

Leveling Up: Gamification and the College Classroom

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to build a framework for understanding and utilizing gamification techniques in faith-based undergraduate education. This framework uses of three foundational concepts: digital nativity as a linguistic category, cultural brokerage as a dynamic placement between linguistic subcultures that fosters innovation in problem-solving, and gamification as a way of connecting these processes to education. The research is ongoing.

Rather than classifying students as Digital Natives or Digital Immigrants based on age, recent studies in multiple linguistics it is suggested that students should be considered Digital Natives based upon linguistic criteria. Video games present a strong model for this. Cross-cultural brokerage suggests that individuals who regularly function between cultures (or appropriately strong sub-cultures) demonstrate greater speed and innovation in problem-solving. Gamification uses video game RPG elements to further problem-based education. In this framework gamification encourages Fringe Thinking by bringing Digital Natives into a fringe position between two strong linguistic areas.

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The Framework

This project builds a framework of thinking that argues for gamification as a best practice in faith-based college education with particular emphasis on youth ministry preparation.

This framework is built upon two scaffolded positions:

I. Digital Nativity as a linguistic category. Rather than classifying students as Digital Natives or Digital Immigrants based on age, a view through the lens of multiple linguistics suggest that students should be considered Digital Natives based upon cultural linguistic criteria. Video games present a strong model for this. Students are considered Digital *Natives* when their use of video game semiotic domains resembles linguistic fluency. Linguistic brain schematics are deep and extremely fast, making them an attractive brain hack for educators. If linguistics and moral grammar development are deeply linked¹, education strategies that engage these schema effectively should have serious consideration in a discipleship-centric academic program.

II. Cultural brokerage as a dynamic placement between linguistic subcultures that fosters innovation in problem-solving. Cultural brokerage is an anthropological concept that has spread into a variety of fields including education. Cultural brokerage suggests that individuals who regularly function between cultures (or appropriately strong sub-cultures) demonstrate greater speed and innovation in problem-solving².

Phelan, et al (1991) provide a vivid framework for seeing the borders and boundaries between the multiple worlds of students. III. Gamification uses video game Role Playing

¹ This is an argument for another paper.

² Phelan, Patricia, Davidson, A.L. & Cao, H.T. 1991. "Students' Multiple Worlds: Negotiating the Boundaries of Family, Peer, and School Cultures." *Anthropology And Education Quarterly* 22, no. 3: 224-50.

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Game (RPG) elements to further problem-based education. In this framework gamification encourages what I am calling “fringe thinking” – seeing oneself as positioned on a border, able to function on both sides - by bringing Digital Natives into a fringe position between two strong linguistic areas. Gamification provides an opportunity to put students in positions of cultural brokerage in inquiry-based settings.

Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants

In 2001 Marc Prensky wrote a two part essay entitled *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants*, outlining the concept that the digital environment (screen-based content, electronic programming, video game entertainment) was shaping a generation of learners in powerful and subtle ways.³ In the decade since Prensky’s work, numerous studies have attempted to dissect the Digital Native, predict their patterns of learning, and develop pedagogical strategies to reach them. The initial response among educators may have been a type of *moral panic*, calling for an immediate and drastic overhaul of virtually every pedagogical philosophy and technique in preparation for an entire generation of new brain styles⁴. As the concept has ripened, a more nuanced image is beginning to form concerning the Digital Native as an educational entity.

Prensky’s basic assertion is rather simple: information technology impacts its users in physical, psychological, and social ways which directly influence education.⁵ Digital Natives are not simply technologically savvy, but actually have different brain structures and schematics. They think differently, in both active and passive ways. Prensky’s model for discussion is interesting in itself: socio-cultural identity. Rather than

³ Prensky, Marc. "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants." *On the Horizon* 9, no. 5 (2001): 1.

⁴ Bennett, Sue, Karl Maton, and Lisa Kervin. "The 'digital natives' debate: A critical review of the evidence." *British Journal of Educational Technology* 39 (2008): 776.

⁵ Prensky, 2001, 1.

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identifying a learning style connected with digital technology, Prensky likens it to growing up in a particular culture. *Digital Natives* are those who from a very early age find themselves immersed in digital media. Their ability to function in this world is imagined as being more similar to someone learning their native language and culture than to someone learning the language and techniques of a skill or methodology. *Digital Immigrants*, then, are those who find themselves surrounded by this new world and learning the language and culture secondarily. Digital Immigrants have *accents* and other social indicators because they have learned the digital world later in life.⁶

Although his initial call for immediate and drastic changes in educational methodologies may be somewhat overstated, it appears that many of his assertions have some long-term value; especially for students exposed consistently and early to digital information systems. Not everyone on the planet has been exposed to complex digital media at any age, much less during their formative years – Apple’s marketing strategies notwithstanding. Rather

than label an entire global generation as natives of the digital domain, it may be more valuable to understand that there are varying levels of immersion into the digital world.⁷

Taken in moderation with some of the moral panic tweaked out, Prensky’s initial model appears to work very well as a framework for describing a growing population. For educators, this presents a difficult job of transitioning best practices to address this shift. Christian educators have the exponentially more complex job of providing not only content delivery but also a very specific social and moral identity. Christian educators who see their teaching as discipleship should be very interested in research linking

⁶ Prensky, 2001, 2.

⁷ Brown, Cheryl, and Laura Czerniewicz. "Debunking the 'digital native': beyond digital apartheid, towards digital democracy." *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning* 26, no. (2010): 5.

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content delivery to socialization, and current research into Digital Native/Digital

Immigrant distinctions is doing just that.

Multiple Literacies, Semiotic Domains, and Cybernetic Relationships

Much of this framework hinges on the idea that we all have multiple literacies.

