THESIS

GAMIFICATION AND THE CREATION OF ACADEMIC WRITER'S IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

First year writing students often do not see themselves as academic writers. This lack of an academic writer's identity can lead to several issues for students, including the dependence on mimicking other's works rather than creating and developing their own identity, fear of failure, and a lack of confidence as an academic writer. A writer's identity would give the student the ability to think and respond analytically, using evidential proof to effectively make a claim and argument (Bird 80). If students are led to creating academic writer's identities, these identities have the potential to empower them to become better writers on their own without imitation and mimicry, without the fear of failure hindering their learning process, and without these obstacles in their way, students can gain and build their confidence as writers. A possible solution to help students develop a writer's identity is gamification which is the use of game elements (e.g., levels, time constraints, limited resources, badges, clear goals, leader boards) within the nongame environment of a classroom.

I argue in this thesis that using gamification in a composition class may help students to create an academic writer's identity, which will allow them to hone their craft while giving them confidence within the academic setting. By using research from teachers and scholars who work with identity and gamification (Bird 2013; Brooke 1988; Deterding 2011, 2013; Dicheva et al. 2015; Dominguez et al. 2013; Gee 2007; Graham 1999; Osman 2015; Seaborn and Fels 2014; Shaffer 2012; Williams 2006), I will contend that gamification has the potential to assist students to create an academic writer's identity, allowing students to see themselves as academic writers. To make this argument, I will provide both examples of elements that may be found in a gamified classroom design and potential ways to implement game elements successfully into a writing course in order to help students create and manage their writer's identity.

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Introduction

If the question "who are you?" were asked to a first year writing class, the answers would be as diverse and unique as the students answering. One thing that most, if not all, students would agree on is that they are not academic writers. People view academic writing as something serious, something that is judged and graded; therefore, it is thought that it must sound more educated and professional than any other type of writing or speaking communication (Elbow 6). A problem that is found within first year writing classrooms is that students do not have an academic writer's identity, defined as the ability to think and write critically and analytically while maintaining a personal connection within writing (Bird 66). Failure to assume a writer's identity can result in various issues for students, including dependence on imitation or mimicry of other's work, which can become the attempt to remove all signs of their own identity from their writing; the fear of failure, which can make them feel they can do nothing right within their writing; and a lack of confidence in their writing, which can lead to students feeling alone in their struggles (Bird 80).

The problem of students imitating the aspects of academic writing without fully understanding the importance of it, or realizing where they can situate themselves within the genre, can be detrimental to students' writing. When students are writing in an academic setting, they are usually more worried about a grade or writing in the way they think an instructor wants rather than adopting their own identity as writers (Bird 66). If writing is based exclusively on imitation, there is no real thought for students to create their own academic writer's identity. (Bird 65, 69). Robert Brooke argues that students imitating other's writing can become "an

empty exercise in reduplicating sterile form" (23). Without the understanding and the confidence to know that they are writers, students' work becomes dispassionate and bland.

Another issue arising from mimicry or imitation is students removing their personal identity from their writing altogether which can lead to detached uninteresting writing. If educated about academic identity, students are often taught that academic writing is objective and disconnected. They are taught that identity is something that should be taken out of academic writing, leaving only facts, and if the students' identities are recognizable within their own writing, something has gone wrong (Williams 710). Bronwyn Williams argues that "Many students are taught that using five-paragraph essay form with any semblance of identity removed is the core of academic writing and will allow them to march triumphantly through the writing assignments of one class after another" (711). Completely removing all identity does not make writing better or more accessible; it often times makes writing less interesting and convincing because it lacks the passion and personal experience of the author (713-714). This lack of identity in writing can lead to students doubting their writing ability.

The fear of failure is another barrier that numerous writing students face, which can lead to students not feeling like they are good enough writers to write academically. Peter Elbow points out that most students see any comments from their instructor as criticism and negative even if they were meant to be constructive or simply a question: "when students read what we write, they are usually reacting at the same time to all the past teacher comments they have received on their writing" (8). The damaging and distorted mindset of students who already feel that they are failures at writing can further lead to stress and hindering of writing development, making students feel as though they cannot write within an academic setting.

Without confidence in their writing students struggle to view their strengths as a writer. Instead they focus mainly on their flaws. In my experience, students who do not feel like they are writers are less likely to speak up when they do not understand something because they do not want to admit that they do not know. Sarah Galloway explains this fact saying "we unconsciously choose ways of speaking, writing or gesturing in anticipation of how we will be responded to by others. In other words, we speak in ways that will be received well by people situated more favourably that we are in the social order" (52). If students do not feel like they are writers, they are less likely to speak up and ask questions in class because they do not want to be judged by other students who they feel are better writers. They feel that they are the only ones who are struggling and so withdraw from possible scrutiny, rather than putting themselves in a place where they can learn, and possibly gain more confidence.

In order to help students create positive academic writer's identity that will build confidence and be able to assist in shaping the way they think and write beyond a single assignment or first year class, there must be conscious effort on the student's part to know that they are writers. If they are confident in their writing, they are more likely to take constructive criticism as a tool to reach their goal rather than a road block further proving their inability to be a writer. It is vital that students know and understand why being a writer is something that they should be striving for, After that, they must be given the building blocks that will get them to the place where writing, and thinking like a writer, becomes automatic, without the need for a conscious shift into a writing mode.

One possible method that can help with students' writer's identity is the use of gamification in the classroom. Gamification is the use of game features (e.g., levels, time constraints, limited resources, badges, clear goals, leader boards) within a nongame setting

(Deterding et al.). One of the purposes of gamification is to empower those who are using it in order to motivate them to achieve their own goals (Burke 9). Once writing is shown to be an important personal goal, gamification can then be used to strengthen the understanding and learning process by potentially forming and creating their own writer's identity. In this thesis, I will argue that gamification has the potential to empower students to create a writer's identity, which will limit their need to imitate others' works and which may help them to understand the importance of their own identity. Gamification may also lead to a greater confidence within their writing, helping relieve the fear of failure.

