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Pedagogy at Play: Gamification and Gameful Design in the 21st-Century Writing Classroom

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PEDAGOGY AT PLAY:
GAMIFICATION AND GAMEFUL DESIGN IN THE 21ST-CENTURY WRITING
CLASSROOM

by

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ABSTRACT

PEDAGOGY AT PLAY: GAMIFICATION AND GAMEFUL DESIGN IN THE 21ST-CENTURY WRITING CLASSROOM

Danielle Roney Roach
Old Dominion University, 2015
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The language used to discuss play in current academic spaces tends to center around formal games (and computer games in particular in the 21st century classroom). Scholarly conversations tend to distort the actual practices that occur in classrooms and subsequently limit the scope of any investigation of the pedagogical function and outcomes of those practices. This project explores the use of play and games in the classrooms of nine composition instructors. From these stories, this project begins to map out a taxonomy in order to begin building toward a pedagogy of play for 21st century writing classrooms. Using a multiperspectival cultural studies approach, this study amplifies the voices of actual writing teachers while examining the theoretical implications and possibilities of the language surrounding gamification and gameful design.

In particular, this project reflects on the ways in which the “gamification” trend affects the methods used by writing teachers, and also how the language used to discuss those methods reflects on a particular set of anxieties present in (but not necessarily unique to) this cultural moment. By investigating the relationship between language and thought in this instance, this project offers insight into the attitudes and moments that have yielded such a strong preoccupation with gamification over the past decade.

Attention to such details will, subsequently, provide new ways of considering what it means to use games in these spaces.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my mom and dad for their many years of unwavering support and loving encouragement; to my sons Josh and Ben for showing me boundless love and for reminding me never to stop learning; and to my husband Wayne for being my partner, my advisor, and my very best friend.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2010, game designer Jane McGonigal recorded what would become one of that year's most-viewed videos for the non-profit organization TED (short for Technology, Entertainment and Design), a lecture entitled "Gaming Can Make a Better World." The video quickly went viral (as of June 2015, it had about 3.9 million views across platforms), and in 2011 she followed up the talk with her book *Reality Is Broken*. In both her talk and in the book, McGonigal points toward the untapped power of the game by situating it in contrast to reality:

The real world just doesn't offer up as easily the carefully designed pleasures, the thrilling challenges, and the powerful social bonding afforded by virtual environments. Reality doesn't motivate us as effectively. Reality isn't engineered to maximize our potential. Reality wasn't designed from the bottom up to make us happy. (Introduction)

In setting game space and the "real world" in contrast to one another, McGonigal reinscribes multiple binaries that reflect the larger difficulties of discussing life in the digital age, particularly work versus play and the physical versus the virtual. In constructing this real world, McGonigal and others have been quick to embrace what they see as a solution to all this boredom, disinterest, sadness, and inefficiency: gamification.

Pinpointing the coinage of the term "gamification" can be difficult; companies like Conundra have, in the past, laid claim to the term, purporting on their home page to be "a UK-based consultancy specialising in 'Gamification'," and many other tech-based companies have recently embraced the model as a way to increase both employee output

and consumer response. The larger trend of gamification has gone on much longer, with both producers and consumers being encouraged to engage with a given activity or product through play (think office pools, production bonuses, McDonald's Monopoly games, even cereal box prizes). As advances in digital culture have diversified the platforms available for the more formal organization of these games, the business model of gamification has gained favor in multiple sectors of the economy, from tech start-ups to traditional retail establishments to schools and universities. More and more, twenty-first century employers have embraced "gamification," ostensibly as a way to boost employee satisfaction, but realistically for the purposes of increasing productivity and efficiency. Producers have also taken up the banner of gamification as a way to increase consumer enthusiasm and to spread product awareness. Schools and universities, perhaps as a part of the larger move toward the corporatization of education, have been increasingly enthusiastic about finding ways to gamify the classroom for similar reasons. The enthusiasm (and subsequent backlash) surrounding gamification seems to indicate a move toward codification and institutionalization of play and games in spaces traditionally thought of as devoid of leisure and thus not appropriate for playfulness. This need even just to name the practice of using games and play in non-game spaces suggests heightened cultural attention to what it means to play, and also then what it means to work. The anxiety surrounding the breakdown of that binary may explain, at least in part, the impulse to bring structure and definition to the practice of play through naming, watching, and judging in public spaces, which brings to mind Foucault's suggestions about the function of the panopticon and the ways in which such spaces shape and regulate behavior.

This project investigates the presence of games in education, particularly in the writing classroom, examining the ways in which the language of play and games is used in those spaces, and also the ways in which culture shapes various rhetorics of play, particularly in mediated spaces. Using a cultural studies approach to play and games along with a series of interviews with writing instructors who use games in some form in the classroom, this project informs a more complete understanding of how games and play are being used in writing studies. In particular, this project reflects on the ways in which the “gamification” trend affects the methods used by writing teachers, and also how the language used to discuss those methods reflects on a particular set of anxieties present in (but not necessarily unique to) this cultural moment. By investigating the relationship between language and thought in this instance, this project offers insight into the attitudes and moments that have yielded such a strong preoccupation with gamification over the past decade. Attention to such details will, subsequently, provide new ways of considering what it means to use games in these spaces. Such consideration pushes back against the positivist and arguably escapist early notions of McGonigal and others about the promise of games in education, instead asking scholars and teachers to consider the broader implications of using games in the classroom and the full scope of what we are teaching when we embrace gamification (more than dismissing so-called reality and high-fiving each other for innovating with or through games). This study’s multifaceted cultural studies methodology, which employs a cadre of approaches that includes semiotics, critical theory, and game studies to examine personal interviews with writing teachers, yields great insight into the ways language circulates in and around the college writing classroom.

The goal of this undertaking is not only to augment and complicate the ways we talk about “games” proper but then to expand the reach of that conversation outward toward the more nebulous category of “gamified” or “gameful” spaces. Additionally, these investigations parse how these trends change (or stay the same) when they occur in computer-mediated spaces, and also how games redefine and complicate those spaces as they impose varying degrees of structure and discipline. Ultimately, this project thinks through how play and games inform, encourage, inhibit, or complicate social interaction and learning (and also how the language of play and games gets used to discuss and shape these spaces), and then uses that consideration to examine the use of play and games in the writing classroom.

A history of game studies

Game studies as a field has been laid claim to by scholars in a variety of disciplines within the academy, with everyone from engineers to educators to psychologists framing themselves as game studies experts. Some of the most in-depth research into the cultural significance of these objects of study have come not from the designers (often housed in the hard sciences) or even from social scientists but instead from the humanities. In fact, a common starting point for an academic history of game studies is the work of two key scholars that rise out of the humanities.

In 1955, historian Johan Huizinga published what would become something of an origin text for game studies, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. In this comprehensive volume, Huizinga tries to outline what he believes to be the fundamental characteristics of play itself: play is many things, including “freedom,” “not ‘ordinary,’” “limited,” and “order” (10-12). Huizinga endeavors to develop a taxonomy of these

characteristics so as to underscore his foundational assertion that play is absolutely bound up in culture: “Civilization is, in its earliest phases, played. It does not come from play like a baby detaching itself from the womb: it arises in and as play, and never leaves it” (173). Huizinga also offers forth the idea of the “magic circle,” a delimited space within which play happens (10). This term is still bandied about by play scholars concerned with how play is (or is not) shaped and limited by culture.

Six years later, anthropologist Roger Caillois responds to Huizinga with what serves as both an extension and a complication of the work in *Homo Ludens*. Caillois’s *Man, Play, and Games* maps the continuum of ways of playing between free play (paidia) and structured play (ludus). Along that continuum, he plots various combinations of what he identifies as four attitudes about play: agon (competition), alea (chance) mimicry (simulation), andilinx (vertigo) (12). Depending on which of these attitudes dominate a given game or moment of play, he uses these tendencies to attempt to create a taxonomy of game types. Underneath this system, however, Caillois suspects there to be something lurking that may prove to undo this carefully organized framework. Considered by many to be on the cusp of post-structuralism, Caillois insists that play presents as codifiable systems underneath which is chaos, as opposed to Huizinga, who says ALL play is structured. Caillois even goes so far as to suggest that there may not BE a magic circle as proposed by Huizinga, a move that marks just how much he grapples with the confines of language in his quest to unravel the mysteries of play.

Each of these early scholars wrestles with what we can know about play, how it is shaped by culture, and the degree to which it can be separated and systematized in contrast to (or at least beyond) some form of non-play. Both with Huizinga’s taxonomies

of characteristics of play and Caillois' naming and cataloging of spaces (in particular, the "magic circle"), these two early theorists attempted to organize the field and make sense of how we think and talk about play. Since that time, scholars have often doubled back to this same ground, desperately seeking to add to or clarify what this "play" is and why it is so significant in our culture. Brian Sutton-Smith offers a more specific and language-based examination of play with his "rhetorics of play." Sutton-Smith organizes not how we play, but the ways we talk about play, into seven categories:

Rhetoric of play as progress

Rhetoric of play as fate

Rhetoric of play as power

Rhetoric of play as identity

Rhetoric of play as imaginary

Rhetoric of the self

Rhetoric of play as frivolous (9-11)

Sutton-Smith explains that "Each is called a rhetoric because its ideological values are something that the holders like to persuade others to believe in and to live by" (11). In moving the conversation more specifically toward the implications of language, Sutton-Smith offers yet another framework for thinking about play in culture. Working from a Burkean perspective about language, Sutton-Smith seeks to find a framework through which scholars can begin to unravel what he sees as the "ambiguity" of play itself.

Despite the work of scholars such as these, however, academic discussions of play continued to be mostly ancillary, often merely appended to studies about cultural anthropology or child development, until the 1980s. Not coincidentally, this was about the

same time that computer games moved into popular culture, having been until that time relegated to fringe elements and subcultures. That shift was accompanied by a whole host of anxieties about the medium itself and its influence on culture in general. As computer games exploded onto the cultural scene, play was no longer the purview of random liberal artists and social scientists; it was now fodder for industry. Scholars (particularly in engineering and computer science) began to try to parse what made games “good,” whether this meant marketability, reproducibility, novelty, or even deviance. During this time, the humanities and social sciences began to push against one another as well, trying to decide how games should be studied, why they should be studied, and why any of it mattered within the context of a given discipline. This shift happened alongside shifts in literary theory, pedagogy, and technology, so the intermingling of a whole host of disciplinary approaches began to shape the exploration of games.

By the late 1990s, theorists had begun to push off into camps, seeking to define the field in order to defend its legitimacy in the academy. One of the most significant debates to rise up during this time was the “narratology versus ludology” debate, with narratologists attempting to use literary theory to approach games in much the same way scholars would approach a play or novel (e.g., Janet Murray) and ludologists insisting that games demanded a new framework that accounted for the richness and differences of the game space when compared to traditional literature (e.g., Espen Aarseth). The conversation that rose out of this fueled an explosion of theory and debate about methodology and about what the young field should value in its epistemological approach to these exciting objects of study.

Meanwhile, concerns about game players became a more prominent focus of study, and some scholars turned their attention to issues of gender (e.g., Justine Cassel and Henry Jenkins; Yasmine Kafai et. al) and violence (e.g., Sheila Murphy; Mark Griffiths). For some, the player became somewhat fetishized in the meaning-making process, and combined with the fomentation of the aca-fandom movement under the charge of Henry Jenkins and others, scholars began to look to the role of the players in the “making” of the game, from their roles as users to those of fans, critics, and even co-designers. In this supposed promised land of the information revolution, scholars began to set forth the “prosumer” as a powerful force in the creation, circulation, and significance of the game (e.g., Jenkins’s *Textual and Poachers* and *Convergence Culture*; Juul’s *A Casual Revolution*).

As these player-centric approaches gained ground, however, some scholars pushed back. Were the players really as empowered as so much of this literature insisted, or was the circulation of power simply recreating the same consumer/producer power structures that cultural theorists (e.g., Michel Foucault; Umberto Eco, Jean Baudrillard, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, etc.) had long been dissecting in other arenas? With scholars like Nick Dyer-Witheford renewing the call for an examination of materialism’s significance in the digital age, and other scholars insisting that we think about the critical tools that were so useful in approaching other texts (e.g., Ken McAllister and Judd Ruggill), the conversations about the circulation of power and about the confines of agency began to flourish.

Meanwhile, broader influences continued to shape the humanistic approach to play and game studies. Popular culture literature began to call for consideration of games in

education and in the workplace (e.g., Jane McGonigal). Industry continued to push for greater consumer research to better design the games themselves and find approaches to making games that would succeed in the marketplace, which led to greater attention to the rules of play (e.g., Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman). Meanwhile, literacy scholars like James Paul Gee attempted to lay claim to game studies, insisting that good games illustrate kept concepts about literacy and language learning. Each in their own way, these scholars wrestle with how best to define game studies as a field.

At this juncture, even the scholarly context of these conversations (namely, the types of journals dedicated to games and play) becomes revelatory because it demonstrates the fragmentation of all the different interests in the field of game studies. Many of the more prominent journals about games (e.g., *Simulation and Gaming*) tend to approach game design from a more technical or industrial view. Consider, for example, the mission statement on the web site for one prominent journal published by the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), a leading international organization for computing scholars and professionals: “ACM *Computers in Entertainment (CiE)* aims to foster critical discussions and innovative thoughts among entertainment computing scholars and professionals as well as creative executives, writers, producers, directors, artists, designers, and other talents.” The approach reinforces the binary between producers of games and consumer/readers (“scholars” versus “talents”) and necessarily recenters the conversation around the industry’s output (i.e. the game). Though this is not necessarily a bad thing in that particular context, this trend neglects one of the most important actors in the game equation, the player, and consequently muffles the discussion of the language used to talk about play and the implications of that discourse. Though such an approach

may serve to advance the critical attention to the creation and distribution of games themselves, it does little to foster any humanistic inquiry in to the nature of play, the language of games, and the cultural implications of the circulation of both products and ideologies.

Meanwhile, emerging journals that do focus on more social and humanistic approaches (*Eludamos*, *Games and Culture*, *Game Studies*) still find themselves in more limited circulation and with smaller (and less distinguished) bases of scholarly support. Thus, game scholars often farm their work out to related journals *like Transformative Works and Cultures* and *The Journal of Comparative Media Studies* along with open publishing forums like *Hybrid Pedagogy* and The Institute for the Future of the Book (curators of projects like *MediaCommons* and *in Media Res*). This widening can be both problematic and useful. On the one hand, an argument can be made that scholars dilute the particulars of game studies as a focal area to appeal to a wider audience. However, by extending the conversation beyond the smaller game studies community, individual scholars can build the ethos of the field, especially by offering forth parallel approaches and methods that extend the game/play conversation's significance out across the disciplines. Additionally, the openness and lack of parameters encourages innovation and play in the approaches to scholarship itself, something that might not be as possible in a more well-regulate and disciplined field. By dissecting games and play from multiple angles, and by seeing how playfulness manifests itself in a multitude of ways in a particular setting, this project stands to more comprehensively articulate place of play in culture in a number of key ways.

First, consideration of the language of play is important if we are to understand the role of the game in culture. Such an endeavor offers a chance to begin to unravel the work/play binary as it is constructed through language. Mackenzie Wark wrestles with this separation, proclaiming it to be all but dissolved: “Work becomes a gamespace, but no games are freely chosen anymore. Play becomes everything to which it was opposed. It is work, serious, morality, necessity” (section 011). The linguistic choices regarding work and play reshape notions of both types of spaces, and suddenly neither one is its own entity, but instead a complex matrix of interwoven and overlapping struggles for power. Even Wark’s attempt to discuss the framework reinvents the struggle, as now games are almost artificially elevated and deified in the process of supposed binary-busting. Examining the language and rhetorical structures of conversations about play is as important as the contents of conversations themselves. A discussion of play is also important if we are to fully understand the implications of frameworks of language on perception of a given act, actor, or object. From the taxonomies proffered by Huizinga and Caillois to Brian Sutton-Smith’s seven rhetorics of play, interrogating how we understand the language of play helps ground discussions of play outside of games.

Additionally, bringing the discussion of play back to game studies is critical in order to frame more complete explanations of political economy and commodification of play, something that Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter aim to accomplish in *Games of Empire*. Consideration of play as training reinvigorates the study of games by unpacking how the way we talk about how this “playbor” reinforces and complicates the distribution and circulation of power in computer-mediated spaces. By embarking on a consideration not just of games but of the whole of play and the many ways it is understood socially and

culturally, this project offers a more nuanced framework within which game studies can consider a larger and more comprehensive set of play acts and objects, particularly within digital culture and spaces.

The turn to the classroom

Though play is invoked and evoked in many different ways in conversations about pedagogy, the predominant mode of talking about learning tends to embrace what Sutton-Smith classifies as the rhetoric of progress. This is not at all surprising, given the mission of education at large. Sutton Smith points out that “most educators over the past two hundred years seem to have so needed to represent playful imitation as a form of children’s socialization and moral, social, and cognitive growth that they have seen play as being primarily about development rather than enjoyment” (9-10). Though pedagogy scholars don’t entirely eschew play for the sake of play (what Sutton-Smith calls “frivolity”), most of the arguments for including playfulness in the classroom rely on appeals to students’ needs for growth, enculturation, and socialization into a given discourse (namely, the academic one). Furthermore, the integration of digital tools into classrooms seems to give educators a broader sort of playground, introducing novel and arguably unrelated tools and activities to play toward larger course goals.

Thus, though the framing of play as progressive seems to dominate the scholarship in this particular area, the social constructivist perspective would seek to extend the conversation into discussions of power. In this way, play evolves from simply a tool of passive socialization to a broader indicator of underlying power structures, possibly anticipating the next move (which, arguably, is to somehow *win* the game by better understanding the political and social rules by which it is played). This study will delve

further into the rhetorics surrounding gamification in the classroom, mapping out how rhetorics of play construct and are constructed by the classroom itself. Much of the conversation within classrooms comes from current scholarly and popular texts that theorize about games and education.

Matthew Farber's 2014 book, *Gamify Your Classroom: A Field Guide to Game-Based Learning* has been widely discussed in academic circles for its broad treatment of the role and consequences of play and games for learning. The book's publisher describes the book as "a survey of best practices aggregated from interviews with experts in the field," going on to list dozens of authors like Henry Jenkins and Jesse Schell. Interestingly, however, the majority of the authors listed are working outside of academic contexts, and many of the academic authors speak from their experiences doing research on the use of play and games by *others* and not in their own classrooms.

Perhaps the most prominent voice in the conversation about games and learning is James Paul Gee. His book *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* has been widely cited and discussed since its publication in 2003. At the core of the book are what Gee delineates as "36 principles of learning . . . built into good video games" (8). In the introduction to his text, Gee introduces himself as a linguist and literacy scholar and guides the reader through how his personal experiences with games were a sort of lightbulb moment for him. He discusses how he began watching his young son, Sam, play an educational game, and how he decided he would play himself to be able to better help Sam navigate the game. His sudden realization of the time and commitment involved in gaming led him to begin to explore other games and to think about how some of those motivations and enthusiasms might be harnessed in more formal educational contexts.

Out of this exploration, Gee begins to categorize the many ways that learning and literacy intersect with games, codifying those ideas into his now-famous “36 Principles.”

In particular, he directs the reader’s attention to how those principles are situated in three key research areas: situated cognition (the idea that learning is tied to context), New Literacy Studies (the argument that literacy has impacts in society beyond the individual) and connectionism (the notion that the human mind thrives on pattern recognition) (8-9). He insists that “these three areas capture central truths about the human mind and human learning [that are] well represented in the ways in which good video games are learned and played,” something that he argues is less obvious in formal school environments (9). Gee’s goal is for his list to provide an impetus for change and exploration, not just within schools, but in larger society’s consideration of both how we teach and how we learn.

Again, however, Gee speaks mostly from his own experiences with and observations about games and not as much as someone who has implemented gameful learning into an actual classroom. Because the approach is so broad, much of what Gee discusses is difficult to contextualize without seeing how it might look in a classroom with a specific subject matter, format, setting, set of learning objectives, etc.

Even in narrowing the focus to the specific discipline in which this project’s study takes place (the writing classroom), the overarching scholarly attention to the ways in which play and games are used in classrooms tends to be fragmented. A revealing example of the anxieties of the field can be found in a series of interviews that took place in 2008. The article, entitled “Computer Games and the Writing Classroom: Four Perspectives,” examines four perspectives on the connection between video games and the teaching of

writing from game designers and scholars working in the field at that time (Colby and Colby). The four answers given to the same basic set of questions could not be more different.

Chris Crawford, the founding editor of *The Journal of Game Design*, all but dismisses the possibility that games can be used to teach writing. Even though he wholeheartedly lauds the capacity of video games to teach (pressing heavily toward what we now think of as procedurality when he acclaims their potential for rule-learning), he quickly turn toward a proclamation that “the material [video games] teach is devoid of any socially redeeming value.” When asked what connections he could imagine between games and writing instruction, Crawford replies bluntly, “None whatsoever. Good writing requires mental skills that are absent in computer games.” In hindsight, this perspective seems short-sighted (and will likely leave most social constructivist writing teachers a bit aghast); good writing pedagogy, the story goes, roots not in syntax and grammar but in critical thinking and consideration of multiple literacies, and *this* type of writing instruction can be (and has been) done extremely effectively in games. However, Crawford’s perspective, though blunt, was not, and still *is* not, all that uncommon. Myriad educational technology companies continue to design games and products for the writing classroom that miss the point of broader writing pedagogy and instead hone in on skills-based instruction (see for example, Jen Justice’s review of Toolwire’s foray into making games for writing classrooms).

The other three scholars interviewed in the piece are more (cautiously) optimistic about the possible uses of games for writing instruction. Jane Jensen, a game designer and novelist, stops short of endorsing the teaching of writing *in* games, but she ruminates on

the possibilities of a pedagogy that might encourage writing *for* games: “It’s hard to imagine a game that, by playing it, would teach writing. I think a better exercise might be to dissect a game and try to plot out it’s [sic] branches – or, as already mentioned, try to outline a game yourself.” Jensen highlights yet another fissure in the conversation: what exactly (logistically) do we mean when we say games can teach writing? In his interview, meanwhile, game studies theorist Jesper Juul suggests that adventure games hold possibility in the way they showcase “what text can do.” Juul sees potential for using the world-building potential of language in games as something that could be harnessed by composition instructors. He points to the ways in which games often “create interesting worlds by simply describing them,” an affordance that seems relevant to the needs of a writing instructor.

Benoît Sokal, a game designer and comic book artist, seems to be the most optimistic of the four interviewed subjects in the piece. Sokal suggests that games might attract otherwise reluctant young writers to engage in storytelling more fully, and he seems excited about the possibility of encouraging students to see the medium as a vehicle for narrative exploration. And yet, even as he muses on this possibility, he makes a statement that strikes at the core of the conversation about games and education when he admits that, “in my mind, playing and learning are two separate things, and I am not sure that learning should necessarily be ‘fun.’” This seeming disconnect has dominated many discussions about games and play in education, especially when metaphors of work and labor and production are so roundly accepted in the classroom. In the writing classroom in particular, the tension between work and play, between learning and fun, tends to produce a kind of anxiety in teachers as they seek to justify their pedagogy in a

social and institutional climate that already struggles to understand just what goes on in writing classrooms.

The current landscape of the composition classroom

A brief survey of the history of composition as a discipline serves to contextualize this project since it investigates games and play in writing classrooms in particular. The debate about what a composition classroom should look like is helpful to consider because it speaks in many ways to the climate around and within which instructors have been asked to construct their classes. Scholars still wrestle with the function of the composition classroom, and a long canon of work has been dedicated to mapping out various schools of thought in composition pedagogy. Should composition classrooms be a setting within which students can become acclimated to academic discourse (Bartholomae; Bizzell; Harris; Porter; Swales), focus on writing as a process (Emig; Flower and Hayes; Perl; Sommers; Murray), or even reflect on writing itself through their writing (Downs and Wardle)? These and many other schools of thought have held sway in the university throughout the years, and the field is at its best when it remembers its complex history through these conversations. The potential interplay of theories about what composition studies should seek to *do* serves as a starting point for consideration of what might be “typical” in college writing classrooms.

As writing classrooms work to expand students’ notions of texts and writing, scholars have also considered the scope of the field of composition studies and of the kinds of writing that might or should happen in college classrooms. This reframing, often thought of as new in light of the digital turn of the past few decades, can be traced back much further, and Jason Palmieri’s *Remixing Composition* offers a brilliant glimpse into

multimodal practice in classrooms dating back to the 1960's, 70's, and 80's. Palmeri surveys the ways in which composition legends like Ann Berthoff, Donald Murray, Janet Emig, Linda Flower and John Hayes, and many others embraced the importance of multimodality in the field's early years. Palmeri celebrates the ways in which these early compositionists "studied and taught alphabetic writing as an embodied multimodal process that shares affinities with other forms of composing (visual, aural, spatial, gestural)" (5). In highlighting what he calls "analog technologies" in composition studies, Palmeri illustrates how much multimodality predates the digital era.

