Chapter 11
Exploring Guild Participation in MMORPGs and Civic Leadership

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ABSTRACT
This chapter reports the results of a survey study of the civic engagement and participation of guild members in the massively multi-player online role play game (MMORPG) World of Warcraft (WoW). Further, the authors explore the implications of the results of the study for K-12 social studies education. Specifically, the authors focus on the potential of MMORPGs such as WoW for meeting content standards in the social studies—in this case, the National Standards for Civics and Government—and for impacting on pre-service social studies teacher education.

INTRODUCTION
“The qualifications for self-government in society are not innate. They are the result of habit and long training.” -Thomas Jefferson, 1824

Thomas Jefferson’s early nineteenth century reference to the importance of preparing individuals for the awesome responsibility of citizenship is as poignant today as it was nearly two hundred years ago. The definition of citizenship is broad and its application nebulous; the dictionary defines it as “the state of being vested with the rights, privileges, and duties of a citizen,” and a Google™ search of the term returns over 33 million results in a variety of categories, such as becoming a citizen, passing a naturalization test, and the philosophical definition of the term (dictionary.com, 2008, online). In twenty-first century American public schools, the curricular responsibility of preparing future citizens falls to the broad field of social studies (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994). Among the primary missions of social studies education is for students to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of democratic citizenship, in which the citizens
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of tomorrow are taught “to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994, p. 3).

Engle and Ochoa (1988) argued that in order for democracy to prosper, its citizenry must have “a willingness to be responsible for the state and to engage at all levels in decisions that chart its course” (p. 18). Civic participation in the manner which Engle and Ochoa (1988) described requires synthesis and application of ideas and concepts; both higher-order tasks. Accordingly, they argue that citizenship education should move beyond “merely knowledge of the mechanics of government,” but rather, applying this knowledge (p. 17). This notion has been recognized by the National Council for the Social Studies (2001), as they put forth that “a primary goal of public education is to prepare students to be engaged and effective citizens” (online). However, an “effective citizen” can be difficult to define, complex to discern, and very challenging to teach. Therefore, in this chapter, we define an effective citizen as an individual “who has the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to assume the ‘office of citizen’ in our democratic republic,” and among the characteristics of this individual is that s/he “Actively participates in civic and community life” (National Council for the Social Studies, 2001, online).

In order for such citizenship education take place, however, it is necessary for social studies teachers to not only possess the qualities of a democratic citizen, but also to be able to convey the importance of these characteristics to their students. Similar to Jefferson’s early nineteenth century comment on citizenship, the ability to teach is not innate, therefore necessitating social studies-specific teaching methodology (commonly called ‘methods’ courses). The goal of these courses is multifaceted. While methods courses can be stereotypically viewed in the short term as a means to managing a secondary social studies classroom, they also offer the opportunity for future teachers to become familiar with the broad field of social studies education. Within these courses, future social studies teachers are taught pedagogical strategies within the context of content, while simultaneously becoming familiar with state and national content standards.

Familiarity with such content standards is essential because these standards spell out the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed by students in order to become effective citizens. One such example can be seen in the Center for Civic Education’s (1994) National Standards for Civics and Government (hereafter NSCG). These standards were developed “to help schools develop competent and responsible citizens who possess a reasoned commitment to the fundamental values and principles that are essential to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy,” and are divided into three broad grade levels (K-4, 5-8, and 9-12) (Center for Civic Education, 1994, online). For each level, there are five essential questions as well as a number of sub-questions that provide scaffolding; an example of this is that the fifth question in the 9-12 standards, which rhetorically asks “What are the Roles of the Citizen in the American Democracy,” with the first scaffolding question asking “What is citizenship,” to the last being more of a higher-order application question, asking students to consider “How can citizens take part in civic life?” (Center for Civic Education, 1994, online).

While the notion of active participation in ‘civic and community life’ can be broad and might conjure up different images for different individuals, it is important to note that citizens in today’s digital universe need not live in the same city, state, or even country to be a member of such a community. One example of this can be seen in the advent of so-called massively multiplayer online role-playing games (commonly referred to as MMORPGs). While engaged in these MMORPGs, individuals around the world can become ‘citizens’ of the same synthetic community. A MMORPG is a form of online computer role-playing game