Engaging the World: Social Pedagogies and Language Learning

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Chapter 8

Beyond Participation: Symbolic Struggles with(in) Digital Social Media in the L2 Classroom

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Introduction

Participation—that long-standing assessment category on proficiency-oriented language syllabi—has found a new conceptual life over the last few decades through the influence of socioculturally oriented applied linguistic and pedagogical frameworks. Recent studies emerging from these fields have urged educators to encourage students to engage with the social world more broadly and to expand beyond the foreign language classroom. As linguistic anthropologist William Hanks reminds us, “[t]o speak is inevitably to situate one’s self in the world, to take up a position, to engage with others in a process of production and exchange, to occupy a social space” (1993, p. 139). A pressing concern for L2 educators is thus which social spaces we inspire learners to enter through our pedagogies and which positions, that is, what forms of participation, we enable them to assume within those spaces. This paper contributes to discussions of social pedagogies in L2 teaching by considering digital social media as not only an opportunity for language educators to access authentic communicative contexts but also a means of enabling learners to expand the scope of positions, which they occupy as users of a new language.

The focus of this article is two instructional studies implemented in different semesters of an intermediate/advanced collegiate German course. The overarching curriculum of the course was inspired by multiliteracies frameworks, which conceptualize language, literacy, and learning as situated in social systems of meaning (e.g., Byrnes & Sprang, 2004; Kern, 2000; Maxim, 2008; Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016). The creation of a digital media unit was motivated by a desire on the part of the Language Program Director (the first author) and the instructors (one of whom is the second author) to continue to develop learners’ awareness of linguistic designs and their effects, while also introducing the potential for increased...
and less predictable social interaction between students in the class and between students and other German speakers. The first unit, involving networked digital gaming, laid the foundation for the second, a multi-week project engaging with online discussion forums. While many of the students reported that they enjoyed the opportunity to engage with more vernacular genres and with language use outside of the classroom context, others experienced moments of misalignment and contested participation (see also Reinhardt, Warner, & Lange, 2014). At the center of this article is a contrastive analysis of the classroom contributions and reflections of two students, one from each variation of the unit. These case studies offer quite different examples of the kinds of symbolic struggles students face as they try to position themselves within the layered social spaces that form when digital media are integrated into classroom practice.

In what follows, we first outline some of the key ways in which participation has been conceptualized in the more recent history of L2 teaching and argue that these different conceptualizations also entail different positions that learners can take up during in- and out-of-class activities. We then examine how the students in the two case studies positioned themselves at different moments during the course, specifically in relation to the digital media unit. Finally, we conclude by identifying some potential implications for curriculum coordinators and instructors.

From Communities to Contact Zones: Positioning Participation in L2 Teaching

Since the proficiency turn in the early 1980s, participation in the sense of “the ability to function in real-life contexts” (Higgs & American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1984, p. 12) has remained a stalwart beacon toward which all other language learning objectives can orientate. Proficiency-oriented language teaching was a clear shift away from methods and models in which participation was primarily considered to be a mental activity (see Kern & Liddicoat, 2011) and toward social models of language teaching and learning. However, the matter of what particular forms and contexts of participation classroom-based language teaching ought to integrate has been an ongoing and manifold discussion in post-proficiency L2 educational research and teaching practices over the last few decades.

Communicative language teaching (CLT), which began to dominate methods books and textbooks in step with the proficiency movement, has tended to locate participation in an unspecified group of speakers, a “particular sociocultural group” (Breen & Candlin, 1980, p. 90), by and for whom certain ways of speaking might be deemed appropriate, read: “native-like” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 16). CLT was heavily influenced by sociolinguist Dell Hymes’s concept
of communicative competence, the ability of a given speech community “to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others” (Hymes, 1972, p. 277). When operationalized in language curricula, however, the notion of speech community often poses analytical problems for L2 teachers and curriculum designers, who have been left to fill the empty signifier “community”—often with an idealized imagined community (to borrow a phrase from Benedict Anderson [1983/2006]; see also Kramsch, 2003, p. xii; Thorne, 2009).