Gamification, like games, can create its own cultures and identities that players must become a part of, allowing students to smoothly step out of their comfort zones and into the minds of writers without leaving reality completely behind (Gee 145-155)[1]. Gamification allows students to have a safe place to learn from their mistakes and failures and can be used as a platform to teach how to fix the problems they have within their writing (Deterding 63; Gee 175). Since gamification has the ability to change behaviors by implementing steps such as small manageable tasks, building complexity over time, having a group that all have the same goal(s), and repetition or practice during the building of knowledge (Burke 53), it has the potential to empower students to form and create their own academic writer's identity by using intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is doing something for the sake of personal reward, or doing something for its own sake rather than for an outside reward or feeling forced to. (19). Once students begin to change or strengthen their behaviors of thinking critically and analytically and are able to form opinions with both personal and external evidence, they are thinking and acting like academic writers (Bird 80).

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[1] James Paul Gee's work is not published by academic publishers but because his work is considered influential by scholars of gamification I am citing his work within my thesis.

There is not much being said about how the two subjects of gamification and identity link together and complement each other within a writing classroom. My research on gamification and identity has brought many things to light in terms of what is being said about the two subjects. There are numerous studies and writings on the use of gamification (Burke; Deterding; Dicheva et al.; Dominguez et al.; Gee; Osman; Seaborn and Fels; Shaffer). There are also several articles on how creating writer's identity can help students understand writing and become better writers themselves (Bird; Brooke; Graham; Willaims). I also found an article showing how play and games form and create identity (Mead).

Within the next sections of this thesis, you will find the following: The keywords of gamification and identity defined. Next will be the background information on the two topics of gamification and identity and how they can link together in order to create a successful gamified classroom. How a gamified classroom will help students create their own academic writer's identity will be discussed as well. I will also be delving into what makes a good gamified classroom design, techniques that can be used, and the effect on students of creating a writer's identity will also be viewed within the analysis section. Finally, in the conclusion, final findings will be discussed, along with possible points of further study including: possible detriments of using gamification, transfer, implications with nonnative English speakers, connections of gamification to classrooms, and gamifying more than a single first year classroom.

Definition of Key Terms and Background

In order to fully understand the significance of the argument that gamification can potentially assist students to create an academic writer's identity, there must be an understanding and knowledge of the two key terms of gamification and identity, specifically an academic writer's identity. In this section, I define gamification including both the nonacademic and academic factors of it. Following gamification is the definition of identity, broken down to what specifically is an academic writer's identity. Finally, I will show how the two key terms link together, illustrating how games or gamification can help create and form identity.

Gamification

Like games, gamification is used by many people who benefit from the outcomes without fully fleshing out and understanding the exact definition. Sebastian Deterding's definition of gamification, which is "the use of game design in non-game contexts," is a widely accepted explanation, and the definition that I am adopting for this thesis; although, the question of what exactly game design in a non-game environment is, is not always clarified (Deterding et al. 2011). I use Deterding's definition, although vague, because he is one of the first scholars to tackle the subject of gamification and to create a solitary definition.

Deterding et al. go on to explain that a gamified system, like a game, usually has rules and is goal oriented. Gamification is not a full-fledged game, although it utilizes many techniques that games implement such as, levels, clear goals, time constraints, badges, value conscious game design, challenge, limited resources and leader boards. It allows people to stay grounded in reality, while still profiting from successful game benefits like gaining access to a person's emotions and intrinsic motivation, which in turn will help create habits.

When a person is emotionally involved in a task, his or her motivation becomes intrinsic. There are three elements to intrinsic motivation that should be kept in the forefront when creating a gamified system which Daniel Pink explains are "(1) Autonomy—the desire to direct our own lives; (2) Mastery—the urge to make progress and get better at something that matters; and (3) Purpose—the yearning to do what we do in service of something larger than ourselves" (qtd. in Burke 19). Gamification reaches users on an emotional level allowing them to have the benefit of creating their own goals by reaching users here, what they learn and what they do can become habit, which becomes a part of who they are forming and melding to their identity (Burke 19-21). The history of gamification shows that the goal of it has always been to help the user reach their goals while the organization that created the experience profits from the involvement.

The history of the term gamification is not necessarily a clear one. According to Burke; Nick Pelling coined the word "gamification" in 2002 for his new consulting business. Pelling defined the word as "applying game-like accelerated user interface design to make electronic transactions both enjoyable and fast" (Burke 5). Pelling's emphasis was in the hardware though, and the coined term outlasted his failed company (5). In contrast, Deterding et al. say that the first documented use of gamification was in 2008 by the digital media industry, "but the term did not see widespread adoption before the second half of 2010." Foursquare is one of the most successful earlier software applications (app) that the digital media industry implemented gamification within. The app allows users to "check in" wherever they are, rewarding points and badges that can be seen by other users (Burke 4). Gamificaiton's popularity grew along with the popularity of Foursquare, inspiring other businesses and organizations to try implementing game

mechanics. This spike of interest helped the status of gamification, so much so, that gamification was the runner-up for word of the year in 2011 by Oxford Dictionaries (Burke 6).

Gamification is used by companies for the three main reasons of "changing behaviors, developing skills, and driving innovation" (Burke 37). Examples of these are Nike+, which helps get users active and to change their unhealthy behaviors to healthy habits by tracking all activity, and letting the user know how much energy has been used. All exercise is turned into NikeFuel points, which can be posted on social media sites and used to compete with other users (Burke 39-41). Khan Academy is a non-profit educational organization that helps users learn and master math, science, and other school subject skills using gamification to motivate their students to view more lessons and explore and develop more skills. With every section mastered, users are awarded with new sections opening up that they could not access before (Burke 59-60). Finally, the United Kingdom's Department for Work and Pensions created a gamified system in order to receive employees' input, ideas, and development for new projects and for how to make their company better and more efficient. This not only helps the company, but also taps into their employees' intrinsic motivations; they know they are making their company a better place (76-77).