With the surge in technology in the late 1980's and early 1990's, however, multimodality quickly becomes forefronted in composition studies. Janice Lauer's 1993 piece entitled "Rhetoric and Composition Studies: A Multimodal Discipline" encourages a shift toward multimodal inquiry among composition scholars. Johnson-Eilola reiterates the need for attention to the shifting definition of writing, reminding scholars that multimodal texts should be considered "at least as important (and often more culturally relevant) than singly authored papers arguing a single, clear point forcefully over the course of five, neatly typed, double-spaced pages" (7).

Scholars in the field of composition studies have enthusiastically taken up the charge of Lauer, Johnson-Eilola, and others (and arguably had even before the early 1990's preoccupation with multimodality in light of new technologies). Composition studies has long acknowledged the importance of all kinds of texts, even as the constraints of social and institutional expectations reduce writing classrooms to places where grammar, sentence-diagramming, and five-paragraph themes rule the day. A 2005 article by the Writing in Digital Environments (WIDE) research collective, however,

acknowledges that writing teacher-scholars have long dismissed such reductive views and have been embracing multimodality, both in inquiry and in practice, for some time. The writers of the article insist that, for many composition scholars, “writing no longer means merely words on the printed page. Today, writing means selecting among and scripting multiple media, including photographs, charts, video, images, audio, diagrams, hyperlinks, and more.” In advocating for this shift in perception of texts, scholars have felt compelled to define multimodal composing explicitly. Cynthia Selfe and Pamela Takayoshi, for example, offer a broad definition that encompasses “still and moving images, animations, colors, words, music and sound” (1). Their rationale for enumerating the possibilities comes in their conviction that multimodal teaching reinforces the kinds of sound pedagogy composition already values.

Kathleen Blake Yancey joins in a similar refrain in her 2004 CCCC address, urging the field to push itself forward to avoid undermining the work going on in our classrooms by ignoring the realities of texts being produced beyond them. Speaking about compositionists’ reluctance to advocate for multimodality in departments and universities, Yancey insists that it is the job of scholars to be more vocal in their support and advancement of a more multimodal understanding of textuality in college writing. Gunther Kress and the New London Group take this idea one step further, insisting that composition studies must be entirely overhauled to meet the needs of new technologies and to embrace the possibilities of multimodal composition in new (and often digital) spaces.

Exciting as this idea may be, the true nature of writing classrooms (then and now) is often less innovative and flexible and more bound to the ideological and logistic

constraints imposed by the university, the curriculum, course requirements, and even infrastructure. Kress himself argues that focusing on the agency of individuals will allow for such an overhaul, an assertion that Paul Prior and others reject. Prior insists that not everything has changed, and that composition theory should be rooted in careful consideration of real teachers, students, and classrooms. Anne Wysocki also shares Prior's concern about Kress's lack of consideration of the materiality of multimodal writing and reminds scholars that composition studies has been doing multimodal writing long before this wave of new technology, and that it is on the materiality of all texts that we should focus our attention. Wysocki reiterates that all texts are "new media" insofar as the material nature of text is encounterable by the reader. The nature of the modality is of less importance than attention to how those material conditions shape the text, and how interaction with the text works on and through the reader.

Jody Shipka also works to emphasize the realities of multimodal practice, and she warns of the consequences of overemphasizing and pushing too much for technological innovation:

I am concerned that emphasis placed on "new" (meaning digital) technologies has led to a tendency to equate terms like *multimodal*, *intertextual*, *multimedia*, or still more broadly speaking, *composition* with the production and consumption of computer-based, digitized, screen-mediated texts. I am concerned as well that this conflation could limit (provided it has not already limited) the kind of texts students produce in our courses. (*Toward a Composition Made Whole*, 7-8)

This perspective is especially important for this particular project as it highlights the limitations of simply advocating for innovation in the classroom. Multimodality does not equal computer-driven, nor must a text be digitally rendered to qualify as multimodal. Instead, Shipka and others reiterate that sound practice should be rooted in a more fully-realized composition pedagogy.

Acknowledging the strong foundation laid by composition scholars regarding multimodal texts provides a clear sense of the larger state of the field and the conversation already happening about the kinds of texts we use and produce in writing classrooms. This context, coupled with a clear history of game studies and of games in education, provides needed background as this project moves into classroom spaces wherein games and play are used to teach writing. This project seeks to stretch the fields of both English and game studies, to generate conversation about spaces wherein play is happening, and has been for some time. Moving the conversation into the classroom in particular, and specifically into the *writing* classroom, reveals the richness and complexity of games and play themselves as well as the depth and intricacies of sound writing pedagogy.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND STUDY DESIGN

Many scholars and teachers tend to think of play and games as something of a pedagogical gimmick. The criticism of the CCCC's own conference game, "C's the Day" is but one example of the kind of negative press surrounding play in the hallowed halls of the academy. Responding to an article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* by Dan Berrett, Adam Weinstein lambasts the organization and humanities at large with his biting commentary on the game: "The C's are changing to be warmer, funner. Everybody's a scholar of communications here, so let's learn to break the ice and communicate, *mingle* even, with some brilliant parlor stunts." His panning of the game gave way to a string of comments that continued in the devaluation of the conference and its participants. For Weinstein and others, games seem wholly out of place in academic circles and only serve to underscore the perceived irrelevance of the research done in many of these circles.

Criticism from within the academy has been equally scathing; scholarly approaches to game and play-based pedagogy have often lambasted the approach as regressive or anti-intellectual. In 2003, Edward C. Smith, the then-director of the American-studies program at American University, dismissed video games altogether when asked about the work of James Paul Gee for an article in *CHE*. In the interview, Smith derides Gee's work as antithetical to all that scholars like himself hold dear: "If you're going to replace traditional methods of education with something new, you should replace it with something better. If this guy thinks that playing some goddamn video game is the equivalent of memorizing a Shakespeare soliloquy, that's crazy" (qtd. in Carlson). Unfortunately, Smith's view was not uncommon at the time, and even now, scholars are

hesitant to supplant “tried-and-true” texts and approaches with something that might be viewed as frivolous. However, a close examination of actual practice reveals the complex pedagogical underpinnings often found when play and games are used to guide, to teach, and to facilitate learning in unfamiliar environments, something this project seeks to explore.

Methodology

This project, while situated in play and game studies, examines the ways in which games and play are being used in writing classrooms, and how that practice shapes and is shaped by various rhetorics of play. This study maps out and then complicates the rhetorics of play that are used to discuss the use of games and play in writing pedagogy. A fair amount has been written in game studies about play rhetorics, yet, as mentioned earlier, focus on play has, of late, taken something of a backseat to the game itself as object. Still, using a cultural studies approach to games and writing offers a unique way to tease out the many nuances and contradictions inherent in discussion of gamification.

Unfortunately, framing the particulars of such an approach carries with it an inherent set of complications, many of which are rooted in the history of cultural studies itself. Even deciding what cultural studies is can be complex; Simon During is one of many practitioners of cultural studies who struggles with precisely how to imagine what he does:

In practice, engaged cultural studies is rapidly becoming another area of specialty . . . Nonetheless, I’d suggest that, for both practical and theoretical reasons, in the current situation, we need to think of cultural studies not as a traditional field, nor as a mode of interdisciplinarity, but as what I will call *a*

field within multidisciplinary [emphasis added]. This means that cultural studies should aim to monopolize its students, or indeed, its teachers and intellectuals, as little as is possible within the academic-bureaucratic structures we have. (28)

Arguably, what During tries to call “a field within multidisciplinary” amounts to what can be more effectively referred to simply as something like an “approach.” These parsings aside, however, recognizing cultural studies as such an approach rather than a field or discipline (within multidisciplinary or otherwise) gives practitioners greater flexibility in applying the tools of the trade to various situations. However, while such an approach might be in some ways freeing, it also runs the risk of leaving those who practice cultural studies standing always outside of *something*, be it a department, a discipline, a source of funding, etc. Consequently, trying to catalogue methodologies in cultural studies becomes a challenge. Even as distinct schools of thought have emerged (The Frankfurt School, The Birmingham School), cultural studies itself has long operated such that the codification and prescription of methods was seen by many as at best irrelevant and at worst wholly antithetical to the heart of the project. Michael Pickering points out that “there has long been a reluctance to bring any explicit discussion of methods and methodology into cultural studies. . . . Cultural studies has been distinguished as a field of study by the ways it has engaged with theory and sought to apply it, rather than by its adoption or development of practical methods” (1). In other words, the goal is not to start with a method and end up with an answer, but instead to begin looking through theory to figure out which questions should be asked.

Again, though, as freeing as such an approach might seem at first blush, the academy in particular is hesitant to tolerate any approach that has at its core such an open disregard for formal (or at least traditional) methodology. The difficulty in outlining a cultural studies methodology for play studies is also rooted in the inherent academic bias towards empirical research. This tendency traces back to the Enlightenment turn, to the demand that pervades education and scholarship to this day for empirical approaches to knowledge such that outsiders looking in might be assured that the academy deals in “facts,” not just in “ideas.” Even Frans Mäyrä, an advocate for multidisciplinary in game studies, acknowledges the hierarchization of empirical approaches over other methods:

Where research in humanities is generally strong in providing original and insightful interpretations about the meaning of the studied phenomenon, social sciences can provide some verifiable facts about the use or influence of this phenomenon. Verification is at the heart of classic scientific method which is rooted in the view of science as study of empirical, objectively observable reality. (Introduction 158)

Implied in this comparison is the assumption that, while more interpretive or theoretical approaches yield helpful starting points, the ability to get at “verifiable facts” somehow more wholly legitimates the study of a given object. The entrenchedness of this Enlightenment approach to epistemology haunts even the most ardent cultural studies practitioner (regardless of object of study), so it is of little surprise that play and game scholars wrestle with justifying the degree to which such methodologies pervade the study of a given game, play act, or cultural artifact or moment.

Nevertheless, emerging methodologies in game studies have turned again and again to cultural studies, and this project will engage in a particular set of approaches. The goals of this methodological grouping are not only to interrogate the rhetorics of play surrounding the use of games in these particular writing classrooms, but further than that, to expand and enrich the field of game studies itself by exploring the ways in which cultural studies can be not only useful as a critical approach but also generative, even productive, as the field of game studies continues to explore new texts and contexts.

Douglas Kellner calls for a “multiperspectival approach,” and for this project, such an approach offers a rich set of tools while simultaneously eschewing the bounds of more rigid empirical methodologies were they to be applied in such a context. For Kellner, “a multiperspectival cultural studies draws on a wide range of textual and critical strategies to interpret, criticize, and deconstruct the artifact under scrutiny” (98). This project employs a number of those strategies in its investigation of gamification.

At the foundation of the approach is a series of interviews with writing instructors who use games and play in the classroom. These interviews have been used to map out a sampling of strategies used by writing instructors to include games in play in their courses. The interview data has been examined alongside a number of other texts which center around gamification: popular books, pedagogical and other scholarly texts, and even actual games and game-related spaces. This project looks at all these texts to identify patterns in the ways in which games and play are discussed.

A helpful starting place (although not where the project will ultimately situate itself) is be a cursory scan of the signs themselves, and for this Roland Barthes and other semioticians are useful. Thinking about the language used to describe these teaching

strategies through Barthes' three "messages"—the linguistic, the denoted, and the connoted—provides a sort of baseline. Though Barthes is addressing images in particular, dissecting a given sign (whether image, text, or some combination thereof) offers observations against which the researcher can push and pull as they apply later, more socially constituted methodologies, especially in attempting to parse out the connoted message and how we arrive at decisions about those connotations. Looking semiotically at the interviews, the project begins to postulate how some of the strategies fit together (or how they might not), and then what that alignment might suggest about that particular cultural moment and the conditions in which the text has been created and circulated.

Almost immediately the confines of language itself unravel, and in that moment, the true worth of cultural studies as an approach to games and play becomes apparent. Drawing on a long a rich history of Marxist criticism, the project both maps and critiques the ideological foundations, recreations, and contradictions inherent in both the text and all that surrounds it, for the two are inseparable. Paula Saukko praises the strength of such a cultural studies approach because, as she points out, "Rather than examining the formal or aesthetic features, the paradigm investigates the ways in which cultural texts emerge from, and play a role in, the changing historical, political, and social context" (99). Saukko goes on to assert that

we should humbly admit that we can never completely understand a text, because all our readings are socially situated. Rather than try to undo bias in our readings, we should aim to become more self-reflexive about the social commitments and roots of our interpretations and use this awareness to tease out the contradictory politics of texts and their interpretations. (114)

Such an approach reveals that the contradictions and complication inherent in textual analysis may be the things that yield the greatest understanding of what the text is, what it does, and how it moves with and through a given reader or culture.

Thus, this project takes full advantage of the vast cadre of theoretical approaches laid out for materialist approaches to texts of all kinds, moving from the Frankfurt School's interrogation of the culture industry (e.g., Horkheimer and Adorno) to the Birmingham School's attention to reciprocity and complications of the binary construction of production versus consumer (e.g., Hall), and forward to new reconfigurations of materialism and the understanding of ideology construction in the digital age by forward-thinking critics like *Cyber-Marx* author Nick Dyer-Witheford and the aforementioned Douglas Kellner. By mapping the connection of discussions of games and play to power structures, ideology, capital, etc., this project reveals the ways in which the practices of gamification and gameful design reflect the social moment in which they occur, and further emblemize that moment by revealing how these practices circulate, recreate, and complicate the structures out of which they are born, especially when considered within frameworks like that set forth by Raymond Williams (wherein texts both rise out of and inform dominant, residual, and emerging cultures).

A complete look at the texts of the interviews also benefits from consideration of the production of games or gamified objects or situations themselves, and industrial approaches to game studies have provided another tool by which this project sketches a more complete picture of the implications of the gamification movement across culture. Mackenzie Wark comments on the production of games and the dilemma of manufacturers in producing the next big game. In his works, he advances the conversation

about how games function to stave off boredom in what he calls the “military entertainment complex” (section 166). Judd Ruggill and Ken McAllister pick up on this idea when they problematize what they term the “aimlessness of games: “Because the medium is fundamentally boring, game developers are obligated to frequently compel players to stay engaged” (9). Both authors engage in a study of the medium of the game itself, and though not all the texts in this study are themselves games, they all embrace the value of the genre and the medium and so fall prey to the complications identified by these and other authors. Examining the genre and medium of the game in turn expands the purview of this project and the significance of these texts in the larger cultural moment out of which they rise.

Finally (and perhaps most appropriately), this project engages play itself as a method by which it explores the gamification concept. Though not alone, game studies scholar Frans Mäyrä lauds the adoption of play as method, insisting that

analytical appreciation involves being able to communicate and critically examine one’s experiences with the subject of study. . . . Playing is thus part of a larger range of activities which all contribute to the overall qualitative understanding of studied phenomena, necessary for formulating well-informed research questions. (Introduction 165)

Part of the study of any text is engaging that text, and games are a text that cries out not be read or heard or watched but played.

Judd Ruggill and Ken McAllister also insist on the importance of playfulness. In their exploration of video games, the authors wrestle with the idea of a specific approach to the medium because of its rootedness in play itself:

there are simply too many different kinds of play, too many different kinds of players, and – if noted play theorist Johan Huizinga is to be believed – too many different kinds of cultural and ideological processes informed by the act of play generally, for the structures, meanings, and experiences of computer games specifically to be anything but idiosyncratic. (2)

Thus, Ruggill and McAllister advocate for what they term a “whimsical” approach to game studies, one that carries over to a broader investigation of play rhetorics. After all, the authors go on to argue that “whimsy is also an avenue to good-natured provocation, which is key to the formation of new and unusual synthesis of knowledge production (3).” Both literally though playing games and playing in game spaces, and figuratively, through adopting Ruggill and McAllister’s “whimsical” approach, this project attempts to demolish the binary of work versus play by bringing play to the most hallowed work space of all: academic research. The need to defend such an approach, or even having the language to so differentiate, speaks volumes about the power of play, the station of games in culture, and the powerful rhetorical moment that materializes when serious work is “gamified.”

This project engages in a mixed methodology that combines personal interviews with a broadly-conceived cultural studies approach that includes semiotics, critical theory, game studies, and play itself. Each of these valuable angles informs a more complex and nuanced assessment of how the language of play is appropriated, manipulated, applied, and consumed in a particular space (in this case, the college writing classroom). Taken together, these approaches comprise a multifaceted approach to the idea of gamification and the interrogation of the rhetorics of play (particularly in digital spaces). In so doing,

these methods not only serve to advance the discussion of these issues, but they also reveal the complex relationship of scholarship and the academy itself both to non-“traditional,” non-canonical texts and pedagogical approaches. This project, therefore, not only investigates games and play in a specific context, but also advocates for a renewed and vigorous embrace of the cultural studies project as a whole. By expanding and representing this diverse notion of what cultural studies methodologies can and should look like, this project suggests ways in which cultural studies can and should be expanded and reimagined in the 21st-century university. Resisting the rigidity of disciplinarity offers opportunities for cultural studies to expand its reach and resonance, both within and beyond the academy.

Thus, at the core of this project are voices. By amplifying the voices of these teachers and by committing their work to the page, this project displays and celebrates the human elements that cultural studies has so long sought to affirm. Though somewhat imperfect and in no way definitive, the findings that rise out of this study are rooted in a firm commitment to listen to and honor lived experiences (in this particular case, those of writing teachers in actual classrooms). This centering is in no way new, and it is in fact deeply inspired by a whole chorus of other authors who have sought to imbue cultural studies and humanities at large with the voices of the people whose lives bear out the ideas in their pages. One such example, and one that has particularly inspired this project as it has taken shape, is a plenary address given by Julie Wilson and Emily Chivers Yochim at the Humanities Unbound Conference in Norfolk, Virginia in May of 2015. In that address, entitled “Mothering and Media in Precarious Times” (based on their then-unpublished manuscript *Nuclear Options: Mothering and Media in Precarious Times*),

Wilson and Yochim offered up stories gathered from a group of mothers in the post-industrial Rust Belt who use social media. By sharing these women's stories and listening extensively to the actual words spoken by these mothers, Wilson and Yochim argue for the development of a multilayered cultural studies approach in order to enrich the ways in which research subjects are examined and presented.

This project follows the brave example set by Wilson and Yochim and others, honoring the voices of the instructors who participated in this study in order to endorse a methodology that moves beyond the page and into lived experiences and their complex implications. This project aims to reaffirm the value of a cultural studies approach like that which During describes as

a way of shoring up differences and counter-hegemony inside the humanities in an epoch of global managerialism . . . Engaged cultural studies best situates itself into the humanities and social sciences as a fluid and critical moment, neither weighted down by disciplinarity, nor blanded out into the interdisciplinarity of the wider cultural turn. (29).

By embracing the call of During and others to expand the scope of cultural studies, this project attempts to bring both game studies and the cultural studies approach to that field into focus as legitimate, productive, and applicable in writing programs, in the academy, and in society at large, perhaps now more than ever.

Study design

The ubiquity of play and games, particularly in digital environments, has no doubt permeated education in the United States at all levels. The seeming zeitgeist of games and play in the academy perhaps reflects a set of institutional anxieties about the relevance

and currency of higher education. It is no surprise that games, gameful design, gamification, playful learning, and the like have cropped up in almost every discipline and at every level of higher learning, from first-year general education courses through to graduate seminars and even into professional development classes and workshops for faculty.

Each of these instances carry with them a set of priorities, goals, and expectations specific to the discipline and subject matter at hand. This study isolates one such group to understand better the kinds of real practices going on in classrooms and to suggest ways of interrogating those practices both as cultural moments and as practical pedagogical endeavors. Specifically, the following study examines play and games in the college writing classroom. From the data gleaned from this examination, this project proposes a loose taxonomy of the kinds of practices being implemented in actual writing classrooms.

Participation in the study was solicited from the population of the attendees of the 2014 Play and Game Studies Special Interest Group (PGS-SIG) that met at the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Upon approval from the IRB, an email was sent to the PGS-SIG's general mailing list with permission from its administrators. The following email was sent to the 34 email addresses on the PGS-SIG's email list:

Because you are involved in the CCCC Special Interest Group on Play and Game Studies, I'm writing to ask for your help in a research project exploring the use of games and play in the writing classroom.

Participation would consist of a one-on-one interview. All interviews will be kept confidential. All data collected will be reported under pseudonyms, and none of the data gathered will be used to make employment or course assignment decisions now or in the future. Additionally, any potentially identifying information will be removed from the transcripts. Only the research team will have access to the interview data, and both the recordings and the transcriptions will be kept on a password-protected computer only accessible by the research team. If at any time during the process you choose to opt out of participating, you will not be held liable for further participation.

If you are interested in participating, please complete this brief preliminary survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/XZ382NS>. Please also feel free to pass this email along to any other writing instructors who might be interested in participating. I appreciate your help, and I look forward to speaking with many of you in the coming weeks.

Thanks,

Danielle Roach

When instructors followed the included link, they were taken to an online survey (hosted on SurveyMonkey, a free online application). The survey, entitled “Games and Writing: Preliminary Survey,” asked the following questions:

1. Are you currently teaching writing at an institution of higher learning?

2. If so, please identify the type of institution at which you are currently teaching (select all that apply):
 - a. Four-year college or university
 - b. Two-year college or technical school
 - c. Other (please explain)
3. What is your email address?

Respondents to the survey were contacted via the email address that they provided in the survey. Eleven subjects responded, and of those eleven, nine interviews were scheduled (two of the respondents did not respond to subsequent emails, so interviews were not arranged for those two respondents). Each of the nine available respondents was interviewed separately, either live via Skype or textually (asynchronously through email). Volunteers were asked the following questions:

1. What writing or composition class (or classes) do you teach at your current institution?
2. Do you use games in your writing classroom?
 - a. If no, why not? (Skip to 4)
 - b. If yes, when and why did you begin incorporating games into your class?
3. (For those currently using games in the classroom) Describe to me one or more examples of games you have used in your writing classroom.
 - a. Describe in as much detail as possible how you used the game in your classroom.
 - b. What were your goals with this assignment?

c. How successful was the use of the game in meeting your goals for the class?

4. Would you consider using (more) games in your classroom in the future?

Why or why not?

All audio interviews were conducted using Skype and recorded using Evaer, a recording add-on for Skype. Interviews were transcribed using a software called Express Scribe. Textual interviews were conducted via campus email and aggregated into Word documents. All interviewees were assigned pseudonyms, and all potentially identifying information was omitted from the transcripts. Recordings and transcriptions were at all times stored on a password-protected computer accessible only to the research team.

Respondents

After the initial survey, the following nine subjects were interviewed:

- Quinn is a Ph.D. candidate and adjunct instructor at a four-year research university. She is currently ABD and has taught part-time for several years.
- Olivia is a Ph.D. graduate teaching assistant in English at a four-year research institution. She is currently ABD.
- Virginia is an associate professor in her first year her current institution (a four-year research university). She has taught elsewhere for several years.
- Louis is a graduate teaching assistant pursuing a Master's Degree at a 4-year research university.
- Daria is an assistant professor at 4-year research institution.

- Kaylee is a full-time instructor of English at 4-year research institution. She is also taking classes part-time toward a Ph.D.
- Barry is a Ph.D. graduate research assistant in English at a four-year research institution. He will be teaching his first college-level writing course the following fall.
- Charlie is a Ph.D. graduate teaching assistant in English at a four-year research institution.
- Phil is a Ph.D. graduate teaching assistant in English at a four-year research university. This is his first year teaching college-level writing.

All the respondents participated voluntarily and received no compensation for their participation. Even so, they were all fairly eager to share their stories and to reflect on the ways in which games and play informed their teaching of writing.

CHAPTER 3

INTERVIEW ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The breadth of responses for the interviewees became apparent immediately, with instructors talking about everything from video games to board games to unstructured play activities. Even when asked “Do you use games in the writing classroom?”, several of the respondents sought clarification of the question. Olivia and Kaylee both explicitly asked if that meant video games, and Quinn initially hesitated to answer because she felt as though she wasn’t using the kind of games that the study might be looking for (Quinn has not used *video* games in her classroom, but, as she explains later, she uses a whole host of other games and playful practices). This broad conception of games opened up even further later in the interviews as the subjects became more comfortable sharing and reflecting on the ways they were using games. A few of them circled back later in the interviews to give more examples of things that, while perhaps not considered “games,” were game-like or playful (Kaylee’s use of puzzles, for example, while not formally a game, used playful objects and was structured in a way that adopted many of the parameters of a game). These reflections and struggles even within this cohort of nine interviewees revealed that the ways that games and play are being used in writing classrooms are varied, and analysis of each of the interviews began to reveal themes and patterns in the types of practices instructors felt comfortable including under the banner of games.