Beginning in the mid-1990s, the American Council for Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)—the primary standardizing body for foreign language study in the United States—proposed a view of “communities” that diverges from the idea of the classroom as a simulacrum of an imagined native speech community. The 1996 Standards for Foreign Language Learning published by ACTFL located participation both very broadly in “Multilingual Communities at Home & Around the World” and as manifested by “using language in and outside of instructional settings” and by engaging in activities for “personal enjoyment and enrichment” (National Standards Collaborative Board, 1996). On the one hand, this definition parallels educational frameworks developing since the mid-1990s, which posit a more global, multilingual, and multicultural body of possible speakers (see also New London Group, 1996). At the same time, it acknowledges the importance of a much more local “community”—fellow language learners and classmates. The layered model of community conceptualized in the Standards points to an interesting potential point of tension between the classroom, the imagined national community, and the more geographically distant speech communities within which learners might engage.

Writing two decades ago, the authors of the original Standards could not have fully anticipated the ways in which social participation would come unmoored from geographically located social spaces as digitally mediated communication became a predominant form of interaction. The implications of this shift for language and literacy learning have been the focus of a number of studies, including notably Eva Lam’s (2000; see also Kramsch, A’Ness, & Lam, 2000) research on the destabilization of cultural identity through participation in online communities, Rebecca Black’s (2005) work on affiliation practices in online fanfiction sites, and Steve Thorne’s work on networked digital gaming environments (2008, 2011).

The study of digital social spaces has brought critical attention to the ways in which participation and community have been operationalized within fields of education and literacy studies and second language teaching—an intellectual trend that is captured by James Gee’s concept of affinity spaces. The notion of affinity spaces shifts attention from membership to the space—virtual or physical—in which participation occurs. Affiliation in affinity spaces arises from shared interests, endeavors, or goals. Participation is also less regulated and more varied—the same individual can participate more centrally in some respects or
moments and more peripherally in others (Gee, 2005, p. 228). Knowledge and authority are more distributed across participants and more dispersed (across other sites or sources). Gee (2005) contrasts this with a typical classroom space in which participants are segregated by the level of skill, knowledge is evaluated but not shared, participation is restricted, and leadership is concentrated in an individual—the teacher (pp. 230–231). The porousness of affinity spaces means both that individuals can participate without being members, that is, without being perceived by themselves or others as belonging, and that non-participation does not necessarily equate with a sense of not belonging.

Perhaps because speech community and space are more difficult to situate in the case of digital encounters, work in digital literacies tends to treat language as a complex, relational, and contingent form of human activity (e.g., Kern, 2015; Thorne, 2013) in ways that resonate with poststructuralist and sociocultural approaches to language, literacy, and interculturality. A common thread across these discussions is that participation is an ever-evolving performance of self within socially constituted activity frameworks. It follows that a fundamental mission of language and literacy education—whether in a first, second, or additional language—is to develop learners’ capacity for reflective, linguistic practice, as is also emphasized within multiliteracies (or multiple literacies) frameworks for language and literacy teaching (Kern, 2000, 2015; Kramsch, 1993; Swaffar, Arens, & Byrnes, 1991). Through a wide palette of linguistic and other modes of meaning-making—for example, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial modes—social actors design, that is, actively transform, the social world around them and their position within it (see Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 184).

A parallel concept appears in Claire Kramsch’s more recent work on symbolic competence, defined as “the ability to shape the multilingual game in which one invests—the ability to manipulate the conventional categories and societal norms of truthfulness, legitimacy, seriousness, originality—and to reframe human thought and action” (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008, p. 667). Symbolic competence, as a desideratum of language education, entails developing a sense of which social worlds emergent multilingual language users want to take up space within and how they might re-shape these spaces with their presence and contributions.

As pedagogical principles, the concepts of design and symbolic competence remind educators and curriculum designers that the goal of L2 education is ideally not only to enable participation in the sense of granting access but also to foster reflective language users “who engage with the world-in-action” (Crosbie, 2005, citing Phipps & Gonzalez, p. 295). The challenge—as literacy scholars Kevin Leander and Gail Boldt have suggested—is that the teacher “make space for fluidity and indeterminacy as the nature of things [. . .] that he or she recognize difference, surprise, and unfolding that follow along paths that are not rational or linear or obviously critical or political” (2012, p. 44). This is of particular importance when that engagement is embedded within the participation structures of
Beyond Participation

203

the classroom, which carry their own logics, affordances, and constraints. When participation in online spaces outside of the classroom converges with educational practices, as it often does in social pedagogies, the site of participation becomes a kind of contact zone, in Marie-Louise Pratt’s sense of “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (1991, p. 34). Pratt suggests contact zone as an alternative to what is viewed as “utopian” ideas of community, whereas the notion of community assumes “that all participants are engaged in the same game and that the game is the same for all players” (1991, p. 38). The concept of contact zones reminds us to pay attention to the kinds of symbolic struggles that are particularly salient in multilingual and multicultural L2 learning contexts, as learners negotiate not only different language capacities but also the systems of power, knowledge, and value within which they take up subject positions in relation to a new language (see Kramsch, 2011, p. 356).

