INTRODUCTION

A decade into the 21st century, there are vibrant pedagogical discussions regarding 21st century texts and new approaches to teaching across grade levels and content areas (Beach & O’Brien, 2009; Coiro, 2003; Larson, 2008; Merchant, 2009; O’Brien & Scharber, 2008; Wagner & Dobbin, 2009). Prensky’s (2001) concept of the ‘digital native,’ or those born into a digitally saturated world, aptly describes most students not only in the K-12 system, but also in the university, pre-service education classrooms. Many of these students have grown up using digital technologies in the classroom, as I have found that some of my nineteen- and twenty-year-old Education students recall using the Internet in elementary school. However, to my dismay, my undergraduate students understood the role of digital technology through the lens of traditional pedagogy. In this way, the students may be digital natives, but they appear to be digital immigrants when they approached pedagogy and practice through the lens of their formative educational moments as students. In other words, these pre-service educators appeared to develop an understanding of practice based on their classroom experiences as students; and if their teachers did not welcome out-of-school literacies inside the classroom, then my students would have had limited exposure to using their out-of-school literacy practices, such as video gaming, in meaningful ways inside the classroom.

The discussion regarding pre-service teachers’ identities (Casey, in press; Danielewicz, 2001; Franzak, 2002; Galman, 2009) suggests that the role of an educator is a ‘negotiated’ space, and one’s pedagogical use of virtual spaces can hinge on a number of factors/obstacles, including previous experience (Casey, in press; Goodson, Knobel, Lankshear, & Mangan, 2002), resources and time limitations (Baek, 2008; Kirriemuir & McFarlane, 2003), curricular and game alignment (Van Eck, 2006) and school cultures that privilege traditional semiotic domains (Goodson, Knobel, Lankshear, & Mangan, 2002; King & O’Brien, 2002). This discussion in the early part of this decade stemmed from a disconnect or “culture clash” (Goodson, Knobel, Lankshear, & Mangan, 2002) between students and their teachers, school, and curricula, with an eye on how educators and schools “fail to learn about these literacies or why they seem so important to so many students” (Hawisher & Selfe, 2004, p. 676). A seeming response to this discrepancy, the discussion of digital technologies in the classroom emerged, and the examination of video games and their “rich, pedagogical
potential” (Squire, 2009, p. 660) has become a focus of pedagogical discussions (Abrams, 2009; Boot, Kramer, Simons, Fabiani & Gratton, 2008; Charsky & Mims, 2008; Cherney, 2008; Crawford, 2005; Gee, 2003; 2007; Lacasa, Méndez, & Martínez, 2008; Van Eck, 2006).

Given that technology changes at a rapid pace, the discussion of implementing video games and video game learning in the classroom will need to accommodate new media and new experiences. Nonetheless, culture clashes can continue to occur, especially if an educator feels vulnerable (Norton-Meier, 2005) or threatened (Curran, 2003). Pre-service educators are part of the discussion, and this chapter takes a closer look at the ways four pre-service teachers initially perceived the role of teaching, how this perception changed over the course of a semester, and ways video games became part of their teaching as a result of this perceptual change. Observational data of student-teaching opportunities in a New York City public high school, along with university students’ formal and informal written and conversational responses, help call attention to why pre-service educators’ concepts of teaching and of gaming are important and how these perspectives are essential components of effective teacher preparation.

VIDEO GAME CLIPS IN LIEU OF VIDEO GAMES?

Video games are pedagogical tools known to motivate engagement and learning (Gee, 2003, 2007; Rosas, Nussbaum, Cumsille, Marianov, Correa, & Flores, 2003; Shaffer, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) and involve active learning, experimentation, and discovery (Aldrich, 2005; Gee, 2003, 2007; Greenfield, 1985). Though most discussions of video gaming and learning focus on what happens while gaming or as a result of gaming, this chapter focuses on the ways educators can capitalize on students’ gaming experiences without having the students play the games in class. Resources in many schools seem to be limited, and this discussion provides educators practical ideas for building upon the gaming experience without having a console or software on hand. Though some may suggest that use of video game images rivals that of images from other popular culture sources, video gaming experiences are distinct because they involve the gamer; one’s projection of self (Gee, 2003, 2007) onto the gaming character involves perceiving the game through the character’s eyes and feeling responsible for the virtual character and game play, and this personal connection to the virtual world can manifest itself in gamers’ actions and value systems in the real world (Abrams, in press). As a result, when video game images are discussed as didactic prompts, they are not to be misunderstood as replacements for other images; rather, they are distinct visuals that invoke personal experiences and emotional connections that are part of video game learning and can be related to classroom material. In this way, this chapter provides practical ideas for conceptualizing video games and learning within the confines of traditional environments with resource limitations.

SCHEMA AS THE CONNECTION

Experiences inform interpretations and decisions, and this Piagetian concept, known as schema or schemata (plural), helps to lay the foundation for understanding how