Interview analysis

To begin to examine and sort through those themes, the interviews were divided into sections. In response to question 3 (“Describe to me one or more examples of games you have used in your writing classroom”), eight of the nine subjects gave at least one

example of a game or game-like practice they had used or were currently using in their writing classrooms. Of those eight, the examples they gave varied tremendously. From across the eight instructors who had used or were currently using games, 25 separate examples were mentioned. Two additional examples were also mentioned by instructors planning a game-related activity for the coming semester, bringing the total number of examples discussed to 27. Some instructors discussed a single practice in depth (like Phil, who focused two games used similarly for the same purpose) while others discussed multiple distinct examples (like Olivia, who mentioned four different examples of games in her classroom, each of which embodied a different goal or purpose and each of which accomplished very different outcomes). Each example was separated out and re-read to determine *how* the game or game-like practice had been used by that instructor for a particular class goal. Each example was examined in terms of the following questions:

1. What is the location of play in this example?
2. What is the function of the game or play in this example?
3. What is the instructor's role?
4. What is the student's role?
5. What uses or outcomes are identified by the interviewee?

Out of this examination, it became apparent that the examples served certain distinct functions (question 2) and sought to achieve specific sets of outcomes (question 5), which yielded the rough taxonomy of categories discussed below.

Findings

To be sure, the categories have some overlap, with practices often skirting a line between one or more category or functioning, across the span of a semester or even a

single assignment, in more than one way. However, when considered alongside the literature currently circulating about play and games in the classroom (and even specifically in the writing classroom), it became apparent that there is a need in the field of writing studies for some sort of taxonomy or rhetoric within which scholars can discuss different types of game-based learning practice as it occurs in writing classrooms.

The emergence of categories of study

As mentioned, analysis of the interview data revealed quickly a wide variety of response types. The examples provided by the instructors of what they were doing or had done in their classrooms (along with a handful of descriptions of plans for future classes) all involved games in some way, though even interviewees struggled to find the line between “just play” (in the words of Kaylee) and actual games. However, even with this common thread, the way the game itself was used differed, both between interviewees and even within the instructors’ own classroom practices. The 27 examples from the nine participants were first grouped according to what function the game or play served in the classroom as seen in Table 1 on the following page:

Function of the game	Examples given by participants
The game (or play) serves as discrete tool for delivering lesson or other content	Interest inventory seek and find (Olivia) Multiplayer game play (Olivia) Cooperative play with Donkey Kong (Phil) Hands-on multimodality (Kaylee) Rhetorical scavenger hunt (Quinn) Value of writing round robin (Quinn) MLA vs. APA citation competition (Quinn) In-class game play of Paper Chase (Olivia) Lego brick instruction manuals (Kaylee) Puzzle communication game (Kaylee) Peer review scavenger hunt (Olivia)
The class itself (or some aspects thereof) is structured as a game.	Abilities and achievements as extra credit (Kaylee) Incentivizing engagement (Olivia) Ideas for “choose-your-own-role” game (Barry)* Ideas for “stakeholder role-playing game (Kaylee)*
The game is an object to be analyzed.	Features of storytelling in Gloom (Daria) Textual analysis of Monopoly (Daria) Rhetorical strategy in Diplomacy (Daria) Textual analysis of Endgame: Syria (Phil) Procedural rhetoric in Limbo and Papers, Please (Charlie) Rhetorical situation in Portal 2 and The Stanley Parable (Louis)
The game is an object to be described.	Walk-throughs for narrative games (Daria) Group writing of walk-throughs as instructions (Virginia)
The game is a text to be created by writers.	Game creation with A Thousand and One Blank White Cards (Virginia) Game mechanics pre-lesson (Louis) Writing in Minecraft (Louis) Narrative game creation in Twine (Charlie)

Table 1: Participants' activity examples sorted by function

Once these groupings were identified, the third and fourth groups were combined because, in both cases, the text serves as an object about which writing is taking place.

Also, even though the ideas mentioned that fell into the second group were sparse, they

seemed unique in that they asked players to take on the role of a game player in lieu of (or in addition to) their role as student, and so that grouping remained a category of its own. Ultimately, from these groupings of the 27 examples, four general categories emerged that encompassed the activities discussed. The titles given to those categories are meant only to be descriptive of the practice and how it relates to the writing classroom:

1. Playful pedagogy
2. Writing classrooms as game environments
3. Writing about games
4. Writing in and for games

Again, the borders of these categories are somewhat blurry, but they take shape as we consider where and how the game (or playful act) itself functions in the course. For some of the activities described by the instructors, play was not forefronted (playful pedagogy) and instead acted as a teaching tool; in many of these cases, instructors did not necessarily talk to the students explicitly about the game mechanics or presence of the game or play but instead used the activity as a tool to convey information and lead students toward desired outcomes. In other examples, the game was built into the course itself, with instructors incentivizing behavior explicitly through putting forward the course, or some aspect of it, as a game (writing classrooms as game environments). These examples embody most closely the kinds of practices typically discussed in conversations about “gamification” of or in the classroom (see especially Farber; Sheldon), although that definition continues to shift as the chapters below reveal.

Other examples involved the inclusion of formal games in classroom practice. In many of the examples, students were asked to play games. Interestingly, however, even

those examples split in terms of how that game play functioned as a part of the course. Some instructors used games as texts, asking students to engage in the rhetorical analysis of the game itself or to consider the conversations going on outside of the games and to participate in the circulation and creation of game-related content (writing about games). In some examples, students' roles as writers shifted; instead of working in response to an existing game, students were asked to compose games or to compose in games (writing in and for games).

Descriptions of chapters

In mapping out these patterns, this study not only highlights a diverse array of classrooms practices and strategies for conveying content and meeting outcomes, but also explores the rhetorical and material strategies employed by the instructors themselves as they describe how they have incorporated games and play into the fabric of their writing classrooms. That exploration spans four category chapters as well as a chapter about anxieties and limitations and a chapter that considers the project as a whole.

Chapter 4: Playful Pedagogy. Chapter 4 examines the first of four categories into which the participants' practices can be parsed by looking at the ways in which writing instructors integrate play in its most general terms. Playful pedagogy has long been a staple of composition classrooms, and instructors in this study engage in all sorts of play, from more basic playful activities like quiz bowls and non-digital tools like puzzles to play in computer-mediated environments and with more complex tools. These playful practices often underscore already established curricular practices so as to augment but not replace the assignment or goal at hand.

Chapter 5: Writing Classrooms as Game Environments. The next chapter shifts the conversation from playful pedagogy to a more formalized conception of games with its examination of gamification of the writing classrooms itself. From fully formed classes created as games to gameful or gamified designs, overlaying a game form onto the class itself is becoming an increasingly common practice. In an effort perhaps to capitalize on the popularity of MMORPGs like World of Warcraft, instructors ask students to build characters or fill roles, and students work through achievement systems, levels, and the like as they complete coursework. This strategy seeks to fundamentally change the way students encounter the classroom, a shift that holds the potential for both progress and peril.

Chapter 6: Writing about Games. Beyond the use of games and play as setting and classroom environment, games themselves offer writing instructors many opportunities to expand the moves we encourage students to make in the writing classroom. This chapter explores assignments that ask students to write about games. In much the same way that students are asked to close read a poem or analyze a newspaper article, assignments in this category ask students to pull apart a game and to interrogate what it says and how it says it. This practice, rooted often in more traditional notions of rhetorical analysis, pushed students to do the often complex work of critically considering a multimodal text as an object of study.

Even as we ask students to look at games themselves, it becomes immediately apparent that games do not happen in a vacuum. Instead, games arise out of a complex system of participants and workers, and often times the richness and success of a given game stems not only from the work of the game's designers but also from the efforts and

input of game users and fans. This chapter looks at writing in the spaces around games and examines how instructors in the study use game-related texts and writing practices to underscore the cultural complexity of the game while imbuing the composition classroom with real-world writing practice. By asking students to analyze games as texts and to create texts that converse with the games, these assignments exemplify the ways in which games offer promising textual alternatives for a variety of different kinds of writing classrooms.

Chapter 7: Writing in and for Games. Finally, Chapter 7 explores what happens when students are asked to themselves write for or in a game. Asking students to compose games themselves necessitates a full discussion of game design and theory alongside the hallmarks of writing praxis. Because the assignment is the game, discussions of writing for games often runs parallel to a more general consideration of what good writing looks like in other media; students must carefully consider the rhetorical situation of the game to effectively compose a text that communicates effectively with its user/reader. These kinds of compositions, though complex, have the potential both to yield a rich writing experience for individual students and to create a dynamic community in the larger composition classroom.

Chapter 8: Anxieties and Challenges. Alongside the investigation of the examples discussed by these instructors belongs a consideration of some of the anxieties expressed by instructors throughout the interviews. For all most all of the instructors, a good portion of the interview was spent musing on the final interview question: “Would you consider using (more) games in your classroom in the future? Why or why not?” Even after having enthusiastically described examples of real, successful classroom activities, many of the

instructors admitted to feeling uneasy about the role of play and games in their classroom and about how much they would be able to incorporate such practices into future classes. From those conversation, a varied list of challenges, anxieties, and pitfalls can be culled, all of which both complicate and enrich the conversation about games and play in the writing classroom. Far from being a catalog of insurmountable obstacles, this list offers scholars a chance to balance the promise of these new and exciting practices with the realities of lived experiences and embodied praxis. By shedding light on these difficulties and concerns, this project aims to broaden and enrich the conversation about the use of play and games in academic spaces.

All of these practices have the potential to expand and enhance the writing classroom. Also important, though is a consideration of the possible obstacles and pitfalls of trying to integrate play and games into any classroom, particularly one as constrained as the writing classroom. The instructors in the study offer up their own experiences with limitations and even failures in implementing these practices, and they also reflect on potential problems or roadblocks (often ones that have prevented them from integrating these ideas more fully into their classrooms).

Chapter 9: Conclusions. The final chapter attempts to reexamine the project itself, looking closely at its limitations and also using it as a space to generate suggestions for future research. Not only do the findings of this study serve to illuminate the real spaces of the classroom through its attention to actual uses of play and games in writing classrooms, they serve as a call to researchers to continue to reach into lived experiences to reinform the theories upon which our disciplines stand.

As a whole, this project represents a complex analysis of the interview answers. By examining narratives about the inclusion of games and play in the classroom, this study seeks to consider how the examples offered by instructors compare with literature and prevailing attitudes about games and play in the classroom. Whether in actual games or in spaces ranging from the playful to the banal and seemingly “serious,” then, tracing the reach of gamification and exploring the intricacies of play rhetorics in these spaces allows us both to question the significance of those instantiations and to consider how they serve as reflections of larger cultural tendencies. Not only does this project seek to investigate how culture uses play to reimagine endeavors like education, this examination of play and games (and the rhetorics which surround them) highlights the cultural moment within and out of which these artifacts and instances have come into being. What does the way we think about play reveal about our time? How does it help us understand the goals, anxieties, tensions, and contradictions of the so-called “digital era”? Human attraction to the game is nothing new—the desire to play has been a fascination throughout history—and yet understanding the ways that rhetorics of play circulate in this particular point in that history speaks volumes to what is happening in and through our culture right now and how that radiates into unexpected places like the writing classroom. Play is no longer only in the game, and perhaps it never was. Perhaps teasing out Huizinga’s notion that cultures exist “in and as play” (173) is the first step in better understanding not only the game and the players, but the larger cultural moment wherein play truly is the thing.

CHAPTER 4

PLAYFUL PEDAGOGY

When I was a new teaching assistant, I observed a veteran teacher, Peggy Lindsey, in her first-year writing classroom one day. It was about mid-way through the semester, and the students were working on a researched argument essay. She had mentioned in our communication before the class that they would be working on MLA style, so imagine my surprise when the Jeopardy theme song began to stream from the speakers in the room. On the projector was the Jeopardy logo with MLA added just above it; after the theme song ended, the slideshow gave way to a grid of categories and numbers and Alex Trebek's signature voice saying "One 'Daily Double' coming up in one of these categories." I was stunned and delighted by the method; I had never seen anyone really use games or play in a college writing class. My own experiences with composition had been with literature-based writing classes that consisted of lectures, some discussions, and writing as an individual effort. This was a classroom where there was no lecture. The discussion was loud, often raucous and filled with laughter and playful banter. The students were engaged and invigorated and supporting one another. Throughout the next 50 minutes, in teams of five or six, the students discussed, debated, competed, and *played* their way through the intricacies of MLA style. I left that observation with the template for the game and so much more: I had been given permission to play in the writing classroom, something that would radically influence my approach to teaching.

The origins of the game itself (built in PowerPoint and passed down from instructor to instructor) are almost mythological for me now. In the document properties, the creator is listed as "Bill Arcuri," and an internet search of this name returns thousands of

instances of the game recreated for other purposes. Since then, I have used the game myself to discuss MLA style, and I have also reconfigured it in various ways for other lessons: my students have played “Argument Jeopardy,” “Scholar Jeopardy,” and yes, even (gulp) “Grammar Jeopardy.” I have been in many classrooms, both as an observer and as a leader, and the presence of play and games in those classrooms almost always brings something unique and powerful to the outcomes and lessons of the class.

This chapter discusses the first and perhaps broadest category of practices to come out of this study: the use of play as a pedagogical tool. The overarching preoccupation of literature about play and games in the writing classroom seems to focus on the use of computer games, either as texts to be analyzed or as texts to be written (categories that are discussed in chapters 5 and 6, respectively). However, a careful consideration of the presence of play in pedagogy (both now and throughout the history of education) is in many ways foundational to any investigation of the current role of games in the classroom. This chapter explores the many ways that instructors in this study have used play, from informal playful activities to more structured games like the Jeopardy game.

Starting from Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman’s simple yet revolutionary suggestion that “play is free movement within a more rigid structure” (304), this chapter seeks to unpack the complex yet fruitful relationship between playfulness and academic spaces of writing instruction. The academy is by its nature rigid; it is an institution, and it exists as such because it adheres to the “rules” about what such a place should be: there are hierarchies, policies, standards, outcomes. Introducing play into that structure, however, need not be counterintuitive; in fact, in many ways the introduction of play can serve to highlight the boundaries of the academy (and by extension the academic

classroom in general, and the writing classroom specifically) in ways that allow for consideration and discussion of how students can, should, and do function within those boundaries.

Also important to the writing classroom is a consideration of the structures of writing itself. What does it mean to write, and how do we teach students to do it, to do it well, and to identify as writers in the context of the academy? One way, is to open up the larger role of author to students, and using play to do that can be an effective tool for students new to the context and hesitant to embrace the identity of “academic author.” Kevin Moberly discusses how playing games is a form of composition, and he outlines the ways teachers of composition might leverage the writing that happens in games for consideration in the classroom. Using World Of Warcraft as an example, Moberly demonstrates that much of how players perform in the game is dictated by acts of composing: everything from interactions with other characters to the design of the playable character him or herself require the player to consider the multi-faceted context of the game and to move the character through the game by making choices about how the characters will look, perform, interact, etc. Moberly argues that

games like WoW can provide a conceptual framework that helps students approach individual writing assignments as a series of implicit and explicit rhetorical challenges that are designed to not only challenge their ability to identify and implement the most effective rhetorical strategies, but their larger understanding of how particular discourse communities construct effectiveness. (295)

By identifying these strategies, Moberly insists, students can then reflect on the ways in which their choices are rhetorical in nature and parallel the choices they are asked to make when composing in more traditional spaces (i.e. an academic essay). In many ways, the act of playing *is* writing.

Similarly, David Michael Sheridan and William Hart-Davidson discuss the creation of the multiplayer online game (MOG) *Ink*. Designed by developers with significant background in composition and rhetoric, the game “allows players to enter into complex rhetorical situations that include exigencies, audiences, and rhetorical purposes” (323). Designed as a persistent alternative world (PAW), *Ink* was conceived as a sort of parallel reality, a world wherein students were asked to construct lives, choices, value systems, etc. Students progressed through the game by collecting “ink” and following various “pathways.” The tasks required for this progress often involved the creation of some document, either individually or collaboratively with other players, and so, in many ways, the play of the game both implicitly and explicitly involved composition.

These examples of using games in writing classrooms have been happening for some time. In 1986, Thomas J. Derirck created about a game he developed for use in his composition classrooms. Called *DOSEQUIS*, the game plays with the notion of “invisible writing” wherein students would draft on the word processor without being able to see what they were writing on their monitor (a technique written about by Marcus). In *DOSEQUIS*, the students are placed in pairs, and their monitor wires are quite literally crossed so that student A’s monitor shows what student B is typing and vice-versa. The two students compose collaboratively across the shared space in silence and ultimately merge their files so that they can see the results of their game play. Derrick discusses his

rationale for the game: “mental game-playing, as opposed the test of hand-eye coordination found in video arcades, allows students to experience the satisfaction of thinking creatively about writing” (44). He also notes the potential benefits of collaboration that the game affords students: “Partnership relieves the pressure to perform solo and increases the pleasure of working together towards a mutually determined goal, a coherent paragraph” (44). The game also benefits teachers, he points out, as they can watch students engage in rhetorical practice in real time in a relatively low-stakes environment. This early example of using mediated play in the teaching of writing is one of many, and various other modes of play that are not mediated have been happening in writing classrooms for far longer.

The examples in Derrick, Sheridan, and Moberly are significant not because they are mediated or because they occur in the context of computer games but because they leverage play in order to interpolate students into a discourse community wherein more formal academic writing is the eventual desired outcome. The activities discussed by interviewees below have similar goals, and they are grouped only loosely by thematic goals. All of the activities, however, ask students to compose through play, even if that composition does not materialize in a traditional alphabetic textual form.

Community

One way that the interview subjects discussed using play was to help build classroom community. Composition studies has long focused on the ways in which classrooms can and should function as discourse communities (see especially Swales, Bizzell). By building relationships among students in a given class, the classroom itself functions as a communicative body, and the students’ identity with and participation in

that group encourages greater investment in the activities and outcomes of the work happening in the class. Several activities mentioned by teachers in this study use play and games to work to build community within the writing classroom.

Interest inventory seek-and-find (Olivia)

Because the final unit of her first-year writing course involves a large group assignment, Olivia has found herself using games to help ease the transition into collaborative writing. In some of her classes, Olivia uses traditional icebreaker-type games to help transition the class into groups that are not directly connected to course outcomes or the assignment. For example, Olivia uses a personal interest inventory seek-and-find game to encourage conversations within the groups. The inventory serves to help students identify things like one another's academic majors, course history, familiarity with tools, and other key pieces of information that will help students "find out what skill sets each member of the team may have or how they may be able to work with one another's best qualities." By offering the students a framework for introductions in a playful space, Olivia hopes that the game will help them build relationships that will help in the completion of the group project unit.

Multiplayer-game play (Olivia)

In other writing classes, Olivia has asked students to play multiplayer games as a team-building exercise when they begin the group project unit. Once the students are divided into groups for the project, she offers students a list of games, but she also encourages them to bring their own ideas to the table. Ultimately, the games work both as an icebreaker (students can introduce themselves and better get to know the other members of their group) and as a teambuilding activity (students learn to work together

to accomplish a common goal and begin to develop prototypes for roles within the group for the project itself). Having used the activity several times (and in a few different forms, shifting games and parameters depending on the class), Olivia is pleased with the shift that happens through this game play. She especially likes that the simple act of playing a game together allows for a productive shift in focus as it encourages students to “work together in an environment separate from the traditional classroom environment.” Thus, it is the act of play (and not the game itself) that is the key pedagogical impetus behind this activity, as Olivia forefronts the value of play to work in social spaces to drive discourse.

Cooperative play with Donkey Kong (Phil)

In his first-year writing class, Phil takes a similar approach, using the game *Donkey Kong* to engage students both with one another and with ideas about play itself. He incorporates the game toward the middle of his course, usually after a break or long weekend. When he introduces the activity, Phil is careful not to give students much information so that they will rely on one another to navigate the game: “Students pass around the controller and I don’t give them any information about how to play it or what the controls are, but they eventually work without my prompting. They end up working together on figuring out not only the controls but the strategy of how the game works.” By giving students a space in which they must work together to navigate a relatively simple game like *Donkey Kong*, Phil provides the students with opportunities to communicate with one another in real time and to build community through working together toward a common goal.

Phil also notes that his choice of game is deliberate; because *Donkey Kong* is a single-screen platformer game developed in the early 1980’s, most students are generally

unfamiliar with the game play: “The game is old enough that they’ve typically never played it before and they have no idea what’s going on.” Rather than employing a more current game wherein some students might enjoy an advantage having played the game, Phil intentionally includes a game that is older to effectively level the playing field in the classroom; many of the students are familiar with the character (and even later iterations of the *Donkey Kong* franchise), but Phil notes that none of the students in his particular class had ever encountered the original version of the classic puzzle game. Although the game is ostensibly fairly simple (both graphically and conceptually), the game play can be a challenge for students unaccustomed to this kind of 8-bit game setting. The productive tension of a game whose appearance is simple and yet whose game play is relatively challenging opens up what Phil sees as spaces for conversation and for community building that will scaffold the course’s later assignments (Phil’s use of games as objects of textual analysis later in this same course is discussed in Chapter 6).

In each of these examples, students are asked to communicate with other students and to begin to work together to accomplish a task or to discuss some issue. Olivia’s introduction activity, even though it requires no formal writing, encourages students to engage in literate practices in real time: students compose their identities with the answers they give and the ways they interact, and they read one another’s compositions in those interactions as well. Similarly, in both Olivia and Phil’s game play activities, students are given a communicative task and must work together to navigate the game space and to solve problems. This kind of community building is rich with possibility for any classroom but scaffolds particularly well the higher-level goals of a writing classroom,

wherein students move beyond what a text says to wrestle with the relationship between the text and the many people who are involved in giving that text meaning.

Content

Other instances of playful pedagogy discussed by the interview subjects worked to convey actual course content through playful interactions. Regardless of the way in which a given writing classroom is structured, the goal of learning to write is always augmented by content. Depending on the model of writing instruction employed in the class (writing about writing, current-traditional rhetoric, literature-based composition, etc.), students are always expected to interact with concepts and texts as they themselves learn about doing writing. Introducing some of these ideas can be difficult, especially when the concepts tend toward the more abstract. The following activities use play as a means by which course content is introduced or reiterated.

Hands-on multimodality (Kaylee)

In Kaylee's upper-level undergraduate digital writing class, play becomes integral to discussions of the social underpinnings of writing practice. After assigning a particularly challenging text on multimodality to her class of juniors and seniors, Kaylee asks them to think through play. She explains:

I have them read the introduction to *Multimodal Discourse* by Gunther Kress and Theo VanLeeuwen, so there's [a discussion of] multimodality, and obviously they come to class and some of them are like, "uh, what?" So we start with kind of a vague questions like, "what do we want for children?" "We want our children to be creative problem-solvers, we want our children

to learn to be brave,” and so we start talking about some of the ways that that gets articulated in our culture. . .

Kaylee encourages the students to discuss their own childhoods, including television programs they watched and toys they played with when they were young. As they begin to generate a list of memories, they find common ground in shared experiences. Then, Kaylee groups them into teams and has them circulate among stations throughout the room. The stations include activities like watching a segment of the children’s television show *Sesame Street*, playing with Play-doh, reading the children’s book *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, or viewing a video walk-through of a game like *Little Big Planet*. At each station, Kaylee instructs students to take notes on how they interact with each media and how much is expected of them as the user/player. These notes are used to support a conversation on how those media function to reinforce cultural values and norms:

We talk about how [each activity] supports and reinforces what we want for our children in terms of creativity of problem-solving or bravery. We talk about how these messages get articulated across media, and then we also talk about some of the differences of that media and what it requires of the user.

By asking students to engage in multimodal practice in this low-stakes environment, Kaylee uses play to both guide a discussion of a difficult reading and also to begin to demonstrate critical applications of theory as students both think about and engage in multimodal discourse during the class meeting. Not surprisingly, Kaylee reports that the students respond positively to the activity and that the discussion generated

during class seems to yield a greater understanding of the text than a more traditional lecture or even seminar-style discussion.

Rhetorical scavenger hunt (Quinn)

In addition to including generalized play as described in Kaylee's above activity, many of the instructors use more structured play within the class. One distinction of this shift is that some of the more structured play activities described by instructors tended to have some competitive element. Quinn describes an activity that she has used at the outset of her first-semester first-year writing class to help introduce students to terminology within the writing classroom. Students were grouped into teams, and the teams were given a list of rhetorical terms. Using the cameras on their mobile phones (Quinn ensured that each group had at least one member willing to use his or her phone to take pictures), students were sent out of the classroom on a scavenger hunt to find visual examples of the terms on the list. Students then sent the pictures to a central Tumblr page set up by Quinn so that the images aggregated in a single feed for the class.

Quinn reflects on how the activity accomplished multiple goals: "I like that it's teaching them object-oriented thinking, how we take abstraction and place it into concrete detail. It also is teaching them definitions. Also . . . it was the first week, so it was intended to build community, and it did." By asking students to subvert their expectations of the classroom (and indeed, actually physically leave the classroom), the activity encourages students to reconsider their own expectations of the writing classroom and to play with notions of what it means to compose something as seemingly simple as a definition. She was also surprised by the magnitude of responses, with students submitting many more images than she originally expected. In fact, Quinn admitted that

she planned to limit the activity a bit in future iterations, admitting that she would “probably narrow it down and say pick your three most effective images so that we don’t just get this slew of imagery. That was fun, but then we didn’t really get to talk about them in depth.” By narrowing the parameters, Quinn hopes to be able to allow for more time to discuss and engage with each group’s images.

