copy what they do," "Yes Mom, I know it's just part of the game," you know? He knows that violence is not a way that we approve of to solve a problem. In real life, if something's in your way, you don't take out your sword and cut its head off…. It's hard to make parallels in real life to the video games because typically what he's playing is not realistic, right…

SCOTT: Well, you can watch too…

CAROL: But sometimes watching you still don't know what is going on inside the head. You know, they don't tell you everything. You know, Justin talks but he doesn't tell me everything, right.

SCOTT: Sometimes he'll talk to me about things like when he's playing, I will ask him questions. Like I'll ask him about the money and the payoffs that are in the one game. I did tell him that I was thinking "oh well that's teaching you something that I didn't think was totally valid." That's when we get into an argument. Like if he has a completely different opinion right. Sometimes I don't say things because I don't want to get into an argument - I want it to be relaxed and fun and enjoyable.

CAROL: Well, he said that his favourite character was Link. And he thought he was a cool character because the games connect you to him. And that it would be better if Link could speak, so I guess he doesn't speak.

JANICE: He'll play a level and then sometimes I'll ask him things, and he'll even listen to some of my suggestions. If he keeps making the same mistake over I'll be like, why don't you, and I'll just say something, right? 'Cause I physically can't do certain things, but I could see what could be done. Like he kept falling and falling into the lava so I was just like why don't you do this…? Then eventually he tried it.

SCOTT: We already had conversations started you know as soon as, when he was 6 or 7, when he got that and so it has just continued and, um…so he just knows that I don't want games where you've got those limbs flying off and blood flying out and games that are offensive like *Grand Theft Auto* where you're being disrespectful to women and random violence…

CAROL: What does he say?

SCOTT: He just laughs. He'll remind me that it's not always about shooting and blowing things up, but sometimes it's about winning a race…

JANICE: …so it's competition. I think the role that it's been playing for me has been his entertainment. Like really, he's an only child and I'm a single mother so there's times when I need him to entertain himself, right, and um he has…well he's got two or three systems anyway. (Gets up and heads off stage for something)

CAROL: There was a turning point for me where I went, "OK, all of your friends are doing it, I don't want to keep you out of the loop socially, but we're going to talk about the violence…and is it OK and in this game? I see that you've just killed an innocent little dog…is that OK in real life and he'll roll his eyes and say "of course not." So he gets it, but it all scares me.

SCOTT: That's really crucial to me is that he understand that he's indulging in a fantasy environment where there are no rules and you can get run over by a car and stand up and walk away and all those things that are so obvious, but as parents we go…you know…you shouldn't really drive like that, right? "But, Dad, give me a break! I know what would happen if I went through a windshield and…"

CAROL: Well, that's sort of it…like…just (mimics talking with her child) "Do you know that that's not OK?" and, "Why is it OK in the video games?"

(pretends her son's voice) It just is….it's just for fun, we know it's not real.

"Why is it fun to kill your buddy, your playmate, your best friend…you just killed him."

You get another life, it's ok..

So he rationalizes it; I continually question him on it…um, but that's exactly what the conversations look like. I question him, he rationalizes and makes it OK.

JANICE comes back and sits down.

JANICE: He says to me constantly about video games, "Oh well, the physics in this game is just ridiculous…this car gets launched over this…. and he's actually pointed out to me that some of the content that on the surface sounds sexist or sounds racist or anything like that is actually a parody…he'll have me listen to a radio station in the game, and from our conversation I totally understand that he understands that it is a parody or

sarcasm about the subject, so yah, (nods to SCOTT) I know… he's ridiculously smart…

SCOTT: We don't talk about it a lot because when you bring up a topic and you talk about it he states pretty clearly his position and I don't then feel like I need to go over it and over it and … so it's only if there's a new element in the game or anything else in life…Like, "Wow, this is above and beyond anything else we've encountered before." Then I'll raise it and make some sort of comment about it just to gauge how he's feeling about it or….and usually his reactions show me that he's fully aware of what he's looking at… like we did have a little talk about *Grand Theft Auto* before we bought it, but I try not to really judge these too much until I see them, you know.

CAROL: Sometimes we have talked about the violent games, and then my kids say to me "Mom, don't be stupid, we know it's just a game…(laughs) … I don't know the whole scenario of the game, but yah… maybe I should ask him.

(lights fade on stage)

Others' advice discussed.

A gatekeeper is someone who monitors the comings and goings to a space; in this reference, parents play gatekeeper when they monitor when video games are played, which video games are played, and who plays them. Each of the parents express different ways that they are gatekeepers of video games, even if they would not call themselves gatekeepers. One parent wished she was stricter about the games that came into the house and how often her son played. Other parents hinted at not being able to determine which games are appropriate: either they try to research the games, rent the games, or one parent described logging onto the video game site on the computer after her son had played and checked his past interactions; this parent in the script is concerned over the games her son might play at other people's homes. Not feeling like they know a lot about video games coupled with how challenging the games are to monitor makes it difficult to fulfill the role of gatekeeper..

The conflicts and tensions that arise from video games have been woven throughout the scripts but this script highlights how talk between parent and teen can be either strained or helpful. Different forms of conversation by adolescent and parent are evident in this script. Scott (in this script) describes how sometimes his son will talk a lot about the content of the game, sometimes so much that Scott cannot stay interested. He also suggests that he does not always know how to talk about sensitive or controversial issues with his son who will sometimes act defensively and become argumentative instead of discussing. These interactions seem typical of parent-teen interactions and video games seem to play the present day scapegoat as the cause of parent-teen tensions, whereas in the past there were parent-teen conflicts over styles of music, dance, and clothing, or opinions about peers might have been the cause of these strained interactions.

Another parent, Janice, described how she sometimes watches her son play video games and verbally offers suggestions as a way of helping to problem-solve some of his trials. “Getting it” emerged as a descriptor parents used to indicate if their adolescent understood the line between ‘game’ and ‘reality’. Parents were encouraged after the first focus group to ask their son about aspects of his game play and a parent in this script, Janice, reports that by asking him she found out a much different perspective about the video game than if she had relied on her own assumptions about it. Janice also describes how her son refers to the physics of the game, or the parody or satire in the game, to underscore her feeling about how smart her son is. Carol’s comment that, “he gets it, but it all scares me” suggests that the gamers are just fine, but more focus needs to be on adults/parents ‘getting it’ or understanding what video games are really about.

Parents did share many ways that they provide opportunities or support for their adolescent playing video games. Beyond buying the games for socializing, parents also play, watch, and talk about the games. One interesting story that did not make it into a script but is critical to share at this point is the story of Howard. Although his interview answers showed him to be the only parent who does not watch, play, or barely talk about the video games with his son, he did share a story at our focus group of taking his son to visit one of his online gaming friends…in California! They had a family holiday planned to the area and somehow a side trip to meet this older online gaming friend was arranged. The online friend was an 18 year old gamer who "goes to community college and he's studying to ultimately research in the biomedical field" and they visited in person at his home. This story highlights the various ways that parents support (even unintentionally) their child's gaming even in indirect ways.

Part II – Summary of Parents' Engagement with Video games and their adolescent

Parents experience video games in many ways, directly and indirectly with their adolescent children. Feelings of guilt weave throughout the scripts but are balanced by the parents' involvement with listening, watching, and sometimes playing video games with their adolescents. Parents find themselves in roles of establishing rules, negotiating games and game time, and trying to resolve the conflicts and tensions that arise between themselves, their child and video games. Parents thought about video games often and worried mostly about future effects; they were not as concerned about the effects of video games on their child at the time of this research because they monitored their play and talked enough about the video games with their child to satisfy those concerns. In the

next section parents talk more about their concepts of play, learning, and school as they consider the larger aspects associated with their concerns about video game play.

Part III - Parents' Understanding of Learning: play, school, and video games

The third research question of this study was 'What are the parents' perceptions of learning in regards to video games and school?' This was an important question to ask because how parents understand learning affects how they view video games. If the belief is that traditional pen and paper schooling is effective and necessary for present day students' learning, then video games and the learning they encourage will be in direct contradiction in the parent's mind; however, if parents are aware that meaningful learning happens in multiple ways, learning is individualized, and that digital media are necessary for today's students, then video games will mesh with parents' understandings about learning and enable them to view video games beyond the often troubling content.

Much of the first focus group was spent with the parents talking about the school system and how their children learn. This discussion was prompted by the PowerPoint-workshop format (see Appendix D) which highlighted the learning involved in video gaming. This new perspective of video game learning prompted the parent participants to compare video game learning to school learning. After that focus group, each parent was interviewed a second time individually. Each of the parents referenced video game learning but at varying degrees, with one parent barely recalling what is learned in video games, to some parents who displayed more confidence in referencing the different learning their son showed from playing video games. Further questions about learning were asked at that interview to gain a deeper understanding of the language parents use to

describe and understand learning for their child. Some key questions that pertain to this section were:

- Please describe a positive learning experience (in or out of school) that your child had (describe the beginning, middle and end, the context, the emotions, etc). What was your role in this story?
- Please describe a negative learning experience (in or out of school) that your child had. What was your role in this story?
- Describe a time when you thought of your child as highly successful. What was your role in this story?
- Play – what is your definition of 'play'?
- What is escapism?
- Can you describe a time when you were fascinated with your child's play experience? What was your role in this play experience?
- How can you/we know what our children are learning/picking up/taking up from video game violence?

The two scripts included in this section reveal parents' concepts about learning as related to play, school, and video games. This section shows how parents are initially afraid of video games and its effects, but once they reveal their beliefs and thoughts about meaningful learning, video games begin to be perceived differently.

Parents' Understanding of Learning: Play

This next script evolved from the first focus group because the parents were complaining and wishing their adolescent sons participated in play other than video

games. They were asked during the focus group about what kind of play they would prefer their sons to engage in instead of video games. Parents responded that they would prefer their sons to be active outside, and their examples were playing road hockey, spending time with friends at a playground, jumping on the trampoline at home, or exploring at the beach. During the next individual interview I asked parents more specifically about their definition of play. Many of their responses are in this script. The setting for this script arose from my asking one participant about her own play time – whether she took time to play, and what her play looked like. This parent responded that she socializes with friends over coffee, walks and doing things she enjoyed or relaxed doing, like reading. Her responses are similar to gamers' responses of why they play video games: to socialize, to enjoy, to relax.

This script is separated into two Acts: four parents talking over coffee, and the next Act is the four of them walking and still talking. This script includes definitions of play from the parents and reveals that these parents value play for their adolescent children.

Script #8 - Coffee Shop Play

ACT I

Setting: Four parents having coffee in a coffee shop. They were friends from high school and still live in the same city together and get together monthly for coffee. Parents already have their coffee and are sitting together, engaged in conversation.

Lighting: Lighting is on the parents, huddled over a coffee table.

Music: *Life is but a dream* plays in the background.

Characters:

TABATHA – Married mother of three children: two daughters and one son. Son (Jacob) is 14, oldest child, and the main video gamer in the family. She works as a nurse.

SCOTT – Single father of 13 year old son (Caleb). He manages his own IT company. Son struggles in school and father is keen to reflect on broader societal beliefs to understand issues.

WANDA – Married mother of 13 year old son (Saul). The son does satisfactorily in school. He has one older brother. Mother and father both work. Mother works in health care and has limited computer experience.

RICKI – Single mother of 16 year old son (Ethan). She is unemployed at the moment. Son struggles in school. They live in a basement suite. She is very keen to reflect on the psychology of issues.

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TABATHA: Well, no they aren't really allowed video games at my house. They are allowed half an hour, maybe a little bit more if it is a sleep over or something. But then it is building *Lego* or they might go outside and usually it is some kind of pretend thing outside. And that is active, in a way, because it is more kind of dramatic. They have roles that they are playing out, but they are still pretty young. I think of that bin of action figures. I think they are all *Iron Man*, and so he's usually sitting and talking to me watching a show and he's playing with these action figures. Before this year there was a lot more *Lego* play; there *was* a lot more *Transformers* play; so maybe he's just evolving away from those toys. They don't come out as much. And they play a little bit of basketball, so I try to encourage it but it is a little bit of a challenge with this particular boy. My daughter, she is not that way, so it isn't necessarily a family thing. She loves to run, she loves to bike and she plays soccer and she's go, go, go. She has a lot of energy compared to Jacob, so yeah it is not necessarily a family thing. It's just Jacob is that way.

SCOTT: We go to free lectures. The problem being, and I have to tell you this… why this happens, you know, maybe it's the flash of insight right now, but there's a lot of things going for younger kids' age group. And then you suddenly reach 11 or 12 for a boy and that's the last of the *Lego* competitions; the last of the Cub experience; and unless you find something else - a big organization, a religious organization or - there isn't much for boys 11 to 18. There isn't and so what filled the gap? Video games. There we go.
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WANDA: He usually has a lot of homework…oh my God…really too much. He has so much homework every day, every day. Um, last night he had to read 3 chapters in and do a synopsis of each chapter and then there was like a big question sheet and he had a little bit of Math. But then, you know, I said, "It's nasty, but then it prepares you for when you do have a lot of homework."

TABATHA: We get from the school that if they have a certain amount of screen time, whether it's video games, or computer or television that their grades drop… That's what information they send us, so whether that's true or not, I'm not sure…I think they give a number like 10 hours a week or something - if it's more than that their grades may suffer.

WANDA: But it is very hard to know how much. It's very, very hard because you know when he gets home from school he is looking at it as a way to sort of relax from what else is going on; there is that escapism part to it. Yet he talks a lot about what the characters are doing and so I can tell he is interested in the play; the different roles he is taking part in the play part of it too so I think it is very hard to measure that. How can you really measure that?

SCOTT: There's this game…*Runescape*.

RICKI: Yes it's more social.

WANDA: But saying it's more social, you mean "online social." A different kind of social, a space social. Because my son will say "I don't need to have my friends over" you know, so instead of doing after school "play" they get online and that's his idea of playing which I have issue with. I do.

SCOTT: What kind of play do you want them doing?

WANDA: Well it's kind of silly really because I know even when the kid comes over…

SCOTT: They'll play video games!

[laughter]

RICKI: But that reminds me of, you know, with me and my girlfriends, when we were younger, we didn't need full sentences either…and it was just our own way of communicating…this is their way of communicating. Some of the words are new (laughter)… but they still understand each other.

SCOTT: …if there was no video games, what would you like them to be playing?

