Linda Ensign

PhD in Education, Educational Psychology

My professional plan is to deepen my knowledge of learning and motivational theories and cognitive psychology, and combine it with my existing technical experience, programming acumen, and enjoyment of playing video games to increase the existing body of knowledge on cross-disciplinary methods and models for creating effective game-based learning. In addition, I plan to publish the results of my research, participate in research studies, teach at local colleges, and continue to share and expand my knowledge. I also hope to new and existing knowledge of learning, technology, game play, motivation, and cognitive psychology to refine the new learning-based game theory that I began work on during my Masters program. My career goal is directly linked to being a small business owner – to create and *commercially* distribute AAA *learning-based* games.

I have never been satisfied with the status quo; always striving for personal growth. In the mid-nineties, I moved my family from South Africa to the United States to accept a contracting opportunity. A few years later and newly single, I moved my children cross-country to a contracting position in the Midwest. I remarried in the mid-2000s, and shortly thereafter enrolled in an online Bachelors degree program in Interactive Media Design with the goal of mitigating the threat that global outsourcing posed to my career.

Early in this degree program I realized that it was not only the new programming or digital skills that intrigued me, but also the role technology played in enhancing learning and making education more accessible. In the midst of my studies, I relocated to Virginia, lost my contracting job, and started my own business.

A few months after completing my Bachelors degree I enrolled in the online MS. Ed Learning Design and Technology program at Purdue University. My goal was to gain a greater understanding of learning theory and instructional design so that I could develop solutions to the problems I had experienced as an online student.

My husband is currently working on his Doctoral Thesis for his DBA in Entrepreneurship, a step we both view as a logical progression in the attainment and application of knowledge. I too began my Masters with the mindset that I would continue on with a PhD.

I have played video games for over a decade and when I read "well-designed games are a potentially powerful vehicle to support learning" (Shute, Rieber, & Van Eck, 2012, p.329) during one of my courses, I was intrigued. Research on constructivist instruction revealed that its goals of "problem solving, reasoning, critical thinking, and the active and reflective use of knowledge" (Driscoll, 2005, p. 393) aligned closely with the new competencies discussed by Shute, Rieber, and Van Eck. The common methods of learning based on constructivist theory include microworlds, hypermedia, collaborative environments and role-playing – constructs on which some of the most popular video games are built, including games that I am most familiar with. I began to wonder why, if popular and commercially viable games contain all the necessary elements of

constructivism, learning games of comparable stature are not being created or actively and commercially marketed.

I conducted independent research on game-based learning during my Masters program and began developing a theory on learning-based games. My current research interests are cognitive psychology, motivation theory, systems thinking, creativity, technology, game design, play theory, learning assessments, and evidence-centered design.

My goal is to combine theories and models of these disciplines with my own prior knowledge and experience with data analytics, programming languages, and playing video games to further develop and refine my fledging learning based game theory, and to identify and research additional constructs that will positively contribute to the use of video games in positive, effective, and accessible learning environments.

The highlights of my thirty-year career in information technology are those moments when I had the rare opportunity to spend time analyzing the cause of a business problem or researching the best methods to meet a business need. Over the past decade I discovered that I found this same satisfaction while researching, studying, discussing, analyzing, formulating, or preparing academic arguments or position papers.

Both my Bachelors and Masters degrees were completed one hundred percent online and, while I realize that this was a necessity for many reasons, I would like to complete my educational journey by attending a traditional brick-and-mortar college so that I have experienced both sides of the current paradigm of adult education.

George Mason University has a stellar reputation, a fully equipped Game Design Lab, and an Educational Psychology faculty whose research interests align with and complement my own. Dr. Erin Peters-Burton's research into the knowledge acquisition processes in game design could guide my understanding of how to design games to effectively acquire knowledge, Dr. Michele Buehl's research on motivation could inform my research on motivational theory in game design, and Dr. Kimberley Sheridan's research into learning in the arts and media will be invaluable, as enjoyable and entertaining video games are as much an art form as they are a combination of technology and visual media.

I hope I will have the opportunity to complete the capstone of my educational journey at George Mason University.

References

Driscoll, M. P. (2005). *Psychology of Learning for Instruction.* Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Shute, V., Rieber, L., & Van Eck, R. (2012). Games...and...Learning. In R. Reiser, & J. Dempsey (Eds.), *Trends and Issues in Instructional Design and Technology, 3rd Edition.* Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.