EPIC: PLAYING TO BECOME

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to Dr. Matthew Brown to whom I owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude that I can never repay or even express. There are only a handful of people we meet in this life who so drastically alter the trajectory of our experience. You helped me realize not only what I wanted to do with the rest of my life but also why I wanted to do it and nothing that I learned or accomplished in these last three years would have been possible without your help. Looking back at the cavalier kid I was three years ago makes it seem all the more fitting that I dedicate a thesis about learning via the making of a compatible identity to you.

Thank you for believing in me when nobody else did.

Not even me.

I'll never forget it.

~
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v
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In 2014 CSU Chico decided to use game-based learning principles to redesign Early Start into something that didn’t feel or look like remediation. Students, not their teachers or the institution’s curriculum, would be the center of this course. Using predominant theorists in the field of game studies, Chico designed an Early Start that would focus on helping students learn how to learn, participate, and be in the University as well as its environs. The new Early Start, named EPIC, was built with kinesthetic structures that stress the concept of learning-by-doing. Constructivism calls this concept legitimate peripheral participation while gaming studies refers to it as embodied learning. But both entail a performative experiential approach where the learner gradually internalizes the practices needed to become a more capable participant. It is in this way that good learning, according to the field of game studies, requires the making of goals stemming from an ongoing construction of a more capable identity. Unfortunately the effect of traditional remediation like Early Start is typically the exact opposite: students become so
put off at being labeled remedial that they lose all confidence to perform or internalize the activities of remediation. And if they can’t perform or participate, and already feel the opposite of confident, how is that they are to be remedied in remedial programs?

Game based structures bear a striking resemblance to Vygotsky’s theories of play, learning, and development. Vygotsky’s sociocultural methodology emphasizes social relations specifically between learners and more capable peers as a means to produce genuine learning rather than information regurgitated on an exam. Games don’t cultivate knowledge prepended for a test but an identity conducive to producing more expert participation in a specific context. This study explores the results of this game-based course, its curriculum, and the engagement we saw from the students within the program as they started to take on the identity of college learners.
In 1994, the CSU became increasingly worried by the high percentage of incoming freshmen needing remediation in math and English. This number was already over 50% and increased an additional 10% by 1996, prompting the Trustees to set a goal: 90% of incoming freshmen would be ready for college-level courses by 2007. In 2004, the Trustees created the Early Assessment Program that would enjoin college standards into high school standardized testing to provide students with early signals about their readiness for college-level English. But by 2007 only 16% of the 342,348 students who took this test were deemed “ready for college” (Early Assessment Program). During this time, CSU campuses pursued a variety of other approaches to address college readiness such as Summer Bridge, one-year stretch models, and summer bootcamps. In October 2008, the CSU convened a system-wide conference to study these different approaches and ultimately make a mandate to address remediation on a broad spectrum. The resulting policy was heavily influenced by a mandatory pre-registration program that San Diego State University piloted in summer 2009 to prepare incoming freshmen for college writing. San Diego State called the program Early Start.

In March 2010, Chancellor Reed signed Executive Order 1048 thereby mandating a system-wide Early Start requirement for students with deficient scores on the English Placement Test. This Early Start program would charge students $182 per
unit\textsuperscript{1} to be remediated in English or math as a prerequisite to enrolling in their fall classes. One month later the CSU English Council\textsuperscript{2} submitted a statement voicing their strong opposition to this ill-conceived, however well-intentioned, program that they described as an indefensible use of the EPT, which was designed to place students into the most appropriate CSU writing course, not as a punitive and discriminatory admissions test (“CSU English Council”; Price). Based on their concerns the council recommended that all CSU campuses refuse to implement the program. This report was ignored and the two-phase implementation plan began. In the first phase, all admitted freshmen who scored in the bottom quarter of the English Placement Test would be enrolled in Early Start. By year three, all students scoring below 147 on the English Placement Test were required to complete Early Start in the summer before their fall enrollment.

Despite employing several English faculty who had helped write the CSU English Council’s statement against Early Start, Cal State Chico piloted three online Early Start courses in the summer of 2012. Chico’s online Early Start had students read an article, take a survey about their reading and writing habits, write and revise a long essay, and complete a Directed Self Placement\textsuperscript{3} to decide if they would be placed in a writing workshop adjunct to their academic writing class. In 2012 130 freshmen enrolled in Chico’s Early Start program followed by 98 more in 2013 (“CSU, Chico Continuing”).

\textsuperscript{1} Most campuses offered a one-unit online option but others also offered a three-unit in-person option

\textsuperscript{2} A team of English faculty from all 23 CSU campuses

\textsuperscript{3} DSP is a placement method that provides students with information and advice about their placement options (the “directed” part of DSP) and places the ultimate decision in the students’ hands (the “self-placement” part of DSP). By allowing students to make their own placement decisions, they gain responsibility over their educational pathways.
The second phase began in the summer of 2014 and required all incoming freshmen who scored below 147 on the English Placement Test to Early Start. The implementation of this second phase meant 401 more students than they had the previous year, which provided an opportunity to rethink the structure of Early Start, how it could be modified to support larger numbers, and how the learning environment could be improved. Chico’s composition faculty has overseen the design of several programs that forward effective learning within a large class. Of particular interest is Summer Bridge and the Jumbo sized Academic Writing classroom. Summer Bridge contains between 100-200 students while the Jumbo can hold 90-100 students.

Though these classes are quite large, very little time is spent interacting as a whole. Instead the students become accustomed to working in smaller break-out groups of ten with each other and student mentors. Over time these niches become examples of Grego’s and Thompson’s third spaces. Not all students are comfortable speaking in class, especially one so large. So the mentors serve as a resource that students can utilize rather than vying for the instructors’ attention amidst a sea of 100. These third spaces do not exist only inside the larger class. Once a week each mentor meets for two hours with only their small group of ten in a separate place to do the work of the course. In these configurations the mentor is a near peer who works closely with each student at their point of need. In congruence with Kurt Squire’s explanation of play-based learning as the free movement within a more rigid structure, these workshop spaces work in a separated unison to accomplish the same goal in different ways depending on the mentor. By

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4 Grego and Thompson’s studio model (or workshop) “where activities of production are undertaken individually but in a place where others are working and discussing their work simultaneously” was derived from Edward Soja’s study of human geography analyzing the human experience via a more critical spatial awareness (Grego et al. 7).
creating a studio model the design of these courses also demonstrate what Jane McGonigal calls epic structures. Epic structures create effective learning habitats by having students work together within a certain set of constraints to establish goals and increase each other’s performance through the giving and receiving of feedback from each other, their mentor, and the instructor (Jaxon et al.). The architect of these designs was Chico State alumni Dr. Kim Jaxon. After successfully piloting the Jumbo model in 2009, Dr. Jaxon began to question many of the axiomatic assumptions about class size. Results from Summer Bridge and the Jumbo indicated the efficacy of learning relies on the means of participation and interaction which are afforded by the configuration of the environment rather than the size of that environment (Jaxon et al.).

The studio model and game-based epic structures are both derived from Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning that stresses the importance of interaction and collaboration to create learning. For Vygotsky learners should always work with more capable peers who can provide learners with feedback. When combined with Lave and Wenger’s theory of situated learning and Legitimate Peripheral Participation these structures bring newcomers into an existing community of practice and gives rise to an effective culture of inquiry and expertise -- or what McGonigal calls gameful learning. Learning that is gameful must place the learner not the instructor at the center in the hopes of imbuing learners with the spirit of a gamer: someone who is optimistic, curious, motivated, and always up for a challenge. Both the Jumbo and Chico’s Summer Bridge mirror this by spending very little time with the instructors as the central focus. Instead the majority of the time is spent with students doing something. Based on the success of
the Jumbo that boasts a pass rate between 93 and 98% since its creation, Dr. Jaxon began working on a way to make Early Start into a gameful experience.

Using her spring 2014 English 431\textsuperscript{5} students, Dr. Jaxon began to redesign Early Start into an augmented reality game that would bring incoming freshmen into Chico’s community of practice. Jaxon and her students designed quests that students would complete as the work of the course. These quests were created based on common freshmen confusions, things upperclassmen wished they had known as freshmen, and interviews conducted with second-semester freshmen. The design of EPIC was completed just in time to be piloted during the summer of 2014. That summer would offer three sections of Early Start: the first two would be the online-only version while the final section would test drive EPIC.\textsuperscript{6} Together these sections would be more than capable of assisting the 500 incoming freshmen to complete their Early Start requirement.

This thesis investigates the results of EPIC, the data collected on the online Facebook page and student interviews, and discusses what it means to run a game-based or gameful course. As an environment that must be unequivocally student focused the learning, at a cursory glance, would seem to be absent but is in fact invisible due to its dependency on the learners cultivation of a specific identity that is better suited for a specific purpose. Using Jane McGonigal’s theories that create a context for epic or gameful participation and James Gee’s principles for good games and effective learning, I will evaluate the ontological nature of EPIC via the aspects that encouraged the construction of identity. By doing this I hope to identify the key factors that provide an

\textsuperscript{5} An upper division English class dedicated to training future writing mentors. The course typically consists of less than 20 students.

\textsuperscript{6} The complete narrative of EPIC’s creation can be found under the first subheading of the methods chapter.
effective impetus for identity work and analyze the ways that participants interacted with those factors so that they may be replicated in future iterations of the program and potentially other educational paradigms. The potential efficacy of EPIC will hopefully issue a cry for different forms of learning as well as more effective forms of remediation in the academy.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

When we say learning, we think of the process of acquiring a skill or capability. But learning is also the process of becoming someone who can utilize that skill. California State University’s Early Start program was intended to be a space where students who were deemed under proficient would be placed to receive instruction in language and writing so as to remediate them prior to college. The CSU’s mandated practicum was not at all central in EPIC. For starters, unlike the online Early Start, there were no essays or revisions -- things that would seem crucial to a writing course. Instead, there were quests that encouraged exploration and discovery, and thus learning. As students explored the campus and its practices they were exposed to facets of what it is like to be a college student. This program had multiple goals: to test the efficacy of game design theories, to co-opt and subvert “remedial”\(^1\) work, to build a bridge into the university for incoming freshmen, to increase graduation rates for remedial students, and to gauge what students anticipated or worried about concerning college. To answer all of these conclusively would require data that does not yet exist. So for the purposes of this thesis, I would like to address the ways that the Facebook page and the quests, facilitated the necessary identity work needed to become a college student. In so doing, this project

\(^1\) I hesitate to use this term because of the heavy stigmatized connotation it has come to carry. Hence my use of scare quotes. To me remedial should mean something different than it does, and the term itself will likely need to be retired rather than rescued.
will demonstrate the ways that game design principles mesh with sociocultural and constructivist pedagogy to produce learning via the construction of an identity. This lit review will draw on sources from different disciplines to outline the process of building a new identity that produces learning as well as discuss how that learning differs methodologically from typical academic practices. This scholarship will hopefully highlight the drastic lack of nuance between what is now called gameful learning and what has been called sociocultural learning since the dawn of the 19th century. With the idea that game-based curricula is not a passing fad but is couched in developmental and kinesthetic praxis, hopefully this lit review and overall study will demystify game studies and precipitate an ethical paradigm shift in terms of remediation. As it stands remediation, in student eyes, denotes punishment not a learning opportunity and as a result the well-intentioned aims fall by the wayside. Perhaps making this work more gameful will yield better results or at least better perceptions.

In their pivotal work, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger describe what they call a community of practice (COP) where learning becomes an “integral part of generative social practice” specifically located in the social world (36). Within a community of practice participants achieve insider status by gradually moving towards fuller and more informed participation. Thus social activities produce learning. When learners participate in a community of practice, they are exposed to practices that they must observe and replicate. The workings of this COP are derived from *Mind in Society* in which Vygotsky, Cole, and John-Steiner describes the zone of proximal development as the measure “between problem solving abilities exhibited by a learner working alone and that learner’s problem-solving abilities
when assisted by or collaborating with more-experienced people… [who aid the learner in developing learning processes that] …have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state” (48, 86). Vygotsky, Cole, and John-Steiner contend that learners can attempt to imitate these embryonic functions with the help of a more capable peer, without a clear understanding of the practices themselves. This imitation, say Vygotsky, Cole, and John-Steiner, eventually leads to the internalization of that practice by the learner, which lays the groundwork for better or more complex participation (88). As the learner begins to internalize more things, the more-capable-other must then provide the learner with models of acceptable participation and feedback on the learner’s current participation.

James Gee also underlines the necessity of feedback in learning, recreational or otherwise. In What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy, Gee describes the amplification of input principle: “When systems operate according to this principle, they give, for a little input, a lot of output” (60). Gee argues that many facets of effective learning are baked into good games and the giving of feedback to players/learners is essential for the learner to take on the identity of a participant/player who knows how to be in that context. Like Lave and Wenger, Gee explains that effective learning is participatory and exists within a “social group that helps learners understand and make sense of their experiences in certain ways. It helps them understand the nature and purpose of the goals, interpretations, practices, explanations, debriefing, and feedback that are integral to learning” (Salen 23). This social group that Gee refers to is analogous to Lave and Wenger’s community of practice that also relies on the performativity of its participants to produce learning and identity. Gee calls this
embodied learning, or learning that requires the use or movement of the whole self, while Lave and Wenger refer to it as legitimate peripheral participation (LPP). Like Gee who says learning happens within a social context, Lave and Wenger propose LPP as a “descriptor of engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent” of all activities (35).

Not only is feedback necessary for more legitimate forms of participation but it also assists in the identity construction or what Gee calls a Discourse [sic]. In “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: What is Literacy” Gee defines a Discourse as something that functions as a sort of “identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (Gee, “Literacy, Discourse” 526). Since people joining a new community “must say or write the right thing in the right way while playing the right social role and (appearing) to hold the right values, beliefs, and attitudes” all play a part in helping the participant take up the role of how to be an insider within that Discourse (Gee, “Literacy, Discourse” 526). Discourses are ways of being in the world that constitutes everything from one's words and attitudes to minute things such as “gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes” thus as participants become more fluent participants, they acquire more aspects and aesthetics that signify that they subscribe to or possess that particular Discourse (Gee, “Literacy, Discourse” 526).

Through our socialization early in life with family or close peer groups one comes to acquire at least one primary Discourse which “constitutes our original and home-based sense of identity, and, I believe, it can be seen whenever we are interacting with ‘intimates’ in totally casual (unmonitored) social interaction” (Gee, “Literacy,
Discourses acquired later are secondary Discourses that come as a result of interactions “with various non-home-based social institutions-- institutions in the public sphere, beyond the immediate kin and peer group [such as] … local stores and churches, schools, community groups, state, and national businesses, agencies and organizations, and so forth” (Gee, “Literacy, Discourse” 527). As with the primary Discourse a person’s Secondary Discourses are acquired through apprenticeship or exposure to the Discourse within these unfamiliar semiotic domains, which leads to the steady enculturation of the learner into the ways of being within that Discourse. But as Vygotsky, Lave, and Wenger argue, the knowledge of how to be cannot be taught or overtly given but must be acquired through imitation, replication, and feedback.

The fact that newcomers learn by experimenting and receiving feedback from a more experienced other demonstrates the importance of the social element in learning and identity construction. The field of distributed cognition forwards this idea. In “Practices of Distributed Intelligence and Designs of Education” Salomon, Pea, and Seely Brown contends that anyone who has closely observed the practices of cognition is struck by the fact that “the ‘mind’ rarely works alone” (48). Instead, he argues that we regularly draw on the resources within our environment including other people. This notion that “knowledge is commonly socially constructed through collaborative efforts towards shared objectives or by dialogues and challenges” again returns to the Vygotskian ideology that learning should be collaborative so as to further development rather than remaining so solipsistic (Salomon, Pea, and Seely Brown 48). This assertion forwards the idea of people as tools or resources, which Vygotsky says can mediate the activity and “serve as the conductor of human influence on the object of activity” that
will ultimately provide an easement to the learner (Vygotsky, Cole, and John-Steiner 56).

More importantly these tools and resources exist all around us in our environment.

Genuine learning is acquired through participation, which “dissolves dichotomies between cerebral and embodied activity, between contemplation and involvement, between abstraction and experience: persons, actions, and the world are implicated in all thought, speech, knowing, and learning” (Lave and Wenger 52).

Learning is ubiquitous since participation whether mental or physical foments learning and the identity which that learning encourages. Learning through empirical experience is what Gee calls embodied learning and is built into movements, bodies, and unconscious ways of thinking through repeated practice and again carries forward the need for participation to create learning and the identity of one as a learner or practitioner (What Video Games 108). Like Lave and Wenger who claim that “learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world,” Gee and Vygotsky, Cole, and John-Steiner emphasize the participatory and embodied nature of good learning (Lave and Wenger 35). But this participation and the learning it entails must be optional, says McGonigal and Gee, which highlights the crucial importance of choice and agency.

Player choices have a reflexive relation with the agent making them and connects to the kind of identity work games recruit: there exists our real life identity as “a nonvirtual person playing a computer game”; our virtual identity “as a virtual character in [a] virtual world”; and finally what Gee calls the projective identity, which plays on two senses of the word ‘project,’ meaning both to ‘project one’s values and desires onto the virtual character’ … and ‘seeing the virtual character as one’s own project in the making, a creature whom I imbue with a certain trajectory through time defined by my aspirations for what I want the character to be and become. (What Video Games 50)
In “Becoming a Hurdler: How Learning Settings Afford Identities,” Nasir and Cooks describe the ways and means by which learner identities are constructed based on the resources available and the intended trajectory of the learner. The authors say that “identity is constructed at the intersection of the individual and the social world… [and] that identity is simultaneously an individual, social, and cultural phenomenon” but that it also develops in relation to key circumstances such as trajectories and ideational, material, and relational resources (42). Nasir and Cook define learning as a shift in the use of artifacts and identity as the participation in a practice revealing an integral part of the self. They coined the term practice-linked identities -- a term that affords the ability to further discuss the relation between learning and identity while still considering them to be separate ideas. In acquiring a practice-linked identity the learner needs access to material resources, relational resources, and ideational resources that are all constitutive of the necessary identity work needed for good learning. Indeed, one way to “think of learning is as the historical production, transformation, and change of persons” (Lave and Wenger 51). This notion of transformation connotes a sort of movement along a path of becoming a different person through acquired knowledge. Nasir and Cooks call this an identity trajectory. There are two types of identity trajectories -- peripheral and inbound.