WANDA: Outside, hockey, basketball or a board game or anything else…

RICKI: My son goes and he gets together with his friends, often they go to Monse Rock. "What did you do?" Well guess what? They run all the way there , so I know he gets physical activity. I do not know what they do. I know that they don't smoke, I don't know, I guess they talk; I ask 'do you like to go to school?' 'yeah, it's okay, but can I skip?' No. But what do you do? After school and the weekends they're at school. I guess that's a hanging out, I don't know. "We met at school and we ran to the playground and then we went here" and so they're doing lots of things. There are three or four of them who are always together. it's always the same group. They play music together. I don't know. But it's not all the time.

[sips her coffee]

But I know that I would rather have him with his friends than sitting in front of the computer with a headset and I keep hearing this 'bang bang' exploding.

WANDA: That's what I have.

SCOTT: We have a lot of concerns about our children getting involved in real activities that they're engaging on the games. Maybe I was a very bad boy when I was young. Noooo! [laughs] But I came from a pretty average middle class family and neighbourhood like my son does and the things we had already gotten involved with for real by the time I was his age… I mean violence, destruction, theft, alcohol, drugs, experimenting: what did that feel like to smash a window? What did that feel like to get in a fight? Caleb and his friends haven't even ever approached anything we had done by the time we were their age.

[sips coffee]

Now I don't know if that's just putting off that behaviour to later, but I think for some reason within us we have, a lot of us have, especially young boys and men, this inner desire to some how experiment with the more exciting, more dangerous, play. Certain parts that are innate in us - they're doing it in these games, but they're not doing it for real. And I don't see my son showing any sign of getting extremely violent games and all of a sudden going 'oh yeah, there was a fight at school today and' you know, 'I cut my knee.' By the time kids were that age they were coming home with black eyes.

TABATHA: Yeah – like Strathcona camping trip was for Jacob. That was really, that was just phenomenal for him to get past any fears that he had and just to try everything and do everything and plus feel comfortable, you know, away from home and stuff? He did really well. He was up there for a couple of days and he had such a good time. Like I said he's not your real aggressive, sporty kid and so he was kayaking, and he was doing the ropes and he doesn't particularly like heights either. His sister, Amy, is the totally no

fear, never a drop of fear in her body, unfortunately from the get go. He's always the one who's cautious. He looks over the edge of the pool, makes sure is everything okay and she's "Weeeeee" straight out of the change room and 'boom' into the water. So he really did well in that environment because he pushed himself to do the rock climbing. It was a really, really good learning experience for him 'cause he learned he had to push himself a little bit and he didn't back out.

SCOTT: Yep, but I just think that it's something that boys that age, particularly boys that I know of, want to explore. And you're absolutely right, they're exploring the kinds of behaviours; the results are unfortunately not that realistic, but they don't seem to get confused about that; they don't get confused about 'boy if a guy hit me in the head with a 2 x 4 what would happen, oh! I'd just get up and punch him!' No, I'd probably be down with a split skull and be dead. You know? I don't think they're confused about that.

WANDA: Well, I think I can see where all of the learning comes in so I do agree there. With the games like the NBA basketball and the NHL Hockey you were talking about how they have got the charts, how they do the season, and there is a lot to read and the skills there. I can't even remember all the different data that they store, but they do have good charts with different data based on the number of games won or goals scored or whatever. So *that* I thought was a potential for learning, but also one that could just be completely missed by a child who doesn't care to look at it.

TABATHA: Yah, yah, my son knows when one thing means something in a video game….so like if there's a crack in the wall, it means that you have to find a way to go through it or if you…you know, just things like that. Like symbols that give you hints, but also that he's always on the lookout for those things and I found that interesting that he seeks the subtleties that are in video games. But, when he's reading a book or if he's having a conversation with his teacher, those subtleties go right over his head. [SCOTT looks questioning at her] Oh, we know (laughter). He's a 13 year old…you know. The teacher calls and says he's not getting it. We know… They could be right in his face and he doesn't get it, but when it's visual, in a game…he gets them.

SCOTT: Well, the thing that he's really on right now…it's quite funny to me… he has this fairly eclectic taste in music and in *Grand Theft Auto* they have these radio stations and there's this kind of Russian theme in there. So they have this Russian radio station and this Ukrainian radio station and the little DJ's they have on there, they say funny things, political things. But they also have all this music and now all of a sudden he's interested in all this Ukrainian music, this Russian music…he's like downloading and listening to it…East Indian music, and he's sort of got the seed from there….and it's great…. I say he's got this very eclectic taste, but it's actually another example how games don't normally do this, but in that particular game they've thrown in a whole mixed bag of other cultural references and music references and like everything else that's just the seed and then they zip off to their computers and before you know it they're going

'psssh' and they're checking all these cross references, and 'who is this person' and 'well they actually grew up here and now they live in America and now they have this happen, their family was like that'….OK, so again, that's something totally out of my area of knowledge or anything I perceived, but it's extremely interesting to him and it makes him, again look at the world in a much broader sense.

TABATHA: Well, the education side, like that Jacob's doing an after school gaming club where they learn different programming languages; you know, so they're learning what actually goes in behind, so I like that. More than I see some of his friends doing. I like the strategic sort of thought processes that it puts him in when he's doing the role playing games. They've always stressed that children learn through play, their social skills…

RICKI: That's good. One thing that surprised me was the response from a guy who sat beside me and when he heard that I took away the TV from Ethan's room, he was like "You mean, he doesn't have a man cave to go to?" And I was just like, in my head I was "What? He's NOT a man yet." I was just like (laughter) …I'm sure Ethan would like to believe he is but… well his homework suffered, right? I don't know, he's stuck in this muddle.

SCOTT: We're telling our kids, "Hey if life's boring, you're unhappy, now make a change, make a change go onto something else." So again, I don't have the answers, I just think that's sort of what's being put out there and we fear partly video games because we say that's not the real world, that constant sense of satisfaction and reassurance.

RICKI: Now-a-days that is the real world.

SCOTT: Well maybe, that's it.

RICKI: If you're not happy in your job, you know…

SCOTT: Move on!

TABATHA: That is the reality right now.

RICKI: Maybe it's depending what kind of job you do like if you're working at Tim Hortons you can move to Subway or you can move here but if, you know, it's not as easy as that for certain jobs. I think for every job there's mundane parts and I tend to think that there's a balance between getting reward and all of that, and the real world, right? I think that if kids always need approval of the positives that's not really the real world…? Right? So I can see that fear that the real world isn't like a video game where you're always "getting."

TABATHA: I think there are good things about having to go or having to do things they don't want to do. And that are boring. And I think that may not be such a bad thing. It's

a challenge 'cause um, there are things about school that are…frankly…stupid. There are things out in the world that are ridiculous and so you have to say "Yes, this is a ridiculous, meaningless task but I'm going to tell you to go and do it anyway."

WANDA: Well, I thought that my barometer was going to be how he behaved, so if playing video games meant that he was going to act violently or become obsessed with them, not have a variety of interests, not want to do anything else, you know addictive qualities and negatives qualities, and I haven't seen that. So I guess, I mean I only know my kid, I only know how he behaves. [leans in toward the other parents] But with video games I can make assumptions that 'little Johnny' our neighbour who plays a lot of *Halo* day in and day out and he isn't having dialogue about it, someone isn't monitoring the images he is seeing.

SCOTT: Kids who are really into gaming are not stupid kids, which is not a good word to use, but they're …you know, they're thinkers, they question a lot of things, they have ideas, they're not just following mindlessly. Whatever the activity is, it's not just making a bunch of kids who are mindless zombies. They're very engaged and curious.

[Parents begin to get up, push chairs in, lights dim]

ACT II

Setting: Same characters are now with jackets on, walking with their coffee cups in their hands, passing by a school playground. This scene could be up on the back stage screen. Children are playing, running, laughing all over and around the playground. Parents begin talking and pause mid stage to talk and then keep walking.

TABATHA: For me, play is free time to hang out and you know, just kick back and do whatever you want whether it is reading or running around in the backyard, trampoline, badminton, going down to the beach, digging in the sand. Yeah, that would be my definition of play and probably in my definition… video games would fall into that [laughter, head falls forward in humourous defeat].

[Tries again] The purpose of play is just to hang out or chill out … which I guess videogames do that. Yeah I don't know.

[Pause. Sips coffee. Parents pause mid stage and keep talking.] I guess I think of it as down time, you know, when your mind can slow down and you're just digging in the sand with a friend or flopping around on the trampoline. You're not really doing

anything and I guess for me video games are more stimulating, as opposed to you know kicking back and just chilling out kind of thing.

RICKI: Play is just when you're having fun, you don't have to be doing what you are doing, I mean our lives are so structured. So fun for us is when, yeah we don't have to go to work, we don't have to go to school, we have down time. We love down time. We're often in our jammies until noon on the weekends. We don't like to get up and out the door too quickly.

SCOTT: Play is supposed to be fun. I don't hear a lot of laughter though. I got to tell you I don't hear a lot of laughter. *Guitar Hero* they laughed about… I don't think kids laugh the same way we used to laugh. You know, so snot would come out of your nose. I don't think kids do as much.

[pause. Sips coffee. They keep walking across stage.]

We've made it very hard for our kids…we've cut them off from having, you know, through fewer numbers of children, through the kind of neighbourhoods we live in…through all the worries… we've cut them off from having what we experienced as normal play and so, this is what we in a sense said is safe for them: "You're in a house, and you know, you're locked in and so this is good"…so to turn around and complain about it after it's all we left them with is not really a good thing.

TABATHA: You know I think for sure there's just a definite play quality to video games, yeah, maybe my perception is different because, I don't… you know, like when my dad was over and played Wii, we had fun and everything, but it was like 'okay I've had enough of this.' You know. It's not my definition of play.

(Lights fade)

Play discussed.

This script reveals that ideas about play are complex in that they are steeped in past experiences, wrapped up in societal values and gendered concepts, and related to knowing what is best for those playing. Sometimes these beliefs about play can even be contradictory such as the assumption that boys need dangerous adventure and yet assuming that a parent's role is to protect their child from danger. These subtle yet complex beliefs about play appear to be confusing as parents talk about them.

Concepts of gender were woven throughout all the interviews. All of the parents spoke mainly of their adolescent son who played video games. Four of the nine families had daughters in the family but they were all younger than the sons and were not the main video game players in the family. Subsequently, when they wanted to make generalizations about gamers, or play, or socializing, or schooling, often they relied on their limited access to gendered examples. Also, many of the mothers referred to their sons as "not being typical boys" in which they inferred that their son did not appear to participate in gender-expected activities or behaviours, such as competitive sports or outside physical activity, and did not exhibit a high-spirited, forceful nature. They would describe them as kind, gentle, and caring to describe the difference. This script addresses the contradictions of being male and different parents' perceptions of expected male behaviour or interests.

Play was a critical topic to explore in a script because parents are often adamant that they would rather not have their child playing video games, but when forced to consider what play looks like for an adolescent the complexities began to arise. For example, one parents talks about how she is unsure what her son and his friends do when they hang out at a local beach or playground, but not knowing remains her preference compared to video gaming at home. She briefly considers that they do not smoke, but no other substances are mentioned, with the sentence ending: "I don't know, I guess they talk." Playgrounds were a topic of discussion with one parent suggesting that playgrounds are vacant these days; one parent suggested that she would want to see her adolescent sons and friends hanging out at playgrounds. This script purposely shows children playing on the playgrounds during school time; children are on the playgrounds,

at supervised times, but perhaps also not at the times when parents of older children are looking. In addition, the consideration that teenagers should not be hanging out on playgrounds meant for children did not enter the conversation. A recent trip to Vancouver provided an opportunity for me to take my young children to a park, only to have to turn around and leave because many male teenagers were skateboarding on the equipment and smoking. According to the parents, other options for adolescent boys to play included sports, or action figures that they might be out-growing; one father realized how few options for play or group joining are available to adolescent males.

A theme that weaves throughout many of these scripts is the concept that parents know best for their adolescent child. When asked what a conversation about video games or issues in video games looked like with their child, parents rarely quoted their own child, but instead answered with their own beliefs about a topic like play. In this script parents question whether the adolescent is intelligent or interested enough to be cognizant of the charts, graphs, or statistical learning involved in certain video games; meanwhile another parent realizes how the adolescent is expanding his tastes in music because of the eclectic choices a video game offers. The contradiction of gamers being intelligent and aware verses passive viewers was voiced throughout the interviews and suggests that parents feel unsure as to what learning is happening for their adolescent while they play video games.

Two parents are also quoted about the concept of homework suffering, or grades suffering because of video games. One parent has heard this warning about the terrible effects of screen time from a public health nurse article. The other parent mentions her son's homework not getting done, but does not blame it on video games; however, she

takes video games away as a means to punish, and perhaps create time where homework could be done. The cause of not getting homework done is skirted around and remains a mystery.

Parents also drew on their past experiences as children or adolescents to compare what play should look like. Often their own experiences were described as a 'childhood of freedom and adventure' that was safe, or a childhood that was protected and innocent. Besides the one father's honesty about the misdemeanours he and his friends did as youth, most parents described a protected, safe childhood. This protection seems to also mean keeping their own children safe, primarily from video games. Again, some parents had a preference for rock climbing, water polo, hockey, and hanging out unsupervised on beaches compared to sitting at a computer playing video games. Almost any activity level, no matter how aggressive or dangerous, seemed to be preferred over gaming as a form of play.

That the parents' conversation does not flow perfectly is intentional. Because the parents are considering their own definitions of play for the first time they are unable to listen closely to another's assumptions. Overlapping and sometimes unfinished thoughts remain for the reader to make their own meaning. Another main issue that parents raise is that video games will not prepare their adolescent for the real world. This issue was appropriate to integrate with concepts of play because often the two topics overlapped in conversation; parents would almost seem reassured if video games could prepare their children for 'real life.' Real life seemed to relate to careers mostly and sometimes relationships with others. Parents' beliefs about the 'real world' included notions that there will be boring and sometimes unnecessary tasks to accomplish, that learning to

arrive on time is of huge importance, and that we should not look for constant feedback nor gratification from our daily jobs or lives.