Badges, points, and leader boards have become the game elements that are synonymous with gamification because of their frequent use in gamified systems (Dicheva et al. 800), although they are not necessary for a gamified environment. Seaborn and Fels explain that "game elements are patterns, objects, principles, models, and methods directly inspired by games" (17). Deterding et al. explain that there are five levels of game design elements which include: "Game interface design patterns (e.g., Badge, leader board, level); Game design patterns and mechanics (e.g., Time constraint, limited resources, turns); Game design principles and

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heuristics (e.g., Enduring play, clear goals, variety of game styles); Game models (e.g., MDA[2] ;

challenge, fantasy, curiosity; game design atoms; CEGE[3]); and Game design methods (e.g.,

Playtesting, playcentric design, value conscious game design)" The designer and creator of a

gamified system not only needs to know the outcomes and objectives they want for their players,

but must understand the goals of the players themselves and what motivates them in order to

create a successful product. Only when the users of the system are understood should the game

elements be chosen and implemented (Burke 95-96).

   Instructors in academia have put many game elements into practice within their

classrooms over the years long before the term gamification became popular. In the early 1980s,

both Thomas Malone and R. F. Bowman wrote on how aspects of computer games could

possibly be implemented within the classroom to help students (Dominguez et al.). Dicheva et al.

created a mapping study of gamification within education, studying 34 papers. They found that

the five most popular gamification designs used in education are "visual status, social

engagement, freedom of choice, freedom to fail, and rapid feedback" (79). Within the top eleven

gamification designs being used is "new identities and/or roles" (79). Gamification should use

intrinsic motivation which turns an experience into something emotionally meaningful. Intrinsic

motivation also has the potential to shape habits and behavior; because of this, it has the

possibility to form culture and identity. Gamification is a good platform to invite students to

create and adopt identities as academic writers. I define identity as a learned approach to how

individuals view themselves and interact with the world around them (Brooke 24).

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[2] Mechanics, Dynamics, and Aesthetics
[3] Core Elements of the Gaming Experience

Identity

The definition of identity that I am going to adopt for this argument is that of Robert

Brooke, who draws his definition from the works of Erving Goffman, Erik Erikson, and R.D.

Laing. Brooke explains that

> your identity is the sense of self attributed to you by yourself and other participants in your social situation.… An individual's identity, in other words, is a consequence of the way that person acts around others. On the basis of their actions (occupation, hobbies, mannerisms, quickness or slowness to anger, likes and dislikes, etc.), individuals come to be recognized and come to recognize themselves as certain sorts of people. The mutual recognition of self by self and others becomes one's identity. In interacting with others, then, one negotiates and is assigned a kind of consistent stance towards the world, based on the pattern of one's past and present interactions. This assigned consistent stance is, as far as anyone in the situation can tell, one's identity. (24)

A person can have many identities that coincide with the different parts of their life; these

identities are molded by a person's surroundings, and also the other people or groups a person

spends his or her time with (Mead, Mind). Will Durant explains the importance of a person's

ability of forming his or her own identity when he states: "We are what we repeatedly do" (98)

illustrating that it is in practice that identity is formed. What is important to understand for this

paper is not only the definition and what shapes identity, but the specific identity of an academic

writer.

For students to be confident and succeed in academic writing they must be able to view

themselves as writers, and they must learn how to interact with the world around them as a

writer. Barbara Bird argues that students must have a writer's identity and feel that they are a

part of the academic community for their greatest success (66). Bird states that "Students'

writing performances become more controlled and authentic as students understand how

academic writing connects to their own identity… According to research in both social identity

and learning theories, academic writing competence relies on internalizing core identity

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dispositions like confidence and motivation." (64). Academic identity has the potential to help students become more confident, better in their writing, and be able to complete high stake assignments with certainty and understanding.

Bird illustrates in her article what it means to think like a writer and gives three components of strong academic writer's identities. The three components are Autobiographical, meaning the ability to create new ideas and being able to claim and articulate personal experiences; Discoursal which is a writer being able to make definitive statements and link evidence to those claims; finally, Authorial, which is to develop and or join in an intellectual discussion using logic (80). Although some writers may be stronger in one component than the other, a well-rounded writer should be able to maneuver in each component, often times simultaneously. To put it simply, to think like a writer is to think critically, logically, and be able to analyze and link both personal experience and external evidence. The smoothest way to think like an academic writer is to form an identity by tying a preexisting identity to the identity of academic writer.

As writers, students are expected to have or gain a power over the English language, which would help situate them as academic writers. David Bartholomae writes of the struggles of first year students in his article "Inventing University" saying, "The students have to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and they have to do this as though they were easily and comfortably one with their audience, as though they were members of the academy" (4). First year writing students are expected to act as though they are a part of academia although they do not know the rules or often have no experience with it at all. Some students are closer than others, or have more confidence in their writing to try and reach the goal of proficient writer, while others stay in their comfort zone with language and grammar (Bartholomae 16-18).

The knowledge that these students are writers may help them be able to stretch their ability. If it is up to the students to form and mold their own academic writer's identity, it will give them confidence in their writing helping them want to stretch their skills and become more proficient writers. Gamification, like games, can help students form academic writer's identity.

Connecting Gamification and Identity

George Herbert Mead made the argument that part of the creation of self[4], and self-consciousness is through the experience of playing and games. Mead explains that at a young age, children learn who they are and how to react to themselves through games: this is a lesson that stays through adulthood, helping create a way to situate a person's self within any given situation. Mead's theory is that in order to be successful at a game a person "must not only take the role of the other, as he does in the play, but he must assume the various roles of all the participants in the game, and govern his action accordingly" (Genesis 269). Mead goes on to explain that

> in a game where a number of individuals are involved, then the child taking one role must be ready to take the rôle of everyone else. If he gets in a ball nine he must have the responses of each position involved in his own position. He must know what everyone else is going to do in order to carry out his own play. He has to take all of these roles. They do not all have to be present in consciousness at the same time, but at some moments he has to have three or four individuals present in his own attitude, such as the one who is going to throw the ball, the one who is going to catch it, and so on. These responses must be, in some degree, present in his own make-up. In the game, then, there is a set of responses of such others so organized that the attitude of one calls out the appropriate attitudes of the other. (*Mind* 70)

Games allow a person to step into the identity of the player, but it also requires that person to think like all of the other players. The same thing is asked for writing students. They are

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[4] Mead uses the term "self" in his works, but his definition of "self" coincides with my definition of identity within this thesis

expected to write, which encompasses editor and revising writer; they are also asked to keep in mind their intended audience and the actual audience of their instructor and classmates. Students must look at the world with a writer's perspective to be able to think and make decisions as a writer. With Mead's theory, a possible way to help students tap into experiencing both the roles of academic writer is through gamification, allowing students to see and experience the roles of academic writers and the roles of audience and editors. Like a game, the best way to get better at writing is through practice.