Literacies are systems of decoding symbols in conjunction with other symbols and settings.⁸ Newer views of literacy see a variety of systems overlapping, even within one type of literacy. For example, English comic books and English law books require more than the simple understanding of English letters and words to properly decode.⁹ James Paul Gee's work on video games and literacy describes this layered idea of literacy as *semiotic domains*. *Semiotic* means *signs* or *representations of meaning*, and include much more than words: "...images, sounds, gestures, movements, graphs, diagrams, equations, objects, and even humans like babies, midwives, and mothers..." are all signs that carry a variety of meanings in a variety of settings.¹⁰ These symbols and the practices they are embedded within form semiotic domains, such as "...cellular biology, postmodern literary criticism, first-person-shooter video games, high-fashion advertisements..." or any of a host of others.¹¹

This way of thinking makes *literacy* a system, and the relationship between two literacies becomes necessarily a cybernetic one.¹² Semiotic domains interact with each other within individuals and groups in dynamic ways. Every student lives within a rich ecology of overlapping literacies, and these literacies are not disconnected. As in any

⁸ Gee, James Paul. *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*. NY, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 18.

⁹ Gee, 18.

¹⁰ Gee, 19.

¹¹ Gee, 19.

¹² Walsh, Christopher. "Systems-based literacy practices: Digital games research, gameplay, and design." *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* 33, no 1. (2010): 27.

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ecological system, smaller internal systems may play a profound (or minimal) role in the function and adaptation of the overall system and its inherent agents. Studies in moral development talk about *moral grammar*, and indicate that developing morally may have more in common with learning language than with learning rules and regulations.¹³

Newer, broader concepts of literacy frame meaning-making across increasing bandwidth, bringing "...the multimodal, culturally and socially situated experience that includes all the elements (i.e. modes) that are part of the meaning making process" into the fold of literacy.¹⁴

Semiotic domains require identity development, especially for those new to them.¹⁵ This means that literacies and the semiotic domains layered onto/within them are building blocks of *nativity*. As one develops a type of literacy, they become more and more embedded within that literacy's semiotic domains. They become competent at deciphering the codes and symbols within the literacy and merging those meanings on a variety of levels of interaction. Being truly competent within embedded semiotic domains is being *fluent* in that literacy. Being *born* into that literacy, developing it as one does their language of birth, is being *native*. Humans, as it turns out, are designed to develop semiotic domains with great speed and efficiency at early stages of their growth. If the research is pointing in the right direction, the development of some of these literacies is *physiological*.¹⁶ The brain changes shape and structure as we develop literacy involving multiple semiotic domains.

¹³ Rosenstand, Nina. *The Moral of the Story*. New York, N.Y.: McGraw Hill, 2009, 11.

¹⁴ Abrams, Sandra S. "A gaming frame of mind: digital contexts and academic implications." *Educational Media International* 46, no 4. (2009): 337.

¹⁵ Gee, 46.

¹⁶ Prensky, Part II, 1.

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Students are not only digital natives, but might be moral natives, or American English natives, depending on the type of literacy. The intersection of these literacies may be profound or negligible. My argument here hinges on the concept that these literacies are cybernetically connected as an ecology, and therefore these intersections are worth examining. Additionally, I agree that the digital shift means a growing population may find that digital literacy (in a variety of forms) will become increasingly normative, making the intersection between digital literacy (in a variety of forms) and Kingdom literacy (in a variety of forms) more vibrant. In examining these intersections I'm going to focus on Walsh's *systems-based literacies* model and Gee's *semiotic domains* as they relate to digital literacy and gaming.

In using this language of *literacy*, *fluency*, and *being native* I am asserting that culture is an excellent word for sufficiently complex literacies. In the case of Digital Nativity I believe *gaming* can be considered a vibrant sub-culture of the larger DN cultural matrix.

Game Play is Serious Work

The concept of using games as teaching tools is hardly new; *play* is a foundational process for childhood moral development. *Gamification*, however, is a next-step format for the integration of learning and play. Game-based learning focuses on the use of games as problem-solving tools to teach a specific content or skill; it is *learning-with-media*. Experiential Education (EE) utilizes observation and debrief to engage students in metaphor-making, and uses both planned and spontaneous activities to create teachable moments. *Gamification* structures the learning event itself as a

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game rather than embedding the game into previously existing lesson plans. It is *learning-within-media*. EE methodologies are often employed to unpack the learning moment and help students draw connections between the content and the concepts used to teach the content. While the process shares many concepts with EE, Gamification more deeply entwines the practice of the game into the teaching moment itself. In EE the experience is a metaphor for the applied content and the facilitator enables the students to connect the dots and draw out meaning. Gamification, on the other hand, uses the very game structure itself to enable students to practice trial-and-error processing as part of the content itself. The game isn't a metaphor; the media is the message.

Role-Playing Games (RPG's) are the most common foundational formats for gamification. In the RPG story and gameplay merge into one blended experience. RPG's are exceptionally popular and most large, robust games involve at least some aspects of the RPG gaming experience. Skyrim, a fantasy RPG by Bethesda, is one of the most successful games of any genre, selling over 20 million copies as of 2012.¹⁷ Even though RPG's are a relatively small genre of games their impact on gaming has been profound. In addition to the success of particular RPG franchises almost every genre of modern video games have RPG elements, especially in regards to storytelling and character advancement.¹⁸

¹⁷ Peckham, Matt. "At 20 Million Copies Sold, Skyrim Is in the Top 20 Bestselling Games of All Time." Time. January 27, 2014. Accessed April 7, 2015. <http://time.com/1875/at-20-million-copies-sold-skyrim-is-in-the-top-20-bestselling-games-of-all-time/>.

¹⁸ Clements, Ryan. "RPGs Took Over Every Video Game Genre - IGN." IGN. December 12, 2012. Accessed April 7, 2015. <http://www.ign.com/articles/2012/12/12/rpgs-took-over-every-video-game-genre>.