Parents also mention many times how video games give too much feedback to the player and how the real world does not provide this kind of feedback, so the adolescent might as well get used to that lack of feedback now. The gap between providing young children with ongoing, positive feedback and how adolescents should get used to very little is an unsettling thought. So is the dismissal of spaces and activities that are able to give robust feedback. Parents are promoting grim messages to their children about the world. Adolescents are receiving desolate messages about how their lives are 'bound' to look or play out.

Parents' Understanding of Learning: School

This next script was inspired from the first focus group when the parents spent much of the time talking about and reflecting on their understanding of learning. We were considering learning because I was sharing the workshop PowerPoint (see Appendix D) with them about video game learning. Parents reflected on their own child's school experience and their own school experiences. Near the end of the first focus group Scott asked: "So can we get you to go to the school district and get you to tape us to interview us about school?" Other parents nodded in agreement and we laughed. They were recognizing that there were concepts about learning that they knew were meaningful, and yet were not being practiced in the schools. His question also suggests that parents do not have a role or worse, will not be listened to in the process of recommending changes in education to school boards or administration.

During the subsequent individual interview parents also discussed their perspectives about learning. When I spoke with Scott again in the next individual interview I asked if there was anything from the focus group that he found interesting or questionable, he said,

> …that was a really interesting area for me was the fact that we ended up talking so much about education. I mean it was almost more about that…but obviously there's a link that we feel….like we're looking at what our kids are…how they're learning.

Although this script does not focus on video games, the parents' perceptions and experiences around learning are critical to hear and consider. The complexities of how and why they situate video games as they do became evident through their concepts of learning.

The form of this script took a creative turn in being written as poems the parents speak. Poetic Representations are helpful in allowing the reader to see and feel the world of the participant more closely (Sparkes, 2003). These poems are intended to allow the reader to experience and interpret the speaker's intimate words, and to engage in their own reflexive analysis (Richardson, 2003). According to Richardson, "Even if the prosodic mind resists, the body responds to poetry. It is *felt*" (2003, p. 189). The parents had many lengthy or sometimes disjointed stories of their adolescent sons' learning in relation to school and the poem format helped keep them succinct and helped evoke the emotion these parents expressed as they shared their stories. Although many of the scripts hold personal information of the parents about their thoughts about video games, this section held more emotions; parents stories went beyond the prevalent fear connected to

video games and expressed more of the heartfelt tension they feel as they consider their adolescent's learning process – the process that is juxtaposed between 'meaningful learning,' and 'schooling.' The poetic representations support the postmodern theoretical frame of this study as well: the poems enable the reader to see the gaps and understand that further meaning exists between the lines and the structure of the poem; therefore, multiple readings can occur and no single truth exists (Sparkes, 2002).

Script #9 - Voices Rising.

Setting: stage is organized to look like a school board meeting. At right stage is a long table – with three chairs. In front of the chairs are oversized cardboard cut-outs in the shape of people – cardboard can be black and not show details or features – these represent the board members. At centre stage are 10 chairs. Only 5 people sit in the chairs – the other chairs remain empty. When it is their turn to speak, each character stands and speaks to the cardboard cut-outs.

Lighting: Lights are on the area between the parents and board members – so parents and board members are partly in the dark.

Characters:

RICKI – Single mother of 16 year old son. She is unemployed at the moment. Son struggles in school. They live in a basement suite. She is very keen to reflect on the psychology of issues.

TABATHA – Married mother of three children: two daughters and one son. Son (13) plays video games mostly. She works as a nurse. *Reads cue cards at meeting.

MIRANDA – Married mother of two children. 11 year old son and younger daughter. She works as a university administrator in Computer Science.

SCOTT – Single father of 13 year old son. He manages his own IT company. Son struggles in school and father is keen to reflect on broader societal beliefs to understand issues.

HOWARD – Married father of 14 year old son and younger daughter. He is a retired teacher and practicing journalist. He is involved in much of the downtown community organizations and they live in a condominium. *Reads off a piece of paper at the meeting.

JASMINE – Married mother of 13 year old son and five year old son. Born and raised in Hong Kong she reflects on how to merge the different cultural beliefs while raising her sons. She works night shifts in health care.

~~~~

RICKI: My son stopped drawing after grade 2 or 3

because the teacher gave him trouble

for drawing purple trees.

and he '*should have been'* drawing clothes on his stick people too!

But he stopped drawing.

Art is so interpretive.

Art is so subjective.

It's individual choice.

My son definitely reads, but

he reads at the wrong times.

He dropped Chemistry

'cause he was failing

part because he was reading in Chemistry.

His English he's failing.

All he wants to do is read…he's not handing in assignments or anything.

It goes back even to grade 3

Trumpet of the Swan
~~~~

He read the whole thing in one night.

And it had to be done “page 5-10” and “pages 12…”

And the teacher told him you’re not supposed to do that.

You read ahead,

you *can’t* do that!

SCOTT:

Communication and information

has really made a shift

toward self-learning.

These kids

at a very young age

can really educate themselves on almost any subject;

now the information unfortunately isn’t all reliable

and isn’t all good

but they feel as though they can educate themselves

on anything they want

we’re still not using that model for them in school

We’re teaching them to go into a class

with a curriculum that ministry reps

have to argue about for 15 years

to change

it’s very slow moving

My son knows

most of what he’s learning in school

is totally irrelevant

“I can learn more about that

in 15 minutes
than my teacher can teach me
in the next 2 months."

"Look I know this stuff,
I'm smart,
I know the stuff I'm writing down is totally right and
she's spending all her time commenting
'well you're still missing a bit of punctuation'
'it's not as neat as it could be.'

They then look at the adults,
let's face it
we don't solve a lot
of problems in our society…
environmental, war, or education,
they look and go
"you guys have not got this figured out,
it's coming anyway,

So don't hold me back."

TABATHA:
I would argue,
their hands are tied
(all parent Hmm in agreement)
I've seen a lot of great teachers
who are very pro-internet,
and creative and technological ways to learn

the stuff.
then the principal,
or administration
or school board's like
"um nope."

You slow it right down.
Slowing the machine down.
It's so quick
they don't look at it
then all of a sudden
'panic! oh my god.' What are they going to see?
Shut it all down.
My Space, Facebook
It's really difficult.

We were exposed to so much more.

HOWARD:
I think there's a worry
educators use these funny terms
that really end up:
"What we're trying to do is
get your kids used to
being bored,
frustrated,
angry,
and put down,
because that's what they're going to have

the rest of their lives
when they go to work”

I was raised like
‘your job is going to be boring
you’re going to do it anyway
you’re going to support your family’
‘that’s life kid, get used to it’

I think the fear is,
Video games
constant satisfaction
“every time I hit that button something good happens”
fear comes in
the education system starts to
pull back and balance:
“look - we’ve got to prepare these kids
for the real world
not this constant sense of achievement.”

RICKI:
my son
in grade 2
failed three grades,
‘he didn’t successfully complete them,’
but
was passed onto the next grade.
they don’t fail you until grade 9.
My son

because he's actually quite smart,
learned that he doesn't have to do things,
he'll just move ahead
that's why now he doesn't pass in assignments.
He's like…
'oh well I'll still get here'…
'cause he's smart,
he's found other ways to do it.

SCOTT:
School does give this real feeling
to your child,
if you're not getting a passing grade in every subject,
you're actually failing
because you couldn't pass two courses;
you could do quite well in these others
but you still feel like a failure

that's not realistic out there in the world.

'we're going to do this great home reno
but
I won't touch the plumbing;
so we bring a plumber,
and we'll get past that part
and then we'll start painting.

your boss doesn't go,
you're not being hired because you're good at art and math and PE.

I want to know if you're good at English, Science
we have other people in the art department
who will draw the art,

you don't even have to feel like a failure.

MIRANDA:
the only time
he has ever been so enthusiastic,
he did all of that himself

the only thing I had to do with it
he came to me with his cue-cards and said "can I read it?"
….he's terrified of doing oral presentations
so we practiced

an email
from the teacher
"Tyler refused
to do his presentation
because he wasn't ready
…obviously he hadn't done the work
"0" out of 30
I am not letting him do it."

"What happened?
I know you were ready!
I know you were ready

what happened?”

But he did it…
had done it in January,
this was two months early

“Well the teacher came in
said “OK Tyler,
you’re up…
let’s go”
….and I said
“No, wait…can I…”

“No, if you’re not ready,
that’s it
you get “O”
…moving on.”

the one thing he was so excited about
just ripped away from him

so I talked to the teacher
and to the principal
I said
“I know he was prepared;
I know he was,
because he had read me a speech,
he had his cue-cards;
she’d marked his essay,

he'd gotten like 94% on his essay,
you know he was prepared.

"No" he said "he wasn't ready"…

she just said
"I am absolutely not going to change this
at all
for any reason.
He was given an opportunity,
he didn't take it
he needs to learn that he just needs to do what he's told
when he's told."

And that's what I tell him too,
about school.
You have to jump through hoops,
that's the way it is
do your best
learn what you can learn

SCOTT:
it's just getting him through…
I talked to a lot of other parents
who had older kids,
the primary concern
isn't the sex and drugs and rock & roll,
it's getting their kid

to not completely disengage during their school years…
basically not to drop out
of school

we all seem to be accepting
'yah, we've got to grade 12
to keep these kids just getting up and going….

it's going to be really hard
because they are all smart…

It may prepare them for jobs
but does it mean
overall
that it's preparing them for life?

That's what I want to know.

That's the big question.

It's not
"have a balanced life…."
it's
"you can earn
and become a good citizen,"
part of the machine
something we all agree to
to keep eating and keeping afloat,

I don't think that's new
that our kids are being wired
for what we want them to become
…just quickened up.

JASMINE:
Back home in Hong Kong,
it was different,
Schooling was first
Now they are not just the books
they are more as a whole picture
Like social lives and emotional wise.
And how you develop as a person is important.
I'm still thinking
he is lacking details in his work.

We learned more
than what they are learning.
I don't know
how much times harder.
Whatever they learn it's too easy.

Every subject he got B,
except Math and Science
he got A.
I think he is doing ok at school.
At home,
I never see him reading a book
or study harder.

Maybe I am imposing
what I did
when I was young.
I spent all my time,
even at home,
just studying.
And that is normal to everyone
back home.

I notice the education today
they read more story book.
And for me it is no,
I don't have that chance,
it is pass the exam, pass the test, to move from grade one to grade two,
because
you have to do that,
so I had no choice.

If you push him,
he will do it.
If you don't push him,
he will just stay there.
I think Finlay High School
will be a better one for him.
We are looking for achievement
in academics,
this is the one that they are focusing more on the academic.
So that one he can benefit from.

HOWARD:
Fairly astute about
what can and can't be done
in the world
as a fourteen year old.
Frustrated by that
in many ways,
wants to move on.
Frustrated
by the lock step of high school.
why does high school have to be, so…

he's willing to take challenges,
willing to take risks,

I said, why not use the computer
to generate some credits
for your high school diploma.

in many cases
he found he couldn't,
distance courses from other school boards
for grade 10, 11, 12,
not for grade 9.

I said
well come with me
to the business union club breakfasts,

you don't get credit for them,
but at least you are going,
and he does.

When Elizabeth May came,
there were only two kids
in the whole room,
mine.
Where were the rest?
most of the people were over age 55
I say to him
where are your schoolmates,
where are the parents with the kids,
why aren't they here?

The other teachers
they want to do the textbook thing
and the testing thing
and the validation
that has gone on for the last…
which didn't,
I don't think ever really worked
except to create workers
to go to work at 8 o'clock and come home at 5 o'clock.
You don't work like that
any more.

I'm guilty again,
next week

there is a specialist coming
to talk about Adobe.
I said,
why don't you go to it.
Just skip school.

(lights fade on stage)

School discussed.

This was an important script to include as the parents' struggle with power weaves through their stories. Sometimes they felt society had power over them and their choices, and sometimes they felt they had power over their children. Often they felt powerless to the school system and educators and yet they regained their power in knowing that their children are learning in meaningful ways, and not always in connection to school learning. Parents are torn between knowing that their children need to learn the ideologies that the school system teaches: show up on time, do what you are told, be prepared for boredom or harder work; and yet, once these ideologies had been considered, parents often began to realize that those were not really rules they wanted their children to live by for the rest of their lives. In speaking to the school board, the parents almost hope that the school board members will make sense of their contradictory, complex role as parent and fix it. This is why the school board members appear in this script as cardboard cut-outs – they are not the ones who will figure this out; in fact, they are often parents themselves caught amidst the same challenges. Eventually parents need to make the changes themselves, become more clear and determined about

what they really want for their children, and consider how they can help disrupt societal ideologies about learning, school, careers, and success for themselves.

These ideologies about learning are critical when considering video games since the learning involved in video games is much of what parents are calling for the school board to adopt. Many key phrases in this script hint at the irony between video game learning and school learning. For example the phrase: “the teacher gave him trouble / for drawing purple trees” seems so silly and yet the teacher likely was trying to teach the boy to follow directions and not how to be an artist. As was described in the literature review, video games encourage the player to think outside the box in order to proceed in the game. Video games encourage imagination like drawing purple trees; video games encourage lots of reading and the player can complete the game as slowly or as quickly as they would like. Video games encourage online research into learning about codes, cheats, history, and developer’s blogs, and the technological skill set surpasses the pace of technology use in most classrooms. Video games also particularly encourage self-learning in which the player is empowered and supported by the game to problem solve the game on their own or with support if they so choose; the gamer decides how they can best complete the game and in order to accomplish this end goal successfully they need to be aware, to some degree, about how they learn best.

“We were exposed to so much more” was reiterated by many of the parents who realized that they were exposed, from different sources, to much of the same content that video games perpetuate, such as war, violence, racism, and gender inequality. Another phrase that was often raised as a concern for parents was how video games may not prepare their adolescent children for the ‘real world’: “we’ve got to prepare these kids /

for the real world / not this constant sense of achievement." Once spoken, this phrase is contradictory to what parents seem to want for their children – to sense achievement, to feel successful, in whatever endeavour they encounter. Video games often provide that sense of achievement for the players and that seemingly constant sense of achievement scares parents, possibly through the lack of confidence their child might suffer later in life if they do not continue to achieve success. Of course, this sense of achievement may build a solid confidence in gamers who may then seek out more meaningful and fulfilling jobs as a consequence.

