



January 31, 2008

Prof. Michael J. Streibel  
Department of Curriculum & Instruction  
School of Education  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
225 N. Mills Street  
Madison, WI 53706

Dear Prof. Streibel

I am writing in response to your request for a letter of evaluation with respect to promoting Kurt Squire to Associate Professor with tenure at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. I do not know Kurt well though I have heard him talk at conferences on a number of occasions in recent years. However, two of my close colleagues know him quite well and have spoken very highly of him.

I have been very impressed with Kurt ever since I first heard him talk. He has chosen to study one of the most important issues concerning the design of learning environments for the future: what is it about the design of games that makes them such compelling learning environments and how can we design educational activities that incorporate the features of games that make them so compelling. His analyses are sophisticated and design-oriented. He has identified the role that reflection in action plays in driving gamer's learning, and how repetitive practice is fostered by recycling players through earlier stages when they have difficulty and rewarding them when they succeed in later efforts. He also emphasizes the role of semiotics and narrative in gamer's learning and how they use reading and writing to help them acquire the skills they need to succeed. These are crucial insights for designing successful learning environments.

I find his design of a mystery to teach students how to carry out scientific investigations to be very inventive. By allocating different information to different students, he forces them to argue with each other to reach a consensus about possible causes for the protagonist's death. The fact that the possible causes are open-ended circumvents the major problem with most hands-on science activities: that the students are following a prescribed path with a known outcome. Here students are trying to figure out a real mystery involving different medical and environmental issues. This is the kind of science education that will elicit real involvement by students and focus their thinking on scientific inquiry rather the regurgitation of facts.

My own view is that in order to produce a generation of people who seek out learning, learners need more control over their own learning. Learner control can be fostered by giving children the tools to support their own learning, such as access to the web and computer-based games that foster deep knowledge and entrepreneurial skills. For example, the people who play massively

multiplayer online games use basic literacy practices to develop a whole range of other applied skills, such as negotiation, bargaining, forming alliances, strategizing and outwitting opponents, calculating which approach is most likely to work, and communicating with different kinds of people. As Kurt has found, children who play real-time strategy games such as *Civilization* begin to check out books on ancient cultures and earn better grades in middle school. By understanding how new technologies can encourage kids to take responsibility for their own learning, society may help to produce a generation of people who seek out ways to learn.

Kurt is one of the best speaker's in the learning sciences. He is clearly very smart and knows how to engage an audience with his ideas. His articulateness is truly amazing and his ideas come across in a clear and compelling way. He is also phenomenally productive in writing, producing a very large number of publications in a short time as a scholar. In fact his work is very highly cited in Google Scholar for such a young researcher.

Wisconsin should clearly promote Kurt to a position with tenure. He is a great speaker and a prolific writer who is addressing major issues in education. He is a key person in a remarkable group of young scholars that Wisconsin has amassed in recent years. You should have absolutely no hesitation in promoting him.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Allan Collins".

Allan Collins  
Professor Emeritus of Learning Sciences  
Northwestern University