"IT'S DANGEROUS TO GO ALONE": AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF COLLEGE ENGLISH STUDENTS READING VIDEO GAMES AS TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

"IT'S DANGEROUS TO GO ALONE": AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF COLLEGE ENGLISH STUDENTS READING VIDEO GAMES AS TEXTS

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My dissertation research studies the use of video games as texts for analysis in a College English course. The purpose of the study was to see what happens when College English students are asked to engage with a video game as a class text, use their engagement with a video game to make sense of other texts, and how reader-response theory applies to making meaning of video games as texts. A secondary purpose was to study, if this transaction does take place, whether video games can support the kind of analysis required of a College English curriculum and what this curriculum might look like. I conducted this study as an autoethnography of a course designed for this purpose as the course instructor. Observing my students' participation and analyzing their written work served as the primary data, as well as self-reflection on my own meaning-making processes. My final observations suggest that students engaged with the video game as a class text, though not more than they might have any other text; however, the nature of playing the text (and the multiple

interpretations that afforded individual students) encouraged a critical reading in which students readily participated. For this reason, game choice was of paramount importance, that it might align with learning objectives but was accessible to a wide variety of prior experience with video games. Finally, a committee of department faculty deemed the majority of student work as of the quality expected for the course, suggesting video games can serve as texts for analysis that the field expects of its students. The implications of this study should inform English Education's adaption to teaching the multiple literacies of the 21st century, as this research itself is multimodal and requires multiple literacies to read. This choice of research method and format was also meant to serve as examples of the transactions I and students experienced in the study.

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Special thanks goes out to Santa Claus, who brought me a Nintendo Entertainment System on my 6th Christmas, even after my parents said I couldn't have one. But thanks also to my parents, who seemed to adjust with ease – to my dad for so quickly thinking of a game he wanted to play and taking me out to buy it; to my mom, for not letting me play every day and making me find something else to do. You both set me on a path to not only finding my passion but using it for others.

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I hope this project and I make you all proud.

- BJV

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

> "Once upon a time there was a boy who loved language. He loved it all: nursery rhymes, stories, comic books, plays, movies, advertising, instructions on packages, even school books. What becomes of such a boy? If he is lazy—and lucky—he becomes an English teacher. I was such a boy, and that is what became of me."
>
> - Robert Scholes, *The Rise and Fall of English*

It is clear to me now that I became an English teacher as a direct result of video games. By kindergarten, I already enjoyed reading. But things changed when, that Christmas, Santa Claus brought me a Nintendo Entertainment System. I spent the day playing *Super Mario Bros.* and *Duck Hunt* with my dad, but the next day, he took me to the KB Toys at the mall to look for a new game. A friend of his recommended one he wanted to try, and we went home with *The Legend of Zelda*. The cover was very non-descript, other than the title, but featured a coat of arms with two hearts, a key, and a lion. That meant it had to be about knights and castles and everything else I loved from fairy tales.

We excitedly took it home, whereupon opening it we discovered a gold-painted game cartridge, rather than the usual gray. It was beautiful, like holding a holy artifact. Indeed, the only golden things I'd ever seen that weren't jewelry were in church on Sundays. We booted it up and were met with some melancholy music playing over a title screen, featuring a sword underscoring the title with a shimmering golden triangle behind that, hovering over a waterfall. (See Figure 1.) But soon, the sun set over the waterfall, the screen faded to black, and the music tempo hastened into a theme song that would stay with me for the rest of my

life. Text began to scroll past the screen, telling the story of the evil Ganon stealing the Triforce of Power and the clever Princess Zelda hiding the pieces of the Triforce of Wisdom before being captured by Ganon's henchmen. Then it listed all the treasures available to help the hero, Link, on his way.

Figure 1. Video of *The Legend of Zelda* (1986) title screen.

From there, we were taken to a selection screen, where we could choose a save file to name our hero and begin our adventure. My dad let me play first, and as the game began, I found myself looking down on my 8-bit avatar, a little green and brown-clothed elf surround by hills with paths to the north, west, and east. But there was also a little cave in one of the hillsides. Armed with only a tiny brown shield with a gold cross on it, I moved Link into the cave, which he trotted down into, finding an elderly man and two bonfires. In front of the man was a little brown sword, and as I stepped in he spoke: "It's dangerous to go alone! Take this." (See Figure 2.) I took the sword in hand and lifted it overhead to musical fanfare and was, from that moment on, Link.

Figure 2. Link receiving the wooden sword at the beginning of *The Legend of Zelda* (1986).

I played during the day, searching dungeons for the pieces of the Triforce that Princess Zelda had hidden, and my dad played at night when he got home from work. I'd fall asleep hearing the music from the other room and my dreams were consumed with fighting monsters. But soon Christmas break ended, and I went back to school. My parents established a firm rule that whenever school was in session, I would only be allowed to play video games on the weekends, if I maintained my grades. But the desire to return to that world consumed me, and pretty soon, I turned back to those fairy tales and other stories, discovering that reading could fill my imagination in the space between games.

However, where stories had clear plots, lots of characters, and a moral at the end, *The Legend of Zelda*'s plot was up to me, I was alone in this world, and the moral was basically the usual good overcoming evil. Given this contrast, much as I loved playing the game, the story left a lot to be desired. By the first grade, I was making up my own stories to fill in the blanks, and I'd start the game over and over, trying out new details: in one Link and the

Princess had been very good friends; in another they didn't even know each other but Link's village had been destroyed by Ganon; regardless, they were destined lovers.

Soon, short stories were my favorite classroom assignment, and the subjects began to vary from Link saving Princess Zelda. And so, too, did my reading interests broaden. While adventure was the general theme, I'd read pretty much anything: Jean Craighead George's *My Side of the Mountain*, Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, the *Goosebumps* series, *The Hardy Boys*, *Johnny Tremain*, *Number the Stars*, and on and on; a friend so loved *The Baby-Sitters Club* I'd sneak a peek at random copies, even though those were "girls' books."

At first, my stories were merely acted out in play other than the occasional creative writing assignment. But by high school, I'd decided writing would be my thing, and I looked up most to my English teachers, who lived lives that seemed brilliant to me, spending all their time reading, writing, and teaching both.

There were other things that pushed me to love books and writing—my dad's summer promise of a book report for a gift I wanted; writing fan fiction with my best friend; teachers encouraging my analyses of texts and the way I expressed those analyses. But it began with games, and games were always there, at the heart of all my interests and passions. Because it's dangerous to go alone, I took games.

Framing

Now a college teacher myself, studying English Education, I reflect on this and see that video games and books meant so much to me as a child because I related to them in much the same way—as stories. Thankfully, while few people saw in games what I saw, no one outwardly discouraged this. Once I became a teacher, however, I began to see that my

experience was not common; many of my students seemed to have been even discouraged to relate personal interests to what they studied. They watched movies, TV, played games, listened to music, but asking how those media related to what we discussed in class was akin to saying a dirty word. When I began to design my courses to do just that, I often experienced surprise or resistance; handing out the syllabi to my first class studying comics, one young woman clarified the topic of the course, gathered her things, and walked out. Several more didn't come back, as if asking them to analyze anything other than books was not to be taken seriously.

Quickly, though, I felt that some students in my courses that used comics and film seemed more engaged and interested than those with more traditional curricula; students could readily analyze the heroic arcs or central themes in novels if they were first asked to find them in their favorite films, something I really noticed during the first college literature course I ever taught: a sophomore level Introduction to Pop Culture class. It was tied to the program I helped coordinate, which was the only reason why I, only an instructor with a MA, was even allowed to teach a literature course in a department full of qualified, tenured professors.

The caveat was that the course was carefully vetted before I taught it (using this professor's text recommendations, that one's syllabus, etc.). Luckily, I managed to include only books I'd already read and studied, except one—Robert Coover's *Universal Baseball Association*. *UBA* is about a man who invents an elaborate pen and paper baseball game—a kind of *Dungeons & Dragons* with baseball. A loaner in love with his game and its characters, the novel begins with a series of dice rolls that end with the death of his favorite pitcher. Devastated, this is the catalyst for the novel's central conflict (separating between the real

world and his imagined one). Having been written in the 1960's, my students had no idea what to make of it.

"This guy needs to get a life."

"He's whining about some made-up character?"

"Is the whole book like this?" were some early responses. Struggling to engage them with the character (and therefore, the whole novel and three weeks of the course), I asked, near desperation, "Can't we relate to the character on any level?!"

Then a Vietnamese student who I'm convinced learned English by watching American sitcoms, spoke up.

"Oh man, Mr. V. This reminds me of how I felt when Aeris died in *Final Fantasy VII*. I cried. It was legen-wait-for-it-dary!" (He ended many of his class comments this way.) I pounced on it, quickly explaining to the class that this video game death is widely considered one of the most emotional in video game history, in which a central character, into whom a player could have poured dozens of hours, dies. Permanently. This does not happen in video games. When it happened to me, almost twenty years ago, I cried, too.

"Oh!" a softball player jumped in. "When I was younger, my favorite game was *Pokémon*." At this, several students comment, chuckle, and otherwise assert collective nostalgia. "I had this one team of *Pokémon* that I just kept playing with, even after I beat the game. Then one day, my little sister stole my Game Boy, started a new game, and saved over my file, deleting my Pokémon." There were several groans among her peers. "They were gone. And I didn't pick it up again."

The dam broke; students were discussing their own Pokémon or beloved Tamagotchi (a kind of virtual pet that players have to take care of) whose batteries died. And just like that, the majority of a class of teenagers connected to a 1960's fictional character

dealing with the death of another character of his own creation for a baseball game played with pen, paper, and a handful of six-sided dice. I also went home that afternoon and pulled out my old copy *Pokémon*. This was the start of what would become my current research interests and the reason for pursuing a doctorate.

My childhood love of video games, reading, and writing, and this moment in my teaching are the catalyst of the study I herein conducted, in part to satisfy my own curiosity but also to broaden what the pedagogy of teaching English considers "the text" and how we as educators might use it. So my early questions, which contributed to my current research interests, were simple. Why was my Vietnamese student immediately able to find a connection from a class text to a video game when most of the class (of different ages and ethnicities) had similar experiences? Could a better pedagogy be used to encourage students to draw on these experiences? And what was it in my experiences and education that lead me here? These were some of my very vague questions when I began this research, and they lead to the framework through which I view the work I conducted.

Reading Graff through Rosenblatt and the Implications to Critical Media Literacy in College English

In his piece "Why How We Read Trumps What We Read," Gerald Graff (2009) expands on his assertions "that there is no necessary relation between the intellectual complexity or value of any object of study and the degree of difficulty in studying it, that any text becomes challenging when subjected to the *right kind* [emphasis added] of analysis" (p. 67). He explains his philosophy of using texts that students already appreciate and understand to teach them how to make sense of the texts they struggle with. To do this, he cites a class lesson he gave demonstrating that even a celebrity autobiography was ripe for close analysis. In the lesson, he convinces a class that *Vanna Speaks* (about *Wheel of Fortune*

letter-turner Vanna White) could support analysis of subjects such as "gender roles, notions of female beauty in our culture, the culture of celebrity, the cultural circulation and impact of visual images, and so forth" (p. 68).

Here, Graff builds on ideas he put forth in *Clueless in Academe* (2003): "Bridging the gap between the discourse of students and teachers starts with the recognition that there is a continuum between the adolescent's declaration that a book or film 'sucks' and the published reviewer's critique of it" (p. 24). In other words, he argues that students already know how to make the moves used by academics; they just need a way to learn how to do it academically—that is, in the way valued by academics. I doubt that Graff is suggesting that makes it right but instead that it builds a bridge between two different (but not separate or unequal) discourses. Further, it creates a place from which to question those versions of "academic" writing as the ones that count.

Graff's (2003, 2009) lessons are an important example of the kind of English Education I am proposing in terms of using multiple literacies and modes to teach college reading and writing (discussed further in the next chapter). Graff's ideas are also tied closely to my research of how teachers might make use of the textual experience students bring to make meaning of class texts. For this reason, I also see Graff's ideas linking to Louise M. Rosenblatt's (1978) transaction theories, specifically those espoused in the second chapter of *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*.

In her chapter, "The Poem as Event," Rosenblatt (1978) argues,

> The reading of a text is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader. The transaction will involve not only the past experience but also the present state and present interests or preoccupations of the reader. (p. 20)

In other words, she states that the poem (meaning) a reader will make of a text will be informed by the reader's life experiences and interests. She arrived at this conclusion by

first investigating "the paths by which…students approached even a tentative first interpretation" and cataloging some of the questions one asks in this first reading (p. 7). To do this, she asked students to "articulate the very stages that are often ignored or forgotten by the time a satisfactory reading has been completed," noting that such a process is akin to watching slow-motion, instant replays of each stage of the student's understanding (p. 10).

Rosenblatt (1978) ended with two primary findings: 1) "the reader's creation of a poem out of a text must be an active, self-ordering and self-creative process" (p. 11); 2) there needs to be made "a semantic distinction between 'the poem' and 'the text,' terms often used interchangeably" (pp. 11-12). She goes on to define these two terms: "'Text' designates a set or series of signs interpretable as linguistic symbols…. 'Poem' presupposes a reader actively involved with a text and refers to what he makes of his responses to the particular set of verbal symbols" (p. 12). She takes this one step further, saying that not only do the text and poem exist separately from one another, but the creation of the later requires a "transaction" between the reader and the former (p. 17).

If Rosenblatt's (1978) theory around how a reader makes sense of a text holds, as I believe it does, it suggests that teachers miss an opportunity to encourage student engagement with a text based on the students' experiences with popular culture. Further, such transaction should work both ways, with students being able to take what they learn about a text back to their pop culture, especially if, as Graff (2009) affirms, their texts are just as rich for analysis as those teachers give them. Therefore, analysis of one should inform the meaning made of the other.

In light of this, I also see this research framed by the theories of critical media literacies and critical pedagogy as interwoven. I began this understanding with the New London Group's (Cazden, Cope, Fairclough, Gee, et al., 1996) "A pedagogy of

multiliteracies" (also related or referred to as new literacy studies and multiliteracies): "the evolving language of work, power, and community, and fostering the critical engagement necessary for them to design their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment" (p. 60). Games fit squarely within these considerations, as another form of media that can exhibit power over students but also, with increasing ease, can be leveraged by students as a means of creation. Kellner and Share (2007) offer the broad ways that teachers can approach this, from "protecting" students from media by encouraging consumption of traditional texts to varying degrees by teaching students to analyze media and encouraging them to learn to produce it while not forgetting the traditional texts that inform new media using critical pedagogy.

Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2009) describe critical pedagogy as a cyclical process of not only understanding the discourse of a topic but questioning all assumption within it by creating space for as many voices as possible. Graff (2003, 2009) and Rosenblatt's (1978) assertions then suggest a form of critical pedagogy attempted here. By studying the ways students relate prior experiences to the meaning making of video games as texts, as well as how that meaning making might influence their understanding of the traditional texts of the College English classroom, the students I studied for this research and I as a class might have engaged in a critical media literacy that centered their lived realities as ways of understanding others'.

In other words, helping students develop critical reading skills in the 21st century means creating opportunities for them to leverage those skills at both the traditional texts of the English classroom and those they experience outside of it. And a pedagogy of games studies might offer ways of not only teaching students the same literacy skills we as English

teachers want them to use in our classrooms but encourage them to be critical consumers of games and other media outside of it.

Problem Statement

This research studied the use of video games as texts in a College English course because I wanted to find out if, and if so how, students engage with games as well as if, and if so how, players' experiences transfer from games to other texts and vice versa, in order to, I hope, draw implications from this research for pedagogical considerations in the College English classroom.

Pilot Study

I determined to begin digging at this problem in a pilot study that I hoped would allow me to not only test my framing but my methods, as well.

I spent a great deal of time debating the choice of game and text to read alongside for my pilot study during the Winter Break of 2015-2016 just prior. But then, one morning right after the New Year as I prepared to return to work, I had one of those very early morning moments of clarity. It occurred to me that I could just as easily choose a novel or book with themes that matched all the games! Then students could choose any of the games I was considering and still have a text in common! I began racking my brain for a book, and a few came to mind: Robert Coover's *Universal Baseball Association*, about a man who creates and loses himself in a pen, paper, and dice baseball game; Tom Bissell's *Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter*, a memoir and critique of games the author holds dear; Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother*, a novel less about games and more about technology and privacy violations;

finally, Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One*, about a dystopian future in which most of the world spends their lives in a virtual reality game.

This last I had not read, but given my interests, friends and family had been suggesting it since it came out in 2011, most recently my baby brother. I picked it up and devoured it in a couple of days. The novel takes place in 2044, a time when pretty much all the conceived ills of the early 21st century have come to fruition: disastrous climate change, food and water shortages, overpopulation, terrorism, fuel shortages, corporatocracy, etc. Facing such bleakness, most of the world has chosen to escape into a virtual reality universe called the OASIS. Deemed a public utility, the OASIS is used for everything from ordering pizza to attending school, playing video games to earning a living. Wade Watts, the teenage protagonist, was practically raised in the OASIS, a far better life than his real one, moving between his cruel aunt's home in the Stacks (high-rise stacks of recreational vehicles built in the Midwest to accommodate urban flight with abandoned vehicles lacking gasoline) and a junkyard sanctuary with wireless access.

The one silver lining of this world is the death of the OASIS' creator James Donovan Halliday (a kind of Steve Jobs—the founder of Apple Computers—mixed with Gary Gygax—the creator of *Dungeons and Dragons*). On the occasion of his death his will leaves behind the first clue in a virtual scavenger hunt spanning the OASIS—find three keys, find the gates they unlock, overcome the challenges within, and inherit Halliday's considerable fortune, including controlling stock in his company and the OASIS. For Wade, that's enough money to escape the dying Earth and establish a space colony or solve world hunger; for Innovative Online Industries, the world's largest internet service provider, that would mean control over history's most pervasive media ever, with access to the minds of humanity. But Halliday's clues and challenges are based on his love of late 20th century

popular culture, in particular the 80s. That means solving the puzzles requires knowledge of movies, music, television shows, and of course, games that are decades old.

As a child of the 80s, whose love of video games goes back to the 1986 fantasy adventure video game *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo), the book's many (and often extremely obscure) references offer a lot to enjoy. From a teaching perspective, the book offers even more, since not only does it explore many of the same lessons seen in the games I considered for this study, but it demonstrates some of the consequences of not learning from them, including the importance of interrogating the multiple media consumed every day.

With this in mind, I decided to still have the class begin with a common game, while moving onto the novel and game of each student's choice from the list of those I was considering (this list is discussed in greater detail in Chapter III). The common game would give us something to analyze together, informed by short, non-fiction texts (news articles and chapters on media studies) before letting them loose onto the game of their choice, something they could play along with reading the novel, creating space for transaction, if any, to occur.

There's little reason to go into detail about the course taught for the pilot study, except to discuss what didn't work and why. First, having students read a novel alongside playing a game (even a game of their own choice) was disastrous; given the choice to write about the game or novel, almost every one chose the novel, meaning almost none of them actually played a game to completion for the course—akin to nearly an entire class refusing to read a course text. However, this still showed me the most important (i.e., dangerous) assumption I was making about teaching with video games.

In the end, it became clear that I was assuming that by assigning students a video game, I was asking them to play rather than work. The students, however, did not see it this way exactly. They complained I was assigning too much homework and asking them to spend too much money for the class (the book plus the game), and opted to continue reading rather than purchase and play the game. In the end, I concluded that by treating the game as "just a game" rather than a course text, I encouraged students to do the same. And this became a way I began to rethink the course observed for this study, particular in the questions I was asking.

Research Questions

1. What happens when College English students are asked to engage with a video game as a class text?
2. In what ways, if any, do students use their engagement with a video game to make sense of other texts?
3. In what ways, if any, does reader-response theory apply to making meaning of video games as texts?

To begin addressing these questions, the first half of this dissertation will do three things. The next chapter will review the literature about both English Education broadly and games studies specifically. However, in view of my framework and third research question, this review is as much about my transaction with the material as the research itself. Secondly, as a means to demonstrate both the kinds of transactions I experienced in the first three years of my doctoral research (how researchers choose different areas to explore as interests and relevance shift and change) and how games work (exhibiting some of the tenets of play and games described herein), the chapter takes the form of an interactive narrative,

exemplified by "Choose-Your-Own Adventure" series of books, allowing the reader to make their own decisions about where to go in their own study of the literature here. To play, readers simply have to review the prompts at the end of a given section and choose one by Ctrl-clicking their choice in underlined, blue text or turning to the specified page.

The third chapter lays out the methods I used to study my research questions in a course I designed for this purpose and reflects on the theory and practices used to do so, as well as some of the assumptions I saw myself bringing to the study. I can best describe these methods as a kind of constructivist (Clandinin, 2013) autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), in which I noted observations during the course I studied (to address my first and second Research Question), analyzed student work situated into case studies (Creswell, 2009) for examples of transactions (which I hoped would address my second Research Question), and then reflected on how my own experiences influenced my interpretations of these artifacts (addressing my last Research Question). Autoethnography felt a particularly appropriate method to use, given my interest in, as Ellis and Bochner (2000) explain, "the research process (graphy), on culture (ethnos), and on self (auto)" (p. 740). It was important I reflect on the research process here as it also allowed me to reflect on my teaching, the design of the course for study, and what I interpreted from it. The focus on culture (not only video games but that which the students brought with them to the classroom) was central to the study, as was the self, in how I looked back on my own education and might use it now to inform my pedagogy as an educator. In other words, who my students were, at the time of this class, and how their prior experiences influenced their reading of the course texts (including the video game we played), was a prime consideration.

The end of the third chapter will then transition from the design of my course to the second half of the dissertation, a digital interactive narrative (a text-based video game)

representing what would traditionally be the Findings and Discussion chapters. This digital text, titled "It's Dangerous to Go Alone" after the famous line from *The Legend of Zelda* (Nintendo, 1986) has multiple purposes; the first is simply as a way of representing my autoethnography in the form I defend and describe throughout this research, a way of showing the playing the day to day choices made in teaching, collecting student work, and reflecting on it in the moment. Further, because player choice is affected by prior experience, every choice made in a video game is an example of Rosenblatt's (1978) reader-response theory, and my hope is to give the player a new store of experiences (interpretations of my own and my students') with which to approach the teaching of College English.

The last chapter of this project, while traditionally referred to as the Conclusion, will instead be my Final Statement, a reflection on the overall experiences of the class and a more detailed description of what I hope teachers of English and the field of English Education will take away from "It's Dangerous to Go Alone." Finally, I will discuss the limitations of such a form, as well as what I have learned from writing it, both about games as texts and teaching with them. This last point will include what I've learned about the field of game studies in the time since proposing this project, such as how the work of others like Kurt Squire (2006) and Ian Bogost (2006) have helped me make sense of what I observed in my class and how I chose to represent those observations. Indeed, Bogost even offers questions I now realize are more generalized versions of my own: "What do video games do, what happens when players interact with them, and how do they relate to, participate in, extend, and revise the cultural expression at work in other cultural artifacts?" (p. 45) Both of us are concerned with how games influence players' understanding of their own experiences, past and future—though we have different ways of addressing these questions.

In that sense, much about this project has changed since I started it three years ago. The focus has narrowed to specific kinds of student engagement (reader-response theory) with a specific video game (Telltale Games' [2012] *The Walking Dead*). The data gathered has expanded from student work to observations made by other faculty. The methods have expanded from an ethnography of student interpretations of games as texts to an autoethnography of how video games have influenced my own learning. The format has shifted from a simple Choose-Your-Own-Adventure to a digital interactive narrative.

What hasn't changed is the projects' importance to the field of English Education and its students. For the English Department of the 21st century, helping my students develop "skills" will be as important as teaching content. In their 2015 report, the World Economic Forum identified sixteen skills the next generation will need to foster in the 21st century through a meta-analysis of education research in order to close the income gap in ninety-one countries, which they break up into three categories: 1) Foundational literacies—"how students apply core skills to everyday tasks"; 2) Competencies—"how students approach complex challenges"; 3) Character qualities—"how students approach their changing environment" (pp. 2-3). What texts we ask students to read and write, then, is not more important than how we read and write about them (Graff, 2009). Looking at the first 100 years of English in higher education shows it replacing other programs as the definition of literacy changed to suit society's needs (Scholes, 1998); if those first 100 years aren't going to be English programs' last, I am not alone in believing that they need to continue evolving.

A Link between Worlds

When I first got my Nintendo and *The Legend of Zelda*, I wanted nothing more than to talk about it with friends. But they either didn't play video games themselves or, if they did,

were more interested in sports or shooter games. This was another reason why I turned to storytelling, I think—to express my passion and love for this game. I would be in high school before I knew people as passionate about the series as me, and even then, we were the school misfits, only friends because there was only one unoccupied table left at lunch and none of us were in any established cliques. There weren't exactly a lot of us.

Things have changed in the nearly three decades since I first heard the theme song. The semester before I proposed this study, my wife Veronica surprised me with tickets to the symphony. A full orchestra played music from across *The Legend of Zelda* series to a packed house of fans. It was moving to watch music performed that I'd only ever heard as 8-bit chip tunes, a few digital tones that could only vaguely represent some musical notes. But this was how I'd always imagined it, how I remembered it, and no doubt the same was true for the rest of the audience who sat in rapt attention: teenagers dressed up as characters, parents with children, couples. Applause brought the conductor back out for three encores. I was surrounded by my people.

A couple of weeks later, I was on the train playing the most recent game in the series, *A Link between Worlds* (Nintendo, 2013), lent to me by my youngest brother. When we stopped in Chinatown, a 40 or 50-year old gentleman sat down next me. Over the course of the next few stops, I explored a tower, finding the dungeon master at the top—a large centipede-type monster that charges around attempting to knock you off, its weak spot in the last segment of its long body. I blocked its charges with my shield, running around when I got too close to the edge, struck when it turns away. Finally, I made the killing blow causing it to explode in a colourful burst of smoke.

