Gamification in the RhetComp Curriculum

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Series in Critical Media Studies

VERNON PRESS

www.vernonpress.com

In the Americas:
Vernon Press
1000 N West Street, Suite 1200
Wilmington, Delaware, 19801
United States

In the rest of the world:
Vernon Press
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,
Malaga, 29006
Spain

Series in Critical Media Studies

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022945909

ISBN: 978-1-64889-323-0

Cover design by Vernon Press using elements designed by macrovector_official / Freepik.

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Acknowledgments

This is the second project I have worked on with Vernon Press, both of which started as a panel at a Northeast Modern Language Association conference. We want to give our thanks to NeMLA for giving us our start and Vernon Press for continuing our project.

To the scholars who set us on the path to gamification. Each contributor in our collection has such a scholar who inspired them.

We also want to give thanks to our students, who both enjoyed and endured our attempts at gamification.

Foreword: Procedural Rhetoric in the Ludic Century

Matthew Farber, Ed.D.
University of Northern Colorado

My foray into playful learning first occurred when I was a social studies teacher. At the time, I was completing a degree in educational technology and anecdotally observed how engagement was piqued whenever play was infused in lessons. I became keenly aware of how students were suddenly transfixed by social studies content when they knew they created podcasts and digital stories. They worked diligently to import sound effects, images, and music to augment their narration. Play, I quickly learned, drove meaningful instruction.

Play occurs within the structure and constraints of rules that games afford.[1] Too many constraints can be too restrictive; too few can overwhelm. Podcasting and video production had just enough play constraints, plus a game-like goal of publication to an authentic audience. I decided to seek out more multimodal activities that would promote social studies literacy. Inevitably, I was led to game-based learning. In my classroom, that often meant iCivics, a platform of free civics games. I also incorporated project-based learning, where students would play a game, then make one.

As it happened, the chair of my dissertation committee had written a chapter on student-powered podcasting in the influential new media literacy book *DIY Media: Creating, Sharing and Learning with New Technologies*.[2] Many examples of new literacy practices were shared, ranging from digital storytelling to game-based learning. New literacy is founded on principles of play and remix.[3] To be new media literate means understanding how audio, video, image, text, games, and other interactions on the internet can be a form of persuasive rhetoric, just as political cartoons and documentary films were in the past centuries.[4]

Game studies scholar Eric Zimmerman applied new media literacy principles to the 21st century when he wrote *Manifesto for the Ludic Century* (2015). To be media literate requires an understanding of multimodal representation in visuals, such as comic books and graphic novels, film, and television. Visuals were transmitted or broadcast to stores and screens, to be read, viewed, and consumed.

Early new media literacy scholars, like Henry Jenkins (2006), observed how digital tools democratized media to be less consumer-based and more participatory.[5] With tools, like Apple's GarageBand, anyone with a microphone and internet connection could become a producer and publisher of audio content. Anyone with a computer could write report news, or share opinions and ideas on blogs and social media posts. Video editing and game design tools also became more accessible to the masses.

These new media toolsets were powerful but also game-like. Thus, Zimmerman dubbed the 21st century as ludic, the Greek word for playful. Not only is literacy increasingly multimodal, but it is also often interactive and playable, gamified, and game-like.[6] Smartwatches and wearables, as well as exercise equipment, are game-like, featuring leaderboards and social rewards. Financial services, like Robin Hood, Zelle, and Venmo, are ludic, as are food ordering (DoorDash, Grub Hub) and ridesharing applications (Uber, Lyft).[7] In the 20th century, people hailed taxicabs; now, we "play" Uber on an interactive map, rating drivers, and getting rated as passengers.

Zimmerman wrote, "New literacies, such as visual and technological literacy, have also been identified in recent decades. However, to be truly literate in the Ludic Century also requires gaming literacy".[8] If we don't understand how these ludic systems function, we risk being gamed by them. This is evident in the politics of Gerrymandering, where political districts are drawn to support those in power. Financial systems can also be gamed by those who spread rumors to drive stock or cryptocurrencies higher for selfish gains. Conspiracy theorists have manipulated ludic systems, too. Gaming political and financial systems are the opposite of playful. Games should be played democratically, where players interact with systems to have mutually positive outcomes.[9] Bernie DeKoven wrote about "well-played games," playful experiences that are more like social contracts between players where no one hordes power. To be literate in these complex systems requires an understanding of how these systems function rhetorically. Understanding procedural rhetoric in well-played games requires literacy in systems, play, and design.[10] Each undergirds gaming literacy and is key to navigating the 21st century.

In 2021, I wrote the book *Gaming SEL: Games as Transformational to Social and Emotional Learning*, which shared how games can proceduralize social and emotional learning by breaking down competencies into mechanical steps.[11] Games are practice spaces for youth to play with emotions, which enable players to actively perspective-taking through digital avatars and can evoke empathy. These ideas were founded on Ian Bogost's theories of procedural play—how games are a form of rhetoric.[12] In video games, ethics are explored through play. In games like *Papers Please*, players learn about a corrupt ethical, political system by becoming part of that system.[13]

Chris McGunnigle's book expands and builds on how to encompass rhetorical composition as fluency, deepening literacy as it pertains to the Ludic Century. Each chapter demonstrates how understanding systems, play, and design can be rhetorical and persuasive. Chapters include case study examples of gamification, collaborative play, assessment, role-play, and composition. And yes, there is even a chapter on student podcasting as playful rhetoric—a true convergence of my teaching journey and play in the Ludic Century more broadly. Game on!

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Endnotes

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[2] Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear, eds, *DIY Media: Creating, Sharing and Learning with New Technologies* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2010).

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[5] Ibid.
[6] Zimmerman, 19-21.
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[12] Ibid.
[13] Lucas Pope, *Papers, Please*, 3909 LLC, Microsoft Windows, OS X, Linux, iOS, 2014.