It is the instructor's task to create a writing space for students to situate their new academic writer's identity, a place where they can learn the context, values, skills, and knowledge of writing and practice these skills (Schaffer 410). It is also a place for them to break the bounds of who they think writers are, breaking down the stereotype that all good writers fit a specific profile that most students do not fit. It is necessary for a student to know they can and do fit in the academic writer setting. Robert Graham explains: "As many teachers already understand from experience, a major stumbling block to creating classroom conditions for students to acquire that strategic knowledge is very often the unexamined assumptions and images some students bring with them about writers and about the act of writing" (358). Williams narrows down the issue explaining that "when we pick up a piece of academic writing, without explicit descriptions about the identity of the author, we often move to our cultural default setting of whom we assume the author would be… a white man in a tweed jacket" (712). He also points out that "Students need to see that intellectual work is not always easy, that it is often frustrating, and that it is carried out by people no different from themselves, whose identities, weaknesses, and strengths shape their lives and work" (714). Students need to understand that writers come in every form possible, and that they fit the identity of a writer.

Gamification can help with this by helping instill confidence and intrinsic motivation to help

them form their academic writer's identity. Students need to understand that their identity will be

present within their writing, and that is not a bad thing, or something that should be avoided.

Once students understand that they can be a part of the academic writing community,

they can start working and practicing with their identities in order to situate themselves within

that domain. Author of the book *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and*

Literacy, James Paul Gee argues:

> People cannot learn in a deep way within a semiotic domain if they are not willing to
> commit themselves fully to the learning in terms of time, effort, and active engagement.
> Such a commitment requires that they are willing to see themselves in terms of a new
> identity, that is, to see themselves as the kind of person who can learn, use, and value the
> new semiotic domain. In turn, they need to believe that, if they are successful learners in
> the domain, they will be valued and accepted by others committed to that domain—that
> is, by people in the affinity group associated with the domain. (54, original emphasis)

Gee goes on to explain that sometimes teachers must help students repair damages that have

been done to students who are not confident in their learning. Classes should be designed to

build confidence of the students and help them build bridges between their already established

identities and the writer's identity that they are cultivating (57). If these bridges are built

correctly, it will empower students and give them the desire to make their writing identities not

only strong, but also permanent (61).

Games create their own domain and contexts; they have set rules and players are

expected to shift into the identities of the players. As Mead explains "They make rules on the

spot in order to help themselves out of difficulties. Part of the enjoyment of the game is to get

these rules" (Mind, 70). When a player sits down to play a game they are expected to do certain

things a certain way, and they expect to gain knowledge and to get better the more they play. The

rules make this shift of understanding easier, and a player knows exactly what is expected of

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them. This is an unspoken acknowledgement and understanding that every player has if they choose to play.

By using gamification in the classroom, students are able to have the chance to create a writer's identity and learn about the contexts and skills it takes to be a good writer until they are able to think and interact with the world as an academic writer. As I will demonstrate in the next section, gamification in the first-year composition classroom can benefit students by building their confidence and empowering them to create their own academic writer's identity

Analysis

Composition teachers have many options when gamifying a classroom. Sebastian Deterding in his article "Gameful Design for Learning" explains that there are specific things about the classroom that can easily be changed in order to start the gamification process. In this section, five game elements will be examined; showing how they connect to the composition classroom and with creating academic writer's identity by instilling confidence and intrinsic motivation into students who do not see themselves as writers. The five game elements are: accrual grading; nested, challenge-based learning tasks; player choice; freedom to fail; and competition and cooperation. Deterding does discuss the sixth element of visual progression, which is not included in this paper because of its possible violations to FERPA by using elements such as leader boards.

Accrual Grading

Accrual grading is an early step that can be easily implemented into a gamified composition classroom. It falls under the game design principles and heuristics category of game design elements because of its clear specific goals (Deterding et al.) Having students start out with their grade at zero and gain points to work up to a higher grade is psychologically motivating and empowering, rather than the more traditional grade scheme of starting at 100% and with every mistake points are deducted over the course of the semester. Accrual grading allows students to see that they are gaining skills rather than being punished for what they are not learning quickly enough (Deterding 62). Accrual grading gives students the opportunity to see their mastery of their writing skills with every point obtained, which can be important to students who struggle seeing themselves as writers.

One way accrual grading pertains to the composition classroom is through the act of assessment or evaluating a student's skill. As Kathleen Blake Yancey explains; "writing assessment has always been at the center of work in writing" and although how student writing is assessed has changed, and continues to change, the act of assessing writing stays firm (483). Although composition studies often focus on programmatic assessment, the assessment of student writing in class remains an important concern. Teachers must have a way to assess their students' skills and ability, and gauge progress throughout the semester in order to know if the students are learning; the composition classroom is no different. Assessment is also important for students, and the ability to gauge success can be significant, especially for students who struggle seeing themselves as writers. As a teacher at a two year college I often see students struggle with writing skills that they learned in early years of education but have since forgotten, especially those students who are adults coming back to school. Michelle Navarre Cleary states that "academic success is a crucial factor in adult students' decision to remain in school" and goes on to explain that "returning students are more anxious about writing than younger students" (36). The assessment of accrual grading has the potential to shift a student's mindset towards a goal to become a better writer due to the possibility of emotional connection of mastering the abilities of writing that they are being taught within the composition classroom.