It was only then I realized that I was still on the subway, when the older gentleman sitting next to me nudged me with his elbow. I looked over at him; he flashed me a big smile and gave me a thumbs up before getting off at the next stop.

As video games become a more ubiquitous part of our global society (in 2016, Nasdaq [Nath] reports that video games generated more revenue than film or music), their potential and importance for study grows. My hope is that this study will offer some further insights for why this is important and how educators might go about using them.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Year 1

You can't believe it; you're in a doctoral program at an Ivy League school in New York City, on your way to becoming a professor of English Education. If you travelled back in time four years and told your MA-in-English-Literature self where you were from, your past self would have scoffed about being finished with school. Your working-three-jobs-to-pay-for-college self would have laughed in your face. And your barely-graduated-high-school-on-time self would have thought you had travelled in time just to make fun of yourself. But ironically, it was your high school teachers, not letting up on you and encouraging you and your peers, who inspired you to become a teacher. You appreciated what they did for you, and you wanted to be like them—sharing knowledge, challenging thought, changing lives. And you followed a path that you hoped would get you there. Actually, perhaps it's not so ironic that you ended up at Teachers College, Columbia University in Manhattan, after all.

It doesn't help, though, that everyone here seems so much more knowledgeable than you. The TA for your Teaching of College English course makes a point of stating that everyone here is at different places in the program and we shouldn't compare ourselves, but you sort of feel like that's easy for her to say, a graduate of Columbia University, daughter of teachers, TA of a doctoral level-course. It's easier to be intimidated than reassured. And there's so much catching up on the state of your field that it's difficult to know where to start!

[To focus on the formation of English as a field, turn to Page 23.]

[To look at Composition, a major area of consideration, turn to Page 30.]

[To jump ahead to the conditions that lead to the present state of the field, where most of your peers seem to be focused, turn to Page 22.]

Exploring the Most Recent Research

"It is pitch black. You are likely to be eaten by a grue" (Anderson, Blank, Daniels, & Lebling, 1977).

"The grue is a sinister, lurking presence in the dark places of the [academy]. Its favorite diet is [scholars], but its insatiable appetite is tempered by its fear of [knowledge]. No grue has ever been seen by [those who've done adequate research], and few have survived its fearsome jaws to tell the tale" (Anderson et al., 1977).

[To go back and study the formation of English as a field, turn to Page 23!]

[To go look at Composition, a major area of consideration, turn to Page 30!]

The Formation of English

"In the beginning there were no English professors," Robert Scholes tells you (1998, p. 3) in the introductory chapter of *The Rise and Fall of English: Reconstructing English as a Discipline*, framing the fall of Classics and Rhetoric curriculums to make way for the beginning of English programs. His purpose for this is two-fold: it offers a history of American English programs; it serves as a warning of what he believes may happen to English programs in the future (p. 1).

Scholes explains that this fall of rhetoric and belles lettres and rise of literature and composition barely took sixty years in the United States and was led primarily by what students and society were then demanding of higher learning: oratory gave way to composition; rhetoric to the analysis and appreciation of literature. This latter, Scholes assures you, became popularly associated with the clergy and public office (p. 5). Appropriately, some of the most influential professors of the 20th century, according to Scholes were also ministers: Billy Phelps and Matthew Arnold.

However, the observations that come of this history lesson are potentially more important. For instance, Scholes humourously notes:

> Let us remember, [the] good old days, and what we learn from them is that from 1770 to 1914 and right on to the present moment, English teachers have not found any method to ensure that graduates of their courses would use what were considered to be correct grammar and spelling. (p. 6)

In other words, "two hundred years of failure are sufficient to demonstrate that what Bronson called beggarly matters are both impossible to teach and not really necessary for success in life" (p. 6).

Looking at the history of English in American higher education, with the help of Scholes (1998) and Gerald Graff's (2007, first published in 1987) *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*, affords you a view of where your discipline has been, where it's going,

and if it looks carefully, how to save itself. For what this history really demonstrates is that an education that does not serve the needs of the students for the society of which they are a part is doomed to fall. Just as rhetoric and oratory were less necessary for the two great spheres of public service and religion, if English cannot change with the times it may (and perhaps should) give way to a subject that can. However, Graff notes that these needs are often at opposition to society's wants: "What this society does *not* want from our educational institutions is a group of people imbued with critical skills and values that are frankly antagonistic to those that prevail in our market places, courts, and legislative bodies" (p. 19). In other words, Graff explains that education is necessary for a truly democratic society; in that way, a carefully limited education can maintain class structures. And that makes what you want to teach all the more important.

Reading Graff's (2007) *Professing Literature* is like getting a primer on your old university's English department. There's much overlap with Scholes (1998) here, which creates a problem while trying to annotate them. Both books are essentially written chronologically, but Scholes is less specific with dates than Graff (2007). The result is that while rereading both, you keep making associations to what you remember the other saying, only to discover that the two may very well be referencing entirely different time periods. Thus, it quickly becomes apparent how much history repeats itself in English' growth in the U.S. from Classics and Rhetoric at the end of the 19th century to its slow decline at the end of the 20th.

The primary difference between the two texts, however, is that Graff (2007) expands and discusses the growth of the American university in greater detail that Scholes' (1998) concentration on the field of English. Such a view provides an excellent context for Scholes' more pointed history. That and Graff (2007) perhaps pulls fewer punches: "College teachers

were likely to be well-connected failures in the law or the ministry content with a professor's pittance" (p. 24). In other words, those who couldn't do taught.

As the above quotation illustrates, since college students were rarely expected to become college professors (Graff, 2007, p. 25), it's no surprise that they spent little time cultivating ideas of their own: professors pontificate while students dictate. A curious example of this might be the university library, which Graff notes served the librarian more than the students or even faculty (p 26-7). As such, it should come as no surprise that even in modern universities, some faculty fiercely hold on to what they've attained and guard the means by which they attained it—an observation Scholes (1998) corroborates in detail. This, of course, led to the assumption that since "'the imperceptible spirit of…literature' would somehow rub off on students through contact with linguistic technicalities, the classical instructors assumed that great literature teaches itself. They would not be the last teachers of literature to assume that" (p. 35). And Graff (2007) here is writing of the university of the mid-to-late 1800s! But this view allowed professors to concentrate on language, since the meaning in the literature was, in their view, apparent and not worth studying.

Jumping ahead, it's little wonder that this view of literature, and the Classics and Rhetoric departments that held it, began to lose their relevance. Graff (2007) explains that Francis A.

> March's classes at Leicester consisted of "hearing a short Grammar lesson, the rest of the hour reading Milton as if it were Homer, calling for the meaning of words, their etymology when interesting, the relations of words, parsing when it would help, the connection of clauses, the mythology, the biography and other illustrative matter, suited to the class." (p. 38)

Here you see the concentration on the literature as merely a device for studying language, but what students really found interesting, and useful according to March and Graff, were the practice recitations of English texts. For one, students found this a more practical

education for their lives after school in public service, as lawyers, or in the ministry, all professions that not only called for the understanding of texts but the ability to speak at length in a persuasive manner, and not likely in Greek or Latin. Walter P. Rogers explains that it was in this way that the use of literature in the college began to sway (as cited in Graff, 2007, pp. 42-37).

The shift away from language study was not met without resistance by the profession, however. While some individual professors, such as Brander Matthews argued that since literature is an extension of language, and as the pervasiveness of English was then growing around the world, the study of its literature was necessary to fully appreciate the language (as cited in Graff, 2007, p. 71). But the old guard was holding fast; the Modern Language Association, for example, maintained that literature was of small interest to their study, and James Bright of Johns Hopkins University famously remarked that calling him a professor of literature would be as ridiculous as calling a biologist a professor of vegetables (as cited in Graff, p. 68).

Nevertheless, a compromise seemed to have been struck by the turn of the 20th century, in which the Generalists rose up and taught literature half as an object of study and half as a portrait of the people who produced it. Taking cue from ministers trying to reveal the mysteries of the Bible, the Generalists were concerned with revealing the mysteries of literature. But the Generalists got a little too caught up in their own research to notice the change that was happening in their programs. While they taught literature to their own students and delved into their own research, the new call for general education was seeping into the institution and left to teachers who didn't understand or care what the purpose of it was. The Generalists had worked themselves out of a job; taking the thing students found useful for the outside world and placing it under a microscope back in the institution, general

instruction began to fill this gap (Graff, 2007, p. 91). By the start of World War I, Harvard had become one of the first universities to separate scholarship (what professors wanted to study) from composition (what students need to succeed after graduation). And the War put a halt to any productive conversation of whether this was a wise or sustainable move; in many universities, the division holds true to this day.

William T. Foster (as cited in Graff, 2007) tried to raise this criticism in 1911, that the division of English had become a hot mess, that so many different profs were doing so many different things that there was no "essential" English class (p. 100). Graff explains that this was a product of what he calls the "field coverage model," in which departments hire different faculty to fill the various aspects of the field they deem worth covering but with no agreement upon what the outcome should look like (p. 111). It was like giving students a box of puzzle pieces with no reference for what the finished picture was. And instead of addressing this, profs simply blamed the American culture of sports, poor prior schooling, and contemporary fiction (p. 116).

Still, some like Bliss Perry (as cited in Graff, 2007) argued for the use of this literature in the classroom (as far back at the 1890s), suggesting that the institution was missing an opportunity to teach students about good and bad literature, a taste they would take back with them to the public, who would then demand better literature (pp. 124-5). But the university had bigger fish to fry: preparing the citizenry for war and the rebuilding afterwards. While the institution pushed English programs to rally its students with texts to affirm their nationalism (and some did), professors don't much like being told what to teach (p. 130). The MLA's main addresses during the war years urged against turning the field into a propaganda machine (p. 132), though this would not be the last time academic freedom would find itself under attack.

In some ways, Graff (2007) seems to suggest that the New Critical movement may have been given the push it needed in this atmosphere. While the trend (which urged for the study of literature as literature and not as historical texts or pedagogical tools for grammar instruction) can be traced back to the 1890s, it's curious that it really rose when professors may have been having their texts dictated by institutions supportive of the military effort. In adopting New Critical methods, professors could teach these works but in a vacuum (p. 146) without consideration to the nationalism they may have been intended to inspire.

By the end of the Second World War, the call for general instruction had come back as a means for reeducating a post-war nation. Graff (2007) argues this created the perfect situation in which to cement criticism as a hallmark of education: that as greater specialization for vocations rising in the university, "knowledge was becoming fragmenting [sic?], and that because of deepening conflicts of ideology, unity of Western culture was disintegrating into a chaotic relativism" (p. 162). In theory, by giving students the means to engage critically with multiple texts meant they'd be able to operate out of whatever vocations they'd been trained for, creating a more wholly knowledgeable public. Harvard President James Bryant Conant (as cited in Graff, 2007) argued (persuasively) that this was mandatory for a truly democratic society (p. 162).

It was out of this belief that the Great Books movement (courses in the most important works in the whole of Western literature) really gained traction, the idea being that a common knowledge base would be even more helpful in making a unified society. And New Criticism promised a way of making these texts timeless, since they'd be looked at without consideration to their age (Graff, 2007, p. 171). Further, this made all professors happy, since it meant that each could look at their own particular fields without having to justify or confront the larger issues of their field (Graff, p. 243). However, a major flaw in

this was overlooked. Without historical or cultural context, students found it difficult to relate to and therefore learn anything from or say anything productive about these texts. But that wasn't the professor's problem, and if the student was having difficulty in this, it was because their Composition instructor hadn't properly educated them.

Ironically, reading about the history of your field is one of the few things that does make you feel like you belong. You realize, of course, how nerdy this makes you. Most of the class laments the texts you've been assigned to study the field, especially Gerald Graff (2007) and Scholes (1998), but you love these stories of professors from a bygone age. You read them alone in your living room, in the late, cold days of fall, under a blanket on the couch with your dog. But the books take you across time and space to crowded lecture halls made of stained wood, and like church, a man stands before a podium at the front, delivering a sermon on a great book. You imagine how much trouble could be saved if you could just explain to him how things will turn out if he keeps pushing the teaching of writing off as a secondary concern. But what're the chances these old, white men would even listen to you, a Chicano kid from Texas whose parents never got Bachelors degrees?

But you don't know much about that, outside your own experience, yet.

[To look at Composition next, a major area of consideration, turn to Page 30.]

[To jump ahead to the conditions that lead to the present state of the field, where most of your peers seem to be focused, turn to Page 33.]

Composition

As you're aware from your own student and teaching experience, the split between composition and literature in the U.S. goes back as far as the first decades of the 20th century. As an undergrad, your composition course was taught by a doctoral student in literature. You discussed the texts you read in class but not really how to write the assignments he gave you. Shortly after midterm, he assigned the final research paper, gave you the due date at the end of the semester, and told the class he'd see you all then.

As an instructor at your graduate university, you weren't allowed to teach literature in your composition class because you only had a MA. According to the vocal professor who argued this, only one with a PhD in literature had the training and research to explore longer texts with students. Non-fiction was fine; there was no professor of non-fiction (creative or otherwise) at that time, but that may have been coincidental. Anything that could be taken up by a professor, should be taken up by that professor—this despite the fact that these professors taught the fewest sections of compositions of any instructors in the program.

Of course, as you now know, this isn't new. Both the Generalists and the New Critics were too busy studying their books to worry about teaching students how to write about them. For this reason, J. A. Berlin (1982) explains in "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," that most composition teachers have looked at their job as simply the transmission of a mechanical skill designed to prepare students for the rest of their education and life afterwards; that's literally why these classes were created (p. 766). In many ways, this can be traced back to Aristotle, for whom reality can be known and therefore communicated (p. 767). This explains composition's long-standing approach as a means of relating truth and why this ill-prepares students for criticism, which is a matter of interpretation. For Berlin, this is a limiting view. "To teach writing is to argue for a version

of reality," he explains (p. 766). In other words, writing doesn't represent the real world; it creates it (p. 775). And in teaching writing, we give students a way of experiencing and making sense of the world around them (p. 776)!

David Bartholomae's (2009) "Inventing the University" offers another reason why New Criticism and Composition don't mix. Bartholomae's essay focuses on the near impossible task (as he sees it) that College English professors set to freshman writers. This task begins when teachers ask them to consider the audience of a discourse to which they are trying to belong in their writing (p. 609). However, the entirety of his argument on this point is perhaps best explained by him late in the essay:

> To speak with authority student writers have not only to speak in another's voice but through another's "code"; and they not only have to do this, they have to speak in the voice and through the codes of us with power and wisdom; and they not only have to do this, they have to do it before they know what they are doing, before they have a project to participate in and before, at least in terms of our disciplines, they have anything to say. (p. 622)

Given this, asking students to write as New Critics, with the text in a vacuum, is absurd! It forces them to make meaning of a text they know nothing about for an audience they nothing about, **as** they're learning the means to do so! So the student must imagine what the professor wants, which will be different from history, to science, to English (p. 605).

In his penultimate chapter, Graff (2007) explains that "good" students only succeed at this by copying the moves they're clever enough to notice the texts they're reading make, moves forgotten once they're no longer needed for that situation. This means the poor students are forced to copy the same moves poorly or just copy them outright, plagiarizing. Either way, Graff insists the institution is failing at its job to educate (p. 231). What begins to become clear is that this split between Composition and Literature does more harm than good.

You're beginning to see that the field of English must focus on both consuming and producing texts. But you're not really sure what that means yet.

[To focus on the formation of English as a field, turn to Page 23.]

[To jump ahead to the conditions that lead to the present state of the field, where most of your peers seem to be focused, turn to Page 33.]

Conditions for the Present State of the Field

As your first year of doctoral studies wears on, you feel like you really need to figure out what you're going to focus your dissertation research on. Everyone else already seems to know what they're studying and have known for a long while. One day, a woman describes her research into the pedagogies of debate with inner-city students of colour as tied to her own youthful passion from debating foreign policy at university summer camps in 10th grade. This causes you to think about what you were doing in 10th grade—holed up in your bedroom in private moments you can sneak away from your family, trying to beat the Water Temple for *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo,1998) on the Nintendo 64.

This took up half of a school year, as your parents only allowed video games on the weekends and then only when your grades were good enough, which they never were. Except for in English class, you were a solid C student, with a few Ds and Bs tossed in. But you got a N64 and *Ocarina of Time* long (1998) after your friends, and you wanted to join their discussions of the game, so you'd stay up after your family had gone to bed, or ask to be left alone in your room to "study," or just pretend to be too tired or sick to go out with your family, all to play, enjoying the game, until the Water Temple. The Water Temple of *Ocarina of Time* is considered by many fans to be one of the most difficult levels in not just the game but the entire *Legend of Zelda* series. And with only little moments here and there to play, it took you months to beat. Thinking of this woman's incredible accomplishments in academics at the same age, all you can think of is the Water Temple, and how much that also makes you feel like you don't belong. You share this with your brother in one of the most touching moments you ever experience with him.

"I mean…the Water Temple was really hard," he says. And you feel better. But it doesn't change the fact that you have only the vaguest conception of what you're going to

study: pop culture. And you're only going to get there by reading about what English departments are doing now.

In studying their history, you're about caught up to the state of English departments as you know them—where Classics and Rhetoric departments were a hundred years ago. Graff (2007) insists that history doesn't have to repeat itself and that English can be saved if the cycle is broken. Otherwise, English is going to age itself out (literally) with only Composition to replace it, a field not quite ready to stand on its own yet (p. 249). You see it happening already, as the number of college students across the country (and therefore Composition students covering their general instruction courses) increases but the number of English majors decreases (Flaherty, 2015). And the university has no reason to replace those professors if they have no students.

But Graff (2007) claims that faculty insist on keeping their heads in the sand and explains that rather than confront the issue, most programs are content to simply add another course that might be relevant. But this is a band-aid cure, as each professor is still focused on their area of expertise without considering the curriculum at large (p. 250). Graff urges that a safer strategy would be to look at the field, agree on what students need to know for both the college and society, and construct the curriculum around that (p. 252). And he reminds you that theory can be brought into any course, meaning there's no need for professors to sacrifice their research (p. 262)!

Still, others insist this decline in interest and therefore literacy isn't their immediate responsibility. In "Cultural Literacy," E.D. Hirsch Jr. (1983) gives the Great Books ideology another push. He analyzes the "national decline in our literacy" (p. 159) as a product of students' lack of a common "cultural literacy" on which to build. He operates under the assumption that the common knowledge concerning raising literacy involves researching the

best methods for doing so. He highlights two studies (his own and one done by City University of New York) that demonstrate that reading content is more important than method. The result was that students better understood texts if it was on a topic with which they were already familiar. He uses this to support his argument that students need a common core of knowledge for reading instruction. In other words, if they've all read the same books, they'll all be able to write about and understand the same ideas. Both Graff (2007) and Hirsch Jr. (1983) raise the issue of who gets to decide which contexts "count," offering different opinions, and Hirsch Jr. is fairly prescriptive in what he thinks all American students (regardless of race, class, or gender) should read.

But Louise Rosenblatt (1978) troubles these notions (as well as those surrounding New Criticism) in *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*, by trying to answer that age old question: if a book falls open onto a desk, and no one's around to read it, does it have any meaning? She comes to two conclusions in this book: "the readers [sic?] creation of a poem out of a text must be an active, self-ordering and self-creative process" (p. 11) and that there needs to be made a "semantic distinction between 'the poem' and 'the text,' terms often used interchangeably" (pp. 11-12). She further defines these two terms: "'Text' designates a set or series of signs interpretable as linguistic symbols…'Poem' presupposes a reader actively involved with a text and refers to what he makes of his responses to the particular set of verbal symbols" (p. 12). So not only do the text and poem exist separate from one another, but the creation of the latter requires a "transaction" between the reader and the former (p. 17). She concludes by explaining this final point:

> The reading of a text is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader. The transaction will involve not only the past experience but also the present state and present interests or preoccupations of the reader. (p. 20)

In other words, who a reader is at the moment of reading determines the poem he reads. To your mind, this creates further trouble for both the Great Books and New Critical approaches to English education, as neither fully takes this transaction into account: the Great Books presupposes you have the necessary life experiences to make sense of the works it includes and New Criticism denies the interpretations you bring from outside the text. If Rosenblatt's theory holds, then neither method is useful to students.

For this reason, Scholes (1998) calls for a reframing of what it is to be an English teacher. He calls on Derrida for this, who says you (and other teachers) must ask yourselves: "where are we?...*What* do we represent? *Whom* do we represent? Are we responsible? For what and to whom?" (as cited in Scholes, p. 44). If the answer is "to your students," you have to stop considering teaching as secondary to research (p. 48). Doing so is not only damaging to your students in the short term but toxic to English departments in the long, since this emphasis on research means new scholars must challenge the old for positions to defend from the research of the next generation. In doing so, the system that's been built must be torn down and rebuilt, leading to the kind of cycle the history of English education in American higher education has been plagued by (p. 53). Scholes urges you not to view English as a subject and start thinking of it as a discipline that your students will need once they graduate (pp. 67-8).

And this starts with broadening your understanding of text (p. 72). Answering Derrida, Scholes (1998) believes students need some guidance in reading the world and then critiquing and improving it, by whatever textual means necessary (p. 83). Your teaching must then be concerned with three things: "how to situate a text (history), how to compose one (production), and how to read one (consumption)" (p. 147). Curiously, Scholes here marries all the major trends of English education, the Generalists' concern with how a text was

made, Composition's efforts to pass on a way of writing the world, and the New Critics methods of closely reading it.

You're seeing the beginning of the movement Scholes (1998) describes now, such as in Kellner and Share's (2007) "Critical Media Literacy is not an Option." Also synthesizing the major trends Scholes lays out, Kellner and Share (2007) discuss the importance and means of critical media literacy, which they define as "an educational response that expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication, popular culture, and new technologies" (p. 60). To engage students in Critical Media Literacy, they lay out four levels of accomplishing this, along with echoing reasons for doing so. If your students are going to participate in the democracy of the 21st century, traditional textual literacy isn't going to be enough. As Scholes urged, English teachers must expand their understanding of "text" along with the world outside of the academy.

Given even just your basic understanding of this so far, you think you're ready to dig deeper into what the 21st century English classroom will and does look like. You know you don't want to keep floundering in the same pitfalls as the scholars of the last 100 years, but you're not really sure what that means, except that terms like "pop culture," "multimodal literacies," "critical media literacies," and "new media studies" keep popping up. Don't they all mean basically the same thing, you wonder, your first year behind you in a whirlwind of books, articles, annotated bibliographies, final papers, and presentations about topics you pretend to know a lot more about that you feel you really do. But as you leave meetings with your professors, as feedback begins to roll in (one professor says of your first attempt at a literature review that, "The first 5 pages are a mess, but you accomplished more than most 1st semester doc students"), you start to feel that maybe, you're not lost after all.

[But then Year 2 begins. Turn to Page 38.]

Year 2

As a new Composition instructor almost a decade ago, you knew you couldn't teach the same dusty texts that some of your colleagues were using, so you started bringing in your own pop culture: comics, film, and superheroes. When you arrived at Teachers College, Columbia University, you knew you wanted to study this further, but you didn't really understand why or what that meant. Your first year offered a glimpse of where you think the field of English can and needs to go from here, and pop culture is only one aspect of it. Scholes (1998), you think, really nails it with his urge to broaden our understanding of text—from something merely consumed to also the contexts and methods of its creation (p. 147). But you think he's still focused on the texts we teach, as opposed to the ones students produce, as much outside of class as in. Much about English Education has not changed in the last 100 years, and before even the turn of the 20th century, novelist Frank Norris was decrying his Berkeley education, urging faculty that the best was to study literature was to write it (as cited in Graff, 2007, p. 104). It's not enough that teachers start bringing in comics or hip-hop or film to the class and ask students to read them critically; they need to be given more opportunities to study by doing!

This is still a relatively new revelation to you, and one you admit pulls you from your comfort zone. Learning how to make this an option for your students is where you see the field going if you're truly going to prepare them for a world that bombards them with ever new media of text. But with this move the field may have to give up some things. And therein lays the challenge, because the English class of the future will be a class in the reading and production of a broad range of texts whether the discipline likes it or not because that's what your students need—or so some in the field seem to agree. And you can either lead that charge yourself or step out of the way for those who will.

[To look at some of the theory you see informing the pedagogies of English Education in the 21st century, turn to Page 44.]

[To look at some of the pedagogies of English Education in the 21st century, turn to Page 53.]

Theory

Your second year is marked by heavy theory, broader philosophies that teach you much when applied to English Education. But they're dense. You read and reread, and just when you think you're starting to understand it, class discussion makes you feel lost again. It's the difference between seeing the piñata, knowing where it is and that it's full of candy and then being blindfolded, handed a stick, spun around three times, and told to try to hit it. It's exciting and frustrating all at once, but immensely satisfying when you land a hit, less so when someone else does but you still get a treat. That's what studying theory is like, full of dizzying blindness, swings, near misses, and cheering, and so important.

After all, a 21st century pedagogy built on and utilizing students' multimodal skills and needs (while a new notion) has its roots in the early 20th century. Writers such as Gramsci and Benjamin were challenging the dominant discourses in ways that inform the critical pedagogies theorized in your own research.

Boss Battle!