Quinn’s rationale for incorporating this (and other) play-centered activities in the writing classroom came from her own experiences talking with other writing studies teachers who were interested in game studies. In her own conversations with these other teacher-scholars, Quinn was struck by their enthusiasm for “the potential for games to foster community and engagement.” Ultimately, Quinn says she was pleased by the level of student participation and interest in this particular activity, and she in fact mused over how invested students became in discussing and rationalizing their choices. Quinn remembers that the students “sat there arguing over whether something was ethos or pathos for like twenty-five minutes. That’s something that doesn’t happen when you just lecture at them.” Interestingly, even though there was no declared winner in the scavenger hunt, students perceived the activity as at least somewhat competitive.

“Value of Writing” round-robin (Quinn)

Quinn also used an activity that moves closer to what she herself would consider a game. Borrowed from a colleague at the outset of her first-year writing class, the activity sets students up in small groups and asks them to consider the seemingly simple question, “what’s the value of writing for you?” In their groups, students are asked to write brief statements answering the questions. At the end of a pre-determined time, each group reads their list, and members of the other groups are instructed to cross off any items

found on their own lists, with the idea that the group with the most unique items remaining on their list at the end is the game's winner. Even without a prize for the game's winners, the students become invested in their group's list:

They kind of debate and argue about, "Well, is this the same goal?" or what kind of objectives do they share? They even talk about how different fields view that objective differently. So it was really good discussion, but it was very ambiguous in the terms that ... students would be like, "well, I don't think that when you say audience that's the same as me saying reader."

As students wrestle with these complexities, Quinn is careful to encourage the class as a community to make some of the harder decisions about the nuances of the answers. Ultimately, if two groups cannot decide if one of their items is the same or not, Quinn leaves it to the class to decide by asking the whole class to vote.

MLA vs. APA citation competition (Quinn)

One of Quinn's favorite gameful activities, and one that highlights the ways in which more competitive play can be leveraged in the classroom, was an idea she developed as a last-minute patch to an existing lesson plan. Noticing that her students were struggling with formatting and citation systems, Quinn developed a game to engage her students in attending to the details surrounding the formal requirements of citation and style. She asked the class to group themselves into teams, and then each team chose whether they would represent APA or MLA style (the two dominant citation systems typically used in first-year writing classes). For each round, Quinn gave two teams a source and asked each team to create a Works Cited or Reference entry for the source given the information she had provided. Once the teams completed their entry, they were

asked to share it with the rest of the class. At that point, the other teams were allowed to scour the entry for errors, gaining points for spotting errors in the writing teams' entries.

The first team who represented MLA went to a Works Cited generator, one of those sites that we all hate that are always wrong, copy and pasted the source, got the generated citation, and they said they were done. That is how they lost the whole game. They were never able to catch up because all the other teams spotted like 15 errors. As that team was leaving, they said "I'm never using one of those again," and I thought, "Yeah, you learned!"

By allowing students to make mistakes in a lower-stakes environment like the game, Quinn was allowing students to build a body of knowledge about the topic by actively engaging with content, and she reports that the citations in the final papers for that course more accurately reflected the conventions of the style systems. Quinn was also pleasantly surprised at the students' own reactions to the activity: "Many of them told me that was their favorite day. Students really liked it, and honestly I think it reflected in their writing because they understood the concepts." Quinn plans to continue to use the activity, modifying it to include more structured time limits on response times to ensure a more even distribution of participation; she notes that some teams tended to dominate the discussions and use up a lot of the time, so she plans to try to limit the time for those interactions in some way.

From unstructured play to more formalized games, these activities show the possibilities for playful introduction of ideas. Kaylee's lesson about multimodal practice in education transforms a difficult course reading into a set of concrete activities. Rather than ask students to write reading response essays, Kaylee opens up a classroom space

composing with the same goal in mind. As students are interacting with and responding to the text, they are doing the work that could have been assigned in a more solitary textual environment in a way that makes the ideas concrete and that allows for discussion and exploration within a low-stakes collaborative environment. Similarly, Quinn's scavenger hunt lifts terminology off the page, eschewing what could have easily been a quiz or short-answer example essay test in favor of application: find an example of this idea, and then explain how that thing you found represents something essential about the terminology in question. Even as the activities move into more competitive arena, like Quinn's "value of writing" round robin and the citation competition, the incorporation of play moves the central themes and goals of the composition classroom off of the page and into a more active, participatory space.

Writing process

One particular type of activity discussed in the interviews was the use of playful strategies to open up space for discussion of writing as process. Process-based writing pedagogy has circulated in writing studies for decades (e.g., Emig; Murray) and writing about writing has become a prominent approach in writing studies in recent years (e.g., Downs and Wardle). Both approaches underscore the importance of talking expressly about writing (and about the various stages of the writing process). The activities discussed below incorporate play and games into various stages of the writing process, providing not only a platform for participation but also a means by which to discuss the importance of the various elements of writing as process and the realities of how writing happens.

In-class game play of Paper Chase (Olivia)

Olivia, for example, includes another computer game in her classes that explicitly focuses on writing and persuasion. The online game *Paper Chase* asks players to take on the role of someone at a newspaper (a reporter, a columnist, a copyeditor, etc.). Playing as that character, students look at articles and assignment for the newspaper, looking for certain features depending on the role. Editors might be asked to consider what kind of story would work best for a given issue or topic as they prepare to assign it to a reporter, while reporters might be asked to consider the scope of a given assignment. Because each member of the class plays a role, and because the game is played in real-time in Olivia's classroom, students play together as they review and discuss writing concepts and approaches: audience awareness, logical fallacies, rhetorical strategies, genre, etc. For an entire class period, Olivia asked students to immerse themselves in the game: "I put the game up on the big screen in front of the classroom so that everyone could monitor each other's points and see how well they were doing in learning the game and playing against one another, and so I just took an entire class period and we played around with it." As the class period progressed, Olivia encouraged students to discuss, ask questions, and engage not only with the game but with one another.

Fortunately, because Olivia teaches in a networked classroom in which every student has a computer, she felt comfortable including a computer game in her writing classroom. Olivia also encourages students (both during the game but also throughout the rest of the class meetings) to engage in backchannel chat with one another through the university's content management system. By being able to discuss the game out loud but also in a text-based chat, the conversation about the game and the issues it raised took on

yet another dimension. The points system of the game drove some low-level competition as students tracked how the ideas they had been discussing in the class translated into points within the game.

Olivia also notes that she valued the way that the game allowed students to take on a potential career role in a low-stakes environment. Because many of the students in the class were interested in careers in writing and English studies, the game allowed them to model the kinds of behaviors in which professional writers engage. She notes that “they could see how for a particular career, the work that they were doing in a rhetoric and composition classroom would translate to that kind of real-world experience, so I thought that was pretty positive.” That role-playing opportunity, coupled with the content of the game itself, offered Olivia a chance to shift the tone of a particular class meeting while still engaging in ideas and conversations that the class had started well before they played the game.

Lego brick instruction manuals (Kaylee)

Kaylee also mentions incorporating play in her second-semester writing class for technical majors. The activity (one that has become a bit of a staple in technical writing classrooms in the past decade) involves creating a user manual to build an object with Lego bricks. Kaylee heard about the assignment through a colleague and decided to incorporate it into her writing class. For the assignment, each student chooses 25 Lego bricks and uses the bricks to build a structure, taking notes and even snapping pictures with their phone as they move through the process. Once students are satisfied with their structures, they are asked to compose an instruction manual for their creation. Kaylee discusses with the class the convention of Lego’s own instruction manual (often full color

graphics with few verbal instructions), but she challenges the class instead to create instructions using only text. Far from an arbitrary choice, however, Kaylee explains her rationale for limiting students to a text-only model:

[Lego manuals] are all visual-based, and what I require students to do is to keep it text based, just to kind of have a discussion about the differences between visual communication and written communication, the difficulty of clarity of communication within writing, so they find that *really* challenging to keep it written. Part of it is like they find it difficult to even come up with terminology for describing things, like “what do you call the little bumps on top of the Legos?” I think it’s a really fascinating exercise for all of that and generates a lot of good discussion.

Once each student has drafted and revised his or her own manual, they all bring their instructions and Lego sets back to class for what Kaylee calls “Usability Testing Day.” Students find a partner and trade sets, working through the instructions to try to assemble the structure outlined in the other person’s instruction manual. “Invariably,” Kaylee laughs, “they struggle to do it. It’s actually pretty rare when they’re able to successfully use the manual to totally complete the thing.” That struggle becomes fodder for the next stage of the process, serving as peer review that provides the original writer with notes they can then use to revise their instructions. Kaylee underscores the value of that site of struggle in the writing process:

The whole process becomes very enlightening for students in terms of peer review, in terms of how clear their own writing is. As the usability testing is going on, their classmates can talk to them about the difficulties that they

ran into, make notes on the manual about where they got lost, and provide really good feedback to one another.

Kaylee finds that the resulting revised instructions have a clarity and precision that she is convinced is borne out of the collaborative revision process engendered by user-centered nature of the assignment. She has modified the assignment in her upper-level digital writing class to include images (students in that course use image editing and document design software to create manuals with both text and images). Even with the inclusion of the images, however, Kaylee still finds the activity effective for helping students create documents that center on the needs of the audience and for spurring rich conversations during class about rhetorical awareness and the writing process.

Puzzle communication game (Kaylee)

After describing her Lego user manual assignment, Kaylee describes another gameful activity she uses in her writing classrooms (particularly those with a technical focus) that involves instructions that she says is meant to focus students' attention on "clarity in communication." For this activity, she sets up students in pairs and has them sit with their backs to one another. In each pair, one student receives a bag of puzzle pieces (a collection of different colored shapes) and the other holds what she calls a "master sheet": a document that ostensibly shows how the pieces fit together to make a shape (the shape of a capital "T"). Kaylee describes the students' initial interactions:

The person with the master sheet will start saying, "Place the blue triangle next to the orange square so that the long end of the triangle is up against the square," so they're saying their directions and the person's trying to put it together. Eventually, they start realizing that this isn't working. The

person putting it together is like, “This isn’t making a ‘T’ like you say it’s supposed to make.”

The reason for the confusion, Kaylee reveals, is that the color-coding on the master sheet is different than the colors of the actual pieces held by the other partner. The goal is for the students to identify that there is a communication barrier present in the activity and begin to work toward overcoming or resolving that barrier. Many times, the students modify their descriptions and begin to ask each other more questions to clarify the process. Kaylee says students can usually figure out what the barrier is by talking, but she has used other strategies to augment the process and move the conversation along, such as involving other students as observers and allowing those students to weigh in periodically during the process.

Once all the pairs (or groups) of students have completed the task, Kaylee leads them in a post-mortem of the exercise:

We talk about “what did you find from this, and how does it connect to technical writing or technical communication?” So they can talk about understanding the language of their audience or maybe what words made sense to them. We can talk about clarity in communication. We can talk about even the emotions involved in business communication, when working with someone and telling them what to do and getting frustrated when they can’t do it even though they’re trying.

The conversation that follows the activity is the activity’s ultimate goal. Reflecting on the process becomes more valuable than the activity itself because it engenders genuine conversation about writing and communication and allows for what Kaylee sees

as an effective transition to then applying those ideas and themes to the course's later assignments.

Peer review scavenger hunt (Olivia)

Olivia discusses having built a game into her peer review process. Rather than structuring peer review as a more lengthy one-on-one process, Olivia gives students a scavenger hunt list and challenges them to find those items in other students' papers. She has used the activity at different points in her course, and usually after she has had them engage in more traditional one-to-one peer review sessions earlier in the course. For the scavenger hunt version, the items on the list vary: sometimes the list includes concepts and terms from class discussions ("rhetorical elements like ethos, pathos, logos") and other times it includes formal or stylistic concerns (MLA formatting, citation style, etc.). Students are asked to work through the list of 15-20 items by circulating among their classmates and spending small chunks of time with each paper rather than long stretches of detailed reading and responding. The goal is for everyone to get as many items checked off of their list as possible, but Olivia usually includes some small incentive for those who can show that they found examples of all the items (a small amount of extra credit, for example, is given to students who upload a picture or scan of their completed scavenger hunt sheet to the course site). "The hope," she reflects, "is that they find that they've covered every aspect of the evaluative criteria of the assignment in some way with every other student."

Olivia began using this activity because she had grown frustrated with the peer-review workshops she had been using and students' lack of engagement in that process:

I was noticing that, without the game, peer review would often kind of get stagnant, or they would only look at a paper for a particular amount of time or only look for particular elements. [The game] was really to get more in-depth and get more out of the experience for more of the students.

Adding a gameful layer to the assignment incentivized student participation while simultaneously adding elements of both critical and embodied movement to the peer review process. Olivia reports that this system, which she is continually modifying and tweaking, has increased student participation and has also improved the quality of feedback students give each other.

Using play to highlight elements of the writing process can encompass a whole range of activities, and the examples seen here underscore the many ways that can happen in writing classrooms. Allowing students to try new roles gives them space to experiment without concern for high-stakes grading, and so inhabiting various roles in the writing process in *Paper Chase's* simulated environment gives students opportunities to consider writing from different perspectives. Working with an audience to communicate ideas, like in Kaylee's Lego and puzzle activities, reinforces the reciprocal nature of the text and the importance of audience awareness and revision. Olivia's peer review scavenger hunt functions similarly, asking students to examine someone *e/se's* text through careful application of the rhetorical concepts discussed in class. All of these activities encourage greater awareness on the part of student writers and enrich and expand students' ideas about audience, about texts, and about the nature of writing itself.

Characteristics of playful pedagogy

This category of play as pedagogy is perhaps the most unexpected of the groupings to come out of this study, and yet its breadth serves as a reminder play has been present in pedagogy all along. These practices, while unique to the particular situations in which they occur, reflect the larger history of play in education. Instructors have long filled the role of creator in their classrooms, and so writing play into a syllabus or unit is in many ways an extension of the work educators already do when creating meaningful, engaging lessons for students. However, justifying the use of play (in this category and in the chapters that follow) creates for many an additional hurdle; although play is embraced in education for the very young, engaging in playful pedagogy at the college level can be seen as frivolous, unproductive, and lacking the rigor expected in a college classroom. This casts the instructor in the unenviable position of feeling compelled to defend the use of playful activities as germane to the goals and tenor of the larger academy.

Meanwhile, the role asked of students in playful pedagogy also often defies their expectations. When asked to upend the role of “serious student” and instead compose themselves as “players,” that shift can be disconcerting and can sometimes backfire for students who are reluctant to expose a different facet of their identity to an audience (in this case, the instructor and their classmates). It is important to remember that play does not always equal fun and that asking students to take chances, both in their interactions with their peers and in their own performances as “students” can involve a great deal of anxiety and risk as they navigate the complexities of academic discourse. Often discussing, even in meta terms, the play that is happening can help students process both

the content and the means of delivery more fluidly. Conversation is key and leads to a sort of collaborative composing and meaning-making simply through discussion.

Although many of these ideas are not unique to the writing classroom, they take on a particular significance and added value in that particular context. Even when these activities do not encourage students to “write” anything down, reflecting on play as composing offers brilliant possibilities for expanding the conversation about what it means to be a writer. The significance of these practices especially to the subfield of multimodal composition are vast, and advancing a theory of play for writing studies offers real possibility as scholars reflect on what composition should and will look like moving forward (particularly in the digital age).

The progressive rhetoric of education has long embraced the idea of play as practice, and so the idea that writing studies instructors continue to embed play in their pedagogy is of little surprise. What is revealing, however, is how these types of practices tend to take a backseat to more formalize game-based learning. This trend reflects not only a privileging of the new and innovative (and particularly of object-based technologies) but also the embeddedness of the dominant masculine discourse that tends to pervade game studies. Discussions of play are expected to be about games (and often focus on a specific canon of games which will be discussed in later chapters). The ideas discussed in this chapter underscore the importance of remembering that sometimes there can be play without a formal “game,” and reflecting on these ideas honors and amplifies the long and successful history of integrating play into the writing classroom.

CHAPTER 5

WRITING CLASSROOMS AS GAME ENVIRONMENTS

A major preoccupation in the discussion of games and play in the classroom concerns the gamification of the class itself (and structuring the class or some aspect of the class as a game). With the recent release of books like Matthew Farber's *Gamify Your Classroom: A Field Guide to Game-Based Learning*, educators are being compelled into the role of game designer. In the Chapter entitled "Gamification and Quest-Based Learning" Farber discusses trends in gamification across culture, using the Starbucks app as one example of gamification outside the classroom (customers are awarded stars for purchases which accumulate to earn prizes and prestige). However, even after highlighting some of the ways in which educators could gamify specific elements of a class, Farber cautions that the implementation of gamified curriculum should not be attempted haphazardly:

Because gamification can strip out the parts of a whole system, taking pieces here and there from this list will not instantly turn your lesson plan into a game. It's not a pantry of ingredients. The elements detailed in this section should be used to deepen the journey or acknowledge "mile markers." I would not simply add a leaderboard; however if it was done in the spirit of fun, it can be engaging. Keep in mind that adding rewards or feedback mechanics will not make a boring activity into something fun. (123)

Farber's caution here is salient (after all, gamification for its own sake stands to accomplish little), and yet his admonition raises more questions than it offers answers. How are teacher to know if something is being done "in the spirit of fun," and who decides

(the instructor? one student? the entire class?) when an activity moves from being “boring” to being “fun”? Using gamification to accomplish course goals or to meet outcomes becomes even more complex when instructors are asked to puzzle out the role of fun in student engagement.

At least part of the conversation about gamification (even as we are parsing what the term means) should be some discussion of motivation. In his 1981 article “Toward a Theory of Intrinsically Motivating Instruction,” Thomas Malone sets out to answer two questions: “1. Why are computer games so captivating? and 2. How can the features that make computer games captivating be used to make learning--especially learning with computers—interesting and enjoyable?” (334).

Malone posits that the answers to these questions can be found by examining the role that motivation plays on the player, and he distinguishes between two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. While extrinsic (or external) motivation relies on outside incentives to entice a person to act, intrinsic motivation comes from the individual’s investment in the activity itself. Malone explains that “an activity is said to be intrinsically motivated if people engage in it ‘for its own sake,’ if they do not engage in the activity in order to receive some external reward such as money or status” (335). Malone determines that, at least in part, an effective and enjoyable educational game would be one that relies on intrinsic motivation rather than on extrinsic factors outside of the player or the play elements of the game.

Subsequently, scholars have drawn on Malone’s discussion on intrinsic motivation to shape discussions of the qualities of games made specifically for instruction. Rosemary Garris, Robert Ahlers, and James E. Driskell focus on outlining the characteristics of

effective instructional games, and so they examine the many dimensions of games to try to parse what qualities “good” games must have in order for them to bring about learning in the player. Specifically, they try to develop games that work to create the “motivated learner,” an ideal student whose “behavior is self-determined, driven by their own volition rather than external forces” (444). Good instructional games, they determine, feed not on extrinsic motivation but on the kind of intrinsic motivation highlighted by Malone and others.

In particular, technical communication pedagogy has explored the value of imbuing parts (or even all) of the classroom with role-playing, asking students to assume the persona of particular parties in real-world conversations about technical communication issues. Barry Batorsky and Laura Renick-Butera discuss their use of role-play in the university technical communication classroom. They observe that “it is easy for students to dismiss rhetorical problems in which they are not fully engaged,” and so they argue that the role-play structure simulates circumstances in which students can and will be more fully engaged (153). Building on a constructivist pedagogical model, students are asked to take on the role of an individual faced with a real-world situation. This role-play, they argue, helps students more fully invest in the assignments required of them in the class, something that can be a challenge without such structures in place. Because the classroom becomes a place where students can safely assume roles not easily performed in real-world spaces, Batorsky and Renick Butera contend that “classes become student centered; we become facilitators of learning rather than lecturers, and students become actively and critically engaged in authentic problems of organizational and technical communication” (148).

Tracy Bridgeford describes her approach to teaching technical communication as one that values “a narrative way of knowing.” By embracing storytelling as a way of making meaning, Bridgeford’s approach begins by framing each class within some theme into which narratives can then be woven (she uses the example of agricultural communication). She then incorporates stories—some fictional, some not—that draw on issues and anxieties at the forefront of the theme. Students are asked to imagine themselves as party to some aspect of the story as they begin to craft documents that contend with some aspect of the theme. Bridgeford’s goal is to encourage and extend “the connections the students make between this imaginary ‘playacting’ and the kind of communicative interactions in which students will be expected to participate in the world of work” (121). Other scholars have gone on to extend these kinds of role plays by gamifying part (or even all of) the classroom so that students fill the role of player as they move through the requirements of the course.

Lee Sheldon, for example, details his construction of several “multiplayer classroom syllabi” that casts students as characters in role-play course scenarios. By structuring the class itself as a game, Sheldon’s students create characters, earn experience points instead of grades, and “play” their way through the class in much the same way that an individual might move through a massively-multiplayer game (MMO).

Other scholars, however, are more hesitant to embrace models that rely on achievements and points. In *The Gamification of Learning and Instruction: Game-based Methods and Strategies for Training and Education*, for example, Karl Kapp argues that gamification is not badges, points, and rewards. Unfortunately, the least exciting and least useful elements of games have been labeled

‘gamification.’ This is unfortunate because the real power of game-based thinking is in the other elements of games: engagement, story-telling, visualization of characters, and problem-solving. (12)

Kapp insists that teachers have been using many of the key elements of games for a long time, but his proposal aims to bring those strategies together under a unified theory of game-based learning. Thus, for Kapp this means thinking of gamification as “a careful and considered application of game thinking to solving problems and encouraging learning using all of the elements of games that are appropriate” (15-16). One possible motive for Kapp’s broadening of the definition of gamification is his desire to legitimize gameful practices by couching them as a sort of evolution of existing best practices. However broad the definition of gamification, the instructors in this study who discussed creating a game-like environment in their writing classrooms all seemed to have at least some sense of the scope of the current conversation in education in general about such practices.

Current practices

Interestingly, while many of the participants discussed the idea of the classroom as a game, none of them had taken the step to gamify their entire classroom. This may be because of the limited scope of the sample and the nature of the classes being discussed, but further research is needed to determine the degree to which this type of practice is happening, not only in college-level writing classrooms but in college classrooms across the board. However, a few participants discussed having “gamified” a portion of a class, *Abilities and achievements as extra credit (Kaylee)*

In 2011, Kaylee implemented some gamification in her first-year writing class. She is unsure where she first got the idea, but she remembers having watching a video online

with Jesse Schell (his 2010 D.I.C.E. Summit talk, “Design Outside the Box”) and hearing talk of “someone who had developed a class where, rather than grades, had students leveling up” (that someone was the aforementioned Lee Sheldon). Intrigued by this idea, and hoping to better engage her own students, Kaylee started to consider how she might incorporate the idea of the classroom itself as a game into her first-year writing syllabus. Kaylee remembers: “I thought that was a great idea, but I didn’t want to go all the way with basing my entire grading system on it, so I wanted to try it out as just an extra credit system to see how students would respond.”

Rather than make her entire class into a game, she decided to implement a system of achievements and trophies to help motivate certain behaviors in her students. Kaylee put together a list of tasks related to the curriculum for that course: visiting the campus writing center to discuss a given writing assignment, providing evidence of attending a lecture or event outside of class, or even simply coming to office hours and asking a productive question. Kaylee assigned each task points depending on the difficulty or importance of the task and on her own desire to see students complete the tasks. She admits that “sometimes I would just try to incentivize things that I wanted done in the class, like when we had a guest speaker, I would give them a point for every good question that they asked, so of course [when I implemented that achievement] they asked a lot of questions and interacted with the speaker.”

The points accumulated throughout the semester, and toward the end of the course, those points could be used by students to unlock what Kaylee called “abilities.” These abilities gave students the power to earn extra credit, improve a poor score on an assignment, request extra time for an assignment, and lay claim to a number of other

desirable “extras.” Kaylee reasoned that it was a more equitable way to handle the kinds of extraneous requests that often come up for students:

Students always want to negotiate with the teacher about things like, “Can I get an absence waived?” or “Can I get an extension on this assignment?” or this or that. They’re always trying to negotiate for these things and so what I wanted to do is basically say, “Yeah, you can have those things if you *work* for them. You can gather up your points and then purchase that with the points that you’ve got.”

For the most part, Kaylee was satisfied with the outcomes of the system she created, but she acknowledges that “ultimately, it worked for the students who are already find extra credit appealing, and the students that don’t tend to do extra credit also didn’t tend to do these gamified points either.” Although Kaylee was pleased with the results, she is interested in studying whether this kind of system can in some way draw in those more reticent students to engage with the incentives and thus with the class in general.

Incentivizing engagement (Olivia)

Olivia implemented a similar approach in her writing classes and was relatively pleased with the results. Having taught several different composition classes, Olivia decided in 2013 to create a system of points to incentivize participation and engagement beyond the minimum required in the syllabus and for the course’s major assignments. At the outset of each course, Olivia alludes to the kinds of activities and behaviors that will earn special extra points or incentives, and then she folds in opportunities throughout the term as the students progress through the various course units.