Introduction

Maybe in my second year teaching at the university level, I experienced a pedagogy-threatening event: I almost fell asleep teaching class. It was one of those 8 am Composition courses that adjuncts are frequently assigned, because no fulltime tenured faculty wants to get up that early in the morning. I was writing notes on one of those now out-of-date transparency projectors, standing at the front of the classroom, in the dark. The feeling of boredom and ennui hit me. I could only imagine how my students felt. The past twenty years of my teaching career have been me trying to do something different.

My first step in renovating my curriculum was giving my assignments a facelift. I used graphic organizers and infographics and pieces of colored construction paper to enhance the visual appeal of my assignments. At some point, I must have encountered Howard Gardner's ideas on multiple intelligences because each step in the development of my pedagogy focused on the addition of some new type of sensory learning style. For example, because I've always had difficulty with uncomfortable silence, especially during independent practice, I included musical components to the ambience of my classroom. At first, this involved me bringing in a portable CD player and just playing music. But of course, my students didn't like the music I played, so I would pass around a sign-up sheet for students to request specific songs. This was during the time in which Napster and LimeWire were just beginning. Twenty years later, with music streaming services abounding, making student playlists has become so much easier.

These simple audio and visual accouterments lead to full-on theatrical performances. I dressed up as Satan to teach *Paradise Lost* and donned my puffy shirt when teaching the Romantics. There has always been the question of whether the role of the teacher was to be a mage on stage or a guide to the side. The mage on stage is the entertainer; the guide on the side sets up lessons, so students are at the center of the lesson, actively engaging in the learning process. I had fallen into the mage on stage mentality but was consciously trying to engage students more. I just didn't know what that meant at the time.

When doing some courses in Education to complete a second Master's degree, one of my professors gave me some pedagogy-changing information where she went over the rate of knowledge retention according to pedagogical styles. Lecture was at the bottom with only a 5% retention rate. Audio-visual components increased retention to 20% with demonstration having a 30% retention rate of knowledge. Near the top of the charts was hands-on

simulation. Teaching a topic was the highest at 90% retention rate. I had been unknowingly working my way up to greater levels of student knowledge retention.

To return to the progress of my pedagogy, I mentioned that I had been using graphic organizers to help guide students into some sense of organization for their essays. I eventually put together a demonstration using giant, plastic, colored children's blocks similar to Legos in order to visualize the process of researching and composition that goes into the writing and organization of an essay. I would build towers of different colors out of the individual blocks in front of the students, each step of the way going over some of the basic compositional principles that were involved in the metaphor of building the essay.

A few years ago, students began asking if they were going to be playing with the blocks. I told them, no, but they could watch me play. I can imagine that students weren't really as excited watching me having fun as they would be playing with the blocks themselves. Picking up on this dissatisfaction, I started giving some students extra blocks so that they could play a little on their own. The problem was I just couldn't afford to give each student their own blocks to simultaneously model their own composition process.

I found a way around the financial limitations of my Lego demonstration by making the building block process more collaborative. I didn't need to give each student his or her own set of blocks but rather just provide enough blocks so that groups of students could play with them. I then added some competitive elements asking students to build the tallest tower and then seeing who could take their tower and move it from their desk to my desk. Students always spectacularly failed as their towers came tumbling down. This was to serve as a metaphor for the ways in which they were often haphazardly constructing their own papers. I would then show them how to create a more organized and stable tower.

Around the same time, one of my students showed me Kahoot! For anyone not familiar with Kahoot!, it is an online game consisting of questions which the instructor displays on the class projector screen. Students create pseudonymous accounts on the Kahoot! website to answer questions, and after each question is answered, the Kahoot! display gives the right answer, highlighting which players are getting the most right answers. With the introduction of Kahoot!, I felt I had taken my first solid step into gamification.

The (not-so-recent) trend in gamification is a reflection of twenty-first-century cognition which permeates every aspect of society. Of course, education would also be affected. Marc Prensky's research in *Computer Games and Learning* shows that students in the twenty-first century simply

learn and think differently than older generations. This has been the result of being raised by computers and video games as well as highspeed music videos and blockbuster movies. The pace of the twenty-first century is pedal to the metal. In response, students process information differently. They think in quick non-linear bursts, mass-processing information through scattered hyperlinks structures while multitasking with other media. The days where a teacher showing a movie in class had students buzzing with excitement is now long gone—students need an active experience rather than a passive banking model.[1]

Gamification of the classroom, then, seems to be a natural response to an increasing student body raised on video games. This wasn't my thinking, though: I never saw my students as video gamers and never considered video games at all. Kahoot! was literally one of the last additions to my pedagogy before I more formally began researching gamification. Gamification, for me, was an alternate to traditional learning and teaching which I saw as being ineffectual in engaging students. Remko W. Helms, Rick Barneveld, and Fabiano Dalpiaz concur, indicating that "recent research suggests that games can help increase learner engagement and motivation."[2] I saw the classroom as a dark, early morning, sedentary experience where even the teacher was bored. How could we turn on the lights and get students moving around to vivify the learning experience? Reinforcing the increased engagement that gamification brings, a literature review conducted by Juho Hamari, Jonna Koivisto, and Harri Sarsa confirms that "all of the studies in education/learning contexts considered the learning outcomes of gamification as mostly positive, for example, in terms of increased motivation and engagement in the learning tasks as well as enjoyment over them."[3] Hamari, Koivisto, and Sarsa add "enjoyment" as another feature in addition to motivation and engagement. I have had multiple students over the past decades reconnect with me, telling me how my gamified pedagogy had inspired them to become English majors or teachers themselves. When lessons aren't "fun," learning itself becomes more difficult.

This project gains its title *Gamification in the RhetComp Curriculum* from my pursuit of a new style of pedagogy in the field in which I have been teaching for over twenty years. Composition courses have gone by many names, but the larger doctoral Concentration in which I earned my PhD goes by the formal title Rhetoric and Composition, abbreviated RhetComp when the full term gets too unwieldy. RhetComp as a field of study typically includes not only rhetoric and composition theory but also the teaching of the two, along with the administration of writing programs. The broader nuances of the field have ebbed and flowed over the decades and centuries, with RhetComp encompassing persuasive communication, rhetorical approaches

to textual analysis, the place of communication, especially writing, among a diversity of media, discourse analysis, cultural criticism, translingual practices, literacy, assessment, and more. No list could be all-encompassing, and this collection is but a drop in the bucket of what Rhetoric and Composition entails. Gamification enters the picture as a media practice and pedagogic technique which I used to enhance my teaching, but like Rhetoric and Composition, gamification brings with it its own history of games and what their interdisciplinary potential and application might involve. *Gamification in the RhetComp Curriculum* hopes to start exploring what both RhetComp and gamification mean and what new approaches to theory and praxis are formed in their intersection.