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Sid Meyers, creator of the gaming innovation *Civilization*, said “A game is a series of interesting decisions.”¹⁹ The RPG completely embodies this idea. In the RPG the player creates a character to interact with a fictitious world. The player is given a variety of options at character creation that greatly influence gameplay and storyline development later on. Characters choose specialized attributes and abilities they will expand throughout the game. In the more complex RPG’s players’ choices at this point can have enormous impact on the feel and flow of the game. Replaying the game with a different set of character choices can feel like playing a completely different game.

Once the character has been created and gameplay has begun the player begins following the main game story arc. This series of quests involves overcoming obstacles, solving puzzles, and defeating enemies (including Bosses, higher powered foes that mark significant progress points in the game). Optional side quests appear along the way, giving the player more experiences and sometimes a chance to earn special abilities or items. Completing actions earns the player experience points; larger successes or main quest challenges earn larger amounts. It is in spending these points that the “interesting decisions” really begin to mount up. Skills or abilities are often organized around a “skill tree” with each increased skill unlocking more and more branching choices. Perks and abilities create often intricate combinations granting ease through some challenges and making others profoundly difficult. A good RPG balances these difficulties of gameplay. No single character is best; they are simply better at some scenarios than others.

¹⁹ Reeve, Alexander. "GDC 2012: Sid Meier Sees "Interesting Decisions" Even in Rhythm Games." www.escapistmagazine.com. March 7, 2012. Accessed April 7, 2015.
<http://www.escapistmagazine.com/news/view/116212-GDC-2012-Sid-Meier-Sees-Interesting-Decisions-Even-in-Rhythm-Games>.

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The more robust, open-world games have mastered this. *Skyrim*, for example, allows the player to choose from 10 different character races at startup, each with their own bonuses and weaknesses. As they move through the game they have the option to add points to 18 separate skill trees, each with 8-10 branches. Skills can be improved on a scale of 1-100. Using the skill successfully enables a small increase, while gaining a level allows the player to intentionally spend points to increase the skill. Some skills in turn unlock the ability to create a variety of items which themselves grant abilities and modifications. Players then proceed to complete quests. There are a number of linear quests which further the main storyline and at least 7 core side quests some of which are not possible to complete concurrently, meaning players must play a second time with a new character and new choices to complete all of them. Finally the game generates random “radiant quests”. These can be completed multiple times. In theory the game quests are infinite; completing over 400 quests is not unheard of. Add to this 80 unique items and a much larger number of special items which can be gained as rewards for completing quests and the “interesting decisions” become astronomical.

RPG's and Multiple Literacy

These choices are not an added benefit to the game. They are the game itself. Choices and rewards drive the player and are an integral part of the gaming experience. Video games involve hyperrealities, bringing elements of simulation and reality definitions to bear.²⁰ Gaming allows participants to enter an experience where layered meaning is not only expected, it is an inherent property. This is particularly important for the study of developmental issues connected to multiple literacies (including discipleship), because the semiotic domain overlap between one “reality” into another

²⁰ Frostling-Henningsson, Maria. "First Person Shooter Games as a Way of Connecting to People: "Brothers in Blood". *CyberPsychology & Behavior* Vol. 12, No. 5 (2009): 561.

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directly impacts nativity/immigrant status. It is within this overlap between literacies that educators and students begin to function as cultural brokers, bringing connections between literacies.²¹ Semiotics (the defining of codes, signs, symbols, and their interactions with meanings, real things, and behaviors) intrinsically assumes some level of layered reality, and this framework is no different.²² For an educator considering gamification this linguistic hyperreality may allow for a greatly enriched learning environment. Much of the work engaging students in such a layered way is accomplished through the grammar of gaming itself.

Within video gaming literacy James Gee sees three embedded, concurrent semiotic domains closely related to identity. Video gamers fluent in this literacy have three identities (semiotic domains) when they play any game, and the more complex the simulation (the greater the hyperreality) the more *real* these identities are. Players have a *virtual*, a *real*, and a *projective* identity. Operating in each of these identities *at the same time* is a mark of nativity for gamers, although non-gamers can quickly become conversant.

A gamer's *virtual identity* "...is the virtual character in the virtual world."²³ This would be "Brian-**playing**-Spanky" or "Carly-**playing**-Laura-Croft".²⁴ This identity includes things one can or cannot do based on the parameters of the game and the development choices of the gamer. This identity deeply intersects with the game's *design grammar* – the controls and constructs that enable to game to progress and

²¹ Michie, Michael. "The role of culture brokers in intercultural science education: A research proposal." Paper presented at the 34th annual conference of the Australasian Science Education Research Association held in Melbourne, Australia, July, 10-12 2003

²² I think personally Baudrillard overreaches a little in his framing. However, his constructs themselves are fairly useful when applied on a smaller scale.

²³ Gee, James P. *What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*. New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 49.

²⁴ Spanky is a character of mine in the video game *Skryim*.

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develop.²⁵ A gamer's *real-world identity* is the player-as-player. This would be "**Brian**-playing-Skyrim" or "**Carly**-playing-Tomb Raider". This identity is what Digital Immigrants would consider the "real world", and they would draw a much stronger separation between this identity and the others. A gamer's *projective identity* is the more complete and complex identity of "Player-**as**-Character." It is this interaction that Gee sees as the most important for marking fluency in the gaming literacy.²⁶ Gee also finds this the most difficult to articulate. This is the blending of the identity of the virtual character (Spanky) and the real player (Brian).²⁷ Projective identity involves understanding that the character has some sense of identity or reality within the game construct, and that the player's choices and interactions enable or restrict that character. The character might be said to shift from the category of *character* to that of *avatar*.²⁸ It is in this domain that the player/avatar's enmeshed identity could be described as the identity of *me/not-me*. When Brian plays *Skyrim*, he is Spanky as well as Brian. There are things Spanky *could* do that he *does not* do because it is Brian playing him. Another player could pick up the game and produce the same character development stats, but not the same *character*. Likewise there are things Spanky is comfortable doing that Brian would not. They are consistent with Spanky, not Brian. These actions exist within the hyperreality of the game itself and do not directly reflect the game's design grammar.²⁹ They do not develop the character's skills or abilities, but they do develop the character's reality. That reality is intertwined with the player, and this peculiar semiotic construct distinguishes Spanky-the-character from Spanky-the-avatar. The character requires a player; and the avatar requires *this particular* player.