An inbound identity trajectory indicates an individual who moves away from the peripheral practices and deeper into the community of practice by taking up more

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2 Physical artifacts in the setting. The way in which the physical environment and its artifacts support one’s sense of connection to the practice.
3 Interpersonal connections to others in the setting. Positive relationships with others in the context that can increase connection to the practice.
4 Ideas about oneself and one’s relationship to and place in the practice and the world as well as what is good or valued in that practice.
responsibilities, which affords more opportunities and respect. Conversely, identities on a peripheral trajectory are not recognized as legitimate members of the community since they remain stagnant on the periphery (Smith 14). This viewpoint also links back to Legitimate Peripheral Participation since an inbound identity trajectory would imply becoming a different person … To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities … [as a result] viewing learning as legitimate peripheral participation means that learning is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership,” which continues to reshape the identity of the learner based on the knowledge acquired. (Lave and Wenger 53)

In “Learning and Games,” James Gee defines what he calls a social identity, which is crucial for learning. Similar to a Discourse, which focuses on ways of being and acting when unmonitored, a social identity includes the sorts of goals one should have in a given situation; the ways in which one should interpret and assess one’s experiences in those situations; the sorts of feedback one should receive and react to; the ways in which one uses specific tools and technologies -- all of these flow from the values, established practices, knowledge, and skills of experienced participants -- they all stem from the identity of being or seeking to become such a person. (“Learning and Games” 23)

In other words the foundation of a social identity is reliant on goals and norms of that particular identity. For example, learning to become a member of a SWAT team means adhering to certain goals and norms like preventing civilian casualties at all costs. The identity constructs are then reified by others including peers or more expert participants in order to construct a zone of proximal development using collaboration and feedback. Gee expounds on the importance of feedback that is both on-demand (when the learner needs it) and just in time (when the learner is ready) since it is the learner’s relation “to other apprentices and even to other masters that organize opportunities to learn” (Lave and Wenger 92). Learners participate in practices in order to acquire the skills and
embodied knowledge of that practice before receiving feedback or instruction to better teach them how to accomplish these practices (or talk about them) thus creating an overlay of acquisition and learning. This mix is particularly effective since “we are better at what we acquire, but we consciously know more about what we have learned” so as the practices become part of procedural memory, our knowledge of them increases with more feedback, which in turn increases the learner’s metacognitive processes (Gee, “Literacy, Discourse” 540).

As the learner develops a higher metacognition, they are able to utilize their more capable peers in different more robust ways to increase their knowledge of the community. More importantly is that the learner will also gain a heightened awareness of what kinds of things should be offloaded onto others. In “Person-plus: A Distributed View of Thinking and Learning,” D.N Perkins defines the person-plus as someone who successfully offloads their cognition onto the appropriate surround in order to utilize their more capable peers. In essence the person-plus is greater than the sum of one’s cognition and knows how and when to utilize all available tools from their surround (Salomon, Pea, and Seely Brown 96). Perkins calls this ceding the executive function. According to Perkins, the executive function as the “routines that do the often non-routine job of making choices, operating at decision points to explore the consequences of options and select a path of action” (Salomon, Pea, and Seely Brown 96). Perkins uses the example of somebody following the directions in an instruction manual to set up a new stereo system to explore the benefits of ceding one’s executive function to the surround. And anyone who has ever attempted to assemble such things (or anything from Ikea) without instructions will understand why Perkins claims that “ceding the executive function to the
surround is often one of the most powerful moves we can make” (Salomon, Pea, and Seely Brown 97).

The idea of ceding the executive is mirrored in two of Gee’s distributed and dispersed principles. Like Salomon, Pea, and Seely Brown and Perkins, Gee claims that is good to “get help from the material environment and objects in it -- good that the material environment and objects in it are part of your intelligence...[and] frees learners to engage their minds with other things while combining the results of their own thinking with the knowledge stored in these tools, technologies, material objects, and the environment to achieve yet more powerful effects” (What Video Games 107, 110). In doing this learners share their cognitive work with whatever or whoever is present in their environment so that meaning becomes “distributed across the learner, objects, tools, symbols, technologies, and the environment” (What Video Games 211). By utilizing distributed cognition, knowledge and meaning is “dispersed in the sense that the learner shares it with others outside the domain/game, some of whom they learner may rarely or never see face to face” (What Video Games 212). As learners distribute, disperse, and internalize different practices they are constantly renegotiating their identity by becoming an insider of a different community. And as an insider, they are recognized as and thus come to see themselves as someone capable of acting, thinking, and being a different kind of person.

In “Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems: The Career of a Concept” Etienne Wenger reinforces this idea of learning as altering the self: “learning is not just acquiring skills and information; it is becoming a certain person” (2). And if learning entails a process of becoming then it is inextricably tied to our neurology. In
“Brainology: Transforming Students’ Motivation to Learn,” Carol Dweck says that “more and more research is showing that our brains change constantly with learning and experience and that this takes place throughout our lives,” which means that learning modifies aspects of our identity in the process of physically changing the brain (Dweck 1). The fact that learning is capable of changing the brain is both developmentally and psychologically relevant. In its youth the brain is a true renaissance machine, capable of many things and eager to absorb exorbitant amounts of existential information. As the child ages the brain undergoes the process of synaptic pruning that deletes minimally valued connections. The result is a higher cognitive function for actively utilized neural processes. A similar thing happens via trial-and-error during the maturation of a Discourse when someone tries to compensate for a lack of knowledge by falling back on their Primary Discourse by “adjusting it in various ways to try and fit it to the needed functions; this response is very common, but almost always socially disastrous” (Gee, “Literacy, Discourse” 528). Like synaptic pruning, which trims the unnecessary connections in our brains as we mature, it is the role of the learner and their fellow practitioners to negotiate what is or isn’t desirable in a certain context, leaving room for more frequently utilized cognitive pathways.

There is evidence that recursive practices and knowledge in a Secondary Discourse can form a reflexive relationship with the Primary Discourse in a process called filtering which occurs when “aspects of the language, attitudes, values, and other elements of certain types of secondary Discourses … are filtered into primary Discourse” (Gee, “Literacy, Discourse” 534). While falling back on a Primary Discourse outside its range of efficacy can impede learning, once that Secondary Discourse becomes
functional outside the Primary Discourse, aspects of the latter can bleed into the former causing a shift in the learner, their abilities, and sense of self.

Our attachment to certain communities affects whether or not we claim to be “someone who does x” or “someone who is good at x.” In “Narrative Identity,” Dan P. McAdams and Kate C. McLean define narrative identity as “a person’s internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose” which has a drastic effect on the self efficacy of a learner and, as a result, their ability to perform (1). From our narrative identity we create our sense of ourselves and what we believe we are or are not proficient at: for example, someone who’s historically bad at math will quiver at its mere mention thereby undermining their ability to perform before the task is ever presented.

McLean and McAdams claim that through our narrative identity we harbor an internalized life story that provides purpose to our activities and constructs our self efficacy in different contexts. And if high self efficacy has a positive relation with learning, and self efficacy is built through internal speech, then the concept of narrative identity cannot help but demonstrate the cognitive power of speech -- especially internal speech. Vygotsky and Piaget placed high value on this self-talk, which they called egocentric speech. They asserted that egocentric speech is the basis of inner speech so that when socialized speech is turned inwards, learners appeal to themselves instead of others, and thus language “takes on an intrapersonal function in addition to its interpersonal use … [so] when [learners] organize their own activities according to a social form of behavior, they succeed in applying a social attitude to themselves” (Vygotsky, Cole, and John-Steiner 27). It is language that constructs our practices and
ways of being within any given community of practice. A powerful example of this is Alcoholics Anonymous. According to Lave and Wenger, “the main business of A. A. is the reconstruction of identity, through the process of constructing personal life stories, and with them, the meaning of the teller’s past and future actions in the world” (80). Like any community of practice, newcomers to A.A. begin by describing their history in non-A.A. terms and must learn the appropriate patterns of speech like identifying themselves as an alcoholic before sketching the problems that brought them to the group. The practices and speech patterns are met “with counterexemplary stories by more-experienced members who do not criticize or correct newcomers’ accounts directly” but aid the newcomers by modeling skilled testimony in meetings that demonstrates the appropriate communal norms and helps hone the learner’s Secondary Discourse by demonstrating which practices receive validation from others (Lave and Wenger 106). This corrective and non-threatening feel does not bear out in typical remedial environments. Normally the very fact that students are placed in this arena normally provokes a threatened attitude that impedes learning while simultaneously lowering self-efficacy. Students in remedial landscapes have been told a story of their deficit ability for so long that by the time they reach college, they have come to genuinely believe it.

There are several names for these spaces that require a knowledge of group norms; Lave and Wenger call it a Community of Practice while James Gee refers to them as a Discourse, semiotic domains, or affinity spaces. Regardless of the name, these

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5 Semiotic domains are a way of discussing how things like “images, sounds, gestures, movements, graphs, diagrams, equations, objects, and even humans” take on new meaning (What Video Games 19).
spaces all have a certain telos which phenomenologically constructs the rules that govern them. These rules (or norms) have a reciprocal relation with the identity of its participants and requires a certain type of being. These ways of being requires proficiency in the internal and external design grammars of the community which demonstrates an understanding of what is acceptable content or social practices in a semiotic domain, respectively. In other words, to demonstrate internal design grammar is to have an awareness of what is or is not acceptable content while being astute in an external design grammar would mean understanding what counts as “thinking, acting, interacting, and valuing like someone” who participates in that community (Salen 28). As with the A.A. example, proficiency with these design grammars is socially constructed and reified by more capable peers so that the practices, “the community, and one’s relationship with it become part of ones’ identity. Thus identity reflects a complex relationship between the social and the personal. Learning is a social becoming” (Wenger 3). By drawing on this surround and the resources and peoples within it, the participants are “reshaped through a dialectic of reciprocal influences: Our productive activities change the world, thereby changing the ways in which the world can change us. By shaping nature and how our interactions with it are mediated, we change ourselves” (Salomon, Pea, and Seely Brown 57). That is, as learners continue to model, hone, and craft the different kinds of effective practices within the community they shape the future Discourse of the community.

In Vygotsky’s research on play, he approaches what has been called a purpose-built identity (Smith 2014) when he discusses two sisters who explore the

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6 Insiders of a communicatively asynchronous semiotic domain who may “never meet face to face, but ... can recognize certain ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, and believing as more or less typical of people” in their respective semiotic domain (What Video Games 27).
performativity of sisterhood by playing a game of pretend in which they adopt exaggerated sister personas. In other words, through play our identity can be manipulated to allow a child to adopt a different identity, and allows that identity (governed by the rules and goals of the game) to dictate their behaviors. If children use play to develop specific, purpose-oriented, identities (that they can internalize and use in their daily lives) then individuals can develop new aspects of their own identity in order to enhance their abilities or help them complete specific tasks or goals. This process of acquisition is a long and arduous one rife with trial and potential embarrassment as learners are forced to fall back on their primary Discourse while they acquire a secondary one. During this process it is understandable that learners often try to carry the bluff that they are more knowledgeable than they actually are, which is called mushfaking. According to Gee, mushfaking is a term that connotes making do “with something less when the real thing is not available” in order to get by and continue the steady process of acquisition (“Literacy, Discourse” 533). So to mushfake a Discourse would accordingly imply a partial acquisition of a Discourse “coupled with meta-knowledge and strategies to ‘make do’...” (“Literacy, Discourse” 533). The process of mushfaking a Discourse is integral to the process of acquiring the practices and ways of being that come to define that Discourse, especially during the beginning stages of observation and imitation.

This arduous process can be mitigated by offloading parts of our cognition onto other resources or artifacts that aid us. Salomon, Pea, and Seely Brown asserts that we often distribute our knowledge by “off-loading what could be elaborate and error prone mental reasoning processes as action constraints of either the physical or symbolic environments” (48). Instead of subjecting ourselves to erroneous activities, we leverage
our cognition using the minds of others so as to better bear the burden. This is why Salomon, Pea, and Seely Brown so heavily harangues the “widespread conceptions of learning and reasoning … as largely a property of the minds of individuals” since this knowledge is embodied and socially constructed (47). This co-construction of knowledge through the offloading of cognitive processes will invariably reduce the anxiety of learning through the existence of what psychologist Erik Erickson calls a psychosocial moratorium, which is a “learning space in which the learner can take risks where real-world consequences are lowered” (What Video Games 59). In other words, through the reduction of risk, learners are given more freedom to discover and experiment without falling victim to the consequences of failure, whatever they may be. Games that encourage this kind of free exploration and experimentation are what Kurt Squire calls sandbox games. In “Open-Ended Video Games: A Model for Developing Learning for the Interactive Age” Squire defines sandbox games as ones that “have open-ended worlds, through which there is no single, correct pathway” as result sandbox games are widely known and recognized for their ability to produce creative contexts for player expression as they navigate through the multiple solution paths (Salen 170). These sandbox games produce far less scaffolding which allows a greater degree of explorations and experimentation on the part of the player within a given didactic landscape.

But an unstructured landscapes absent of instruction would become very aggravating very quickly, which highlights the necessity of some sort of feedback or guidance. Though any activity is enabled by intelligence, it is not only the intelligence contributed by the individual player but also the collective intelligence of the surround and more capable peers, which is why Salomon, Pea, and Seely Brown says that
“intelligence is accomplished [not] possessed” by any single agent (50). This means that for good learning to occur, there must exist some method of feedback for the learner that serves as an apparatus of guidance within new or unfamiliar territory. More importantly, good learning is embodied, which means that they encourage ways of knowing connected to their movements, bodies, and unconscious ways of thinking. As Gee says, “one good way to make people look stupid is to ask them to learn and think in terms of words and abstractions that they cannot connect in any way to images or situations in their embodied experience in the world” and expect those abstractions to somehow inform real world practices (What Video Games 72). Gee uses the example of basketball. Someone who has never held a basketball would get little out of reading how to dribble or reading a description of the game versus somebody who does the game and gets instructions along the way.

The concept of feedback plays a crucial role in learning and gaming. The presence of others returns to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development which relies on more capable peers to provide novices with instruction and advice so that learners remain at the edge of their regime of competence, which is to say that “things are challenging but not undoable” (What Video Games 137). When operating at the periphery of our regime of competence, challenging but enjoyable tasks have the potential to induce what Italian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi called a flow state that immerses players and learners alike in a state of absolute focus on the goals before them. For these flow states to take effect, a few things must happen. First the learner must adopt what philosopher

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7 A state of concentration or complete absorption with the activity at hand where people are so involved in an activity that nothing else matters.
Bernard Suits calls the lusory attitude, which “allows players to adopt rules which require someone to employ worse rather than better means for reaching an end” and is a necessary state of mind required to enter into the play of a game since players must accept the limitations created by the rules because of the pleasure that the game affords (Tekinba, Salen, and Zimmerman 97).

In Reality is Broken, Jane McGonigal explains how the lusory attitude facilitates play. Many games, she says, when broken down are merely more complex ways of doing something that we would find incredibly boring. For example, in a game of golf there is a clear goal to get a ball in a hole several yards away: “if you weren’t playing a game, you’d achieve this goal the most efficient way possible: you’d walk right up to each hole and drop the ball in with your hand,” when instead, we stand far away and attempt to accomplish this goal with long iron clubs (22). This is why the lusory attitude is so essential both in learning and gaming -- it precipitates a willingness to try, fail, and reflect. This attitude is the exact opposite of the one often seen in education contexts, which Stephen Krashen called the affective filter -- that is a filter that shuts out input from the world when a person is fearful, emotionally resistant, frustrated, or otherwise emotionally overburdened. Krashen explains that while emotions can help thinking and learning, they can also impede them. High stress, too much frustration, anger, or fear, can overwhelm our thinking and shut down our learning. When this happens, input does not become compatible for learning (Krashen uses the example of someone trying to learn a foreign language, but is fearful of failing and looking silly).

Schooling often raises one’s affective filter because failure is punished rather than used as an opportunity for further learning. An effective aspect of games is their
establishment of clear actionable goals and the provision of feedback as the player attempts to achieve those goals. Within this kind of learning, three things must occur: the learner must be enticed to try even if they are afraid, they must be enticed to put in lots of effort even if they have little motivation to do so, and the learner must achieve some meaningful success from their efforts (What Video Games 58). Within a game players are often aware of their objectives and are given in-the-moment feedback by the game as they try and explore, but this is not always the case in school contexts. Instead school must rely on the presence of a Vygotskian more capable peer to provide the learner with feedback for both their successes and shortcomings. Ideally, this feedback should be as immediate as possible so that players can see their progress or failures as they continue to experiment with new strategies. This immediate feedback is also one of the quintessential elements for producing flow states which are the pinnacle of motivation and concentration. That’s why an important aspect of these games is that “you’re always playing on the very edge of your skill level, always on the brink of falling off” all in an attempt to induce a state of flow (McGonigal 24). When immersed in a flow state “both quitting and winning are equally unsatisfying outcomes,” which prods players to keep playing with no awareness of end, time, or anything but improvement (McGonigal 25).