What is gamification?

Gamification is an umbrella term used to describe a variety of approaches and philosophies where gaming mechanics and components are applied to non-gaming fields.[4] The field in which gamification has developed is referred to as Game Sciences or Game Studies, an interdisciplinary domain primarily connected with Media Studies. As an interdisciplinary technique, the nuances of what gamification involves naturally changes with each field that takes an interest in the gamification phenomenon.

To define gamification, one must eventually define what a game is. Jane McGonigal takes her definition from philosopher Bernard Suits: games are "the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles."[5] By "unnecessary obstacles," McGonigal refers to constraints placed on a game. She uses as an example golf, which requires a ball to be placed in a hole at a distance using a club. The club and number of strokes and so forth are all unnecessary hindrances which make golf a game. In addition, McGonigal identifies individual criteria that culminate in the gaming experience: "all games share four defining traits: a goal, rules, a feedback system, and voluntary participation."[6] Goals and rules give structure to the game to differentiate it from freer play. Feedback systems include points, badges, leaderboards, and other means of providing players with a sense of how well they are performing. Lastly, voluntary participation puts gaming in contrast with work and similar concepts, which are typically seen as mandatory or forced.

Alice Robison provides a similar description of gaming as McGonigal: "games are designed, interactive, rule-based and achievement-bound systems."[7] As part of a game's deliberate structure, a game must be designed and built upon rules and consistency. Interactivity, especially in the form of increased participation and productivity, is a common motivation in gamification: how does one increase performance and involvement in an activity, especially its joyfulness? With its emphasis on goal-oriented behavior and feedback,

gaming requires some type of achievement as part of its measurement and to give closure to activities.

Karl Kapp defines gamification as when "a **player** gets caught up in playing a game because the instant **feedback** and constant **interaction** are related to the **challenge** of the game, which is defined by the **rules**, which all work within the **system** to provoke an **emotional reaction** and, finally, result in a **quantifiable outcome** within an **abstract** version of a larger system."[8] Kapp's definition incorporates overlapping components shared with McGonigal and Robison, including feedback, challenges (obstacles), and rules. Other components seem *sine qua non* to the point of not needing to be mentioned—for example, including players as a criterion—or dubious—does a game need to provoke an emotional reaction? Certain core traits run through multiple definitions of games, while each definition has superfluous additions.

In considering their definition of gamification, Sebastian Deterding et al. ponder what elements are necessary for games to occur. Based upon the scholarship of J. Leighton Read and Byron Reeves, they identify ten criteria or elements: "Self-representation with avatars; three-dimensional environments; narrative context; feedback; reputations, ranks, and levels; marketplaces and economies; competition under rules that are explicit and enforced; teams; parallel communication systems that can be easily configured; time pressure."[9] Deterding et al., however, point out that not all of these criteria are essential—they can appear outside of games or not at all, for example, avatars. Helms, Barneveld, and Dalpiaz organize gaming elements into seven categories: progression, rewards, rules, social, competition, communication, and general.[10] With any element detailing, the question will always arise as to what elements are essential and defining. Tao Jueru et al., for example, isolated nine elements that they deemed "indispensable": intrinsic motivation, goals, challenges and quests, progress, feedback, unlocking content, freedom of choice, freedom to fail, and easy access.[11] Each new study would naturally have its own unique list to distinguish itself, but throughout various definitions and element lists, shared components best help define gamification and games.

In addition to common features, distinguishing between "games" and "play" has been important to ensure that gamification approaches are not just "playing around"—introducing playful activities that aren't necessarily games. While games are bound by rules, play is defined more as a freeform activity. Compared to the structure of games, game designers Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman describe play as "free movement within a more rigid structure."[12] However, scholarship on the relationship between play and games frequently blurs the lines between the two, often placing them on a continuum of activities. Cultural anthropologist Johan Huizinga argues that play does contain a form of rules-system, however, one which is created each play

session rather than formerly established as inherent to the game.[13] Imagine if golf changed the rules each game. It would no longer be a game but rather play. Similarly, anthropologist Roger Caillois distinguishes between different forms of play, for example, *paidia*, which is more freeform, and *ludus*, which relies upon rules which need to be mastered. Callois develops the gaming/play continuum further based on what he refers to as *attitudes* of gameplay like competition, chance, and simulation, which specify and differentiate types of play and games.[14] In considering the comparison between games and play, Deterding et al. have used terms such as *playfulness*, *playful design*, *gameful design*, and *gamefulness* to refer to systems that have qualities of play or games without being fully gamified. Andrzej Marczewski uses the Twitter fail whale as an example of gameful design, where when an error occurs, an icon of a whale is displayed. This display is not gamified but infused with a sense of playfulness.[15]

Because games have often been associated with child's play and frivolity, the term *serious games* has frequently been used to distinguish frivolity from focused intent. Ian Bogost defines serious games as "videogames created to support the existing and established interests of political, corporate, and social institutions."[16] His definition, however, is political in itself. As a more appropriate definition, serious games apply gaming techniques into contexts where the gamification is meant to achieve practical goals rather than entertainment. The purpose of serious games is traditionally educational.[17] Some important sectors which have developed serious game discourse, as outlined by Bogost, have been the government, military, and corporations: "government games translate existing political goals in videogame form; … military games help armies and soldiers address existing global conflicts with new, cheaper, and more scalable simulations; [and] corporate games provide executives with videogame-based tools to accomplish their existing business goals."[18] Other areas using serious games, as noted by Bogost, include education, healthcare, first responders, and STEM.