Instead, parents find themselves feeling powerless as they buy into past beliefs about the world requiring workers to take on meaningless tasks; therefore, parents emphasize this powerlessness to their children when they say: "You have to jump through hoops, / that's the way it is / do your best / learn what you can learn" or "yah, we've got to grade 12 / to keep these kids just getting up and going….// it's going to be really hard / because they are all smart…" This last quotation is reveals the tension caused by their beliefs. As the script ends, one father finds himself disrupting the ideology of school enough to provide what he thinks is a meaningful learning experience (a political guest speaker) for his child and says: "Just skip school."

Part III – Summary Parents' Understanding of Learning: play, school, and video games

These parents knew that play is learning. They knew when their child was engaged in learning. They knew what school considers learning. However, the contradictions and blocks to merging all three became apparent as parents spoke and shared their experiences about learning.

Parents understood play to occur outside the house, involve activity or movement, and be free of responsibility. They described play as exploration, experimentation, social, unstructured and safe. These descriptions lead parents to understand how video games provide play for their adolescents and why video games would be such an enticement for their children. Parents also understood play to be fun, not forced, including activities that develop identity.

School learning was described as necessary for their adolescent children yet frustrating for both parent and child. Parents depicted school as traditional and limited because, as they expressed, teachers are limited by the system. School learning was described to be job-focused or motivated and yet it was also understood to not be related to 'real world' learning and is responsible for disengaging youth. Parents would express belief in the school system and also a mistrust of the system. They understood that school learning is based on teachers' assessment and expectations and that societal rules and expectations are being taught to their adolescents. The school system was also described to hold rank over parents' and students' ways of knowing. Parents were conscious of these restrictions of school learning and yet they did not communicate alternatives.

Through our discussions of play and learning parents began to articulate and describe video games differently. They understood video games to be play that is interactive, and based on familiarity with content and technology. Video game play and learning were described as escapism, exploration, creative and self-instructive. On the other hand, parents believed that the skills and content their adolescents learned in video games were not like 'real life' learning and will likely disadvantage them in the 'real

world.' Parents were unsure how learning transferred to outside video game contexts and this revealed an importance of 'real world' values and beliefs.

Findings Summary

The intention of these scripts was to enable readers/audiences to be privy to a world with which adults may not otherwise be exposed. Parents' conversations about video games, learning, parenting roles and adolescents are not always commonplace, especially the comments parents would not be apt to share out loud. The contradictions, complexities, and curiosity of the parents have intentionally been represented in these scripts to show that video games can be a lens to viewing critical issues such as parenting, learning, and societal expectations. The hope would be that these scripts provoke further conversations about important issues such as the ones raised by the parent participants in this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In this section I explain how I made sense of what I had witnessed and experienced through these ethnodramatic scripts. In his keynote address to qualitative researchers about alternative research representations Eisner (1997) described the power of alternative representations:

> It [an alternative representation] is an image that acknowledges the variety of ways through which our experience is coded. It is about the ways in which the transformation of experience from the personal to the public can occur. It is about what we can learn from each of these transformations. It is about the trade-offs that are inevitable in the selection of any option. It is about exploring the edges and reexamining the meaning of research. (p. 7)

These ethnodramatic scripts aided my own analysis and interpretation of this research study. Of course, my interpretations are just that, my own, and should not deter others from considering their own meanings from reading the scripts. The scripts are written to enable a wider audience to experience multiple layers of parents' experiences around video games or have them experience what Eisner terms 'productive ambiguity': when "the material presented is more evocative than denotative, and in its evocation, it generates insight and invites attention to complexity" (p. 8).

The study of video games has been gaining credibility as a research field and yet very few studies have focused on parents' voices or stories. My intention had been to learn more about parents' experiences with video games and adolescents. I expected the experiences to be revealed as stories, and likely as stories about what video gaming looked like in their homes, or how they negotiated with their adolescents over video

gaming. What I was not expecting, and what was revealed were the complexities, contradictions, and conflicting beliefs and practices that parents experienced, because of their positioning as parents, and because of the way video games have positioned them as parents. Video games became a lens through which to view parenting. Video games accented parents' already complex relationships with adolescents and highlighted their positions of feeling uncertain, conflicted, and afraid.

The main overarching themes that emerged from this study included 1). parents' positioning as 'not knowing,' 2). the tensions that parents experience, and 3). the fears parents harbour about video games and their adolescent children. Throughout each of these main themes emerged sub-themes of power, fear, and conflict.

The perception of 'not knowing' was evident in how the parents spoke about their understanding of video games and their role as parents of adolescents; this concept of 'not knowing' affected parents' power positions, created a sense of fear, and produced contradictory messages. Parents' positioning of themselves and their adolescent children suggested a kind of imagining or projection of who their child is and what their role as parents should be in relation; this projection of adolescents involved power struggles, fear of change, and tensions of how to interact and engage with them.

Another emergent theme was tensions that arise from the intersecting issues involved with parenting adolescents. Issues such as playing, schooling, and becoming young adults all challenge parental authority and suggest a shift in parents' roles in connection with their adolescent. These tensions were evident in parents' contradictions about video game playing, questions and thoughts about learning, and their shifting role as parent as they considered their adolescents' needs.

Finally, a major theme that continued to appear was parents' fears. Concerns about their adolescent's future, influences on their adolescent, and the worry and guilt involved in assessing their role as parent created an overwhelming sense of fear in the parents' Discourses; this concept was evident in parents' surveillance practices, self proclaimed worries, and leaps in their predictions regarding causes and effects. These themes are worthy of further examination since they encourage questions about the larger issues about the role of video games and the role of parents in adolescents' lives.

Critical Discourse Analysis

In order to look closely at the language, Rogers' (2004) descriptions of Genre, Discourse, and Style will be drawn on to explore the layers in parents' language. In particular, passages were selected according to Fairclough's (as cited in Rogers, 2004) recommendation to examine "cruces or moments of crisis in the data as an entry point into the analysis. These are moments in the discourse when it is evident something is going wrong" (p. 75).

Critical discourse analysis terms.

This chapter is organized by the themes of 1). parents' positioning as 'not knowing,' 2). the tensions that parents experience, and 3). parents' fears. Each theme is analyzed for Genre, Style, and Discourses (see chart below). Each of these analysis categories uses more specific terms to explain the analysis more thoroughly. They are drawn from Rogers' (2004) list of how to examine language closely.

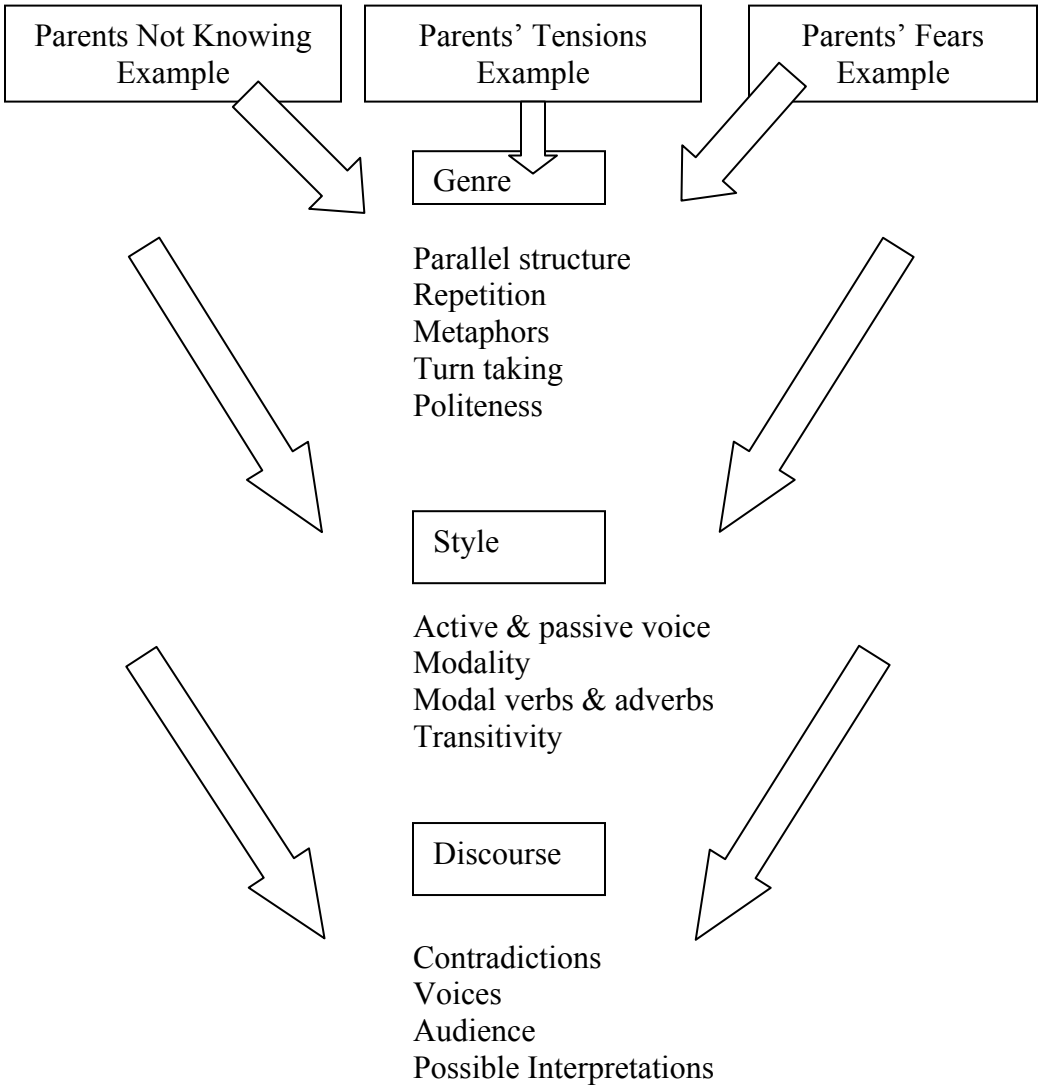
Parents Not Knowing Example
Parents' Tensions Example
Parents' Fears Example
Genre
Parallel structure
Repetition
Metaphors
Turn taking
Politeness
Style
Active & passive voice
Modality
Modal verbs & adverbs
Transitivity
Discourse
Contradictions
Voices
Audience
Possible Interpretations

Figure 1

Genre

Rogers (2004) described **genre** to reveal the "organizational properties of interactions" (Rogers, 2004, p. 51) which means the mode used to interact such as song, poetry, speech, or questioning. The following aspects help to identify the genre: what information is used, what wording is used, what cohesion devices (parallel structure, repetition) are used as well as considering metaphors, turn taking, and politeness conventions.

Style

The **style** of the text focuses on how the language is structured: "the domain closest to identity or 'ways of being' and includes aspects of grammar that signify how people are drawn into and compose social structures" (Rogers, 2004, p. 51). Aspects to identify style include:

Active and passive voice – active voice is when the subject of the sentence is acting, while passive voice is when the subject is being acted upon (Lunsford, Connors & Segal, 1995).

Modal auxiliaries – these are verbs that "show possibility, necessity, obligation, and so on" (Lunsford, Connors & Segal, 1995, p. 302). Modal verbs examples are: can, could, will, would, shall, should, may, might, and must, ought to. Modal adverbs (probably, possibly). Modal verbs and adverbs are used to identify present and future and often to express doubt or uncertainty (Lunsford, Connors & Segal, 1995).

> **Transitivity** is also a part of style that includes language that "enables humans to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their world and the 'goings on' of doing, happening, feeling, believing" (Rogers, 2004, p. 76) and includes statements of 'want, desire, like, or need' or words like "think, thought, believe," and "remember statements" (Rogers, 2004, p.77).

Discourse

Discourses are described by Rogers (2004) as "ways of representing" through a combination of style and genre. Rogers (2004) draws on Gee's capital 'D' Discourses when she identifies Discourse to reveal the themes or ideologies in the text. Consideration of **contradictions**, **voices** being represented, the intended **audience**, and possible **interpretations** of this text all help to explore Discourses.

The following examples of Critical Discourse Analysis are organized into a description of what was seen in scripts, short examples of the language from the scripts, discussion about the genre, style and Discourses, and the contradictions and gaps that appear.

Portal – Parents Not Knowing

Portal is a sophisticated puzzle game created by the makers of *Half Life*. This single person game has a game avatar move through different portals: patterns, secret entrances, pathways needed to be learned and remembered. As a first time player of this game, one is positioned as 'not knowing' and needs to figure out how best to manoeuvre

through these portals to an end goal. This discussion section is titled after this game because it mirrors the theme of 'not knowing' that parents displayed during this study.

Parents were revealed to be 'not knowing' in various ways through out the scripts. One way of 'not knowing' was simply being uninformed about video games themselves: not knowing enough about the ESRB ratings, or what happens in a particular game their child played, or how the game is played. With the adolescents as the 'knowers' and parents as 'not knowing', the traditional power positions are shifted: the perception of parents as experienced and omniscient guide of their child is disrupted by this shift. Video game expertise shifts experience and knowledge to the youth and offers a power position to these adolescent gamers in comparison to their parents, who now appear as new to the experience and not having much knowledge. Even the way parents seem to get their information and knowledge about video games is from secondary sources (i.e. newspaper, magazine articles, television, movies) and not from primary sources (playing newest games) in which the players are participating.

The excerpt from the first script *Keeping Company* reveals the parental position of 'not knowing' in the context as a whole and then more closely in the style, genre, and Discourses being demonstrated and identified in Miranda's language.

> MIRANDA: That's a good one. You're right……..he's fine…*you know* what it is? I worry about the future. The future him, it's not the him now *I think*. Maybe it's, when I look at him… *my vision is*, he's going to be an adult…his house is going to be a mess and he's going to be so lazy, he's not going to be able to cook and not going to have any social skills….he's going to be glued to this [points into

the living room at TV] and he's going to miss out on life…*I think* that's what it is. It's about the future *I think* that's what it is.

Upon examination of the genre (underlined) in this passage, Miranda's fear of the future for her son is evident by the repetition and parallel structure of the verb 'going'. Her repetition of 'he's going to be' – both in the positive (he's going to be a mess) and negative (he's not going to be able…) brings attention to her projections into the future. Although there are pauses as she thinks about her fears, her definiteness of a bleak and limited future are accented by the repeating statements. The metaphor of 'life' is all-encompassing of her son's identity or being, and yet the metaphor suggests a specific life, a life that Miranda values for her son; her language implies that she values a life that includes the opposite of everything mentioned here: a life that includes a neat house, productivity, cooking, socializing, and limited access to television/video games.