One of your favorite video game series of the last decade is Hidetaka Miyazaki's *Souls* series, a medieval & Gothic-themed series of role-playing games lauded for their difficulty and therefore not very popular among most players; they are cruel teachers. Many games teach you how to overcome pivotal obstacles as you progress towards them with smaller easier problems; the *Souls* series teaches you through repetitive failure. The games are dark, violent, and unforgiving of mistakes made, but their worlds are also rich, beg to be explored, and critical; you're first national conference presentation looked at the contemporary trend of deicide and religious critique in games with *Demon's Souls* as the main focus. But it's the gameplay—which requires patience, meticulous attention to details, online comradery, and

above all, perseverance—that has drawn you time and again into its foreboding halls. Defeating the boss monsters at the end of every dungeon can require hours of planning and practice before success. One such series of battles that you remember proudly from *Dark Souls* (FromSoftware, 2011), is that against not one but two final bosses—the Executioner Smough and the Dragon Slayer Ornstein. The two attack simultaneously—one with a great hammer, the other with a lightening-enchanted spear—and even if you defeat one, his power is absorbed by the other. The first time you emerge from this battle victorious, you exclaim aloud, frightening the dog.

Later in the series, Ornstein makes a return, by himself; the battle is nostalgic but nowhere near as difficult. Smough and Ornstein have to be taken together. Much of this also describes your feelings towards theory, Walter Benjamin and Antonio Gramsci in particular.

Gramsci (2012, but originally written in the late-1920s) defines hegemony as "the supremacy of a social group [manifested] in two ways, as 'domination' and as 'intellectual and moral leader-ship'" (p. 35), as well as how it differs from ideology, which does not have to be dominant (though it can be connected to hegemony). However, ideology can also be separated into organic (knowledge necessary to one's life and therefore immediately validated) and arbitrary (knowledge conferred and validated by the State, such as a degree) ideology. Finally, Gramsci refers to the State as a 20th Century, geo-political organization made up "of the ruling classes" (p. 34).

In many ways, Benjamin (2012, but originally written in the 30s) furthers this notion in his discussions of high and low art. Where Gramsci (2012) argues that the masses need not be validated by arbitrary knowledge given by the state and instead might relish in that which they can create and enjoy themselves, Benjamin (2012) actively warns against the standardization of the state in mass-reproduction. Gramsci's (2012) discussing the

knowledge the people need for everyday life, which is often co-opted by the state; Benjamin (2012) is discussing art created by the people and co-opted by the media.

In Benjamin's (2012) discussion of the importance of non-reproducible art forms over those made for mass consumption, his main contention seems to be that non-reproducible art (stage performances, paintings, etc.) asks for analysis, while reproducible art (film, photography, etc.) ask for nothing but consumption. For this reason, the art of popular culture can only deceive where high art can teach. He gives the example of stage versus film actors. Stage actors, he argues, must truly "identify" with their role from repeated performances, whereas the film actor doesn't give a true performance (since he or she doesn't truly know the character). Instead of teaching, Benjamin argues this fetishizes the actor as a commodity (p. 43). Benjamin warns that one possible result of this is that the masses can be too distracted with popular art to question their station.

While some might dismiss Benjamin (2012) as simply an old man lamenting that kids these days have no appreciation for tradition, when read alongside Gramsci (2012) one can see their joint concern that what's created by the people for individual use is boiled down to its essential, recognizable components and marketed to the masses in such a way that they cannot appreciate it, having not created it themselves. Without this detailed knowledge of the inner workings of its predecessor, they are unable to critique it and instead passively consume it.

It takes you all year to arrive at this synthesis of the two great writers. And when you do, you feel like you've "leveled up," a common mechanic in role-playing games, in which certain attributes of the player's avatar are changed by the experience gained.

+1 Analyzing

+1 Reasoning

+1 Synthesizing

-1 Health Points

Literacy

The implications of Benjamin (2012) and Gramsci's (2012) work to teaching are profound, as they suggest it's not enough to teach students to be critical readers of the world; students should learn to become critical producers, as well. In the 21st century, this will mean creating space for students to learn what is varyingly called critical media literacies, multiliteracies, new literacy studies, and multimodal literacies. Just as the definition of literacy has changed to suit the needs of each generation (from simply being able to sign one's name), you feel that the skills described by each of these schools of thought will be necessary for the 21st century. As such, you consider them all simply literacy, though you continue to use the individual terms put forth by each author.

[To study what reading literacy will mean, turn to Page 44.]

[To see what written literacy will look like, turn to Page 50.]

Reading. Street (2003) expounds on the phrase "New Literacy Studies." He argues that "it represents a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy, focusing not so much on acquisition of skills, as in dominant approaches, but rather on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice" (p. 77). In this way, he positions new literacy studies as a form of critical pedagogy that can also apply to students' existing literacy practices:

> NLS, then, takes nothing for granted with respect to literacy and the social practices with which it becomes associated, problematizing what counts as literacy at any time and place and asking "whose literacies" are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant. (p. 77)

Finally, he notes that

> We bring to literacy event concepts and social models regarding what the nature of the event is and makes it work, and give it meaning. Literacy practices, then, refer to the broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts. A key issue, at both a methodological and an empirical level, then, is how we can characterize the shift from observing literacy events to conceptualizing literacy practices. (p. 79)

In other words, Street warns of the dangers of elevating new literacy studies and the practices that come with them to the level of devaluing traditional literacies (p. 83). 21st century literacies, too, then, cannot devalue other cultures or literacies.

This reminds you or your first academic presentation, at a small regional conference on pop culture. The year before you'd played *Resident Evil 5*, the latest in the zombie horror series, only to notice a lot of resemblance to colonial Gothic fiction of the 19th century. The paper used literary criticism to suggest the racist themes of the game were actually critiques of them, but you didn't yet know where to go from there. So you put the paper away. Reading this theory now, you go back to it, seeing that one possible (of many) missing piece is in how to teach students to be critical of contemporary media by exposing them to classic literature and vice versa. But you're still not quite sure how to do that.

The distinction between respecting traditional literacies and remaining beholden to them, however, is stark. Luke (1994) is straightforward in her piece "Feminist Pedagogy and Critical Media Literacy":

> I will argue here that critical media studies pedagogy can be conceptually based on these theoretical reformulations of subjectivity, identity, and text(s), and that media ought to be a foundational curricular component in any "cultural literacy" undergraduate syllabus. (p. 30)

Her "theoretical reformulations of subjectivity, identity, and texts" suggest that culture is both created and constantly reflected with each person it comes into contact with (p. 35). In other words, subjectivity and identity are not only always in flux with each new text (piece of culture) someone experiences, but culture itself (the texts that make it up) changes in response, and this process needs to be made apparent to students.

Further, Luke (1994) offers up her own definition of "cultural literacy," as different from Hirsch (1987): "a critical literacy of the cultural present not of the canonized past—of which media literacy is just one component" (p. 30). Luke (1994) stresses that such education is important, as

> Media, particularly TV, provide powerful public pedagogies which shape concepts of self, gender and race identity and relations; ideas about which social groups count as culturally relevant and politically powerful; and what counts as "history," "progress," "science," "cultural difference," "family," "individuality," or "political processes." (p. 31)

This echoes Benjamin's (2012) concerns about mass-produced art and their function as distracting from issues of importance. Teaching students to recognize this effect is extremely important, and helpful to your own research, Luke (1994) voices a concern you continually come back to:

> Media studies scholars suggest that the relocation of children's and adolescents' "leisure/ pleasure" texts into the classroom for formal intellectual scrutiny, potentially subverts and belittles whatever pleasure kids derive from such texts and the social relations within which such texts are consumed. (p. 42)

As Gramsci (2012) puts it, this co-opting of culture by the state (in this case the teacher) renders it "arbitrary." But Luke (1994) responds that

> as long as teachers operate from the marxian "false consciousness" notion of ideology as the fundamental premise of media studies, then all classroom activities based on the study and use of media will remain locked into a model in which media texts are the ideological culprits, and students the "duped" viewers who must be emancipated from "bad habits" and "incorrect readings" (Williamson 1981). (p. 43)

In other words, teachers only need worry about "ruining" texts for students if the goal is to show students how "bad" their texts are. Furthermore,

> Asking students for critical interpretations of mass cultural texts is likely to cue a critical response which can often be an outright lie. As with any "critical" discourse (including that of critical pedagogy, cultural studies or feminism more generally), students are quick to talk a good anti-sexist, anti-racist, pro-equity game. (p. 43)

And while Luke asserts that one way out of this is self-reflective criticality of your own pedagogies (recognizing that students have different media experiences that are just as valid as your own), she doesn't quite explain how this is supposed to encourage students' honest interpretations, or even what that would mean or how you would know it.

And this seems to build on Freire (2001) who, in warning of literacy as propaganda, argues that any literacy isn't necessarily better than no literacy, by providing as example a group of illiterate adults capable of "reading" their world and finding value in this (p. 622). He explains how creating a liberating literacy curriculum, that privileges the learner over the teacher, can be a democratizing tool, in that the teacher does not hold all the power (p. 628). In many ways, this teacher becomes merely a facilitator of a curriculum jointly developed given the interests and needs of the learners (p. 626).

Going in a slightly different direction, the New London Group's (Cazden, Cope, Fairclough, Gee, et al., 1996) "A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures" argues for teaching a broader literacy to better prepare students for "the evolving language of work, power, and community, and fostering the critical engagement necessary for them to design

their social futures and achieve success through fulfilling employment" (p. 60). The article is the result of ten scholars applying their thoughts, theories, and practices to teaching multiliteracies: a kind of "scholar review."

This text (Cazden, Cope, Fairclough, Gee, et al., 1996)) relates to your research in that it addresses reasons and results for using pop culture texts to teach reading and writing. However, this text is theoretical in nature. While the scholars are pulling from their theories and experience, the article doesn't involve study of these theories in practice, which is what you're hoping to find. Still, they explain,

> First, we want to extend the idea and scope of literacy pedagogy to account for the context of our culturally and linguistically diverse and increasingly globalized societies, for the multifarious cultures that interrelate and the plurality of texts that circulate. Second, we argue that literacy pedagogy now must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies. (p. 61)

This notion of teaching multiliteracies as necessary for students to engage democratically (as both consumers and producers of culture) with their world is important to your research.

But you're still not sure what the best ways to teach them are. In the past, you've had students turn in work that examines different forms of literacy using different forms of literacy, but these seem like artificial steps in Vygotsky's (1978) zones of proximal development. As he notes, students must see themselves as practitioners in these more complex zones of multiliteracy, in a way that you're not convinced your methods of teaching them have provided.

Kellner and Share (2007) discuss the importance and means of critical media literacy, which they define as "an educational response that expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication, popular culture, and new technologies" (p. 60). This article describes four levels of critical media literacy instruction: 1) "protectionist approach": avoiding and discouraging the use of non-traditional media (p. 60); 2) "media arts

education": teaching students to be producers of media, as opposed to merely consumers (p. 61); 3) "media literacy movement": analyzing pop culture media using traditional print literacy (p. 61); 4) "critical media literacy": pulls from the three other approaches using a critical pedagogy lens (p. 62). Also of importance here is the history of why this movement (popularly begun in the 1970s) has had difficulty taking off.

Kellner and Share's (2007) ideas seem especially important given Scholes' (1998) assertions that the teaching of English must change or fall by the wayside to make way for disciplines that enable their students to make sense of their world in the 21st century.

Finally, Henry Jenkins (2009) offers up another definition which he promptly challenges:

> A definition of twenty-first century literacy offered by the New Media Consortium (2005) is "the set of abilities and skills where aural, visual, and digital literacy overlap. These include the ability to understand the power of images and sounds, to recognize and use that power, to manipulate and transform digital media, to distribute them pervasively, and to easily adapt them to new forms" (p. 8). We would modify this definition in two ways. First, textual literacy remains a central skill in the twenty-first century. Before students can engage with the new participatory culture, they must be able to read and write. Youth must expand their required competencies, not push aside old skills to make room for the new. Second, new media literacies should be considered a social skill. (p. 18)

What Jenkins is saying here is that while 21st century literacies are important, they cannot come at the cost of traditional ones; students need more tools at their disposal, not just new ones or old ones but as many as we can encourage.

Given all this, Donna Alvermann's (2001) "Effective literacy instruction for adolescents" is a good place to start surrounding what changes in pedagogy 21st century teachers need to make. Perhaps the most basic lesson to be gleaned from it is that teachers new to what Alvermann calls the "Net Generation" cannot simply fall back on traditional pedagogies to teach 21st century literacy skills but, rather, need to take critical approaches (p. 3). She notes, however, that every new "literacy crisis" makes this difficult, and teachers are

often forced (or strongly encouraged) to go back to the drawing board (p. 5). She concludes that "effective literacy instruction for adolescents must take into account a host of factors, including students' perceptions of their competencies as readers and writers, their level of motivation and background knowledge, and their interests" (p. 24). Further, she argues that because the "Net Generation" is going to develop its own literacy practices, teachers need to value these literacies and create space for them to develop along with academic ones (p. 25). In many ways, this article is clearly a precursor to Alvermann's (2011) research. However, it also justifies further research in this field (e.g., Dickson, 1998), including your own.

[To see what written literacy will look like, turn to Page 50.]

[To see what all this means together, turn to Page 52.]

Writing. The flipside of this discussion about 21st century literacy skills is asking students to write the multimodal texts they will need in the 21st century. Appropriately, Yancey's (2009) "Writing in the 21st Century" is a good place to start.

This piece summarizes the history of composition and the challenges that poses for 21st century writers. Yancey (2009) assures you that 21st century students and citizens are "self-sponsored" writers, who take up the charge to document, express themselves, as well as learn (by hand, text, online, etc.) out of need, boredom, and the ability to simply do so. This understanding means that the field needs to rethink what it means to teach writing to writers (as opposed to students), to move "beyond a pyramid-like, sequential model of literacy development in which print literacy comes first and digital literacy comes second and networked literacy practices, if they come at all, come third and last" (p. 6). To do this, Yancey offers three "tasks" for writing teachers of the 21st century: "Articulate the new models of composing developing right in front of our eyes...Design a new model of a writing curriculum K–graduate school...Create new models for teaching" (pp. 7-8).

Jenkins (2009) corroborates this notion of self-sponsored writers in the 21st century when studying participatory cultures. Here, Jenkins explores the ways in which students learn from participatory cultures, a term he defines simply as

> a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices. A participatory culture is also one in which members believe their contributions matter, and feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created). (p. 3)

He further adds that there are different types of participatory cultures: affiliations, expressions, collaborative problem-solving, and circulations. "Gee (2004) calls such informal learning cultures 'affinity spaces,' asking why people learn more, participate more actively,

engage more deeply with popular culture than they do with the contents of their textbooks" (p. 9).

Jenkins (2009) clarifies that he is mostly interested in those participatory cultures that exist online, as well as how teachers should be bringing them into the classroom (p. 4). The importance of this is noted in the statistics that half of the teenagers in America could be considered "media creators": "someone who created a blog or webpage, posted original artwork, photography, stories or videos online or remixed online content into their own new creations" (p. 6).

Jenkins (2009) further echoes Yancy (2009) when he notes that "young people are creating new modes of expression that are poorly understood by adults, and as a result they receive little to no guidance or supervision" (p. 17). Therefore, 21st century teachers must be versed in these modes or risk setting their students at a disadvantage in the future:

> What a person can accomplish with an outdated machine in a public library with mandatory filtering software and no opportunity for storage or transmission pales in comparison to what person can accomplish with a home computer with unfettered Internet access, high band-width, and continuous connectivity. (Current legislation to block access to social networking software in schools and public libraries will further widen the participation gap.) (p. 13)

Here he gives voice again to Gramsci (2012) and Benjamin's (2012) concerns, that

> Politics, as constructed by the news, becomes a spectator sport, something we watch but do not do. Yet, the new participatory culture offers many opportunities for youth to engage in civic debates, to participate in community life, to become political leaders, even if sometimes only through the "second lives" offered by massively multiplayer games or online fan communities. (Jenkins, 2009, p. 10)

In other words, disallowing students to participate in 21st century literacy practices forces students to merely consume them, mass produced by the state and corporations.

[To study what reading literacy will mean, turn to Page 44.]

[To see what all this means together, turn to Page 52.]

21st Century Literacy. Moving away from theory and into the practice section of the review, Jenkins (2009) has one more kernel of advice, in the form of three pedagogical questions that English Education must tackle to best prepare and honour your students for the literacies of the future:

> • How do we ensure that every child has access to the skills and experiences needed to become a full participant in the social, cultural, economic, and political future of our society?
>
> • How do we ensure that every child has the ability to articulate his or her understanding of how media shapes perceptions of the world?
>
> • How do we ensure that every child has been socialized into the emerging ethical standards that should shape their practices as media makers and as participants in online communities? (p. 18)

Helping to answer these questions, you decide, will be an important part of your work.

[To see what it looks like in the classroom, turn to Page 53.]

[To only explore some of the implications for this, turn to Page 59.]

[To conclude (because you already know enough to make decisions like that) with what this means for English Education, turn to Page 58.]

Practice

Theory is great, but how do you **do** this work? Of course, with so many different terms and situations, there is no magic formula, but some examples would be nice. So you set out to study some.

Adapting pedagogies to use existing student literacy practices to prepare them for those they need isn't new. The push of the late-20th century toward culturally relevant pedagogies is demonstrated by Lee's (1995) "Culturally Based Cognitive Apprenticeship." Lee's piece looks at the ways in which teachers might better privilege African-American student participation in discussions of literature, studying an intervention performed in two urban high schools featuring "signifying." Lee explains that signifying is "a form of discourse in the African American community…full of irony, double entendre, satire, and metaphorical language… an attitude that language use which is valued should be creative and figurative" (p. 612). Lee believes that signifying is similar to the discourse used by scholars to make sense of figurative language in literature. Before going into the methods of her study, she lists her research questions which may be useful in the development of your own:

> 1. Do prior social knowledge and knowledge of signifying affect the range of skills in reading and interpreting fiction achieved by African American adolescent novice readers?
> 2. Using their prior social knowledge and skill in signifying, how do students construct generalizations about African American "speakerly" texts based on an analysis of the figurative language of such texts?
> 3. How do teachers support this scaffolding process?
> 4. What are the effects of instruction? (p. 614)

You think these questions are useful for practical studies because they investigate not only how students use the literacy skills they already have but also how they might make use of those same skills in other contexts.

In the end, Lee (1995) uses her study to create a framework to help "novice readers" engage with complex texts:

> (a) structure a learning environment for students in which through active investigations they can unearth and articulate otherwise tacit strategies that they use to construct inferred meanings in oral speech events; (b) apply those strategies to literary texts in which the patterns of discourse studied in the oral context are appropriated for literary effect; and (c) sequence future series of texts within units of instruction so that the first texts are ones for which students initially have greater social and linguistic prior knowledge while they learn to master task-specific reading strategies and the second texts are ones for which students now have greater mastery of task-specific reading strategies and less social and linguistic prior knowledge. (p. 627)

Not only does this begin to offer answers to Jenkins (2009) questions for 21st century pedagogical considerations, but it's also a master-class in scaffolding (and valuing) what students already know with what they need to learn.

Taking this idea and exploring it further, Randi Dickson's (1998) "Horror: To Gratify, Not Edify" demonstrates the type of literacy Luke (1995) and Alvermann (2001) argue that teachers must capitalize on without worry of ruining it for students. Dickson's article does a fantastic job of looking at pre-teen, self-sponsored literacy through popular, young adult, horror fiction (specifically R. L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series). She attempts to answer important questions about 1) how youth (and by extension, adults) are enticed into horror fiction, 2) whether it has literary value, and 3) whether students can use it to garner an enjoyment for reading outside the genre. She tackles the first question by studying Noël Carrol's definition of "art-horror in her book *The Philosophy of Horror*, noting that it creates

> an emotional state wherein, essentially, some nonordinary physical state of agitation is caused by the thought of a monster,…which thought also includes the recognition that the monster is threatening and impure…Monsters, here, are identified as any being not now believed to exist according to reigning scientific notions. (p. 116)

Seeing that this explains enjoyment of the *Goosebumps* series, she moves onto the next question, deciding that the book has little to no value as literature—with its formulaic plots,

inexplicable twist endings, and lack of denouement. This naturally leads to her last question, citing an *American Educator* article comparing Stine's work to pornography, particularly noting that the "At least they're reading!" defense is not a good enough justification for letting students enjoy them. However, Dickson concludes, "It's not so much that young people should be discouraged from reading R.L. Stine, as that they should be encouraged to seek more places for the same kinds of gratifications they get from Stine's books" (p. 121). Further, she cites librarian Judith Rovenger:

> Kids need a certain amount of just practice in reading, and that tends to be most easily accomplished when there is high motivation and pleasure in the reading…There is also a purpose served in creating a habit and association that reading is a very pleasurable activity—that you don't have to be asked to do it. (p. 119)

In a way, Dickson suggests that not only do students self-sponsor their literacy practices but develop critical tastes on their own, as well.

Having been an avid *Goosebumps* reader yourself, you tend to agree with this conclusion. You don't remember any of them being particularly frightening so much as just fun to read. And while you thought nothing of moving from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to *Welcome to the Dead House*, you got tired of them after just a couple of years—particularly because they were so short you could finish one in an afternoon—as Dickson's (1998) research asserts will happen when young readers are given the space to explore literature on their own.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of developing student writers, Gere (2001) delves into extracurricular composition groups and how they often succeed where traditional composition courses fail. In this, she asserts that "we have neglected composition's extracurriculum" (p. 278). Historically, she notes, extracurricular groups in many fields lead to the formation of new programs in the American university (pp. 279, 286). In this way, she

calls for a composition pedagogy which begins to break through the walls of the classroom: "I propose that we avoid an uncritical narrative of professionalization and acknowledge the extracurriculum as a legitimate and autonomous cultural formation that undertakes its own projects" (p 284).

It's important to note, however, that Gere's (2001) not calling for a breaking down of these walls, but merely tapping to the outside. One of these methods is writing centers. The influence of these spaces is obvious for students, but they provide learning opportunities for the teachers of these students by showing them how unacademic texts can improve student voice, self-esteem, and skills.

Another, perhaps more important, method is no longer viewing composition courses as gateways to academic success. This decentralization of academia makes way for student growth in the classroom (Gere, 2001, p. 288). In many ways, this is what Jenkins (2009) is recognizing by studying the self-sponsored literacies of participatory cultures and how those cultures help their members develop those skills. For example, Gere (2001) notes that one of the drawbacks of school composition is that many students don't care about the feedback they get because they don't feel a part of that academic culture: "The culture of professionalism, with its emphasis on specialization, abhors amateurism, but composition's extracurriculum shows the importance of learning from amateurs." (p. 286) In other words, students do seek validation from the members of those communities to which they do belong. But when writing for teachers, Bartholomae (2009) notes, they have to "invent" the audience for whom they're writing: "Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion—invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like History or Anthropology or Economics or English" (p. 605).

Bartholomae's (2009) essay focuses on the near impossible task (as he sees it) that College English professors set to freshmen writers. This task begins when we ask them to consider the audience of a discourse to which they are trying to belong in their writing (p. 609). However, the entirety of his argument on this point is perhaps best explained by him late in the essay:

> To speak with authority student writers have not only to speak in another's voice by through another's "code"; and they not only have to do this, they have to speak in the voice and through the codes of us with power and wisdom; and they not only have to do this, they have to do it before they know what they are doing, before they have a project to participate in and before, at least in terms of our disciplines, they have anything to say. (p. 622)

Bartholomae goes on to support this by looking at student samples. In the end, he suggests that to aid students in this process, we may have to encourage their crude imitations of academic discourse with varying levels of critique appropriate to how close their mimicry approaches their discourse:

> The problem of audience awareness, then, is a problem of power and finesse. It cannot be addressed, as it is in most classroom exercises, by giving students privilege and denying the situation of the classroom. (p. 610)

Taken all together, adopting new pedagogies of supporting 21st century student literacy means making fundamental changes to not only how you teach—the spaces (Gere, 2001) and practices (Dickson, 1998; Bartholomae, 2009)—but what we teach (Lee, 1994).

[To look at some of the theory you see informing the pedagogies of English Education in the 21st century, turn to Page 44.]

[To conclude (because you already know enough to make decisions like that) with what this means for English Education, turn to Page 58.]

[To only explore some of the implications for this, turn to Page 59.]

Conclusion

"It is pitch black. You are likely to be eaten by a grue" (Anderson, Blank, Daniels, & Lebling, 1977).

"The grue is a sinister, lurking presence in the dark places of the [academy]. Its favorite diet is [scholars], but its insatiable appetite is tempered by its fear of [knowledge]. No grue has ever been seen by [those who've done adequate research], and few have survived its fearsome jaws to tell the tale" (Anderson et al., 1977).

[To look at some of the theory you see informing the pedagogies of English Education in the 21st century, turn to Page 44.]

[To see what it looks like in the classroom, turn to Page 53.]

Implications

Mizuko Ito et al.'s (2010) collection of research *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out* begins with the problem of multimodal literacies: "A generation is growing up in an era where digital media are part of the taken-for-granted social and cultural fabric of learning, play, and social communication" (p. xi). In other words, just because the current generation is growing up in the digital era that does not mean access, knowledge, and participation are equal, and better understanding this continuum of engagement (explained in the book's title) is the purpose of aggregating the research of fifteen scholars.

However, you're beginning to find particular interest in one area of 21st century literacy: games. For this reason, the last thing you **briefly** study at the end of your second year is why reading and writing games might be important 21st century skills for students as well as teachers. It's appropriate, however, to begin with Vygotsky, whose (1978) "The Role of Play in Development" shaped your understanding of how players learn from games.

One of the key problems that Vygotsky (1978) takes up in this piece is the definition of "play as an activity that gives pleasure to the child" (p. 92). The key reason he uses to challenge this is noting that were it true, a child would not submit to games, because rules inherent in games would interfere with pleasure. Instead, he argues that in play a child "learns to follow the line of greatest resistance by subordinating herself to rules and thereby renouncing what she wants, since subjugation to rules and renunciation of impulsive action constitute the path to maximum pleasure in play" (p. 99) Therefore, children are most engaged when at play, since it requires the greatest impulse-control (p. 99). And for these reasons, Vygotsky asserts that

> **play gives a child a new form of desires**. It teaches her to desire by relating her desires to a fictitious "I," to her role in the game and its rules. In this way a child's greatest achievements are possible in play. (p. 100)

With all of a child's attention focused on a game, the results of the game can yield much greater development than half-attentions paid to less engaging activities, such as formal learning.