Serious games and gamification can be seen as conceptual opposites of each other. Gamification adds gaming elements to educational material to increase engagement and motivation, among other purposes, while serious games are games where educational value has been added.[19] As an example of gamification, a curriculum could add extrinsic rewards to activities, while as an example of a serious game, PlantVille from Seimens, teaches its players about the on-job responsibilities of a manufacturing plant by having players take on the on-job responsibilities at a manufacturing plant in the game.[20] With gamification, content is not necessarily connected to the gaming elements; in serious games, content is part of the game.

Within Bogost's overview of serious games, the business sector's increasing incorporation of gamification bears special attention. This has been a rich soil in which modern concepts of gamification have grown. Businesses originally saw gamification as a means to motivate employees into greater productivity. Sebastian Deterding writes, "individual workers, groups, and whole factories were awarded points for their performance, earning commendations, banners, and orders for surpassing certain point thresholds or beating other groups."[21] Trends in gameful and playful design in corporations, particularly in Silicon Valley, later became a device to customize products to encourage maximum consumer interaction. Play, as a frivolous activity, became an important aspect of product design to enhance the "pleasurable experience" of using a product.[22] Gamification techniques like point awards and leveling up increased positive user experience and engagement. Deterding explains: "if design firms used play and games for product innovation processes, researchers in [human–computer interaction] early on started to explore them as inspiration for desirable product qualities."[23] Products and services like Nike+, Farmville, foursquare, and Ribbon Hero revolutionized business and social practices through their gamification, setting up the basic platform for gamification's increasing popularity as once localized practices became mainstream and almost ubiquitous.

Meanwhile, coming from the non-profit sector, Jane McGonigal's philosophy on gamification brought about a paradigm shift in the purpose of games. She writes, "Reality wasn't designed from the bottom up to make us happy. Reality, compared to games, is broken."[24] The purpose of games, for McGonigal, is to fix the malaise of our everyday experiences by bringing about a positive transformation of the gamer and in turn society itself. Larger goals for gamification in McGonigal's philosophy can be broken down into four smaller, more focused elements: "to be happier in our everyday lives, to stay better connected to people we care about, to feel more rewarded for making our best effort, and to discover new ways to make a difference in the real world."[25] Deterding explains that McGonigal's approach to gamification "emphasize[s] collaboration over competition, shared experience over individual distinction, and the 'epic' sense of 'Becoming a Part of Something Bigger than Ourselves.'"[26] As an example, McGonigal's game *World without Oil* combines the politics of green energy with roleplaying as players are asked to imagine a world without oil and document their simulated experience via whatever media they see most rhetorically-appropriate. *World without Oil* creates a collective experience that anticipates a future crisis to solve it collaboratively before that future comes.

Within these different contexts, gamification has developed multiple variations in its definition and has assumed different forms based upon the

purpose of the gamified discourse. Game Studies seeks to explore how games have manifested in varying contexts. Brian Sutton-Smith's appropriately titled book *The Ambiguity of Play* isolates seven main ideologies on what play and games might involve: 1) the whims of gods and fortune; 2) skill development; 3) displays of power through competition; 4) products of the imagination; 5) community-building celebration; 6) self-indulgent activities; and/or 7) pure frivolity.[27] While metaphysical spheres like the whims of fortune and fate are probably not integrated into many serious games, which have likewise sought to separate themselves from self-indulgent activity and pure frivolity, these contexts between fortune and frivolity are those most commonly involved in gamification: skill development, competition, imagination, and community.

Because gamification advocates continually seek new contexts in which gamework can be framed, proponents frequently extend the boundaries of what gameplay involves using analogy and degrees of comparison. While these components do not necessarily involve gamification in its strictest definition, they pose useful design elements to expand what gamification itself might include. Deterding outlines some common analogies. For instance, gamification can involve concepts and precursors related to games but not directly a game, for example, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of creative flow or Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque. General categories such as collective experiences, immersive performances, or aesthetic acts of expression can also fall under gamification's sphere of relevance. Other components or cousins of gaming systems like virtual currencies, ritualistic behavior, parties, theatre, theme parks, and so forth are among many discourses that can be applied to other fields under the umbrella of gamification. As a last example, although not completing Deterding's extensive list of gaming analogs, gaming genres like massively multiplayer role-playing games (MMORPG), social networking games, toys, etc., can inspire discourse practices.[28] While again, each of these ideas are not truly gamified devices, they can add insight into what gamified approaches can involve.

The use of games in RhetComp pedagogy

The pedagogy surveyed by scholars like Rebekah Shultz Colby, Danielle Roney Roach, and Douglas Eyman and Andréa Davis have isolated frequent common categories in gamified Rhetoric and Composition curricula. Foremost amongst the different categories is "writing about games," which can be subcategorized as the use of games as a prompt for writing and analysis while also presenting course content and discourse theory. Genre is emphasized—Shultz Colby focuses on professional-technical writing while Roach and Eyman and Davis look at writing in different contexts. For example, writing can occur in response to a game or about a game but also as part of the

process of gameplay. At the most complex level, game design or the writing of the actual game itself is mentioned by Shultz Colby and Eyman and Davis as an important pedagogical component. Outside of writing and composing, both Shultz Colby and Roach surveyed many instructors who reframed the RhetComp classroom and general discourse as a gaming space. Within the RhetComp gaming space, pedagogy ranged from playful activities to full-on gamification using video games as a central component to the course. However, Shultz Colby notes that gamification in its truest sense as the application of gaming structure to pedagogy was the least used approach. Game-based learning formed the framework for most lessons, combined with procedural rhetoric.

Table 0.1. A comparison of trends within surveyed game-based pedagogy.

Shultz Colby[29]	Roach[30]	Eyman and Davis[31]
1. rhetorical analysis of games 2. games as theory 3. professional writing genres in gaming 4. games as research spaces 5. gaming as transfer 6. gamification 7. composing games	1. using games to teach course content 2. analyzing the game as a text 3. writing about games 4. writing done as part of game design or gameplay itself 5. the writing classroom as a game-like habitus 6. pedagogy incorporating playful techniques	1. writing about games 2. writing around games (which involves non-academic fan writing like forums and fanfiction 3. writing inside games 4. writing the actual game itself

A comparison of trends within surveyed game-based pedagogy.