²⁵ Gee, 28.

²⁶ Gee, 50.

²⁷ *Avatar* is my own term for this construct.

²⁸ Frostling-Henningsson, 558.

²⁹ Gee, 28.

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It is important to stop a moment here and reemphasize that *semiotic domains* are a type of linguistic development. That is, the ability to process these interrelationships between the player and the game involves a physical brain structure. One who is textually literate is unable to refrain from reading the letters that they are literate in. They cannot *not* process. This is not a choice, but rather a result of innate brain schematics. Gee's semiotic domains for gamers appears to be of similar design. A Digital Native fully literate in gaming *will* operate their character as an avatar (a me/not-me, the *projective identity*), developing the character as a character utilizing the game's design grammar (the *virtual identity*), as well as understanding that they are just playing a game (the *real-world identity*). They will do so at the same time, and they will do so as naturally as a textual literate would recognize the letters, sounds, and words on a sign. Further, they will do these things overlaying real-world social networks and operating in cybernetic relationships with them.³⁰

If moral development is in fact a semiotic construct, at least operationally, RPG's may have found an effective methodology for engaging moral development in conjunction with other problem-based learning.

So What: Mind Candy vs. Potential Paradigm

Cotton candy tastes pretty good, and it takes up a lot of space (for a food). As sustenance, it leaves a lot to be desired. Mind candy works the same way, providing a mental rush but little long-term change or value. Gaming seems a very stable cultural presence and the idea that gameplay impacts learning seems clear. Games are motivators and common educational tools. RPG's, however, have their detractors. RPG's can be violent and the entire idea of becoming lost in a virtual world brings a

³⁰ Frostling-Henningsson, 559.

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number of concerns. In order to avoid losing serious implications in a sea of moral panic, refining of these ideas is vital.³¹ Is gamification a fad or a useful pedagogy? I think there are some morsels to chew on in this material. A (very loose) proposed framework for best practices follows, along with some considerations for future research and thought.

First, digital literacies appear to be effective and ubiquitous. The evidence that *all* literacies change brain development, and that this development in turn impacts the construction of future literacies is mounting.³² Information communication technology (ICT) is growing exponentially and the 21st Century Classroom movement is riding the wave. Our world is flat in many ways, and our educational strategies are going to reflect these changes; if only because of the influx of teachers conversant with digital technologies. Digital literacies appear to be a real phenomenon, albeit directly tied to the cultural artifact of ICT prevalence. Video games, the foundation for gamification strategies, are currently tied intimately to this conversation.

Second, digital literacies and new semiotic domains play a role in moral development, especially identity formation. Semiotic domains are identity builders, they are inherent qualities of brain development, and are in cybernetic relationships with other mental, social, and spiritual developmental systems. As an ecology, this system's interaction with the whole cannot be ignored, even if the momentary impact is minor. Additionally here the systematic impact may be as important (or more important) than simple content impact. That is, *how* video games function may be more important for education than the surface content transfer.³³ This is not to say that content filtering is

³¹ Bennett, Sue, et. al. 776.

³² Johnson, Steven. *Everything Bad is Good for You*. New York, N.Y.: Riverhead Books, 2005, 180.

³³ Johnson, 144.

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unimportant. What we read is important, and what we take in deeply affects us.³⁴

However, content evaluation can no longer ignore the literacies and processes which convey them.³⁵ In short, simply telling students “don’t” in response to video games does not work anymore than telling the reader to stop processing text.

If discipleship is analogous to socialization into a Kingdom, understanding digital literacy is analogous to translating Scripture into someone’s heart language. The process involves much more than the simple one-to-one transfer of symbols to sounds. There are some vital images within this view of Digital Natives which may be profound for re-framing our educational and discipleship paradigms. Paul views our world as being in a state of now/not yet, and this image fits well within the hyperreality of video gaming (I’m in the world of Skyrim and on my couch at the same time).³⁶ It is in this connection that I see a lot of room for future practical theological development because here we find a natural cybernetic link between fluencies, and one with potentially deep resonances with Digital Natives. Their understanding of semiotic domains may provide them with a natural framework for understanding the design grammar of the Kingdom of God – the behaviors that produce results in character development and influence choice, which influence future capabilities and choices. Living in the Kingdom is not operating as a character in a *virtual identity* (as if the Kingdom were a fantasy world we hope is real), nor is it solely a *real-world identity* (as if actions in this world were unreal), but rather operates more like a *projective identity* (I exist in the Kingdom now, but not fully yet).

³⁴ Studies connecting video and video game content with behavior are plentiful, and often conflicting. It is my argument here that the *how* may be more important to us than the *what*.

³⁵ Gee, 22.

³⁶ Sampley, J. Paul, *Walking Between the Times: Paul's Moral Reasoning*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1991, 18.