In a composition classroom utilizing gamification a point system can be implemented instead of the normal letter grading scale. Students would start at zero and as they begin turning in work and assignments their score will increase. Just as in a game with every task completed experience points are added up for the player to see, points are added to a student's grade which brings them closer to a higher grade and they are able to see their progress. Although the traditional assessment scale (i.e. 90%-100% = A) might be used for the final grade books,

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changing a traditional scale to a point system is a relatively simple task. A possible point system scale may look like this:

Level I	0-6,000
Level II	6,001-8,999
Level III	9000-11,999
Level IV	12,000-14,999
Level V	15,000-18,000

The point is not to hide grades from students, but to visually show them how writing is the important part of the class and how every step they take and assignment they turn in, brings them closer to the highest score possible. An example of point distribution could look like this if a teacher had the assignments of three papers, they could be worth 4,500 points each; a group/team paper towards the end of the semester could have the potential score of 1,800 points; and finally all class work/homework due over the course of the semester could total up to 2,700 points. These point values have the capability of shifting as the teacher designs the class depending if the teacher wants to emphasis certain aspects of the work in class, or feel that their students need to push themselves in certain areas.

Levels, as seen above, are a possible way to break down the accrual grading in the English composition classroom. Each student starts at level one, but as they progress and gain points through the class and coursework they pass into higher more difficult levels to reach the finish. Students should be aware of what level they are in at all times, and how many points it will take to reach the next higher level. Students should know what the level breaks are so they know how close they are getting to the goal; if a student receives thousands of points but does not understand what the goal is it could be seen as frustrating and meaningless. When I was a student I had this experience; I would get assignments back with large scores, well over 100 points, but did not know my grade until the very end of class. Levels can assist the use of accrual

grading to show the smaller steps within the large scheme of the point system. Within an argumentative paper worth 4,500 points students can see how the point system is broken down: grammar is worth a possible of 450 points, clarity and flow, 450 points, approach of argument and logic, 1350 points, use of in-text citation and sources, 1350 points, and finally works cited page, 900 points. Showing students how their skills add points and what they can work on to improve their point gain next time allows students clear feedback on what they are doing well, and what may need more work.

Accrual grading can help students build their academic writer's identity by allowing them to practice their writing and move forward in the class positively. Moving forward with their grade rather than backwards can make it an emotional experience, and possibly lead to "Fiero" or personal pride because of triumph (Lazzaro 6). This pride of their work has potential to change into intrinsic motivation because students may feel that they are in control of their grades and that they can succeed in writing which can encourage them to continue pushing themselves and their skills. This gain of control empowers students to continue on their journey and gain confidence keeping them moving forward within their practice of their academic writer's identity. The more they practice their writing and the skills they are learning, the stronger the possibility that their academic writer's identity will be embedded within them. A possible downfall to accrual grading is that if students do not turn in their work, they will get stuck in lower levels which could be demotivating; however, the good of building confidence in students who are trying to succeed in the class outweighs the bad of this possible downfall. Using accrual grading allows students to have the ability to see how far they need to go in order to succeed, and each step they are taking individually which leads to the next possible element; nested, challenge based learning tasks.

Nested, Challenge-Based Learning Tasks

Nested, challenge-based learning tasks are a part of most video games fitting into the game model element of design. Deterding gives the example of Super Mario Brothers: "you have the long-term goal of saving the princess, which breaks down into medium-term goals (finish level 1, 2, and so on), which break down into short-term goals (cross this passage, collect these three items)" (62). There are many steps that students must take in order to create and become comfortable with their academic writer's identity. Giving students who do not feel as though they are writers small steps to take to become academic writers will help them understand the minute aspects of writing, including the importance of logical and critical thinking.

Nested, challenge-based learning tasks allow teachers to help students gain knowledge about writing skills within the larger goals of academic writing. Myhill et al. explain that teaching embedded grammar lessons within a composition class help students become better writers. They explain that by giving students grammar lessons that have to do with specific goals being taught throughout the semester rather than a full grammar lesson all at once improved students writing overall (103-104). Nested tasks can allow a teacher to add smaller tasks of grammar or other writing skills to help students who do not see themselves as writers strengthen their writing confidence and ability.

Nested challenge-based learning tasks can be translated into an English composition classroom with working on an essay. The long-term goal could be the end product of an essay; medium goals, prewriting and drafting; short-term goals could be grammar, or building a strong thesis statement and sentences. A gamified classroom could encompass "boss challenges." For example, a student's essays must pass a certain boss (i.e. final grade) in order for the students to

get to the next level. Using bosses shifts the attention from the teacher as a grader, and puts the emphasis on the essay and its ability to withstand the challenge.

Writing skill assignments can be placed into a nested format to help students learn the necessary skills they need to become better writers. One way of doing this is making each paper have required tasks that must be done in order to get access to full points for the paper. The assignment could be set up like this:

In order to receive the possibility for full points for your paper 100 points must be gained before the paper is turned in. If you do not have 100 points made, than the Highest Score Possible will reflect the received work.			

100	Assignment 25 points	Paper = 100 HSP
75	Assignment 25 points	Paper = 75HSP
50	Assignment 25 points	Paper = 50 HSP
25	Assignment 25 points	Paper = 25 HSP

Each point gained from early assignments allows access to points in the paper. If a student only turns in three of the necessary assignments before they turn in their final paper, even if it is flawless, it can only receive the highest possible score of 75 out of 100 points. This type of assignment set up allows students to see the importance of all that they are learning, and emphasizes each step in the writing process. An important aspect of a gamified composition classroom is to continually show students the relevance of each step and level, giving them concrete reasons why everything is done, and how it leads to an end goal that is completely doable because of all the work they have already done in previous levels (Deterding 62). One way of doing this is having the necessary small assignments that are due before their paper be geared towards writing skills (e.g. sentence structure, grammar or the creation of an outline) that they need to know and be helpful for their journey as an academic writer.