Review of literature discussing the use of games within the RhetComp classroom revealed roughly half a dozen topical trends within a few larger categories. The primary theme was using the game as a text or source of content. Within this theme, scholars and instructors primarily took a Cultural Studies approach, with analysis of New Media literacy and multimodality widely discussed. Situated learning was an important sub-theme within the multimodal focus, using both video games and role-play to simulate rhetorical situations. A third theme within textual analysis involved collaboration and community-building, with the use of game-related paratext prominent. Lastly, re-framing of gaming in terms of its rhetorical and compositional attributes was another theme. Ian Bogost's concepts of procedural rhetoric and persuasive games fits well into this category.

Most of the sampled pedagogy involved game-based learning, where pedagogy was based on analyzing and/or playing the game. Analysis and gameplay were present in equal proportion to each other. Despite the

preponderance of video games mentioned within our review, analog games also had a sizeable presence. This is a concern of ours, where video game-based pedagogy is dominating gamification scholarship perhaps as a form of selection bias. Within our own chapter collection of sampled pedagogies, our authors favored analog games in their pedagogy even while acknowledging their own video game fandom.

Games as cultural text

Although treating the game as a text to analyze and introduce discourse content might not be considered gamification per se because it uses gaming as a topic rather than as a series of techniques, the game-as-text approach is a fundamental entry point into gamified pedagogy. Douglas Eyman writes, "Much of the current research and academic work that addresses computer games focuses on how to read the games as texts or examining the effects of games on game players."[32] Analysis typically involves a multiple-step process beginning with an introduction to rhetorical-compositional basics and a primer to gameplay mechanics followed by actual gameplay itself. Gameplay, in turn, becomes the basis for academic inquiry. Rebekah Shultz Colby and Richard Colby had students in their Writing classroom play a popular massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft* (*WoW*), where players create online avatars using fantasy races like dwarves, night elves, gnomes, worgen (wolf humans), and so forth to engage in collaborative quests. As part of their gameplay, Shultz Colby and Colby had students "looking for rhetorical exigencies that create opportunities for emergent learning."[33] In other words, in addition to questing within the game, students quested for topics—needs to be fulfilled or gameplay mechanics to be explored or developed—to research. Some sample student topics included a gameplay strategy guide for players to capitalize on *WoW's* in-setting economic market where players can make, buy, and sell items, and a proposal to display what player avatars are within the local gameplay setting to help coordinate collaborative efforts.

In writing to gameplay, certain topics dominate. Eyman explains, "cultural studies of computer and video games is the most prevalent form of games research in rhetoric/composition and related fields."[34] At its broadest, game-as-text-based pedagogy looks at how a game represents cultural values, acknowledging how the values behind a game's performance are subjective depending upon the culture in which the game is released. Rilla Khaled explains, "For a technology to be effective within a culture, as opposed to being effective only for a handful of individuals within that culture, the core premises on which the technology functions must be broadly acceptable by that culture."[35] Naturally, different cultures will have different positions on the

rhetoric behind a particular game or gaming in general. Khaled continues, "in the United States, while it might be considered admirable for an individual to pursue her personal objectives 'against the odds,' in Bangladesh, the same individual might be perceived as selfish, especially if her objectives clashed with those of her immediate community."[36] A competitive game built on leveling up may fall flat in a hierarchal community-oriented culture or it may cater to taboos. The success of a game reveals a lot about its audience and the design of a game about its designers.

Matters of cultural identity are of special importance. Shultz Colby, quoting one of the teachers she interviewed, explains: "through video games, we are able to talk about sex, gender, race, misogyny."[37] Given the different levels in which game-based pedagogy can work, multicultural focuses can range from analysis of the game text to gameplay invoking identity context. She gives an example of an analytical textual approach where "students have conducted textual analysis of the visual graphics within the game. One student examined the degree to which WoW stereotypes Native Americans with their visual representation of the Tauren race, a race with bovine features, by comparing it to the culture of certain Native American tribes."[38] More related to actual gameplay, Shultz Colby points to an example of a game where "having students experience what it is like to interact with other players while playing an avatar of the opposite gender in a massively multiplayer online (MMO) game like WoW can embody for students both queer and feminist theory."[39] The virtual computer graphic nature of video games especially allows for mutable representation and experimentation in embodied identity through avatars and other game icons. Through the affordances of gaming multimodality, one can learn more about the experiences and processes involved in constructing cultural identity and deconstruct them as needed or desired.

Multimodality and media literacy

The second theme common in analysis of games involves a focus on multimodality and media literacy. Shortly after the start of the new millennium, Rhetoric and Composition became interested in new media that were dominating world culture. Gunther Kress's *Literacy in the New Media Age* (2003) was especially influential in Rhetoric and Composition's turn towards something different. According to Kress,

> It is no longer possible to think about literacy in isolation from a vast array of social, technological and economic factors. Two distinct yet related factors deserve to be particularly highlighted. These are, on the one hand, the broad move from the now centuries-long dominance of writing to the new dominance of the image and, on the other hand, the

> move from the dominance of the medium of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen.[40]

For RhetComp, these shifts from word to image and book to screen also meant a drastic shift in what "composition" meant. This displacement of writing also involved the way in which communication was increasingly seen in multimodal terms. Kress continues,

> writing […] has begun to make use of spatial resources, both actually and virtually: actually in spacings (spaces between letters, words), line forms, paragraphs, but also with other spatial features such as indents, bullet points, blocks of writing; and virtually, in the hierarchical structures of the syntax of writing. But mixed logics are, above all, a feature of multimodal texts, that is, texts made up of elements of modes which are based on different logics. Mixed logics pose new questions: of reading, but also of design in writing.[41]

Writing is multimodal and to address this reconceptualization of writing as a medium, Rhetoric and Composition needed to expand the extent of the media within its domain as well as its overall approach to teaching and analyzing written media. The focus of Rhetoric and Composition thus changed into an emphasis on multimodal texts involving visual, virtual, material, spatial, and an assortment of other media.