For example, in a “Public Issues” themed writing course, Olivia offers students extra points for tying real-world events in to the ideas discussed and practiced in the class. Olivia encourages students to attend public arguments, and she provides them with suggestions throughout the term. She incentivizes that behavior on a sort of loose model of extra credit or back credit: “I tell them that if they attend three [public arguments] they get extra credit, or they get extra kinds of benefits with participation or absences and that kind of thing.”

Having used the system for a few semesters, Olivia continued with the model she had created because she says she appreciates the utility of gamification in helping encourage behaviors that are ancillary to the actual curriculum but perhaps no less important to student success.

I definitely think that even tying so much as like coming to office hours and getting feedback than is generally available in the classroom setting to a kind of gamified model helps. If you come twice and get feedback, you then link to a particular kind of benefit in the class which obviously [that behavior] does kind of informally anyway.

Again, though, Olivia reports observing a pattern of student behavior similar to that reported by Kaylee, wherein higher achieving students tend to be the ones most interested in reaping the benefits of the incentivized system. Ultimately, however, she sees potential in the system and is relatively satisfied with the ways in which the incentives reinforce the kinds of behaviors that she believes are beneficial to students in the writing classroom:

Usually the ones that come and want more one-on-one feedback tend to do better anyway, but if they see it as tied to if you attend five times . . . I've just seen that that really does work well and then once that's happened they'll come back more because they'll find out that it's a beneficial strategy anyway.

In some ways, these types of incentivized classroom set-ups serve to promote the broader values of the class culture (participation, involvement, active inquiry, etc.) while at the same time shaping or training the behaviors of individual students to be agents in their own academic success.

Plans for future classes

In addition to mentioning practices currently in use in their writing classrooms, some of the respondents mentioned structures that they were building for future classes that imagined the curriculum or classroom (or some subsections of it) as a game. That some of the instructors interviewed expressed curiosity about the idea of gamifying the classroom again points to the level of interest in this kind of practice but does not indicate how pervasive the notion may yet be in actual classrooms.

Ideas for “choose-your-own-role” technology training (Barry)

Barry, who does not currently use games in any of his writing classrooms, talks about developing what he calls a “choose your own role” system in his classroom. His department had recently purchased institutional access to the online tutorial site Lynda.com. Lynda.com bills itself as an “online learning company that helps anyone learn business, software, technology and creative skills,” and so the site includes a whole hosts of video tutorials on everything from basic office software to photography and video

programs to coding languages like Python and Java. Barry hopes to leverage that access in his class, asking students to role-play their way through a tutorial series:

I was thinking about setting up some kind of scenario where students would have to select one of a [list of] pre-selected, pre-screened software programs, whether it's Photoshop or InDesign or whatever it might be, and then use the tutorials on Lynda.com to kind of teach themselves how to use it.

Barry envisions crafting some kind of narrative within either the syllabus or the unit guidelines to lead in to the project so that students could see the larger structure of the sequence of activities and more easily orient themselves to the game-like environment.

Barry muses on how he might best accomplish that goal:

I was going to set up a kind of story, role-playing scenario where they would have to learn this program. For the purposes of the assignment, that would help them kind of achieve one of the multiple end-results of the scenario I'm going to develop, so kind of like a choose-your-own-adventure with branching story lines, that kind of thing.

Even merely musing over what such a plan might look like triggers for Barry a sort of sub-reflection, and he discusses having taught an American Culture course to students in Korea. Having taught there for several years before returning to the United States, he talks about how useful it might have been to set up a role-playing game in that space. He imagines setting up class sessions as games wherein students would engage with some sort of pre-scripted story prompts about life in the United States by taking on and enacting a given role in that story "as a way to help them understand the performance of

culture and things like that.” This observation, that the enactment of roles might help students in a variety of disciplines better understand how culture is *performed*, underscores one possible motivation for structuring the class more formally as a role-playing game.

Ideas for stakeholder roleplaying game (Kaylee)

Kaylee also discusses her plans to use a larger role-playing classroom setup for an upcoming second-year general education writing course for honors students that she has themed, “Climate Change and Crisis Communication.” For the class, Kaylee has built what she bashfully calls a “choose-your-own-adventure type of thing” in the online tool Twine. Twine allows users to create “non-linear” stories which then publish as HTML documents that require the reader to make choices to proceed through the story and that can range from simple text-based stories to graphically-rich, highly interactive games. Kaylee’s game (or story, as she uses the names interchangeably), asks each student to take on the role of a stakeholder in a conversation about climate change. Each student’s choice of role (and their simulated adoption of that role’s interests and values) then shapes how that student’s major assignment for the course will be focused, with one option for the students themselves being to create a game: “one of the assignments that they could ultimately choose is to develop a game that is a risk communication game regarding climate change or energy conservation or sustainability.”

Kaylee’s rationale behind this assignment comes from her desire to help students contextualize the documents they are creating, to provide a set of real-world situations and stakes that impress upon students some of the realities of communication in spaces beyond the classroom. Having encountered Twine in one of her own classes as a PhD

student, Kaylee felt the pairing of Twine’s narrative function with the theming of her own classroom might work well for her purposes. Citing inspiration from the ideas of scholars like Tracy Bridgeford about using narrative in technical communication classrooms, Kaylee suggests that her use of Twine in this way would give her an opportunity to build storytelling into the fabric of her course. Because of the rather broad population of the course (a general education writing course with a focus of students in science and technology majors), Kaylee wanted to structure the class in a way that would allow for students to create functional documents within their respective majors and interest areas. By reflecting the complex realities of a conversation about an issue, Kaylee imagines opening up a wider array of possibilities for students:

Climate change is a topic that really sits at the nexus of political debates, of economic debates, of social and civic debates, and so it really can lend itself to a variety of interests and majors, so rather than have them only create through some kind of typical risk technical communication document, I want them to think about, ok, here’s this dilemma of climate change, here are the audiences and the characteristics that they have who we’re working with.

What kind of message would you create?

Kaylee also sought to model for her students a possible tool that they could use for projects later on in the course. The design of one of the major assignments for the course involves creating a public argument document that moves beyond the traditional printed page, so along with encouraging students to consider using tools like Twine, Kaylee asks students to think of other multimodal ways to communicate as a stakeholder in the conversation about climate change, including “creating content for a website, or creating a

video, or a radio commercial spot, or a game.” By using Twine to model conversation, Kaylee hopes that students’ own compositions will prompt them to wrestle with the rhetorical complexities of technical communication in a situation more closely aligned with real-life scenarios than many traditional technical writing class assignments, and that her game will also model emerging media and communication practices for students in order to encourage them to reconsider the ways in which ideas can be publicly circulated in these complex conversations.

Interestingly, Kaylee seems hesitant to endorse her idea as a game, questioning throughout her reflection how “gamey” her activity really is. As her interview wraps up, she settles in to the notion that it is a game, but with a caveat: “It’s not the most exciting game, but it’s something I built.” This hesitation, expressed by all the participants who reported having ideas in this category, reflects the stakes inherent in committing to making an entire class into a game, something that is discussed further in chapter 8. What is clear is that, with the rise of more mainstream literature endorsing such practices, more research needs to be done in the coming years to trace the trajectory of the incorporation of these ideas into actual classrooms.

Characteristics of writing classrooms as game environments

Despite the buzz surrounding gamification and gamefully-designed classrooms, this category contains the fewest examples from those interviewed in the study. Perhaps because this type of incorporation of games involves a transformation of the entire class framework, the instructors interviewed here are interested in the possibilities but unready to transform their entire course into a game. The play involved in this category is so all-encompassing that the class itself is “played,” and so the game and the class are the

same thing. As appealing as this may seem, it fundamentally changes the roles of the participants, both student and teacher. For instructors, they move into role of game designer, a role that is admittedly not dissimilar from the role of course designer. When designing a writing course, instructors are responsible for creating lessons that map to outcomes and desired results in much the same way that a game designer creates scenarios that enable the player to move toward the win state (or at least the end) of the game. What is unclear is how the instructor's design can (or should) act on the students as players. Incentivizing behavior in the classroom is nothing new, but the types of motivation elicited by gamification have the potential to be mostly extrinsic and thus less effective in building skills or encouraging critical thinking that will stay with students over the long term.

As students move into the roles of players, their goals shift to succeeding in the game but not always to building real knowledge that can be applied outside the game-classroom. Students compose themselves (and their behavior) in relation to the game, and so it is unclear whether students will behave the same when outside the game, but this also can be said of other modes of composition. As composition instructors continue to look for ways to incorporate gameful design into their classrooms, the ideas presented in this category will likely continue to expand and shift in ways that will allow for a closer look at the connection between gamification and actual learning in the writing classroom.

CHAPTER 6

WRITING ABOUT GAMES

At the 2000 Digital Arts and Culture Conference, noted game studies scholar Jesper Juul gave a paper entitled, “What Computer Games Can and Can’t Do.” During that talk, he acknowledges that game studies as a field has debated the role of textual analysis in games research for many years. In wrestling with himself with how games should be approached, Juul reiterated the tensions between narratology and ludology (as discussed earlier in this project), and he reported on his plan to create a framework that could distinguish what is and is not a game and to then determine what that means. In so doing, he problematized analyzing games as texts because, as he said at the time, “We lack a theoretical understanding of what games are and can [be], and how they relate to the narrative media such as the novel or the movie. We lack the tools to evaluate and place a computer game both historically and in relation to other games.” Juul also cited his own scholarly lineage as foundation for his critique:

My background is from literature, but when I have created games commercially, it was very obvious that we were not discussing plot, character, narrators, and so on. We were rather discussing interface, level design, gameplay, play mechanics. Because these are the kind of issues you have to think about.

Juul’s ambitious project, to create a wholly new framework for studying games, resonated with many as forward-thinking, even revolutionary.

However, since that talk, other game studies scholars like Mia Consalvo and Nathan Dutton have taken issue with such a narrow characterization of how textual

analysis works in literature and in textual studies writ large. Even as Consalvo and Dutton wrestle with whether games are or are not narratives, they remind scholars like Juul that textual analysis of any kind is not confined to the components of what a text says, but instead should seek to unpack the ways in which meaning is made within and by a text. Thus, Consalvo and Dutton propose a framework that encourages “the qualitative, critical analysis of games as broadly figured ‘texts’” and encourage other scholars to engage in similar endeavors. This type of approach acknowledges that, to do textual analysis well in relation to *any* artifact, the reader/player/consumer must strike a balance between acknowledging the uniqueness’s of a particular text type and embracing the tools already at our disposal from like text types.

This chapter heeds the call of Consalvo and Dutton (and many others) as it looks at the ways that instructors use games as texts for analysis and engagement in the writing classroom. Textual analysis in the field of composition studies has been widely researched and discussed. Charles Bazerman and Paul Prior discuss the ways in which textual analysis is in many ways foundational for writing studies. They argue that textual analysis is integral to the writing classroom: “To understand writing, we need to explore the practices that people engage in to produce texts as well as the ways that writing practices gain their meanings and functions as dynamic elements of specific cultural settings” (2). They underscore the importance of teaching students about how writing (and writers) work, focusing not only on what the text says, but on *how* the text communicates meaning.

Many scholars attempt to imagine how the study of games as texts might best be accomplished in writing and English studies classrooms. Jeroen Bourgonjon, for example,

asserts that video games should be included under the banner of literary studies but that they cannot be approached in the same manner as what he calls “traditional texts.”

Instead, Bourgonjon argues for a more multidimensional approach that accounts for a greater appreciation of the literacies the video game players bring to the classroom. John Alberti cites conversations from within composition studies as parallel to that surrounding the analysis of games as texts:

It is worth reminding ourselves that the development of the process/product dichotomy within composition studies was as much a strategic rhetorical move as it was an empirical description, aimed at decentering the centrality of the printed text in an effort to move from writing as noun to writing as verb. From the beginning, the process movement understood itself as reframing questions of authority, of who could or should control the production of meaning as well as of whose interests are being served in the writing classroom. The inherent and inescapably interactive nature of gaming likewise complicates questions of who authors and authorizes meaning in a discourse community. (266)

The exploration of the discursive nature of games falls in line with the long and well-researched history of textual analysis in composition studies, encouraging reader/players to reconsider the function of the text and the roles of everyone involved in the meaning-making process.

Even writing around games can be fruitful. Lindsay Sabatino, for example, discusses her use of the Facebook game *Mafia Wars* as an exploratory space through which students are then asked to reflect in writing. Not only does the act of writing about playing

allow students a space to consider rhetorical strategies, the act of gameplay itself reinforces the careful attention to the rhetorical situation inherent in the game and the role of the player (and others) in the creation of the text. Because meaning is being actively made through the playing of the game, the text continues to change shape as both the players and the algorithms of the game compose within that space.

Those algorithms are themselves a preoccupation of many game studies scholars, and Ian Bogost has famously set forth what he calls “procedural rhetoric” to encapsulate the manner by which meaning is made in games. He defines procedural rhetoric in his 2007 book *Persuasive Games* and delves into the particulars of the term and the accompanying implications. Procedural rhetoric, he explains, is

the art of persuasion through rule-based representations and interactions rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures. This type of persuasion is tied to the core affordances of the computer: computers run processes, they execute calculations and rule-based symbolic manipulations. But I want to suggest that videogames, unlike some forms of computational persuasion, have unique persuasive powers. While “ordinary” software like word processors and photo editing applications are often used to create expressive artifacts, those completed artifacts do not usually rely on the computer in order to bear meaning. Videogames are computational artifacts that have cultural meaning as computational artifacts. (Bogost ix)

Applying this definition absolutely to a game or game space, however, can become highly problematic. Miguel Sicart addresses the potential for such an understanding of

games to severely limit the conversation about the full context of a game and of the stakes (and stakeholders) surrounding that game. “The assumption behind mainstream proceduralism,” Sicart argues, “is that the meaning of games is contained exclusively in the formal system of the game.” Sicart eschews this notion, focusing instead on highlighting the ways in which players themselves make meaning in their interactions with the game. As they negotiate what the game will and will not allow, players are writing the game and shaping meaning through the act of play. Sicart objects to the limitations that procedural rhetoric imposes on the larger game system, particularly when scholars consider the role of relationships and people in games:

Procedurality explains the whys and hows of how game technology operates, and how games can aspire, as designed objects, to funnel behaviors for reflection. Play, however, is personal, individual, and communitarian, played with others, for others, in an intensely, deeply *personal* way. And politics and ethics are personal, too. Therefore, when a player engages with a game, we enter the realm of play, where the rules are a dialogue and the message, a conversation.

Responsible analysis of games as texts includes some consideration of the elements of Bogost’s procedural rhetoric but must also account for the personal, human elements that players bring to the game when they play.

Tabletop games

Typically, scholarship that addresses the use of games as texts in education (particularly in the way they are used in this section) deals with the use of computer games and rarely mention games outside of these electronically-mediated environments,

sometimes referred to as “analog” or “tabletop” games. This study uses the term “tabletop” game to refer to any game not played on a computer, mainly to avoid wading into the technical inaccuracy of labeling games as “digital” and “analog.” A survey of the articles in the journal *Games and Culture*, for example, reveals multiple articles about games like *World of Warcraft*, *Grand Theft Auto*, *Tomb Raider*, and *The Sims* and yet few that focus exclusively on non-computer games. For example, a search for the MMORPG *World of Warcraft* yields 130 results, while a search for the classic board game *Scrabble* returns zero results. The field’s preoccupation with computer games can overshadow the possibilities inherent in tabletop games like board games, card games, and paper role-playing games. In some ways, these games offer a broader range of possibilities because they are less limited by issues of access (something this project discusses further in chapter 8).

Features of storytelling in Gloom (Daria)

Daria points to a few examples of tabletop games she has used as texts in her various writing classes. In a creative writing class, for example, Daria uses the card game *Gloom* as an example text to highlight some of the key features of story-telling. The description of the game on the Atlas Games web site reveals a sort of darkly comedic text:

In the *Gloom* card game, you assume control of the fate of an eccentric family of misfits and misanthropes. The goal of the game is sad, but simple: you want your characters to suffer the greatest tragedies possible before passing on to the well-deserved respite of death. You'll play horrible mishaps like Pursued by Poodles or Mocked by Midgets on your own characters to lower their Self-Worth scores, while trying to cheer your

opponents' characters with marriages and other happy occasions that pile on positive points. The player with the lowest total Family Value wins.

("Atlas Games: Gloom")

By asking students to play the game and then reflect on the structures of its stories, Daria encourages greater consideration of the complexities of narrative.

Textual analysis of Monopoly (Daria)

Meanwhile, in other writing classes, Daria uses the classic board game *Monopoly* to lead into more theoretical discussions. Because the game is familiar to most students, playing together creates a space to engage a known text in new and different ways. Daria offers them a brief history of the game to help students better understand the rhetorical situation surrounding the text:

Monopoly was designed to teach players about the evil and inevitability of capitalism, but it's so much fun that people often ignore this. As a result, it teaches people capitalism as an unproblematic system [in which] someone can achieve a winning status.

By approaching the game as a cultural object, Daria uses *Monopoly* in much the same way that instructors might use an essay out of a thematic reader in a writing course like this.

The text is both topically and structurally useful in the writing classroom; it provides a basis for discussion not only of what the text says but how it says it and how effectively it does so.

Rhetorical strategy in Diplomacy (Daria)

Daria also uses the board game *Diplomacy* to both discuss and enact rhetorical strategy in the writing classroom. *Diplomacy* was created in 1954 and is currently

trademarked by Avalon Hills, a brand of Wizards of the Coast Games that currently also owns the expansive strategic board games franchise *Axis & Allies*. *Diplomacy* is distinct from many other strategic board games in that, in addition to moving pieces and strategizing resource placement, each round of game play includes what is called a “Diplomatic Phase.” In this phase, all the players in the game meet for a period of conversation that can sometimes last as long as 30 minutes, with groups discussing anything and everything related to the game at hand. The game rules warn that “these conversation usually consist of bargaining or joint military planning, but they may include exchanges of information, denouncements, threats, spreading of rumors, and so on.” The multiplicity of rhetorical strategies available to players during this phase becomes especially useful when discussing argument and rhetorical strategy in the writing classroom.

Daria has a small group of students play while the rest of the class observes. Because she uses this game in classes with strong rhetoric focus, she tries to make sure that all the students get the chance to be both player and observer. For several weeks at the beginning of class, she chooses a new group of students to play each class meeting to ensure that, at the end of that cycle of weeks, everyone has had a chance to play and has had to engage in a round of diplomatic negotiations. She notes that here students catch on quickly, especially because, despite the complexities of game play, the objective is fairly simple:

The goal is to further the objectives of your nation, period. So as a group of people play, the rest of the class watches, seeing when the students are

using ethos, pathos, or logos (and the appeals get filtered through quickly and are highly visible in this sort of situation).

Because Daria is concurrently discussing rhetorical strategies with the class, her expectation (which she makes explicit throughout the playing of the game) is that students will draw on the terminology they have discussed. She reviews the terminology throughout the weeks in which game play is happening, and she reminds them to try to fold in these ideas as they extemporaneously compose their arguments. She even encourages players to engage with logical fallacies (like bandwagoning, for example) and to try to use them in practice without getting “caught” by other players and by observers. Ultimately, the game, and Daria’s careful construction of the classroom so that players are both participating in game play and also observing that play, serves multiple purposes. Daria explains that “students who play have to reflect on the challenges of using and analyzing rhetoric while in the middle of action, and the students who observed are able to make comments about what they are able to see from the outside.” The game functions as both a space of engagement and a text for reflection as students engage with the rhetorical complexities of argument happening in real-time.

Computer games

Despite the relative ease of incorporation associated with tabletop games, most of the instructors in this study who discussed using formal games focused on computer games, particularly in this category where games are being used as textual objects or subject matter. By asking students to interact with computer games as texts (and then to analyze and even write back to or alongside those games), the instructors in this study

accomplish a range of goals in their writing classrooms that align well with the desired outcomes they have set forth for their courses.

Textual analysis of Endgame: Syria (Phil)

Phil asks students to engage with the game *Endgame: Syria* as the textual object for a rhetorical analysis essay. The game is produced by Auroch Digital Ltd.'s "GameTheNews" arm, which includes other titles such as *Cow Crusher* (wherein players run a cartoon meat packaging plant) and *NarcoGuerra* (a role-playing game that explores the "War on Drugs" in Mexico). *Endgame: Syria* asks players to assume the role of Syrian rebel in the ongoing conflict in that region. The game's creators emphasize the real foundations of the game, and they include on their site an article devoted solely to discussing the sources they used to inform the creation of the game (Rawlings). Created in 2012, the game was designed to offer players a chance to interact with the circumstances surrounding the ongoing conflict and to learn about the intricacies of the situation in some way other than reading a more traditional news article.

In his class, Phil encourages students to engage not only with the game but with its context, and many students seek out information on the GametheNews web site to augment their understanding and analysis of the game. The game itself, however, is the centerpiece of the assignment; students are encouraged to look at the choices made by developers within the game to determine the ways in which the game text functions on and for its audience. Phil reports that his students seemed surprised by the choice of a game as text, but he notes that they seemed eager to engage with the game and to analyze the textual elements therein, talking about theme, tone, stance, and the like in much the same way that they would with a short-story or a non-fiction essay. In fact, Phil thinks that

the students were almost more willing to offer critical analysis of aspects of the game than they were with other texts he used in similar ways.

Phil does note, however, that the “gamefulness” of *Endgame* became a point of frustration for many of the students in his class. Having discussed play and fun earlier in the course, students were prepared to engage with games as a part of the curriculum. However, upon encountering *Endgame*, many students were surprised and even displeased as they began to realize the serious nature of the game and the real exigencies that the game revealed through its narrative and gameplay. For some students, the focus of their essays analyzing the text were decidedly negative and a bit more narrow in scope than Phil would have liked.

What ended up happening was that because the game itself is not enjoyable to most of the students, [some] just did not like it and they focused on that. Some of them just outright hated it and those first drafts focused on “I didn’t like this game. It wasn’t enjoyable. I like to play sports; I don’t like to play video games” and that type of thing.

Phil says he is unsure if those issues of personal dislike interfered with students’ ability to think critically about the game, but on the whole, he was satisfied with the work students did in responding to the text. Phil reports that students on the whole did well in their analysis essays about the game, and he says that he plans to use the game again for similar purposes.

Procedural rhetoric in Limbo and Papers, Please (Charlie)

Charlie, himself an avid players of video games, struggled for a while to find a place for games in his classroom. When he began thinking about incorporating games, his

approach was, he admits, a bit frenetic. Because of his own enthusiasm, he included a number of different games and lenses through which students could view those games, all of which he says seemed to overwhelm the students and muddle the effectiveness of the use of games as textual examples. In his first course, for example, he struggled to help students apply the tenets of Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad to a handful of pre-chosen game texts, and he was unhappy with the results. He felt that students were struggling to find footing with the concepts and that the writing they produced was, in his words, "scattered." To try to focus the objectives of the use of games, and to streamline the course both for himself and his students, Charlie decided to concentrate on Bogost's notion of procedural rhetoric:

After the scattered approaches I saw the first time, I realized that since this was a research-intensive unit, it made more sense to have students directly apply procedural rhetoric to a game of their choosing, and spend time inside and outside of class playing games in support of understanding procedural rhetoric.

One of the games Charlie uses as an object of textual analysis is the 2010 platform game *Limbo*. Available on most major game systems (including Xbox, PlayStation, Windows, and even Android and iOS for tablets and mobile devices), *Limbo* is an award-winning minimalist puzzle game whose main character is a nameless young boy. Charlie is particularly interested in highlighting and discussing procedural rhetoric, and so for this game students are asked to play the game outside of class to support discussion and writing about that aspect of gameplay. Charlie chose this particular game for the ways in

which it could possibly highlight “the more expressive possibilities” of games when considered as texts that exemplify and complicate the notion of procedural rhetoric.

More recently, Charlie has changed that same lesson to use the game *Papers, Please*. Another critically-acclaimed game, *Papers, Please* is a puzzle game set in which players assume to role of an immigration officer in a fictional country. Billed by creator Lucas Pope Games as “a dystopian document thriller,” the game asks players to make decisions about who can and cannot enter the country, taking bribes and dealing with corrupt officials along the way. When he shifted from *Limbo* to *Papers, Please* as the main textual object for his course, Charlie began to expand the activities surrounding the game to integrate the use of the game more fully into the larger class plan and to leverage the common text to encourage students to engage in more collaborative writing. One example of this is the group project he assigns mid-way through the unit. Students are sorted into groups and asked to use a simple presentation software like Google slides to create a presentation that focuses on some example of procedural rhetoric in the game. Those groups become instrumental for many students as they work to build their own knowledge base about rhetorical strategies employed by the game.

Because the focus of his discussions centers on procedural rhetoric, Charlie feels compelled to help students build a vocabulary and knowledge base. To that end, he says they “spend a lot of time in class playing games as well, where we try to identify and assess the procedural rhetoric of games in class, [thereby] building procedural literacy in students to aid them in their own analysis.” Again, by working (and playing) together during class meetings, Charlie hopes to build within the cohort a community within which students can build a shared knowledge based about the rhetorical aspects of these games.