The style aspects in this passage include transitivity (in italics in this passage) throughout her speech. Miranda tries to make sense of what her concerns are and uses "I think" repeatedly as well as "you know"; these cognitive phrases are used in her attempt to understand what is happening for her as she watches her son play video games on a daily basis. Her repetition of 'I think' and the pausing while answering implies that this may be the first time she is considering her own concerns at this level.

Miranda's voice as a parent and wife are evident in her Discourse. She is a parent who feels responsible to some extent for her son's future life. She admits in this passage that her son is fine in present time, that no effects of video gaming seem to hinder his 'life' at present. But she feels compelled to make the leap to possible effects years later.

The leap includes large generalizations (house upkeep, social skills, laziness, being glued to the television) and consequently, her beliefs seem to be a general concern for her son's future and not a concern based solely on video game playing. The generalizations also work to keep fear firmly planted within her belief systems, making her son's future unpredictable and therefore, scary. These generalizations about his future appear triggered by video games but would seem connected to many other aspects of his life and her parenting.

The parent participants all expressed fears of not knowing about their adolescents' futures, whether in regards to schooling, relationships, careers, or general personality traits. This position of powerlessness and the feeling of not having control or the ability to effect a child's future is new for parents of adolescents who, in their past experience, have had some control over how their child was being raised. Likely, Miranda was not bemoaning her young child's future as she put Lego in front of him and encouraged him to play, but faced with video games, was much more resistant and fearful. Yet parents in this study voiced concerns of not knowing what their adolescent was playing at friend's houses, not being able to learn everything about a video game, and not being told details happening in their teenager's life.

This passage is an example of how Critical Discourse Analysis uncovers the learning this parent experiences through her Discourses. The tension between *knowing* that her son is perfectly "fine" and while herself in turmoil by imagining and *not knowing* her son's future reveals the ways that parents of some adolescents are situated as not having as much influence as they did when the child was younger or of the influence their parents had on them; this tension also reveals the questioning of their ability to guide

their adolescent child into the future. The leap between "being fine" and having a limited future represents the degree to which fear plays a role in how a parent can view the activities of their adolescent child. Video games appear to be the component that has lessened parents' power position with their adolescents, and yet, video games seem to be a symbol for the often natural, developmental shift in power positions between parent and adolescent.

A gamer needs to stay in each moment while playing the game Portal; they must figure out the puzzle at each stage and not project into the future about how to do the final sequence. Gamers understand that there is a final goal but they can not spend their time wondering or worrying about the ending of the game because they can not progress through the game without completing each task along the way. Although *Portal* is a single person game, it can be played effectively with other players who assist in problem solving the puzzles. Likewise, parents have an end goal of supporting their adolescents into adulthood, but they will be successful in completing each interaction with their child in a productive way. As well, parenting is a mostly singular journey, but gaining help to problem solve the challenges could also be useful.

A gamer beginning to play *Portal* would find assistance from others who either know more about the game and the puzzles, or who would approach Portal in ways to be successful. A player would not look for assistance from someone who only thought the game to be challenging and scary, unable to make any productive suggestions for success. Parents are unsure of where to get their support in becoming more knowledgeable about parenting their adolescent gamers.

Another example of Discourses of parents 'not knowing' is apparent in this passage from the script *I Read Somewhere* in which a father is reading a newspaper article that disrupts some of the classic fears about the effects of video game violence.

> HOWARD: Right now they still *seem* very frail and there they sit in front of their video game watching endless amounts of violence. *What I've heard* about Grand Theft Auto … the portrayal of women and degradation… I had concerns about that. *I don't know, there's always that speculation out there* regarding violence in video games and those kids who - a very graphic example like Columbine, *right?* Playing whatever video games they were playing. *I guess* there's that fine line between you see it enough and you become *sort of* anesthetized to it, so you're not thinking that this is real and my son gets so locked into it - that does concern me.

The genre of this passage (underlined) focuses on this parent's understanding of violence and video games. The organization of the passage begins with a one-sentence description of his child, which reveals one of his perspectives of his child as being 'frail', implying the need for protection. This description is followed by a contrast to the frail adolescent with approximately five more phrases about frightful, dominating violence (endless amounts of violence, Grand Theft Auto, Columbine [school shooting example], anaesthetized, locked into it). The end of the passage comes back to the child who is described as getting 'so locked into it' implying that an outside force keeps him controlled: imprisoned – the choice is not his own, and in fact, 'locked in' does not imply

choice of any kind. These word choices describe a helpless, drugged, trapped adolescent; this description reveals the parents' perspective that adolescents need protection, and that video games hold immense power that seems uncontrollable.

The style of this passage (italicized) includes modal verbs and adverbs (they seem, become sort of) and coupled with the transitivity phrases (I've heard, I don't know, I guess) imply uncertainty, a not knowing, emphasizing this parent's underlying feelings of ambiguity and insecurity regarding video games in relation to their adolescent.

Howard's role as parent protector is evident in the Discourse of this passage, but his role as passive reader of the news is also suggested. His uncertainty about the details, his leap from frail child to sensationalized media stories, and the personification of the video games being able to lock the son in imply that the media messages support this parent's fear of video games; if read passively, without questioning, parents adopt the media style and reiterate sensationalized stories of the influence of video games. Comments like "there's always that speculation out there" is restated in many forms throughout the scripts of "they say" I've heard" "other parents say" where the parents continue to defer to others' knowledge and experience over their own in relation to their own children and video games. This cycle of not knowing maintains the fears of parents.

The language that parents are hearing from other sources (parents, media, gamers) influences their images about video games and seems to inform them only partially; the language they can draw upon is limited as is their ability to make sense of a phenomenon that appears to disempower them and keep them trapped within cycles of fear. The parents' ability to view video games from any other perception will be difficult if they continue to remain in a state of 'not knowing'. A gamer playing *Portal* would not rely

solely on a newspaper clipping for information; they would expand their ability to navigate the puzzles, secrets passages, and missions by learning as much about the game as necessary. Like a gamer, parents have many chances to determine how they approach the puzzle of video games and adolescents; they can rely on other parents and experts to help them problem solve, and they can, likely after various trials and errors, become more knowledgeable and skilful in navigating the culture of adolescents and video games.

Counterstrike – Parents' Tensions

Counterstrike is an online, multi-player, first person shooter game set as a war zone in many different settings. There are always two sides competing, but there is no 'good' side or 'bad side'. One tension of the game includes hiding from and seeking each other; another tension includes following particular game rules established by the game format, the moderators who monitor the games, and the players who follow the unwritten social etiquette of the game. This video game is used as a metaphor for the tensions with video games that parents experience with their adolescents.

Some of the main tensions arose around socializing, parent-child negotiating (time, rules, allowable games, game ideologies), violence and its effects, being a 'good' parent, the changing stage from child to adolescent, and concepts of play. Examples are seen throughout the scripts. The term 'tensions' is used to mean the push and pull of concepts, beliefs, and behaviours. I had initially called these tensions 'contradictions' when sharing them with the parents, but they did not agree with the word choice. They did not feel that encouraging their adolescent to play sports and not wanting them to play violent video games was a contradiction. Writing the scripts helped highlight the complex weaving back and forth of values and opinions that parents negotiated when they

described their parenting, their adolescent, and the video games. Although many contradictions appear, 'tensions' would have been a much more appropriate word to use with the parent participants to describe the gaps and negotiation of ideologies they expressed.

In this first excerpt from *Keeping you safe and healthy, boys!* the genre, style and Discourses reveal examples of the tensions parents described about their experiences around video games and their adolescents.

> SCOTT: No, it's just, *I talk* to other parents and they said "Yeah, they should be out doing something"…*they should* be out golfing or riding their bikes, or doing something but video gaming's *all they want to do*. It's just sad...almost obsession with it but then *I talk* to my sister and she said "But we watched tons of TV in my generation", and *I think* about how much…
>
> TABATHA: Yah, that's an unhealthy amount of time to be stationary with your eyes focused at six feet away… Jacob complains about headaches, about eye strain, you know, other sort of physical things that you know are connected to it and *all you can say is* "Well…maybe you should stop now". It's a big negotiation thing…like a power and control issue.

The genre of this passage (underlined) focuses on these parents' responsibilities towards the play and physical activity of their children. The repetition of 'should' is also a style component in that it is a modal verb, yet the repetition highlights the guilt and

expectations that parents experience. The word ‘should’ was an effect of the expectations that came from school newsletters, media reports, and news articles that emphasize the amount of exercise young people should be getting and how video games inhibit their physical well being. Parents’ language gets riddled with ‘should’s’ and reflects their guilt of not appearing to measure up to societal expectations of being a ‘good’ parent.

Tensions are also evident in the extremes used to describe activity involvement in connection to video games. The list of verbs (golfing, riding, doing) suggests that adolescents should be in continuous involvement in activities, as if that would mean a healthy lifestyle. Instead of balancing activity levels with screen time (i.e. “all they want to do”) this aspect of genre highlights the binaries that parents utilize when faced with ‘should’s’. This mode of language is meant to position them as ‘knowing’ (knowing what their adolescent child should be doing), however, the extremes reveal the gap of ‘not knowing’ or having thought about what is best for their own child. Not knowing creates tensions for parents in that they feel they need to guide their adolescent in practicing a healthy lifestyle, and yet, they are unsure how to support a healthy lifestyle for them.

The style of this passage (italicized) includes patterns of transitivity (I talked, I think) which reveals the parents’ attempts to make sense of what occurs and what they feel around video gaming. Again, parents experience a tension between knowing for themselves what is best for their adolescent child, and relying on outside sources to inform them about the best interests for their child. The word ‘should’ is also a style feature of this passage and reveals parents’ hesitations in their decisions: they hand over some of their power to the adolescents who they suggest ‘should be’ choosing more physical activities, or at least, choosing less video game time. Even the last ‘should’

(maybe you should stop now) is preceded with the passive voice 'maybe'; this maybe represents Tabatha's own indecision of whether her son really needs to stop playing and her lack of influence over his decision to stop playing.

The shift in parents' power positions is evident in the Discourse of this passage. The last phrase sums up many of the tensions parents expressed during this study: "It's a big negotiation thing…like a power and control issue." This exchange of power caused unease for parents and fuelled their fears of the future because of this lessening of control. Parents described negotiating the amount of time that video games could be played, which games could be purchased or played in the home, and that sometimes they negotiated the opinions they each held about ideologies (such as violence, competition, consumerism) or messages in the video games. The word "It's" implies video games, but also seems to represent a much broader, unarticulated aspect of the parent-child relationship.

Another tension revealed in the Discourse of this passage is the concern over adolescents' well-being because of time spent video gaming compared to the parents' generation and how much they watched television. Parents are shifting between numerous ideas, opinions, values, and beliefs around adolescents and video games: tensions are a subsequent effect.

Tensions are not necessarily negative. Tensions make the video game *Counterstrike* exciting. A gamer can play as a quick-draw shooter, or he can play as a stealthy soldier; being able to do both and at different times makes for a more effective player. Similarly, parents navigate between establishing rules and learning the rules of video games and parenting. The online game is complex because players interact and co-

operate with many other players which is similar to the multiple relationships involved in video games and in life: parent and child; parents and child; parents and children; parent, child, and child's friends; parents, child, and societal expectations. Negotiations and communication about different strategies is essential in *Counterstrike*; likewise, parents and adolescents engage in negotiations around video games which are challenging according to the parent participants, yet seems a critical development in any adolescent-parent relationship.

What is being learned is another tension *Counterstrike* evokes: gamers are learning how to shoot a weapon and role play being violent; gamers are also learning that soldiers on either side of a war experience fear, loss, and success; they are learning that soldiers need more skill and ability than to simply hold a gun; on the other hand, aspects of war can be learned about in history books and there may be no need for the learning evoked in a video game like *Counterstrike*. The tension involves considering which learning is believed to be more valuable.

The second excerpt, from the script *Voices Rising,* focuses on the tensions parents feel as they consider their adolescent in relation to schooling and learning, and their own role as parent.

<u>And that's what I tell him too</u>,

about school.

You have to <u>jump through hoops,</u>

<u>that's the way it is</u>

do your best

learn what you can learn

SCOTT:

it's just *getting* him through…

I talked to a lot of other parents

who had older kids,

the primary concern

isn't the sex and drugs and rock & roll,

it's *getting* their kid

to ***not completely*** disengage during their school years…

basically not to drop out

of school

we all seem to be accepting

'yah, ***we've got to*** grade 12

to keep these kids ***just getting up and going***….

it's ***going to be*** really hard

because they are all smart…

The genre (underlined) of this passage highlights the tensions between parents, society, and adolescents. There is pressure within the active voice of the parents (getting him, I talked, getting their, we've got to, going to be) who are working diligently to help

their adolescent meet expectations. This tension exists between parents and society. Meanwhile, the adolescent who apparently needs to be acted upon has no voice in this passage.

The verbs (getting, going, got to) indicate actions that are vague or quiet broad and suggest that the parents do not know how to help their child meet the expectations required. The word choices of 'jump through hoops,' 'that's the way it is,' 'disengage,' 'drop out' and 'really hard' suggest rigid expectations; these words also imply a mistrust and bleak hope in the school system. The well known metaphor of 'sex, drugs and rock and roll' represents video games in this passage and emphasizes this parent's belief that helping adolescents complete their schooling is the "primary concern", not video games.

The style of this passage utilizes the metaphor of hoops which implies that although she knows the activities (in school) are meaningless, nonetheless, the child needs to complete them. The present tense verb, "that's what I tell him…jump through hoops" implies that the mother is in the midst of the tension, and expects to keep promoting this advice. The father's speech uses a future verb tense (getting him, going to, got to) which implies a projection into the future about what he thinks is likely to happen: that his son disengages from school.

These two parents revealed their beliefs about schooling, their adolescent, and their role as parents through their Discourses. To them schooling has become a necessary societal checkpoint that needs to be completed. At no point did a parent participant consider their child's future without school in the equation. There were fears that the son was failing or disinterested, but never a consideration of what life would look like for the adolescent without the traditional schooling scenario in which they were enrolled. Parents

expressed concern about how to provide a supportive, successful education journey. They found themselves strained between knowing that the school system did not address their son's learning needs and yet, believing in the societal expectations of what a 'good' student is – one that graduates from Grade 12. Parents were well aware of what meaningful, engaged learning looked or sounded like for their child, and they agreed that video games meet those learning needs in many ways. The tension between knowing the purpose of *learning* and the purpose of *schooling* was a space where parents expressed frustration and because of these tensions reacted in sometimes contradictory ways to their beliefs about learning and schooling, particularly in interactions with their adolescents.