To keep learners at the edge of their zone of competence requires immediate and repetitive feedback that often exceeds the capability of one instructor, which returns to the essential presence of other players or peers engaged in the same activity. These co-learners or co-players will invariably create a large portion of the experience; imagine sitting by yourself in a large classroom accompanied by a teacher who seemed to be talking to a large group or being the sole player in a large game environment trying to
play the game solo. It wouldn’t take long for the activity to feel odd or incredibly boring. This is why James Gee subcategorized the word game into two iterations -- Game and game. Like most learning contexts, games often organize themselves to become active communities of practice with their own social identities that contain certain ways of being, speaking, thinking, or applying values to solve problems, and as a result, the prospect of creating a serious game “requires as much care about the social system (the learning system) in the game is placed as the in-game design itself” (Salen 24). For Gee the game [sic] is the thing that comes in the box ready to play but the crucial decisive component is the Game [sic] which “is the social setting into which the game placed, and all the interactions that go on around the game” (Salen 24). Good games, like good learning, necessitate the presence of a social element that can be used to construct a zone of proximal development as the player experiments, learns, and tries anew. For this to be formative and not aggravating requires an artifact or person that the learner can offload questions and anxieties onto. It is by ceding their executive function in certain contexts that transforms novice learners/players into intermediates and so on until they begin to inhabit the identity of someone capable or more capable of that activity. This experiential learning is the crux of legitimate peripheral participation which claims that learning is always performative and participatory rather than abstract and disconnected.

Anyone who has played a strictly linear game knows there is no replay value once the game is completed because there is no other way to learn or play other than the way the game mandates. This is why Kurt Squire says that good games or learning environments (though the two are essentially synonymous) create possibility spaces. These possibility spaces allow every player multiple trajectories of experience, as well as
“multiple nodes of interaction with the space” wherein they can develop along different trajectories of experience, new ways of knowing, learning, and being in the world (Salen 172). These possibility spaces are taken up based on what developmental psychologist Michael Tomasello calls shared intentionality that he defines as the choice to participate with others in collaborative activities with shared goals and intentions (McGonigal 270). But this is only one half of the recipe to produce experiences that feel like play rather than work. To complete the formula requires both shared intentionality and a common appreciative system. Every person possesses a sense of what they like or what is “good” according to them, which is what Gee calls appreciative systems. One’s appreciative system is determined by their set of goals, desires, feelings, and values in certain contexts (What Video Games 93). In schools or games if agents endeavor a task for the same reason and appreciate the same results then the experience will be highly didactic and productive. But this is a highly idealized environment.

It is far more common that people differ either on what they appreciate or their intention for an activity. Yet if the activity is to produce learning, the agents must collaborate all the same. This is why Jane McGonigal stresses “the ability to thrive in a chaotic collaborative environment,” which she calls the superpower of emergensight and encourages the exchange of expertise (McGonigal 278). When systems are designed to help people share their interests and goals, they issue a call to action that draws players to engage in work they enjoy or excel at. It is this opportunity to excel that “helps students build real self-esteem among their peers” and is capable of pivoting a game into a cause (McGonigal 130). These systems that encourage the exchange of expertise are situated within a culture of inquiry “whereby the goal is for both the participants and the
community to improve their skills and knowledge” while also cultivating a new Discourse within a given community of practice (Salen 188).

All of this becomes very problematic when compared with the ideology of programs like CSU’s Early Start, which seek to remediate students if they are deemed less than proficient in math or language arts. Essentially the institution is deciding that after 12+ years of schooling, certain students still aren’t good enough and are handed off to a college for 15 hours with the expectation that the college will teach them to “write better.” This is somewhat ironic given the original definition of remediation which is “the process of solving or correcting a problem” (“Remedying”). If this was the case then students likely wouldn’t cringe at the thought of something that would foster improvement. Too often these programs utilize archaic practices borrowed from basic writing programs whose dogma is that students can be given discursive building blocks that will ultimately pave a path to more advanced strategies. But as stated in “Basic Work and Material Acts: The Ironies, Discrepancies, and Disjunctures of Basic Writing and Mainstreaming,” these stepping stones are not advantageous and can actually become toxic for students since “one learns to participate in a particular writing practice by being engaged in that practice and not by learning some other writing practice with the idea that the latter prepares writers for the former” (Rodby & Fox 88).

Remediation, as a word, has taken its place among the ranks of damaging language. Now, it would seem that the word remediation needs to be remediated, in the original sense of the word. Good or lasting learning isn’t aural; it’s participatory, embodied, and collaborative. This research will seek to prove that successful “remediation” needs to be reconceptualized in order to capitalize on “effective game-
based learning environments [that] leverage the critical aspects of the medium as they apply to the needs of a twenty-first-century educational system” (Ecology of Games 167). Hopefully this paradigm shift will lead to a more ethical clarification of what it means to remediate and, more importantly, the practices we use to do so. In the following chapter, I discuss the methods used to analyze the activity in EPIC through the lens of identity.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study that investigates a game-based course designed for incoming remedial students. Using gameful structures, EPIC sought to pivot a remedial mandate into something that would foster engagement, collaboration, and certain kinds of identity work mentioned in the review of the literature. Though there have been previous studies and research with gaming theory, most have employed a theoretical perspective in order to extract and examine pedagogical relevance. This study will empirically analyze the results of a semester long project which re-engineered an unfunded remediation program. By using identity as a framework and bringing Vygotsky, Lave, and Wenger’s concepts into contact with ongoing research into gaming theory, I hope that this study can demystify the connections between learning and games, capitalize on the aspects of good classrooms and good games,¹ and precipitate a shift away from the academic tradition of remediation towards something more ethical.

Design of EPIC

During the semester prior to the summer of 2014, when all matriculating students labelled as remedial² would be placed in Early Start, Dr. Kim Jaxon repurposed

¹ Good games are those whose design replicates and utilizes structures of problem-based learning where learners think in context rather than in abstractions.
² These students that were labelled as remedial had scored a 147 or below on their English Placement Test
her Theories and Practices in Tutoring Writing class\(^3\) to create a more ethical remedial structure using game design principles. Jaxon and several colleagues had been searching for something conducive to the application of gaming theory, and after the English Council’s plea was ignored, that “something” became Early Start. Bernard Suits defines play as “the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” and indeed many students view this remediation as unnecessary (Suits 96). But what if the other precept could be true and this remedial program could be pivoted into something that students would want to do? What if an element of play could be baked into remediation?

To begin tackling this question, Jaxon’s English 431 students were immersed in the research of notable gaming theorists such as Jane McGonigal and James Gee and learning theorists like Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger. These students were tasked with determining if applying certain gaming principles could create a more productive and enjoyable environment within the stigmatized context of remediation. This project was codenamed EPIC, a term McGonigal uses to describe “something that far surpasses the ordinary, especially in size, scale, and intensity” (McGonigal 98). Following the footsteps of USC’s 2011 alternate reality game, Reality, that sought “to give incoming freshmen the opportunity to collaborate with other students and sharpen their skills before their sophomore year,” the designers of EPIC began the process of building an alternative reality game\(^4\) (Maton).

\(^3\) Also called English 431. This course offers an internship in the tutoring of students in composition. The course contains approximately 30 upper class or graduate level English students, many of whom are aspiring teachers.

\(^4\) These games seek to “engineer alternative realities: new, more gameful ways of interacting with the real world and living our real lives” and better facilitate participation as well as motivation (McGonigal 115).
Armed with Jane McGonigal’s *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*, Jaxon’s 431 students began an extensive discussion focused on the visible connections between gaming and learning in order to highlight the most important concepts to bake into the design of EPIC. Following this the class was split into teams with specific purposes: There was a team to help with website design, a writing team who wrote quests, an "info gathering" team who spoke with freshmen and surveyed freshmen in English 30, and a team who looked a digital platforms and apps (such as Tailblazer). These teams wrote memos in shared Google Docs, presented and received feedback from the other design teams, and contributed to the EPIC website on Comphacker.⁵

In order to utilize the affordances of both asynchronous and synchronous communication, this new EPIC was to be a hybrid course. The in-person portion would see students selecting quests Based on what they wanted to learn about their university to-be, while the online portion would make use of different social medias in order to build community⁶. To that end a private Facebook group page was established in late May 2014 for students to use to get to know each other, ask questions, and complete their chosen quests; it also contained a link to the course Wordpress which housed the syllabus.

Every student Enrolled in EPIC was sent an invitation via email to join this Facebook group and encouraged to participate in the EPIC Twitter page. Access to the

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⁵ A network derivative of Wordpress used extensively in the department in lieu of PeopleSoft. As it’s name implies, the site’s participants endeavor to hack the field of Composition for the better of the discipline.

⁶ The online portion took place between July 28th and August 1st. The in-person portion took place on August 21st and 22nd.
Facebook page was restricted, so that viewing or joining required administrative permission. The administrators never granted access unless the person’s enrollment in EPIC could be verified, which meant that even students’ parents were not permitted to join. In addition to the Facebook page, a Twitter page was also built with a unifying hashtag #ChicoEpic that would organize students’ questions and quests into a single feed.

Together Twitter and Facebook served as adjunct spaces where students communicated before the start of the program and where they posted their quests. The researcher considered analyzing both Twitter and Facebook but eventually decided to discard Twitter for a number of reasons. The first reason was time. Though many students utilized the course Twitter, there were many duplicate posts, pictures, and quest proofs that would need to be sorted through by the researcher if both Twitter and Facebook were to be analyzed. The second reason was purely quantitative. The number of tweets on the Twitter page was profoundly dwarfed by the number of posts on the Facebook page, which made the Facebook page a far more robust and profuse artifact. The third reason is genre limitations of the social media. Twitter constrains its posts to less than or equal to 140 characters, which led students to use it predominantly for very short questions or simple quest posts to prove they had accomplished something. While these tweets go a long way in analyzing the popularity of the quests, they aren’t useful for the purpose of analyzing student discourse. The final reason relates to the content and interactivity. On close inspection, I noticed that the questions and confusions posted by participants on the Twitter page were rarely, if ever, responded to by other students or the
mentors. As a result this study will focus predominantly on the Facebook page\textsuperscript{7} for the purposes of assessing this alternative remediation.

In addition to looking at the Facebook page and the course interviews mentioned earlier, the researcher also conducted three post-course interviews. One of these was formal and audio recorded at a restaurant in order to make sure that every word was valued. The other two were informally conducted with former EPIC participants at the end of one of the researcher’s writing workshop classes, which the two students were enrolled in. These interviews provided a useful follow up regarding the relations they had maintained from EPIC and what if any information from EPIC was proving useful. This could also reveal future tweaks to be made to the program. The last data set is a simple single question survey asking students how many people from EPIC they maintain friendly contact with. The response for this survey is a multiple choice format starting at zero and ending with “more than ten.”

Setting

The setting of this study is California State University, Chico in northern California. Chico State is a four-year university located in the small rural city of Chico approximately 90 miles north of Sacramento. Founded in 1889 for the purpose of training educators, the school was originally called the Chico State Normal School by its sponsor, General John Bidwell -- pioneer, statesman, and founder of Chico. Chico State Normal School became Chico State Teachers College in 1921, Chico State College in 1935, and finally California State University, Chico in 1972.

\textsuperscript{7} This page was actively utilized from the middle of June 2014 until the end of August and then sparsely throughout the Fall 2014 semester.
As of spring 2015 there are 17,287 students enrolled at Chico State. Figure 1 shows the demographic breakdown of the student population. Basing this program at

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Fig. 1. Chico State student demographic.

Chico State had some affordances. Since Chico is a small, rural town, there is no element of urban sprawl, which allowed us to send students downtown to explore not only the campus but the town. This journey is a walkable distance and not a confusing one as it might be in a larger city. The rural dynamic also affords an extra ease of communication with the locals of the town. There was no concern that long-time Chico residents would be rude or discouraging to these students who were just getting to know Chico as people in a big city might be towards tourists. There also was little concern about students
getting lost downtown. Since Chico is small and laid out in a square-grid street pattern, it allows easier navigation.

Site Selection

There are a number of spaces that could be analyzed for this objective, but for the purpose of this study I will be focusing on Chico State’s newly piloted Early Start: EPIC. The reasons for this are two fold. First and foremost Early Start was selected by the composition faculty as the site which would be pivoted into an augmented reality game prior to my decision to focus my research on gameful spaces. This leads to my next point which is largely a pragmatic one. After gaming theory piqued my interest, EPIC had already been engineered and I had volunteered to work as a mentor within the program, which afforded me access to the program, its participants, and the administrators of the program.

Participants

Although participants in other sections of Early Start could be future freshman at other California State Universities who chose to fulfill their Early Start requirement at Chico, participants in EPIC were required to be destination-students of Chico State. Since EPIC is a program intended for incoming freshmen, the subjects of this study are predominantly eighteen years old. Some were older as a result of pursuing sports or vocational related activities after high school but these were anomalous students. The participants in this section of Early Start\(^8\) (EPIC) included two instructors, 19 upper

\(^8\) Chico State ran three sections of Early Start. Only one section featured game based structures. This section is referred to as EPIC.
division or graduate level English mentors, and 274 non-EOP incoming freshmen\(^9\) who scored at or below 147 on the English Placement Test.

**Role of the Participant-Observer**

During the 2014 Early Start EPIC program at Chico State I was a participant observer. I facilitated the small group dynamic of the course by mentoring one of the small groups comprised of exactly ten students. As a mentor it was my job to facilitate community and help continue discussions about in class materials such as Jane McGonigal’s TED Talk. I met with the instructors and other mentors at the end of the day for a debrief and plan of action for the next day. On the last day I set up the video camera outside next to two desks in order to conduct interviews while I took some brief field notes about the interviews on my laptop. In the final hour of the final day I gave a short presentation explaining the process of direct self placement, the description of English 30 (a writing workshop labeled as remedial), and how the decision to enroll in English 30 could benefit them.

**Data Collection**

During the EPIC Early Start program every participant was given a copy of the researcher’s Informed Consent (See Appendix B), a short explanation of the form, and informed of their rights should they agree to participate. On the last day of the program ten randomly selected students were asked to participate in a short video recorded interview with the assurance that their confidentiality would be strictly

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\(^9\) These Freshmen are not part of the Education Opportunity Program (EOP) but are required to take this course due to low scores on the EPT
preserved. Though all participants signed the form, approximately five abstained from being video recorded. In order to collect better data these students who did not want to be recorded were not interviewed. Since the researcher felt it was important to have student’s exact words rather than field notes which might detract from the conversational capability, the students who declined to be recorded were not recorded. The ten students who agreed to be interviewed were asked a series of questions (see Appendix C) which were intended to measure how students were taking up the structures of the course and their perception of those structures.

Since ten is a relatively small sample size, additional data had to be collected in order to better see how the gameful structures were working in this remedial space so the researcher began to manually harvest all the data on the EPIC Facebook page in order to answer the following research questions.

1. How do the principles of games inform the structures of an effective learning environment?

2. How does the dynamic of EPIC aid the process of students building their identity and habits as future college students?

Answering these questions required a data set less subjective than individual interviews. The interviews I collected were not nearly numerous enough to by themselves answer these questions. To address this I turned to the Facebook page, which extended over a period of two months. This was beneficial in that it would allow me to track shifts in the students’ identities, measure how they were reacting to the game-like structures, and see how they were learning about their new college setting. More importantly, the
Facebook page was an encoded medium that had preserved the students’ discourse and would allow me to asynchronously analyze the content.

To analyze this data set required me to manually harvest all the data on the EPIC Facebook page. This manual harvest of Facebook was problematic for a number of reasons. The first and most prominent was that there is no effective tool or program that can crawl and collect this much data. In fact, thanks to new privacy concerns, Facebook now bans accounts or entire pages if they suspect them of trying to mine or scrape mass amounts of information. Additionally, the developer tools for Facebook were not capable of handling so much information and outputted the data in a format that was both incomplete and nearly unrecognizable. Lastly, since Facebook prioritizes posts which have more recently received comments rather than their chronological order, I reorganized posts in order to better see the evolution of student discourse and engagement.

As a way to organize and later analyze this data I created an Excel spreadsheet with seven different columns: date of original post, time of original post, posters name, quest number, links to any external media, the content of the post, and the comments the post received. When working with the quests that students completed in the latter half of the program, an additional column was added to gauge how many students quested collaboratively. This was assessed based on whether they tagged other participants in the post or comments.

After the Excel sheet was created and formatted, I began to manually copy and paste one post at a time into Excel with all the comments it received. Since I wanted these to be arranged by their precise time stamps (i.e. 2:30 pm precedes 2:31 pm) this
process took several days. After the posts and comments were transferred, the other five fields listed above were filled manually. This harvest yielded exactly 1,266 rows (posts) in Excel. And while this is the number that remains now, three things must be mentioned. The first is that exactly two posts were sanitized by the faculty administrators since the posts were discussing partying and were deemed inappropriate. The second is that some content is missing both in terms of posts and comment threads since one mentor (who vehemently dislikes Facebook) requested that his account be permanently deleted after the culmination of EPIC. I mention this for precision sake but also to highlight the possibility a problem with numbers on a broader scale. It is impossible to determine now how many of that mentors posts/comments once existed and, more importantly, how many students who participated in EPIC could have also requested their accounts be permanently deleted. This means that this data set could be far more incomplete than we realize. The last was a decisive omission of exactly 20 posts by the researcher due to the fact that these posts were not deemed pertinent to the study or the overall data set.

Despite these specific excisions from the data set, the remaining sample size nearly numbers at 1,300 and allows me to comfortably analyze the role of identity in a space informed by gameful and sociocultural theories of learning.

In order to reach the findings in the following chapter, I analyzed the students’ discourse through the concepts mentioned in the review of the literature in order to answer the questions mentioned above:

1. How do the principles of games inform the structures of an effective learning environment?
2. How does the dynamic of EPIC aid the process of students building their identity and habits as future college students?

Analysis

The Facebook data and survey data was analyzed as a whole in order to answer these questions. Good learning, according to gaming theory and sociocultural learning models, is both participatory and embodied. These concepts do have some overlap but also possessed some nuanced differences. Embodiment implies the utilization of the whole learner’s self. But since “the notion of participation dissolves dichotomies between cerebral and embodied activity” it’s possible to participate, according to Lave and Wenger, in different kinds of ways as long as that participation brings the learner further into a community of practice. It was this idea that gave rise to the category of legitimate peripheral participation. These posts featured something outside the scope of the page’s intent that expanded conversations into different arenas such as asking if anybody enjoys duck hunting. To return to gaming theory, this category speaks to the effect of providing fewer constraints on student activities and demonstrates numerous game design principles which advocate the co-construction of any learning environment by the students.