Vygotsky (1978) concludes by stating that all his makes play a zone of proximal development, because the "fictitious I" that the child takes on is always in a zone that's developmentally more complex than her own. In other words, you play *Clue* to see what it would be like to be a detective solving a murder because, even as adults, you may never be one. This is, you think, the aspect of Vygotsky that is most central to your own research—creating learning opportunities in zones that are proximally close to (and more complex than) the ones students are already in.

But these opportunities cannot simply be about reading texts. Kellner and Share (2007) offer up reasons why production is an essential step of critical media literacy—learning about by creating. Appropriately then, games (and all multimodal) studies must also culminate in creation. As Gramsci (2012) and Benjamin (2012) note, this is the most important step in learning how to critique and not be distracted by mass-produced media.

Literacy in the 21st century means being able to engage with multiple media simultaneously while constructing meaning that produces critical responses using multiple media. As always, each generation is quick to adopt new media but not always critically, and the sheer volume of media in the 21st century will make this even more difficult. Not fostering and developing these skills along with your students means not serving their needs. You still don't think you really understand how to do that, but you're willing to learn.

In some ways, *Dark Souls* (2011) doesn't really begin until after you defeat the Executioner Smough and the Dragon Slayer Ornstein. This occurs a little over half-way through the game's narrative, but their defeat proves you are the Chosen One who can either

save the world or remake it in your own image. To do either, however, you must then defeat the four Old Ones, the original gods of the world whose corruption has led to civilization's downfall. These are, naturally, the most difficult parts of the game but also the only ones in this world to give the player a real sense of purpose beyond simply surviving.

All of the *Souls* games feature this game design. You never begin as The Hero; you're merely a survivor. And the games are so difficult that many players will quit (i.e., not survive). The player who does make it this far, however, finds a purpose, but in that purpose lays an even greater challenge.

This is how you feel at the end of your second year of your doctoral program with less than a semester of actual course work left, like you know that you've made progress, and you know what the next steps are. But it seems large and foreboding, exciting and ominous.

[To move on to Year 3, turn to Page 65.]

Year 3

During your first semester, you remember a lunch lecture that sounds really interesting but forgot about until the last minute, walking home from work in a fall downpour. Cold and soaked, you stand on the corner of Amsterdam and 121st Street, directly between Teachers College and campus housing, staring up the block at Riverside Church. In the foggy, dim downpour, it looks like Barad-dûr, the tower of the Eye of Sauron, watching you make up your mind.

You still haven't decided the focus of your doctoral research, but you know it's related to pop culture. And this lecture's going to be about using games in education, an area of pop culture you're intimately familiar with but only just beginning to consider as an area of serious study.

You're also exhausted, cold, wet, and on the verge of getting sick. On top of all that, you have a pile of reading that never seems to get any smaller. You have a decision to make.

[To go home, where's it's warm, take a hot shower, and start in on the pile of reading you have, turn to Page 65.]

[To go to the lecture on a topic you're interested in, where there will be free food and you will almost certainly learn something fascinating, turn to Page 65.]

Go Home

"It is pitch black. You are likely to be eaten by a grue" (Anderson, Blank, Daniels, & Lebling, 1977).

"The grue is a sinister, lurking presence in the dark places of the [academy]. Its favorite diet is [scholars], but its insatiable appetite is tempered by its fear of [knowledge]. No grue has ever been seen by [those who've done adequate research], and few have survived its fearsome jaws to tell the tale" (Anderson et al., 1977).

[The last 100 years of English Education isn't going anywhere! Games in education is happening! To go to the lecture, turn to Page 65!]

[There's still so much you need to read on the formation of your field! To keep studying it, turn back to Literature Review—Year 1, Page 20!]

The Lecture

The lecture is given in the basement near the cafeteria, and for lunch you have a thick, rich lamb stew. You don't feel so cold and wet anymore and are immediately happy with your decision to attend. The lecture is given by a research assistant professor in the Mathematics, Science, and Technology department; he discusses his history of using games in educational settings, specifically card games and gamification of classrooms. Then he talks about the work done in his Video Games in Education course here at TC; his students study the design and theory of games and make their own for educational purposes. He mentions the Games Research Lab, where a library of tabletop, card, and video games can be played, studied, and discussed. And you listen, taking copious notes, immediately deciding you have to take this course…

…It takes you two years to work out your schedule in such a way that you can finally take his class, but within two class meetings, you're already certain your dissertation research is going to be about games. You imagine a course in which you ask students to play and analyze a video game in the same way you ask them to write critically about a novel; a gamification of library research that functions as a kind of role-playing scavenger hunt tied to the novel they read; a close reading exercise that asks them to adapt a novel into a simple table-top game with design elements that reinforce the book's themes. Every week, ideas pour out of you, and you begin to wonder where they're coming from. Have you always had this desire?

[To spend some time reflecting on your education as it relates to games, turn to Page 65.]

[What does it matter? To study what games are doing in education now, turn to Page 70!]

Reflecting on Games in Your Own Education

You're on the verge of becoming a teenager, visiting family friends with a daughter you grew up with. You were always smart, but she could read before you, calculate complex math without hesitation, spell any word, remember any fact, and knows what she wants to study in college. Your parents have vaguely explained college to you, but your mother only completed an Associate's Degree; you father began but never completed. So the details of "college" are fuzzy, and you're just finding out that in college you study one particular thing (what's called your "major"). Your friend's parents want to know what yours is going to be, and they toss out a barrage of examples—law, business, engineering—but you have no idea. You like school, all the subjects; you want to study everything! But that doesn't get you a job, you're told; you have to decide on one thing, right now, evidently.

Your friend, maybe sensing your uncertainty and trepidation, exclaims, "It's college! You can major in GameBoy if you want!" She likely means it as a joke to make you feel better, but in the moment, you imagine sitting in a classroom, playing your handheld video game. "That!" you say. "I'll study that!"

…Your love of education wanes in high school. Living in French-speaking Canada, your parents send you to a private, Jesuit, all-boys school because they teach in English and it's Catholic. It's challenging, and you like it well enough. But during the first parent teacher conference, your well-meaning French teacher tells your parents that it's unrealistic to expect you to pass the provincial French exam required to receive a high school diploma, an exam other French-Canadians have been preparing for since kindergarten, if not birth. Your parents don't accept this, hire a private tutor to see on Wednesday afternoons, and send you to school early once a week to work with your teacher. You barely earn Ds, so you're not allowed to play video games, even on the weekends. After a couple of years of this, you

don't see the point of trying in any of the classes you don't enjoy, which is most of them. You'll never earn grades good enough to please your parents, you won't pass the French exam at the end of your final year, so what's the point?

English class, however, is a different story. Still in love with reading and writing, your eighth-grade teacher adds your third passion. The main project of the year accompanies your reading of Roger Lancelyn Green's *King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table*—King of All Britain. The class is broken up into groups (separate British kingdoms), each with the goal of becoming the king who unites the country in the wake of King Arthur's death. To do so, once a week, each kingdom and each individual is allowed to submit in writing a request to the teacher for what they want their action in the game to be for the upcoming "chapter." The teacher reads these, decides how and if to accommodate them, and reads the outcomes after. It's like playing a role-playing and strategy game in school!

Requests are considered on the basis of how well they're written, how closely they align with the themes of the book, and how well researched they are. As the lord of England's south-eastern shores, for example, you're the target of another student's request to send his wife on a supposed mission of peace, with the intent to assassinate you; angered by her husband's mistreatment, however she joins your court revealing secrets about your peer's kingdom. Your best friend and you join forces, and art class is used to design rudimentary steam-powered machines that could have been built with medieval technology. Another friend spends hours in the library before and after school, reading every scrap of the lore on the possible, real-life hiding place of the Holy Grail, all to present a "request" (which looks more like a research paper) to go on a quest to find it. In the end, the alliance you help build unites the kingdom and Britain enters an age of peace. This teacher will be

the first of many of who convince you that you want to teach, too, and collectively, they will motivate you to graduation.

It's during this time you remember that games don't have to be digital to be fun. Regardless of the stigma, you join the chess club—one of many strategy games (along with checkers, *Stratego*, and finally, *Risk*) your father taught and continues to play with you. One of your favorite movies is *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, and you wish you could stop going to school and just study chess, become a grandmaster. Despite the fact that you barely graduate, you're ranked third in the school by ninth grade, and you regularly trounce your class valedictorian. Around the time you begin to consider teaching as a career, you wonder why all school can't be like chess club. You imagine an elective course called "Miscellaneous," the content of which would change each semester to topics you don't normally get to study. One of those is a semester studying *Risk*, playing it, discussing strategies, modifying it with Martian invaders, etc.

…In college, you co-manage a YMCA aquatics department, training lifeguards and teaching swim lessons. You use a lot of games for both team-building (like the human-knot and human-bridge) and competition (from simple relays to strengthen swimming to seeing who can grab the most pennies from the bottom of a bucket of ice water to experience hypothermia), pushing the guards to be better. You put together teams of guards to travel out of state for competitions, and eventually design and host one of your own. When you leave for grad school, your guards give you the trophies they've won.

…While studying to complete your Master's in English Literature, you turn back to video games to relieve stress. On the morning of your thesis defense, a friend who you've been discussing the latest *Legend of Zelda* game with asks how you're doing. He's thinking of your defense; you're thinking of the dungeon you couldn't figure out how to finish the night

before. You answer, "I don't know what I'm supposed to do!" A look of panic flushes across his face, until you begin relaying which items you've tried using to solve a puzzle. You both laugh when you realize the miscommunication; you're not worried about the defense, and it goes fine. But you skip your commencement ceremony to compete in an eight-hour video game tournament, using the prize money to purchase a new console.

[To study what games are doing in education now, turn to Page 70!]

Games in Education

So you've decided that you must read up on using games in the classroom; it's a brand new area for you, and you don't know enough about it. You're not sure how to go about it. For one, making school more like a game sounds like a lot of work for what could just be a short-term gimmick. Secondly, can games that already exist really be educationally useful? And lastly, there are just so many games out there you don't know where to start.

Also nagging at you is whether video games even have a place in the classroom. You know you like them and find themes worth exploring but will academia? What in them is even worthy of study? You've raised this question as you've experimented with bringing other kinds of popular culture into the classroom, and your research in the last two years confirms that the scope of English has to broaden to include the texts with which students choose to engage out of class. You could start by double-checking what Kellner and Share (2007) and maybe Robert Scholes (1998) have to say about this.

[To refresh your memory about English in the 21st Century, turn to Page 73.]

[To dive into The Research, turn to Page 71.]

[To forget all this nonsense and go back to Teaching the Same Old Stuff, turn to Page 70.]

Same Old Stuff

"It is pitch black. You are likely to be eaten by a grue" (Anderson, Blank, Daniels, & Lebling, 1977).

"The grue is a sinister, lurking presence in the dark places of the [academy]. Its favorite diet is [scholars], but its insatiable appetite is tempered by its fear of [knowledge]. No grue has ever been seen by [those who've done adequate research], and few have survived its fearsome jaws to tell the tale" (Anderson et al., 1977).

[To refresh your memory about English in the 21st Century, turn to Page 73.]

[To dive into The Research, turn to Page 71.]

The Research

You decide to look into the research to see what's out there that might be useful in your English classroom. As with any new area, there are probably several through lines. You could look into the theories that surround play (why humanity plays games), or how video games teach us how to play them and keep us engaged, or maybe jump straight into some case studies of video games used in classrooms. Where do you start?

[To study Play Theory, turn to Page 73.]

[To see what What Makes Video Games Good at Teaching, turn to Page 81.]

[For examples of Video Games Used in the Classroom, turn to Page 87.]

English in the 21st Century

Kellner and Share (2007) discuss the importance and means of critical media literacy, which they define as "an educational response that expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication, popular culture, and new technologies" (p. 60). Thus video games are tied also to the notion of media literacy. This article describes four levels of critical media literacy instruction: 1) "protectionist approach": avoiding and discouraging the use of non-traditional media (60); 2) "media arts education": teaching students to be producers of media, as opposed to merely consumers (61); 3) "media literacy movement": analyzing pop culture media using traditional print literacy (61); 4) "critical media literacy": pulls from the three other approaches using a critical pedagogy lens (62). Also of importance here is the history of why this movement (popularly begun in the 1970s) still hasn't really taken off.

Kellner and Share's (2007) ideas seem especially important given Scholes' (1998) assertions that the teaching of English must change or fall by the wayside for disciplines that enable their students to make sense of their world in the 21st century. But it's one thing to say these skills are important and another to lay out a list of guidelines for its implementation, as Kellner and Share do!

That's all well and good, though, but you still don't feel like you have the expertise or knowledge to bring games into the classroom. Do you keep up with your research or stick to what you know?

[To dive into The Research, turn to Page 71.]

[To forget all this nonsense and go back to Teaching the Same Old Stuff, turn to Page 70.]

Play Theory

One major point of confusion you run into seems to be distinguishing between "play" and "games." At one point, you might have thought of them as one in the same but not anymore. To make matters worse, definitions for each range from the academic to the popular, the complex to the simple.

Salen and Zimmerman's (2003) *Rules of Play* offers up some explanation, first borrowing from Wake Forest University Professor of English James S. Hans for their definition of play as "a structuring activity, the activity out of which understanding comes" (p. 298). To clarify, they explain that "games are a subset of play" but that "play is an element of games" (p. 303). In other words, a game is play with rules but even within these rules, there is play. Specifically, according to Salen and Zimmerman, there are three kinds: "Game play is the formalized interaction that occurs when players follow the rules of a game and experience its systems through play"; "Ludic activities are play activities that include not only games, but all of the non-game behaviours we also think of as 'playing'"; Being Playful "refers to not only to typical play activities, but also to the idea of being in a playful state of mind, where a spirit of play is injected into some other action" (p. 303). There is great overlap here, with Game Play both Being Playful and a Ludic Activity, while Ludic Activities are Being Playful, too. While these categories are somewhat fluid and arbitrary, they do aid Salen and Zimmerman in coming to a final (if broad) definition of play as "free movement within a more rigid structure" (p. 304)—the boundaries of that structure, of course, being decided by the designers of the game—which can range from as widely as the 500-plus pages of rule books in *Dungeons & Dragons* to a kindergarten teacher making a game of snack-time clean-up.

Looking for other simple definitions, you find that Henry Jenkins' (2009) *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century* defines play as "the capacity to experiment with one's surroundings as a form of problem-solving" (p. 22). To define game, he borrows from legendary *SimCity* creator, Will Wright: "a game is nothing but a set of problems" (as cited in Jenkins, 2009, p. 21).

In more layman's terms, Costikyan (2002) simply states that "A game is a form of art in which participants, termed players, make decisions in order to manage resources through game tokens in the pursuit of a goal." In this, he states that a key difference between a game and play is the presence of goals; play has none. The tokens clarifier is perhaps odd, but he defines these broadly: "In a boardgame, it is your pieces. In a cardgame, it is your cards. In a roleplaying game, it is your character. In a sports game, it is you yourself."

This is a good general background. But there's more research to dig into. Should you look into more complex definitions of play or games or move on to how play aids in learning and development?

[To find more Definitions of Play, turn to Page 75.]

[To find more Definitions of Games, turn to Page 77.]

[To read about Play as Development, turn to Page 79.]

Definitions of Play

French philosopher Roger Caillois' (2006) *Man, Play and Games* (published originally in 1958) takes up a central issue to your research: what is play? His essay "The Definition of Play" tackles the project by building on definitions of some past researchers, such as rector of the University of Leyden Johan Huizinga and French philosopher Paul Valéry. For example, in 1933, Huizinga suggested that

> Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious," but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (as cited in Caillois, 2006, p. 123)

Caillois takes two issues with Huizinga here: 1) that while play is indeed caught up in the secrecy of its rules, the players delve into these secrets as they play; 2) this definition completely removes gambling as a kind of play, odd given gambling's place in the history of most of the world's cultures. Further, as Huizinga argues that nothing is produced, he ignores the experience had and lessons learned by those who played, a key feature of play outlined by other theorists, such as Valéry in 1943 (as cited in Caillois, 2006).

Valéry's as cited in Caillois, 2006) definition grasps at categorizing play by **when** it happens as opposed to **what** happens: "only when the players have a desire to play, and play the most absorbing, exhausting game in order to find diversion, escape from responsibility and routine…[I]t is necessary that they be free to leave whenever they please" (p. 125). Valéry doesn't give us a lot to work with here, but Caillois extracts a lot of meaning, noting that a definition of play then must require free play (that is, players must be free to leave the game), agreed upon boundaries (if it's to serve as an escape), an uncertain end (otherwise, what's the purpose of playing?), no exchange or creation of actual goods or wealth (which

suggests that gambling is more work than play), and rules **or** the space for "make-believe" (p. 128). These last two are important to Caillois' definition, as he argues that "make-believe" occurs when players don't know the rules. He notes that children can "play at 'playing chess'" by moving the pieces around in imitation (p. 127).

It seems, you think you begin to understand, that all games require play but not all play is a game. Rules, then, are what separate games from play, and while "make-believe" can occur in games, it is required in play.

[To find more Definitions of Games, turn to Page 77.]

[To read about Play as Development, turn to Page 79.]

Definitions of Games

Caillois (2006) takes his definitions one step further in "The Classification of Games." Here, he breaks down what he sees as the four basic types of games people (and even some animals) play. Agôn games are competitive based—the sole purpose being for players to demonstrate their superiority over others. He notes that while people engage in such play recreationally, some animals (especially young ones) compete in various ways for seemingly no other reason than that they can.

Alea "is the Latin name for the game of dice" (Caillois, 2006, p. 133) and appropriately refers to games in which chance decides the victor. Such games are played because they rely on fate, an equalizer among players, though, he suggests, perhaps those with more experience do better.

Ilinx, probably the most unusual classification, refers to games that stimulate the physical senses, such as vertigo. Games of spinning, falling, bouncing, and balancing are included as safe ways of experiencing normally dangerous sensations. Caillois (2006) notes that many animals practice this form of play, as well, such as those that experience running fits, play in pools of water, and bounce off tree branches.

Finally, Mimicry refers to games of role-playing or pretend. "The pleasure lies in being or passing for another" (Caillois, 2006, p. 136). Caillois notes that in many ways, mimicry is the most basic form of play, as it often underlies all others, given his requirements of the separate, free, and uncertain aspects of play. And while it includes no "rules" of its own, it is often a feature of the other classes of play. The Agôn player, for example, may act more confident as a way of appearing as a superior opponent. Similarly, players of all games may take on an imagined persona as part of the game.

Caillois' (2006) classifications are necessary to understand here because they explain not only the **kinds** of games one can play but the **reasons** for playing them in the first place. The game is chosen to suit the wants of the players. Further, it demonstrates that games and play seem to be an instinctual aspect of life and learning in not only humanity. Lastly, Caillois' classifications make it clear that using games in the classroom successfully depends on picking the appropriate kind of game for the students and kind of learning involved.

Should you look further into how play is defined, too, or delve deeper into the role of play in development and learning?

[To find more Definitions of Play, turn to Page 75.]

[To read about Play as Development, turn to Page 79.]

Play as Development

Vygotsky (1978) concludes "The Role of Play in Development" by stating that the aforementioned submission to rules in games makes play a zone of proximal development, because the "fictitious I" that the child takes on is always in a zone that's developmentally more complex than her own. In other words, you play *Clue* to see what it would be like to be a detective solving a murder because, even as adults, you may never be one. This is, you're beginning to think, an aspect of Vygotsky that is central to your research. If students are most engaged while at play, why is school not more like a game? Why not teach using games, then?

Elaborating on this, James Paul Gee (2005) lays out the sixteen important ways that games promote learning but many classrooms do not: good games foster a sense of identity, which makes learning easier; video games teach through interaction (p. 34); students should have a part in the design their own curriculum; students should be able to make mistakes to learn from quickly; students (like players of a game) should be able to learn and succeed in different ways (p. 35). All of these previous elements in games give players a sense of agency in their learning (p. 36). Further, class learning (like games) should: include a lot of scaffolding; give students the information they need to problem-solve **when** they need it; have context (p. 36). However, even these previous elements don't mean that learning need not be challenging but rather should encourage: pattern recognition; multiple solutions to one problem; different modes of learning and problem solving for different students (p. 36); cross-functional teamwork; "performance before competence" (p. 37).

Finally, Gee (2005) asks, "How can we make learning in and out of school, with or without using games, more game-like in the sense of using the sorts of learning principles that young people see in good games every day, when and if they are playing these games

reflectively and strategically?" (p. 37) This is a problem, then, that you think you could address in the College English classroom.

[To find more Definitions of Play, turn to Page 75.]

[To find more Definitions of Games, turn to Page 77.]

[To see what Gee says about What Makes Video Games Good at Teaching turn to Page 81.]

[For examples of Video Games Used in the Classroom, turn to Page 87.]

What Makes Video Games Good at Teaching

Gee's (2007) *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy* looks at video games ("good" video games, at least) and their ability to teach. Now, at first glance, his purpose might seem to be promoting "edutainment" like "Leap Frog" learning games. But what he's really interested in is how good video games teach us to play them. And he's interested in how teachers can learn from that kind of learning.

Unfortunately, there's a few clarifications that aren't brought up at all or until late in the book (2007). For example, a better title might have been "What Good Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Teaching" or even "What Teachers Can Learn from Good Video Games." These distinctions are important as Gee concentrates on specific games that best teach the player how to play them. Also, Gee's use of "literacy" in his title is meant in the broadest sense of the word (in the way we might say someone who can make sense of baseball statistics is "literate" in baseball) as opposed to meaning "the ability to read and write." And in an interesting, but funny, move, Gee admits at the end of his conclusion that, really, he just likes playing video games and wanted to justify his countless hours of "research" by writing a book combining his knowledge of learning from sociolinguistics with his new-found passion.

But at the same time, Gee (2007) breaks down learning into thirty-six principles which he uses to demonstrate the kind of learning that exists in good video games that should exist in classrooms. Gee enlightens you to the fact that players have to continually learn how to play good video games. And if the game isn't teaching well, we get bored, frustrated, call it a "bad" game, and give up on it. Similarly, if you can't manage to teach well, then the students get bored, frustrated, call it a "bad" subject, and give up on it.

In many ways, this is a continuation of the work you found in Gee's (2005) "Good Video Games and Good Learning," in which he noted that "Schools often allow much less space for risk, exploration, and failure" (p. 35). Contrary, this is not only how learning happens in games but how all good learning occurs. Gee explains that a game will give players an obstacle they have to overcome which requires knowledge they didn't have before reaching the obstacle. Once solved, the player then knows how to solve similar problems, adding whatever knew knowledge is gained along the way as the problems increase in difficulty.

> This cycle has been called the "Cycle of Expertise" (Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993); it is the way anyone becomes an expert at anything worth being an expert in. In school, sometimes the poorer students do not get enough opportunity to consolidate, and the good students do not get enough real challenges to their school-based mastery. (p. 36)

In other words, players master game skills better than students master school learning because games often present problems in a manner that is more conducive to learning. Gee (2005) gives a specific example of this regarding vocabulary: "research suggests that people only really know what words mean and learn new ones when they can hook them to the sorts of experiences they refer to—that is, to the sorts of actions, images, or dialogues the words relate to" (p. 36). These represent just a few of the aforementioned learning principles that you might glean from how games teach students to play them.

You feel strongly that this ties back to Rosenblatt (1978), that your reading of text is informed by your prior experience. Without certain experiences (such as the context required to make sense of a new vocabulary word, to use Gee's [2005] example), a text may mean very little to you. You realize, too, Gee isn't the first to offer these principles as indicative of good teaching or conducive to learning; he is, however, one of the first to explain how video games make use of them.

From here, you could look more closely at the specific examples that Gee (2005, 2007) studies these and other principles at work. Or you look further at Play Theory in a broader context.

[For examples of How Games Teach, turn to Page 84.]

[To study Play Theory, turn to Page 73.]

How Games Teach

One of Gee's (2007) favorite games, in terms of the principles he lays out in *What Good Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*, is *Pikmin*. Gee begins with a quick explanation of the game. As Captain Olimar, your rocket ship crash lands on a strange, deadly planet, leaving you to enlist the help of small, plant like creatures capable of helping you navigate the planet's perils and collect the parts of your stranded spaceship before your life-support systems fail. Gee likes a lot about this game, and it's one of his first examples because it encompasses most of the learning principles he later discusses.

First, Gee (2007) likes that the game encourages Active/Critical Learning: rather than having the player read a bunch of instructions out of context (i.e., before playing the game), the game teaches the player how to play as the player explores the game world. This seems pretty common sensical to you; however, Gee points out that still too many teachers try to teach skills out of context (like assigning a chapter from a history text and expecting students to just remember everything they read; this isn't learning, it's memorization). Similarly, he likes the use of what he calls, the Practice Principle, whereby the player/student is taught through practice that is not boring and encourages the player/student to spend a lot of time on the task. *Pikmin* does this by slowly introducing the player (Capt. Olimar) to various kinds of obstacles that exist on the planet (from carnivorous creatures to fire and deep water) while also introducing the different types of Pikmin (cute, carrot like figures who live in onions) and techniques required for solving them. As the player in introduced to a new type of Pikmin, Capt. Olimar is faced with a new obstacle; once the puzzle is solved, the player feels a sense of mastery over the associated skill and ready to continue exploring the planet.