There is much evidence throughout the scripts of the tensions parents experienced. Within these tensions are the spaces of learning that Fairclough described:

> Such moments of crisis make visible aspects of practices which might normally be naturalized, and therefore difficult to notice; but they also show change in process, the actual ways in which people deal with the problematization of practices. (as cited in Roger, 2004, p. 75)

Like *Counterstrike*, parents adopt social rules and etiquette to which the social network adheres; however, if the social rules and etiquette of keeping adolescents in school and away from video games does not end up making sense, then the rules and etiquette need to be questioned and changed. During the final focus group parents began to question what they could do to disrupt the agenda of schooling and began to view video games as a Discourse they could draw from to explain powerful and meaningful learning that could be happening more regularly for their own adolescents in an education setting.

Consequently, parents experienced praxis in their concepts of learning as they were able to dialogue about the tensions they experienced around their adolescents learning.

Doom – Parents' Fears

The metaphor of *Doom* is used in this title since it is a horror video game. As a first person shooter, the avatar is in a space station on Mars and he protects himself from zombies and other frightful, unrealistic creatures. As one reviewer of the game commented, "Everything about *DOOM 3* oozes dread" (Adams, 2004). This video game reminds me of parents' feeling towards video games: much dread, an unknown setting, and being alone on a mission.

The parent participants were quick to admit they have concerns about video games, but 'afraid', 'scared', 'fearful' are not usually terms used in passing conversations between adults about video games. 'Dislike', 'disinterest', 'concern', and 'worry' are the terms found more often in this study. However, a lot of the fear is evident in what is not said; those gaps will be considered in this section.

Fear is evident in the scripts and is revealed in parents' fear of judgments from others, the loss of parental authority, the content of video games, and the possible effects on the gamer. Another type of fear was worry for the lack of success their adolescent might experience in health, social interactions, or school success. Parents' fears were evident in their surveillance of their adolescents' video games and play. Their fears were also revealed in the leaps they made from one aspect of an issue to another extreme; for example they might reference blood being shown in a video game and later refer to war or murders as an example of an effect of video games.

In this first excerpt, from the script *Ideas about the World,* the genre, style and Discourses reveal examples of the fears parents expressed about their experiences around video games and their adolescents.

> JASMINE: *There are video games* that I tell my son "I don't want you having anything to do with." I know some of them he's played other places, but I still say no and I explain why and I talk about him making different choices and give him things to think about because you can't ignore the issue 'cause it *could become a problem*. The military uses certain video games to train them to kill, shooting on impulse without even thinking about the consequences. They use video games to train them to be desensitized.

The genre (underlined) highlights the fear parents have in their interactions between their adolescent and video games. The repetition of the authoritative voice, "I tell my son, I don't want you, I still say no, I talk about him" reflects the positioning parents attempt to move themselves into when they are needing to establish control and gain more power. Adolescents are at a stage where they form and establish their own beliefs about the world, and begin to make their own decisions; choosing sports teams, music, friends, and food begins to be decided fairly independently by the adolescent. And yet, when parents are worried, afraid, and fearful for themselves or their adolescent, a natural reaction is to re-establish their authority and demonstrate their power position: talking at them, emphasizing their own opinions, and not allowing space for the adolescent's opinion. Another aspect of the genre of this passage that reveals the theme

of fear is the generalizations parents made (“having anything to do with”, “some of them”, “other places”, “different choices”, “give him things to think about”, “certain video games”, “shooting on impulse”); these phrases suggest that the parents were unable to describe the concepts, at least immediately. This inarticulation revealed a desire to ignore the complexities and cover them up by using generalizations and revealed that position of ‘not knowing’ already discussed in this chapter. Ignoring the complexities and being unsure are signs of ignorance and ignorance is a symptom of fear.

The style (italicized) of this passage utilizes a modal verb in the phrase ‘*could* become a problem’ which projects fear into the future effects of video games. This phrase then leads directly into two sentences of active voice about the military. The assured voice of the parent as she speaks using continuous present tense verbs (uses, shooting, thinking, train) suggests an expert knowledge of military video games and military training. However, military was not the background knowledge of this participant; the information was learned from media sources.

The various voices present in this passage include watchful parent, involved parent, protective parent, and media informed parent (military facts). These parent participants still believed that adolescents need protection; their physical safety does not appear threatened, but they need protection from ideas. Even though Jasmine knows that the ideas are available from other sources (“other places”), she speaks as if she can control the ideas from being heard or seen in the family space - then she believes she will have done her best in protecting her son. Part of this Discourse is the gap between protecting the adolescent from video game content and the jump to the real life military’s reported use of video games.

The fear mongering by the media is evident in parents' discourses. Exaggerated media reports can lead to moral panic and can feel impossible to fight against.

> Moral panics remain one of the most effective strategies of the right for securing popular support for its values and its policies. And this point needs to be made, that the moral panic has been inextricably connected with conservativism and that it also marks a moment of connection between 'the media' and 'social control'. But it should not be forgotten that at root the moral panic is about instilling fear in people, and in doing so, encouraging them to try to turn away from the complexity and the visible social problems of everyday life and either to retreat into a 'fortress mentality' – a feeling of hopelessness, political powerlessness and paralysis – or to adopt a gung-ho 'something must be done about it' attitude. The moral panic is also frequently a means of attempting to discipline the young through terrifying their parents. This remains a powerful emotional strategy. (McRobbie, 1994, p. 198-199)

Similarly the sound effects, visuals, and timing in the video game *Doom* is meant to frighten gamers. However, turning down the sound makes the game less frightening; or understanding the game to be simply pixels on a screen helps dissipate fear. Parents too can pay less attention to the media reports, and they can remember that they know their adolescent well enough to know how video games affect them.

In this second excerpt, from the script *Coffee Shop Play,* the genre, style and Discourses reveal more examples of the fears parents express about their experiences around the use of video games by their adolescents.

> WANDA: Well, *I thought* that my barometer was going to be how he behaved, so if playing video games meant that he was going to act violently or become obsessed with them, not have a variety of interests, not want to do anything else, you know addictive qualities and negatives qualities, and I haven't seen that. So I guess, I mean *I only know* my kid, *I only know* how he behaves. [leans in toward the other parents] But with video games *I can make assumptions* that 'little Johnny' our neighbour who plays a lot of Halo day in and day out and he isn't having dialogue about it, someone isn't monitoring the images he is seeing.

The genre of this passage (underlined) utilizes words that leap over understanding; the phrases cover over hidden meaning: I thought, if, you know, I guess, I mean. These word choices ask the listener to fill in a gap for themselves. What more is behind, "I thought"? What emotions arose as she thought, did she talk to others, read about anything? Did she worry, act suspicious of the video games or her son, did she calculate risks? The term, 'you know', is used often by the parents to check for understanding and see if another will agree with their thought or belief. These word choices keep hidden the fears parents are experiencing but are not sure how to articulate.

A barometer is used as metaphor in the genre of this passage; the barometer represents the parent's way to judge, to gauge, but the scale of judgment is never articulated. More specifically the barometer seems to represent Jasmine's level of fear and not-knowing. Consequently these judgments inhibit her ability to learn about video games.

The style (italicized) of this passage uses some of the same phrases functioning as transitivity patterns (I thought, I only know, I can make assumptions) that are used to describe the parent's ability to judge what is happening, and in turn, make sense of what is going on in their world. Her language implies that she has not been sure in the past about how her son has been doing. These transitivity patterns are in contrast to the active voice Jasmine uses when talking about Johnny (who plays, he isn't having, someone isn't monitoring). This active voice suggests that she is convinced about how other children play video games and what is best for those children. This uncertainty with her own son and yet certainty about other people's children enables Jasmine to keep her fears about video games remain real and possible in others. Another contrast in this passage is the present tense verbs the parent uses to describe someone else's child, but she uses future tense verbs in reference to her own child (if playing, he was going to, become obsessed, not have, not want) which suggests that her fears lie in an unpredictable future for her child, but her fears in other children are deemed possible in the present tense.

Jasmine expresses some relief in knowing that her own child is not negatively affected by video game play, but she quickly turns her attention to an object that she can not really know enough about, and therefore, she can continue to fear – someone else's child. As she focused on another person's child, she gives up the power she thinks she has in protecting youth from video game effects, and once again, video games can appear to be something to fear: the thought patterns appears to be that video games may affect another child, who in turn could negatively affect her own child and that parent continues to feel a loss of power and be fearful of the unknown.

Discourses describing other peoples' children in relation to video games were a common practice for the parent participants. Further, parents would describe the friends or neighbours in a much more concerned description: the adolescents were described as having access to brand new video game equipment consistently, or they play more often, or they play more inappropriate games. These other gamers were often less known and were projected as fearful in relation to video games. They are the players who might influence their own children or be the gamers who are influenced most deeply by the violence in the games. This projection onto other children enabled the general fears parents held about video games to still have a chance of manifesting. These descriptions and assumptions positioned the parents' own adolescents as more innocent and framed the parents as protective, and imposed on by these 'others.'

Fear weaves throughout the scripts in what is said and what is not said. These fears are projected onto video games, but there will always be a next thing to project it onto. These fears seem more deeply rooted in the concept of parenting and not an object out in the world. The parent participants' Discourses revealed that they expect themselves to raise sheltered adolescents: adolescents who do not experience ideologies or opinions different than their families' values; adolescents who do not experience distraction; adolescents who are able to maintain an innocence about the world. Without having much opportunity to ever voice and reflect on their parental philosophy, parents can keep themselves bound to making decisions based on broad, unattainable fears and call them responsibilities. The parents' Discourses made it more evident that fear is perpetrated by the complexities and tensions found in the beliefs and values that they hold about

adolescents, parenting, as well as in the language they use to keep those ideologies thriving.

Discussion Summary

The enthodramatic scripts reveal the stories and descriptions that the parents told about their experiences with their adolescents and video games. Beneath the stories and between the lines are common threads of 'not knowing,' tensions, and fear. These main themes are evident in the scripts, and also evident upon closer examination of the Discourses parents used. Themes of power, conflict, and uncertainty also emerged throughout and among the main themes. As became evident, much of what parents considered about video games was a reflection of their values, beliefs, and opinions about parenting, and video games became a lens to view such complex and meaningful ways of being. Further considerations for parents will be discussed in the Implications section, along with contemplations for adolescent gamers, educators, and researchers.

Chapter 6: Implications of the Study

This chapter considers what has been revealed from this research study, and reflects on what this learning means for parents, gamers, educators, and future research.

Filling the Gap

Children and adolescents are rapidly becoming experts with video games, ahead of and separate from many of their parents. There are two perspectives of this emerging relationship, says Jenkins (2004): "Myth of the Columbine and the Myth of the Digital Generation," one perspective triggered by fear, the other by simplistic hope. Jenkins referenced the school shooting that happened at Columbine high school in which the story became simplified into 'two adolescent shooters shooting and murdering students because they played a violent shooting video game'. The second alternative is also far fetched to suggest that digital media and tools will flourish and affect individuals and societies easily and only positively. He suggested that there is a middle, grey area that requires negotiation and exploration and I believe this research project addresses that call. Research about gaming, gamers, and the role of education in relation to gaming is growing, and this study attempts to inform that field by examining parents' experiences, thoughts, and beliefs.

The video game company *Nintendo* listened to why people other than teenaged males were not video gaming and they created the *Wii*, an accessible, family and generational friendly, system that has done extremely well financially. If more gaming companies and educational institutions would listen to what parents have to say, I believe video games and the way they are taken up in society would transform dramatically. As

video gaming continues to happen primarily in family home spaces, parents continue to have a potentially enormous role to play in the future of video games.

Most importantly, this research addresses a gap in societal knowledge; this study provides some answers and awareness to parents, living day to day, with adolescents and their video games. This research enables the personal stories and experiences of some parents to be heard by other parents. Fears can be eased and more productive talk can occur about video games and adolescents as more parents talk about their struggles with video games and recognize the complexities involved.

What does this research learning mean for parents?

Parenting adolescents is already a complex relationship and by adding video games to the mix, all the insecurities, tensions, and fears are accented because video games likely appear as a tangible object upon which to place blame. Parenting is not easy, nor simple. In-depth examination of parents' experiences reveal how parents position themselves, and identify themselves as 'parent' and how they perceive their adolescent in relation to themselves; video games then play a role as a lens through which parents can view these complicated values, beliefs, and ways of being they have established and continue to maintain.

Through societal and cultural expectations, parents create roles and responsibilities for themselves which include protector, gatekeeper, and even omniscient guide of the future. This is an impossible set of roles to fulfill and consequently parents' Discourses become satiated with seeming failure: being in positions of not knowing, struggling to maintain power positions, and being afraid, instead of confident in their adolescent's future.

In order to address these issues, parents can recognize the complexities they are in the midst of in dealing with adolescent development and video games and allow themselves time and space to reflect. They can reflect on their perceptions of video games and consider what sources they are trusting to help form these opinions and perspectives. Parents can benefit from acknowledging how simplistic the media often makes discussions of video games. This research has helped illuminate the complexities involved for parents as they consider video games and their adolescents. Parents can also learn to trust themselves as knowing about their own child, even as they transition into adolescence. This trust will enable parents to view video games in relation to their adolescent child; consequently, they can be better informed to guide and make decisions based on what the adolescent is learning and perceiving based on video games. This trust will require parental engagement with their adolescent and with video games.

This research has discovered that parents are engaging with their adolescents around video games in more ways than just the playing of the games. An implication from this understanding is that parents may view or come to view themselves in positions of knowing, that is, being participants beside their adolescent gamer – establishing rules, watching, listening, supporting, and questioning. Perhaps video games will become less fearful as parents understand themselves as already playing a critical role within the culture of video games and adolescents.

These research findings suggest that parents can benefit from shifting how they perceive and engage with their adolescent. Instead of viewing them as someone to protect from ideas, they could view them as young adults who need guidance in forming their own ideas and opinions about aspects of the world. Instead of viewing their adolescent as

someone who is passively consuming all media messages, parents can view their adolescent as engaged in sophisticated learning. The benefits would be that they would feel more confident in their role as guide, the trust they have in their adolescent would guide their decisions, and the adolescent could develop a critical approach to video games while valuing the sophisticated learning in which they are engaged.