The co-construction of a learning environment gives students agency, which helps transition them from idle consumers to active producers in a community of learners. But since such a notion first requires the establishment of community, it was necessary to trace the amount of community building I saw occurring within the Facebook page. Once this community was better established, the question shifts towards addressing how well
that community functions in providing that support network. This led me to trace the feedback structures that I saw occurring within the Facebook page.

Ideally this feedback should arrive when the learner needs it most (in the moment) and when they are ready for it (on demand). This played out in several ways within the Facebook both from mentors and students which lead to the creation of a category for more capable peers,\textsuperscript{10} zone of proximal development, distributed cognition, mentor posts, and a category called No Mentors that saw students supporting each other once the mentor presence became more or less extinguished. Since these categories all speak to the emphasis on togetherness and joint cognition, I also wanted to include a category that traced students agreeing to quest or participate together either inside or outside the context of the class. Since successful structures must catalyze some kind of collaboration I wanted to quantify the frequency of collaboration.

Lastly and perhaps most pertinent to the second question posed above is how students utilized EPIC in order to begin formulating their college identities and discover the ideational, material, and relational resources needed to construct an inbound identity trajectory. To achieve this, according to gaming theory, requires three things: the learner must be enticed to try, the learner must be persuaded to deposit significant time and effort, and the learner must experience some sort of success. To address this I fashioned three more categories: Mushfaking speaks to the first requirement since it denotes an effort made with resources not sufficient to accomplish the activity which, like learning, will require additional attempts to be successful. Projective identity, Gee says, is both an agent projecting aspects of their identity onto an external artifact or viewing their own

\textsuperscript{10} Coding categories in italics
identity as a project still under construction. The notion of identity as a project still being built speaks to the second step necessary to produce good and gameful learning. Lastly, Gee’s theory of Discourse acquisition connotes some form of success in internalizing outside norms into our ways of being within the world.

To organize these classifications and ensure the nuances did not confound my coding of these concepts, I composed a coding glossary (see Appendix D) to aid the consistency of coding the posts and comment threads. After the glossaries were complete, each category was given a specific color code based on the theories that were present within them. After all the non-quest posts were color coded and categorized, I used Excel’s capability to create several different sheets in the same document in order to delineate and better quantify each category. The quest posts were not color coded or categorized in the same way due to a lack of student discourse and comments for these particular posts. To address this, I added an additional column to calculate how much questing (according to Facebook) was done collaboratively and then created exactly three new sheets to measure: which students posted the most quests to the Facebook page, which quests were completed most (in)frequently, and how many of these quests were completed collaboratively.

By using the Excel’s Data function to organize specific columns by their color, I was able to efficiently find all manifestations of each theory and place them into several different sheets, which would allow them to be viewed separately or in combination with the other posts. Some theories could only be seen in the comments thread (like more capable peers) and others only tended to manifest in the original post (like projective identity) these sheets are not completely one color. I considered
separating posts from comments based on color but discarded this idea since to see comments without the post or vice versa deletes the context of the discourse. This means that there are posts which exist simultaneously in different categories because the post and comments demonstrate different concepts but must remain connected for the sake of coherency. Thus in order to see how many total posts were made, the master sheet must be consulted rather than tallying the sum of the individual categories as this would invariably yield a far higher total.

By looking at these constructs that are inherent within the sociocultural learning theories described above (and mirrored in gaming theory), I hope to assess the effectiveness of this game-based course in helping students build their identities as college learners. This specific data will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter.
CHAPTER IV

MAKING AN EPIC IDENTITY

Using *Reality is Broken*, and a sundry of other gaming resources, the students of English 431 built EPIC around several core fundamentals of gaming theory. The first of these was forming community. The creators placed a great amount of importance on ensuring that people felt comfortable with one another so that this comfort might burgeon into future collaboration in the course. An even greater hope was that these formed relationships might flower into lasting support networks for Freshmen year or longer.

To build community that might accomplish this objective, the participants had to be in constant interaction. To that end multiple social medias were chosen to allow communication through multiple mediums. As with community, it was hoped that this multiplicity of participation and communication structures would lend itself to future collaboration or networks of support. But the hope of students communicating and helping each other was not the only support structure built into the course. The creators wanted students to receive feedback from more capable peers. To do this the program used embedded mentorship to provide more support from veteran students. The discourse of this mentor feedback might then begin to be imitated by students.

All these constructs were included in the design to facilitate the process of becoming Chico insiders. These Chico insiders would walk away armed with college know how and pro tips but also a comfort with the city itself. They would, theoretically,
begin to subsume the identity and design grammars of Chico as they learned how to be like a Chico local.

What About Writing?

Before I begin discussing the construction of community as well as the other structures that were created as a part of EPIC, I feel I need to address what will likely be a frequent critique of this program -- the lack of academic writing. It’s true that students in this program did not write the kind of papers that they will see in their academic writing class. But that doesn’t mean there was no writing. By simply asking questions, receiving feedback, and helping each other the members of the Facebook group page produced 137,477 words. So without considering the long survey students completed about their writing, the in-class quick writes, and the multimodal resources that EPIC students made for future freshmen, this program created 458.25 pages of writing.\(^1\) Distributing that equally would yield one and two-thirds pages per participant, and this is excluding the content on Twitter \((n = 274)\). I am open to many critiques of this program, but one asserting that there was no writing is not one of them.

Community and Communication on Facebook

To begin building community, four pre-campus quests were created for the online portion of the course.\(^2\) These pre-quests were as follows:

1. Check in on our Facebook page and say hey. Where are you from and why did you choose Chico?

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\(^1\) Assuming 300 words per page, double spaced.

\(^2\) July 28th - August 1st 2014
2. Join Twitter (if you don’t have an account already) and follow us.

3. Tell us what you know about college classes? What stories have you been
told? What are your concerns? What does it take to do well at Chico State do you think?

   **Bonus:** Respond to someone else’s post on Facebook. What concerns do you share? What insights can you provide? Five additional points for each response.

4. Post questions you have about college to our Facebook page or Tweet out using the hashtag #ChicoEPIC.

The students were invited to join and contribute to the Facebook page, but they are also given the option of creating a Twitter account and conversing under a common hashtag. Students were also given extra points for following the mentors’ Twitter accounts which we hoped would help students find each other on Twitter through the mentors’ list of followers. Numbers three and four were created with the hope that students might begin to form ties from shared anxieties, questions, or expectations of college. Perhaps it would be none of these but the goal was interaction between students. This desire is especially evident from the bonus received from responding to other posts. By quantitatively valuing interaction it was hoped that students would form out-of-school relations in the service of doing the work of the course. All this strove to create community which naturally begs the question: Did it work? Within the constraints of the Facebook page the answer would be a resounding yes. Even though the course was not scheduled to begin until July 28th the page was created at the end of May 2014. Below is the first contribution to the page:

“Greetings all. I'm honored and excited to be a part of EPIC (Early Start). I'm reminded of a quote by Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu: ‘A journey of a thousand
miles must begin with a single step.’ Thank you for choosing to take that step at Chico St!”

This post was made by a mentor on May 21st and was the only content on the page for 29 days. The first student post, dates 6/19/14 and was followed by five more students later in June. It’s true that these posts were small trite formulas of name + home city like the following post:

“S.S³ from Redlands California”

From the start of July to the beginning of the face-to-face course, 45 more posts were made and many of them featured far more robust, curious, and personalized narratives or queries like the following:

Hi I'm A. It's funny seeing everyone introduce themselves because it reminds me of a scene in Finding Nemo when Dory is up in front of the sharks happily introducing herself. Sorry, I have a weird sense of humor. I am from Riverside, California. I chose Chico because of its gorgeous campus, small class sizes, and it's far away home.

Hey everyone. MY NAME is E.J but my friends call me Geno. I'm from Sacramento, Ca and I chose Chico because I've heard great things about the school. Also, I'm going to be an incoming freshmen for the second time and I'm ready to start my adventure in Chico. I hope to have a way better school experience and I think in Chico, that will definitely happen.

By the official start of the online portion, there were 53 posts on the page. I emphasize this to underscore that these students were volunteering to spend what was their summer vacation to contribute to this course before it began. This could mean they were looking to meet people, were eager about college, or they were bored. I’d venture that the answer is a mix of the options, which would still indicate that this paged filled some sort of need or craving on the students’ part. In the posts above there is a noticeable

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³ Student names abbreviated for Human Subjects
shift away from the trite and formulaic towards the incorporation of other elements like personality and personal information that was not in the scope of the instructions. The first sentence of the first example shows enough comfort to incorporate a quirky voice into the content (and was the first post to do so). This additional personality demonstrates a felt comfort on the part of the student and the people on the page en masse. The second post incorporates personality through the telling of his past experiences. Normally people are reticent to discuss their shortcomings or undesirable experiences, yet this gentleman shows no hesitation in admitting to, what is still at this point, a space full of strangers that he will be a Freshmen with for the second time now, presumably because he failed the first time -- a testimonial which shows a definite trust and positive portents of community.

After the initial online interactions this community developed steadily and only seemed to increase with time. This page contained 365 community building posts, which accounts for 28% of the pages total content (n=1266). Twenty eight percent is counting the 904 quest posts at the end of the program. If these are not counted then community accounts for 40.4% of the page. Either way it would appear that community was a successful construct of EPIC.

Feedback on Facebook

When the online portion officially kicked off, students began to flood the page with their questions, concerns, and expectations about college. These posts allowed the mentors to begin functioning as more capable peers and addressing anxieties or questions:
Poster: I have heard that when it comes to college classes, it is your responsibility to pay attention and keep up with the work. It is your choice to ace or fail a class. No one is going to be there to tell you to get your work done except for you. Don't let anything distract you from your work, and keep pushing yourself to do your best in school.

Mentor: Well put J! The responsibility lies with you now to get assignments done on time. But more than that, your college classes (for the most part) are filled with other people trying to understand and work through it. Make some friends because the more minds working toward a common goal the better experience for all.

This mentor confirms the student’s conceptions about college to try and raise her confidence. But far more interesting is what he does next, which is encourage the student to seek help from her compatriots in a class and form supportive relations in college. His comment advocating a collective intelligence approach to problem solving in college both addresses students’ fears about not being able to get everything done while also highlighting a crucial difference between secondary and post-secondary education. This difference is that unlike high school, college is not built or intended as a solo endeavor. It is in this sense that the mentors’ feedback was not only used to answer questions about the specifics of Chico State or its internal workings but also to provide moral support and suggestions for best practices. This returns to the pre-quests three and four, which were meant to use mentors to provide insight and feedback that students could leverage towards their future success at Chico.

Dependency As a Route To Identity

The intent of mentors providing feedback was to address worries and questions but the hope was to help these students learn how to learn in college. But re-learning how to learn is a question of being typically laced with turbulence. In EPIC this turbulence was first seen with students being overly concerned with their performance or
grade in the course. There are numerous posts by students asking if they had enough points. Many of these threads had upwards of 60 students reliant to know if they were participating correctly.

Student 1: At what time tomorrow can we start doing [Epic]?

Student 2: I thought we just had to gather up 400 points by Friday??

Student 1: Dude I don't even know how did works haha

Student 1: This*

Student 2: Honestly me either haha. But that's all I put together. Either way I only got 30 points so far I need to get on it. But I thought we got 400 points by Friday and on august 21 we meet at chico

Student 1: Wait you only have 30 points? I thought we start tomorrow?

Student 2: Ya you do little things like writing on here about yourself or whatever gave you 15? And I did so either survey. And ya I don't really understand it man lol.

Student 1: Damn I didn't know they gave you points by posting haha I'm going to start posting a lot of things that way I'll be done with 400 point by Wednesday haha

Student 2: Lol no i think it only gave us points for the information about us. Not like for any random post lol. I got an email letting me know about the class and it came with a link. Because we aren't doing it on blackboard. If you click on the link it tells you all about the class. But ya basically all I got out of it was to gather 400 points by August 1st. And then we meet on that same date.

Student 1: Wait when did you get that email?

Student 1: The one by [the instructor]?

Instructor: Where did you come up with 400 points? No stress....take survey (quest c) plus choose from two pre-campus quests (a,b,d or e). You're already ahead of things by being here on our Facebook group. We'll worry about points when we meet Aug 21. For now, just get to know each other. And welcome to Chico State!

Instructor: And no specific time....did you get the email?

Student 1: Thank you [Instructor]! We were all lost haha!
Student 2: Okay so all I need to do now is do one more campus quest? Because I already did c and d. Now I should just need one? I thought we needed 400 points sorry lol.

Instructor: Seriously, don't worry about points...using this online week to get to know each other. And look..you're already doing that. ftw.

Student 1: That explains a lot lol, once again thanks [instructor]

Student 2: Okay so other than the quest we don't need to do anything else right? Sorry just don't want to do something wrong or fall behind. Thank you and sorry if I'm annoying with all the questions! Lol

Instructor: You'll earn 150 points when we meet on campus in August. Then we'll add these points to it....we have cool swag. Someone will win an iPad.

Instructor: Just do three pre-campus quests: the survey ("C") plus two more...like posting here. But honestly, I'm more interested in y'all chatting with each other. You can't do it wrong. Glad you're here.

Student 2: Okay cool thanks again this guy just added me on here so it's Facebook official were friends lol.

Student 1: [Instructor] just to be 100% all we need for this week is quest c and two other ones?

Instructor: yep and watch the TED talk and be ready to discuss in August

The high amount of dependence exhibited above placed the instructor near a position of in loco parentis (Trimbur 191) as she walked students through the information (which was also accessible via the course website) and assured them three times over that they hadn’t done something wrong or fallen behind. I do not mean to harangue these students. Confusion was expected and to see them grappling with their confusions out loud and collaboratively was an aim of the program and is a prerequisite for socially mediated learning. Learners in a new domain are understandably reliant on their sponsors for assistance. But reliance is an integral rung in the acquisition of new literacies that often sees sponsors aiding newcomers. In “Sponsors of Literacy,” Deborah Brandt
defines a sponsor as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, or model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy” (2). For Brandt, a literacy is equivocal to new fields of knowledge and connotes an emergent self resulting from the steady acquisition of that knowledge.

Question: Does anyone know how many points we need to earn before meeting at the campus?

Student 2: [The instructor] said we basically just do the 3 quest and watch the Ted talk and not to worry about anything else other than getting to know each other for the online week lol. Also be ready to discuss the Ted talk when we meet. And yes a prize will be an iPad.

As the learner becomes more adept at navigating the social, mental, and discoursal constructs, their dependence gradually decreases. Although student two (same student as above) now possessed the necessary information to answer this question, he chose to do so not with his own words but by drawing on the ethos of the instructor and parroting the information. Parroting like this denotes a learner’s identity still under construction -- something not fully understood but capable of being imitated. This acquisition of a different secondary Discourse highlights a part of self that will grow as students begin to recognize and wield the external and internal design grammars of different contexts.

Portrayed Identities: Party Talk

Given the setting and age demographic of this program one would likely wonder how much of this page’s content was professional and how much was recreational. The truth is that we often didn’t see a difference between the two. The only concern we as designers and mentors had was the potential for students to begin
discussing things that would run against the grain of being successful as a newly minted Freshmen, like going to parties.

Within any domain James Gee says there exist two sets of rules for insiders that he calls internal and external design grammars (What Video Games 35). These grammars, Gee explains, dictate what is considered appropriate content and social practice, and that knowledge of them is integral in acquiring any Discourse (35). It’s hardly disputable that overexposure to party scenes hinders scholastic performance, it would make sense that content of this nature wouldn’t belong on a page dedicated to ensuring academic success. Such content would fly directly in the face of this page’s purpose and indicate a poorly developed internal design grammar.

This page contained only three posts that had to do with going to parties. Many people would likely expect a higher number from freshmen, especially freshmen at Chico State, a school often stereotyped as being a rambunctious “party school.” Yet the opposite appeared to be true with these students. The word “party” appears in 23 posts within this group. Seven of these were in regard to a campus hosted pool party, five references were made in jest (e.g., work hard and party hard), the word was mentioned three times by the mentors to address Chico’s stigma as a party school, and seven posts asked how to best stay away from the party scene. This left only one post and one comment thread that discussed actually going to parties. This thread accounts for 0.07% of the page’s content (n=1,266). So either these freshmen were excited about college for academic or existential reasons, or they simply recognized that this Facebook page was

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4 Two of these were deleted by the site’s administrators
5 Meeting new people etc
not the space for discussing parties. I hesitate to favor either side of this binary because it seems that the more likely answer is that it was a combination of both. This means students were more interested in cultivating their academic identities than they were in ensuring they would have pals for partying with, and/or they recognized which facets of their selves should be made transparent in this context. Both of these indicate an effective Discoursal awareness on their part as well as a desire to become a “good” college student.

Imitation: Mushfake It ’Til You Make It

As students grew more comfortable with the constructs of the program and the Facebook group, some members’ participation began to evolve. Rather than simply querying some began attempting to take on the roles of the mentors.

Post: Rumor has it that college classes are much harder and a lot different the high school classes. Is this true? What is the normal work load compared to high school classes?

Student Response: Depends on the class And it sure is different than High school. You have more freedom and responsibility.

Instructor Response: I think what is surprising to most new students is the amount of reading we ask you to do each week. I’ve really found that setting aside time each week (a couple of large blocks of time--say 3 hours each) in the library makes all the difference. Just schedule the time like it's another class. And then develop some ways of approaching the volume of reading...ways of annotating, etc

Mentor Response: I second [the instructor’s] response on the reading load. That’s got to be the toughest part of any class...and i’m a literature guy. I also think that the students who take school and life seriously (not meaning you can't have fun, but you take the important things serious) will find that the transition is smooth and not as overwhelming as expected. Yes, work is more in depth and requires work on your part, but it is doable by anybody who wants it bad enough.