The same year that Kress's *Literacy in the New Media Age* was published, James Paul Gee's *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy* (2003) broached the topic of expanding definitions of literacy specifically applied to gaming. Gee writes, "When people learn to play video games, they are learning a new literacy. Of course, this is not the way the word 'literacy' is normally used. Traditionally, people think of literacy as the ability to read and write, … [but] in the modern world, print literacy is not enough. People need to be literate in a great variety of different semiotic domains."[42] Gee outlines thirty-six learning principles that are involved in video and computer game literacy, including the cultural principle, the multimodal principle, the situated meaning principle, and the active critical learning principle, among others. The detailed, almost exhaustive, list which Gee put together demonstrates the complexity of multimodal literacy in the 21st century.

As Composition scholars increased their focus on New Media rhetoric and pedagogy, video games became especially valued because of their media properties. Shultz Colby comments, "All games, but especially commercial video games, provide richly multimodal spaces that incorporate visual, aural, written, spatial, and kinesthetic modes that students can then analyze and

explore."[43] Digital environments and video games are noticeable for their increasing complexity of media. Focusing on game design pedagogy, Shultz Colby gives a few examples of simplified multimodal games composed by students in her survey. She describes several games "designed to teach something about writing or literacy to a specific audience. … some students created simple, text-based choose-your-own-adventure games which integrated writing, sound, images, and procedurality. In doing this, students also had to create decision trees, thinking through what options players have to click on as they played through the game and how they could design these options to most effectively persuade players."[44] The purpose of gamified instruction need not involve students designing a grand marketable gaming system but rather to play with multimodal elements via gaming platforms.

However, while video games are a main focus within gamification approaches, the multimodal affordances of website design and non-digital media are still present within RhetComp and its gamified curricula. The incidental erasure of such media is actually a concern of scholars like Jody Shipka, who expresses,

> 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 that it has not already limited) the kinds of texts students produce in our courses.[45]

Shipka's concerns can be broken down into at least two sub-issues. Her point is that New Media, specifically, web-embedded media, are displacing other types of media, many of which are also multimodal—"print, speech, still images, video, sounds, scents, live performance, textures (for example, glass, cloth, paper affixed to plastic), and other three-dimensional objects."[46] Other multimodal media like comic books, maps, postcards, collages, and more can be added to the list of often ignored media. Given that Shipka's concerns were expressed over a decade ago, one has to wonder if video games are replacing earlier web-embedded New Media. With the rise of YouTube, podcasts, streaming music, locative media, and continued interest in older forms of analog multimedia, one must also resist the urge to surrender gamification to just video games.

Situated learning

An example of a particular type of game-based learning which vacilliates between video and analog gaming is situated learning. Gee refers to "'situated cognition' (i.e., thinking as tied to a body that has experiences in the world) … [which] argues that human learning is not just a matter of what goes on inside people's heads but is fully embedded in (situated within) a material, social, and cultural world."[47] Learning is a matter of situation and context, both of which can be easily altered through the embodied placement of student-players within simulated virtual environments—or less technologically, through role-play and similar types of playful activities. Bogost explains, "Videogames simulate the actual dynamics of the material world, and playing such games has the same effect as would real learning in the material world."[48] Via role-playing simulation, almost any character or setting can be presented with which student-players can interact as a tutorial.

The multimodal simulation provides enough representation to create a sense of presence so that experiential learning occurs through simulacra. As an example, Sean Conroy has students use *SimCity*, a city-building video game, to learn public planning and civic engagement. Conroy writes, "I wanted the game to be a springboard for recognition, reflection, and theorizing of actual civic and environmental systems, so that the knowledge and know-how the students acquired by playing the game could be brought into real, lived fruition in their daily lives."[49] The setting for a video game not only provides an environment for gameplay but a tapestry for rhetorical situations. The creation and use of virtual space is little different than the construction of writing spaces or the class habitus; simulation allows the player-student to produce limitless situations for learning and writing.

However, gamification scholars like Bogost, Gee, and Conroy are focusing on video games as the most immediate form of situated learning. Long before MMORPGs came about, table-top role-playing (RPGs) like *Dungeons & Dragons* had been all the rage. For those unfamiliar with RPGs or *Dungeons & Dragons*, role-playing games are interactive stories where players assume the role of a fictional character. The Dungeon Master or Game Master describes the events of a fictional setting in which the role-played characters inhabit, players responding to the unfolding of the story by relating how their characters act. Created by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson in 1974, *Dungeons & Dragons* was loosely based on J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Ring*'s fantasy world, with players role-playing fighters, thieves, wizards, dwarves, elves, hobbits, and other fantasy-inspired professions and creatures. Other genres of RPGs spring up according to the trends of the time, with zombie apocalypse RPGs rising to prominence after the television show *The Walking Dead* became a breakout hit.

Although role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons* construct their situated learning through interactive narration rather than audiovisual media, they are no less multimodal. An important part of situated learning is the provision of an active embodied performance. While video games use media-constructed avatars as extensions of the player, in more traditional analog RPGs, players situate their experience within their own physical body. The embodied performance found in role-play provides just as active an experience as virtual simulation, if not more based upon actual movement of the body compared to the more limited and sedentary engagement of video games.

In the academic world, a popular type of situated learning has been the Reacting to the Past (RTTP) role-playing game. Pioneered at Barnard College in the 1990s by history professor Mark C. Carnes, RTTP assigns students historically-based roles set during critical moments in history. In this role-playing structure, students engage with texts and ideas more deeply and more actively than with traditional pedagogies. Each year, Barnard College holds its Reacting Consortium and Game Development Conference, having attracted interest from nearly 400 colleges in the United States and other countries who have been slowly integrating Barnard's role-play gaming pedagogy into their own curriculum.[50] Like all analog and digital RPGs, even those built on fantasy role-play like *Dungeons & Dragons* or *World of Warcraft*, Reacting to the Past provides a simulated and situated experience for students, locating role-played learning in constructed rhetorical situations.