Overall, Charlie feels like this unit accomplishes a great deal in terms of engaging students in thinking about rhetoric and writing, both within the games and in students' writing about the games. Charlie admits that he was pleasantly surprised at the response from his students. He observes that students seem to be engaged more fully in conversations as they begin to build a vocabulary about the games and about the procedural rhetoric they discuss within those games. He notes that, while students who self-identify as "gamers" tend to really enjoy the unit, those students are not necessarily the ones who move through the unit most successfully. He notes that some of the best work that comes out of this unit often comes from students who do *not* identify as "gamers," a welcome surprise given Charlie's initial nervousness about how incorporating games in a writing classroom would work. His experience, he says, shakes up the notion that using games in the classroom somehow limits the appeal and reach of the curriculum:

I've seen students of all kinds, both those signing up for a game with a *Zelda* reference right in the title that advertises itself as a course focused on videogames, and a "regular" ENC 1101 course respond well to these activities and getting the kinds of things out of them that I want them to, like awareness of who their audience is supposed to be, and how to appeal to them in a composition, and how to effectively combine images and text together.

Even though the content can be dense (particularly in the discussion of some of the minutiae of procedural rhetoric), Charlie says he feels like the discussion and writing that come out of this unit tends to be some of the best work he sees in his writing classes.

Rhetorical situation in Portal 2 and The Stanley Parable (Louis)

Louis also uses games throughout his course, but one of the first ways he uses them in his larger course sequence for first-year writing is as texts themselves. Before asking students to design their own games (a lesson that is discussed later in this study in the chapter entitled “Writing in/for Games), Louis introduces two games as model texts for beginning discussions with his students about the rhetorical aspects of games. Because all writing classes at Louis’s institution are taught in computer lab classrooms, he is able to have games loaded onto the computers for students to play during class time using the institution’s *Steam* license. The labs already have several games loaded onto the student computers, so Louis feels fortunate to have easy access to these games for himself and his classes.

The first game he introduces is *Portal 2*. The game was released in 2011 by Valve Corporation and was the follow-up to the wildly popular 2007 game *Portal*, an innovative and award-winning puzzle game. In both games, the first-person game play happens through Chell, the game’s female protagonist. The sequel, however, also allows for game play in cooperative mode, wherein a pair of players can embody two robots, Atlas and P-body. In both games, the player or players must navigate a series of puzzles that begin with little information. In *Portal*, the game begins with Chell waking up alone in a small lab-like space with no door and little indication of what is happening; similarly, in *Portal 2*, Chell awakens in a hotel room alone. Louis includes *Portal 2* to show students an example of a first-person game that does *not* involve combat, something that he points out is atypical in the larger canon of popular first-person games that includes mostly shooters (games like *Halo* and *Call of Duty* are some common examples of best-selling first-person

games). He suggests that the game is a bit more accessible to non-gamer students because of the open nature of the game play.

Louis also incorporates a game called *The Stanley Parable* in the first unit of his course. The game by Galaxy Café originated as a modification on the Valve Corporation's 3-D game engine Source in 2011 and later evolved into an independent game in 2012. *The Stanley Parable* is also a first-person game; it also does not involve combat, but unlike *Portal 2*, *The Stanley Parable* is structured as a first-person narrative, with a voiceover narrator actually moving through the game with the player (who plays as a random office worker named, of course, "Stanley"). Instead of solving puzzles, players are simply asked to make choices as they role-play their way through the game's many branching options. The game has multiple endings, each relying on the choices made by the character in the course of his or her game play.

Louis uses both of these games alongside lessons about various aspects of writing and rhetorical situation to offer students a context within which they can discuss the terms and elements that they are learning as they relate to specific texts. Louis asserts that the affordances offered by games as texts are somewhat unique and can generate more complex conversation and inquiry:

Games teach rhetorical situation in a fairly unique way because you are inserted into a situation as a player . . . One of the things I've talked with them about are the rules of play and culture in a game, and how that translates to [discussions of] rhetorical situation well. When you're in a system like in *Portal 2*, even though the system is fantasy, how do you know you're in a post-apocalyptic world? How do you know you don't trust the

one robot but you do trust the other robot? How is the game making arguments to you to let you know what time and place you are and why things aren't quite right? That's a really fun conversation to have because it takes the terminology we learn early on [in lessons about rhetorical situation] and shows it in a practical light, so it's like, "Oh, yeah. I know all this stuff. How DO I know that?" Because of the arguments that are being made to you by the game.

Louis maintains that being able to use games as texts for analysis and reflection offers students a space in which they can better understand the complexities of the writing process and of the rhetorical choices surrounding any textual object."

Walk-throughs for narrative games (Daria)

While many of the instructors discussed activities that asked students to examine the rhetorical structure of games, others chose to use games as contexts for introducing writing in a specific mode. In her technical writing classes, Daria uses the space around games as fodder for one of the typical genres expected in such a class: procedural manuals. Though similar to the instruction assignments discussed earlier in the chapter on play as it is more broadly considered, this approach differs in that it is anchored not only in an activity but in the larger culture of users already familiar with and invested in the production of documentation related to that activity. Daria's goal is to engage students in the rhetorical aspects of creating procedural manuals by immersing them in a situation that requires careful consideration of how the document they create will be received by a real community of users. To do this, she asks students to create a walk-through for a section of a video game.

Daria focuses especially on the narrative elements of video games in this assignment. Specifically, she asks students to think about the ways in which players navigate games and then consider how best to translate that into verbal instruction. Using a variety of narrative-based computer games, Daria's students produce brief documents that walk players through a small section or level of a game. The goal, Daria says, is deceptively simple: describe "how to get from point A to B in a narrative based game." The process by which students work toward that goal, however, underscores many of the challenges of technical writing.

Group writing of walk-throughs as instructions (Virginia)

Virginia takes a similar approach in her undergraduate professional writing class, devoting an entire unit to the creation of video game walk-throughs. She chose to try this kind of assignment because of her own frustrations with the predictability and lack of context of more standard professional writing assignments. Because writing instructions is an important part of professional writing, it is a critical component of any such class, but the ways in which it is outlined in many textbooks tends to be fairly generic and often far outside of any real-world context. Virginia explains that, because the project is rooted in a game, students tend to find the assignment both inviting and challenging:

The alternative is like, "write instructions for how to tie your shoe." That's so boring and so overused, that, for them, the chance to use games in the classroom is exciting. At first, they're sort of like, "Wow, this is going to be really easy. I can't believe I'm playing games in the classroom. Man, this is awesome and it's going to be so easy," and then they start actually trying to write a walk-through and they realize that no, it's very challenging.

By teaching the same skill sets as a more traditional instruction assignment but in a more complex and interactive context, Virginia says her students engage quickly and deeply with the walk-through assignment.

For the assignment, Virginia splits the students in the class into small groups and gives them a list of games from which they can choose. She has, in the past, allowed groups to suggest games, but in later iterations she decided it was easier for her to simply ask students to choose from the list she offers them. She says that limiting their choices allows her to make sure not only that she is familiar with the game but also that the game will sustain the group through the assignment without becoming overwhelming or too unwieldy.

For the first few weeks, class time is spent learning how to play the games and getting settled into groups. Players are given time to learn to use the controls, to map out the game, and to begin to think about what they want to explain and how that might take shape. Students are encouraged to gather data as they play, including notes about their own game play, screenshots, and related content they use to help them become proficient in the game. During this time, Virginia offers several pre-writing and brainstorming prompts to get students thinking about what they need to attend to as they play and consider the game. This formative time also allows the groups to begin to consider how they will work together to accomplish the goals of the project.

After the first few weeks, the students begin drafting. Because it is a group project, the challenges of writing with other people become apparent right away, and so class time is spent discussing strategies for group composing and how to best work together as a unit toward a cohesive end document. That, too, Virginia says, underscores the outcomes she

hopes to accomplish in the course, as students begin to reflect on the challenges of the types of collaborative work that professional writers are so often expected to do. The class spends time discussing the role of teamwork in business and professional environments and what kinds of strategies work best in those situations.

Virginia notes that her own writing process came into focus in this part of the course as she revised the assignment sheet to reflect more clearly the goals of the assignment and the intricacies of the group work she was asking students to do. She discusses looking back at the instructions she drafted the first time she used this assignment and making adjustments to better clarify how the groups should function:

One of the biggest things that I noticed was that the roles thing was kind of weak in my original instructions, where I just said, “Hey, figure out who’s going to play what role and who’s going to do what.” So then everybody just wanted to play the game, and the person who was not playing the game wanted to sit back and do nothing because they were like, “I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.” I realized that one of the areas that I needed to really clarify was [regarding] the possibilities for roles you can play . . . I had to kind of put in more oversight in terms of “I’m going to be watching your group dynamics to see if you are indeed playing those roles effectively and on-task.”

By being explicit in her expectations and by guiding students through decisions about the various roles in the group, Virginia believes that her instructions gave students a better foundation for group interaction in subsequent iterations of the assignment.

Because the walk-throughs explain how to move through a video game, the content itself is also more complex than a simple set of step-by-step instructions. Students do have to think about the order of actions and about how to clearly articulate the steps a player must take to accomplish the task or level at hand. However, they also are asked to consider the medium in which they are creating the instructions and what their own choices in that regard will mean for the overarching effectiveness of their walk-through instructions. Because Virginia requires the guides to themselves be multimodal in nature, students must consider when and if to include visual elements like illustrations, diagrams, photographs, and screenshots to augment the alphabetic instructions. Depending on whether students decide to make print guides or digital guides, and on where they decide to publish or print the guides, the groups must decide what best meets the needs of the reader while still conforming to the limitations of the media they have chosen.

Throughout the process, class discussion about audience becomes especially prominent, and Virginia encourages students to converse and wrestle with who the audience might be for their documents. In this particular assignment, the audience spans both inexperienced players looking to find their way through a game but also more seasoned players working to monitor the conversations happening around the games. Finding ways to ensure that the document not only helps players but lives up to the community's expectations and assumptions about what these kinds of documents should do makes for a complex and rich set of considerations for students as they construct the documents. Especially for students who identify themselves as "gamers" or fans of a particular game, Virginia notes that writers sometimes have difficulty remembering to be thorough in their instructions while still being clear and concise.

Once each group has a draft, the class moves into peer review in the form of usability testing. Each group trades instructions with another group, and the students move through the walk-throughs, taking notes as they play. Virginia reminds them to note points of confusion and difficulties they have following the instructions, asking questions about everything from game controls to narrative structures. She notes that the groups seem to really invest in helping one another work out the bugs in the instructions. Players are quick to point out places where they need more information or parts of the instructions where visuals might help clarify the procedure. For Virginia, the process accomplishes her goal of helping groups better analyze their document's rhetorical effectiveness through the actual circulation of the document:

Inevitably the student groups go in and are like "Our walk-through's great! They're going to be able to play this so easily and they're not going to have any problems at all." Then of course the other group tries to play, comes up with moments where they're like, "I'm so confused. I can't do this. I need help" and the group that originally wrote it then realizes [that] having somebody else test your materials and help you understand where it's not rhetorically successful is so, so very important.

After the usability testing round, the groups revise and finalize the document for submission. As they are finalizing the documents, Virginia again asks them to consider carefully the context in which the document will circulate. Because many of the students have chosen a digital medium, issues of longevity and access often arise. Especially if a group has decided to post their walk-through online, Virginia asks them to consider the implications of the public audience that will have access to the document. This

conversation offers yet another moment for students to wrestle with the rhetorical complexities of a document that has a public purpose.

Overall, Virginia is pleased with the outcomes of this assignment. Having used it three times, she reflects on how her own satisfactions with the unit:

I love that moment [when] they kind realize that what looks really simple on the surface actually involves a lot of choices and a lot of negotiation and a lot of understanding . . . Then they start really getting into it. The best part is when the groups start really caring about their walk-through and are like, “We want to make this look really good and we want this to be kind of professional.” They start really thinking about it in a way that shows investment, which is what I like.

Citing this as one of her favorite assignments to use in technical writing classes, Virginia also admits that it is both time- and labor-intensive (something this project reflects on further in chapter 8). However, ultimately she says that student respond well to the assignment and that it is an effective way to teach instruction writing in a mediated environment.

Characteristics of writing about games

Notably, the “writing about games” category encompasses more examples from the interviews than any of the other three categories. Perhaps because textual analysis is so central to writing studies classrooms already, using games as the subject of writing works in much the same way as other texts: instructors ask students to engage in examination of the language and rhetoric of the text, to discuss not only what the text says but how it says it. Even in the walk-through assignments, students are asked to take apart a game so that

they can guide other reader-players through the text. In this instance, play occurs in the game while the work surrounding that gameplay consists of the kinds of assignments and activities that take place in most composition classrooms.

Because the game is a textual object to be examined, the role of the instructor is similar to the role embodied by instructors with more traditional assignments. The instructor is the reader and evaluator of the resultant student-written text and also a moderator of discussions about the game text. Meanwhile, the student occupies the role of critical thinker and writer as they reflect on or write about the game. These roles closely parallel the roles occupied by students and instructors in more traditional assignment units in writing classrooms. By embracing the use of games as texts, these kinds of assignments open up students' ideas of what constitutes a "text" and enriches their notions of the value of textual analysis and the complex relationship between a text and its reader-player.

CHAPTER 7

WRITING IN AND FOR GAMES

Advocacy for and scholarship about multimodal writing has been prolific in composition studies for some time. Even in the early 1990's, scholars like Janice Lauer were calling for the discipline itself to reframe not only its approach to production but more generally to inquiry. Lauer put forth Bakhtin's idea of *heteroglossia* as a way to embrace and apply the ideas and voices of many in meaningful ways in the writing classroom. She insisted the field should aim toward embracing "a dynamic diversity of modes grounded in different point of view on the world" (45). Other scholars were quick to follow suit and began to look toward to multimodal production in the classroom as a way to reinforce multimodal inquiry from the bottom up in the field of composition studies.

Johndan Johnson-Eilola cautions that inclusion of multimodal practice requires greater attention to and value of the modes themselves. Johnson-Eilola insists that, as new technologies enter the writing classroom, it is the responsibility of researchers in the field to "rethink what we mean by composition" (7) and to investigate the relevance and impact of those modes even as we seek to find ways to incorporate them into our classrooms. This project wholeheartedly joins in that call in listening to the voices of those working in classrooms to help determine how multimodal writing in and for games fits in to the conversation about what it means to "compose."

Some scholars have begun to move toward investigating the writing of games in the composition classroom. Alice Robinson discusses how reflecting on the principles of game design can help writing instructors understand the ways in which the writing

process for games reinforces much of what we value in other modes: collaboration, revision, critical thinking, etc. Robinson argues that “understanding how this process works helps us begin to make sense of our questions about video games’ significance as places for literacy” (368). Indeed, one of the participants in this study, Daria, notes that writing in a game offers opportunities that are hard to duplicate in other media: “If I had to convince someone that ecology might be harmed by importing kudzu, for example, I can tell you, or I can create a game where you will *feel* the crushing inevitability of an eroding ecosystem.” She notes that, from the perspective of a game creator, the medium expands the scope of how idea can be communicated to a reader. She is careful not to elevate the medium into a class of its own; instead, she simply notes that games (and writing in and for them) expand students’ notions of how texts work rhetorically.

Richard Colby makes a similar argument, and he expands the conversation to discuss some of the logistic issues that come up when he assigns video games in his writing classroom. In particular, Colby is interested in assessment: once we ask students to write in and for games, how might we assess what they have created? His concern echoes many other conversations about assessment and multimodal composition (see, for example, “The New Work of Assessment” by Murray, Sheets, and Williams, which offers instructors ideas about making rubrics and other tools for evaluating multimodal work). Colby chooses to focus his assessment on the procedurality of the game (a term popularized by Ian Bogost and discussed earlier in chapter 6). Colby admits, however, that although assessing procedurality might seem relatively straightforward, the task at hand becomes complicated when instructors seek to determine *where* they will focus their assessment:

Writing with/in/about procedurality can come in multiple modes. We can assess the actual gameplay—player interacting with the procedurality—as one means. We can assess the code that the procedure was written in. We can read a written description of the procedurality. We can see a visual representation of the procedurality. In other words, procedural representation is itself a multimodal composition. (46-47)

Colby suggests that focusing on students' functional literacies is one way to encompass a multiplicity of those instances of procedurality at once, something students can be asked to explore through reflection in a portfolio. This strategy is advocated by assessment scholars throughout composition studies (Shipka; Borton and Huot) and reinforces the ways in which writing in games falls in line with the overarching goals of composition studies as a discipline. Writing in games, with all its multiple instances of procedurality and with its many voices, perspectives, modes, and levels, is the epitome of multimodal composing and would greatly benefit from deeper exploration by the field of composition studies. This study contributes to that exploration by looking at how the interviewed instructors have assigned writing in and for games in the composition classroom in which they teach.

Tabletop games

Just as chapter 6 discussed the skew toward computer games when they are used as texts, this chapter bears out that same trend in regards to writing in and for games. The kinds of conversations that dominate discussions of game design in general tend to privilege computer games (and attention to and anxiety about those digital environments contributes to the amplification of the study of writing for computer games). However,

much of the conversation about the fundamentals of game design are as applicable in non-computer-mediated settings, and some of the instructors interviewed in this study encourage students to create tabletop games. Even though the activities they discuss are meant to lead into subsequent lessons that often involve computer games, the affordances of a non-digital space still offer opportunities to wade into multimodal composition in some innovative ways.

Game creation with A Thousand and One Blank White Cards (Virginia)

Virginia uses a game she calls *A Thousand and One Blank White Cards* to get students thinking about composing in spaces other than the traditional alphabetic essay. She gives each group a stack of blank index cards and asks them to create a game. There are few rules for the game, so students are expected to make key decisions about the rules, the content and significance of the cards, and the game play on the whole. Virginia says it is a good jumping-off point to discuss the rhetoricity of games: how do games work as texts, and how can understanding that help game creators make better games? By using the activity not only to encourage composition but to invite students to revisit the rhetorical situation that surrounds a game as a text, Virginia includes this game writing activity as a way to reinforce concepts while having students themselves engaged in the active composition of a text.

Implementing game mechanics pre-lesson (Louis)

Louis discusses a similar activity in his first-year writing classes, one he discovered in talking with a colleague in his department. Designed as a mini-activity leading in to one of his larger writing units, Louis prefaces the actual workshop with very little instruction or discussion so that the activity itself becomes “a crash-course in making rules, using

game pieces, play testing, tweaking, writing out rules, that kind of thing.” He provides the students with a collection of tools that they can use in the creation of the game: dice, pieces from other games, playing cards, and the like. Working together, he asks students to create a functioning game and explain their choices and rationale for the ways in which the game is played.

Computer games

The above examples serve to underscore the rhetorical nature of games and the mechanics that underlie good game design. Similarly, asking students to create computer games requires them to consider many of the same concepts. Writing in digital environments, however, requires students to acquire at least some additional skill-set to interact with the game design software or program. By encouraging students to learn to write in digital environments, instructors have begun to help students conceive of writing itself more broadly and to include the notion of coding and the interface in their consideration of the rhetorical situation in which they are composing.

Writing in Minecraft (Louis)

Louis uses the above-mentioned tabletop game creation activity to prepare students for a larger course unit. In this unit, students design a game using the sandbox adventure game *Minecraft*. Since its full release in 2011, *Minecraft* has become wildly popular with players of all ages. The open play of the game allows players considerable freedom to build and design complex game spaces. With little in the way of tutorials or guidance from the game, players learn quickly how to gather resources to craft items. Louis became interested in using the game in his writing classrooms after he taught at a summer camp for younger students. As he was teaching the game to children, he says he

realized that much of what he was discussing even with them was germane to the concerns he wanted to emphasize in his writing classrooms. The potential to emphasize storytelling alongside visual rhetoric and design seemed to Louis to fit well with kinds of issues he was interested in highlighting for composition students.

The unit functions as a major unit in Louis's course. At the outset, students are assigned to groups and given the relatively open-ended assignment to design a game within the game. Before the design even begins, one key component of the unit is research, even though it is not research as it is traditionally conceived in the college writing classroom. The course relies heavily on *Minecraft's* sprawling library of user-generated content, available across the web in various spaces and forms. In particular, Louis focuses his class's attention on the Minecraft Wiki, a space hosted by Gamepedia but written by the game's users. Louis asks his students to work in this space both before and as they build in the game, and he notes that, like more traditional library research, the work of navigating the Minecraft library can be at once tedious and overwhelming. To combat frustration as students dig through the pages and pages of user-generated content on the wiki, Louis encourages students to strategize within their groups on ways to maximize productivity as they canvas the research available to them. Louis notes that students quickly "learn to find and share information across their groups." By supporting one another in their research, this reinforces the class space as a discourse community working toward a set of common goals.

The game's structure, and students' roles as writers within the game, also encourages students to consider both the responsibilities and limitations of authorship. Louis also forefronts in his discussions of the game the ways in which players, as the

audience for the text, make meaning in the game text that the students create.

Rhetorically, the game functions differently than an alphabetic text in that the presence of choice in the game requires the writer-designer to consider more carefully the agency of the reader-player. Louis emphasize that he wanted students to consider that reader-writer relationship more closely through the game. Simply having a space to wrestle with those complexities opens up rich discussion about what it means to be an author.

The discussion quickly turns to the ways in which design as part of the rhetorical situation is forefronted in the creation of a game text. As students build in the game, they have to consider how the tools they have in the game space can be used to communicate a message, and they also have to think about reader choice. As the student-designers work to guide players through the game text, they have to consider how players will choose to read the text. To highlight the commonality of this concern across texts, Louis pairs the unit with resume writing. In both the game and in a document like a resume, Louis reminds students that “design and narrative and technical elements help signpost or move a reader through [the document], even though you have no assurance of how they will actually experience it.” The seeming contrast of the two texts allows students to clarify those characteristics which are common to all texts, especially the ways in which document design and audience awareness are so inextricably linked no matter the medium.

The game also allows Louis to introduce programming in his writing class, something that he had been looking to incorporate for some time. Louis explains the mechanics of Minecraft’s building system:

The chief way you make stuff happen in Minecraft is with Redstone, which is like electrical wiring, and then Command Blocks which are like writing little

lines of code that you can wire with Redstone to make virtual functions. It's like visual material functions in the digital space.

As students learn to create simple functions using the visual coding available to them with Command Blocks, Louis says they are learning yet another mode of writing. Even though the programming language in the game is relatively simple, it echoes the functionality of more complex object-oriented programming languages. Composing in this language introduces students to the idea that programming is yet another mode of writing, one that requires reflection on the relationship between the writer and the reader and on the intricacies of the text's rhetorical situation more broadly conceived.

Because Louis's writing class includes students from all different disciplines and majors, he wanted to create a unit that would draw from across the disciplines to emphasize the interconnectedness of the kinds of research and practice that are happening in these seemingly distinct worlds. Thus the unit, Louis says, asks students to stretch beyond the stereotypical parameters of their fields: students in the hard sciences learn to engage in humanistic inquiry and research practices in regards to the game, and students in the humanities and social sciences learn programming and explore the technical aspects of game design.

Narrative game creation in Twine (Charlie)

Charlie also uses game design as an assignment in his first-year writing class. One of the four units in Charlie's first-year topics class involves the creation of a game. Because it was a topics class, the focus of the course was video games specifically. The third unit in the course, entitled "Games as Stories," involved an assignment that asked students to design a game. If students had experience with a specific game tool, he

allowed them to work with that tool. For students without a tool in mind, he encouraged the use of the tool *Twine*. Created in 2012 by Chris Klimas, *Twine* allows writers to create web-based narrative games using text and images. Charlie chose this tool because of the strong narrative structure the game affords writers.

Once students created a game, the second part of the assignment was for students to consider how they might go about advertising that game. Each of them was asked to create some sort of multimodal advertisement outside of the game (a commercial or trailer, a series of print ads, a billboard, etc.). Students were asked to justify their choice of medium for the advertisement as well and to consider how best to market their particular game to an interested audience.

Surrounding this two-part assignment were a number of texts with which Charlie asked the students to interact during the four-week unit. To highlight storytelling across various media, he centered the unit around the *Walking Dead* franchise. Students were assigned volume 1 of the *Walking Dead* comic book series and were asked to consider how the medium of the comic book was used to tell the story. He also assigned Telltale's *The Walking Dead: Season 1*. All told, Charlie estimated that the game playing time was at least 10 hours, but he reasoned that it would complement the work the students were doing as they created their own games in *Twine*. "I thought this would be great, since *The Walking Dead* is a game largely fueled by choice, and the Twine software encourages that same kind of design." Charlie also included excerpts from Jesse Schell's book *The Art of Game Design*. In the book, Schell discusses, among other things, what he calls the "Elemental Tetrad." Schell suggest that game design consists of four elements: aesthetics, mechanics, story, and technology. He suggests that all four of these elements must work

together harmoniously and he discusses the relative visibility of each component (typically, technology should be least visible while aesthetics should be most visible). Schell suggests that good game design attends to these four elements and ensures that the elements work together and support one another. Charlie included this text to ensure that students had at least some game design vocabulary as they began to think about designing games of their own.