Nested challenges allow students the potential to build confidence within the process of building on academic writer's identity because they are able to build on their foundational writing skills as they are working on the larger tasks of their papers. Writing skills are essential

to understand, for students who do not feel as though they are writers. Just as in a game that is being played, the more skill a person has the more comfortable and confident the player is, students who have writing skills and are comfortable with those skills have the potential to be more confident. Students have greater prospects of feeling like a writer and connecting with an academic writer's identity if they feel comfortable with the skills of writing, and know the different levels it takes in the process of writing an academic paper. The possibility is there with this element to get caught up in the small tasks and losing sight of the main goal. It should be explained to the students how each skill and thought process builds upon each other to help create their academic writer's identity as a whole. Nested challenges also help by giving students plenty of practice with their identity to implant the information and make it easier for them to draw on when they need it. Another gamification element that can help implant academic writer's identity is player choice.

Player Choice

Player choice is the ability for a player to choose the route to take to continue on to their ultimate goal. Games also give the player choices on how to tackle smaller tasks within the larger scheme of the game, and allows players to choose to play it safe, or take larger risks for a possible larger reward (Deterding 63). Using the game design principle and heuristics element of player choice allows students to choose their route to get to their end goal and can help them feel that they have autonomy with the creation of their own academic writer's identity. Player choice can be implemented within the classroom, as long as there are clear parameters around it, and expectations are clearly stated and understood by the students. Deterding suggests having some basic challenges along with more advanced ones so that a student can choose to go straight

to the more difficult challenge or do more of the basic challenges in order to gain the same amount of points in smaller increments (63).

Player choice is relevant in the composition classroom in terms of helping students who do not see themselves as writers feel supported in their journeys to academic writers. As Cleary contends the teacher's shift to mentor has the potential to help students who are uncomfortable in the college setting feel less judged for their writing and more supported. If students feel support within their writing, they are more likely to succeed and continue confidently in their journey of writing (56). Deterding proposes that by using player choice within the classroom, a teacher can do just that, going from "being the central dispenser of content to that of a mentor supporting individual learners in their current challenges" (63). This can happen because of the autonomy of choice.

Autonomy allows students to have control over their writing and the process of their learning. They have the choice of how they are going to proceed through the challenges of their assignments, which has the possibility of leading them to a deeper understanding of the content. In my own teaching experience with giving students assignment choices, students were slightly confused when given the option of choosing different tasks, but not having to do them all. Once they were comfortable with the idea, it became a successful way of allowing students to do work within their chosen comfort zone, and learning style while still reaching the common goal of learning and understanding the needed information.

Player choice can be built into the assignment that was mentioned in the example from the nested based challenge section. Students could have the ability to choose how they want to show their knowledge for the pre-paper assignments. These can be done in creative ways, and do

not have to be narrowed to only writing assignments. An example of a possible assignment might look like this:

> For this assignment you must show knowledge of sentence structure and punctuation.
> Possible projects could be but are not limited to: making a video, writing a poem, creating a comic strip, writing a short how to post, draw a diagram, write a song.

Perhaps a student will choose to create an educational video geared towards small children teaching the content, or create a comic utilizing the learned content for the punchline; the possibilities are endless and can be guided by the students' imagination and creativity. By allowing students to choose how they show the knowledge that they have learned they must have internalized the information. They are also free to express themselves within their learning style and past experiences allowing them to be as creative as they would like.

Each assignment students do successfully has the possibility to further strengthen their belief that they are capable and competent in the field of academic writing, which in turn has the potential to deepen their academic identity as a writer. Barbara Bird makes the argument that "Students' writing performances become more controlled and authentic as students understand how academic writing connects to their own identity" (64). Allowing students to create their own projects within their comfort zone helps them connect what they are learning in composition to who they know they are already. This connection can help students create their academic writer's identity by connecting their new skills with a part of their identity they are already comfortable with. Something that should be watched for is students who choose the easiest path every time. It is critical for the students learning and creation of academic writer's identity to make sure that the assignments gradually gain in difficulty throughout the semester so even if they do choose an easier route it still requires more of the skills they are learning than the first

assignment. Just as in the game Mario, the skill of jumping is needed for every level starting at level one, but as a player continues in the game and into higher levels the things that must be jumped on or over become less predictable and more difficult to get by forcing the player to get better at this simple task or lose a life. This gain of difficulty leads to the next possible element of the freedom to fail.

Freedom to Fail

A very important aspect of gamification which can give confidence to students constructing their academic writer's identity is the freedom to fail, which is the ability to try again even after a horrible defeat. Failure is a game design method that is not usually welcomed in classrooms by teachers or students. People come to a game expecting to possibly fail, especially when first learning the rules, but they do not expect to continue failing, or to stay in a state of failure, but rather to learn from their mistakes and to be able to try again until the task is accomplished. New players come expecting to possibly struggle at first, but to end the game feeling victorious, strong and confident as a player. Deterding argues that "You learn how to achieve the long-term goal through a cycle of probing a new strategy, observing how you fail (and why), devising a new strategy based on that" (63). Students usually do not get the luxury of being able to learn by failing. Deterding explains the repercussions of not allowing room for failure within the classroom: "fear and stress are utterly demotivating, and in chronic form, lead to learned avoidance and neurologically damage our capacity to concentrate and learn deeply" (63). Students need to be given the opportunity to explore and practice their new found academic writer's identities, without the constant pressure of failure if they get something wrong.

Students often come to a composition class feeling as though they are failures at writing, this is especially true with students who do not feel as though they are writers and so do not have the confidence to push through their negative experiences. Michelle Navarre Cleary states that adult learners can particularly have this adverse feeling towards writing "From earlier schooling, many adults bring the scars of negative writing experiences" (37) by allowing students to have a mixture of hard and easy assignments students are given the ability to not only learn, but to also gain the sense of accomplishment with every small victory. Jesper Juul conducted a study on player's failure in games and found that "player's ratings were closely tied to their performance in the game, such that a player performing badly would dislike the game, a player performing fairly well would like the game, but a player performing very well would also *dislike the game*" (242, original emphasis). Composition classroom work should follow this same fine line of hard and easy. Teachers should push students to become better writers, but not push them so far that they fall into discouragement rather than understanding and empowerment. As time goes on and students are more comfortable with their academic writer's identity, they will be able to be pressed further due to the fact that they will have their confidence to lean back on when assignments get more difficult.