The focus has thus far been on participation in the sense of sociable activity—whether more local or more global and whether conceptualized as communities, affinity spaces, or social worlds. However, before we turn to the case studies, a final way of thinking about participation bears mentioning. The updated version of the ACTFL Standards released with the title World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) redefines the “Communities Standard” by emphasizing the role of language as a point of access to a “global society” of “global economies and consumers” (p. 100). Within the body text, the more evocative term “community” is more or less replaced by “economy,” which results in a set of pedagogical recommendations for enriching the local space of the classroom with consumable products and practices, for example, games, sports, literature, films, and television programs of the “foreign” culture. This promotion of foreign languages as entertainment value bears some resemblance to Ryuko Kubota’s research on English language learning as a leisure activity in Japan (2011). Kubota distinguishes between serious leisure, which is oriented toward self-actualization, and casual leisure, which is more hedonic and self-gratifying (p. 475). Kubota notes that while language learning as leisure tends to focus on an imagined community of speakers, the appeal lies in the experience of an “imagined exotic space removed from daily life” (p. 475), rather than on any immediate or envisioned pragmatic intentions for using the language. The learner is then positioned as a consumer who partakes in a new linguistic economy rather than as a participant in social activity.

How we frame participation has implications for which social positions are available and accessible for students in instructional activities. If the native German-speaking community is the primary frame and native-like competence is the goal of language instruction, most U.S.-based learners will only ever be afforded an outsider position. Shifting the scope to the broad body of multilingual speakers who use German opens up a range of possible social roles but does
not offer a manageable set of contexts for framing classroom discourse or principles for making curricular choices. Focusing on shared interests across cultures makes the range of contexts more manageable and allows for a multitude of possible position-takings. However, it also potentially limits the linguistic repertoires of learners by restricting their interactions to particular discourse domains. Moreover, while being a fan of a certain cultural practice (e.g., digital games, soccer, and a particular literary genre) can be framed as affiliation and affinity, it can also be a form of consumption. Whereas affinity allows for fluidity of positions (Gee, 2005), consumption seems to encourage a position of cultural consumer that is external to the field of cultural production itself, that is, the learner as cultural tourist rather than as participant.

In the following sections, we describe two pedagogical projects, which were designed to straddle the tensions between unpredictability and principled attention to language awareness. In our analysis of the data we pose the following questions in order to better understand how contact zones are created when classrooms and digitally mediated social spaces collide, enable, or restrict certain kinds of participation: What types of participation are contested by the students and why? What new positions are afforded through the learners’ engagement with digital social media? What happens when symbolic systems are in tension, that is, when particular configurations of meaning seem to shift or are incommensurable—for example, different expectations of what participation in the L2 classroom should look like? By analyzing key examples, we address these guiding questions and posit a final one: What potential might different types of participation hold for the activation of symbolic competence in instructed language contexts?

Cases from the Digital Media-Enhanced Classroom

Course Context
The basis of this article is two classroom-based case studies from different instantiations of a digital media unit included in a fifth-semester German course at a large state university in the southwestern United States. The course, officially titled “Encounters in Language and Culture,” is a 6-credit unit intermediate/advanced language course and is the first in the curricular sequence in which majors and minors outnumber the students who are taking German for their language requirement. For this reason, a core learning objective is to enable students to understand, analyze, and respond to increasingly complex and more abstract instances of language use, of the sort needed in the advanced-level content courses and for advanced proficiency more generally (see Maxim, 2008). The syllabus is organized around three key genre families—description (here: of people and places), narrative, and position-taking—each of which is paired with a thematic focus (see Table 8.1). In both case studies, digital media units were
Beyond Participation