Collaboration and community

Rhetoric and Composition's multimodal literacy is also frequently tied to the collaborative nature of gaming and the writing process. Reflecting on the multimodal turn in Rhetoric and Composition, Jonathan Alexander comments, "a point that Kress and Gee largely gloss over is the collaborative nature of most of the writing in gaming spaces."[51] Rhetoric and Composition sees writing as a social act and in gamifying the field seeks to bring out the collaborative dynamics of gaming. In his discussion of gaming literacies, Alexander silently invokes foundational Composition scholars to capture gaming collaboration. For example, he writes, "Collaborative Writing is often not a 'solo' activity; much writing, even single-authored pieces, is composed 'in conversation' with others' thinking, writing, and ideas."[52] In his article "Collaborative Learning and the Conversation of Mankind," Kenneth Bruffee uses the metaphor of a conversation to argue that peer socialization leads to knowledge production: "my ability to talk through an issue with myself derives largely from my ability to converse directly with other people in an immediate social situation."[53] For Bruffee, our thoughts and knowledge form from a dialogue with others in which ideas intermingle, evolve, and critique each other.

The idea of critique is particularly important to John Trimbur's collaborative approaches, which affirm dissent and difference: "We will need to rehabilitate the notion of consensus by redefining it in relation to a rhetoric of dissensus. We will need, that is, to look at collaborative learning not merely as a process of consensus-making but more important as a process of identifying differences and locating these differences in relation to each other."[54] Alexander namelessly references Trimbur when he describes the dynamics of *World of Warcraft* discussion boards which "take shape through much discussion, negotiation, collaboration, and some amount of contention. Ideas are discussed, arguments put forward, rebuttals heard, and evidence (based largely on the experience of past game play) considered."[55] Collaboration is not necessarily based on continual agreement but through thesis and antithesis where ideas evolve through contrast and negotiation. Collaboration is meant to be an interactive problem-solving dynamic among diverse participants.

Many video games are known for their collaborative dynamics. Games like *World of Warcraft*, for example, are part of a genre known as massively multiplayer online roleplaying games, or MMORPG. *WoW*'s MMORPG is built around the coordinated efforts of players called a *party*; parties, in turn, frequently take part in larger, more stable groups called *guilds*. Rather than knowledge being produced through the writing process, meaning and narrative are built through gameplay collaboration. Furthermore, video game genres like MMORPGs are based in collaboration which scholars have argued performs more effectively than collaborative efforts seen in education or business. Peter Williams writes about *WoW* collaboration:

- Teams formed and got to a high level of performance in a matter of minutes—in business, this process can take months.

- Weaker team members had active roles, learned quickly from their stronger teammates, and over time got significantly better at the game.

- The collaboration skills of the teenage gamers were significantly more advanced than those I have seen in most business contexts.

- Teams constantly reviewed their results both at a team and individual level and critically analyzed their performance. In business, most individuals have a performance review somewhere between every six to twelve months.[56]

The nature of gaming changes the dynamics of collaborative interactions—not only do players possess a personal passionate investment in the game, the goal-oriented challenges of the MMORPG facilitate such investment in a situated manner, providing an active simulated rhetorical situation compared to the passive academic role commonly found in classroom environments.

Utilizing the collaborative capabilities of gaming, Alexander poses some potential lesson plans based on cooperative learning and writing. Again silently referring back to Trimbur, Alexander suggests "to have students examine in depth a specific instance of unsuccessful communication during game play. Why, how, and in what specific rhetorical contexts did the miscommunication take place, and how was it resolved, if it was resolved?"[57] Rather than focus on harmonious interactions, Alexander's reflective assignment has students look instead at the dissent within the group—how ideas form from back-and-forth differences. Another activity Alexander recommends is to have students "outline and design, in writing or as a website, an MMORPG. Students can reflect on the 'values' they would want their game to have and think critically about how they can set up both the rules of their game and the parameters of interaction, enabled and facilitated by communications technologies, to foster those values."[58] Not only do students create their own rhetorical situations through the imagination of a new MMORPG scenario, they also focus on the nuances of social interactions that can occur within this simulation. This creates a secondary layer of rhetorical situation.

As seen in Alexander's scholarship, gaming collaboration not only occurs from the game itself but also with the paratextual technologies that evolve around the game which allow for a greater sense of audience. Williams adds, "Players use existing tools such as wikis, blogs, forums, and online video services such as YouTube to share data, strategies, and 'how to' guides. Likewise, they build and share software to aid them in gaming—planning and scheduling tools, but also add-ons that provide quantitative dashboards to optimize game play and carry out post-raid reviews."[59] Within these paratextual media are potential frameworks for writing as well as writing directed at the specific audience of other *WoW* players. Rather than just collaborating on gameplay, gaming collaboration engages in a stronger dialectic among collaborators than classroom discussion boards achieve. In terms of audience correspondence, Shultz Colby comments, "Because many paratextual documents are directly interactive … students can also quickly see how their audiences are responding to their texts and revise accordingly."[60] As an example, Jill Morris recounts the creation of an alternate reality game (ARG) that took place across multiple colleges where students communicated through discussion boards. Students in one class at one college served as game designers for an ARG zombie apocalypse game while

students at another university took on the role of gameplayers.[61] While Writing classrooms frequently struggle to find a real audience outside of the classroom, a real audience is fashioned between multiple learning contexts which blend academic and public writing.