The parent participants' perceptions of learning appeared to be affected by the ideologies of the traditional school system in that the parents felt pressure to value the traditional school system for teaching and preparing their adolescent children about how the 'work world' functions. This perspective conflicted with what parents also knew to be true – that schools were not beneficial for their child in many ways, and that their child learned meaningful, powerful knowledge and skills in environments other than school. Researchers (Delpit, 1988, 1992; Freire, 1987; Gee, 2003) have raised the point that students will benefit if we value all forms of knowledge and communication, even outside of our own cultural groups (class, race, religion, interests, etc.). This research reveals that parents are aware of some of the learning happening through video games, but the parents' Discourses suggest that they could benefit from more education about what gamers learn around gaming. When parents begin to acknowledge and value the alternative ways of knowing being practiced in video game cultures they will be able to help their adolescents develop a sense of confidence and adolescents will be able to transfer their gaming knowledge and skills to other avenues of their lives. Parents have meaningful roles of supporting and guiding their adolescents as they become producers of significant cultural artifacts (Gee, 2003; Jenkins, 2000; Prensky, 2001, 2006; Squire, 2003, 2005).

What does this research project mean for gamers?

I believe adolescent gamers stand to benefit from this research primarily in two ways. First, as more parents read and learn about the complexities that video games play in our society and our families, I believe parents will become more understanding of their adolescents' video game play; parents may even value the learning involved in video game play which could ease the resistance adolescents negotiate in order to play. Therefore, adolescents' attention and energy can be used more productively in considering, reflecting on, and questioning video game content and play.

Hall and Jefferson (as cited in McRobbie, 1994) refer to the study of youth culture as "subcultural theory" because "youth remains a site of cultural innovation" (p. 179). Youth create and manipulate many cultural forms, and affect the dynamics of social ways of being. Educators and parents could benefit from being aware of the "range of 'different, youthful, subjectivities',… and understand those factors which appear to reach to the unconsciousness of young people and re-emerge in their socially perceptible subjectivities" (McRobbie, 1994, p. 180).

Secondly, adolescents may benefit from this research by learning more about the complexities and tensions that exist for parents as their guides. Adolescents can avoid conflict and discord in their lives by understanding the cause of parents' actions and reactions about video games. Being more aware will provide adolescent gamers with an opportunity to reposition themselves with video games – communicating and modeling independence, thinking and examining critically, and dispelling parents' fears - all from a place of understanding parents' perspectives.

What does this research project mean for educators?

A critical implication of this research in regards to education is the critical examination of the concept of knowing and knowledge. What constitutes knowledge? What constitutes knowing? What of the critical knower? There are many questions about learning that educators could find favourable to examine and the answers may inform their teaching in powerful ways.

Lanskhear and Knobel (2003) raised the concern that the "driving motive behind the most powerful knowledge production these days is to *create* 'truths' rather than to *discern* them" (p. 164). As educators and parents we could enable more time to be spent on the process of honing skills that help us and youth to navigate through multiple truths and spaces or worlds that are created in cybercultures. We can encourage and guide youth to comprehend and deconstruct texts, virtual worlds, identity constructions, and social networking. In this way educators can promote digital tools to be used to produce meaningful commentary, ideas, and products that enhance our communities and societies, and bring to light social justice issues.

These responsibilities can be taken up by teachers in multiple ways. Video games do not need to be played in the classrooms, although many are successfully integrated (Shaffer, 2006), but the ideologies involved in the games and in game play can be considered, critiqued and disrupted. Like parents, teachers do not have to be fully integrated into the culture of video games to facilitate the learning already happening, and to guide further learning. I believe teachers will have more resistance in approaching the potentials of video games. Many teachers are parents themselves who could benefit from examining their own perspectives and values they hold about the video game culture first.

Teachers are also bound by the already mentioned limitations of schools (i.e. the purpose of knowledge, relationships, and skill sets); until a shift in educational philosophy can happen, teachers will have difficulty approaching video game learning in an appropriate, meaningful way.

Educators could benefit from this research through professional development workshops in which educators could read over and prepare the scripts to be reenacted. They could watch the reenacted scripts by video and then they could debrief the episodes, discussing issues, such as violence, learning, competition, societal expectations, and the mixed messages youth receive.

Workshops about video games that include both educators and parents would be a valuable exercise for achieving deeper understandings of who today's youth are, what they know, what role parents and educators play in the adolescents' journey of knowing, what do we know as the educators and facilitators in their lives, and what kind of knowing/knowledge will be beneficial for youth as they immerse themselves in digital communities and possibly find themselves performing as global leaders. It would be advantageous for parents and educators to learn more about particular social etiquette and learning styles that youth employ to interact and engage online. These discoveries could be incorporated into their own approaches to teaching and parenting.

Teachers and parents may also find that working together in collaborative ways to support youth as they grow and develop a positive relationship will yield many benefits. As teachers recognize and value the learning that occurs in the home space, teachers may welcome parents' observations and assessment as part of their curriculum planning and their assessment of the students' learning. In this reciprocal relationship with teachers,

parents may find that they too are knowers of their children, and that as parents they have a voice that can powerfully support their children in their learning process, guiding the children's deeper examination of what they know and how they come to know, and how that knowing transfers to other scenarios.

Teacher education programs could incorporate these afore mentioned ideas with an emphasis on parental knowing and students' knowing which would ultimately shift the teacher education programs from projecting the belief of 'teacher-as-knower.' Teachers could find the role of facilitator to be more meaningful and supportive; educators would be in a position to be able to draw upon what is already known by parents and students and serve to guide learners to further critical examination of beliefs, perspectives, and ways to transform their knowing into powerful and significant ways of engaging in the world.

What does this research project mean in regards to future research?

This research study achieved the initial intentions of the project. Primarily this research was intended to give a voice to parents about their experiences with their teens using video. These research findings subsequently help identify a gap in video game research where the perspective of the parents is considered. Hearing parents' stories and descriptions about their own opinions and experiences with video games and their adolescent builds on other research projects that used surveys (Macgill, 2007; PEW Internet & American Life Project, 2006) or interviews that included parents as additional data sources but not the focus (Piotrowski, 2007). This research moves beyond the research conducted between parents and young children (Aarsand & Aronsson, 2009) and addresses the relationship between adolescents and parents when considering video

games. As video game players mature, change occurs in the dynamics of how they play and the role parents take in their playing; this research begins to look at this phenomenon.

Ethnodramatic scripts were also a helpful analytical process and representation for this study. This artistic form enabled a closer exploration of what Lincoln and Denzin described as "crises and moments of epiphany in the culture. Suspended in time, they are liminal moments. They open up institutions and their practices for critical inspection and evaluation" (as cited in Saldaňa, 2005, p. 3). Writing the analyzed data as scripts created those moments in time to be slowed down, allowing for a focused examination of examples of parenting in relation to video games. All the scripts together emphasize the similarities that parents experience and the multiple aspects parents consider when they contemplate video games and their adolescent. In meeting with and talking with parents about their experiences I came to realize how embodied their reactions and feelings were about video games and adolescents. The ethnodramatic scripts helped reveal this embodiment and exposed those emotions of guilt, fear, and care that the parents expressed: "…the body is the site of knowing and feeling, and the site from which transformation is instantiated and initiated" (Alexander, 2005, p. 425). Therefore, performance representation was useful by bringing awareness back to parents' bodies, which hold cultural stories, practices, and beliefs about video games and youth. This embodied representation also holds hope as a space for disrupting engrained beliefs, values and ideas.

Some suggestions for future research would be to develop a larger participant body and perhaps conduct the research over a longer period. Although I did interview the adolescents as well, future research could include more thorough conversations with

parent, child and interviewer; or simply comparisons between parents' ideologies of issues in video games and adolescents' ideologies to see how they match up or vary from each other. Another group of participants that would be useful to work with would be parents of adolescent female gamers; exploring how parents feel and experience video games with an adolescent daughter would broaden the picture of gamers from that of a male domain to one including females. Further considerations could include having the same parent participants or new parent participants read the scripts and discuss their reactions and thoughts. Ideally, these ethnodramatic scripts will be performed for an audience of parents, educators, and adolescents. Focus groups and interviews after the performance with the audience members could also reveal interesting findings.

Chapter 7: Conclusion, Scripting Continued

This research study has initiated an exploration of parents' stories and experiences with adolescent children who play video games. The hope would be for more parents to be heard, more stories to be shared, and for more people to join the conversation. As stories and experiences are shared and witnessed the opportunity then exists for the 'not knowing' of parents to transform into 'how to know'; the entire scenario would move to a place where parents and adolescents, educators and policy makers can value what already exists within video games and can learn more about how to utilize the knowledge of video games in productive, innovative ways.

Knowing more about the tensions parents have encountered in their relationships with adolescents around video games offered that discursive hiccup that Rogers (2004) celebrates - where new insights and understandings can be made by reexamining at the tensions in order to identify what beliefs and values are causing limitations for parents so far as escaping from cycles of apparent powerlessness. Finally, I am grateful for the honesty and intimacy of these parents in sharing their fears about video games and their adolescents so a closer examination of the fears could reveal that it is only ourselves, in the way we use language, that keeps us limited and afraid.

These scripts promise hope of new Discourses being adopted; Carol was a great example of this. By adopting new practices her behaviours had changed; her son reported that since participating in the research interviews that his mother now understands that when she wants him to finish playing his video game, that he usually needs time to complete a task or level before he can turn the game off; this understanding had resulted in an improved relationship between them. Her shift may appear small, but she had to

transfer more power to him about knowing when to end; she had to modify how she valued video games and needed to alter the language she used in communicating this new reaction.

Video games are embedded into our culture. Parents will benefit from moving beyond their fears toward greater exploration of the many potentials for the positive impact of video games in their adolescents' lives. My hope would be that parents will see themselves as integral to video game culture and therefore be in a position to help guide their children to think critically about video game content and game play.

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Appendices

Appendix A

First Interview Questions

1. What role do video games play in your family? (Who plays, where is the video game consoles or computer, when do people play)

2. What are your concerns about video games?

3. What positives do you see around video games?

4. How do video games compare to other media your children engage with?

5. What kind of participation emerges around video game playing between you and your child?

6. What kind of talk emerges around video game playing between family members – you and your child, siblings, your partner and children?

7. What has been your experience with video games? (first seen or heard of video games; thoughts about them; getting them for your child; which games do you know about; which consoles do you know about)

8. What have been your experiences with technology in general? (Computers, internet, interest, capability, etc)

9. Please describe your child's interaction with video games.

10. Please describe your child's interaction with technology.

11. Please describe your child's personality (likes, dislikes, beliefs, values)

12. Please describe your personality (likes, dislikes, beliefs, values)

13. Describe the first time you felt concern about your son's video game playing?

Appendix B

Recruitment Poster

Needed:
Parents of video game players

Are you concerned about video game violence?
Video game addictions?
Or are you a Gamer and a parent?
I want to hear your thoughts, ideas, and stories…

What: a research study to learn more about parents' experiences with their adolescent video game players
Who: parents who have adolescent children (ages 11- 18) who play video games (parents can be video gamers or have no experience with video games)
Why: to learn about and share parents' experiences; to let parents' ideas, concerns, and thoughts about video games be heard

For more information see the back of this flver…
To participate please contact Leanna Madill
250-479-4179 or lmadill@uvic.ca

A University of Victoria
Research project

Researcher:
Leanna Madill,
UVic Doctoral Student
Website: http://web.uvic.ca/~lmadill/

Main research question:
What are parents' experiences with adolescent video game players?

What is asked of the participants:
- 3 individual interviews (beginning in February)
- 2 focus group opportunities

What are the benefits to participate:
- Learn more about video game concerns and potentials
- Your experiences will help inform and guide other parents, teachers, community members and a larger educational audience
- Find out more about your adolescent gamer's experiences and knowledge

To participate, please
Contact Leanna:
250-479-4179
lmadill@uvic.ca

Appendix C

First Focus Group Questions

Anything to add since we last met? Any ideas, questions, thoughts, experiences?

Anything you noticed about your perspective and involvement with their video game playing?

What part of society makes you feel bad about your child playing video games?

Before our next individual interview session – would you take an hour to observe him playing, the game he is playing, the interactions, context etc. and write about the event from your perspective, providing the details, but also your thoughts and reactions during the game play. Feel free to interact with your son during this time.

Appendix D

First Focus Group Powerpoint

Video Game Learning Focus Group

Leanna Madill
University of Victoria

Social Science and Humanities Research Council funded project

Concerns about video games…

Societal Concerns

- Violence
- Inactivity
- Marketing to children
- Safety online
- Inappropriate display of race, males, females
- Attention deficit

Misconceptions about video games

- Not reading
- Isolation
- Addiction
  - Avoiding other activities
- Lack of creativity
- Cheating

Concern: Not reading

Misconception: lots of literacy

Instructions
Narrative
Non-linear reading
Intertextuality

Lots of literacy

Visuals,
Graphs,
Angles,
Colors, Music,
Symbols,
Language,
Actions
Numbers
Time

Video Game Literacies

- Communicating:

typing/reading online
speaking/listening online
speaking with friends
fan websites & blogs

Concern: Isolation

Misconception: very social

- turn taking,
- risk taking,
- making decisions

Concern: Addicting

Misconception: engaging play and learning

addiction vs. obsession

So is food, competition, spending money, computer searching…

- active learning
- Challenges you when you are ready
- Draws on tv shows or movies you know
- Choice
- Practice is not boring
- Take risks with learning
- Probing the world, reflecting, creating a hypothesis, reprobing
- Multiple ways to make progress

Concern: Lack of creativity

Misconception: sophisticated ideas

Play space

- Pretend to be other people
- Try out different actions that you wouldn't get a chance to do

•Imagine different worlds, different activities, different people
•problem solving skills,
•gain confidence with computers

Creating Video Games

- Squeak
- Stagecast software
- Game Maker software
- Kid's Programming Language
- RPG Maker

Concern: Cheating

Misconception: problem solving

- Understand end goal
- Challenge yourself
- Get by something you can learn later

Recognizing and Valuing

**from page 2 & 3 of the handout…

Technology capabilities
(what technology practices were you using?)

Literacy practices
(viewing, representing, listening, speaking, reading, writing)

Social skills
(who or how do you interact when you are playing video games?)

