



## COMPUTER GAMES & VIRTUAL WORLDS

### 2009-10 Speaker Series

#### Digital Literacy & Play in MMOs & Virtual Worlds for Young Children

Monday, April 12

Panel 3:30 - 5:00 p.m.

Reception 5:00 - 6:00 p.m.

6011 Donald Bren Hall

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Sponsors: Mimi Ito, UC Humanities Research Institute

#### Panelists:

**Jackie Marsh**

Professor of Education, University of Sheffield, UK

**Heather Horst**

Sociocultural anthropologist, UC Humanities Research Institute, UC Irvine

Associate Project Scientist for the Digital Media and Learning Research Hub, UC Irvine

#### Abstract:

In the last five years, MMOs have become increasingly popular with young children. Currently over 200 MMOs/virtual worlds are aimed at the youth market (Virtual Worlds Management, 2009). I will draw on studies of children's (ages 4 – 11) use of the MMOs/virtual world Club Penguin™ and Barbie Girls™. I will focus upon two key issues in the discussion of the data: play and digital literacies. First, I will explore the nature of children's play in MMOs/virtual worlds and examine the way in which these environments are integrated across children's online and offline play through sibling and peer group activities and textual choices, and the development of toys and artifacts. Second, I will explore the digital literacy practices embedded in children's engagement with sites such as Club Penguin™ and identify the way in which these practices help to shape a virtual 'interaction order' (Goffman, 1983) in an ostensibly chaotic virtual space. In these playful encounters, children have opportunities to engage in critical digital literacy practices, important in the development of their abilities to navigate a complex and fast-changing online world.

#### Bios:

**Jackie Marsh**, is interested in the relationship between popular culture, media and new technologies and young children's literacy practices, both in and outside school. She has conducted research projects that have explored children's access to new technologies and their emergent digital literacy skills, knowledge and understanding and has examined the way in which parents, caregivers and other family members support this engagement with media and technologies. She has explored how creative and innovative teachers have responded to the challenges of the new media age, and has evaluated a number of national projects that have aimed to develop teachers' expertise in the teaching and learning of digital and media literacy. Jackie has published widely in this field, including the edited volume 'Play, Creativity and Digital Cultures' (Routledge, 2009) and is an editor of the 'Journal of Early Childhood Literacy'.

**Heather A. Horst** is also a Research Fellow in the MA Program in Digital Anthropology at University College, London. Her research focuses on the relationship between place, space and new media. Her work explores transformations in the organization and understandings of family life in light of new media, material and consumer culture, and transnational migration. She co-authored *The Cell Phone: An Anthropology of Communication* (Horst and Miller, Berg, 2006), the first ethnography of mobile phones in the developing world, and *Hanging Out, Messing Around and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with Digital Media* (MIT Press, 2009, Ito, et. al.) that explores new forms of participation and learning through digital media. She has been a guest editor for the *Journal of Material Culture*, *International Journal of Cultural Studies* and *Home Cultures*. She is currently working on a manuscript, tentatively titled *Mediating Childhood: Coming of Age in Silicon Valley*, that examines the relationship between communities, networks and society among youth and families living in the Silicon Valley.