The student’s phrasing, “depends on the class” and “it sure is different than high school” are casually stated as if the student has experience with colleges or college classes, when
in fact she had no more experience or college credits than the original poster. James Gee calls this mushfaking, which is the use of a partially acquired identity kit to fake your way into more expert forms of participation (Gee, “Literacy, Discourse” 533).

At first glance the first responder could be mistaken for a mentor based on the advice she’s doling out. But when compared to the following two responses, it becomes evident that the first comment operates purely in abstractions rather than drawing on empirical or anecdotal evidence. The difference in experience can be seen with the use of phrases or ideas such as a surprising reading load or “I’ve really found” and “I also think that” compared to the generalizations that stem from colloquial rumor about college being more work, more freedom, and more responsibility. Mushfaking doesn’t rely on common knowledge as much as it does a strategic rehash of pre-existing discourse so by drawing upon the surround to gather discourse it betters the odds of being accepted, while decreasing the odds of being outed. And to that point, the words responsibility and freedom are used numerous times by both mentors and students in this group with the earliest occurrence being in the 29th posting on July 24, 2014. This comment was made on the 30th of July which means that this student could very well have acquired her discourse by imitating others rather than drawing on previous experience.

Post: ...My only concern is not being able to keep up with my classes and getting overwhelmed and then letting down my parents. What I believe it takes to do well at Chico State is being true to yourself and staying focused on what you came to accomplish. Which for me is getting my degrees in Criminal Justice and Psychology and be the first person in my family to graduate college!

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6 I am not trying to claim that this student never took a college level class either as an extension of high school or as a pretext to going to an actual university. I only wish to highlight that even if this is the case, these classes exist in a different context than college classes while enrolled at a university. Thus their identity would have yet to be formed in this context even if they had previous experience with college level classes.
Goose: Go for the gold! always strive for success and never doubt yourself! you're the only person who can tell yourself you can or can't do something! good luck and have a memorable time at Chico!

There were a few different forms of mushfaking, students such as Goose sought to mushfake their way into a mentor role, but not for authority’s sake like the previous example. Instead they began performing the role of community building to spark excitement and friendships. By taking on this role, Goose positioned himself in a cheerleading role similar to the previous mentor’s comment. In fact the takeaway from both is identical: “you're the only person who can tell yourself you can or can't do something” and “Yes, work is more in depth and requires work on your part, but it is doable by anybody who wants it bad enough.” I realize that this just seems friendly and nothing more than simple excitement, and I would agree if this was normal student discourse on the page, but it wasn’t. Students started helping each other more as the days progressed but this kind of cheering phrasing was only seen from a very select few students who I’ve come to refer to as the resident mushfakers. This particular mushfaker quickly distinguished himself with these kinds of posts as soon as he began participating on the Facebook page. Combing back through the data reveals that his entrance to the page was marked not by a welcoming post or even an introduction but an immediate display of comments such as this one. It was only some days after he joined that he actually began doing his work for the course.

Poster: Procrastination was and in some occasions continues to be a big defect in my academic life. What are some tips that will help me diminish the bad habit?

Student 1: Rewarding yourself and doing things little by little really helps me

Poster: Thanks!

Student 1: No problem
Mentor: Definitely what [Student 1] said. Work your butt off all week so that when the weekend comes you are free and stress and can have fun. Take [it] day by day. Do the hard stuff first so that the week gets easier, not harder.

Poster: Sounds great! Thank you

Student 2: Personally I use a planner to keep myself organized so I don't have the stresses of having to remember all the stuff I have to do.

This is another form of mushfaking that makes do by drawing on previous experiences or other secondary Discourses such as study habits in high school. But it does not do so solely for authority, community, or feedback but for all three. Though the poster asked the question and two students offered their advice, all three of those students received feedback on their habits. Since this third type of mushfaking doesn’t place as much interest in positioning themselves in a mentor role, I’ve come to call them the liminal mushfakers since their posts teeter between the work of the class and mushfaking.

Regardless, it demonstrates the efficacy of mentor feedback in helping students draw on vetted practices to do college. Even though the mentor agrees with student 1 and forwards that advice, he also adds onto it. So it’s not simply doing things little by little, there’s also a hierarchy of prioritization -- you should do the hard stuff first that way your work gets easier and easier as you become more fatigued from working on several things.

Mentorship: (Re)Shaping Identities

When beginning something new, James Gee says we must acquire the identity kit or Discourse \textit{sic} for how to be. Gee explains that we have dozens of these Discourses, which functions as a sort of “identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (Gee, “Literacy, Discourse” 526).
Post: Mrs. Kim Peck Jaxon how do you if we followed all the links for twitter? Also who can I talk to about getting into the beef unit at the school farm?

Mentor: *soft tap on shoulder, whispers in ear* Pro-tip: Never call a professor Mr. or Mrs. Go with Professor or Dr. So here is how you call attention so that your question is answered! Hey Dr. Kim Peck Jaxon! Could you spare a moment to clarify?

Kim Jaxon (Instructor): Nice tip [mentor]! Yep, Dr. Jaxon always preferred. Good question [poster] about how I'll know...I just look at who you're following on your Twitter account. No worries. Not sure about the ag question. I would call the Ag Dept and ask that: 530.898.5844

Poster: Thank you Dr. Jaxon! And thank you [mentor].

The way this comment is phrased, tucked between asterisks, “*soft tap on shoulder whispers in ear*” gives the impression that the mentor is imparting a secret – and in a way she is. These students just completed 12 years of school where the dynamic between student and teacher is noticeably different from that seen at the college level. This student is drawing on a Discourse he acquired in high school, which requires teachers to be addressed in a specific way that rarely includes a first name, and if it does, it’s always preceded by Mr. or Miss/Mrs as a sign of respect. Yet what constitutes a sign of respect in that context is actually a sign of disrespect in this one.

Obviously the intent was not intentionally disrespectful. It actually displays the typical process of acquiring a Discourse. While in the process of acquiring a new Discourse it is customary to fall back on previously established Discourses.

That this question clearly lacks University fluency, but has no consequences creates what James Gee calls a sandbox space or simulation, which is a kind of game or play that simulates real world activities but with no regard for failure (Gee, Good Video Games). Sandbox simulations are highly effective in encouraging learners to take risks

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7 The instructor’s name was included to better contextualize this particular post
because they embody what psychologist Erik Erikson calls a psychosocial moratorium, which is a context that both lowers and extinguishes stakes by allowing secondary efforts if the first results in failure (Gee, *Good Video Games* 59). This too was part of the intent in the creation of this EPIC and the Facebook page with embedded mentorship -- to allow learners to make mistakes where they could be corrected without consequence and could proceed to do college with this novice anxiety not affecting them. And many students said that just knowing what to call their faculty raised their comfort with going to class.

The modification of the student’s phrasing in his final comment “Thank you Dr. Jaxon…” shows a revision to his budding Discourse. One of the primary objectives of the mentors was to provide feedback that would address anxieties and provide a more experienced narrative that students could draw on to more quickly transcend their novice status. This was an effective structure as evidenced by the 221 instances of mentors acting as more capable peers for students and 25 more instances where multiple learners helped each other with some assistance from a mentor or instructor who provided cognitive easements.

**Distributed Cognition**

Poster: So I'm going to be having two jobs... Do you guys think taking 15 units and joining one club will be a bad idea for the first year?

Student 1: maybe you should wait on the club and see how everything goes that first year or semester

Mentor 1: A club may be hard. But with two jobs how many hours are you planning to work?

Mentor 2: I think it depends on how much the club supports your academic goals. If you are in a club that encourages serious academic work, or has weekly study hours, then it can be a source of support.
Mentor 3: It is possible, but for your first semester I would recommend experiencing the workload of taking college classes and working at the same time. I hope you all join clubs on campus, but manage your time for rest and relaxation too.

Mentor 4: How many hours a week are you going to be working?

Mentor 5: Honestly, that sounds like a pretty heavy load for your first semester.

Mentor 6: Two jobs and 15 units! Very heavy. That's close to what my workload looked like when I transferred and it was kinda rough. Clubs can save your sanity, but I agree [name omitted] that you should be sure they support your academics somehow. Maybe scale back to 12 units your first semester and find one solid club. I fine part of school is increasing you tolerance for workload stress. You'll get there, but be nice to yourself and give yourself the space you need to adjust.

Me: I am inclined to agree with the other mentors. Two jobs and a full load is probably too much for your first semester. I think it's possible to do of course but your academics might suffer. I think you're stretching yourself too thin for your first semester of college. What club is it and how many hours are you planning to put in at each job?

Student 2: For your first semester of college its going to be hard having two jobs. I would say that you should wait till your second semester to see how your schedule is with your classes and your club and if you think you have enough time to work, then you can consider working.

Mentor 2: Some ppl have to work guys, it's not always an option to cut back those hours

Poster: I will probably be working 15-20 hours every week for each job...@[names omitted] But thanks so much everyone for your feedback! I think I might just end up dropping one class if I find it too difficult to manage it in my schedule.. But i have to keep two jobs in order to pay for everything so not working is not an option.

Mentor 4: Nothing wrong with taking 12 units....You can make up the other class during the intersession or summer if you are still trying to finish in 4 years or less.

Mentor 2: Sounds like you got a got a great game plan to me. Like I keep telling everyone, start reading now if possible to lighten your load for the semester

Student 3: Will you be working on campus?

Poster: Thanks! That helps a lot! [names omitted]

Poster: And thanks! haha I actually started reading not too long ago and I'm actually enjoying it. haha [names omitted]
Poster: And yes, I will be doing Work-Study. Although, I don't know much about it...

Distributed cognition says that by using the resources of our surrounding environment we increase our ability to perform a cognitive task. This student distributes her cognition into her surround, thus ceding her executive function and allowing it to be co-opted by more knowledgeable nodes. The distributed nature of knowledge was very deliberately baked into EPIC, and the page contains 254 posts demonstrating distributed cognition ($n = 1266$). That accounts for a little over 20% of the page. It’s also interesting that it required several mentors to address this question. Distributed cognition recognizes that different people have different experiences and different fields of knowledge. Several mentors agreed that this sounded like too heavy a load for a first semester until the second mentor (who had extensive experience with balancing school and a full time job) pointed out that some clubs can be helpful for school and that not everyone has the option of only being a student if they must pay their own tuition.

The constructs of distributed cognition and feedback from more capable peers are mutually dependant on each other and are the most represented theories seen on this group page. This high prevalence would seem to indicate that the students trusted and appreciated the presence of these more capable peers and asked a litany of questions that ranged from banal things such as how to not look like a freshman and fit in better all the way to pertinent tips on how to cope with stress and do college the best way possible:

Poster: I heard college classes go at a much quicker pace. In order to keep up with them you need to prioritize and keep an organized schedule. Time management is a top factor to either success or failure in college courses. I heard a majority of classes are going to be lectures and you need to rely on yourself to take notes.
Me: Time management is a must. You’ll find the method that works best for you but I find writing things down helps me a lot. Especially if you ever start to feel overwhelmed or like you don’t know where to start. Some people use planners, I use post-its. You’ll figure out what works best for you. As for the classes, it depends on the subject and the teacher but if you want to keep up then you will. Teachers don’t make their classes so that students will fail, quite the opposite. Also don’t be intimidated to visit your professors or ask questions. This isn’t high school where you’re not "supposed to" care or ask questions. Again, it's quite the opposite.

Poster: Thanks for the advice! I'll definitely take advantage of office hours! I was always that person to stay after when I didn't understand something to get clarification.

Other Mentor: Good to hear! This is also an opportunity for you to get to know professors and get to ask them questions about their expertise. They also can give you recommendations for programs you might want to enter or can also give you a boost in finding a way to get experience.

Time management was another common thread within this page, and as is obvious above, two mentors provide feedback that includes either personal advice or tried-and-true practices such as making post it notes or staying in touch with professors to decrease progress-impeding anxiety. It’s also worth mentioning that since many of the mentors in this space are also instructors for freshman writing courses, the feedback distributed was able to incorporate not only what experienced college students do but also what freshmen instructors want or hope for from their students.

Poster: I have heard a bit about the college classes. The number 1 thing i’m told is that it is completely different than high school. There is more studying involved and no procrastination is allowed. My main concern would have to be giving up if a class or assignment gets to challenging. But, i'm trying not to get into that mentality. In my opinion, to do well is not giving up, be very organized, and stay on top of things. And of course not forget to enjoy college.

Mentor 1: I think you and I have a very similar ideas on what it means to do well! It sounds like you're starting off on the right foot by not letting yourself to get into the giving up mentality.

Mentor 2: Just knowing that giving up is not an option is such a positive way to come into this! Teachers (like me!) are so willing to work with those students who...
give 100% to their school work and that can really help you cultivate a good relationship with your teachers.

Notice the second mentors parenthetical inclusion “teachers (like me!)” to demonstrate both an ethos concerning successful practices from the perspective of a successful student and teacher. This kind of advice might seem overly idealistic in its encouragement to never give up and talk to your professors, but there were also several threads that featured a real world perspective that were definitely not what one might expect to be given to first time freshmen such as the example below:

Poster: I have heard a lot about college and college classes. The main things that I've really heard is that college is not as easy as high school and in college you have to stay on top of things/try not to fall behind. My concern is that I tend to feel overwhelmed when too much is put on my plate (doesn't everyone?) and I guess I'm scared of all the challenges that I have to face with my schoolwork. For me, I think to do well in college you have to always ask questions, schedule time for studying, stay super organized, stay confident, keep a positive mind, do your personal best, and most of all have fun

Me: I don't know why you're worried. It sounds like you know exactly what you have to do in college. Trust me, the idea is always scarier than the reality. You're going to be great. When I am overwhelmed I like to write down everything I have on my plate so I can start planning when I want to do each thing. But everyone has different ways of managing. Scroll through this page some, we have a bunch of super smart mentors that have been giving their personal methods for handling stress also. And keep in mind these are some of the most organized people I have ever met

Poster: Thanks for the advice!

Me: Any time

Mentor 1: Derek is spot on above...but I will add that for me personally I dont do every single assignment that gets assigned (I know...blasphemy right? ) But you will find that missing an assignment here and there wont kill you either. Just make sure it's not a major paper or test.

Mentor 2: I think I can speak for Derek and myself when I say "we have never missed an assignment" and we do procrastinate and find time for extracurricular activities. But we probably get less sleep than most.
Me: Sometimes prioritization and procrastination are necessary evils as are mental health holidays (shirking all responsibilities for a day). Just remember to keep everything in moderation

Mentor 2: I think Harry Callahan (Dirty Harry - Clint Eastwood) said it best "A man's GOT to know his limitations."

Poster: Haha thanks guys for all your wonderful support!

Mentor 2: You will do great!

Mentor 3: Such smart men are in this program! All of the above is fabulous advice. Kim always tells us that college is an opportunity to build up your work ethic and to find your stress threshold. College is pretty much a full time job. You will learn all kinds of tricks for staying organized and positive along the way but don't forget to take time to relax and give yourself a break!

Mentor 2: [Mentor 3] We are only outdone by the smart ladies in this program.

Poster: All of you are our "mentors" right?

Mentor 3: Such smart humans* in this program! Haha and we are a pretty awesome example of the sense of community that draws so many students to Chico State. Going to school in Chico is honestly one of the best things that has ever happened to me.

Mentor 3: Yes we are mentors and some of us teach various English classes

Me: Yes we are. … [mentor names omitted here]

Mentor 2: As a whole we've mentored Freshman comp classes, taught freshman comp classes, taught creative writing classes, and have taught literature classes. We all dabble in everything for the most part.

Mentor 2: As English Grad students our faculty is very gracious in letting us dive into all aspects of teaching English classes. They prepare us well (as long as we are willing to put in the time and effort) and are always there for support. We support each other all the time as well.

Mentor 4: Yep! I'm a mentor too. I haven't been around the block as many times as the grad students, but I've been mentoring and tutoring students since late 2011.

This is a very overt example of mentors giving real world pro tips that definitely don’t conform to most people's conception of what to tell first time freshmen. Even the poster seemed surprised enough by the grit of the content that she asked if we were mentors at
all. Admissions such as “I don’t do every single assignment that gets assigned” and “we do procrastinate and find time for extracurricular activities” would not seem like things to admit in an academic arena even if they are true. But the fact remains that the advice above is realistic and far more helpful in reducing stress than trying to browbeat students into believing that one must always do everything no matter what.

**Imagined Selves: Projective Identity**

One quest that asked students to state what they thought it required to be successful in college bore a strong tie to James Gee’s theory of projective identity. Projective identity plays on the dual meaning of the word project to mean either projecting one's values and desires onto a digital persona or seeing that persona as a project in the making.

Poster: I think in order to be successful at Chico you should be seeing your advisor at least twice every two weeks and you should be getting help from tutors.

Mentor 1: It good to see an advisor but I generally meet one every semester. And tutors are great when you need help!

Mentor 2: Yeah meeting with your advisors towards the end of the semester is generally what I would recommend. Only need to do that once a semester.

This post demonstrates what I call a fallacious projective identity. The student is imagining something that would be incredibly impractical and not useful. It is likely that anxiety and insecurity contributed to the formation of the projective imagination, but the ability to step in and help the student renegotiate this over-the-top conception of what it takes to be successful is what made mentor feedback so useful.

Poster: Quest D I've heard that some classes can be very strenuous and others can be quite straightforward. I've been told that if you don't manage your time correctly with your classes, homework, and study time you may fail. My concern is not
getting straight A's. And to do well in Chico I think all your time needs to be spent in the library so I’ll see you guys there.