The use of freedom to fail in the classroom is something that may take time for students to understand and accept since it does not follow the course structure of only having one try at an assignment that is worth a large portion of their grade. Students need the chance to try out what they have learned while creating their academic writer's identity without feeling like they will fail the class if one thing is done wrong. A possible way to allow students to fail and try again within the composition classroom is to have a three try policy:

In this class there is a three try policy. Once an assignment is turned in, if you are unhappy with your score, you will have two more opportunities to raise your points for that assignment (please note that each assignment has deadlines for each try that must be followed). If you are satisfied with your score, there is no need to turn the assignment in again.

This policy allows students to try something possibly out of their comfort zone, and if they completely fail, they will have the opportunity to try again helping relieve the emphasis from passing and failing to gaining points to reach the next level. In order to make sure students do not take advantage of this policy by turning in everything the last week of class, due dates are necessary.

If students' academic writer's identities are strong enough, challenges will be welcomed rather than shied away from. James Paul Gee comments on what a gamified solution is striving for when he states that "In video games, losing is not losing, and the point is not winning easily or judging yourself a failure. In playing video games, hard is not bad and easy in not good…hard is always good, easy is not" (175). Low stakes assignments can help students transition into this mindset. Peter Elbow explains in his article "High Stakes and Low Stakes in Assigning and Responding to Writing" people often feel that writing is more important than speaking and is evaluated and graded much more strictly than any other form of communication: "Writing *feels* like an inherently high stakes activity—especially because most people learn and use writing primarily in school, where it is virtually always evaluated, usually with a grade (6 original emphasis). I have implemented low stakes assignments in my own class, some are writing assignments that are more creative in nature, and others are work sheets or having teams put back together an essay that I have cut up in essay sections such as introduction, thesis statement, essay map, body paragraphs and conclusions. These assignments are graded more on participation and if the students are there and contribute receive full points for their work.

Gamification and freedom to fail allows students to fail and learn from their mistakes, a low stakes environment allows the opportunity to help students gain control over their writing and academic writer's identity. Instead of being discouraged by their failure, knowing they can

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try again can give students the motivation to try harder and possibly approach the task a different way the next time. Low stakes assignments are a great place to implement the ability for students to fail without affecting their grade too drastically; it also can fit well into student choice, giving them several assignment options that they can choose from to complete. Sometimes the lessons learned in failure are stronger and more memorable than those learned from easily gained success.

The more students practice their skills as writers the more potential they have to deepen their understanding of writing and become more comfortable with their academic writer's identity. Being able to fail and try again alleviates the fear that students can have about turning in a perfect assignment or not passing the class and allows them to try more difficult assignments and deepening their writer's identity with the knowledge that they can try again.

Competition and Cooperation

Competition and cooperation are elements found in every game; some type of adversary is needed, even if it is just the element of luck-of-the-draw, and there also must be cooperative agents that keep a player moving forward within the game. Competition and cooperation are game models that have the potential to improve a composition classroom and have the possibility to help form academic writer's identity within students (Deterding 63).

Allowing students to work together on projects in a cooperative manner can help strengthen skills and allows them to learn from each other. Competition is something that must be implemented with care. The thing that should be kept in mind is competition does not have to pit students against each other, but rather can be groups of students competing against specific elements that are created by the teacher (Deterding 63). Implementing competition and

cooperation gives a greater purpose to the skills the students are learning, and can help illustrate how their academic writer's identity fits into the bigger picture of the class.

An aspect of competition and cooperation that can be utilized in the composition classroom is the ability for students to talk about what they are learning. Sonja Launspach argues that often times there is a gap between what students say they understand and the actual outcome of student writing, and it is important for students to have the opportunity to talk about what they are learning and to be able to verbalize their ideas and confusions (59). Allowing students to talk about their papers with each other cooperatively can let them understand writing better, and help their writing skills by receiving feedback from more than just the teacher.

One way that a composition teacher might incorporate cooperation is through a carefully planned group essay; which I have had success with. The first thing I do is put students in small groups of three or four, and then give them the first assignment of creating a contract or rules for their own small group.

> Please collaborate and create a contract for your team. This contract can be as detailed as you decide; all members must agree to the terms and sign at the bottom as consent to the terms. These terms should include things like personal workload, group member responsibilities, what is expected, what happens if a team member does not fulfill their given responsibilities, if a team member does not show up for a meeting time, and anything else you feel is important for the success of your team in this class. I will be taking the terms and rules into consideration while grading, and a team member who does not fulfill their group's contract will see the consequences within their personal final grade of this project.

Allowing students to work in cooperation with each other to create their own rules can help them feel more in control of the class, and I have found that they are more likely to follow the rules that they have created and agreed to. Just as a player must agree to the rules of the game they are playing, so a student should feel the same compulsion to play by the rules they have helped create. Cooperative group projects give the opportunity for students to learn from each other, and

allowing them to work together gives them the opportunity to both learn and teach the members of their group.

One way a composition teacher might incorporate competition is bringing actual games into the classroom. Competition is an element of gamification that can be either a good or bad experience depending on how it is implemented. Allowing groups of students to work together and compete with other groups can be positive. Another way to use competition positively is to set the students against an adversary that is not human, such as a race against the clock. This gives students the ability to test their knowledge of writing, forcing them to lean upon their academic writer's identities and help show them what they already know, along with possible weaknesses that they should work on. One way of doing this is bringing an actual game into the classroom. I have found success in doing a trivia type game with students.