Again, these are basic examples from Gee's(2007) first point concerning one of the least complex of all the games he brings up as examples (other's include *Arcanum*, *Deus Ex*, the *Tomb Raider* series, the new *Sonic the Hedgehog* series, and of course, *World of Warcraft*; he's also able to relate the same principles he applies to these games to the countless others in similar genres). And as the games he discusses get more complex, so are the learning principles to which he relates them.

But as you read Gee (2010) further, you soon realize that games have the potential to teach in other ways, as well. In "A Situated-Sociocultural Approach to Literacy and Technology" Gee explains the ways in which games do a better job at teaching situated meaning—which he describes as the "understanding of a concept or word [that] implies the ability to use the word or understand the concept in ways that are customizable to different specific situations of use" (p. 184)—for literacy than traditional schooling: "research has shown, for years now, that, in areas like science, a good many students with good grades and passing test scores cannot actually use their knowledge to solve problems" (p. 184). In other words, students are good at learning the language needed to answer questions about it but not how to situate that meaning into practice. Games, however, with often very specific language use, are excellent at situating meaning. For example, discussing the trading card game *Yu-Gi-Oh*, Gee notes:

> Here language—complex specialist language—is married closely to specific and connected actions. The relationship between language and meaning (where meaning here is the rules and the actions connected to them) is clear and lucid. The *Yu-Gi-Oh* company has designed such lucid functionality because it allows them to sell 10, 000 cards connected to a fully esoteric language and practice. It directly banks on children's love of mastery and expertise. Would that schools did the same. (p. 183)

Because the language of the game relates to specific rules of the game, it makes not only learning the language but using it easier than the language students are asked to learn in school, without context. He gives another example of this in his experience playing the role-

playing game *Pokémon* with his son, or rather, with his son playing and he or his wife reading the necessary text to continue the game.

> In real sense, Sam did learn to read by playing *Pokémon*. But he learned to read, then, in a context that was also early preparation for dealing with complex specialist language, a type of language he would see later in school, though, for the most part, only after the first couple of grades. (p. 183)

Given this, Gee urges that school literacy be taught in similarly situated meanings—whether game-like or not. Again, you realize, this is not a new notion and also ties back to your notions of Rosenblatt. It does, however, illustrate that games are capable of teaching in ways schooling often does not.

All this is starting to convince you that good games really are good at teaching players how to play them, and perhaps, in some ways, school is a badly designed game. But you're curious what actually happens when games are brought into a classroom. And how would you go about using video games in the classroom?

Of course, perhaps the key to using games in the classroom lay not in the specific games but how they're designed. So, it wouldn't hurt to brush up on theories around play either. Where do you go next?

[For examples of Video Games Used in the Classroom, turn to Page 87.]

[To study Play Theory, turn to Page 73.]

Video Games Used in the Classroom

One of the first pieces you find is Henry Jenkins' (2009) *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media education for the 21st century*, an oft-cited report because it covers many 21st century media aside from video games. In it, he provides a kind of literature review of research studies of games' use in classrooms.

For example, Jenkins (2009) mentions Beck and Wade's research that suggests that because gamers are used to working **in** groups **against** groups, they are more open to both risk-taking **and** collaborating (as cited in Jenkins, 2009, p. 11). He also discusses how Sherry Turkle's research suggests that gamers may learn **how** to manipulate the game world but only within the framework of the game's assumptions **about** the world (as cited in Jenkins, 2009, p. 13), while Friedman argues that players do this when they attempt to cheat (as cited in Jenkins, 2009, p. 13). Pushing at and circumventing the game's rules requires a knowledge of those assumptions Turkle (as cited in Jenkins, 2009) mentions, but you learn that Squire's (2004, as cited in Jenkins, 2009) updated review of the literature and his own research corroborated Turkle's concerns when he brought *Civilization III* into his world history class (p.15).

But Jenkins' (2009) thoughts are perhaps best summed up here: "Contemporary video games allow youth to play with sophisticated simulations and, in the process, to develop an intuitive understanding of how we might use simulations to test our assumptions about the way the world works" (p. 25). This reminds you of what Vygotsky (1978) believes about play as a zone of proximal development, in which children use play to try on other identities.

So you could refresh your memory on Vygotsky (1978) from here, or you could dig deeper into some examples of games being used in the classroom.

[To read more about Vygotsky and Play as Development, turn to Page 79.]

[For more detailed examples of Games Used in Classrooms, turn to Page 89.]

Games Used in Classrooms

Staaby's (2014) "The Walking Dead in school – moral philosophy after the apocalypse The Walking Dead in school" looks at how one could use the first (free) episode of *The Walking Dead* game to discuss ethical dilemmas in a secondary education classroom—the game's dilemmas often come in the form of choosing to save one character over another, a choice which may be informed by the player's understanding of the situation, culture attitudes, as well as which might be more useful for survival as the game continues, as these choices affect the game's direction. While it's highly prescriptive for this purpose, it does offer some good suggestions for games analysis in the classroom. For example, it offers good reasons for playing a game as a class, as opposed to having students playing individually; it ensures that students have a similar experience on which to reflect (a wild card element of using video games for teaching). For this reason, you think this game and these methods would make for a good model of game analysis before having students repeat such analysis on their own. Furthermore, looking up the game, you realize that in addition to being cheap it's available across multiple platforms (personal computers and consoles) and devices (iOS and Android), making it easy to get to students!

Jane McGonigal's (2011) sixth chapter of *Reality is Broken* ("Becoming a Part of Something Bigger than Ourselves") makes reference to Gentile et al.'s (2009) key finding across three studies of the effects of prosocial gaming—games that ask "players and game characters [to] help and support each other in nonviolent ways" (p. 754)—on young people from three different countries. Specifically, the results show that prosocial gamers are not only likely to be more prosocial in real life but to choose to play more prosocial games (Gentile et al., 2009, p. 760). They find that prosocial games lead to greater empathy than violent games because they intrinsically reward empathy (p. 761). In the end, Gentile et al.

conclude that this means that "video games are not inherently good or bad" but that "content matters, and games are excellent teachers" (p. 762). Their examples include *Chibi Robo* (a game in which players control and a robot trying to improve the interpersonal lives of its family) and *Super Mario Sunshine* (a game loosely about cleaning up a polluted world).

This is useful to your research, as it demonstrates that many games have further meaning that can be pulled by gamers. In other words, they're ripe for the kind of analysis you already ask English students to leverage. Further, it helps in selecting games you might ask students to study by looking specifically for games that reward player choice with further potential for analysis. A violent game might simply reward choice with more violence (something to study in itself, of course), but other games (such as *The Walking Dead*) may offer the reward that comes with complex character design and self-reflection—such as that suggested by Staaby's (2014) "The Walking Dead in school."

Garris, Ahlers, and Driskell's (2002) study in how instructional games might be useful for education for the navy turns up some important observations about how you might facilitate this analysis. For example, their "Input-Process-Outcome Game Model" provides a helpful way of thinking about how games can be used to teach real world skills (p. 445). However, what they discover is that this transfer doesn't happen on its own (p. 459); students must be guided or prodded to make these connections (p. 460).

This is a good justification for how you could use games as texts—with guided discussion and analysis, as you would with any text. Further, this piece offers some more good advice for how you might choose games. Garris et al. (2002) note that the fantasy aspect of games enable players an alternate perspective of their world (p. 448), meaning that any games you select should place students into teachable roles. This supports Staaby's (2014) use of *The Walking Dead* game to teach moral philosophy. They also note that these

fantasies should be endogenous—"related to the learning content"—as opposed to exogenous—"simply overlaid on some learning content" (Reiber as cited in Garris et al., 2002, p. 448).

All of this is starting to make sense to you, and you could see yourself bringing a game into a class for student analysis. But it still seems amazing to you that games could be capable of so much. So while you could start thinking about where to go from here in teaching a game as a College English text, you could also study up on theories of play and what makes games good at teaching. What do you research next?

[To study Play Theory, turn to Page 73.]

[To see what What Makes Video Games Good at Teaching turn to Page 81.]

[To reflect on Where to Go from Here, turn to Page 92.]

Where to Go from Here

As the title suggests, Kellner and Share's (2007) "Critical Media Literacy is not an Option" argues that students of the 21st century need to be equipped with the skills to engage with their world, which requires an expanded notion of "literacy." You're finding yourself of the mind to include games in the media about which students need to be critically literate.

Donna Haraway's (2006) "Cyborg Manifesto" (combined with Jenkins' ideas) explains the importance of writing about games, particularly for women of colour. One of her points focuses around the idea that when interacting with virtual constructs, we create a fictional version of ourselves to exist within the construct (p. 118). And as long as these constructs require our participation, a part of us is left behind after "logging out" (p. 120). Digital technologies allow our existence to be more "fluid," allow us to leave our physical bodies to interact with the machine (p. 121). Further, these spaces do not require that "woman" be boiled down to "white and middle class," but allow for a hybrid that acknowledges and does not try to erase one type of femininity for another (p. 125). In other words, students engaged in virtual spaces (whether they are games or not) possibly can create an entirely new identity for themselves, an identity that they write into existence, which may have even more "authority" than outside these spaces (p. 123). Teachers and students not only need to be given space to practice this literacy but trained to do so, since these spaces can be just as easily used (or not) to maintain the status quo (p. 129). Writing from and with these experiences is an important skill students and teachers need to develop. Granted, as explained previously, much of this will be self-sponsored and much of it will not.

So while bring "literate" in the 21st century includes being able to "read" games as texts (analyze and critique), for Kellner and Share (2007) it has to also mean making students

producers rather than merely consumers. In other words, any course to study games must include giving students space to create their own, as well. In many courses this is easy: students studying literature can write literature, film students can make movies, musicians compose. But methods for doing this have been around for awhile.

One of the next steps, then, is the need to research the pedagogy of designing games. Anecdotally, you've heard of using John Ferrara's (2012) *Playful Design: Creating Game Experiences in Everyday Interfaces* to have students "reverse engineer" popular games to paper prototypes, to study the mechanics of the game, so maybe there's something in that you can use.

McGonigal's (2011) book does a lot to explain why we enjoy games from a psychological perspective, and in that sense, it tells you a lot about your students and colleagues who enjoy games! But this is only the first part of the book. The second concerns the design and implementation of alternate reality games (ARG). She offers descriptions of several different kinds of ARGs, how they came about, and some basic ideas about how the form of ARGs should follow their function. Unfortunately, she only really offers up examples as models; this book isn't a "how-to," which isn't exactly a flaw and not the purpose of the book, anyway. The final part does go into greater detail concerning ARGs with larger potential to affect the world. In a sense, it's a call for more games like ARGs. It's disappointing that there's not more practical advice in how to go about creating them, but the rules around her game *Superstructures* are highly adaptable to many situations and purposes. Plus, her references are exhaustive, offering lots of sources and further examples. With a little more digging and careful thought around the ideas she presents, you feel like you could design a classroom ARG for a College English class.

But outside of academia, other resources are beginning to surface. You find Sora Kareem's (2015) web article "Games that Heal," about designing interactive fiction as therapy using Twine, a free web tool that makes such game design easy. Kareem references numerous such games' (both her own and others') potential for crafting narratives that are both cathartic for the creator and seek empathy from the players. While this article represents only a few individual game designers personal feelings, such a tool may be useful for not only introducing students to games as texts but would allow them to learn as producers, as well. This not only fulfills Kellner and Share's (2007) requirements for Critical Media Literacy, but creates a space for students to share their own narratives in a prosocial way that McGonigal (2011) argues is transferable to real life.

On the other hand, you've also read about students finding games no more enjoyable to study than other texts in Alexander's (2015) report on the game *Elegy for a Dead World*, which asks players to take the role of space explorers writing about extinct alien planets as well as share their narratives with other players. Therein, you read about students resistant to their teachers' use of the game, to the point of using the game to critique its use in school. Nevertheless, even this resistance to learning what was planned by the teacher speaks to what Jenkins (2009) argues about students ability to manipulate and (thereby) learn from game worlds. More information about the teacher Alexander references then might show what not to do.

Regardless, you realize you now have a decision to make. Do you broaden your conception to include video games when you consider your students' "literacies" and the "texts" they use? Do you use what you've learned in this research to begin thinking about how you apply the pedagogies of your classroom to video games? Do you try gamifying your

classroom in some way? Or are you even sure that video games and play have a place in learning or the classroom?

But these are questions this game cannot answer. It's time to play a new one.

The End

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Some people listen to music while they study and write, but I prefer to have movies playing in the background. I'm not too particular beyond picking something I've already seen (so that it doesn't distract me) that's preferably motivating in some way ("Well, if Frodo can get the One Ring from The Shire to Mount Doom, I can finish this research paper!"). One morning while working on my proposal, I was flipping between movie channels for something to put on, when I stopped on something with Michelle Pfeiffer. The movie was *The Deep End of the Ocean*, a drama my mother made my family watch (no doubt a trade-off for something starring Arnold Schwarzenegger that my brothers, dad, and I picked). I started to think about when I'd seen it last, when I suddenly remembered studying it in eleventh grade, thirteen years prior.

In eleventh grade, my high school offered a new elective: Independent Study! The class was a chance for students interested in pursuing their own research to work in and through two committee-guided projects. My favorite teacher, Mr. Donovan, and my Creative Writing teacher Mrs. LeBlanc co-taught the class, and Mr. Donovan had sold me on the course the year before while he was planning it.

My plan after high school was to write my way across America and Canada before going to college to study film. But my parents wouldn't let me take Theatre Arts or Media Studies in ninth and tenth grade, so I saw this as a chance to study movies. Somehow, I found myself interested in how film can change the way we think about the world. So I designed a study to "answer" this question. I read up on social conditioning and behavioral studies, asked the school guidance counselor to oversee my creation of a survey to collect

student opinions on issues prevalent in recent films, and asked a teacher to allow me to show the films in his class.

Mr. Donovan gave me the go ahead, and I showed *The Deep End of the Ocean* (about a boy kidnapped as an infant and then found and returned to a family he doesn't know as a teenager) to his seventh grade Religion class, giving the students a pre- and post-viewing questionnaire on the issues of custody and child welfare. He also let me show *A Time to Kill* to his tenth graders (a film about a man on trial for murdering his daughter's rapists) and asked them questions about their thoughts on the subject of justifiable murder. I collected and "analyzed" these "data," writing a ten-page report "proving" that film can change a person's views on even controversial issues. I even had a "Limitations" section, explaining that my "participant demographics" challenged the "generalizability" of my study.
My seventeen-year old researcher-self was adorable, right? And I like to think I've come a long way in terms of designing a research study. But as I was remembering all this that morning, I was struck by how similar my current research is to that high school project. My interest in studying the transactions (Rosenblatt, 1978) with popular culture has merely shifted to the medium of video games and narrowed the focus of meaning making from world-view to literature. I'm less concerned with generalization and "proving" anything and really just curious about what happens in my own class. But it's very reassuring to find one's way back to a forgotten interest, becoming more informed along the way.

Methods and Theoretical Underpinnings

These days, I'm far less (post)positivist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) in my assumptions about what I supposedly can learn by collecting some responses to a few surveys. Also unlike (post)positivists, I'm less concerned with whether what I observe can be "validated"

(that knowable truth has been captured by the methods) or "generalizable" (that what has been observed can be distilled to common elements that widely exist) in other situations (Creswell, 2009, pp. 6-7). As Ellis and Bochner (2000) point out,

> The question is not, "Does my story reflect my past accurately?" as if I were holding a mirror to my past. Rather I must ask, "What are the consequences my story produces? What kind of person does it shape me into? What new consequences they have, to what uses they can be put." (p. 746)

I am hopeful this research can be used to draw implications for how video games can be used in College English (and other) classrooms, and this kind of self-reflection has enabled me, as a teacher, to better understand my teaching and how it has been informed by my prior experiences, an important aspect of not only this research but teaching.

In this sense, because I'm inclined to believe that knowledge is constructed by our interpretation of our experiences—similarly to how Rosenblatt (1978) argues that our prior experiences inform the meaning we make from the texts we read—I see myself as a constructivist as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe it, where this study is concerned. Denzin and Lincoln explain that constructivists subscribe to "a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjective epistemology (knower and respondent cocreate understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures" (p. 24). However, I also appreciate Creswell's (2009) description of this, wherein researchers "look for the complexity of views rather than narrow meanings" through "open-ended questions" situated "socially and historically" (p. 8). Creswell also explains some of the assumptions present from such a view, some more obvious (such as that people make these meanings as they are experienced, making interpretations almost immediately) than others (this means that understanding in research is co-constructed by both the researcher and participants) (p. 9).

Accepting this, some parts of this research might be conceived of as a constructivist view of autoethnography (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) of my own interpretation of both my students' and my own experiences with and about literacy. This feels an especially important approach for a teacher, as I'm interested in trying to discern if, at all, my students engage in the constructivist concept of meaning making in ways similar to those I made of video games and literature, though (as previously stated) I'm less concerned with generalizability. All that said, I'm going to try to unpack my autoethnography a little in the proceeding paragraphs.

Autoethnography and Narrative Research

Clandinin (2013), working within constructivist orientations—such as that not only is knowledge co-constructed by a society or culture's agreed narrative (p. 10) but that because contexts constantly change within that society or culture, so does the knowledge they make (p. 14)—explains that narrative is a "natural" form of research (p. 11). From Clandinin's perspective, Western-informed construction of stories are used to remember, teach, and learn. It makes sense, then, to situate my interpreted data and analyses' construction as "stories" as a way to express, organize, and analyze my interpretations of what I have "gathered" as my data (p. 11).

My own education is not in any versions of education research but rather in creative writing; in many ways, approaching data as "raw" and thus able to be molded to construct stories as a means to analyze and interpret my research seems the most "natural" way to conduct education research in order to explore my interpretations of my experiences and interrogate how I think I have learned. When I began writing even just the literature review of this proposal, it began as a story. As I started to explore the terrain of narrative research,

it became clear to me that I had to address my own beliefs about what I have interpreted as the transactions I made between literature and video games because this would become a factor (consciously or not) in how I would make meaning of what I interpreted to be my own students' transactions in the classroom.

Clandinin (2013) positions her version of narrative research in relation to Dewey, stating that all experience is "transactional." In the moment we experience something, we are making an interpretation of it, creating memory. And only by interrogating this interpretation can we truly understand it: "our representations rise from experience and must return to that experience for their validation" (Clandinin & Rosiek, as cited in Clandinin, 2013, p. 15). In other words, because how we explain an experience is an interpretation of it, we must also examine that experience for how other interpretations of our experiences (which are deeply informed by the historical, social, and cultural contexts and usually normalizing assumptions of "the world" that accompany them) shaped that interpretation.

Inspired by Ellis and Bochner (2000), this is what I hoped the introduction and literature review of this proposal would begin to do, to explore what I assume to be the transactions with video games that I think led to my love of literature, as they describe:

> I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I've lived through. Then I write my experience as a story. By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life, as Reed-Danahay says. (p. 737)

I attempted this (acknowledging that no memory can be "captured" as it was experienced) in order to try to understand how I had arrived at this understanding, which I hoped my students could embrace too—that stories, in any form, are stories and that all of them teach—in the ways that Ellis and Bochner describe: "authors use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on self and look more deeply at self-other interactions"

(p. 740). In other words, I hoped reflecting on and sharing what I remembered from my own learning might help my reader understand my interpretations in the particular contexts in which I made them.

The early sections of this manuscript were attempts at exploring such stories of my own learning as narratives, in which I "collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure them by means of a plot or stories" (Polkinghorne as cited in Holley & Colyar, 2009, p. 680). I continued to do so as I studied my class, moving into autoethnography, which Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe as:

> an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (p. 739)

This "back and forth" look at myself and my students seemed not only important but necessary, as I approached my research questions informed by own experiences. I could not interpret, for example, how my students made meaning of a video game as text without also interrogating my own meaning making process; otherwise, I would be most apt to simply recognize what looked the same as my own experiences. Further, by looking for students' experience different from my own, I could reflect on assumptions I had made about my own interpretations of self.

Digging deeper, Ellis and Bochner (2000) point at the different perspectives of autoethnography at work in the field, listing the evolution of terms used for the different kinds of autoethnography (p. 739). Specifically, they cite Tedlock as explaining the difference between narrative ethnography and ethnographic memoir. In the former, the researcher creates a story to represents the "dialogue" held by the researcher and their participants; in

the later, the researcher offers a kind of behind the scenes look of the research process (Tedlock as cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 741).

For this reason, Van Mannen (2011) refers to these as "confessional tales," which he describes as "an attempt to explicitly demystify fieldwork or participant-observation by showing how the technique is practiced in the field" (p. 73). According to Van Mannen, the researcher accomplishes this by "confessing" their "biases, character flaws, or bad habits" (p. 75). The effect of this, he argues, is to demonstrate the messiness of the research process, not to bring it into doubt but to avoid the disingenuous "white flash of discovery" (as though the researcher simply looked at their data and suddenly divined meaning) present in other forms of research (p. 76).

Van Mannen (2011) breaks this down even further into the "sub-genre" of impressionist tales (p. 106). He argues that for authors of impressionist tales, "The attempt is to evoke an open, participatory sense in the viewer and as with all revisionist forms of art, to startle complacent viewers accustomed to and comfortable with older forms" (p. 101). In other words, impressionist tales take the messiness of the confessional tale and try to coopt the reader into the process of addressing whatever change in understanding the research calls for by making the reader feel what the researcher has felt (p. 102). Van Mannen suggests that this is accomplished by "the impressionists' self-conscious and, for their time, innovative use of their materials—color, form, light, stroke, hatching, over-lay, frame—that provides the associative link to fieldwork writing" (p 101). In other words, the researcher uses other modes of creation (outside those traditional to academia) to represent their research.

In the end, Van Mannen (2011) presents confessional and impressionist tales as troubling the tensions that exist in social science research. While the term "confessional tale" carries with it the insinuation that the researcher has done something wrong, instead it

represents an acknowledgement that research cannot perfectly represent what was studied as "realist" research had purported. He suggests (within the context of Marcus and Fischer's [1986] revelation of the crisis of representation reflected in new ethnographies of anthropology and sociology) that "most confessions, like most dissertations, never see publication. Those that are published, however, normally issue from authors who have first published notable, attention-getting tales in the realist tradition" (p. 81). The suggestion here is that scholars who had published realist research now "confess" the problematic nature of such attempts at representation by drawing attention to the messy ways interpretation is produced. Or as Tuck and Ree (2013) put it, it's like turning over Tarot cards; turning this one over first will offer a different interpretation than turning that one over (p. 640). Building on this, feminist qualitative research (e.g., Lather, 1991; Pillow, 2003) demonstrates even more complex notions of qualitative research as "self-reflexive." Van Mannen (2011) goes further with "autoethnography," calling it "a wet term" (p. 106), and suggests impressionist tales exist most often "among fieldworkers at the podium, hanging around airports with cronies, in the classroom, at the local saloon, holding forth at a party, or loafing on the beach drinking wine from screw-top bottles with friends" (p. 108) – in other words, at the forefront of academia.

Still, the impressionist tale is, for me, the most meaningful and important way to conceptualize the representation of my inquiry because it allows me to engage with and share not only my students' understanding but my own in such a way that their influence on one another might offer the reader a sense of what happened that non-narrative methods might be capable of. In other words, this approach allowed me to better share my interpretations of my teaching experiences and my students learning experiences with the reader.

Putting this into practice, after teaching the class that I observed for this study—designed for students to play, discuss, analyze, and write about games—I used my interpretations of my observations and student work to piece together a narrative as a way of trying to address my research questions. I kept track of my observations in a notebook both during and after classes—a practice I already engaged in, taking short-hand notes when students were focused on classroom activities such as writing or small-group discussions, as well as longer reflections after class. These notes were generally about how students respond to certain lessons, actions I could have or did take that seemed to lead to the goal of the lesson, and even just whether the topic of a text seemed to lead to a constructive discussion. Of course, these are already interpretations of what I experienced, but their immediacy served as a kind of log of these interpretations of specific lessons and activities over the course of the semester. However, my students' work also helped me both question and reform these interpretations. In both my observations and the students' work, I looked for suggestions of their engagement (reflections on what they thought about playing games as analysis) with the texts as well as how they were "making meaning" of the texts (such as synthesis of ideas from the class games and the other texts, as well as any other means that the students might have demonstrated to me).

Finally, the curriculum outcomes (the skills students were expected to demonstrate before completion of the course) helped me further explore what, if anything, happens when College English students are asked to study video games as texts; in other words, the "outcomes" simply helped me understand what, if any, "academic" work video games might support. This is not to say that these interpretations can be a guide one should have for judging a "successful" College English course. But they offer a way of understanding what

occurred in my class, and whether this class will support these students in their college work after my course, as described by this program.

In this kind of autoethnography, Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe that "concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language" (p. 739). As such, the narratives I constructed with the help of my students' work are, in essence, case studies of that "action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness." Creswell (2009) explains that these close inquiries of specific cases in research are "bounded by time and inquiry" (p. 13) making them a useful way for framing knowledge, which "is a changing stream…characterized by continuous interaction of human thought without personal, social, and material environment" (Clandinin & Rosiek, as cited in Clandinin, 2013, p. 14). Case study, then, can serve as a kind of snapshot of my interpretations of "what happened" in my course, in the same way Van Mannen (2011) describes impressionist tales as "a worldly scene in a special instant or moment in time…. The work is figurative, although it conveys a highly personalized perspective" (p. 101). It can't tell me anything with certainty, but it can help me express what I think I saw to my reader.

This research may only have enabled me to further question my own assumptions about what I have suggested as contributing to these research interests in relation to what and how I teach in the college classroom. As such, my dissertation research has also showed me what I was capable of teaching my students using video games, as well as if and, to whatever extent I could discern, how my students engaged with games in the classroom. Beyond this, however, this dissertation will add to the pedagogy of using video games in

English classrooms—the considerations teachers should make, the kind of reading and writing they may (or may not) support, and what the field of English Education has to gain by interrogating them for inclusion in curricula.