Mentor 1: Whoa whoa whoa! Don’t spend all of your time in the library! You definitely want to create good study habits for yourself, keep up to date and be aware of your class calendars and when assignments are due, and attend your classes on a regular basis, but you also need to take time to enjoy yourself outside of class. There is much to discover and explore in Chico: parks, swimming holes, theaters, sports, the gym (with an awesome swimming pool). Strive to get straight A’s for sure, but take one day at a time and enjoy yourself as well. Find a good balance between class, studying, and down time. You will do just fine.

This post is a prime example of best laid yet unrealistic plans. It could be argued that the student likely wouldn’t end up spending every day in the library, it could also be argued that the very fact that he thinks he should or is supposed to would cause large amounts of performance impeding stress. This mentor’s feedback helped recast this student’s conceptions and construct a trajectory that will yield success through prolonged effort and moderation, rather than exhaustion.

Trading Places: Students Replacing Mentors

After the online week concluded on August 1st, the page witnessed a noticeable decline in mentor presence. The end of this online week meant that students were no longer required to post and no longer received points for doing so. But the fact that students were no longer required to post didn’t stop them from doing so and the page continued to flood with posts and questions. Some mentors returned to continue providing assistance for these students, but many didn’t. Speculating their reasons for not returning is beyond the scope of this study, but to cope with the decline in mentorship students began to address each other’s questions. Many students began to mushfake their way into a helpful role instead of only an inquisitive one. There were 51 total instances of
students helping each other without mentors. Thirteen of these occurred before August 1st while the other 38 occurred after, which indicates a strong correlation between the declining mentor presence and students stepping in.

Poster: Have any of you that are taking out loans done the entrance counseling? I'm having a hard time with it

Student 1: I did it already

Student 1: What are you having trouble on?

Student 2: I had trouble earlier with the same thing but I finally understood it

Student 2: What is it that you're having trouble with?

Poster: I'm not sure if it's just my computer but it won't let me go past the part where you choose the school you notify

Student 1: Did you put in Chico? You're supposed to select the state it's in then it will give you a list of schools.

Student 2: Once you select Chico as the school and click the button under the selection bar that says notify I believe, then you should be able to press continue.

Poster: I was able to continue and it says that my estimated student loan in $0 is that what it should say or the amount that appears on Chico portal?

Student 2: It should say the amount that appears on your Chico portal.

Student 2: There should be a spot to input the loan amount.

Poster: Ok I see and we combine the loans if it's more than one right? Thanks

Student 2: Yes you combine the loans. No problem

Student 2: By the way make sure to separate subsidized and unsubsidized loans if you are receiving those types of loans.

The first response initially indicates a disinterested nonchalance until it is followed up with a query about the trouble this poster is having. This query is then seconded by a different student much like multiple mentors would often ask how they could help or why a student was struggling with something. The poster elaborates and
then the students both walk her through the process step-by-step to ensure that her loans carry through correctly. A great deal of the posts which did not feature a mentor or instructor presence were simple questions (i.e., is there AC in the dorms) or ones that had been answered before already (i.e., when do we find out who our roommates are?). This post does not fit into either of those categories. In lieu of a mentor presence these students are taking up the torch in very similar ways. Emotion and micro expression researcher Paul Ekman describes non incentivized assistance like this as naches, which is a Yiddish word for the bursting pride we feel when someone we’ve taught or mentored succeeds, which could account for this phenomenon (McGonigal 87). They simply grew to enjoy helping each other.
CHAPTER V

QUESTING TO BE(COME)

Why Quests?

The creators and administrators knew that the allotted 15-hour time cap would not be enough time to write, review, and revise an essay. Such an activity in such a small window of time would not provide students much instruction in writing. And since 21 staff/faculty would have to find a way to provide feedback to 274 full length essays, it would place a great deal of stress on the staff of the program while providing little benefit for students. Ten to twenty pages per participant would yield 2740-5480 pages of writing that would need to be read and responded to in two days.

Even if this was accomplished, what would students take from the activity? Perhaps a very rushed and inexact microcosm of what academic writing is like, but the real question is would anything from this exercise transfer to their academic writing class? For some it’s possible that it could, but it seems unlikely since these freshmen are encouraged to wait a semester before taking their academic writing class, which means a 21 week gap between this writing and their writing class. According to Jane McGonigal, feedback\(^1\) should be just in time (immediate and pertinent to the activity at hand) and on-demand (given when learners are ready) or else it is not effective (25). And academic

\(^1\) McGonigal uses feedback to mean a system’s response to a user’s actions, which will keep the user engaged and challenged while they learn to navigate the system.
writing under these terms and constraints would be neither of these. The creators wanted these quests to be something the students would enjoy and find useful for forging the mold of their college student identities.

EPIC was scheduled for the two days before these freshmen would first step foot on the University as official students, so why not give them tools to better navigate the journey they were embarking on? As I look over the notes made while designing the quests, all of the goals pertain to helping students navigate their studies, the campus, or the city based on things that the creators, mentors, and faculty wish they had known (or wished students knew) when they first arrived at Chico. Ultimately, the creators decided that, during these two days, the participants would be required to earn 150 points by completing quests of their choosing. In total there were 35 quests to choose from, each worth different values depending on time, difficulty, collaboration, or resources required.² These do not include the four pre-quests which closed when the in-person portion began.

Quest Popularity

Before I begin discussing specific quests and their popularity, it is necessary for me to mention that since certain quests only required a product be shown to a mentor while other quest results could be posted on Facebook and/or Twitter. So there is a margin of error in the numbers to follow. To get perfect, accurate numbers would first require a side-by-side comparison of Twitter and Facebook to see all the quests, a second

² See Appendix A for list of quests
run through to eliminate duplicates, followed by a trip back in time to see and count all products that were physically submitted.\footnote{There was a spreadsheet maintained to keep track of every student’s points by quest, but because of the mentors’ confusion regarding the points and how they were calculated, I am reticent to rely heavily on this data set. I will compare it to the data on Facebook}

I’d like to start with what was by far the most popular quest: number four “A Journey Through Space and Time.” This quest asked students to return to their dwelling, use the method of transport they intended to use once school began, and time how long it took to travel from their house to campus. On Facebook there were 73 posts for this particular quest, which accounts for 20.2% of the quests posted on Facebook ($n = 360$ campus quest posts). According to the mentor spreadsheet this quest was completed by exactly 161 students, which is 58.8% of the participants ($n = 274$). An initial assumption might be that students chose this quest because it was easy. Freshmen live in the dorms right? It couldn’t take them that long to travel and then they get easy points. Yet this didn’t appear to be the case. A great majority of these students chose to live off campus for family or financial reasons. That being said, this quest is interesting to consider for a number of reasons. The first and most obvious is that it definitely addressed a curiosity that students had. And since students would need to make this trip in less than two days time, it was certainly a pressing question.

This pressing concern returns once more to the best structures of feedback; this question was both immediate and on-demand, which could very well account for the large number of students who completed it. The second thing that is interesting about this is the response that we did not see from students -- which was the easy MapQuest option. Realistically speaking students could have typed two addresses into MapQuest, wrote
down the estimated travel time, and shown it to a mentor to receive their points. But they didn’t. Nor did they simply post simple numbers on Facebook. Instead it became apropos for this quest to use the timer app on their cell phones while they travelled, screenshot the resulting time after they arrived back to campus, and post that screenshot to Facebook.

The most oft cited definition of games is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles in an activity. McGonigal uses the example of golf where instead of dropping a ball in a cup, we agree to back up past a hundred or so yards which contain: flora, fauna, water, sand, and some twists and turns before swinging with a clumsy long iron club. This example and the quest from EPIC both demonstrate what is called the lusory attitude. When adopting the lusory attitude, players agree to use worse rather than better means for reaching an end goal. This attitude is inherent in all play and, if it is not adopted, will color the activity as pointless tedium rather than enjoyable. Lastly the quest shows aspects of a psychosocial moratorium, which allows practice with an activity in a context with lowered or extinguished consequences. In other words, rather than worry about being late or early for their classes, this quest afforded the opportunity to discover, fairly precisely, how much time they needed each morning to get to campus.

The second most popular quest on Facebook was number 16: “Event-ually” that asked students to find a poster or advertisement for a Chico State event that they found interesting or wanted to attend, take a picture of the poster or advertisement, and post the picture to Facebook or Twitter. A total of 47 posts were made for this quest on Facebook which means it accounts for 13% of the quest posts. The mentors spreadsheet reveals that 128 students (46.7% of participants) completed this quest and though Facebook says 16 was the second most popular quest, the spreadsheet indicates that it
was actually the third. This quest contained a number of elements. The first and most
obvious is agency. Students were encouraged to explore the campus and find an event (of
which there are many at the beginning of Fall) that sounded interesting to them and post
it to Facebook. Not only did this award them points, but it also made that event visible for
others who might find it similarly interesting. This visibility also promotes more
community between the participants. Loosely defined, community is the result of doing
something difficult or new together; in this case it is something new.

There are copious references in the EPIC design notes that refer to the
frustration and anxiety inherent in meeting new people at college. Not only does this
quest help familiarize students with the goings on of the campus and the city, but it also
creates an opportunity to meet people at these events. Arguably the most awkward part of
any friendly relationship is the initial moments, but if students had this program as a
shared experience, then this topic alone could provide a conversational ingress and
sidestep the awkwardness altogether. The fact that they had chosen to attend the same
event would also likely provide grounds for additional conversation. This is also referred
to as common appreciative systems, meaning that both people value similar outcomes or
activities. Essentially this quest gave students an excuse to form relations and network
with other students, as they probe their surroundings to discover their interests and other
people who share them. James Gee calls this the probing principle where learners
interrogate their surroundings, form a hypothesis, reflect, and re interrogate their
surroundings to test that hypothesis -- or in this case their interests.

Another popular quest on Facebook was number six: “Ones and Zeros.” This
was a simple quest requiring students to discover the location of a computer lab for
student use, and then post a picture and location to Facebook or Twitter. This quest was posted 34 times on the Facebook page (9% of Facebook quest posts) but the point spreadsheet indicates that 112 students completed this quest (40.9% of participants). This again raises a discrepancy between the spreadsheet which indicates that this was only the fifth most popular quest while Facebook shows it to be the third.

Considering that there are students who may not have their own personal computer or laptop to bring to campus or for those who don’t wish to bring it everyday, this quest sought to familiarize students with sites that they could use for free internet access or other technology needs. This was a quest dependant on students’ appreciative systems. Someone who had a small laptop they could easily carry with them to school likely wouldn’t find as much utility in this quest as would someone who doesn’t have a (portable) computer at all. Once again this highlights the necessity of agency and goal-based learning. It’s common knowledge we don’t retain things we don’t find useful or interesting, yet school routinely forces students to do just that. In gameful environments, our goals dictate our choices, which subsequently have a reflexive relation with our experience in the game.

This quest also highlights the importance of discovery. To retain something learners are better off if they conceive or discover it on their own terms. The program’s directors and the mentors could have easily rattled off several locations of computer labs. But it’s doubtful students would have remembered the list. Rattling off such a list would have been nearly useless since these newcomers would have yet to memorize or even know about all the different halls that contained these computers. They would have likely remembered the library has a spacious computer lab, but come the end of the semester
when students need technology the most to do their work or veer away from distractions, all insiders know to stay away from the incredibly crowded, stuffy, and loud library. Thus this info would have been of little use. But in discovering different locations on their own, players are able to more easily commit it to memory.

The last quest I’d like to discuss here is number 17: “Leave the Gun. Take the Cannoli.” This quest asked to student to go and eat at a local restaurant for under $5 (no fast food), take a picture of the menu item, and post that picture to Facebook or Twitter. This quest was completed 28 times on the Facebook page (7.7% of Facebook quest posts) but the spreadsheet says that 113 students completed this quest (41.2% of participants). This quest contains many similar elements as the previous two quests, which I think advocates the use of these principles in more quests. First of all it allows students the agency to find their own place to eat instead of directing all students towards one particular business. This relates to the idea of discovery and active learning where participants make meaning based on their own goals and not somebody else’s. It also touches once more upon goal driven learning. Fiscally challenged students consigned to a meal plan would not find any use in this quest, and would likely have been upset at having to spend five dollars they may not have to spare. But for the students interested in exploring the different frugal culinary options this quest provided that information both when they need it and when the information can best be used in practice.

More importantly a knowledge of cheap food close-by is a college staple just as a lack of this knowledge is a very clear indicator of a newcomer. So to help bring these students into the community of the city and the university, they should have at least a basic knowledge of different food locations. But handing players a list of cheap eating
spots would not be as mnemonically effective as allowing them to be discovered by choice. Lastly, encouraging students to eat together also opens the doors for them to communicate and perhaps discover shared interests or future friends. Figure 2 illustrates the discrepancy between the quest posts on Facebook and the spreadsheet tally kept

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Fig. 2. Quest completion frequency.
during the program by the mentors. Luckily, the top four (bolded) and bottom three (underlined) quest frequencies maintain their integrity in both data sets.

Quest Unpopularity

Not all quests were taken up by the participants. Figure 1 reveals that there were three quests that were barely touched by the participants. As is evident above, there is a margin of error either as a result of students not posting quests to Facebook, students scrubbing their Facebook account after EPIC, or mentors misplacing point totals in the spreadsheet. But since these three quests come in dead last on the spreadsheet and only place above quests on the Facebook page that were not required to be posted on Facebook, I am confident in my assumption that these were the least popular quests. These quests were numbers 8, 21, and 31.

Quest Eight: “Leave a Trail” asked students to find one of their classes and room information, map the route from the class to that professor’s office, check-out an iPad and record a video of the best possible route from the classroom to the Professor’s office, then upload the video to YouTube. It also offered a bonus if students found more people who had the same class and completed the quest together. To get the bonus required a picture with the student and their collaborator(s) in front of the professor’s office that was tweeted or posted to Facebook. Figure 1 shows that this quest was only posted twice and completed seven times, but the relevant question is not what, it’s why. The first noticeable thing about this quest is that it’s very complex and overdetermined. In contrast to the most popular quests this one offers very little agency. Students are told where to go, where they should start, and how they should remember it. This quest has
the theoretical makings of a gameful activity -- it attempts to encourage collaboration and exploration. And still there are several problematic elements. First of all, it seems unrealistic to expect students to know or hunt down others who they have common classes with. It could arise biologically in another conversation but even if it did, this program contained 274 students who could be any number of places around campus or town. So how is that student expected to track that person down? Secondly, although mapping a route to a professor’s office is something that instructors and mentors realize is useful, it likely wasn’t apparent to these students why it was important. Part of acquiring a new Discourse is relying on an old one, and these students just completed high school, where teachers did not have offices and going to visit them outside of class time likely meant you were in trouble or some kind of dire straits. Given this and that students all planned on being successful in college may shed some light on why so few students chose this quest. Another problem is the required apparatus. Gameful learning arises kinesthetically and does not necessarily require a digital component. Requiring students to video the way to a professor’s office and upload it to Youtube seems more like using technology for technology’s sake rather than for learning’s sake. I understand the underlying objective of encouraging students to know where their professor’s offices are and stopping by to demystify the location and the action, but perhaps this could be done in a less complex way or the central objective of meeting your future professor could be brought further to the forefront.

Quest 21: “Better Now Than…” asked students to use the spring 2015 schedule and their “DPR,” (Degree Progress Report) to develop a “working” class schedule for the spring semester. Students received a bonus for finding the name and
office hours of their major advisor and posting it on the course Facebook or Twitter. There are several problems in this quest. The first and foremost is that it’s confusing. How are first time freshmen expected to have confidence in what a DPR is? They could look it up but even if they did they have no degree progress report because they haven’t started school yet. Perhaps more students would have felt comfortable with this quest had the instructions indicated where they could find this information. Additionally not all majors come with an assigned advisor, nor did all students have a declared major. Again this ties back to students acquiring their college Discourse, which means that all this language is entirely alien and is a very likely reason why this was the least completed quest in the entire program.

But the most troubling component of this quest is its dissonance with the ideology of EPIC itself. EPICs intent was to provide students with information or experience right when they were ready for it and needed it. Yet this quest does almost the exact opposite. While students are busy being pre-occupied with starting college this quest is essentially asking them to also begin planning their second semester. I am not trying to claim that these students weren’t capable of this type of planning because they will do it eventually and clearly did it before otherwise they wouldn’t be enrolled. My point is that the content of this quest was not something students valued beyond getting the points for completing it. EPIC also sought to utilize embodied learning where students move and explore to learn whereas this quest would see them sitting at a computer the entire time to complete it. I understand the purpose in trying to encourage students to understand the specialized language of a college campus but the quest needs more support that was not available in this iteration of EPIC.
Quest 31: “What Would Dewey Do?” required students to borrow a laptop and access the Chico State website:

In the upper right hand corner, find a link marked “Library” and click-it. You should now be at the ReSEARCH Station, where there’s a search bar at almost eye level. Fill in the search bar with something you are interested in; possibly your major and/or something within the field you’d like to study. Read over the titles and jot down some ideas or questions that arise from the titles. Discuss with a mentor. (EPIC Quests)

This quest has several of the same problems as the previous one. Unlike the last quest described the instructions are very clear, supportive, and do not make assumptions about abbreviations that students should be familiar with. There are still some inherently problematic factors to consider. The first and most glaring is that it does the thing that EPIC was trying not to do, which is look like school.

This quest is also not one that is capable of being supported like the instructions claim. Had students been able to sit with a mentor and discuss their interests, then this would allowed some bonds to form between students and mentors as the mentors listened to why students had selected that particular interested and supported them in pursuing that interest (perhaps later in a research paper for example). But all the mentors were so occupied with inputting points for completed quests that this was not a possibility. Additionally, this quest also does not feature information on-demand or just-in-time. It’s a well established pedagogical practice to avoid delving into academic research arenas with novice researchers, at least until they’ve gathered some research of their own about the interest they’ve chosen to explore. Students have no use or interest in this information and will likely not retain it as a result.
Best Laid Plans: Did They Work?

The hope of EPIC was to help students build a socially mediated identity to help them do college. To do this required social interaction that would hopefully lend itself to the formation of support networks that might continue through their first year or possibly college as a whole.