Ideologies
(what rules about the world or how the world works were evident?)

Taking up societal concerns…

Societal Concerns

- Violence
- Inactivity
- Marketing to children
- Safety online
- Inappropriate display of race, males, females
- Attention deficit

Misconceptions about video games

- Not reading
- Isolation
- Addiction
  - Avoiding other activities
- Lack of creativity
- Cheating

What ideologies/messages are in these video game images…

Where to from here

- Observe your adolescent's game play
- Notice the technical, literacy, social components
- Ask about the messages in the games

Appendix E

First Focus Group Handout

Video Games: Concerns & Potentials

Leanna Madill

Email: lmadill@uvic.ca
Website: http://web.uvic.ca/~lmadill/

Concerns about video games…

Societal Concerns

- Violence
- Inactivity
- Marketing to children
- Safety online
- Inappropriate display of race, males, females
- Attention deficit

Misconceptions about video games

- Not reading
- Isolation
- Addiction
  - Avoiding other activities
- Lack of creativity
- Cheating

What is being learned and practiced when playing video games?

- **Technology capabilities**

(what technology practices were you using?)

- **Literacy practices**

(viewing, representing, listening, speaking, reading, writing)

- **Social skills**

(who or how do you interact when you are playing video games?)

- **Ideologies**

(what rules about the world or how the world works were evident?)

Literacy:

- **Sign systems**:
  - Visuals, Graphs, Angles, Colors, Music, Symbols, Language, Actions
- **Practicing expanded definition of literacy**:
  - Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, Viewing, Representing
- **Practicing sophisticated literacy practices**:
  - non-linear reading, intertextuality,
- **Outside direct gaming**:
  - speaking with friends, fan websites & blogs

Social Networking & Identity development:

- turn taking,
- leadership roles,
- competition
- problem solving,
- collaboration
- gain confidence with computers
- pretend to be other people
- try out different actions that you wouldn't get a chance to do
- imagine different worlds, different activities, different people

Kinds of Learning involved:

- active learning
- builds on what you already know,
- challenges you when you are ready
- draws on TV shows or movies you know
- choice, decision making,
- practice is not boring
- take risks with learning
- probing the world, reflecting, creating a hypothesis, re-probing
- multiple ways to make progress

Questions to encourage critical thinking about video game:

Character (avatar) Questions:
Why do you choose that character?
If you had a choice, what would you change about that character (name, clothes, career, size, abilities)?
Share your opinion as an adult – what would you change?
Discuss –why don't they have different cultural characters?
Why not many female characters?
What other characters could they add to make a cooler game or a better represented game?

Graphics Questions:
What is so realistic about this game?
What would you improve?
What do the graphics do for you? Ask them about their opinion regarding the media comments that keep saying video games make players more violent.

Purpose of the Game Questions:

1. *What is the plot/action?*
    a. What other options could they have included for the character to try out (more choices, more spaces to go to, different story line)?

2. *Game Rules*
    a. What does the game require you to do, in order to win?
    b. What rules would you add or change?
    c. When is cheating in video games okay to do and when is it not okay to do?
    d. What ideologies are presented in this game? Ask them about their opinions on these issues ~
        i. The good guys are white
        ii. Only the fastest win
        iii. $ winnings are only used to buy more car parts
        iv. Gang life is romantic
        v. Females are for show/ are only for men's whim
        vi. Violence is the way to solve conflict

Identity Questions:
Why is this your favourite game? What does it say about you and your interests?
How do you compare as a video game player to your friends and how they play?
What actions do you get to do in video games that you likely won't ever do in real life?
Which is your favourite video game player to play as? Why?
If you could create any kind of video game – what would it be like?
How have you helped a friend figure out something about a video game?

Resources:

Video Game Books:

Gee, J. P. (2003). *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cassell, J. & Jenkins, H. (1999). *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and computer games* (pp. 262-297). London: The MIT Press.

Johnson, S. (2005). *Everything bad is good for you: How today's popular culture is actually making us smarter.* New York: Penguin Group.

Prensky, M. (2006). *"Don't bother me mom - I'm learning!"* St. Paul, MN: Paragon House.

Williamson Shaffer, D. (2006) How computer games help children learn. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Online Safety website: www.safety-council.org (Safety Canada Council)

Video Game Software:

- Squeak http://www.squeakland.org/
- Stagecast software http://www.stagecast.com/creator.html
- Game Maker software http://www.gamemaker.nl/
- Kid's Programming Language http://www.kidsprogramminglanguage.com/
- RPG Maker http://www.enterbrain.co.jp/tkool/RPG_XP/eng/

Educational Video Game sites:

For young children:
http://pbskids.org/games/index.html
http://treehousetv.com/kids/games/play.aspx?activity=Games
http://www.webkinz.com/us_en/
http://www.clubpenguin.com/

For older students:
http://www.makewish.org/site/pp.asp?c=bdJLITMAE&b=81924
http://nobelprize.org/
http://www.food-force.com/
http://www.bhf.org.uk/cbhf/fun_stuff.asp
http://contagion.edu.yorku.ca/
http://www.wetcoast.org/games/homeless/homeless.html
http://www.peacemakergame.com/
http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca/speare.cfm
http://www.darfurisdying.com/
http://www.dimensionm.com/

Appendix F

Second Individual Interview Questions

Was anything surprising or interesting from the focus group?
Is there anything you might question or disagree with?
Did you have an opportunity to watch your son play video games since the focus group? What were you able to notice about the technology capabilities, literacies, social involvement of his playing?

Please describe a positive learning experience (in or out of school) that your child had (describe the beginning, middle and end, the context, the emotions, etc). What was your role in this story?
Please describe a negative learning experience (in or out of school) that your child had. What was your role in this story?
Describe a time when you thought of your child as highly successful. What was your role in this story?

Play – what is your definition of 'play'?
What is escapism?
Can you describe a time when you were fascinated with your child's play experience? What was your role in this play experience?

Can you describe your child as a video game player (what does he **look like** when he plays, what **types of games** does he play, what are his **main emotions** around playing video games, when does he usually play, who does he play video games with, what other past times does he participate in besides video games, **how often**, **how talented**?)
Describe an experience when you remember video games being an important part of your son's life. What was/is your role in this story/experience?
Describe a time your son shared his video game experience with you. What was your experience as listener?
Describe a positive experience surrounding video games with your son.

What do you know about ESRB ratings?

What is violence? What is different between ‘realistic’ violence and cartoon violence?

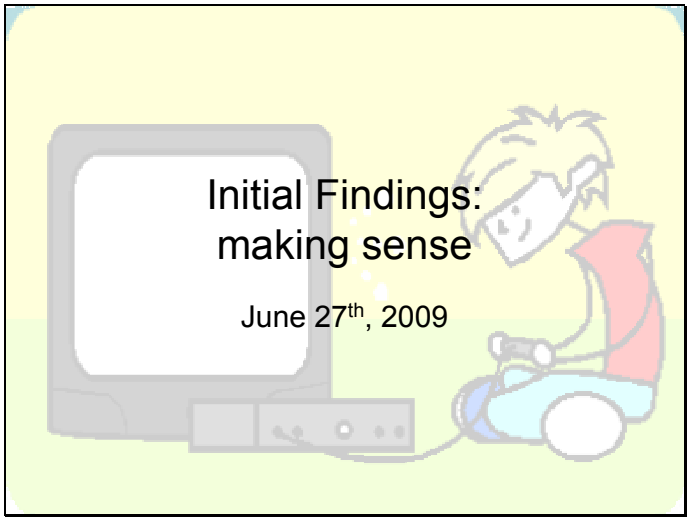
What about societal issues, such as violence, gender/race portrayals, consumerism, etc – how do you address these in your family?

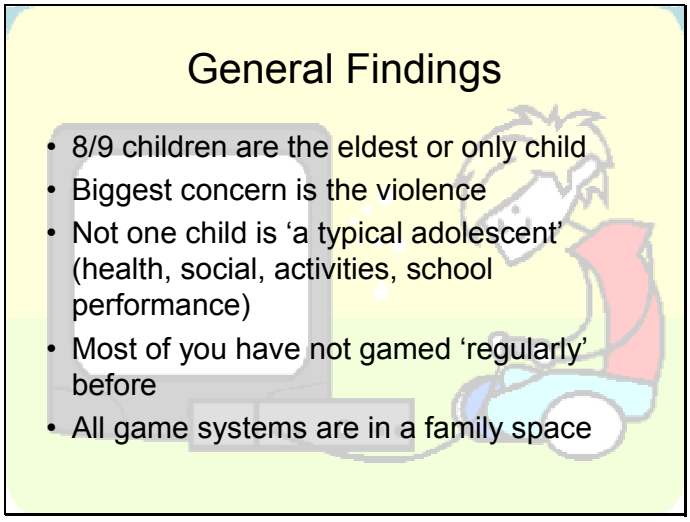
How can you/we know what our children are learning/picking up/taking up from video game violence?

What advice would you give to parents who were considering video games for their grade one child?

Appendix G

Second Focus Group Powerpoint





Online Safety

- Knowing your child
- Having conversations about safety & their activities online
- Computer/console in central location in house
- The adolescents are doing self-monitoring their safety too

Ages & Stages

- Social aspects
  - not meeting face to face;
  - but also still timid of the world – more physically safe than we were…
- Video games taking up so much time…
  - Helping with transition from adolescent to adulthood
- If their ideals/values/self concept is derived from video game content…

Inactivity

- Many of you were concerned about your children getting more activity
- but when I heard about what they already participate in…they seem very active or at least healthily so…

Inappropriate display of race, males, females

Advertising

TV advertising
Magazine advertising
Web surfing – advertising
In game advertising

Discussions with adolescents

- All of you have discussions with your children about different issues such as gender, race, advertising
- When asked about the conversations most of the information was your ideas and opinions…not their words usually…

What is violence?

- Definition
- Judgment/opinion
- Consequences/effects

Violence

Contradictions

– believe video game violence is offensive and inappropriate

– Child plays and is encouraged in aggressive sport

Initial findings

Contradictions

– disappointed son is not more traditionally masculine ‘testosterone, sporty, competitive’

– then concerned that after playing video games he seems aggressive

Content

Contradictions

– thinks content is bad and not transferable

– realizes the son excelled in a social studies project about WWII from playing his video games

Violence

Contradictions

– Realizes after talking with adolescent about violence that they have a healthy perspective

– Still would not allow a game like Mortal Kombat into the house

Definitions of Play

- It's changed. It's not the physical thing that it used to be.
- Anything where it's fun. There's no responsibility attached to it
- Any activity really that is more about pleasure than it is about achievement or chore.
- Being outside. Playing hockey…. Having fun and learning. Toys. Games…Relaxation. Something you get enjoyment out of.
- Having fun. Enjoying and learning. Or achievement too
- Play is when you're having fun. You don't have to be doing what you're doing. Our lives are so structured…
- To me that's all about experimenting and trying different things and finding out what works and testing out pretend things
- Play can be all sorts of things. Play is when you're having fun. The way I look at learning even, I can be playful in my learning….playing with the ideas…being creative.. Play is a broad thing. They always stress that children learn through play, whether it's their social skills or…

Play
Contradictions

- believe children should gain exposure to adult knowing

– concerned that their play doesn't appear fun when video gaming

Play
Contradictions

- Play is for me, my way of thinking, free time, to hang out and just kick back, do whatever you want, whether it's reading, or being outside running around in the yard, trampoline, badminton, going down to the beach, digging in the sand. Yeah, that would be my definition of play and probably, in my definition, video games wouldn't fall into that.
- *What is the purpose of play?
- Just to hang out and chill out which I guess video games do that. Yeah I don't know.I think of it as downtime. You know, when your mind can slow down…

Video Game Culture & Youth

Most recent findings…

Research Context

- Monthly gaming session at the university
  - Computer lab
  - Latest gaming equipment (Xbox 360, PS3, Wii, Rock Band, Guitar Hero, Halo 3, Guild Wars, DDR, game rentals)
  - 2 hours playing

Context

- Focus Group
  - Participants are from previous research
  - Males, ages 13-16
  - From 3 different high schools

Findings

- These adolescent gamers have a sophisticated understanding of
  - How *games* work & how *they work with* games (technical)
  - Involved in the social enterprise of games (social)
  - Issues involved in games & how their identities are entwined (identity)

Rhyzomatic culture/learning

- knowledge is negotiated
- learning experience is social
- personal knowledge is valued
- creation process includes shifting goals and constantly negotiated parameters

Conclusions

- Fluid membership to affinity group
- Game players know it is not about binaries; game play and culture is complex
- Adolescent game players are full of experiences and knowing
- Play is fun, flexible and full of learning

Adolescent gamers' comments about what is learned from video games…

- I pay more attention to what's going on around me… Internet math games – my mom tells me to and that helps me
- depends on the type of game: thinking game, puzzle games that help with problem solving; story – they get me thinking, like creativeness
- hand eye coordination; how to do strategy and stuff, helps you mathematically; stimulates your brain, challenges you, it's a problem – so essentially you are problem solving on a rather large and changing scale..
- who the people were in those times, what they used, why they did it; cyber-electronics (futuristic robots and warfare)

Adolescent gamers' comments about what they wish you knew more about…

- About the rating system – not all older games are inappropriate
- I wish she would try them…I wish she knew more about how to play
- That it's not going to kill me and I could play more.
- That its beyond blood and gore. That's its strategy. It's more than killing people. It involves thinking.
- That they would watch me more often. And know why we want to play it and how to play it.
- That they would understand game play so they don't put time limits on it.

Adolescent gamers' comments about a difference or change in you…

- No! (laughs)
- A tiny bit – she talked to me about this and said it makes sense.
- (laughter) haven't started to…No.
- Not really.
- Yeah. She's been better like she actually lets me play more and she thinks it's good. She hasn't said anything like 'Get off!' or 'Do that!' When she says get off nicely then I'll get off.
- She asked me questions about it and stuff. It was fine.
- Um no…no..I don't think so really.
- A few slight differences like one time me and my dad were playing Mario Cart and she said 'you guys ever wonder or wish you could see each other instead of not just looking at the screen?'

Final Questions

- How are video games different than rock and roll in the '60's, tv in the 70's/80's?
- What kind of resources would you like to have available to you as a parent about video games? (to use the tool, to not be as concerned about the medium, etc.)