

PLAYERS IN CONTROL:
NARRATIVE, NEW MEDIA, AND *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*

Stephanie Sullivan

Dr. Donna Strickland, Thesis Advisor

ABSTRACT

Scholars who study learning in video games draw direct parallels to tabletop role-playing games (RPGs) like *Dungeons & Dragons* in terms of the underlying principles that enhance learning. In fact, tabletop RPGs have formed the statistical, and sometimes creative, basis for many of the most popular role-playing video games to date, so why is it that tabletop RPGs have been largely neglected in favor of the video game variety?

This study takes a close look at how one particular group of players of *Dungeons & Dragons* engages the game as both a game and as an act of narrative creation. Their interactions can reveal something about how storytelling has changed in response to changes in technology and how this contributes to learning within various domains. In conducting this study, the author observed the group play and also became a participant in the experience to better understand how this group functions.

Observation and interaction with these players show that they create stories that are not confined by the traditional boundaries of narrative, such as having a beginning, middle, and end. These stories are not confined to a single method of communication; the group takes advantage of music, films, objects, and even an online forum to expand their narratives across multiple media. The members of this group collectively and actively write their stories, all the while remaining aware that they are in fact creating a story. They challenge each other to improve and collectively work to become better, smarter role-players and narrative writers.