Community

There is ample evidence to suggest that students build a very strong community online. But interestingly one of the most common suggestions given in the Student Evaluation of Teaching Results (SETs) was that more of this community building was necessary during the in-person portion. So either students wanted to continue to get to know each other or desired a better follow up to the relations they began online.

Consider the responses below to the question “What could your instructor do in the future to make this a better class?”

“A little bit more face to face interaction would be beneficial.”

“In order to make this class better, my instructor can add more interactive quest in addition to the one they already have”

“To make this a better class for the future I think the teacher can add more quests for the students can interact more.”

All these responses show a desire to continue building the community that was started online, which might also increase the odds of those relations enduring the end of the program. I also interviewed a few students after the end of the program and found a similar message in their comments. One woman plainly stated that a small amount of time at the beginning simply wasn’t enough to get to know everyone and that she would have wanted that to last longer. She actually made sure that I wrote down that we need
more face-to-face interaction. These comments indicate a desire for more opportunities to build stronger longer lasting relationships.

**Identity**

By utilizing the structures of support and community on the Facebook page, students were able to begin preparing themselves for college. Not simply by getting their questions and anxieties answered but by providing students with a safe low stakes environment where they could test drive the new identity they were cultivating in preparation for college. By constructing this identity they were paving the way to better know how to participate in their new environment. Using embodied learning, this page and the quests had students do things they would later find helpful. From a sociocultural learning perspective this is an integral component of any new or fruitful learning. To learn one must perform or participate and in order to be accepted they must participate in acceptable ways. This is why Lave and Wenger describe learning as a form of social becoming. What’s interesting is that even though this objective of *becoming* was not communicated to students it became something that was subtly commented on in the SETS after the end of the course. See the examples below:

“Well first and foremost the activities/assignments are very helpful towards making the transition into what people call ‘college life.’”

“The instructor helped me meet new people and learned the ways of the school.”

This program was framed in the instructions as something that was built using what other people had wished they knew when they first got to college but I’d like to reiterate that nowhere in the instructions, website, posts, or comments was their any mention of this identity theme that these students are mentioning here. The fact that the culmination of
this program saw students enjoying the work they were doing (there are numerous iterations of praise in these SETs), but also recognizing the efficacy of this work demonstrates some success in helping students become ready for college.

**Long Lasting Relations**

To better gauge how or if relations had survived EPIC I made a survey and posted it to the same Facebook page that the students had been using to communicate before they met. The survey contained only one question: How many people from EPIC students had kept in touch with after the end of the program. Exactly 45 students responded and the results are represented in Figure 3.

**Fig. 3. Number of student responses.**

Thirteen students said they didn’t interact with anyone they had met in EPIC after the end of the program, another 32 responded that they kept in touch with between one and seven people, and one responder said they had kept in touch with ten or more people. Although this survey indicates the formation of some lasting relations, the sample size is smaller than I hoped and does not give me enough confidence to draw any broad sweeping conclusions regarding whether EPIC cultivated lasting relationships.
After EPIC concluded I discovered that some of the people who had participated in the program were enrolled in my English Writing Workshop class. They agreed to participate in my survey, but it was what they added after they had completed the survey that was far more exciting. One student disclosed that come next semester (Spring 2015) he would be moving in with someone he had met in EPIC. A different student said that “all [her] friends now are from EPIC”. Other students I asked said things like “people from EPIC are who I study with” or “I met my close friends in EPIC”. Though these responses are not quantified in the survey above they do speak to the effect of EPIC in helping establish some friendships that will either last a long duration or last long enough for students to make other friends. The following chapter will discuss how to hone the dynamic better to encourage student communities, identities, and relations via gameful structures.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

There are many startling implications concerning the current field of gaming research. Based on the result of EPIC, and the low resistance to the program we witnessed, we can first of all conclude that the majority of the students at least enjoyed the experience. Whether it was because they were given the opportunity to physically explore, question, and learn about their college or college practices or because they didn’t have to write traditional essays is a question for future studies. But I’d wager that the answer is a little of both. In any case what we saw in EPIC was a combination of several theories that were implemented by a veteran staff and mentors. This school has a strong Neo-Vygotskian tradition and this program lived up to that legacy with its use of Vygotsky’s more capable peers within what became quite a sizeable zone of proximal development. Within this zone feedback was asynchronous as well as immediate at different times. And since they did not occur until three days before the start of the semester I also believe it is safe to conclude that this experience and the feedback was on demand. My problem is this: How is this any different from a well oiled classroom?

There is so much hype right now about the field of gaming research that I think it has been forgotten that some instructors have been unconsciously drawing on game-based constructs for years. The precepts found in games are not new to the field of education. Thanks to the sociocultural tradition started by Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget,
we have had access to these theories since the early 1920s and they are used in certain classrooms.

So while many instructors stay married to the idea of a teacher-centered space that does not leave any room for the learner, I have seen similar elements used with great success in classrooms that feature embedded mentorship. Embedded mentorship facilitates feedback, encourages students, and aids in the construction of zones of proximal development that draws on distributed cognition to assist with student worries, questions, or distribute tried-and-true tips. Perhaps we are already using one of the effective principles of games with embedded mentorship.

Unfortunately stumbling upon and/or accidentally using the effective aspects of games like embedded mentorship is rarely the case with this game-fueled-fervor; it’s normally the opposite. This opposite has come to be known as gamification – a catchy moniker I am not opposed to, yet one I so often see used incorrectly when people try to disingenuously extrapolate the superficial elements or aesthetics of games to forward “marketing bullshit, invented by consultants as a means to capture the wild, coveted beast that is videogames and to domesticate it for use in the grey, hopeless wasteland of big business, where bullshit already reigns anyway” (Bogost). While Bogost is nothing if not acerbic, his is a crucial point. Just because we enjoy playing certain games does not mean we can strip the aesthetic elements of those games and press them up against other things to make them different or somehow more enjoyable. In fact I am very troubled by this advent of fallacious gamification. Just because a leaderboard and another person who gives you points is added to an undesirable activity does not make that activity any more
enjoyable or different. It’s simply the same undesirable activity with someone else keeping track of some points with a leaderboard.

Jane McGonigal says we should strive to make things gameful rather than gamified. To be gameful implies a learner-centered context that draws upon intrinsic motivation rather than adding external stimuli to try and somehow change our appreciative systems. But I have a problem with this too when it comes to education. School does not regularly play to all students’ intrinsic motivation. Again, in most circumstances, especially with general education, it is quite the opposite. Students are cornered in a classroom, given readings they find unimportant, assignments they procrastinate, and held hostage by their grades that will one day color their future employer’s opinion of them. All this demonstrates a motivation external to the learner (e.g., grades, jobs, money, etc) which is exactly what gamification does as well; it ignores the problem of creating a genuine want in order to occupy itself with looking like a game.

So perhaps it is a good thing that the word gamification has been stolen by hucksters and greedy agents peddling incomplete ideas to large corporations under the guise of increasing profits. There are several people who subscribe to the incomplete view of gaming studies as the next big fad or magical cure but such gross solutionisms only undermine many of the changes that innovative academics have been trying to enact. And since academia is typically plagued by a nostalgic urge for non-digital-traditional methods of learning, these gameful ideologies are relegated to unfunded mandates that encourage mal-productive terminology like remedial: a word that has lost all meaning and now elicits the same emotional response from a learner as would kicking their puppy. To be clear I am not saying that EPIC was unproductive or that I don’t agree with its
utility because I do. I have talked to several students and read numerous Student Evaluation Tests that would indicate that students enjoyed or were at least grateful for the experience. I merely wish to highlight that instead of implementing these concepts across the curriculum we are relegated to fight for its implementation in programs that presently don’t affect graduation or degree progress.

Implications

There are several implications which have arisen in my studies as well as in conversation with others about the Early Start EPIC program. First and foremost of these is an element that I have found to be curiously absent, and that is the presence of an overriding narrative or story structure. The summary of this program describes it as an Augmented Reality Game but these usually have some sort of ambient narrative. Jane McGonigal elaborates effusively on the importance of elements that generate an epic feeling or inspire a sense of awe which can serve as a call to action in the service of something greater. More importantly it works. There have been several conferences now that ‘troll’ their participants by planning a call with a relatable program that interrupts the meeting and results in the members working together to solve the problem, which as it turns out is a fictional one. Obviously, this story would have to be carefully crafted because I don’t see how we would be able to troll our participants in a similar way; at least not without being either too deceitful or too corny. But I do see a lot of room for this program to work with the creative writing one to produce something awe inspiring. Or better yet why not co-opt some English classes to help with this work? Even if just to make an incredibly detailed storyboard.
Next, the points earned in EPIC for completing quests need to be eradicated. Why quantify their exploration? Things like points require a high level of upkeep on part of the mentors/instructors and is nothing but the fallacious application of gamified aesthetics. So why continue something that was draining for mentors and confusing for students? All these points did was create a semblance of school within an otherwise play-based curriculum. Proof of this can be seen in the numerous Facebook threads frantically querying mentors about whether they had enough points for certain portions of the program -- when in reality the points were irrelevant in the eyes of the administrators. And unfortunately students took this up in the only conceivable way they could, a gamified school-like one where the points became the end-all-be-all objective of the program. Towards the end of the program several students were content to sit around and wait (sometimes several hours) until the course was over for no other reason than “I already have 150 points.” The same argument could be made for the leader board. In the harvest of the Facebook data I found a total of two references to the leaderboard out of 1,270 posts, which indicates that it was too much for the mentors to maintain and/or the students did not take it up. Neither option makes much of an argument for its continued existence.

Another implication pertains to the permanence of social media platforms. What I heard from interviews and saw on the Facebook page reveals that the site was incredibly helpful for students -- perhaps even more so than the on-campus quests. The Facebook or something like it should obviously remain a static element of the program.

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1 Participants in EPIC were told they had to accrue 150 points to pass the program when in fact, merely participating in ESPE 020 fulfilled their remediation requirements.
But if this program is to continue in the foreseeable future and the current research is correct in showing the decline of membership of Facebook and a rise in the average age of users, then perhaps a new medium will soon be needed. Or perhaps Facebook could be used until it becomes a domain no longer known for its use as a casual social media, and it could be reclaimed by us as an academic social media, but I’d caution against this since it seems like students would more engaged with something they already know or use to communicate with their friends. If we try to force them onto something else, I think we run the risk of creating a creepy treehouse phenomenon\(^2\) that will not be as actively used and more quickly discarded after the course’s conclusion.

Whatever medium we decide, it should be a consistent and recursive one. Would it not make more sense to have every round of EPIC in the same Facebook group page? Not only would this afford students the ability to simply search for the questions they have in case it has already been answered but it would also notify previous EPIC participants when new freshmen-to-be began asking questions. The very point of having the mentors participate was to provide more relatable but still knowledgeable people to help students. And who is more relatable than students who just completed this program one year prior?

I realize this sounds overly idealistic but perhaps it’s not as naive as it sounds. After all, students were sacrificing their summer vacation to begin using this page more than a month before they were required to. Is it so outlandish to hypothesize that they might be willing to once again give up part of their summer? Only this time it would not be as nubile uninformed freshmen, but as near-peers who had just completed their first

\(^2\) Attempts to duplicate social online spaces in an institutionally constrained format
year of college. These near-peers could assist mentors, however briefly, with answering questions and building community. Additionally why not mesh this embodied experience into the pre existing program of summer orientation? In fact this was the only criticism I ever heard from a student about this program and that was that it was “basically like my Summer O” so why settle for *basically* when it could *actually* be like their Summer O?

Another practical recourse could be to tabulate the most common questions, anxieties, as well as the best responses to them in order to build a resource that addressed these things in one place. It seems what often impedes students in terms of locating information is the expansive campus website with a lot of information in a lot of different places. Why not create a space where it all exists with searchable keywords? This could have several implications. Students could take it up and find no need for the social media platform save to perhaps communicate with each other and try to make friends prior to arriving. They could take it up and begin asking more nuanced questions that are not the common ones curated in this FAQ, and the mentors could assist them in a different sort of way. Or the students could not use the FAQ at all and continue to post any kind of content to the site. My guess is that it would likely be a mix of the above options, which means that several students would find such a FAQ beneficial.

The final implication is more follow up in nature, but if the goal of this EPIC page was to build community and support networks, why not continue to reinforce these support networks and their tensile strength by keeping these students together for certain classes? This practice would be very similar to existing course link structures where students take a set of classes together to garner a shared intentionality that encourages collaboration. It was suggested that they all be placed into a joint course but I hesitate to
endorse this because the learning it would engender would depend greatly on that instructor's knowledge of embedded mentorship and the role of mentors in a writing space. Chico State already endorses the jumbo course format but I am curious why there is only one section of it in the spring. Wouldn’t it be better to keep as many of these students together as possible? By sheer numbers it may not always be possible to fit everyone in a single section but it seems like a more effective solution to keep these students in a common space with a shared intentionality. Reserve the seats if that’s what’s necessary.
WORKS CITED
WORKS CITED


EPIC Quest List
Summer 2014
Welcome To Our Quests Page!

You Are Not Alone: Pre-Campus Quests (online July 28-Aug1)
Everyone do “c” and then choose 2 more to complete during the week of July 28.

a. Bueller? Bueller?…
Check in on our Facebook page and say hey. Where are you from and why did you choose Chico? (15 points)

b. Tweeting in the Dark
Join Twitter (if you don’t have an account already) Follow us:
[Twitter links omitted] (2 points for each person you follow. Bonus for finding other Chico State twitter accounts.)

c. All of the Above (EVERYONE DO THIS QUEST)
Take this survey about your reading and writing habits (20 points).

d. Rumor Has It…
What do you know about college classes? What stories have you been told? What are your concerns? What does it take to do well at Chico State do you think? Post your response on our Facebook page (15 points)

Bonus quest for “d”: respond to someone else’s post on Facebook. What concerns do you share? What insights can you provide? 5 additional points for each response.

e. I Have a Question…
Post questions you have about college to our Facebook page or Tweet out using the hashtag #ChicoEPIC. (5 points)

Campus Quests (August 21-22)

Not All Who Wander Are Lost: Location Quests
1. I’m Going On an Adventure
Download the Taleblazer app. Put in game code: gegzlox
With a small team (3-4 people), try out the quests in Taleblazer. You must start on Chico State’s campus for the game to work (it works with gps location). Have some people in your team navigate with the app. Have another person record your team’s adventure on phone or with iPad with pictures or video. Take notes or tweet out during your adventure.

#ChicoEPIC. Report back to mentors in Langdon 300 what you discovered on your journey (30 points for starting any portion/50 points for finishing all areas).

2. What Does That Spell?
Visit the downtown area and take a picture of each street sign: Chestnut, Hazel, Ivy, Cherry, Orange. Make a digital collage and post it to our Facebook page or Tweet it out using the hashtag #ChicoEPIC (20 points).
3. Bus, Do Your Stuff!
Log onto http://www.blinetransit.com/
Look for a stop that is near your home location; find the time it arrives and when it gets to schools. Make a schedule of which buses to catch to reach school/ride back home along with times according to your class schedule. Share with a mentor in Langdon 300 (15 points).

4. A Journey Through Time and Space
Drive/walk/bike to school from your home/dorm room. Record the time it takes to get to the school from home at a reasonable, calm pace. Tweet it out or post to our Facebook page. #ChicoEPIC (15 points).

5. We’re Not in Kansas Anymore
Go to as many of the buildings on campus you can in 15 minutes. Write down as many names as you can in those 15 minutes. Back in Langdon 300, take a map of the school (without building names) and label as many of the buildings as you can with the correct name (20 points).

6. Ones and Zeros
Discover the location of a computer lab for students’ use. Tweet it out or post to our Facebook page. #ChicoEPIC (5 points).

7. A Floor of One’s Own
Go to the second, third, and fourth floors of the library. Create a rough sketch of the floor plans or take pictures and tweet out or post to our Facebook page. What can you do on each floor? (20 points).

**Bonus Quest for 7:** Create a quick guide for other new students. Post on our Facebook page (Additional 20 points).

8. Leave a Trail
Find one of your classes and room information and map the route from the class to that Professor’s office. Check-out an iPad Langdon 300 and record a video of the best possible route from the classroom to the Professor’s office. Once completed, bring the iPad back to Langdon, upload to YouTube with a mentor, and get the quest checked off. (20 points)

**Bonus Quest for 8:** Find one or more students who have the same class and complete the quest together. Take a pic of your pair/team in front of the Professor’s office and Tweet it out or post to Facebook. #ChicoEPIC (Additional 10 points).

9. She Turned Me Into a Newt (I Got Better)
“The Three Sisters” stand side by side in petrification, overlooking a plot of flowers. Rumor has it that many years ago they were cursed by Chico State’s groundskeeper, George Peterson, forever doomed to be the “guardians” of the garden. It is said you will meet a similar fate as the witches if you enter the garden and pick the flowers. Inside the garden is a map of Bidwell Park. Using the map, make a list of five activities to do in Bidwell. Present the map and the list to a mentor (15 points).

**Bonus Quest for 9:** Use the map of Bidwell Park to find One-Mile. Take a picture in front of One-Mile and tweet or post. #ChicoEPIC Additional 15 points.

10. It's Dangerous to Go Alone!
Team up with a random student for at least 3 location quests. Document your quests and tweet out, post on our Facebook page, or show a mentor in Langdon 300. Add 10 points to each quest completed together.
Fly Casual: “Fitting In” Quests

11. Don’t Fear the Townies!
Find a person who has lived in Chico for more than four years: ask him or her about a favorite place and/or things to do in Chico. Share this on our Facebook page or Twitter. #ChicoEPIC (15 points).

12. Keep Your Friends Close and Your Professors Closer
Find a professor who doesn’t mind being called by his or her first name. Ask if he or she would be willing to take a picture and share this on our Facebook page or Twitter. #ChicoEPIC (15 points).