While the collaborative composition that occurs as part of the gaming experience is valuable in itself, RhetComp instructors often focus more on the communities which are formed around the game. Roach explains, "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)."[62] Community can involve both the social elements of the classroom as well as the class community as a specific type of discourse. In terms of creating class community, some sample activities which Roach describes in her survey of gamified pedagogy include a seek-and-find game looking for mutual interests between students and using multiplayer-game play to facilitate cooperative communication.[63]

This socialization can in turn build into a discourse community. Patricia Bizzell describes a discourse as "a form of language use that unites a particular community."[64] John Swales expands this definition into several components: "a broadly agreed set of goals … [utilizing] one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims [combined with] specific lexis [and] an explicit or implicit hierarchy and/or structure which, inter alia, manages the processes of entry into and advancement within the discourse community."[65] Within a discourse community, Swales continues, there are implied and silent "horizons of expectation, defined rhythms of activity, a sense of its history, and value systems for what is good and less good work."[66] The itemized complexity of Swales' description of a discourse community translates to the larger issue of the potential inapproachability of entering a new discourse. The student must petition for entry as gatekeepers regulate this entry. The student must learn new vocabulary and ways to communicate. The student must follow laws which are never directly stated. Bizzell identifies that one of the purposes of courses like the First-Year Writing class is to demystify academic discourse.[67]

This demystifying of academia is particularly important for students coming from environments which have had little to no infusion of academic discourse. If social-collaborative learning fails to focus on the specifics of community, it can miss the mark of understanding how students from certain communities navigate entrance into academia. This issue places such students at a profound disadvantage when entering the university environment. Bizzell continues,

> students from different social classes come to school with different abilities to deal with academic discourse: middle-class students are better suited by their socialization in language use to deal with academic discourse's relative formality and abstraction than working-class students are. This unequal removal from academic language is, of course, exacerbated for students whose home language does not resemble the so-called standard English.[68]

The natural result of community inequity is that students from marginalized populations fail in greater numbers than those pre-conditioned into academic discourse. To set right such inequity, Bizzell argues, requires a greater understanding of "the relationship between the academic discourse community and the students' discourse communities."[69]

Returning to Roach's survey of gamified pedagogy, she exemplifies how gaming is in itself a discourse which is often used as an analog or buffer to immersion into more formal academic discourse. She describes, as an example, an instructor who uses *Minecraft* as a research topic, explaining how often students are unfamiliar with the game and overwhelmed by how much information is available about it. This introduction to *Minecraft* models the introduction of a new discourse, guiding students into a coherent and unified conversation around their uncertainties and need for knowledge. Gamification creates a shared space where "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)."[70] This community building and scaffolded immersion into academic discourse helps ameliorate the rough transitions that certain students may have when entering academia.

Composition process and procedure

As part of gaming literacy, Rhetoric and Composition pedagogy frames gamification in terms of the compositional and rhetorical qualities it brings. Rather than focusing on just writing, Rhetoric and Composition sees "composition" as an act that can occur in any medium or genre. Roach explains,

> playing games is a form of composition. … Using *World of Warcraft* as an example … 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.[71]

Each of Roach's examples is its own form of genre or rhetorical-compositional act. For example, the interaction between player-characters is a dialogue and designing a character is a type of descriptive-narrative in which identity and backstory are composed. Meanwhile, the various settings of the game provide rhetorical situations which must be navigated. Jessica Masri Eberhard gives a useful summary of gaming's rhetorical situation in her use of the video game *Mass Effect* in her own pedagogy:

> *Mass Effect* allows players to choose every relationship, substantial line of dialogue, and character response in the game. Each time you encounter another character you have the option of forming a relationship with him or her based on intimidation, subtle coercion, or heroic leadership. The way you choose to speak, act, and respond to other characters' words and deeds changes the way that your character develops over time, which in turn, drastically changes the narrative events in the future of the game. … This makes the player's particular choices, rhetorical as well as material, incredibly crucial to the outcome of the story, and according to BioWare, no two players' stories will be exactly alike.[72]

Student-players make deliberate choices on what situations to navigate and what options work best in their encounters with other players, forming an interactive and collaborative narrative "where player engagement with the rules produces the meaning of the game."[73] While student-players engage in embodied movement through their characters or dialogues with each other, such actions have the same meaning-making as traditional writing composition.

Because composition is viewed as a process, procedural elements of games have been especially applied to Rhetoric and Composition practices. Roach explains that "one particular type of activity discussed in the interviews [she conducted of RhetComp instructors] was the use of playful strategies to open up space for discussion of writing as a 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)."[74] Janet Emig's book *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* identified that writing occurs in a process of multiple recursive and overlapping stages. Early models of writing had seen student composition as a product to be attained rather than looking at how students approached their productivity.[75] Each of the activities exemplified by Roach and Eberhard involves complicated, multi-step processes which can be extended through multiple sessions of gameplay.

Even when playing the same game again, the game will differ because of changing contexts.

Gameplay, thus, can become an infinite creative narrative, similar to Donald Murray's concept of unfinished writing. Murray likewise saw writing as a process which is meant to be unfinished, allowing for students to develop their writing beyond the context and constraints of the writing classroom. This turns writing into a method of discovery and problem-solving as students explore and reflect on their writing as it is composed. Murray writes, writing is "the process of discovery through language. It is the process of exploration of what we know and what we feel about what we know through language. It is the process of using language to learn about our world, to evaluate what we learn about our world, to communicate what we learn about our world."[76] Gamified pedagogy in Rhetoric and Composition curricula frequently combine a process-oriented approach with gameplay to foster this creative exploration and discovery.

Having students be aware of the writing process is especially vital in Writing Studies. Douglas Downs and Elizabeth Wardle write, the Composition classroom should focus on "moving first-year composition from teaching 'how to write in college' to teaching *about* writing—from acting as if writing is a basic, universal skill to acting as if writing studies is a discipline with content knowledge to which students should be introduced, thereby changing their understandings about writing and thus changing the ways they write."[77] Students not only learn how to write but are imbued with the Writing instructor's own knowledge on how writing works. They become aware of the process and their own involvement in it.

Roach gives numerous examples of gamified assignments which rely upon a process approach along with reflection on that process. One instructor has students build a structure using Legos, writing up an instruction manual afterwards which other students use to re-construct the original Lego structure. When the instructions fail, as they invariably do, students work together to revise their instructions.[78] The activity is not only a compositional process, it culminates in reflection on the process of the activity itself. In another activity, students sit back-to-back. One student is given a disassembled puzzle while the other instructs the first student on how to assemble the puzzle (with another catch being that the instructions are wrong). The emphasis of the game is on not only the process of assembling the puzzle and the communication it involves but also how this process has been deconstructed and can be repaired. Roach comments, "Reflecting on the process becomes more valuable than the activity itself because it engenders genuine conversation about writing and communication."[79]

PAGES MISSING

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