Charlie's rationale for including all these texts was that that would coalesce to form the foundation for discussions of how storytelling is shaped by media, and in many ways, the unit was successful in starting those conversations. In hindsight, however, Charlie muses that he tried to do too much. In the next chapter, we will discuss some of what Charlie thought were the shortcomings of the unit. He admits that it was simply too much material for a four-week unit. However, students were still able to create their own games and the corresponding advertisements using some of the ideas brought up in discussions about the Walking Dead comic and game and about Schell's framework. The ultimate goal of composing a story for a game environment brought with it a great deal of consideration of the media itself and of what the audience expects when they encounter a story through a game.

In a summer section of his first-year writing classes, Charlie ran a similar assignment, asking students to both build games and also to create advertisements to go along with the games. Surprisingly, Charlie admits that the first-semester students actually did *better* with the assignment than the students in his topics course.

For that matter, I've had my students this summer (a standard [first-year writing] course) engage in my assignment where I require students to design

games and advertising materials for them, and despite a relative lack of gameplay experience in the classroom, students responded very well to it overall and did perhaps even better than most of my ENC 1145 students did with completing it.

Writing in the spaces around games offers yet another possibility for students to consider the rhetorical nature of games and the complexities of the relationship between players and game producers. These kinds of assignments serve to complicate that binary and to open up composition classrooms to examination of participatory culture, industry practices, fan labor, and a whole host of social issues that swirl around the production and distribution of games.

Characteristics of writing in and for games

In this final category, writing happens in the creation of the game itself or in the creation of game-related content; rather than playing to learn or writing about games, students are themselves composing games, often in lieu of some other, more traditional assignment such as an essay. Because writing is happening in the game, students are composing multimodally while considering play in the context of how their creation can be playfully experienced by a user. Though the creation of the game itself can be playful, the primary location of play in these types of assignments is not with the student as writer but with the reader-player of the game text.

Because the game (or game-related material) is the ultimate product in these examples (in the same way an essay might be a product), students and teachers both fill some of the traditional roles expected in the classroom: the instructor oversees the production of the text and is responsible for evaluation while the student writes, revises,

and submits in ways that can mirror most essay assignments. The exciting difference is that, in addition to these traditional roles, both students and teachers also fill the role of *player*. Instructors must play what the students have created in order to advise and evaluate, and students must play their own games (and ideally the games created by their classmates) in order to revise and edit effectively as they move toward a finished product.

In some ways, writing in games represents both an honoring of what works in composition classrooms and an evolution of the writing assignment to a new but no less relevant form. Inviting students to write in and for games opens up authorial spaces for many of the students while still focusing on how texts work and what is at stake in the creation of these texts.

CHAPTER 8

ANXIETIES AND CHALLENGES

Even as the nine participants in this study enthusiastically discussed the many possibilities for games and play in writing studies, each of them acknowledged the challenges of incorporating these ideas into real classrooms. The final two questions of the survey were the following:

3. How successful was the use of the game in meeting your goals for the class?
4. Would you consider using (more) games in your classroom in the future?
Why or why not?

In particular, the participants' answers to the final two questions revealed a lot about their own anxieties and about the challenges and potential pitfalls of the incorporation of play and games in their curricula.

Many of the issues that arose in those responses are echoed in the more general research canon of composition studies and education. Composition studies has addressed many of these technology-based issues as they relate to the writing classroom in general. In 1999, Charles Moran called out his contemporaries for what he saw as a failure in the field to address the intersection of class and access to emerging technologies, particularly in the writing classroom. Moran's examination of the state of the field is fairly bleak (and he suggests that the proliferation of these technologies is contributing to an increase in the wealth gap itself), and so he calls for his colleagues to do more to address the issue of access:

As members of the community of scholars in the field of computers and composition, as teachers of first year writing courses, and as students of technologies that are arguably partially responsible for the increasing distance between rich and poor, I believe that we have to bring this topic forward on our agenda and give it more attention than we have in the past. (220)

That call did not go unheeded, and Jeffrey Grabill and others since then have tried to look at the ways in which the field *has*, in fact, addressed these issues. Although Grabill acknowledges the scarcity of work explicitly interrogating the relationship between class and access, he also points out that the discussion of “access is embedded in other issues and has rarely been foregrounded” (455). However, he extends Moran’s argument in his own argument about the materiality conditions surrounding what Grabill refers to as “information communication technologies” (ICTs) and argues for greater attention to the infrastructures at work in the actual sites within which these technologies are being used (or not used). Because access is embedded in the material and social particulars of a given situation, Moran encourages scholars to do more to explore all the potential voices in a given situation. He insists that “we cannot adequately account for the uses of ICTs without accounting for their deep infrastructures. If we have to study infrastructure, then we have to see those who are invisible” (467). By working to uncover the lived realities of the whole community, Moran concludes we will be better able to unravel the complexities of access in composition studies.

Another limitation discussed in this chapter is less easily defined but just as pervasive. Heather Urbanski discusses the devaluation of “other” texts and approaches in

the academy and wrestles with the place of non-traditional texts (and textual practices) in college writing classrooms and in the university at large. In her survey of the kinds of textual practices that students themselves bring to the classroom, Urbanski articulates her own discomfort with the value judgments that are often bound up in discussions of texts and textual practices and that those judgments have in many ways limited both students and teachers in the writing classroom. She explains her concerns:

It isn't that "anything goes"; I'm not advocating for an unfiltered, all-encompassing relativity that forbids cultural, aesthetic, or even literary judgments of any kind. Rather, I am expressing my increasing concern that the ways in which we express those judgments too often resort to bullying, to declaring texts, theories, and even scholars, to be the "other" so that we can demonstrate our insider status, to prove our worth, our membership status in the academic world. (249)

These issues become important in situations like the ones discussed in this study when instructors navigate the institutional structures that oversee their own classrooms. The textual "bullying" Urbanski describes (especially as it applies to new media texts and spaces) serves not only to discipline the field but often to tie the hands of teachers in their own classrooms as they consider what kinds of texts and writing they will include in their instruction.

Other issues that arose in this study extend beyond the purview of new media and the technological components of games and play in the writing classroom. Scholars, both within composition studies and in the larger fields of education and of play and games research, have begun to scratch the surface of issues that are more intimately and

inextricably bound to games and play. John W. Rice, for example, attempts to catalog some of the difficulties that arise when trying to incorporate video games in the classroom. By surveying multiple scholarly articles about the use of video games in the classroom, Rice offers a list of what he calls “barriers” to the inclusion of video games in the classroom (numbered here for reference):

1. negative perceptions toward video games as educational components
2. the difficulty of providing state of the art graphics in educational video games
3. a lack of adequate computing hardware in the classrooms to run advanced video games
4. a school day divided by short class periods which hindered long term engagement in complex games
5. a lack of real world affordances
6. a lack of alignment to state standards (249)

While Rice is considering video games and their place in K-12 classrooms, many of these barriers carry over to the college classroom and are reflected in the anxieties expressed by the interview subjects in this study. Rice himself points out, however, that his goal is not to reinforce these barriers but instead to draw attention to them so that they might “be overcome by programmers, stakeholders, and researchers, leading to more robust learning environments in the years ahead” (259). Rice is not alone in his desire to overcome these barriers, and concerns about these limitations extend beyond the

boundaries of video games proper when considering play and games in the writing classroom.

Several of the instructors in this study expressed concerned about student reactions to the use of games in the classroom, a concern that is echoed in the scholarship surrounding the use of games in education. A 2010 study, for example, examines how students react to the use of video games in the classroom. The study shows that students are often simply inexperienced with much of the technology surrounding the games, finding that “ease of use appears to be a significant predictor for both usefulness and learning opportunities” (Bourgonjon, et al. 1152). In some cases, students’ anxieties about playing or using games stem more from unfamiliarity than from disinterest or dislike.

The issue of transfer is also a concern for instructors, and much popular research (Squire; Gee; Kapp; Steinkuehler, Squire, and Barab) suggests a direct correlation between games and motivation without offering much in the way of empirical evidence to reinforce that connection. Even Bogost’s procedural rhetoric assumes transfer (players learn that the procedure dictates the outcome and so learn to respond to the rhetorical constraints of the procedure to produce desired outcomes), but what happens when that breaks down, and how do we ensure that the “lesson” learned from one encounter somehow enlightens students in regards to other parallel encounters? These kinds of endeavors, though useful as instructors consider the efficacy of games as teaching tools, still offer little in the way of assurance of how much (or if) games are teaching what we think (or hope) they are teaching.

Reed Stevens, Tom Satwicz, and Laurie McCarthy acknowledge that transfer itself is an issue that is fraught with complication and misunderstanding, and they attempt to

trace the connection between what is learned in games and the skills and knowledge that students are then able to apply outside of those games. By studying a group of young people both while playing games and also in conversations outside of games, these researchers were able to interrogate the degree to which transfer occurs. Interestingly, however, they are unable to make any concrete assertions about transfer. Instead, they conclude something far more profound, something that goes to the heart of this study and its interest in underscoring the role of culture in games and play. Stevens, Satwicz, and McCarthy conclude that they “do not appeal to the games-are-highly-motivating explanation, but we do see a reason that young people play games and get them tangled up with the rest of their lives, and this reason is cultural” (63). Games are powerful because they are inextricably bound up in culture. Players invest in games and play not because of incentives but because of its ability to hail them as part of a group and to offer them a space of identity.

For these and other reasons, scholars like Judd Ruggill and Ken McAllister are quick to point out the complex nature of games and the unavoidability of that complexities when games and play enter the classroom. As they catalog what they term the “wicked problems” of games in their article “Against the Use of Computer Games in the Classroom,” Ruggill and McAllister emphasize the overarching conflict at the core of ludic pedagogy, which is that “the waste and freedom essential to play and its enjoyment appear to run counter to the seriousness, import, and conservation of formal education” (97). So many of the issues that arise when considering the incorporation of play and games in the writing classroom take root in the disconnect between the expectations inherent in formalized education and the fundamental nature of playing. That tension, far

from resolvable, offers both opportunity but also a site of struggle, especially for real teachers in their day-to-day work in actual classrooms. This study seeks to acknowledge that struggle and address the realities of games and play in existing writing classrooms in order to generate conversation and theories that can be applied to classrooms in the future. Even as the instructors in this study enthusiastically described the ideas discussed above, they acknowledged several very real challenges inherent in including play and games in the classroom.

Access

One of the main areas of anxiety that seemed to resonate with the instructors in this study focused on the issue of access. In a class he was taking as a graduate student, Barry remembers thinking about issues of access first-hand. The professor for the course, Barry remembers, “had his whole syllabus full of games.” Because it was a graduate-level course on games and writing, each week contained a game or group of games that were meant to complement and augment that week’s readings and themes. However, that schedule quickly unraveled; some of the games did not work on certain systems, and so some students were unable to even access certain games. This experience has led Barry to worry about integrating games into his own courses:

I think it can be hard to find a game that everybody’s going to have equal time to have equal access to. I guess they’re out there. I guess you could do browser games, but even those can be hard if students don’t have their own computers, and they have to maybe download a Unity player or something like that. I guess I just worry about [issues like] hardware, software specifications and access that students have.

Because his campus does not require students to have computers with certain specifications, Barry feels like it places an undue burden on students to expect them to procure technology for his particular class. Additionally, writing classes are not taught in computer classrooms at his campus. Faculty can request use of a computer lab, but the English department only has one such lab of its own. The university has a handful of computer classrooms that faculty can request, but use of those labs is first-come, first served, and faculty cannot load any special software onto the computers in those labs.

Quinn, on the other hand, was fortunate to be able to teach her classes in fully mediated rooms, and she fully admits that teaching in a non-mediated room would hinder the implementation of most of her gameful activities. Although she concedes that many of her students had devices of their own, she says she would feel uncomfortable asking students to bring their own computers to class for this kind of work (again, her campus has no technology requirement for students). For activities like her rhetorical scavenger hunt, where students collect images and then share with one another, not having individual computers to use to peruse and respond to images might change the effectiveness of the lesson.

Louis also anticipated access issues related to technology and was pleasantly surprised to find that, for him, those issues were minimal. Louis teaches in classroom without student computers, but he says that he simply requests that his students to bring laptops as a part of his class. Because he teaches at a fairly affluent research university, and because many of the programs at the school require students to have their own computers, the expectation is that most students will have their own computers. So far, he

says, shifting the responsibility for the technology to the students has not presented any problems for him:

They can bring all their own laptops, and that has not caused a problem yet. If they don't have laptops, I can get laptops for them from the department, and I can load Minecraft on them. It's not a problem, and a couple students take me up on that just because their laptops have been broken. I always kind of wait for that to be a hurdle, but it's not been an issue so far.

Perhaps because of the culture of his institution, or perhaps because of Louis's ability to provide technology to students, access to technology has not affected Louis's ability to include games in his writing classrooms.

Time

Many of the instructors reflected on how issues of time limited or shaped the inclusion and effectiveness of play and game-based strategies in their classrooms. Within the classroom itself, Olivia noted that the learning curve for playing games was often more time-consuming than she had anticipated. Specifically, she notes that even making sure everyone is familiar with how to interact with the game and what the rules or expectations of the game space itself are often consumes large portions of in-class time. She notes that in some of her classes that are online or even hybrid, she asks students to spend time learning how to play a game as homework, so that students work through figuring out the game on their own.

Similarly, many of Charlie's struggles with his *The Walking Dead* game development unit (discussed in chapter 7) centered around time constraints. The first time Charlie ran that unit, which included looking at storytelling in *The Walking Dead*

comics and games and then creating a game in *Twine* or some other engine, he was disappointed in the outcome. Because he felt compelled to introduce students to so many different aspects of games and game studies within that single unit, Charlie (and the students) quickly became overwhelmed. Especially as they tried to have conversations about the changes narrative and rhetorical strategies across the different media, Charlie found himself frustrated with the students' lack of foundational knowledge. He explains that "a lot of that was that I couldn't quite explain the differences in how they operated the way I wanted and needed to without a ton of extra reading." The result, he says, was that the unit felt both cursory and disconnected, like he and the students were skimming the surface of a multitude of issues and ideas and not really digging into or connecting much of that information in meaningful ways.

In the second iteration of the course, Charlie drastically overhauled the content and scope of the unit. He realized that many of the sub-sections of the unit were "an entire semester's worth of content." In the first run of the class, the amount of gameplay and reading work he scheduled outside of class was unrealistic, which resulted in students simply not doing all the assigned work. The result was that class discussions were both shallow and strained, and the rush to get through the content left little time for more open-ended exploration and enjoyment of the game itself as an object of entertainment. When Charlie set about recrafting the unit, he realized he needed to scale back both the scope and the content, slashing the number of readings and the amount of game play he expected them to accomplish outside of class in order to give students an opportunity to engage more deeply with the material he *did* assign. Even in the second run, Charlie was still frustrated that he couldn't accomplish all the goals he had for the unit: "I think it was a

unit where students hopefully had fun playing a game for class and reading comics, and making their own games, but it didn't serve the purpose I wanted it to, since it was a bit too much." Even with his goals clearly delineated, Charlie admits that his struggle moving forward is to tailor the unit to the time allotted while still using the unit to meet the necessary outcomes that the unit is designed to meet as part of the larger writing course.

Virginia also noted frustration with time constraints as she tried to implement her walk-through manual unit in her professional writing course. Although in-class time seemed to be less of a concern, Virginia remembers realizing mid-course that her own lack of time with the games she was using had inadvertently made some parts of the unit more difficult for her students. Virginia explains:

The first time I did it, I chose a couple of games that I would not choose again because, to write a walk-through, you have to have a game that takes you from point A to point B and will generally present similar choices to everyone who is going to play that game. You have to be able to walk someone through something that they would also be able to experience. So the first time I had students play different games, I had a trivia game in there, which I loved, called *You Don't Know Jack*. It's a really fun game [but] it's a terrible game to write a walk-through for because it has randomized questions, and it's also a party game, so it requires multiple players to be playing at once.

The students struggled somewhat to adapt their examination of the game to the group model that Virginia had built in to that unit. In the groups, students were intended to rotate through a number of roles, with one student playing while another was taking

screenshots and another was taking notes and another doing research about problems and difficulties. Because the game required several people to play, no one was taking notes or observing the game play, which made it difficult to collect the data and materials necessary to write the walk-through document. Because of the scope of the game, the students themselves simply did not have enough time to survey the game in a way that allowed them to produce the kind of document that Virginia had assigned.

Virginia reflects that, if she had had time prior to the semester to really sit down with each of the games and consider how they would fare as objects of study for the unit, she would have realized before the course that a trivia game might not have been a good choice for this assignment. She remembers really struggling with figuring out how to help the students in the group that chose the trivia game:

The first time I did it, the students who were in the trivia group playing *You Don't Know Jack* were like, "Um, this is really, really hard." And I said, "Yeah, I'm realizing that now that I'm watching you try to do this. What do you want to do?" And they're like, "Well, we'll keep going and we'll try to do as good of a walk-through as we can."

The students did finish the unit with that game, but Virginia admits that the final document was not as good as some of the others for the same class (she mentions games like *Tomb Raider* and *Quake* as examples of games used in the same class that produced good walk-throughs). Even though Virginia posits that having had more time prior to the course might have helped her realize which games might have worked better, she also concedes that having a semester to field-test a group of games was ultimately the best way for her to realize how the unit would work and what changes needed to be made. Her

second attempt at running the same assignment went much better after she had been able to take the time to reflect on the particulars of the assignment and revise it to meet the needs of her students:

The next time around, then, I basically, said, “Ok, so these games are going to be generally single player games. They’re not going to be trivia games or games with randomized environments, for the most part. They’re going to have levels where you have to get through, and so your job as a group is to decide what is the level or section of a level that has a clearly-defined beginning point and end point that you can walk your user through so that they know where they start and then they’ll know if they’ve been successful too.”

Being able to reflect on an actual real-world implementation of the assignment allowed Virginia to reconsider the parameters of what she was asking students to do and to reshape the assignment so that all options available to students gave them opportunities to create successful end products.

Even after retooling the assignment successfully, however, Virginia has decided not to use the walk-through project in her current classes. Since creating the unit, she has moved from her part-time instructional position to a different institution with a permanent faculty appointment. While she was used to teaching in computer labs at her former institution (a set-up that she admits made integrating computer games into her classroom logistically fairly easy), the courses at her new school are assigned to traditional classrooms. Although there are computer labs available, Virginia says she is still trying to figure out how those kinds of things work institutionally, and researching those policies

has taken a backseat to the multitude of other issues she has had to negotiate in her new position. Having recently finished her first year at this new school, she says she has a better idea of the resources available but still needs time to figure out how a games-based project would fit into her classroom in this new setting. She recently joined a campus workgroups devoted to games research, and she has considered approaching the members of that group to discuss what her options might be:

It may be they know some workaround that I don't know because I'm just so new to the institution at this point. So it's definitely something that I'm thinking about, but I'm not thinking about it for this current upcoming semester just because, again, this will be the first time that I'll be teaching this class here, so I'm not going to make any changes to what I'm currently doing to give me time to figure out if this would be worthwhile moving forward. I think it will be, and I'm excited about it, but there's just so much figuring out at the beginning.

As a junior faculty member learning the ropes at a new institution, Virginia's use of games hinges a lot on her own familiarity and experience in the specific space of her own university classroom.

Virginia also reflects on the sheer amount of time it takes to implement any new curricular strategy, something that becomes doubly challenging in a classroom with fewer resources. Particularly because much her games-based curriculum is based in more technology-rich environments, she expresses her own need to take time to think about how those ideas and lessons might translate to a lower-tech setting. She has been researching the use of handheld and mobile games for her classroom, something that

would at least partially offset the lack of student computers in the classroom. This, however, shifts the responsibility for the technology to the students themselves, which Virginia admits could be somewhat problematic. However, given that the majority of her students have access to some kind of portable device (be it a laptop, a tablet, or even a smartphone), she imagines that those kinds of games would be easier to implement. Again, though, she says she has not yet implemented any plans that include such devices because she has not had the time to research the kinds of games that might be useful in the context of her writing classrooms.

Many of the other instructors expressed similar sentiments about the time had constrained their use of games in their classrooms. Kaylee has spent some time looking at games for her own classrooms, and yet she feels like she has only been able to scratch the surface. Adding to that is the changing nature of her teaching schedule, which puts her in special topics classes almost every semester. As the course topic changes, games that might have been useful in her course themed around climate change might be less applicable in a course themed around, say, digital identity. Kaylee laments that she is not able to integrate *more* games into her classes but says that the barrier is, at least in part, having time to simply play games: “I just haven’t put the time into really exploring what games I could use and how I could use them in the classroom.” Kaylee admits that she plays a lot of console games herself, but figuring out what kinds of games might work well in classroom settings requires a different, more time-consuming approach than simply playing a game for leisure.

Olivia registers a similar frustration. She has enjoyed being able to use games in her classrooms, but many of the games she has used in the past are no longer available or

supported. Taking time to explore and learn new games, she says, often feels impractical on top of the many other demands of the classroom. She also reflects on the time it takes *her* to learn new games once she finds them. She jokes some about “my own skill set with certain games,” but her point reflects the larger anxiety that comes with introducing a game as a part of the classroom: especially when she is using a game as a text or asking students to reflect on a game, she is presenting herself as, at least in some ways, an authority on the game. In short, Olivia feels like she should be somewhat comfortable in the game herself before she asks students to dive into that space.

Even Quinn discusses anxieties about the time it takes to implement the kinds of playful pedagogy that she uses. In addition to her own planning a prep time, Quinn mentions the role of class size and its effect on her ability to implement gameful projects and lessons in her classes. She acknowledges that projects like these work better in small or moderately-sized classes, and indeed most writing classes should fall in that category. However, particularly when it comes to discussion of ideas and tracking student progress, she admits that some activities are not as effective with larger classes because the class meeting time simply is not long enough for all students to participate meaningfully in the conversation. Quinn says she is looking at ways to limit the scope of some of her activities without decreasing the effectiveness.

Student reaction

Another set of issues that came up for several of the study’s participants centered around the students themselves. Barry, for example, expresses his concern at the varying levels of basic motor ability for students. Also, because many video games have limited or no accommodations for disabilities like hearing or visual impairment, Barry worries about

how that would affect students dealing with such issues. Determining how to accommodate students with disabilities in more complex technological spaces presents a challenge when trying to craft an assignment that delivers the same level of opportunity for all students in a given course.

In addition to thinking about issues of student accessibility, the participants also expressed broader concerns about students' confidence and motivation to engage in the spaces surrounding games. Louis mentions having encountered student resistance in terms of their own unfamiliarity with the spaces and expectations of the game and the discourse surrounding it. In his *Minecraft* unit, Louis notes that students are especially hesitant in the beginning to dig deeply into the documentation they need to explore as they research the project. Because the *Minecraft* universe's fan community is so robust, the existing documentation is vast, and many of the articles and guides are extremely detailed and incredibly lengthy. The scope can be overwhelming for students who are new to the game, and he says it often takes some time to really impress upon students how best to conduct research in those spaces. He notes that "there's some resistance to getting into documentation . . . It feels daunting at first, like 'I have to get through two whole walk-throughs?' That's the biggest hurdle. Once they start using it, actually *using* it, they're fine."

Louis's experience mirrors what most instructors hope will happen when they introduce students to any new communicative environment: ideally, once students have settled in to an activity, they acclimate quickly to the language and parameters. Olivia points out, however, that sometimes that comfort level can itself be problematic. She discusses the issue of cheating, even in small ways, to try to gain advantage in a game. For

example, when she had her class play the game *Paper Chase* in class together, “I remember that they sort of figured out some cheats pretty quickly in there.” Students seemed comfortable, engaging in cheating behavior and did little to hide it from the instructor or the class; in fact, Olivia reports that they were somewhat proud when they figured out ways to glitch or to trick the system. Ultimately, even though it was in some ways problematic, Olivia felt like she was able to use that behavior as part of the larger discussion about the game space: “They got really into it trying to figure out how to beat the game, so in that way it was a pretty fun way to shake up learning the basic concepts of the textbook and the course.” By allowing students to exert some authority *over* the game, Olivia was able to then ask students to reflect on the differences between that space and a more traditional classroom setting.

In addition to concerns about accessibility and participation, many of the participants mentioned anxieties about overall student confidence heading into a lesson so unlike what most of them have ever experienced in a writing classroom. One of the biggest student-based concerns expressed by the participants was simply student comfort level. Many of the instructors mentioned feeling concerned about how “non-gamers” might react to the use of games and gameful situations in the classroom. Barry, in fact, cites that anxiety as the major stumbling block for him as he thinks about including games in his classes. Even as he reflects his fondness of games, he finds himself wrestling with how games might fit into his writing classroom for his individual students:

I think one of the things I’m kind of struggling with right now as I design this class is kind of how do I keep it as broad as possible [in terms of] the topics and subject matter, so I’m thinking of using games as kind like, “Here’s a

game we'll play and kind of talk about it." I'm hesitant to, I guess, force people to play games who might not necessarily be gamers. . . . I definitely would encourage people to, if they like want to use the games for the projects that I have mind, to do that, but I don't think I would include it as part of the official course. Just because I want to try to keep the focus on writing as . . . [long pause] . . . hmm, yeah, I'm not sure.