Course (Research) Design

The narrative of my research was constructed from interpretations of observations from a single semester in a section of a course designed around my research questions (i.e., the texts, assignments, and what they ask of students) within the curriculum design prescribed by the English Department at Empire City Community College (a pseudonym), which I piloted the semester prior. The course assignments produced the artifacts (short reading responses called Commentaries and formal writing projects), while field and post facto notes of classroom observations helped me to interpret my students' work and vice versa. The meaning I construct from this data has helped me investigate my Research Questions.

I selected study participants from volunteers from this particular course who were over the age of eighteen and who agreed to sign an informed consent form, which I shared with all potential participants and explained the "data" I am studying. These were comprised of my field notes interpreting what "happened" in class, where my attention was on participant observations of any student interaction with the course texts, as well as with each other and me as teacher and researcher. The form also explained what I considered the class artifacts (with names replaced by pseudonyms) that I used as data to be analyzed/interpreted. Finally, I assured all potential participants that their participation or lack thereof would not affect, in any way, my course grading.

In line with Graff's (2009) assertion that students be walked through "serious intellectual culture" (p. 73) before exploring a piece of class literature, the course first focused on readings that analyzed and discussed literacy before and while tackling the video game *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games, 2012) as the course text I assigned for the class. Gradually, the class came to play the game and read articles side by side. These readings were chosen by me early in the semester, to be read and discussed alongside the course texts; students read an article, played some of the game, read another article, and so on, in hopes that the articles might inform their understanding of the game and vice versa by discussing related themes.

Finally, based on the students' individual research topics, they chose the texts to be presented in class and in their research using what they had (perhaps, hopefully) learned from investigating the class texts. In this way, the course attempted to include the criteria for critical pedagogy laid out by Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2009): 1) "the process of critique must be understood as an on-going phenomenon" (p. 12); 2) "it is a critical imperative to develop a strong command of one's particular academic discipline" (p. 13); 3) "all theorizing and truth claims are subject to critique, a process that constitutes analysis and questions that are best mediated through human interaction within democratic relations of power" (p. 13). I see this course design as walking students through these elements of critical pedagogy: 1) playing and studying a video game, 2) reading texts related to the themes of the course, 3) bringing their own texts to the class discussion, and 1) then returning to playing and studying a video game. As Darder et al. explain, teaching with a critical pedagogy is not a scaffold of lessons for students to climb but a recursive process, in which the course lessons should allow students to form, critique, and reform ideas about the discipline.

I read all participants' formal writing projects, creating patterns and themes from these data that might suggest if/how the connections between the course texts facilitated their entry into academic discourses (described in further detail in the proceeding section). These writing projects informed the narrative I have constructed, as drafting the projects (i.e., the lessons and activities assigned to help students compose) include the students' reflections, enabling me to interpret their thinking about the project and topic. To do this, I selected six students as "case studies." These participants were chosen from those who completed the course—that is, maintained minimum attendance (including the one-on-one conference scheduled with all students) and submitted all formal writing assignments and most minor assignments, both detailed in the following section)—though this doesn't necessarily mean they passed the course.

From there, I chose a purposeful sample of participants; Maxwell (2013) describes this method as one in which "particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals, and that can't be gotten as well from other choices" (p. 97). In my study, this purposeful sample of participants formed a range of student entry into video games, literature, and prior experiences—in other words, which students identified as game players, readers, writers, and/or had prior knowledge of the course games and/or texts' subject matter. This seemed appropriate for representing a wide variety of perspectives on both video games and subject matter. I also took student demographics (traditional/non-traditional students, race, and gender) into consideration; however, no formal data was collected on demographics and these aspects were determined observationally, such as when participants disclosed them in the course of our work.

Choosing the Texts

Choosing the texts (the games, books, articles, or even films) this class was to study was one of the most arduous tasks in my conceptualization of this project. For the pilot study, the imagined structure for the course would be that the class would play a video game then read a novel with similar themes, along with short readings (e.g., academic and news articles) related to those themes. However, choosing the "right" game, book, and readings (i.e., texts students could make connections with and between) became a huge task. I began by looking at some narrative-based games I'd read or heard about others enjoying and (in some cases) using for teaching purposes in various contexts. I also wanted to be sure that the games were easy to access.

This last condition meant that the games should not require unreasonable technological and/or financial access (meaning a game that can only be played on an expensive home console or even an expensive game that can be accessed on multiple platforms). The game would also need to be relatively easy to pick up and play (i.e., not assuming the player has already played several games like it and is therefore familiar with the basic mechanics of play); for example, first-person shooter games generally have similar play mechanics and playing several teaches the player to quickly assess and respond (generally with violence) to various game challenges. In other words, while failure and challenge is a necessary part of game design, I did not want to choose games that would be so difficult as to discourage students from playing them. With these criteria, I narrowed down to five games: *The Walking Dead*, *Valiant Hearts: The Great War*, *The Stanley Parable*, *Never Alone*, and *Papers, Please*.

Since choosing from these five games was so difficult, I conducted a series of informal screenings of these games' trailers. I showed the trailers to my Dissertation

Proposal Seminar peers (none of whom were video game players), my then Freshman English students (about half of whom identified as video game players), and my video game playing friends (many of whom are academics) to get their general thoughts about the games.

Based on the comics and TV show, *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games, 2012) is largely about choice through a set of moral dilemmas with the backdrop of the zombie apocalypse. Almost all of the choices end up in the death of a character, which allows for really interesting questions regarding how a player should make these choices. Several of these choices revolve around whether the main character Lee (a Black man convicted of murdering his wife) is considered innocent or trustworthy by the other characters, and to that end, all choices require basic character analysis, whether players realize it or not. Unfortunately, I could not decide what text to pair with it. The game actually avoids discussions of race, which leaves a lot up to inference but might perhaps make jumping to discussions of race feel forced. On the upside, the game is cheap and can be played on virtually any digital device, computer, or video game console.

When showed the trailer for *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games, 2012), my peers saw the kind of moral dilemma riddles discussed in high school and thought it would therefore do well played alongside readings about ethics. My friends who play video games echoed this general impression, adding that, since the game puts the player in the position of an African American man convicted of murder, there's good potential for discussing empathy. However, all agreed that with its specific connection to *The Walking Dead* comics and TV shows and general connection to the zombie genre, students may assume they understand the game already and therefore engage with it less.

Moving on, just watching the preview for *Valiant Hearts: The Great War* (Ubisoft Montpellier, 2014) about (as the title suggests) World War I really hits me. That may seem

silly, but the two World Wars were a major part of my Canadian high school education, and my school was old enough to have a memorial to students who served and died during both. Playing it was draining, in a way; the game is based largely on letters (from all sides of the war) forcing the player to confront individual characters and their trials during the war rather than simply lumping them together with the thousands of lives lost. However, the game goes a long way to pointing out the massive loss of life during the War, so much so that I put off completing the game's final chapter for almost a month, for fear it wouldn't end well; without giving anything away, the ending is very moving. The game, which could be categorized as historical fiction, follows the narratives of five characters through mostly puzzle-based play. The game is also peppered with historical facts and descriptions of important everyday items, which almost situate the player as a kind of researcher. For this reason, I considered pairing it with my favorite book in high school, Timothy Findley's *The Wars*, a short piece of Canadian fiction about a researcher also studying letters from World War I, trying to piece together what happened to one particular soldier decades later. Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, of course, also comes to mind and was another text we read as part of our World War units. I also considered going an entirely different direction and assigning an excerpt from JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, written during and influenced by Tolkien's time in the trenches. The game is also cheap and widely available!

Valiant Hearts (Ubisoft Montpellier, 2014) prompted a more serious response from those I shared it with. For my peers, it conjured thoughts of Theatre of the Oppressed and positioning of the other for the multiple roles it asks players to fill. My students weren't particularly interested based on the trailer, but my game playing friends agreed it's excellent. My peers and friends also threw out suggestions for how to approach interrogating the game, such as looking at propaganda from the era and non-fictional accounts.

Moving in a different direction, *The Stanley Parable* (Galactic Café, 2013) is an eclectic option. When I first started discussing my interest in studying games, a peer actually mentioned this bizarre little game! I've heard of it being used to teach narrative, as the game is essentially about the player making choices either in accordance with or contrary to the descriptions of the narrator. The game can be silly (the narrator gets very frustrated when you ignore him and "ruin" his story), but it's also a commentary on the choices we make in games and the reasons for them. It's not an accident that Stanley is an office worker, and questioning instructions reveal that Stanley is part of a secret experiment. Or maybe he's not; the game doesn't really end, but continually begins again, forcing the player to question whether to believe the narrator (that the game has in fact restarted) or keep playing to further disrupt the narrative. Right away, the game feels like it was inspired by Orwell's *1984* but also Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, so these felt like good texts to discuss with it. As the game's central play mechanic is choice, it also raises questions about the digital choices we make, how we embody our digital selves, and identity formation. Unfortunately, this is one of the least accessible games, as it's only available for computers. However, it's also not very expensive and each play through takes only 15-20 minutes, making it an ideal game for students to play during class. So perhaps it would be possible to have it pre-installed in a school computer lab.

Additionally, *The Stanley Parable* (Galactic Café, 2013) had the most polarizing reactions. My peers loved the creepy trailer, and it immediately made them think of the Stanford Prison and Milgram experiments. My students, however, felt that it would be incredibly frustrating—playing the same game over and over at the whim of the narrator. But my game-playing friends found an interesting medium between the two perspectives, noting that the game is a kind of meta-analysis of video game narratives. However, while

those who play games might find this challenging and enjoyable, non-game players might, as my students suggested, just find it frustrating.

Similarly themed as *The Stanley Parable* (Galactic Café, 2013), my best friend told me about *Papers, Please* (Pope, 2013) when it first came out, which immediately struck me, since he isn't a big gamer. He described how, one holiday break, waiting for revisions on his dissertation from his advisors, he had nothing to do. He'd gone from spending 9am to 5pm, Monday through Thursday in the library to a complete stop. I'm not sure how he discovered the game, but he explained that once he had, it consumed the rest of his break—examining documents, deciding whether to take bribes for his family, trying to help the resistance overthrow the despotic government without sacrificing himself or his family. Over time, curious about what he was so engrossed in, his then fiancée began looking over his shoulder. Soon, she was sitting alongside him, helping him spot forged documents and inconsistencies in immigrants' stories. It took a couple of years, but I finally played it, over the 2015 Thanksgiving holiday, and I had much the same experience. Though my wife never played with me, she still asked if I was okay whenever she heard me groan or curse under my breath. The game isn't really enjoyable, even less so for its timeliness. This would make it an interesting text to look at alongside non-fiction or a dystopian novel like *Little Brother* or, again, *1984*. And while the game is only available on PCs, Macs, and iOS, the graphics don't necessitate a powerful computer.

Papers, Please (Pope, 2013) also intrigued just about everyone I showed the trailer to but that also appeared unenjoyable to most. My peers noted that using it to study the different political ideologies in the game would be interesting. However, I had not considered that because the game satirizes the Cold War and I then taught in a large Eastern European/Russian immigrant community, some of these students may not enjoy it. And

while I typically only have one or two of these students in my classes, one noted that she'd just gone through the immigration process and had no interest in reliving it in a game. Ironically, she was referring to the process of immigrating to the United States, when the game depicts screening immigrants to a satirized Soviet Union. I think this would make it a very interesting text to interrogate, though perhaps it would have been insensitive at that school.

Finally, the Inuit made and inspired *Never Alone* (E-Line Media, 2014) is a puzzle game that tells the story of a young Iñupiaq girl and an artic fox, a kind of spirit guide. The fox and the spirits he can see and call on for help lead the young girl on an adventure narrated in Iñupiaq while sharing cultural stories and art styles. Celebrating traditional Alaskan native culture and way of life, the game touches on themes of sustainability, art, and narrative styles that the creators feel are slowly being lost. The game is fairly simple to play, cheap, and available on all computer and console platforms, though at times, the puzzles can be frustratingly unclear. Playing it made me think of the recent comic *Dawn Land*, telling a similar Native American story about the creation of the bow and arrow to save the hero's tribe from man eating giants. Interestingly, this might have been the game and book I would have chosen were I still teaching in New Mexico, where I worked at a Native American serving institution. The students would, I think, be much more able to relate to the game's themes and importance, the same way I think New York students may react more strongly to *Valiant Hearts* or *Papers, Please*.

My game playing friends had the least to say about *Never Alone* (E-Line Media, 2014), perhaps for its relative obscurity, though those that had suggested ways of using it similar to *Valiant Hearts* (Ubisoft Montpellier, 2014)—to discuss unfamiliar history and cultures. My peers, meanwhile, simply liked the look and feel of *Never Alone* (E-Line Media, 2014), an

important consideration, to be sure, since one of the game's main features is its aesthetic uniqueness as a game not designed by and for the typical game-playing audience. My students much agreed, commenting on the music and that it seemed like a nice game to relax with. Another, older student remarked that it looked like a game she could play with her kids. Much later, when I returned to consider the game further, a Native American, Games Studies colleague pointed out that tackling such issues without consideration for Indigenous pedagogies or research and narrative methods, might be problematic at best and cultural appropriation at worst.

Later, after sharing these trailers, my game-playing friends suggested replacing it with another first-person narrative game: *Gone Home* (Fullbright, 2013). In *Gone Home*, the player fills the role of a young woman just returning home from a year abroad in 1995. Arriving shortly after midnight in the middle of a freak thunderstorm, the player finds the house empty, exploring the house looking for signs of her parents and younger sister, learning about their lives in the year she's been away. The object of the game is to figure out where the family has disappeared to by learning about the personal conflicts and struggles they've experienced. Replete with mid-90s culture and character analysis, the game would indeed make a great classroom text; there are already some examples of its usage popping up on educator blogs and websites (e.g., Darvasi, 2014). Unfortunately, as a relatively new game, it's only available on the newest consoles and computers and priced fairly high. Still, I played it in only a couple of hours and thoroughly enjoyed it. The 90s references (music, games, film, etc.) offer a lot to analyze for a class of students born, at the latest, in the late 1980s, and the game is paced for deep exploration and analysis.

Though not as much as I had hoped, this really helped me narrow done my choice of game for my class other than that *Valiant Hearts* (Ubisoft Montpellier, 2014), *Never Alone* (E-

Line Media, 2014), and *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games, 2012) seemed the most interesting choices for students, but *Valiant Hearts* (Ubisoft Montpellier, 2014), *Stanley Parable* (Galactic Café, 2013), and *Papers, Please* (Pope, 2013) might have more to offer from a teaching perspective. In this case, *Valiant Hearts* (Ubisoft Montpellier, 2014) seemed the obvious choice; I love the game, it's fairly widely available, cheap, and accessible to non-gamers. But something my peers said stuck with me.

After viewing all the trailers, they lamented that I couldn't assign them all or, at the very least, let the students pick one. This latter option, if I really wanted to study what I am positing and conceptualizing as the transactions students might make from a game to a text, makes a lot of sense; from a critical pedagogy perspective, it also allows the students greater agency (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2009) and therefore a greater chance of being engaged with the text (Graff, 2009). But as analyzing a video game is likely a new form of inquiry for students, I felt we should have at least begun with a common game together, discussing the kind of analysis they'll eventually need to accomplish on their own (Graff, 2009) through our early course assignments, the features of which the class would decide together (Blau, 2010). Further, as I wanted students to read a specific text in conjunction with each book, I worried that it would be too chaotic for both me and each student to be playing and reading different things, that I wouldn't have the time to focus individuated attention to a class of students studying different things for an entire semester.

However, as I touched on in my introduction, my pilot study encouraged me to abandon this idea for primarily practical reasons – asking student to play a game and read text in a Freshman English course was too much work. Instead, I chose to simply ask students to play the game alongside shorter texts.

Freshman English 1: Video Game Literacies

After the pilot study, I immediately began revising the course for the summer section I had been assigned to teach. Two weeks before the course was set to begin, I was informed it had been cancelled due to low-enrollment. As an adjunct, I lost my class to an instructor or professor with more seniority. I was keenly aware this might happen (it had before and summer courses are very susceptible) but hoped that as my department knew I was planning my dissertation study, I might hang on to my course. But perhaps for this same reason, less than a week before the summer semester began, I was offered a course but not the one I had designed my study curriculum for (Freshman English I rather than II). I had only a few days to decide whether to redesign my study from scratch or push the entire thing back to the Fall semester. This delay, I knew, would also likely delay completion of this dissertation and graduation.

The decision caused me so much anxiety, my wife Veronica rightly asked if this was how I was going to spend the Summer, hurriedly designing a new class, teaching it, collecting data, completely uncertain with the design, and consequently strung out and unsatisfied with the results. She was right, of course, so I turned down the class entirely and committed to spending the rest of the Summer (trying to relax and) redesigning my study for Freshman English I, which had turned out to be the class I was to teach that Fall. I was undoubtedly happier with the results despite (or perhaps because of) the delays.

I decided the focus of the class would be on "literacy," a concept I intended the class to define together. The course description reads:

> Video games and other digital texts are likely to play a large role in literacy in the 21st century. In recent years, the White House has called for greater research and education in not only how digital texts teach but also whether or not students are being prepared to interact with them. As such, and in line with my doctoral

> dissertation research, this course will explore the reading/playing and writing of video games.
> However, ENG 12 is also an introductory course in college-level reading and writing, emphasizing the development of ideas in essays, including how language communicates facts, ideas, and attitudes. This course teaches writing as a process involving revision based on feedback from readers. You will learn how to develop college-level essays through close reading and inter-textual analysis—reading across and between texts drawn from various disciplines—with the video games as our guide, both as a medium and subject. (See Appendix A for the complete syllabus.)

In this way, I was upfront about the subject of the course (video game literacy), why I had chosen it (my dissertation research), and why it was important to them (the shifting needs of literacy in the 21st century). Beyond that, however, I tried to also convey that, aside from the theme and readings—which consisted of Telltale Games' (2012) *The Walking Dead: The Game* and several short articles—the course would follow the recommended curriculum outlined by the department, such as the "Learning Outcomes" and formal writing projects, which the syllabus also detailed:

> The English Department looks for students to improve their essay writing skills in English 12. We define an essay as a prose document that is written from the author's point of view, has a consistent focus, and offers evidence that illustrates the writer's ideas. Given this goal for English 12, we expect to see the following in all **passing** portfolios of student work.
>
> **A.** Essays that have **a point**, support the point, and explore implications of the point.
> **B.** Essays in which the thinking at the heart of the essay has clearly grown out of and has been **influenced by reading**.
> **C.** Essays in which there is a sense of **overall organization and structure**. This means that paragraphs are used to help focus and develop ideas, and sentences and paragraphs are understandable, logical, and cohesive.
> **D.** At least one essay showing evidence of **independent research** and use of sources. This research should be integrated into the writer's own ideas in the essay. Essay should make skillful and strategic use of **direct quotations**, **summary** and **paraphrase**.
> **E.** Essays that demonstrate **basic mechanical correctness**. The readers should not trip over language as they read the essay.
> **F.** Essays that respond to the **particular needs of the assignment** given by the classroom instructor.
> **G.** Essays that show **development and growth** from draft to draft and essay to essay.
> Please note that this is the minimum criteria for passing English 12.
> In addition to these minimum requirements, we read your work by considering the following:
>
> **Ideas**

- We value the **creativity, originality, and complexity** of ideas.
- We value **complex theses** over simple "black and white" ones.

Engaging Texts

- We value **close analysis of text** and evidence of close reading, where appropriate.
- We value essays that **"show" the reader something rather than just "tell"** the reader.
- We look for growing facility with **MLA citation style** and procedures.

Process

- We value writing processes that **use feedback** offered by the teacher and by peers.
- We encourage students to take chances in drafts, to do **risky and extensive revision,** to delete as well as add text in drafts.

Risk Taking

- We value student writers who take risks with their thinking and **challenge themselves in their writing**.
- We value essays that are less about proving a point and more about **exploring the difficulties and complexities of an idea**.

Presentation of work

- We value essays which are correctly formatted, follow MLA style, include a Works Cited page, when needed, clearly labeled, and presented on time in a neat, clear, easy-to-follow manner.
  This course has the additional goal of learning when visual and verbal literacies are appropriate.
  After passing ENG 12, you must take ENG 24. (See Appendix A for the complete syllabus.)

In this way, I also hoped to be upfront with students about how their work would be assessed—for the remainder of this section, individual Objectives will be referred to by the text emphasized by the curriculum (i.e., Objective B as "influenced by the reading"). I also made it clear from the first day that these Objectives would be used by a committee of English Department faculty to decide whether they were ready for English 24 and would pass English 12. These committees, known as Collaborative Portfolio Assessment (CPA) cohorts, were voluntary (except for new faculty) and a way for the department to assess its teaching while trying to standardize the outcomes for English 12. Participating instructors share their students' final portfolios of work and jointly decide whether the students are ready to move onto the next course in the sequence. This will be discussed in further detail in the proceeding section.

The main course assignments (and thus, artifacts for study) were regularly scheduled commentaries (Blau, 2010) organized to scaffold with the course's formal writing projects. The course description for commentaries reads:

> You will need to have read and responded (250-500 words) to a text on Blackboard by the class it is listed on the schedule, and we will discuss these texts through your commentaries. It will give you a place to prepare for class discussion and to keep track of ideas you may want to write about later.
> We will discuss in class exactly what's expected from these posts, but additionally, you will be required to post at least one comment on another student's Commentary post to receive credit for your own. All posts will be due by the Tuesday before a reading is to be discussed. We'll discuss **how** to post to Blackboard in class. (See Appendix A for the complete syllabus.)

These assignments were meant to help students in several of the Learning Outcomes as preparation for the formal essays. These regular posts were designed for students to practice Objectives B (writing "influenced by reading") and D ("direct quotations, summary and paraphrase"), as well as any others they chose to practice.

These posts, as they asked students to share some of their responses to the games and articles of the course, at various points of the semester (as much as they could or had the inclination to express), made an excellent archive for studying their developing understanding of the course texts, and if/how they influenced their understanding of games, and vice versa, throughout the semester.

Students were also encouraged to use feedback from me and their peers in commentary comments (as well as on short feeder assignments specific to each unit) to develop and revise written work and ideas for their formal writing projects. The course curriculum called for three formal writing projects that covered the main Learning Objectives that students were expected to demonstrate before completing the course; in my course, these were a Literacy Narrative, a Dialogue, and the Capstone Essay, which was a Critical Analysis.

The first formal writing project, the Literacy Narrative, asked students to write:

> a personal narrative that grows out of a close, sensitive reading of the first few texts in the course about literacy. The purpose of this piece is for you to articulate and develop a connection that you find between your (or your family's) own experience/memory/identity and the course narrative readings. Your narrative is **equally grounded** in your reading of **one** assigned text (your choice) and your own experience with literacy. **This narrative requires you to quote directly from the text you choose.** (750 words min.)

It was important to me that all chosen assignments serve both research and pedagogical purposes. Asking students to write a personal narrative about their own literacy afforded me a look at their literacy practices prior to coming to my class (important to my research questions asking how they make sense of texts) as well as asking them to reflect on ways of defining literacy (both for themselves and from the texts they were asked to respond to for the assignment) as we discussed the topic of video game literacy. It was made clear to students that the Learning Objectives valued in this assignment were B ("influence by the reading"), C ("overall organization and structure"), E ("basic mechanical correctness"), F ("the particular needs of the assignment"), and G ("development and growth").

Writing Project #2 took the form of a Dialogue, which asked students to:

> In this assignment, you are asked to put two texts' ideas into "dialogue" with one another. In a sense, you will relate one text's ideas (which must be an episode from *The Walking Dead*) a theme brought up in our course to another text's ideas in order to demonstrate your understanding of the theme. This assignment may take the form of:
>
> A. an essay in which you apply one writer's theories to another's ideas;
> B. a more creative dramatic dialogue in which you imagine a conversation between two texts on a particular topic;
> C. a letter written in the voice of one writer to another focused on a particular issue. Your key objectives are to accurately and sensitively represent the positions, ideas, and words of the two different texts, as well as explain the ways those ideas interrelate. (1000 words min.)

This Project asked students to draw connections from their early readings of the course text (Season 1 of *The Walking Dead: The Game*) to another article read as a class to discuss whatever topic they chose to focus on. This was to allow students to find their own meaning

(Rosenblatt, 1978) within the text, hopefully scaffolded by the course discussion in the first few weeks, and connect that with a text outside the course's consideration, as encouraged by Graff (2009). Giving students a choice of form for this project, which was assigned just as they were finishing *The Walking Dead: The Game*, I introduced them to *Twine*, an open-source software for building simple interactive narratives. The purpose here was to give them insight into how a game like *The Walking Dead* was written but more importantly to allow them the chance to practice writing games themselves. The Objectives for this Project were A ("a point"), B ("influence by reading"), C ("overall organization and structure"), E ("basic mechanical correctness"), F ("particular needs of the assignment"), G ("development and growth").

The third Writing Project was the Capstone Essay, a critical analysis that was meant to serve as the culminating project of English 12, taking into account all of the Learning Objectives. It was also considered the most important document for the purposes of Collaborative Portfolio Assessment. It asks students to:

> write an analytical essay, in which you integrate 2 course readings with 2 independently researched sources. The research should serve to expand and better inform your understanding of the issues raised in Writing Project #2. You will develop and present an informed position on an issue that is deeply related to the central themes of the course—video game literacies, race, horror, and games as art. The Capstone is a deep revision of the Interactive Dialogue. **This essay should represent your best work, as it will be graded by an English Department committee!**

Because the project requires independent research, I strongly encouraged students to continue exploring the topic and texts they brought together in Writing Project #2, but this was not mandatory. Though that assignment may have been more creative, since it required close reading, I hoped they would be able to continue discussing the texts and topics at a critical level, in line with my research questions. Students were asked to meet individually

with me half-way through the unit to discuss any questions they had about the project or course.