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Third, digital literacy includes some semiotic domains that overlap into other areas of life and must be recognized and incorporated into our discipleship. The *projective identity* (or me/not-me thinking) is most easily seen in the gaming literacy, but Gee suggests this may appear in other areas of digital nativity.³⁷ For instance, social networking identities may operate using a similar literacy structure. My Facebook page could include all three overlapping identities. This would certainly explain the anecdotal observations that some Digital Natives appear unconcerned that their persona on social networking sites reflect attitudes and behaviors they themselves would not necessarily act out in “real life”. If so, the Facebook page becomes an *avatar*, and operates as a semi-independent structure.

Certainly this poses a number of questions concerning online behavior, especially bullying, and raises concerns about Digital Natives’ interactions online with others who may not be operating with that identity. What is certain is that if these are literacies at work, Christian educators cannot simply tell Digital Natives to *stop*. As previously discussed, this would be like telling you to see these letters, but stop reading the words. It simply doesn’t work that way. Instead, we must formulate frameworks for the *avatar* construct to itself be a part of the discipleship process. *Avatars* as a part of Digital Natives must reflect Christlike transformation just like the rest of the Digital Native soul. A curriculum which takes seriously multiple literacies (especially those involved with Digital Natives) has to find ways to deepen problem-solving objectives, include gaming design grammars as pedagogical best practices, and assume avatars as projective identities of our students.

³⁷ Gee, 40.

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Such a curriculum would not ignore issues of content, but would be much more likely to view literacies as systemic agents, and find ways to shift the larger system by using the smaller systems. Content discussion from a *projective identity* viewpoint might focus on how the avatar interacts with other avatars in a way that reflects Christ *within the hyperreality*. That is, an avatar may not perform a behavior because doing so is bad for other players, rather than because it's bad for a character to do that action. The Digital Natives' behavior is not pigeon-holed by content alone, but assumes a larger set of identities, and the interaction between those identities becomes the focus.

Gamification as Cultural Brokerage

Shaping this kind of a curriculum requires cultural brokerage, not only on the part of the educators but also the students. Cultural brokerage is an anthropological concept that has spread into a variety of fields including education. Cultural brokerage suggests that individuals who regularly function between cultures (or appropriately strong sub-cultures) demonstrate greater speed and innovation in problem-solving³⁸. Crossing these borders and can range from difficult to impenetrable, and students may need help crossing³⁹. This is easy to see in technological education⁴⁰. A similar call should go out to Christian educators.

Digital Nativity can be seen as a culture existing alongside (or within) that of the Digital Immigrant, with RPG gaming as a strong subculture of Digital Nativity. The border between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants might be more easily crossed with the help of cultural brokers, and Gamification offers a path to that. Educators can stand in

³⁸ Michie, 3.

³⁹ Phelan, et al, 246.

⁴⁰ Pagnucci, 49.

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an intermediary position as brokers rather than simply translators. In creating an educational culture and curriculum, teachers can become cultural mediators by enabling problem-solving that ease border crossing between linguistic barriers. Such border crossing creates a type of *fringe thinking*. Fringe thinking occurs when the cultural broker must problem-solve in the borderland between two linguistics. The task of borrowing from both linguistic cultures to create metaphor and connection demands a high degree of innovation and a growing understanding of the two semiotic domains. Gamification moves this a step farther, drawing students themselves into cultural brokerage and fringe thinking. The identity interplay and engagement of avatar-thinking lends itself of cultural brokerage.

An Ongoing Experiment in Gamification

Two courses in KCU's Youth and Family Ministry emphasis have experimented in gamification: CMY 314: Creative Bible Teaching and CMY 331: Introduction to Youth Ministry. CMY 314 was the first, and involved gamification of a portion of the syllabus. CMY 331 is currently running in gamified form.⁴¹

CMY 314 & the Reading Application Game

CMY 314: Creative Bible Teaching is a course required for the Youth and Family Ministry emphasis of the Bible and Ministry major at KCU. The syllabus for the course includes a number of reading assignments and lectures on the nature of creativity, cultural media subversion, and innovation in problem solving. The Reading Application Game measured student success for the reading assignments⁴². Students began the semester as a Level 0 RAG player. A variety of options were presented for students to

⁴¹ This is as of 9/1/2015.

⁴² Appendix I

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earn Experience Points (XP). Each XP translated directly to one point of the overall course grade. 60 XP were required to level up. XP opportunities were called Quests and could be completed in any order. However, some quests had due dates and were not be available after that time. Students were encouraged to choose wisely. Proper prioritization of time was essential.

As students leveled up the opportunity for interesting decisions increased. Each level had Attributes which were granted to a player automatically when they leveled up. In addition leveled players had access to Perks, purchased when a student leveled up. Each level gave a student access to one appropriate Perk of the student's choice. Some Perks required other Perks to unlock.

Three things became readily apparent as the semester progressed:

- I. Gamification greatly changes administration flow. Grinding (lots of low-level assignments) makes grading a nightmare. In addition the XP bookkeeping must be integrated to work well.
- II. Gamification greatly increased students' motivation to frontload work (at least in this course). Students in my courses have always been able to turn in reading assignments early. RAG students did a large number of assignments early. One student completed the readings (and did very well) in the first three weeks.
- III. Gamification has an interesting decision threshold. Too many options are a possibility, and will likely require a number of iterations to perfect. This isn't surprising given the amount of time an RPG spends in beta-testing.

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- IV. Gamification works best with deep integration. A game layered over other course structure isn't as involving over time. In the future the entire course should become the game.

The RAG was a raging success in terms of student motivation. The game motivated in surprising ways and encouraged strategic planning and time management as a part of the assignment itself. Students were able to reflect on these strategic practices and connect them to the interesting decisions and perceived rewards. Although XP was directly correlated to the grade itself it was *perceived* as a separate commodity and pursued not only for the success it could provide in the course but for the options it unlocked per level and in the Perks Tree.