Barry's candor in discussing his own struggles with thinking about using games reflects his own commitment to ensuring that all students feel like they understand the scope and foundation of the class as a place where writing is the focus.

Louis also mentions having had concerns about student reaction to games, but he points out that even just having a conversation with students about their own experience levels and identities in relation to the games was a helpful way to offset any possible tensions that might arise. He notes that

the first roadblock is always when people say, "I'm not a gamer." I've found that's a good conversation to have, because usually people who say they aren't gamers are girls, and they say they're not gamers because their brother wouldn't let them play or something. That's an easy conversation to say, "Well, your brother's not here right now, so go play and have fun and you're a gamer."

By giving students a chance to openly discuss how identity plays a role in gaming, Louis says students are able to get comfortable with the idea of playing games and with each other as a community of gamers with varying experience and interest levels.

Beyond discussions of identity, Louis admits that students bring a lot of other preconceived notions to the classroom, and so he says he feels compelled to really open up his classroom as a place to discuss those thoughts lest they prevent students from achieving the desired outcomes for the course. Again, students' previous experiences in writing and English classrooms often shapes their notions of what will go on in his classroom, and when those frameworks are disrupted, students often feel uncomfortable:

There are, I guess a lot of the roadblocks are their expectations of what an English class should be. They don't believe that they're going to actually make, or that I'm going to keep using games, that this assignment's going to go on. Once they see that it's for real and I'm for real, then they run with it. I think that the hardest roadblocks are where they're like, "This isn't school. Why are you—what's going on?" Because they're used to performing a certain way in class, in this assignment, I think that they don't have room to perform [the role of] student the way they're used to. They don't have time or space to perform "disciplined student" for me.

By unraveling the stereotypes of "classroom" and "student," and by shifting himself out of the role of the "sage on the stage," Louis hopes to give students an opportunity to establish their own authority, both in the space of the game and in the space of the larger classroom.

Transfer and rationale

Additionally, many of the instructors reflected on larger issues of the place of games and play in the classroom. Daria, for example, ruminates on how we know if a game will do what we intend for it to do in the context of the classroom: when a game is

designed to teach something, what assurances do we have about how that material is received by students and whether they will be able to apply that knowledge beyond the classroom? Daria remembers a curious and unexpected outcomes with a game she was involved in building:

We were building games to teach about Greek history, culture and rhetoric (*Aristotle's Assassins*). We thought that giving students the ability to play through a world would enable them to understand it differently. This is true, but what they [understood was] not what we intended.

Daria also wrestles with the notion on transfer beyond the classroom, something that haunts most writing classrooms (and rightly so) but is particularly hard to pin down with games. When, as Daria puts it, writing instructors (and educators in general) “try to tame games and make fun serve productive purposes,” often they do so with a limited sense of how well (or even if) the activity will produce the desired outcome in the course.

Daria also brings up another salient point that has hounded those who advocate for “games in the writing classroom.” So often, she points out, when she tells people she uses games in the classroom, they automatically think *videogames*. Indeed, much of the focus on using games in the classroom currently seems disproportionately preoccupied with computer games. If the idea is to leverage play in the classroom, writing instructors need not always reach for something that is computer-mediated. Daria herself uses board games and card games and has students create their own paper- and text-based games, all of which harness the power of play to engage students without the involvement of computers or consoles. She notes that the relative simplicity of non-digital spaces opens

up a different set of affordances for students and for her as a teacher trying to ensure that all the students in the class are moving toward the goals for the course.

Also, though Daria is herself a massive fan of videogames, she worries that many people have begun to fold them into courses without properly interrogating the larger context and implications of those games. She explains:

I think, also, that when most people want to include games in a classroom, they only want to include video games, and there are a slew of problems with this as well. [These] games are imbricated in ideological systems concerning class, gender and sexuality, and race. Most games that people discuss for classroom use, such as *WoW* [*World of Warcraft*] or *Bioshock*, are marked as white, masculine, and middleclass in terms of artistic styles, technological skills, and even access.

Thus, although introducing students to these complex game environments has the potential to generate dynamic and rich conversations about these issues, it can also overcomplicate and confuse the lesson at hand. Especially if the instructor is at all unfamiliar with the game and its culture (again, as Colby, Colby, and Johnson argue in their 2010 article), the inclusion of a video game in a classroom can be counterproductive and even dangerous if instructors are not prepared to consider the multiple possible directions that conversations and activities may go in and around that gamespace.

Perhaps wisely, Charlie reflects on his anxieties about introducing games in new courses as they are rooted in his *own* lack of confidence. Though he enjoys teaching with games and does plan to use them in his classes, he has put much of his work with games on

hold as he transitions to teaching a new course in his institution's newly overhauled curriculum.

I want to make sure that my fundamental approach to the new course I'm teaching in the fall is sound. I'm a firm advocate of using games as part of an instructor's pedagogy, but I don't know how best to integrate videogames into [the new course] yet, so, for now, I won't be. . . . I don't think I can say for sure where the best places to integrate videogames into my course will be until I've done at least one run-through of it, to identify where videogames can improve my pedagogy. In the same way that I think videogames can be extremely helpful for an instructor's pedagogy, I only think that's true if it complements the instructor's pedagogy effectively. I think forcing games into an instructor's classroom is unequivocally worse than not using them at all.

Charlie's enthusiasm for games is tempered by his realization that every class and every instructor is different and that including a game in any class should involve careful consideration of where and why it belongs in the course. Although he will continue to play games and think about the ways games might fit in his classes, he insists that "it matters more that we use videogames successfully, and *infuse* [emphasis his] our pedagogies with videogames in sound ways, and where and when it makes sense to instead of brute forcing it to happen." His plan is to teach the new course and think about places where games might benefit students so that he may be able to include them in a later iteration of the course once he has established a solid foundational structure.

Kaylee's anxieties about how "gamey" her Twine creation actually is also echoes the uncertainty present with many of the instructors interviewed. One possible explanation for the tentative nature of the instructors' willingness to incorporate some of the more in-depth or extensive uses of games in the classroom may be that many of these instructors (and many instructors in general) are contingent or non-tenure-track faculty. This raises the issue not only of individualized pedagogy but of labor and of the authority (perceived or real) of faculty to dictate what goes on in their classrooms.

Quinn also reflects on her own realizations about integrating any type of playful activity or game into the classroom, and her anxiety about the inclusion of what she calls "games for games' sake" seems to strike at the heart of this study and of the future of the study of play and games in writing classrooms. She notes that, even as she has begun to infuse her courses with more playful activities and even formalizing some of those activities as games, she has watched other instructors and spoken with many of them about how and why they use games in their classrooms. Though she has gleaned from those conversations many ideas and inspirations that she plans to take back to her own classroom, she muses on one thing that has stuck out in particular. She notes that "out of this experience, I've learned the difference between folks who plop games in for entertainment and those who use games that are intended to facilitate learning, if that makes sense." She has noted that students seem to be able to intuit the difference, and the effectiveness and appropriateness of the inclusion of play and games is often revealed in students own writing as they reflect on the activities of the class and how they have (or have not) learned through play.

Including games and play in the writing classroom is an exciting prospect, one that has been heralded throughout the field of composition studies. However, the above challenges and anxieties reveal that we have much to consider as a discipline and as individual instructors before we begin to push for games and play to become mainstays in college writing classrooms. Excitement about the medium should not be a gateway for instructors to introduce games and play in to the classroom haphazardly. Rebekah Shultz Colby, Richard Colby and Matthew S. S. Johnson insist that composition scholars need to first familiarize themselves not only with the games but with the vast critical and cultural context surrounding the game itself and games in general. Even as they enthusiastically endorse the use of games in the classroom, they insist that “we would be remiss if we did not strongly urge that teachers who have no gaming experience either need to get some or should not be using games in the classroom” (764-65). The complexities of games necessitate careful planning and consideration if they are to be incorporated in the college writing classrooms.

Fortunately, even the most critical game studies scholars continue to try to forge a path for games and play in education. Ruggill and McAllister’s exploration of the “wicked problems” of play and games in the classroom offers a goal for teacher-scholars moving forward:

When teachers are willing to engage expansively with the full complexity of the computer game medium, they will not only be nonplussed when things go pear-shaped in the classroom, they will find in such times not terror but teachable moments. They will also begin to experience “pear-shaped” as the new normal. Similarly, when students learn that seeking more than finding,

wondering more than telling, and failing more than succeeding are all pathways to good grades, game play in the classroom will begin to feel less wrong and more right. This is the process (or at least a process) by which teachers and students can learn to play to learn. (100)

By acknowledging the realities of play and games and by preparing for unpredictability and variance, instructors can and will continue to innovate with games in the classroom and to help students explore the vast array of possibilities presented by playful pedagogy, gameful classrooms, and games themselves as both texts and contexts.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

This rich collection of interviews, and the ideas discussed by these nine instructors, offer a glimpse not only into the realities of the writing classrooms but into the ways in which play and games are being considered in those spaces. Though these ideas are not necessarily new and are certainly not unheard of in the larger field of writing studies, documenting and examining these practices is necessary as scholars begin to build more comprehensive and nuanced theories of play and games in the writing classroom. Studies like this, and the conversations that grow out of work like this, reinforces these pedagogical strategies while still offering critical analysis of the larger picture that emerges when instructors consider including such practices in their own classrooms. In looking at the groupings of activities in the above chapters, we can begin to see patterns beyond just how the games function in the classroom. That insight also radiates beyond the classroom and allows scholars to consider the larger role of play and games in society and what that circulation reveals about this particular cultural moment.

The characteristics for each of the categories explored in this study offer one way to think about the many different ways that play and games can be included in the writing classroom. For each type of activity, students and teachers take on sometimes very different roles in the classroom, and the location of play often shifts into sometimes unexpected places. Table 2 highlights some of those characteristics, and it notes some of the possible outcomes and goals that each category can be used to meet in the writing classroom.

	Categories of games and play in the writing classroom			
	Playful pedagogy	Writing classrooms as game environments	Writing about games	Writing in and for games
AKA	teaching/ learning through play	Gamification	games as texts	games as (writing) assignments
Location of play	within the class/lesson	throughout the course structure	within a game	within the creation of a game
Function of the game	not always necessary; when present, serves as discrete tool for that lesson	to be the structure of the class itself	as a text for analysis, consideration, or discussion	as a text to be created or modified
Instructor role	creator/writer of play	creator/writer of game	co-player; evaluator of writing	player; evaluator of writing
Student role	player; composer (through play)	player; composer (through class participation)	player; writer responding to the game	creator/writer of the game
Identified uses/ outcomes	community building; content delivery; exploration of writing process	student motivation; increasing participation	rhetorical/ textual analysis; topic for instruction-writing	multimodal composition

Table 2: Characteristics of activities across categories

Possibilities for the four categories

The characteristics listed in Table 2 reveal the similarities and differences of the four categories and offer a starting point for considering how the categories might be useful. Each category offers a distinct set of possibilities for how games and play might be leveraged in college writing studies moving forward. The activities in the first category,

playful pedagogy, reveal a wide variety of practices. What is most striking about these activities is that, often, they are playful but involved no formal “game.” Instead, in many instances, students participate and consume content through some activity related to the concepts being discussed. This seemingly simple act of incorporating play into lessons is an almost-fundamental part of most early childhood classrooms, and yet its inclusion in college classrooms has sometimes been met with resistance. However, this study reveals that, in the college writing classroom in particular, play encourages risk-taking and fosters the building of communities within classrooms. Also fascinating is the possibility to reflect upon these activities *with* students as they consider how they are composing themselves through play. Making that discussion explicit then opens the door to conversations about how the activities function to build communities of play within the classroom (which in many ways mirror the functionality of discourse communities in their ability to help students see themselves as part of a group as they engage in thinking and writing in the classroom).

Similarly, the second category, *writing classrooms as game environments*, offers similar opportunities for community-building. As students engage in the class as a game, they play alongside one another and begin to build a common language to discuss their shared endeavor. The activities in this category also offer novelty of structure, which can (for better or for worse) upends students’ expectations about the classroom and the academy. The game structure has the potential to in some ways reconfigure how learning works in the classroom and to lay bare for students the mechanisms of power inherent in that structure. This can, in turn, open up spaces for conversations about the role of

education in culture, the conventions of formal learning environments, and even the function of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in academic success.

The *writing about games* category considers activities that in many ways parallel some of the more traditional endeavors common to the writing classroom (especially the alphabetic essay), and yet the inclusion of the game medium offers exciting possibilities for revitalization and reinforcement of some of the hallmarks of composition pedagogy. In particular, the inclusion of games as textual objects signals the potential for more flexible execution of tried-and-true modes like analysis and instruction-writing. The games themselves also offer a space that can potentially shift the instructor-student dynamic, as both parties navigate within game space.

Finally, in the *writing in and for games* category, instructors harness key elements of multimodal composition theory as students themselves create games. This artful implementation both draw on and builds digital literacies for students and test the boundaries of writing in exciting ways. Such projects as incorporate thinking about the structure of games and how games work, a consideration that necessarily delves into the complex relationship between a game's creators and players. These kinds of endeavors offer chances to connect composition classrooms to multiple disciplines and to foster critical conversations as students reflect on what it means to be human in the digital age.

As Table 2 maps out, each of these categories works and moves in different ways, and yet the overarching themes give scholars much to consider. Though in no way comprehensive, the categories offer a solid foundation to begin to imagine how game and play are being used in the writing classroom, and that insight offers a great deal of

information that informs a clearer picture both of social perception of games and play and of the precarious and complex environment that is the writing classroom.

Study limitations

This project is not without its limitations. First, the sample of interview subjects was deliberately small and so yielded some limited areas of reach. All of the nine interviewees happened to be currently located at four-year universities, though subjects were not asked whether they had taught at other institutions in the past. This may be because the sample was solicited from the CCCC Special Interest Group, a group whose membership is overwhelmingly located at four-year research schools. Also, the majority of the subjects were graduate students (six at various stages of Ph.D. programs and one in an M.A. program); several were teaching either as part of their graduate assistantship or as adjunct faculty outside. Only three of the subjects are in full-time positions; one held a full-time instructor position, while the other two held tenure-track positions at their universities. Still, the instructors offered a variety of perspectives on teaching with play and games, and those perspectives provide at least a starting point for a discussion of the strategies used by writing scholars to incorporate play and games in their classrooms.

The interview questions themselves also proved to be a limitation. Because the questions were fairly open-ended and broad, they may or may not have elicited the responses that might have come from more specifically-worded questions. For example, question two asked, "Do you use games in your writing classroom?" A few participants sought clarification on that question and expressed uncertainty as to whether the activities they had done qualified as games, or as the *kind* of games that would be germane

to the study. A more carefully-worded question with additional sub-questions like the series below might have yielded more specific results:

2. Do you use any games or play in your writing classroom?
 - a. If yes,
 - i. Do you use video games in your classroom?
 - ii. Do you use tabletop games in your classroom?
 - iii. Do you use play in any other way in your classroom?

Similarly, question number 4, “Would you consider using (more) games in your classroom in the future? Why or why not?” seemed to elicit fairly brief and undetailed responses. Although it did bring out some discussion of anxieties that might limit the use of games, it did little to advance any conversation about the rationale for using *more* games or the ways in which the question itself might be complicated by the interviewee’s own personal teaching situation. Virginia, for example, was not using games at her current institution because it was her first year there, so her plans for the future were fairly speculative since she had not, at the time, been able to research the logistics that might be necessary to implement the kinds of activities she had done at her previous institution. The question yielded mostly hypothetical responses framed in a sort of “if x happens, then possibly I would consider doing y”-type construction. Tying the question back to specific classes taught by the subject, or focusing back on plans to repeat specific activities, might have yielded more focused replies and reflections.

However, these sorts of adjustments might just have easily limited the responses by being overly suggestive or specific as to an implied hierarchy of those types of games and play. The openness of the questions seemed to encourage a fair amount of exploration

on the part of the subjects, which yielded unanticipated but extremely useful responses (especially the discussions of anxieties and challenges about specific activities). Overall, the questions yielded rich and honest responses from the participants, but a possible follow-up study with the same participants might seek to focus the questions to reinforce or complicate the taxonomy that came out of this first round of interviews.

Also of interest moving forward are the categories themselves. One concern is that the categories are not discrete. For example, Kaylee's Lego brick instructions assignment is described in chapter 4 as a type of playful pedagogy, yet it shares many characteristics (and the basic assignment design) with the video game walk-through assignments described by Daria and Virginia in chapter 6. The activity seemed to fall into playful pedagogy because it did not involve a formal "game" but instead an activity involving toys, and yet this kind of parsing requires more specific attention to just what constitutes a game (it could be argued that the process of putting together a Lego brick set could be construed as a game, with the win-state being a properly assembled model, and yet few would label Lego bricks themselves a game). These kinds of grey areas complicate the categories in a way that calls for deeper exploration of the terminology and stakes of the language used to discuss these practices.

Similarly, this project cannot (and does not) argue that these four categories are exhaustive. Instead, they simply represent an attempt to begin to encapsulate how play and games are happening in writing classrooms and to emphasize that not all instances are alike. Too often, literature referencing play in the classroom tends to focus on examples that privilege the game itself, and the computer game in particular over the last few decades. The categories outlined in this project are an attempt to sort existing, actual

activities to begin to offer a clearer picture of the spectrum of playful activities that writing instructors are using and to map the ways in which those practices align with sound composition pedagogy. There may be other activities currently being used in writing classrooms that might complicate or extend the categories proposed here.

Further study

This study is very interested in capturing the voices and experiences of actual individual teachers of composition, and many questions came out of the analysis of the interviews that will need to be addressed as this line of inquiry grows and progresses. This study did not account for much personal or situational data about the instructors themselves nor about their students, and many of those factors are critical to the conversation about lived experiences and actual classroom practice.

Almost immediately, it became apparent that institutional factors played a significant role in some of the differences in the answers from the participants. The academic position of each teacher, for one, warrants more attention in future studies. Interestingly, in this particular study, contingent faculty reported a similar variety of activities as compared to those in permanent, full-time positions. Whether this similarity could be maintained across a larger sample is something that would shed some light on the spectrum of practices. What *was* apparent in this study, however, was the difference in activities in different types of institutions. Though the participants were not asked to describe their institutions in terms of resources, some of that became apparent throughout the course of the interviews. Even though all the participants reported working at research universities, the physical conditions of their classrooms and the makeup of their student populations seemed to vary widely. For example, while Charlie

and Louis both reported that all writing classes at their institutions were scheduled in computer labs, Quinn and Virginia both reported teaching in rooms without computers for every student. This difference in institutional resources creates a very different teaching situation for instructors trying to use play and games in the classroom. Investigating the degree to which these institutional factors like faculty position and teaching resources change the way games and play happen in classrooms promises to yield a more complete picture of actual practice and how the ways we discuss this type of pedagogy is received and implemented in a variety of different teaching situations.

Beyond teaching position and institution type, no other personal data about the instructors was collected, but attending to that kind of information should be the goal of future work in this subject area. More research on the role of faculty gender, race, and sexuality needs to be conducted to determine how teaching with play and games might differ among writing teachers. In what ways might those factors change how games and play are used in the classroom, and also how such practices are received and understood by students? How might gender, race, or sexuality constrain instructors wishing to teach with play and games, but also how might those same factors enrich and enliven a more complete pedagogical approach to such an endeavor?

Similarly, because no data was collected about the students participating in these activities, it is unclear to what degree the student population of a given classroom might change the ways in which these practices can or should be implemented. The student population at a private high-research institution would be quite different than that of a smaller, public university or college. Many of the more complex practices mentioned in this study might have very different outcomes in environments with, for example, at-risk

students or students for whom English is their second language. More research should be done to investigate how student populations can and should influence the creation and implementation of such pedagogical approaches.

Beyond these institutional factors, this study also reveals a need for a greater understanding of the language of games. “Gamifying” the classroom has come to mean so much more than simply attaching achievement points or a leveling system to assignments or incentivizing student behavior. By attending more closely to the variety of meanings behind phrases like “teaching with games,” gameful design,” and, yes, “gamification,” scholars across the disciplines can more successfully map the complexities of this growing area of pedagogy in ways that help students and teachers benefit from a vast array of playful classroom situations and activities.

Finally, out of the overarching format of this particular project comes perhaps the broadest and most applicable call for more research. By using cultural studies as a foundational methodology through which to approach the intersection of game studies and composition pedagogy, my hope is that this study will disrupt and complicate some of the more dominant approaches to scholarship in the humanities. By engaging in what Krista Ratcliffe calls “rhetorical listening,” this study situates the interview conversations themselves as generative sites out of which we can more fully articulate the ways in which theory interacts with lived experiences.

Mapping a composition pedagogy of play

In a 2008 article, Rebekah Shultz Colby and Richard Colby advocate for “a pedagogy of play” centered on the use of *World of Warcraft* in the writing classroom. In that article, Colby and Colby propose using the game as a space of invention and

encouraging students to engage in writing within the community space of the game. They point out that “at the core of all immersive games is a secret that both good teachers and game designers know: learning is immersive if people are constantly challenged, striving to learn, but also feel capable of the task at hand” (305). This study applauds this insight and hopes to push forward in that same spirit by advocating for a composition pedagogy of play that encompasses not only the types of formalized game instruction discussed by Colby and Colby but the many varied types of playful praxis discussed by the instructors in this project. My hope is that this project will spur other researchers to complicate and enrich the basic framework that has come out of this sample.

Ten years ago, Anne Wysocki wrote what would become a sort of clarion call for me and for so many other composition teacher-scholars. As she so eloquently wrestled with how to help us consider how we might work *beyond* the constraints of alphabetic texts and the material conditions of our writing spaces, she reminded us all that, “As we analyze and produce communications, we need to be asking not only what is expected by a particular audience in a particular context but also what they might not expect, what they might not be prepared to see” (59). Games and play in the college writing classroom push back against long-held expectations about what can or should happen in that space and against the myriad constraints of formalized educational institutions. It is my fervent hope that we will continue to heed Wysocki’s call, and the call of so many others, to compose our very classrooms in unexpected ways so that we can open spaces for our students to do the same.

Some final thoughts

The relevance of cultural studies as a methodological approach becomes readily apparent in projects like these, largely because the value of cultural studies lies in its ability to lay bare what is often unspoken. The approach is at its best when it examines the mechanisms of a culture by listening to and amplifying voices that inhabit it. Especially in increasingly networked digital spaces, the renewed power of cultural studies lies in its ability to interrogate sociopolitical structures *through* the lived experiences of individuals. Unlike more sterilized forms of critical theory, the cultural studies project, as imagined by Stuart Hall and so many others, has always aimed to shape reality. The goal of cultural studies should not be to find some unassailable truth, but instead to engage in conversation aimed at building toward action, and Hall reminds us of

the difficulty of instituting a genuine cultural and critical practice, which is intended to produce some kind of organic intellectual political work, which does not try to inscribe itself in the overarching metanarrative of achieved knowledges, within the institutions. I come back to theory and politics, the politics of theory. Not theory as the will to truth, but theory as a set of contested, localized, conjunctural knowledges, which have to be debated in a dialogical way. But also as a practice which always thinks about its intervention in a world in which it would make some difference, in which it would have some effect (Hall qtd. in Hall, Morley, and Chen 274-75)

I began this project poised for battle, prepared to prove truths and advance knowledge. What I came to understand, and what I think is the heart of my own research agenda moving forward, is that all these intellectual endeavors (cultural studies, composition

studies, game studies, rhetoric, the digital humanities) are at their best when they are conversing with lived experiences. The hollow victory of a theory upheld on the page pales in comparison to the transformative potential of dialogic meaning-making through better understanding of lived experiences.

At the same time, this project leads me back to where I began: questioning the place of games and play in an increasingly digital culture, and wondering how college writing instruction reflects, refracts, and evolves that role. I also return to the term “gamification” as a sort of sticking point, as the word has been both claimed and rebuked and still creeps into the conversation anytime play is mentioned in association with any “serious” activity. By wrestling with these terms, and by digging through the culturally-situated meanings and stakes surrounding the language we use to talk about games and play, scholars can more fully articulate and advocate for a composition pedagogy of play.

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APPENDIX: LIST OF GAMES AND GAME ENGINES DISCUSSED

Diplomacy. Avalon Hills, 1999. Board game.

Donkey Kong. Nintendo, 1981. Video game.

Endgame: Syria. Auroch Digital Ltd., 2012. Video game.

Gloom. Atlas Games, 2004. Board game.

Limbo. Playdead Studios, 2010. Video game.

Minecraft. Mojang, 2011. Video game.

Monopoly. Hasbro, 1903. Board game.

Papers, Please. Lucas Pope Games, 2009. Video game.

Portal 2. Valve Corporation, 2011. Video game.

Stanley Parable, The. Galactic Cafe, 2011. Video game.

Twine. Chris Klimas, 2012. Game engine.

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