Bonus Quest for 12: Ask the Professor what makes a student successful at Chico State. Tweet out response or share on our Facebook page. (Hint: there will be professors at your department meeting during Wildcat Welcome.) [10 points]

13. Those Who Went Before
Find a Junior, Senior, or Grad student and ask him or her your biggest question/concern about attending Chico State. Take a pic with him or her and share the pic and the answer on our Facebook page or Twitter. #ChicoEPIC (15 points).

Bonus Quest for 13: Go with a partner or trio and an iPad. Video record a few juniors, seniors, or grad students answering your questions about what it means to be a successful student at Chico State. Ask them for insider tips to doing well in college. Post the video with the help of a mentor in Langdon 300. (Additional 30 points).

14. Take Apart Our F.O.B., Overhaul the B.O.B, Think About New Headstacks and Slogans
Figure out what these abbreviated names mean: The BMU, Merriam, The Bear, The WREC, The Breezeway, The P.A.C., a Scantron, a Blue Book…or others that you hear during your time on campus and wonder what it means. Take a picture of these things. Share on our Facebook page or Twitter. #ChicoEPIC (15 points).

15. Ogres Aren’t the Only Ones With Clubs
Find a club or organization on campus that you would like to join. Talk to a member or pick up a flyer or both. Share on our Facebook page or Twitter. #ChicoEPIC (10 points).

16. Event-ually
Find a poster or advertisement for a Chico State event that you find interesting and would like to attend. Take a picture of the poster or advertisement. Share on our Facebook page or Twitter. #ChicoEPIC (10 points).

Bonus Quest for 16: Find the University Box Office and buy tickets for an event. Share on our Facebook page or Twitter. #ChicoEPIC (Additional 15 points).

17. Leave the Gun. Take the Cannoli.
Eat well at a local restaurant for under $5 (no fast food franchises). Take a picture of the menu item or you and a friend eating at the place. Share on our Facebook page or Twitter. #ChicoEPIC (20 points).

Work Smarter, Not Harder: Resource Quests

18. Never Send A Human To Do A Machine’s Job
Find ITSS on campus. Ask them how to get on campus wifi for your smart phone. Take a pic with someone working the desk and share on Twitter or Facebook. #ChicoEPIC (15 points).
19. This Isn’t the Magna Carta
Find a syllabus from one of your classes. Jot down the Professor’s Name, Email, Office Hours, Grading Policy, & Key assignments or questions you have about the syllabus. Show to a mentor in Langdon 300 (20 points).

20. He Who Does Not Economize Will Have To Agonize
Take a look at a syllabus or multiple syllabi from one of your classes: make a list of the prices of each textbook as found in the AS Bookstore. Next, search through these alternative sources for the same textbooks to find just the right price for you. Show the bottom line to a mentor in Langdon 300 (30 points).
◦ Chegg.com
◦ Amazon.com
◦ Lyon’s Bookstore (downtown Chico)
◦ Half.com

21. Better Now Than…
Using the spring 2015 schedule and your “DPR,” develop a “working” class schedule for spring semester. Show to a mentor in Langdon 300 (20 points).

Bonus Quest for 21: find out the name and office hours of your major advisor. Post on our Facebook page, Tweet out, or show a mentor in Langdon 300 (5 points).

22. Question the Sphinx
Question those who ask the questions and ask a question at your major department meeting. Post on our Facebook page or Tweet out your question and the person’s answer (20 points).

23. Who You Gonna Call?
Write down in a planner, or program into your phone, five important Chico State phone numbers you think you’ll need. Show to a mentor in Langdon 300 (10 points).

Mix Master, Type Faster: Writing Quests

24. Hello, My Name is Inigo Montoya…
Write a blog post in Google Docs. Go to: http://www.csuchico.edu/google. Click on Documents. Log in with your Chico State portal ID. In the blog post tell us your story: Where are you from? Why did you choose Chico State? What are your goals/fears? (30 points).

Bonus Quest for 24: Ask Dr. Jaxon or a mentor to post your blog to our EPIC website. Additional 50 points! Another 10 points for adding a picture.

25. I Have A Twitter Account and You Don’t…
Tweet questions you have about college. Use the hashtag #ChicoEPIC (5 points for each question)

Bonus Quest for 25: Tweet (or Re-Tweet) the answers people give you. Use the hashtag #ChicoEPIC (Additional 5 points for each answer you receive and re-tweet).

26. It’s In the Syllabus
Find your first writing assignment in any of your courses. Show to a mentor in Langdon 300 and talk through how to do the assignment (20 points).

27. To “A” Or Not To “A”
Ask a mentor in Langdon 300 for three actual papers turned in by Chico State students. Can you determine which one received an A? Any attempt to find the “A” paper will grant you 20 points. A successful attempt will grant you an additional 10 points.
28. You Had Me At the Proper Use of “You’re”
Ask a mentor in Langdon 300 for a paragraph to edit. The paragraph is missing or has incorrect punctuation marks. Can you make the appropriate corrections? Any attempt to make the corrections will earn you 15 points. Each proper correction given will earn you an additional 5 points.

29. All the King’s Horses and All the King’s Men…
Ask a mentor in Langdon 300 for a student’s paper split into multiple sections. Can you arrange the sections of the paper in the original order? Any attempt to put the paper back together will earn you 15 points. Arranging the paper in the original order will earn you an additional 10 points.

30. Cite This!
Type or print out the proper MLA or APA for your favorite book or movie. Turn in to mentor for evaluation (10 points). Including an example of the proper in-text citation using a quote from the movie or book earns an additional 10 points.

31. What Would Dewey Do?
Ask a mentor to borrow a laptop in Langdon 300. Access the Chico State website. In the upper right hand corner, find a link marked “Library” and click it. You should now be at the ReSEARCH Station, where there’s a search bar at almost eye level. Fill in the search bar with something you are interested in; possibly your major and/or something within the field you’d like to study. Read over the titles and jot down some ideas or questions that arise from the titles. Discuss with a mentor (30 points).

32. What’s Black & White and Read All Over?
Find a copy (or the online version) of the Chico State newspaper, The Orion, and read at least one article. Write a short response to the article in Google Docs. Share with a mentor (30 points).

33. The Quest Journal (LOTS OF EPIC POINTS!)
In Google Docs or a notebook, keep a journal of your adventure through the EPIC Early Start game. Include anything from the different quests you completed, why you chose those quests and how you completed them, information about yourself and your companions as you play the EPIC Early Start game, etc. Turn in or share your journal at 5:00pm on Friday to Langdon 300 (100 points).

Bonus Quest for 33: Document your journal through video. Create a short film in iMovie on one of the iPads. OR Document your journal using Storify, which allows you to curate your tweets, images, etc from your series of quests. Share the link to your Storify on our website (Additional 25 points!)

34. ALL THE STUFF Quest
Collect all the flyers, handouts, papers, advise, etc given to you throughout Wildcat Welcome. Make the stuff into something cool: art piece, mash-up, collage, interpretive dance, video… (50 points).

Bonus Quest for 34: create this with a team. (10 points for every member you recruit who also has stuff to use in your group’s creation).

35. I Am The Keymaster: Quest Creator
Write down a quest of your own and complete it. Document the quest on our Facebook page or Twitter and/or show to a mentor in Landon 300 (10 points per quest. Negotiable depending on quest difficulty).
APPENDIX B
Informed Consent

Human Subjects Consent for "The Study of Augmented Reality for Early Start EPIC"

My name is Derek Swain and I am a graduate student in the English Department at California State University, Chico.

I would like you to allow me to use your data in the research I am conducting on the effect of Augmented Reality contexts. The objective of this study is to investigate the effects of applying game principles to education.

If you agree, I will analyze my field notes and any compositions done by you during the semester for EPIC, including major assignments and informal writing. In addition, I may analyze video and audio taken during class or during our interviews if you agree to be recorded.

The risks of the research are that you might find some of your recorded behavior embarrassing or you may be uncomfortable sharing your written work. I will take care to minimize these risks.

All of the information that I obtain from audio/videotaped sessions, my field notes, and your writing will be kept confidential. I will store the audio and video recording, all writing, and any notes about it at my secure residence. I will use a pseudonym to identify your audio files, your writing, and any notes about it. I will keep your name and its pseudonym in a separate locked location.

After this research is completed, I may save my notes for use in future research by myself or others. However, the same confidentiality guarantees given here will apply to future storage and use of the materials.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You are free to refuse to permit me to keep the record of your participation. Whether or not you permit me to use it, your data will be kept confidential and will not affect your grade in this class.

If you have any questions about the research, you may e-mail me at dswain@mail.csuchico.edu. If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a participant in this research project, please contact the California State University, Chico, Human Subjects Research Committee (HRSC) via Marsha Osborne at 530-898-5413.

I have read this consent form, and I agree to allow myself to be recorded (through audio and/or video) with the condition that I am told before recording begins.

___________________________________                            ____________________
Signature & Printed Name                                                                                Date
Interview Protocol

Investigating the Effect of Augmented Reality in Early Start EPIC:

Student Interview Protocol - Initial Interview
(30 minutes)

Overview of Study:
The goal of this study is to understand the effect of applying principles from video games into different settings such as an academic one in Early Start EPIC where students choose their own tasks based on interest and motivation. I would like to spend about 30 minutes talking with you about your experiences in this course, and how you expect it will affect the rest of your college experience. This interview will be kept confidential. Your name will not be used in any report or sharing of the data, and what you say in these interviews will not in any way affect your grade in this class.

Questions:
1. What, in your opinion, is the role or effect of technology in EPIC?
2. How does this program differ from your previous school experiences?
3. How does this program compare with your expectations of college or what you heard about it?
4. What role do you see your peers playing in your experience in terms of the quests?
5. How would you rate the difficulty of these quests?
6. What were some of the obstacles you faced in completing these quests?
7. How do you think the practices developed here will or will not help you in your college experience?
APPENDIX D
### More Capable Peer

**Full Definition**
Direct transmission of advice or know-how from mentor/instructor to student(s).

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<th>When to Use</th>
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<tr>
<td>Any time a mentor draws on their empirical experience in order to convey knowledge to college/Chico novices.</td>
<td>When students help provide each other with resources or answers to questions.</td>
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**Examples:**
7/21/14:
Mentor 1: It really depends on your major as to whether your classes will be mostly lecture-based, discussion-based, or lab-based. It's been my experience that most professors care deeply about their students, but they do get bogged down with other work outside of teaching, and students can get lost in the shuffle. Be persistent, build relationships with your professors and peers, and if you feel like you don't understand something, do not hesitate to find help.

Mentor 2: I was told this exact thing about college before I got here. "You're whole grade will be a test" and "professors don't care if you have a problem." Sometimes it can be hard to let go of ego and pride to ask for help, but in my many years at Chico I've never had a professor ignore me or treat me badly when I needed help. It's important to reach out -- unlike high school, college doesn't have to be a solo experience. Are there classes where tests are worth a huge part of your grade? Yes. Are most classes like that? Not really. You'll be fine, and you're about to meet a whole bunch of people who will support you while you're here.

### Community Building

**Full Definition**
Articulations between individuals that create a more comfortable open emotional space by establishing shared interests, personal goals, background information, or encouraging language.

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<tr>
<td>When people are welcoming each other to the space, chico, college, or are building relationships</td>
<td>When the construction of relationships entails answering questions that would demonstrate a MCP or ZPD</td>
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**Examples:**
Mentor 1: Welcome! Chico is excited to meet you!
Mentor 2: Seems like I've seen a few animal and agriculture students on FB over the past few days. Welcome!
Student 1: My little sisters name is [name]. Lol weird coincidence
Student 2: Really?! That's awesome and it is a coincidence ! Lol. I only met a few people with the [name] too.

### Projective Identity

**Full Definition**
"To project one's values and desires onto the virtual character and seeing [one's] virtual character as one's own project in the making, a creature whom I imbue with a certain trajectory through time defined by my aspirations for what I want the character to be and become" (Good Video Games, Gee 50).

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<th>When to Use</th>
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<tr>
<td>When students imagine the self they want to be in college or what they think it will take to succeed/function/graduate</td>
<td>When students ask how they should approach things rather than state how they plan to</td>
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**Examples:**
Student 1: Quest D: College classes are very difficult if you don't prepare yourself adequately. A number of college alumni I met with told me that college professors aren't flexible with due dates, therefore I have to make my syllabus my number one priority for each and every class. My greatest concern is procrastination. I have the bad habit of procrastinating a lot and I know for a fact that wont slide in Chico. To succeed in Chico I plan to manage my time wisely and do my homework on time. Wish me luck guys!!

Student 2: I've heard that some classes can be very strenuous and others can be quite straightforward. I've been told that if you dont manage your time correctly with your classes, homework, and study time you may fail . My concern is not getting straight A's. And to do well in chico i think all your time needs to be spent in the library so ill see you guys there.
### Zone of Proximal Development

**Full Definition**

"The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under [with] guidance ..." (Mind & Society, Vygotsky ??).

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<td>When students question and learn together to problem solve through directive discourse; sometimes with each other and sometimes with mentors.</td>
<td>When only more capable peers (mentors) provide advice and there is no other input from other students or original poster</td>
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**Examples:**

Student 1: we have online assignments?
Student 2: I read Blackboard Learn won't be used for this program
Student 2: I could be wrong.
Student 3: The link is in your Blackboard Learn link.
Student 3: Your assignments are your quests.
Student 1: So all we have to do are quests right?
Student 3: Yeah. That's what I remember Kim saying to me.
Kim Jaxon: You're doing it here already. Quests are posted here or on Twitter.

### Distributed Cognition

**Full Definition**

Ceding part of one's cognition into the surrounding resources such as people

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<tr>
<td>When students ask a question that they cannot find the answer to on their own</td>
<td>When no one responds</td>
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**Examples:**

Student: So I'm on wait list for a math class. I'm kind of worry about that. What should I do ?

### No Mentors — Entrance into Community of Practice via participation

**Full Definition**

When no mentors are present in a problem solving situation that gets resolved by the students

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<tr>
<td>When students distribute their executive function into the surround and receive feedback from their peers</td>
<td>If mentors or instructors are in the thread</td>
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</table>

**Examples:**

Student 1: Not about this class but should we be buying books right now? Or after classes actually start?
Student 2: You can start checking! It is probably in your syllabus
Student 3: Where do I find the syllabus?
Student 4: Actually u can find the books on the wild cat store website at the bottom they have a link of course materials and u put the class and says what book u need.
Student 3: Thank you!
### Mentor Discussion

**Full Definition**

When no students ever appear in the comment thread or post.

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<td>If the discussion that should involve a student is exclusively mentors</td>
<td>If students are present</td>
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**Examples:**

Mentor 1: Congrats on playing basketball for Chico. What about the atmosphere of chico and the business program intrigued you most? I'm in love with the Associated Students Wildcat Recreation Center (Wrec), so I'm sure I'll see you training in there and don't hesitate to flag me down if you do.

Mentor 2: The Wrec center is the best! Lifting, running, swimming, yoga...it's got everything I need!

Mentor 1: Absolutely. It has everything. I'm partial to the basketball and badminton courts and pool for leisure, and if you find a time that works for you, the scheduled classes they have are a blast too.

Mentor 2: I haven't played badminton in years, but I'm down for a game.

Mentor 1: Challenge accepted...I bet you're a ringer though, lol...we show up to game and you're pulling out your own racket. Anytime, man...I'll look forward to it. We need to hang soon anyway, maybe grab tea or grab downtown after.

Mentor 3: You are coming to Chico at the perfect time to play basketball. The men's team just had their best season ever I do believe.

### Legitimate Peripheral Participation

**Full Definition**

Entering into a community of practice user fuller or different kinds of participation so as to delineate yourself from newcomers using the community in traditional or expected ways.

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<tr>
<td>When a student creates a post outside the current norm or form of participation.</td>
<td>When a student asks a question that demonstrates distributed cognition, zpd, or MCP</td>
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<td>When a student's post redefines the genre of the facebook group page</td>
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**Examples:**

In need of a workout partner in the Chico Rec Center! Can't wait to start the most important part of my life at ChicoState!

### Discourse

**Full Definition**

An identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize.

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<tr>
<td>When students take on different phraseology as a result of mentor or instructor feedback</td>
<td>When students receive feedback but don't demonstrate their new knowledge</td>
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**Examples:**

Question: *Mrs. Kim Peck Jaxon* how do you if we followed all the links for twitter? Also who can I talk to about getting into the beef unit at the school farm?

Feedback: *soft tap on shoulder, whispers in ear* Pro-tip: Never call a professor Mr. or Mrs. Go with Professor or Dr. So here is how you call attention so that your question is answered! Hey Dr. Kim Peck Jaxon! Could you spare a moment to clarify?

Response: *Thank you Dr. Jaxon*! …
## Mushfaking

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<td>Making do “with something less when the real thing is not available” in order to get by and continue the process of steady acquisition (What is Literacy 533).</td>
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<tr>
<td>When students take on the roles of the mentors to build community, answer questions, or act as though they are in fact knowledgeable about university contexts</td>
<td>When students ask mentors for advice or reveal their inexperience</td>
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**Examples:**

Post: Do we have to wait until the first day of school to know what books we need or are we expected to have them before that?

Response: Depends on what you want to do. You can buy them before or see if you actually need them and buy them after school starts ha

## Collaboration

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<td>Students asking each other to do activities together</td>
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<td>When students ask the students in the group if they'd like to join them for a given activity and plans are made to do so.</td>
<td>When nobody responds to the request.</td>
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</table>

**Examples:**

Post: Anyone want to do quests with me tomorrow?.. 
Student 1: have you finished any quests yet? 
Student 2: No just the ones from the online week haha. 
Student 1: yeah same here...i missed yesterday. 
Student 2: Bro you should do these quests with me tomorrow! 
Student 1: For sure haha 
Student 3: I will! 
Student 2: Sounds good! 
Student 4: I will do them with you too! 
Student 2: Alright cool find me during class! 