Finally, throughout the semester, students were asked to write short self-assessments of each writing project as they turned it in, the instructions for which were to reflect on how well (if at all) they met a chosen Learning Objective for that project. For Collaborative Portfolio Assessment, students were required to create a portfolio including their Capstone Essay and another writing project of their choice, as well as a revised Self-Assessment Essay describing how well they had met three chosen Objectives as demonstrated in their portfolio. The CPA committee asked for a self-assessment or self-reflective essay to give students a chance to demonstrate knowledge of their growth over the course of the semester, as well as a guiding document for how the committee might read the portfolio. Furthermore, it gives students one more chance to demonstrate all of the Learning Objectives except D ("independent research").

The assignments served as the primary artifacts of this research.

Collaborative Portfolio Assessment

I took part in CPA every semester I taught English 12 because I believe, pedagogically, in the practice as a way of assessing my own teaching to the curriculum, learning from other faculty about how they taught the same objectives, and helping the department maintain some standards of practice. I also really appreciated the position in which it places me as a teacher, not as the sole decider of students' grades but as an ally and advocate for them to do well in the course. Before the committee meets, they are a specific audience (the expectations of whom I could explain) for whom the students could write. When the committee met, I could offer my understanding of how their work met the Learning Objectives, offering interpretations the committee might not have appreciated or

noticed. Finally, in the interest of full disclosure, as an adjunct, participation in CPA counted as non-teaching duties, for which I was additionally compensated. However, for the purpose of my study, taking part in CPA meant an additional data point, since it would potentially give me the chance to hear what other instructors observed in my students' work, as well as what I was and was not able to teach using video games as texts. I also hoped it would help me mitigate potential bias in my own assessment, given the topic of my students work.

Dilemmas

One dilemma I mulled over popped up while reading Thomas Newkirk's (1996) "Seduction and Betrayal in Qualitative Research." He writes about deceiving potential participants by describing the study to be conducted without explaining the possibility for negative "findings." And while this kind of deception—not completely informing the participant "in the interests of science" (p. 5)—is permitted by the APA, he notes that it's problematic since the participant may then feel betrayed if what is found is "bad news" (p. 5).

My dilemma was not in why this is problematic (for I perfectly see his point), especially since I won't be sharing my interpretations directly with my participants. Rather, I worried that the alternative (explaining up front how I would be "studying" them and what I hoped to learn more about in relation to my own teaching and "curriculum" preferences) would influence the participant's actions. For example, in my own study, if I had explained to my students that I wanted to study in their writing how, if at all, their engagements with video games affect their meaning making of a piece of literature, I worried that students would have tried to give me what they thought I wanted (a common problem even when I'm not conducting research). Further, even without being upfront about what I would be

looking for in their work, some students seemed to try to address what they perceived as my research interests, going so far as to use language I used when sharing and explaining my Informed Consent forms with them. Had I been upfront, wouldn't that have made analyzing their work for a transaction with games (i.e., places where they discussed the games influencing their understanding of other texts or vice versa) more difficult, at best, and impossible at worst?

However, as Bartholomae (2009) suggests, students most often do this when asked to write about subjects and for audiences with which they're not familiar: "The problem of audience awareness, then, is a problem of power and finesse. It cannot be addressed, as it is in most classroom exercises, by giving students privilege and denying the situation of the classroom" (p. 610). Allowing them to choose the topic of all their writing projects, which episodes of the game to analyze, and how to demonstrate their close reading skills by positioning them as experts on those choices, with the purpose of sharing that work hopefully encouraged more genuine (because it was hopefully informed by their interests) analysis. In other words, perhaps a pedagogy that asked them to write based on the choices they made in the class discouraged them from writing what they thought I wanted to read. And indeed, those students who did borrow my own language to introduce my research were also already very interested in video games and their use in education.

Interactive Narrative of Observations: "It's Dangerous to Go Alone"

My observations from teaching this course and interpretations of the data collected (traditionally the fourth and fifth chapters of a dissertation) are presented as a digital interactive narrative titled "It's Dangerous to Go Alone," which requires the reader/player (distinguishable only in their interaction with a text/game, as discussed in Chapter I, and used interchangeably) to read passages before making choices (highlighted in blue). Each

choice progresses the narrative while affecting the reader's "stress" (a game mechanic) and ability to collect data from the class.

The purpose of representing this narrative as a simple, text-based video game is to offer the player a glimpse of how I came to the conclusions I did in the analysis of my students' work. As Tuck and Ree (2013) explain in their "Glosary of Haunting":

> At the same time that I tell, I wonder about the different endings, the unfurled characters, the lies that didn't make it to the page, the anti-heroes who do not get the shine of my attention. Each of the entries in this glossary is a part of the telling. Together, they are the tarot—turn this one first, and one divination; turn another first, and another divinization. Yes, I am telling you a story, but you may be reading another one. (p. 640)

Writing this game became a way of offering the reader a chance to see those other possible "divinations," a way of reading a different story than the one I am telling.

In that, it should offer a fair, authoethnographic representation of the various day-to-day choices I made to complete this study, how my observations and experiences influenced my interpretations, and how readers might make sense of a video game (both the game my students played and players of the dissertation itself as a game), as well as my imaginings of how things might have changed were I to have made different pedagogical decisions. These last are based both on my interpretation of the previous research summarized in my literature review and my own experiences as a teacher, particularly my Pilot Study. Citation information can be found by hovering the cursor over the source, and references can be accessed at any times via a tab on the left.

Stress

"Stress" became a game mechanic added to this interactive narrative simply as a resource to manage, which constructs an ongoing conflict for the reader/player. Since I as a teacher/researcher had to continually balance the work and my life and was unable to do

everything I needed or wanted to do, the idea of stress seemed like a good way of asking the reader/player to do the same. But while I originally conceived of the mechanic for another game I am designing for fun, it became evident as I was writing that I was also sharing my own experiences trying to manage stress and anxiety as a doctoral student.

The semester before defending my dissertation proposal, I began seeing a therapist to address the day-to-day anxiety I was then experiencing in my new position as coordinator of a graduate writing center, trying to complete my dissertation proposal, adjunct three courses at two universities, as well as being a supportive member of both my extended and immediate family; thankfully, I had decided to finally leave my job as a swim instructor and lifeguard that summer, though I was very hesitant to do so.

In that way, much of this stress was self-inflicted. While, yes, I both needed to work to pay for school and actually be in school, I didn't need to take on so much. Ironically, a major reason for taking on all this work was trying to prove to myself that I had earned these opportunities, and doing so kept me from giving any one of them the attention they deserved, which only stressed me out further. This was not a sudden realization, but one I had come to by the time my dissertation study took place.

For these reasons, the "stress" mechanic in "It's Dangerous to Go Alone" is an effort to share my anxieties as well as how I tried to mediate them. This takes the form of limiting the player/reader's choices if stress is high, rewarding low stress, and exploring instances in which stress is out of the player/reader's control. Undoubtedly, this is a simplistic view of stress management, but it feels representative of my concerns, as well as the influence stress had on my research process.

Evidence

While managing stress is a task the reader/player is given, their goal is the same as mine – look for evidence that addresses the research questions. As the player makes choices during classes, reads student work, and interacts with students outside of class (based on my notes of observations and the work of participants selected as case studies), they will be informed of discovering what I perceive of as evidence addressing one or more of my research questions.

However, while the idea of finding "evidence" is very (post)positivist (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), that specific data points can lead to or support specific observations, I used the term in the game for the sake of simplicity and the reader's understanding. While I might have, instead, clarified that the reader was "making observations" (in class) or "discovering artifacts" (of student work) instead of "finding evidence," designing the game for a separate mechanic would have, I felt, made the game overly complex and with too many resources to manage. Further, I worried it would overemphasize the importance of these mechanics within the overall gameplay. In other words, I didn't want "Evidence" broken into different concepts that seemed more important to the reader that Stress and the proceeding mechanic Rapport.

Throughout the interactive digital narrative, the reader/player will receive updates on the evidence they have found. As the game comes to an end, this evidence is meant to demonstrate the meaning I constructed of them, as well as giving the a chance to make their own interpretations, possibly different from my own.

While many of these pieces will be found in the course of reading/playing, some will be "unlocked" by making what I perceive of as key choices in the curriculum, teaching of the course, and interactions with individual students. Obviously, I cannot know what would or

would not have happened given every choice I as a teacher/researcher faced, but these are places where I have extrapolated the results of different choices based on other observations and the literature reviewed in Chapter II.

For example, very early in the semester, I experienced a somewhat confrontational moment with a student who is one of the case studies here. I cannot know what would have happened had I not made the choices I did in that moment. However, given my research and what I now know about the student and their subsequent participation in the course and the study, I have a good idea of how a different choice would have affected that, a point that an interactive digital narrative can explore. Further, this demonstrates the way that Rapport with individual students affected the research.

Rapport

Rapport is the final game mechanic involved in my interactive digital narrative. "Rapport" is a common game mechanic in which the player is given narrative choices focused on a non-player character (NPC). In dating simulators (games in which the goal is for the player to build a relationship with an NPC), Rapport might be represented as love; in combat-driven games, it might take the form of friendship and decide whether an NPC fights alongside the player. In my narrative, rapport represents trust, how I interpret my choices (such as the one made in the aforementioned confrontation) and the affect they had on how my students viewed me and the course.

Again, I may not be able to know (directly) how students felt about me and my course, or how they would have felt had I made different choices. However, given observations made later in the course and seen in student writing, as well as my research, I can offer my interpretations of how different choices might have affected the students and the course.

Finally, as mentioned before, my relationship with my wife has been a key influence on this project. I chose to include my "rapport" with her (though referred to her gender-neutrally as "partner") as well as the effect that had on the research. A fair autoethnography of my attempts at balancing work and life had to include her; as a major part of my life, she is an inextricable part of how I interpret experiences.

Reasons for these game mechanics

To wrap up, I worry that using game mechanics to represent ethnographic observations might be perceived as not taking the research (and therefore my participants' contributions) seriously or respectfully. Games studies have not yet attained high status in all areas of academia, and very few examples of research findings represented in a game exist.

However, as discussed in Chapter II, game mechanics can be a way of making a player experience different feelings: e.g., stress, empathy, joy, etc. (Staaby, 2014; Gentile et al., 2009) The game mechanics I use here, resource management (Stress and Rapport) and limited choices, were chosen to share my feelings and experiences with the reader/player. These will obviously be different from my own, but so would they have been in any method of representation. But I chose an interactive digital narrative (a kind of game) in hopes of not only giving them a sense of what it was like to teach this course and collect this data but what it also might have felt like to be a student, being asked to read/play a game critically.

Conclusion

The last chapter of this manuscript is my "Final Statement." One of the critiques of impressionist tales like this one that Van Mannen (2011) describes is that while they "can stand alone with or without elaborate framing devices or extensive commentary…. By holding back on interpretation and sticking to the story, impressionists are saying, in effect,

'here is this world, make of it what you will'" (p. 103). Instead, I'm offering some of that commentary in this Final Statement. Having spent a significant amount of this project and process designing and building a text-based video game to represent what would be traditionally referred to as the "Findings" and "Discussion" of my dissertation study, the proceeding section is a final reflection of that process and the game itself in light of my research questions, theoretical framing, and research methods. It describes the overall experience of the class, how I situate the work in the field of English Education, and the limitations of such a representation.

Further, it explains how the game was coded to reflect the observations and interpretations of the course, as well as how the game design mechanics focused on "Stress" and "Rapport" were coded. Last, the Final Statement explores how I situate the game within autoethnography as a practice.

In other words, while the game itself is meant to be played and experienced so that the player might formulate their own interpretations of the course as presented, the Final Statement will look at how and why it was done this way. However, before reading the Final Statement, readers should first play the digital interactive narrative "It's Dangerous to Go Alone," included here as an HTML file to be opened in a web browser. Descriptions of the code, as well as the rationale and what I hope English teachers and autoethnographers take away from the game will "spoil" interpretations of the game before playing.

It was my sincere hope that readers will now play "It's Dangerous to Go Alone," reflect on their own interpretations and choices, as well as my own, and then return to this manuscript for my Final Statement.

Chapter IV

FINAL STATEMENT

Overall, the class that was the subject of this dissertation study was one of the best teaching experiences of my ten-year career. I'm not sure I've ever had so many students complete a course, let alone pass it. Though I was invested in their success, from my perspective, daily discussions were engaging and energetic; weekly homework assignments were insightful and interesting; writing projects were well-written and revised. And while it's perhaps easy for me to say as the teacher, the tone of the class felt to me as was one of community rather than teacher and students.

However, I would not necessarily attribute this to my use of video games as texts. As I noted at the end my digital interactive narrative "It's Dangerous to Go Alone," I think many of my students would have done well and passed the course regardless of what I taught. No, instead, as Gerald Graff (2009) argues in the piece that really spring boarded this research, how I taught was more important than what I taught. There are some elements of my students' success I might attribute to *The Walking Dead: The Game* (Telltale Game, 2012), but even these I'm tempted to think went over well because of how I introduced them and how students responded. What has become clear to me, then, is that teaching with games, like all other teaching in English, should be focused on critical pedagogy and critical media literacy.

We attempted to followed Darder, Baltodano, and Torres' (2009) cyclical process of critical pedagogy in our analysis of the course texts (both traditional and the video game): 1) "the process of critique must be understood as an on-going phenomenon" (p. 12); 2) "it is a critical imperative to develop a strong command of one's particular academic discipline" (p.

13); 3) "all theorizing and truth claims are subject to critique, a process that constitutes analysis and questions that are best mediated through human interaction within democratic relations of power" (p. 13). In this way, students read texts related to the themes of the class (i.e., horror, video games as art, African-American literary criticism), responded to these texts in their weekly commentaries and class discussions, played *The Walking Dead: The Game* (Telltale Games, 2012), responded to the game and previously read texts in new weekly assignments and class discussions, and revised these into their writing projects before starting the cycle over again for the next writing project. Each "loop" students made became wider as they were given space to pull from more of themselves and their outside experiences into their critiques of the game. While I guided this process with feedback and sometimes specific questions for them to answer, I did not present myself as an expert, particularly where the game was concerned, because I only knew about my own experiences with it.

This is, I think, where Darder et al.'s (2009) "democratic relations of power" (p. 13) were first and best practiced in the course. Because Telltale Games' (2012) *The Walking Dead* is driven by player choice, and the narrative changes with these choices, and those choices influence the next player choice, no two games played by students were the same. Further, these choices were shared and discussed in great detail in class. Prior to this, students reflected on their own choices in their weekly commentaries, considering only their own reasons for each choice. Then, in class, students were placed into small discussion groups to consider the reasons for choosing opposing actions in a key moral dilemma before sharing with the class in a larger discussion, then hearing another small group's reasons for choosing actions in another moral dilemma, responding to that, and so on. Thus, after playing each of

the game's five episodes, the class created exhaustive lists of reasons for making each major game choice within the context of the larger narrative.

Of course, scholars and critics of critical pedagogy, like Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989), might point out here that "such debate has not and cannot be 'public' or 'democratic' in the sense of including the voices of all affected parties and affording them equal weight and legitimacy" (p. 302). This is a fair concern, given that I do approach this research as one invested in furthering game studies and that I focused my critical pedagogy on how we approached analysis of the game. I would like to think that our discussions of a narrative predicated on questions of morality (who to protect, save, and why) created this space.

Connected to this, Ellsworth (1989) expresses concerns that while critical pedagogy research often suggests that the teacher should be open to learning from their students, there are still things I as the teacher cannot learn from them. But she argues this can begin to be addressed (though not solved) by acknowledging "that all knowings are partial, that there are fundamental things each of us cannot know – a situation alleviated only in part by the pooling of partial, socially constructed knowledges in the classroom" (p. 310). While I understand the critiques of critical pedagogy that Ellsworth illustrates, I attempted to practice the pedagogy nonetheless, given that each student's interpretation of the game as text was very different.

And this is particularly interesting in the ways those discussions, from my perspective, influenced (or did not) students' individual choices when playing the next episode. Demonstrating Rosenblatt's (1978) transaction theories, students seemed to take their peers' comments on previous moral dilemmas into account when facing the next they experienced. This did not always mean they sided with their peers, but it became a way they thought about each choice–how someone else might act. This appeared to happen in several

key moral dilemmas, especially those that directly lead (as opposed to simply being a link in a chain of events) to the death of a character.

For example, much was made over whether to save the frightened teenager Ben, whose actions or inactions lead to several characters' deaths or near-deaths. The player, as Lee, is given the choice of whether to pull Ben up from a bell tower or let him fall to his death; further, in his guilt, Ben asks the player to let him go. The choice of setting (a bell tower) is not accidental, as the previous episode made direct mention to John Donne's poem "For Whom the Bell Tolls" (as cited in Telltale Games, 2012). Having already discussed the poem's potential meaning and significance in a game about, essentially, survival, class discussions over whether to save Ben (there were several even after we'd finished playing the game) became about whether doing so was in the best interest of the other characters' continued survival (since he'd already gotten so many others killed) or if the protagonist could even be said to have "survived" if in doing so he let others die.

These discussions were long and detailed but, from my perspective, seemed respectful and open-minded. Early in the semester, I worried the class was going to split into two groups – those who believed in survival at any cost and those who did not. However, students seemed to change their leanings week to week, as they continued to play and read, especially as they became more invested in the game's protagonists, Lee and Clementine, and their survival. This is not to say we addressed the myriad of concerns Ellsworth (1989) presents, and I think her research demonstrates that this would be impossible (or near enough). She takes particular aim at Giroux (as cited in Ellsworth, 1989) here, arguing that these class discussions were not true dialogs because the power differential (me as teacher, but also differentials among students based on race, gender, class, etc.) meant the space was not truly safe for all students to share their ideas.

But I do think we attempted "a strategy that affirms 'you know me/I know you' while pointing insistently to the interested partialness of those knowings; and constantly reminding us that 'you can't know me/I can't know you' while unsettling every definition of knowing arrived at" (p. 322). From the first day, reading Langston Hughes' (2001) "Theme for English B," we discussed ways in which "sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me./Nor do I often want to be a part of you./But we are, that's true!/As I learn from you, I guess you learn from me." And while, unlike the teacher Hughes was writing to, I am not white, I am older and perhaps "somewhat more free." In other words, while acknowledging my privilege and power being the teacher afforded me over my students, I did try to use that power to create a space for them to co-construct and share their knowings of complex moral dilemmas through the lens of a video game.

This, too, serves as a good example of the critical media literacy we practiced, as defined by Kellner and Share (2007): "an educational response that expands the notion of literacy to include different forms of mass communication, popular culture, and new technologies" (p. 60). Our analysis of the game was not merely about why particular choices were made, but also how they were presented by the game's designers, allowing us to discuss how our choices might have been manufactured (and why). In the game's first episode, the protagonist Lee is given the choice of whether or not to give a gun to a woman bitten by and turning into a zombie, allowing her to commit suicide. Students were frustrated by this choice—some pointing out that there were other ways she might have killed herself that didn't require Lee to choose whether to help her; others suggested that Lee could just kill the woman himself since it's what she wanted and she was, in effect, dead already.

As this was still the first week of playing the game, I asked why they thought the game's designers wrote these choices, if they were intentionally trying to frustrate players.

However, despite that (or perhaps because) many in the class felt these choices were not ones they themselves would make, they quickly came to the conclusion that the writers were trying to tell us something about the protagonist by not giving him certain choices and forcing him to make others. This kind of critical literacy of the game lead to critiques of the game itself, the way it was designed to illicit certain reactions, particularly emotional ones and especially when done clumsily; these are seen primarily in students' commentaries.

Discussed in conjunction with the rhetorical appeals used by an author to achieve a specific purpose, they were very critical of what they were felt were weak attempts at Pathos (or an emotional appeal), such as when a character dies regardless of the player's choice. On the other hand, they lauded moments when this was done well, such as when the player made choices in extended conversations that developed the protagonists Lee and Clementine. The subject of Clementine's parents, for example, offers Lee and the player several opportunities to either enable Clementine's denial of their probable fate or help her process her loss (though not confirmed until the game's end, their death is strongly hinted at very early in the game).

As the semester wore on, I saw examples of this kind of literacy that I hope they have continued to use–why an author, designer, creator makes certain choices and how those choices influence our interpretations, both purposefully and accidently. But I also strongly feel this was possibly because of the critical pedagogy I endeavored to practice in the class and demonstrate in "It's Dangerous to Go Alone" (primarily through the Rapport system and the consequences of having good or poor Rapport with individual students and the class as a whole).

How this Speaks to English Education

Really, this what I hope English teachers and the field of English Education take away from my research and game—examples of how critical pedagogy worked (and did not) in a class focused on video games. Further, those who play will hopefully also see the enormous potential video games hold for enabling the kind of critical literacy they should want their students to practice and develop.

The game does not go into the details of particular assignments, lesson plans, or even the syllabus, though I meticulously documented these, because that's not where the player's focus should be. Instead, English Educators who play "It's Dangerous to Go Alone" should be paying attention to the relationships they (as the game's protagonist) develop with the students in the course. Who are they? What are their concerns? How can they be mediated in the teaching of the course and material? And of course, what is the emotional work of such a pedagogy? My hope is that engaging in this kind of safe reflection (safe because this isn't really the player's class, not really the player's students, not really the player's stress, but mine) will encourage the player to ask similar questions of their own students and pedagogy, regardless of whether it's about games.

Beyond that, of course, I hope English Educators playing "It's Dangerous to Go Alone" will observe that students performed multiple critical analyses of *The Walking Dead: The Game* (Telltale Games, 2012) on a variety of topics, work that my fellow faculty deemed of the quality expected of students moving on to the next course in the sequence of College English.

However, while I will not argue that my class was definitely a better experience because of the use of video games, I will admit that I cannot imagine having taught this class with these students without *The Walking Dead: The Game* (Telltale Games, 2012). Our

discussions of the game, its narrative, and its characters (to whom we all became so attached) are imprinted on my memory of this class in a way unlike any other texts I have ever taught. As I described at the end of "It's Dangerous to Go Alone," my understanding and interpretation of *The Walking Dead* and its characters are so tied to these students that even playing the game (let alone teaching) has been emotionally difficult for me.

Limitations

This became especially evident when I taught essentially this same course at a rural, Hispanic-serving institution with very different results. While students still played and wrote about the game, fewer engaged with it at the level of the students from my dissertation study. I will not venture explanations of why (as they were not the focus of this research) except to attribute cultural differences, though I may be apt to think that because it supports my observation that aligning game (or text) choice to learning objectives was an important consideration when teaching with games.

But just trying to teach the game with a new class of students was hard in itself; I could not bring myself to replay *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games, 2012) with them. And while many were moved by the game's narrative and protagonists, it was not with the same kind of empathy as my research participants. It is for this reason, too, that I will not venture to argue that teaching English is a better experience with video games. The answer to that question is, of course, that it depends: on the curriculum, the learning objectives, the institutional support, the teacher, and of course, the students.

Using Video Games for Discussions of Social Issues

However, I will say that games, chosen deliberately, can be used to enhance discussions of sociocultural issues like racism. Having taught at undergraduate institutions primarily made up of students of colour, race (as related to identity, language, and culture) is a common topic in College English. Yet these discussions are often coded in a way that students will only talk about it without really talking about it. I saw this in what's presented as Week 5 in "It's Dangerous to Go Alone," when we discussed minority representation in *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games, 2012), in which the characters' races are rarely discussed overtly. There was some disagreement about whether this choice by the designers (including making Lee and Clementine African-Americans) was made deliberately, perhaps as a way of increasing representation in games (one black protagonist is rare in contemporary video games; two almost unheard of). However, others in the class argued it didn't matter because "they" (ostensibly meaning racist white people) aren't going to suddenly become empathetic to people of colour because of a video game.

This isn't unusual for discussions of race in my experience (though, perhaps that has more to do with the number of times I have had students of colour say they see me as white and not Chicano). What was unusual was the student (Moses) who urged his peer using "they" to say what the student meant ("We all black!") and the turning point that served in our discussions of race in and out of the game for the rest of the semester—one the class proved eager (or at least open) to having, especially after reading Toni Morrison's (1992) "Romancing the Shadow" the following week.

In this way, *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games, 2012) became a space to have these discussions and for students to voice their opinions and concerns about race in ways I had not experienced in other classes, even those dealing specifically with issues of racism. This is

evident to me in their willingness and interest in using Morrison's (1992) text to critique others. Several would go on to argue about whether the game's representation of Lee was in line with what Morrison calls for in American literature's treatment of the Africanist presence, which primarily deals with the agency of Africanist characters and whether they serve as mere tools of the plot and/or white characters.

In some ways, I see this as connected to Henry Jenkins' (2009) argument, that "contemporary video games allow youth to play with sophisticated simulations and, in the process, to develop an intuitive understanding of how we might use simulations to test our assumptions about the way the world works" (p. 25). In other words, I think *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games, 2012), created a low-risk space for them to discuss and critique stereotypical representations in media.

Kurt Squire's (2006) "From content to context: Video games as designed experiences" helps explain this by discussing the ways in which video game designers often see their work as creating situations for specific meaning making directed by the designer but chosen by the actions of the player (p. 21). By "designing experiences," video games offer players a new way of seeing the world.