CMY 331: Intro to Youth Ministry as a Game

A more fully developed gamification strategy was put into effect for CMY 331 Introduction to Youth Ministry⁴³. The new game was simplified overall, but more deeply integrated. In this version students earn XP (grade points) and AP (Advancement Points)⁴⁴. XP and AP combine to grant levels, and levels add badges and achievements. All required Quests grant XP. AP is given in two ways: by students engaging in learning behaviors I wish to promote and reward, and by students completing optional Side Quests. AP can be spent on Perks and Items. Perks are permanent (the student can have food and drink in the class) while Items must be re-bought after use (students can extend the deadline for an assignment).

Students work to purchase items that change their learning experience. AP is currently offered most heavily through Side Quests, which operate like grinds. For

⁴³ At the time of this writing CMY 331 is underway.

⁴⁴ Appendix II.

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example, students are given a small number of AP for completing concept maps of chapters not assigned for credit. This includes chapters from the optional reading or bibliography. I also give AP for concept maps from other courses when that material connects sufficiently to the current course. In this way students are rewarded for doing extra work by gaining the ability to impact future Quests.

These kinds of strategic problem-solving directly places the students in avatar-identity mode. It is hoped that in doing so students will become more invested learners. Proper evaluation of these gamification techniques will not be available for some time.

Video games, especially RPG's, present interesting insights and challenges for contemporary educators. The elements of choice, as-needed learning, grinding for mastery, and self-direction have always been tools in the teacher's toolbox.

Gamification is not a magic wand, nor is it simply placebo. Instead it's a particular skill with its own perk tree, one of many available to teachers. For Christian education it adds perhaps another layer in giving students an opportunity to analyze the mechanics behind video games. This methodology is certainly risky, but it can also be said that all the best things are.

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Appendix I: CMY 314: Creative Bible Teaching

Reading Application Game (RAG) – 300(?)

- Please note that this course will move forward assuming you are reading both books in their entirety.
- Here's how this works:
 - **You are a Level 0 RAG player.** There are 5 possible levels.
 - Leveling up comes from earning Experience Points (XP). Each XP translates directly to **one point in your course grade**. 60 XP are required to level up.
 - XP are earned by completing Quests. Quests may be completed **in any order**. However, some quests have **due dates** and will not be available after that time. Choose wisely. Proper prioritization of time is essential.
 - Each level has Attributes. Attributes are added to a player automatically when they level up.
 - Leveled players have access to Perks. Perks are purchased when a student levels up. Each level gives a student access to one appropriate Perk of the student's choice. Some Perks require other Perks to unlock. Please refer to the Perk Tree.
- Level 0: 0 XP
 - Attributes: May attend class; has **no unexcused absences**. May access the syllabus & Sakai. May contact the professor concerning coursework.
- Level 1: 60 XP
 - Level 0 Attributes plus: **1 unexcused absence**.
 - Access to STUFF 2.
 - Unlocks cell phones in class.
 - Unlocks Twitter
 - Unlocks **Concept Map 1 & 2**.
 - Unlocks **Documentaries**
- Level 2: 120 XP
 - Level 1 Attributes plus: **2 unexcused absences**. Access to STUFF 3.
 - Unlocks Group Placement
 - Unlocks seat choice in class
 - Unlocks food/drink in class
- Level 3: 180 XP
 - Level 2 Attributes plus: **3 unexcused absences**. Access to STUFF 4.
 - Unlocks Group Project Assignment
- Level 4: 240 XP
 - Level 3 Attributes plus: **5 unexcused absences**. Access to STUFF 5.
- Level 5: 300+ XP
 - Level 4 Attributes plus: **7 unexcused absences**.
 - Unlocks Extra Credit
 - Unlocks

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RAG QUESTS: XP granted will reflect the grade. That is, a grade of 88 is 88 XP. Remember, you can choose which of these to do, and you may do as many as you like. Some quests are repeatable, meaning they may be resubmitted for more points.

- **Concept Map 1: 100 XP (Requires Level 1) - *Everything Bad is Good for You*.** You are to construct a concept map of the first part of this book. Concept maps are not always easy, so expect to put some time into this. Each concept map will cover one part of the book (there are two, so this works out well). These concept maps should:
 - address *all* significant concepts address by the author
 - connect to each other
 - reflect your processing of the author's information
- **Concept Map 2: 100 XP (Requires Level 1) - *Everything Bad is Good for You*.** You are to construct a concept map of the second part of this book. Concept maps are not always easy, so expect to put some time into this. Each concept map will cover one part of the book (there are two, so this works out well). These concept maps should:
 - address *all* significant concepts address by the author
 - connect to each other
 - reflect your processing of the author's information
- **EBIGFY Documentary – 100 XP (Requires Level 1):** You are to create a 10-12 minute documentary explaining EBIGFY. A quality documentary:
 - Includes interviews with individuals using material from the text
 - Includes a critical review, especially from experts
 - Cites sources
 - Is visually appealing
- **ITACT Documentary – 100 XP (Requires Level 1):** You are to create a 10-12 minute documentary explaining ITACT. A quality documentary:
 - Includes interviews with individuals using material from the text
 - Includes a critical review, especially from experts
 - Cites sources
 - Is visually appealing
- **Creativity/Innovation Documentary – 100 XP (Requires Level 1):** You are to create a 10-12 minute documentary exploring a particularly creative or innovative approach to education. **This quest must be approved early.**
 - Quality documentary criteria apply
- **Applied Creativity Interviews: 30 XP each:** You are to interview 1 educator utilizing specific creative techniques. Interview questions must be approved before attempting this quest.
- **Chapter Summaries – 10 XP each:** *Introduction to Applied Creative Thinking.* You are to write a 250 word summary of a chapter in ITACT.
- **Applied Creative Thinking Experiments – 10 XP each:** ITACT – you are to construct an experiment using 1 of the Basic Creative Strategies from ITACT in a *real world educational setting*. You are to turn in a cover page following the format provided (see Resources on Sakai).
- **Twitter/Social Media: 10 XP per week:** You are to tweet 4 times per week to qualify. At least 1 tweet per week must be considered *thick*.