Teacher Instructions for Trivia Game

- Place students into groups of 3 or 4
- Give each team a small whiteboard and marker (paper and markers work as well)
- After the question is asked students have 1 minute to write their answer down.
- Every team that has the correct answer receives a point
- Once all general questions are asked, final bonus round (think Jeopardy): Each team gets to decide how many points they want to wager BEFORE the question is asked.
- Whoever has the most points at the end wins!

This game can easily be customized to what needs to be taught or instilled within the students in the classroom; because of the time limit students must depend on the knowledge that they have already acquired to win. These are a few of the questions I have used in my first year composition class trivia game:

- Use to, too, and two correctly in a sentence

- What font type should be used in a MLA essay?

- What is wrong with this in-text citation? (James p. 25)

- "Without any help or support or guidance" is an example of what type of sentence?

- If Marilyn Espinoza is the author you're citing how does her name appear on your works cited page?

Students are often surprised about how much they know about writing and how much of the information is easily accessible in their mind which can deepen their belief that they are academic writers. This is also a good way to review information that students should already know, and remind them of certain writing skills.

Activities that pit students against each other, where one wins and the rest lose, can be detrimental, leading to manipulation and a cut throat mentality that does not help create a healthy respect for other writers, but rather a win at all cost mentality. If there is an assignment that allows students to compete against each other, and their grade depends upon their placing, then there must be clear specifications that more points can be earned elsewhere in order for their grades to continue to raise, rather than fall (Deterding 63).

Competition and cooperation can help facilitate academic writer's identity by giving students the chance to use their identities putting what they have learned into practice. Allowing students to work together on a project can help them see where their academic writer's identity fits in within a group. Just as Mead suggests that playing a game requires a player to think both as his or her own part and also all of the other players (*Mind* 70), so a group project can help students see the way they view something and how other's view the same subject.

Something all instructors who are implementing gamification in their classroom need to remember is that gamification is not the end target. The purpose is not to have a gamified classroom in order to wow students or to get them to have fun. The purpose is to reach students where they are and help them become better writers by building on and showing them how to create their own academic writer's identities. Gamification should be implemented into the classroom slowly. Allowing a trial and error process to form in order to keep the students' a priority rather than gamification itself (Deterding et al.).

Conclusion

Gamification, when implemented thoughtfully, has the potential to help students create and form academic writer's identities which can help them with their writing. Helping students see where their own identity fits within the academic setting, can in turn help remove the fear of failure and allow them to gain confidence within their writing. Gamification is a tool that can be used in a classroom to help students become stronger in the field of study and should never be seen as an objective within itself. By implementing game elements, instructors have the potential to help students think more logically and critically within their writing by tapping into their emotions with intrinsic motivation and helping them create and form an academic writer's identity.

Although gamification has not been studied and tested like many other older types of learning and teaching techniques, there have been many success stories from instructors using gamification. A study done by Dicheva et al. which reviewed and mapped out published responses to the use of gamification found that

> The majority of the papers report encouraging results from the experiments, including significantly higher engagement of students in forums, projects, and other learning activities; increased attendance, participation, and material downloads; positive effect on the quantity of students' contributions/answers without a corresponding reduction in their quality; increased percentage of passing students and participation in voluntary activities and challenging assignments; and minimizing the gap between the lowest and the top graders. (83)

Gamification has the potential to do many good things for the English classroom; it can help students become more involved within their classes and can give them the ability to take control of their own learning experience and success leading to intrinsic motivation. Using gamification is a learning process for the instructor as well, and there should always be the

acceptance that just because a gamified area worked well with one group of students, it may need to be changed or adjusted for another group of students.

According to Dicheva et al., the three education subjects that use gamification the most, and that have published the most work about the specific subject, are computer science/information technology, math/science/engineering, and game programming (81). This shows that there is much to be studied with the use of gamification within the English field and how it can help students with their writing. For example: possible detriments, transfer, implications with nonnative English speakers, connections of gamification to classrooms, and gamifying more than a single first year composition class.

It is important for any shift in teaching to view both the positive effects that it is having on the students and also the possible negative effects. Burke explains that "Gamification has tremendous potential, but right now most companies aren't getting it right" (6). There needs to be an understanding of gamification and what the purpose truly is in order for it to become a successful tool. Further study should be taken on possible snares in using gamification and the creation of new identities and how this can affect students and their learning.

Gamification has the ability to help students create academic writer's identities, which, in turn, could possibly give students the ability to transfer the knowledge and skills they learn in one class into other classes and other nonacademic settings they are involved in. This study would need to take much more time, tracking students throughout their time at school and following how the academic writer's identities they created help them use the knowledge and skills they learned within their first year composition course. This would be beneficial to help know how to form classes, which areas are strong, and which areas need more work in order to help students have an identity that they can use within many different contexts.

Within my research I came across many articles of nonnative English speakers who benefitted from creating an English speaking identity within their English classes; how gamification and academic writer's identities could benefit these students is another possible point of study. If nonnative English speaking students form identities differently, due to their unfamiliarity with the language, would be another possible study.

Research and studies on more ways to connect gamification within the English classroom is another possible study. Allowing instructors to see what game elements can help with specific areas of the English classroom would be useful for instructors, especially if they are not fully comfortable with the elements of games, and how they each can be implemented. This could be seen as a form of blue prints for a gamified classroom.

A final possible venue for further study is that of spreading gamification beyond one first year English classroom. If students are given the opportunity to create academic writer's identities their first year, what would be the outcomes if throughout their English classes, more game elements were implemented in order to further build and strengthen those identities. How could this affect their writing and communication abilities?

Gamification works because it taps into people's emotions and intrinsic motivation to help them create behaviors and habits. It is up to the person creating the gamified system to know what should be implemented based on the needs of the users. An instructor has the ability to pull students in with gamification and help them create academic writer's identities, which helps them think and write analytically and logically. If students have an academic writer's identity, they have the potential to become more confident writers, who are not afraid of failure, but instead see obstacles as a challenge that can be figured out, rather than a roadblock that leads

to frustration and failure. Gamification has the ability to empower students to form and create their own academic writer's identity allowing them to understand their potential.

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