

# Chapter 11

## Designing Learning Activities for Sustained Engagement: Four Social Learning Theories Coded and Folded into Principals for Instructional Design through Phenomenological Interview and Discourse Analysis

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The experience of a successful adolescent learner will be described from the student's perspective about learning the video game Dance Dance Revolution (DDR) through selected passages from a phenomenological interview. The question driving this investigation is, "Why did she sustain engagement in learning?" The importance of this question came out of the need for background on how to create an afterschool program that was to use DDR as an after school activity that might engage adolescents and tweens to become more physically active and reduce the risk of adult obesity, and to increase bone density for these developing young people through playing the game over time. The difficulty of creating this program was the risk that the students would not sustain engagement in the activity, and we would not have a viable sample for the bone density adolescent obesity study. Implications of this study include understanding the potential construction of learning environments that motivate and sustain engagement in learning and the importance of identity construction for teachers to motivate and engage their students. In addition to the analysis of sustained engagement through the four socio- and cultural-cognitive theories, four major principals were extracted from the operationalized themes into a framework for instructional design techniques and theory for engaging learners for game design, training, and in classroom learning.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to understand what engages young people in learning, and what sustains their interest to continue. It explores the elements that inform the lived experience of a chosen play activity and the possible social learning theories that might inform it. Four theories were chosen and operationalized for coding the transcript of the phenomenological interview because of their focus on motivation, social learning, and identity construction: Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998), Affinity Groups (Gee, 2001), Social Interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 1994, 2009), and Self-Determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

All of these theories seek to explain the motivation behind learning as socially constructed and distributed phenomena; all seek to describe the process of identity construction as an impetus for situated learning. The assumption in this study was that it is through the process of identity construction that engagement is sustained and supported through the process of group affiliation and is distributed through apprenticeship, modeling, group interaction, interdependence, and situated in space.

### Identity Construction Rituals and Rites of Passage

Traditionally, communities gather to provide ceremony for initiation and status transition for such things as the celebration of status change, where a child becomes an adult, and initiation, where single people become married couple. Although there may be many more transitions and rituals in today's society because of the great variety of cultural subgroups (i.e., churches, car clubs, self-help groups like Alcoholic Anonymous, and hobby groups like The Peoples' Revolutionary Knitting Circle, etc.), many of these groups traditionally necessitated face-to-face interaction. But with the Internet and today's computing power, these relations can be mediated digitally through

portals like Facebook, Xbox Live, *Second Life*, and other social networking tools—as well as expert systems that provide feedback based on performance, such as a video games like Dance Dance Revolution (DDR).

The DDR game club might be represented as a ritual rite of passage to understand how and why people build identities around their play, and sustain engagement to ultimately develop expertise. Central to the rite of passage is the initiation ritual (Van Gennep, 1960), where new roles and status are conferred through public performance where play (Geertz, 1973), the subjunctive mood (Turner, 1969), situates the activity, so that rules, roles, and consequences are suspended and participants can explore new identities, associated activities, and their semiotic domains and thus develop new status.

With this in mind, well-designed video games and their fan bases may represent and express new forms of the rite of passage and initiation ritual. Like a rite of passage, games are structured activities that are valued by certain cultural subgroups, depend on play as a subjunctive mood, represent expert systems that resemble apprenticeship activities, and involve performance initiation. The subjunctive mood observed in games and ritual are said to decontextualize the action and provide a suspension of rules, roles, and consequences found in ordinary life to allow for the exploration of new identities, rules, roles, actions, and social affiliations and status in a safe space. Games can do this well.

The ritual and process of identity construction may be an organizing principle in understanding motivation and engagement. The four social learning theories presented for discourse analysis seek to provide the impetus for motivation and engagement and how to structure it, and rely upon aspects of identity construction; these theories do not present themselves as descriptions of the identity construction process. Each theory has a different focus and seeks to describe aspects of identity and focus on an element that informs

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