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Perk Tree: Leveling up grants students a Perk. Perks can be purchased at any time. A

student may bank Perks to purchase at a later date. Perks may have prerequisites.

Extra Time:

1. Extra STUFF time
2. Extra Assignment Time
3. Extra Skip
4. Choose STUFF time
5. Choose Group time

Extra Points:

1. Extra STUFF points - 10
2. Extra Group points - 10
3. Extra Course points - 10
4. Extra Course points – 20
5. Extra Course points -

Class Presence (these are first come, first serve):

- Hat of Destiny
- WWE Announcer
- Throne
- Peerage Title (Lady or Lord)
- LEGOS in class
- Play-Do in class

Tasty:

1. Small snack per week
2. Large snack per week
3. Home cooked desert
4. Beverage per week
5. Dinner

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Appendix II:

CMY 331 Introduction to Youth Ministry

The Game

You are now a Level 0 YM Students. The goal of this course is for you to advance to *at least* Level 6, which is the minimum Level you must achieve to pass the course with a C.

Almost everything you do in this course will give you the ability to level up. Leveling up happens at the end of each Act (a unit of the course). Student levels are determined by their total Experience Points (XP) plus their Advancement Points (AP). XP is earned by completing Quests. Every grade point you earn is an XP.

Students can also earn Advancement Points (AP). AP earned are added to a student's XP total. However, AP can be spent separately to buy Items and Perks. Items and Perks are described below. Spending AP does **not** lower your total XP.

Your Level does NOT determine your grade. Grades are determined by XP alone.

There are *at least* three types of Quests:

- Quests – assigned tasks that must be completed to attempt Epic Quests. Quests earn both XP and AP.
- Epic Quests – assigned tasks that are Epic! These are major sources for XP and AP.
- Guild Quests – assigned tasks for your guild. Guild quests must be done together. Guild Quests earn both XP and AP.
- Epic Guild Quests – assigned tasks for your guild that are Epic! Epic Guild Quests must be done together. Epic guild quests earn both XP and AP.
- Side Quests – optional tasks that provide AP but not XP. Side Quests enable you to up your level and provide extra AP for spending on Items and Perks. Side Quests may be Solo or Guild. Side Quests may be added (or removed) at any time.

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Quests

The Quest for Lore – 100 XP

You are to construct 1 concept map for five (5) selected chapters of the course textbook. Concept maps are not always easy, so expect to put some time into this. Each concept map will cover one chapter of the book. These concept maps should:

- address *all* significant concepts address by the author
- reflect your processing of the author's information
- follow the standard concept map structure outlined in the concept map rubric

Concept maps cannot be made up. Concept maps are due on the first day of the week they are assigned. Concepts are to be constructed using bubbl.us, an online mind-mapping site. They are to be turned in **as a .jpeg via the Assignments Tool on Sakai.**

Every week two students will present their concept maps to the class. Students should be prepared to reproduce and explain their concept maps in class, as well as participate in discussing other students' work.

We will go over concept maps in class.

The Quest for Shared Experience– 100 XP

Your participation in this class is indispensable. I am of the conviction that true education takes place in the intangible interaction between teacher and students. The beginning of this process involves you *showing up*. This is more than sitting in the classroom – a student who sleeps, reads, plays computer games, or any other activity that is not related to class, that student will be counted absent. **Cell phones should be silenced for class.** I reserve the right to answer anyone's cell phone during class. Second offenses will result in the student being counted absent and losing points for that day.

In every class, students distinguish themselves by volunteering to ask and answer questions and participate in class discussions. If your future includes ministry to others, you will become a leader of some type; therefore, you need to become an active participant and leader in class discussions. **I will reserve the right to give students extra points at the end of the semester if they strengthen and enhance classroom interactions through their contributions.** Do not misinterpret strong participation as someone trying to impress the instructor or someone trying to get "brownie points." Good

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common sense dictates that you should have an interest in your future career and are willing to share your opinions through discourse. Also, remember that you are going to be in ministry, professionally or otherwise, and this involves a certain amount of risk-taking.

The Quest for Status: 100 XP

A portion of your grade will involve ongoing Twitter posts concerning the reading and class discussion. **Students are expected to post at least twice a week.** Here is a short FAQ for tweeting in this course:

- Three reasons we tweet:
 - to post news and share resources relevant to the class;
 - to ask questions and respond with clarifications about the readings; and
 - to write sarcastic, irreverent comments about the readings or my teaching.
- Three types of course tweets:
 - Responses to readings/coursework that takes place outside class
 - Responses to things taking place *in class* (what we call the backchannel).
 - Observations out in the “real world” that connect to class material (observational stuff).
- Three qualities of tweets:
 - Useless – comments about the room temperature, or how ugly the cover of the book is. Likewise comments about my goatee length.
 - Thin – comments that only convey one layer of information
 - Thick – comments that convey multiple layers of information, and (ideally) connect to other resources (video, blogs, etc.).

Epic Quest of Mastery – 200 XP

Two tests will be given during the course of the semester. The tests are valued at 100 points each. The first test is designed to test students over the class lectures and discussions. The second test is designed to measure student mastery of *crisis response* and *risk management*.

Make-up tests are only given in the case of substantiated emergencies:

illness (note from physician required), family emergency, or official university business (note is required). Students **MUST** contact the instructor before the test is given.