Squire (2006) goes on to argue that these designed experiences create new identities in the players who make meaning of them:

> Gee (2003) argues that games set up *projective identities* for players, spaces where they develop unique hybrid characters, which Gee calls the "Jim Gee playing as Lara Croft" hybrid. The resultant game actions are a synthesis between the character and the affordances – capacities for action of the avatar. Critically, players learn not just facts or procedures but how to "be" in the world as the game character, developing the appreciative systems of the avatar as well. (p. 22)

This offers, to me, an explanation of why and how the students of my own dissertation research were open to discussions of race and racism in ways others, in my past, were not. Taking on the role of Telltale Games' (2012) protagonist Lee in *The Walking Dead*, as well as

his motivation to take care of Clementine, created "hybrid identities"–students playing as Lee–and as such created experiences empowering them "to 'be' in the world as the game character, developing the appreciative systems of the avatar." As such, perhaps students felt more safe discussing issues of race because they saw themselves as not discussing these issues based on their own experiences but those of Lee. As Moses pointed out, "We all black!" Lee's experiences were their own but their own experiences were also Lee's.

Games scholar Ian Bogost (2006) offers some additional thoughts on this, citing Espen Aesarth's study of "cybertexts," that "video games and related technologies offer a window onto a broader, perhaps unexplored functional tradition; they 'should be studied for what they can tell us about the principles and evolution of human communication'" (p. 43). In other words, video games, like all texts, offer players new lenses with which to make meaning of their own worlds. However, I will not argue that *The Walking Dead* (Telltale Games, 2012) showed my students a new way of seeing the world (not the majority of them, at least); rather, I do think that the game gave them a way to discuss what they already see under circumstances in which they may not have discussed otherwise.

Finally, Squire (2006) points out that game designers and teachers are really in the same business: "how to set up transformative identity spaces – is also a core enterprise for educators, who want to help students become scientists, doctors, or global activists (Shaffer, Squire, Halverson, & Gee, 2005)" (p. 22). And while from this, one could argue that teachers should think like game designers, I would also use the example of *The Walking Dead: The Game* (Telltale Games, 2012) as using the work done by the game designer to fulfill the teacher's objective – in this case, learning how to critically analyze a game as text by analyzing the choices made by the student as protagonist. However, where *The Walking Dead* helped in these circumstances with these students, that isn't to say it would in others. As I've

already pointed out, teaching with the game in new contexts was not successful in the same ways it was for my dissertation study.

But this offers a reason for further study of video games' use in the classroom. Bogost (2006) offers some thoughts on this, as well:

> Instead of focusing on how games work, I suggest that we turn to what they do—how they inform, change, or otherwise participate in human activity…. Such a comparative video game criticism would focus principally on the expressive capacity of games and true to its grounding in the humanities, would seek to understand how video games reveal what it means to be human. (p. 45)

This can only be accomplished by studying more games in more classrooms and sharing the results, something to which I hope "It's Dangerous to Go Alone" contributes. Bogost even offers questions to be considered, which seem related to my own research questions: "What do video games do, what happens when players interact with them, and how do they relate to, participate in, extend, and revise the cultural expression at work in other cultural artifacts?" (p. 45) My study addresses these questions in specific contexts, though perhaps not in the ways Bogost intended.

To this point, more recently, Bogost (2017) has suggested that the aspects of games with which he is most concerned is not their narratives, the aspect with which I'm most interested. In his piece for *The Atlantic*, "Video games are better without stories," Bogost argues:

> To use games to tell stories is a fine goal, I suppose, but it's also an unambitious one. Games are not a new, interactive medium for stories. Instead, games are the aesthetic form of everyday objects. Of ordinary life. Take a ball and a field: you get soccer. Take property-based wealth and the Depression: you get Monopoly…. Games show players the unseen uses of ordinary materials. (n.p.)

Many have taken issue with Bogost's claims here, particularly when he critiques *Gone Home* (Fullbright, 2013), one of the games I considered as the text for my own study, as merely

"the story of the main character's sister and her journey to discover her sexual identity," ignoring that a marginalized story has been told at all.

In his response to Bogost's (2017) piece, Austin Walker (2017) argues that "for many game writers, marginalized and otherwise—[being] able to tell their stories is in fact the whole point." Writing as the Editor-in-Chief for *Waypoint* (the games journalism arm of *Vice* Media), Walker describes the recent release of Charles Webb's *Mafia III*, a game about an African-American Vietnam veteran in the late-1960s and designed to make the player confront the racism of that era, the racism that Webb himself grew up confronting. Walker addresses Bogost (2017) by suggesting that

> Maybe Bogost can imagine a version of *Mafia III* that can confront racism without dumping millions of dollars of development funds into a story team. Maybe instead of structuring its cut scenes around the filmic grammars of *Cocaine Cowboys*-style documentaries and Scorsese-esque crime dramas, that game would leave the player with some actionable take away about how to address oppression directly. I honestly don't know what Bogost imagines that game looks like. But I do know it wouldn't be a story told by Charles Webb.

This final point brings me back around to my own choices as an academic to not write a traditional dissertation but a (albeit simple) video game. Indeed, Bogost (2017) might be right that my own story could have been told better as a traditional linear prose narrative. But as Walker (2017) suggests and Rosenblatt (1978) confirms, asking players to confront my text through choice makes it their story, as well. And this was one of my goals for "It's Dangerous to Go Alone." Further, that's just what Bogost (2015) describes with games in which "players experience a model of some aspect of the world, in a role that forces them to see that model in a different light, and in a context that's bigger than their individual actions." In this case, I simply tried to offer players (potentially educators) a model to view how seemingly small choices affect teaching.

Reflections on Game Design

As explained in Chapter III, I attempted to complicate these choices through the three game mechanics of "Stress," "Evidence," and "Rapport." I should also state that, strictly speaking, "It's Dangerous to Go Alone" is not necessarily meant to be "fun." I am perfectly aware that the game can be repetitive and tedious and, by extension, frustrating. But that is, in some ways, the point, and it was inspired by Jess Downs' (n.d.) Twine *The Day After Chemo*, which takes players through the effects chemotherapy has on patients. Players are given limited choices each "day" after a round of chemotherapy, with the number of available choices decreasing as the game wears on, wherein Downs describes the shame that comes with being unable to care for oneself. Not only is the game incredibly moving but I was struck by how the design affected my feelings, and it was a mechanic I wanted to see if I could transfer to my own game.

In that sense, limiting the player's daily choices to one, which will influence Stress, Evidence, and Rapport, is meant to be frustrating for the player. Indeed, the easiest course of action for the player is to select "grading" every time it's available (which is roughly every class day, since each increases the number of assignments to grade by one). But doing so is also the most tedious and repetitive way of playing the game, as well as increases the player's Stress level. The consequences of this may not be seen by the player, unless they replay the game making less stressful choices, which "unlocks" different (and more interesting) events and narratives within the game. So yes, the quickest way through the game is grading, but it's hardly the most rewarding. That is not an accident. (Segments of raw code for a few "days" in a typical "week" in game, along with some branching choices, can be found in Appendix B. The proceeding paragraphs while also use some of the vocabulary used in the code so that the reader may follow along if desired.)

Similarly, Rapport requires balance, as well, through increasingly complex choices with both students and the player's "Partner." Decreased Rapport with students leads to less insightful writing (and therefore less Evidence). But low Rapport also makes the game less interesting; students "trust" the player less and consequently disclose less, both in class discussions and their writing.

Meanwhile, the player's Rapport with their Partner primarily affects their Stress, creating a delicate balancing act that, not tended to, can create a negative feedback loop. Low Partner Rapport leads to increased Stress, which can best be managed through grading, which can lower Partner Rapport. However, this is not to say that my own partner was not supportive of my work or sensitive to its importance; however, it would be disingenuous to suggest I spent the entirety of this research study engrossed in my work and that it had no effect on our relationship. Further, maintaining a healthy relationship with my partner was important to my own well-being. In game terms, maintaining high Partner Rapport in real life helped keep my Stress low. This felt, to me, an integral part of this project as autoethnography.

In short, the player who makes choices unreflectively will likely play the least interesting version of "It's Dangerous to Go Alone." Conversely, the player who attempts balance, while likely more stressful and difficult, will be rewarded with (I hope) a more interesting narrative and a better awareness of the individual choices they make teaching their own courses. And that was, of course, another reason for representing my research as a game.

However, while "It's Dangerous to Go Alone" is complete in the sense that it accomplishes what I set out for this dissertation, there is much more work I would like to do with it. For example, many of the values for Stress and Rapport (+ 5, - 7, - 1) were chosen

arbitrarily at first and have been changed with some playtesting by the few who have played its various iterations. But these need much more rigorous testing to be certain the balance I intended is fair and that other players, making far different choices, still achieve the intended outcomes. These values also do not provide much in the way of feedback to the player, and I would I like to replace these with qualitative text that will hopefully better direct the player's actions as well as make the game more interesting.

Further, there are also parts that I cut because I could not figure out the best way to code them. The flow of the game design resembles a loop; if looking at the layout of the game in Twine (See Appendix C), one will see the connections between the "passages" that determine what the player sees after every choice. These become a mess as the "weeks" wear on, because the main choices of each week ("Grade," "Play," "Movies," and "Journal") are housed in the same passages, but are coded to change depending on where in the game the player is. This was a solution I found early on to avoid having to code each week's choices independently, and for all intents and purposes, works very well! However, it makes the addition of new events and choices more complicated, since each one has to be coded "around" the reoccurring choices. Some of these, such as the e-mail from Luis suggesting we play *Life is Strange* rather than *The Walking Dead* ("Luis_Test") and the early semester confrontation with Moses ("Moses_Test") were not difficult to add.

However, other "events" proved too difficult for me at the time. For example, I hoped to be able to show Twines designed by my students ("TwineWiki1") by letting the player play one within my own Twine. However, the coding knowledge required to represent the student's Twine within my own (since theirs look and play differently and also uses a different version of the software than mine) was beyond me at the time. Last, I had hoped to add more "journal entries" of my own reflection than what is represented here. I wrote

several more, and while I don't think any missing are crucial (indeed, many exist in some form within this manuscript), I hoped they might offer the reader a little more insight into my own influences. I consider all of these additions to be "surface details" – important perhaps to the flow and style of the game but not the dissertation. Therefore, I did not prioritize them here, though I want to continue tinkering with them.

Finally, I'm not satisfied with the way the "Evidence" the player gathers influences the conclusions reached at the end of the game. Initially, I kept these conclusions open so that the readers of this dissertation might see the observations I was making in the end but intending to return to "lock" certain observations depending on the game's mechanics of Stress, Evidence, and Rapport. But I also made this decision because quantifying the "amount" of Evidence found in order to determine the conclusions reached seemed counter to the theoretical framework with which I approached this project. In that vein, too, because I felt that my research participants' success was less affected by me as a teacher than by their own persistence, it seemed egregious to suggest that different choices by me would have altered the quality of their final work.

Conclusion

And herein lies one of the tensions of representing academic research as a game – deciding what elements of the research and how much to translate into the game design, as well as which aspects may not transfer neatly. This was a struggle throughout this project, and I was fortunate to receive some help from seasoned games writer Sande Chen. Chen teaches a course on games narrative for Playcrafting, a New York City company that hires those in the games industry to teach short four and eight-week workshops for students to learn different aspects of game design. Chen's course was invaluable in that she offered

different ways of thinking about how game narrative can be structured, as well as feedback on a very early version of the game.

The course also showed me how invaluable feedback could be and encouraged me to share different versions of the game at different stages to gauge how others reacted to different aspects and then tinker where necessary; while to date, only a handful of people have played "It's Dangerous to Go Alone," they undoubtedly made it a better game.

In the end, I may not have accomplished all I hope to with this project (what dissertation can), but I did achieve those goals most important to me. I taught a College English course using video games that engaged students and created space for examples of strong student writing; I began addressing my research questions (which I could continue trying to answer for the rest of my professional life) and share that progress in an accessible and relatable format; I have nudged at that boundary of what can be considered academic research, a boundary that the fields of English and English Education sorely need to explore. In accomplishing this last, I have stayed true to my goal when beginning my doctoral work– write a non-traditional dissertation. And while, in some ways, that may have merely been a vanity project, in my study of English as a discipline, through scholars like Graff (2003, 2007, 2009), Rosenblatt (1978), and Scholes (1998), I see it now as change the field needs to make to continue serving the students we purport to educate. The field must be open to not only teaching in new ways with new types of texts for the sake of students in a society that requires new literacy skills to participate, but the field itself must embrace and conduct research with these same literacy skills. And this multimodal dissertation demonstrates one way of doing so. I hope in reading and playing it, other scholars are emboldened and inspired to push that boundary even further.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Course Syllabus

English 12: Freshman English I

Video Game Literacies

Kingsborough Community College

Mr. Ben Villarreal

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Course Description

Video games and other digital texts are likely to play a large role in literacy in the 21st century. In recent years, the White House has called for greater research and education in not only how digital texts teach but also whether or not students are being prepared to interact with them. As such, and in line with my doctoral dissertation research, this course will explore the reading/playing and writing of video games.

However, ENG 12 is also an introductory course in college-level reading and writing, emphasizing the development of ideas in essays, including how language communicates facts, ideas, and attitudes. This course teaches writing as a process involving revision based on feedback from readers. You will learn how to develop college-level essays through close reading and inter-textual analysis—reading across and between texts drawn from various disciplines—with the video games as our guide, both as a medium and subject.

Learning Objectives

The English Department looks for students to improve their essay writing skills in English 12. We define an essay as a prose document that is written from the author's point of view, has a consistent focus, and offers evidence that illustrates the writer's ideas. Given this goal for English 12, we expect to see the following in all **passing** portfolios of student work.

A. Essays that have **a point**, support the point, and explore implications of the point.

B. Essays in which the thinking at the heart of the essay has clearly grown out of and has been **influenced by reading**.

C. Essays in which there is a sense of **overall organization and structure**. This means that paragraphs are used to help focus and develop ideas, and sentences and paragraphs are understandable, logical, and cohesive.

D. At least one essay showing evidence of **independent research** and use of sources. This research should be integrated into the writer's own ideas in the essay. Essay should make skillful and strategic use of **direct quotations**, **summary** and **paraphrase**.

E. Essays that demonstrate **basic mechanical correctness**. The readers should not trip over language as they read the essay.

F. Essays that respond to the **particular needs of the assignment** given by the classroom instructor.

G. Essays that show **development and growth** from draft to draft and essay to essay.

Please note that this is the minimum criteria for passing English 12.

In addition to these minimum requirements, we read your work by considering the following:

Ideas

- We value the **creativity, originality, and complexity** of ideas.
- We value **complex theses** over simple "black and white" ones.

Engaging Texts

- We value **close analysis of text** and evidence of close reading, where appropriate.
- We value essays that **"show" the reader something rather than just "tell"** the reader.
- We look for growing facility with **MLA citation style** and procedures.

Process

- We value writing processes that **use feedback** offered by the teacher and by peers.
- We encourage students to take chances in drafts, to do **risky and extensive revision,** to delete as well as add text in drafts.

Risk Taking

- We value student writers who take risks with their thinking and **challenge themselves in their writing**.
- We value essays that are less about proving a point and more about **exploring the difficulties and complexities of an idea**.

Presentation of work

- We value essays which are correctly formatted, follow MLA style, include a Works Cited page, when needed, clearly labeled, and presented on time in a neat, clear, easy-to-follow manner.

This course has the additional goal of learning when visual and verbal literacies are appropriate.

After passing ENG 12, you must take ENG 24.

Required Texts

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say / I Say: Making the Moves that Matter in Academic Writing*. New York, Norton: [**Any edition**.] Print.

The Walking Dead: The Game. Telltale Games. 2012. Video game.

Types of Assignments

Commentaries: You will need to have read and responded (250-500 words) to a text on Blackboard by the class it is listed on the schedule, and we will discuss these texts through your commentaries. It will give you a place to prepare for class discussion and to keep track of ideas you may want to write about later.

We will discuss in class exactly what's expected from these posts, but additionally, you will be required to post at least one comment on another student's Commentary post to receive credit for your own. All posts will be due by the Tuesday before a reading is to be discussed. We'll discuss **how** to post to Blackboard in class.

Writing Projects: The four Writing Projects in this course include short feeder assignments as well as at least a rough and revised draft.

On the day it is due, you will need to submit each complete Writing Project. **All completed Writing projects include**:

Feeders: These short assignments should be about one-two pages (250-500 words) and typed. I will respond to these quickly, for they are designed to help you build up to writing the essay.

Rough Draft: You will bring in a rough draft of your project about half-way through the unit. Keep in mind that rough drafts are not simply the first few hundred words of your project but a rough development of your ideas.

Revised Draft: At the end of the unit, you will need to turn in your revised draft to me along with the rest of the writing project assignments.

Essay Format: Each essay should be typed, double-spaced, with 1" margins and in Times New Roman 12-pt. font. And all citations should adhere to MLA format (to be discussed in class).

Writing Project 1: Literacy Narrative: This first writing assignment is a personal narrative that grows out of a close, sensitive reading of the first few texts in the course about literacy. The purpose of this piece is for you to articulate and develop a connection that you find between your (or your family's) own experience/memory/identity and the course narrative readings. Your narrative is **equally grounded** in your reading of **one** assigned text (your choice) and your own experience with literacy. **This narrative requires you to quote directly from the text you choose.** (750 words min.)

Writing Project 2: Interactive Dialogue: In this assignment, you are asked to put two texts' ideas into "dialogue" with one another. In a sense, you will relate one text's ideas (which must be *The Walking Dead*) on the subject of a theme brought up in our course to another text's ideas in order to demonstrate your understanding of the topic. This assignment may take the form of:

1. an essay in which you apply one writer's theories to another's ideas;
2. a more creative dramatic dialogue in which you imagine a conversation between two texts on a particular topic;
3. a letter written in the voice of one writer to another focused on a particular issue.

Your key objectives are to accurately and sensitively represent the positions, ideas, and words of the two different texts, as well as explain the ways those ideas interrelate. (1000 words min.)

Writing Project 3: Capstone Essay—Critical Analysis: In this assignment, you are asked to write a position paper, analyzing two works that you studied this semester. You will develop and present an analysis of the works related to the themes of the course. To support your position, you will integrate independently researched sources. **The assignment will serve as the Capstone Essay for our course, which will be reviewed by a committee of faculty from the English Department.** (1500 words min.)

(Interactive) Self-Reflection and Portfolio: All course work will be reviewed in the Self-Assessment. At the end of the semester, you will assess your own work based on our Learning Objectives. It **must** be written as an Interactive Narrative using the software Twine, which we'll discuss in class! This will be turned in **with whichever assignments you assess in your Self-Assessment, as well as your Capstone Essay!** The Portfolio will be reviewed by a committee of English faculty who will decide whether you will pass English 12. (500 words min.)

Scoring

Commentaries/Misc. Exercises:	150 points	A's = 900-1000 points
Feeders/Completed Drafts:	150 points	B's = 800-899 points
Writing Project 1:	150 points	C's = 700-799 points
Writing Project 2:	150 points	D's = 600-699 points
Writing Project 3:	300 points	F < 600 points
Self-Assessment:	100 points	

Note: A grade of D or higher is required for completion of the course, but a D may not transfer to other schools.

Absence Policy

Since the class is structured very much like a workshop, your attendance and active participation is mandatory; much of the work will be undertaken during class time and therefore cannot be completed without your participation and attendance. You must come to class prepared to participate, with homework assignments completed. If you arrive unprepared and are unable to participate, you may be asked to leave, which will count as an absence.

Arriving tardy may also result in an absence.

Students are allowed 8 absences from English 12 before they may be given an Unofficial Withdrawal (WU) in the course. There is no distinction between an "excused" and "unexcused" absence in college.

On-Time Work

Students who turn-in work on-time will have the opportunity to revise said work for further feedback and additional points added to their grade.

Inclement Weather Policy

In the event that campus is closed for inclement weather, you are expected to keep to all scheduled work and Commentary posts due. Further instructions will be posted to the class Blackboard.

Discussions

Discussions, both in the classroom and online, are an integral aspect of this course. Students should feel comfortable in discussing their thoughts and opinions respectfully with the whole class. Choosing not to participate both surrenders your own voice and deprives

the class of your unique insight. Similarly, choosing not to pay attention during classroom discussions is disrespectful, and you may be asked to leave if you cannot engage with the class.

Plagiarism

According to the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity, "Plagiarism is the act of presenting another person's ideas, research or writings as your own" (http://www.kingsborough.edu/sub-administration/sco/Documents/CUNYAcademicIntegrityPolicy.pdf). If you plagiarize in any of the work you submit in this course, **you will receive no credit for the assignment**. Repeated instances of plagiarism may result in **automatic failure of the course**.

Appendix B

Sample Code

Week_1

```
It’s Week <<print $week>>, Day <<print $week1>>.
You have class 3 days this week with 2 days off.
<<Stress>>

<<if $week1 is 1>>
<<silently>>
<<set $stress = $stress + 5>>
<<endsilently>>
The first day of class goes well. You introduce yourself to the students, have them introduce
themselves, and review the syllabus. This includes informing them that the chief text for the
class is season 1 of <abbr title="(2012)">Telltale Game’s //The Walking Dead//</abbr>.
You show them the trailer to give them a sense of what’s to come.
<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube-
nocookie.com/embed/N40uY51s5Z0?rel=0&amp;controls=0&amp;showinfo=0"
frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>
There are a few incredulous stares and looks of disbelief until you tell them how to best go
about getting the game and to begin playing it for next week. Accepting this, they instead
move to critiquing the game’s visuals as too cartoony or unrealistic.

Lastly, you ask them to read <abbr title="(2001)">[[Langston Hughes’ "Theme for English
B"|https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/theme-english-b]]</abbr> and assign them a
very short reading response for next class.

How should you spend your evening?
<<if $assignments gte 1>>
[[Grading homework stresses you out, more so if you let it pile up. Plus, that’s your
data!|Grade]]
<<endif>>
[[Playing video games relieves lots of stress, especially if you’ve finished replaying //The
Walking Dead//.|Games]]
[[Watching movies with your partner relieves some stress on both of you.|Movies]]
<<silently>>[[Cleaning up your apartment relieves some stress.|Clean]]<<endsilently>>
[[Reflecting on your own video game literacy will relieve a little stress and may help you
interpret your students’ reactions.|Journal]]

<<elseif $week1 is 2>>
<<if $Luis is 0>>
<<Luis_Test>>
<<else>>
How do you spend your day off?
```

<<if $assignments gte 1>>
[[Grading homework stresses you out, more so if you let it pile up. Plus, that's your data!|Grade]]
<<endif>>
[[Playing video games relieves lots of stress, especially if you've finished replaying //The Walking Dead//.|Games]]
[[Watching movies with your partner relieves some stress on both of you.|Movies]]
<<silently>>[[Cleaning up your apartment relieves some stress.|Clean]]<<endsilently>>
[[Reflecting on your own video game literacy will relieve a little stress and may help you interpret your students' reactions.|Journal]]
<<endif>>

Luis_Test
<<silently>>
<<set $Luis = $Luis + 1>>
<<endsilently>>
Overnight, you receive an e-mail from a student, Luis, applauding you on your choice of a video game as a class text. He loves and plays lots of video games, he explains, but never played one for a class!

But he has a suggestion; //The Walking Dead// isn't really the game he woulda gone with. He feels the choices aren't as deep or as relevant to the player as other games. For example, he suggests, instead, we play //Life is Strange//, a newer game similar in design to //TWD//.
<iframe width="560" height="315" src="https://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/z44UF9_NiP0?rel=0&controls=0&showinfo=0" frameborder="0" allowfullscreen></iframe>
He argues the choices the player makes are more meaningful and that it would make a better game to play and discuss as a class.

You're taken aback, for several reasons. First, you're aware of //Life of Strange//; you got to play it at Comic-Con before it was released, and you briefly considered it for this class but decided that it wasn't widely available enough at the time to make it a good choice for students with varying access to the technology needed to play such a new game.

Second, it's not a game you'd expect a young, self-described "gamer" to suggest; as an indie-game, it hasn't had as much press as other titles. It's also often criticized by "hardcore" (i.e., male and competitive) gamers as a "walking simulator" (a dismissive designation for a returning genre of game that emphasizes narrative and exploration over action and violence). The genre has become anecdotally popular among young women, which is part of your surprise.

Finally, you're kind of shocked at the audacity of this student. You've have plenty of students complain about an assigned text, before. But never has one tried to convince you that your choice was poor and that they, in their expertise, have a better suggestion.

Now, how to best respond.

[[Explain your reasons for not choosing //Life is Strange//, that everyone in the class may not have access to the newest consoles or computers powerful enough to play it.|Luis_Win]]
[[Thank him for his suggestion but say that the course is already planned around //The Walking Dead//, so you have to go forward with that.|Luis_Win]]
[[Tell him you've thought about this a lot, and //Life is Strange// probably won't work.|Luis_Fail]]

Grade
<<silently>>
<<set $stress = $stress + 5>>
<<Week>>
<<set $assignments = $assignments - 1>>
<<set $grade = $grade + 1>>
<<endsilently>>
You grade their latest assignment.
<<if visited("Grade") % 3 is 0>>
<<Homework>>

Homework
There's some interesting ideas in their first responses to <abbr title="(Telltale Games, 2012)">//The Walking Dead//</abbr>.

One student, Sam, likens the moral choices to those faced by Hamlet.

Another, Katherine, ties Clementine's story directly to the experience of a young girl in her home town who was left home alone while her mother ran to the store. But the girl's mother was struck by a car and killed on her way home, leaving the young girl forever waiting for her to return.
<<silently>>
<<set $rq1 = $rq1 + 1>>
<<endsilently>>
Woah! You just found some evidence of engagement with a game as a text!

Movies
<<silently>>
<<set $stress = $stress - 7>>
<<set $Partnerrapport = $Partnerrapport + 10>>
<<Week>>
<<endsilently>>
You get snacks, a cold drink, and settle in with your partner!

Appendix C

Game Layout