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The student must take the make-up test within a week of the original test date. **I have specific make-up hours. Make-ups MUST be taken during those times.**

Epic Quest for Lore – 200 XP

There will be one **paper** for the course. This is a position paper; it should be at least 2500 words with 5-10 scholarly sources (this is *in addition* to Scripture!) sources. Students may choose from the following two topics:

- The Appropriate Age Of Baptism: A Practical Theology
- The Appropriate Age Of Elders And Deacons: A Practical Theology

This paper is to be turned in via the Assignments tool on Sakai.

Guild Quests

Epic Guild Quest: The Quest for Mastery – 400 XP

There will also be one **Epic Guild Quest** for the course. This will involve interpreting the material in another media for presentation. You are to research a particular youth ministry and make a 10-15 minute presentation of their practical theology, philosophy of ministry, ministry model, and interviews. Your presentation should include:

- Their approach to practical theology
- Their MVVG
- Their ministry model (ministry *to* youth, *for* youth, or *through* youth)
- YMM 2.0 score card
- Ministry culture
- “Stickyness”

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ALL ministries must be observed in person by all members of the Guild.

Your group will turn in a Ministry Contact Covenant (one per group) and Interview Contact Covenants (1 per interview). I will be in contact with your ministry to confirm your observations and interviews. **Epic Guild Assignments without a Contact Covenant will not be accepted.**

Each project must include:

- a Pecha Kucha overview of your chosen ministry and your research strategy.
- a “score card” evaluating the ministry according to practical concerns outlined in *Youth Ministry Management Tools 2.0*: Parts 3 – 5.
 - Organization
 - Plans & Programs
 - Teams
- a 10-15 minute multimedia presentation outlining what you discovered in your research. The multimedia must include visuals (photographs, graphics, charts) and points (words) to support your presentation. The presentation will be evaluated for your ability to communicate information in a creative, user-friendly manner.
- a 4000 word critique to accompany the presentation
- Your group will conduct the following interviews as part of your project. **Every group member must do at least 2 interviews.**
 - Interview 10 teens of various ages: 3 teens between 12-14
 - 4 teens between 15-16
 - 3 teens between 17-19 (**limit 1 KCU student**)
 - evenly split between male and female
 - Interview 6 volunteers of various ages (**limit 1 KCU student**):
 - 2 volunteers between 19-30
 - 2 volunteers between 31-45
 - 3 teens 46+
 - Interview *all* key youth ministry staff
- **ALL interviews must be done in person. This means no phone or email interviews** (Skype works, however).
- No personal relatives may be interviewed.
- **You will turn in a Contact Covenant for each interview. I will be in contact with your interviewees or their guardians to confirm your interview. Interviews without a Contact Covenant will not be accepted.**

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- Your interview should consist of **at least 20 questions**, 10 of which have been provide below:
 1. What is your greatest pressure or stress, as a teen? Why?
 2. How would you grade your spiritual life (A-B-C-D-F)? Why?
 3. Who are your favorite music groups?
 4. What's do you look for in your friends? What makes a good friend?
 5. How much time do you spend online? Doing what?
 6. What's your favorite TV show? Why?
 7. What's your favorite video game? Why?
 8. Do you believe in God? Why?
 9. If you could ask God one question and be guaranteed an immediate answer, what would it be?
 10. Do you have a role model (other than Jesus)? Who are you trying to be like?
- Interview responses must be typed in the following format:

Who are your favorite music groups?
Korn, Creed, Metallica....stuff like that.

What's your favorite video game?
CoD: Modern Warfare.

Why?
'cause it rocks.
- Each interview should be followed with a short verbatim. A verbatim is a brief summary of the interview with comments concerning the interviewer's observations. An exemplar is available on Sakai of an acceptable interview project.

Other details:

- You may choose almost any ministry you want, with the following guidelines:
 - You may not evaluate ministries staffed by CMY 331 classmates. This means *any* youth ministry which employs current CMY 331 class members (including volunteers). In other words, if you volunteer at First Church, then First Church is *not* a viable ministry for evaluation.
 - your evaluation **MUST** include in-person observations **by the entire group**.
- Presentation days and groups will be assigned shortly after the class begins.
- The Epic Guild Quest will be graded accordingly:

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- The **Guild Grade** will be given to the group. This will consist of 0-100 points.
 - The **Individual Grade** will be assigned **by the guild members**. The group will receive the Guild Grade *3 points, and must divide these points among themselves. Guilds which cannot resolve a distribution will receive a zero for this portion of the grade.

The final grade for each student will be the average of the Group and Individual grades.

Side Quests

Side quests are your opportunity to earn AP. AP does **not** affect your grade for the course, but it does help you Level up, earn achievements, and can be spent on Perks. Side Quests may or may not be repeatable.

Side Quest	AP
Free Play – Students pursue an independent research project on an approved topic. The size and difficulty of the Free Play determine the AP value. This Side Quest is repeatable.	10, 25, 50
LoreMaps – LoreMaps are concept maps for chapters not required for XP. LoreMaps can even be done for readings other than the texts assigned in the course, pending approval. This side quest is repeatable	25
Deeper Lore – Deeper Lore Side Quests are writing assignments. Students seeking out Deeper Lore assignments will be given a collection of terms taken from the reading. The student will then compose a “meaningful paragraph”. This side quest is repeatable	25
Seek the Loremaster – Seek the Loremaster is an interview assignment. Students seeking out Loremaster quests will be given a number of Loremasters they may approach and interview. This side quest is repeatable.	50
Master of Time – To complete the Master of Time Side Quest students will complete a course-long calendar that includes all Quests, Epic Quests, Guild Quests, and Epic Guild Quest due dates along with priority benchmarks.	50
Advice of the Ancient – To complete the Advice of the Ancient Side Quest students will turn in a draft of their Epic Quest for Lore to be revised	25
Guild Advice of the Ancient – To complete the Guild Advice of the Ancient students will turn in a draft of their Epic Guild Quest materials to be revised.	25