implemented in order to expand the space of the classroom and augment what the instructors and course coordinator perceived as the potential two-dimensionality of the text-centric pedagogies that dominated the curriculum (see Lotherington & Ronda, 2014). A primary pedagogical motivation behind these units was to expand the range of social roles students were able to imagine themselves beyond the classroom, by introducing digital social spaces in which participation would be qualitatively different (see also Hanna & De Nooy, 2003, p. 73). Engagement with and within the digital spaces was integrated with more familiar genre-based tasks, which were designed to foster learners’ awareness of how particular design choices (grammatical style, word choice, color, font, etc.) can impact meaning—including the kinds of participation and interaction that are favored and legitimized.

Students were guided to observe how they and others used the digital media, to collect examples as they explored either the games and related websites or online forums, and to analyze the linguistic and multimodal designs of these spaces and interactions within them.¹ Students were given some agency in the choice of game or online forum, but they were strongly encouraged to select from a set of options already identified by the instructors and the Language Program Director. This was a practical decision based both on the relatively short span of time and the desire to have the students work in groups with the same game or same discussion forums. Whether to participate directly in the online forums or chat spaces outside of the classroom community was a choice left largely up to the students.

Although the specific assignments varied in both units, there was an emphasis on contemporary discourses (in contrast to the earlier units of the courses which consisted primarily of literary and historical texts) and a focus on position-taking (in the sense of expressing an opinion) through engagement with articles in the

¹The cycle of tasks was loosely based on the “bridging activities” framework proposed by Steve Thorne and Jonathon Reinhardt (2008, p. 556).
gaming unit and forum discussions in the digital communities unit. The culmi-
nating assignments for this portion of the course were a group presentation and
a position paper, which was written individually and required learners to incorpo-
rate personal experiences and critical perspectives. A more detailed description of
the tasks, the course context, and the participants is provided in each of the subse-
quent case studies from the two digital media units in turn.

Data and Analysis
In order to look more closely at the kinds of social positions potentially taken up
by students as they negotiated interactions in and around the digital media, we
have chosen to focus on two students—Jamie and Jaden. The particular cases
of these students provide not only interesting examples of the kinds of position-
ing different digital media and pedagogical wrap-around activities can afford but
also a contrastive sense of how different students negotiate the range of positions
available to them. Jamie represents students who are able to position themselves
in new and arguably more empowering ways through gaming than are otherwise
perceived as available in the classroom; contrastingly, Jaden represents students
who excel academically, feel comfortable in their identity as “good” students, but
who might still struggle with a digital media unit.

The data collected for this study consist of the classroom artifacts, written
and recorded assignments, interactions between students in the Wikispaces,
and observations by the researchers, who were also instructors assigned to the
courses—the second author in the first case study and the first author in the sec-
ond case study. These sources provide a partial but compelling view of how the
students positioned themselves within and vis-à-vis the media, the tasks, other
students, and other German speakers.

Positioning, as an analytical construct, was first introduced in social science
research as a means of describing subjectivities as a “history of positioning in dis-
courses” (Holloway, 1984, p. 228). Positioning theory has been developed most
notably by Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1990) as well as Harré and Luk van
Langenhove (1999), in order to describe “the discursive process whereby people
are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants
in jointly produced storylines” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 37). In their interactions,
participants use “storylines,” recurring narratives, to make their contributions
and actions meaningful. Positions are then the parts being performed—some-
times fleetingly, sometimes contentiously—by participants. These positions are
“jointly produced” in that mutual engagement and a common commitment to
the performance of a particular part are involved in sustaining a position taken up

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2 These names have been changed to protect the identities of the students.
3 The first author was also the Language Program Director and curriculum coordinator in both
semesters.
by a social actor. This is an element that becomes complicated in *contact zones* because of the ways in which multiple frames are often made salient (see also Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008).

Positioning theory has been used productively as a framework for analyzing classroom discourse—including in L2 learning contexts. Julia Menard-Warwick (2008), for example, analyzed interactions in an adult English as a second language class that primarily served Latina immigrants in the United States and described the tensions between the teachers’ assumptions about their identities and the students’ perceptions of themselves. While it falls outside of language education, Kate Anderson’s (2009) examination of what comes to count as learning relative to teacher formulations of tasks in a fifth-grade math class is also of relevance to this study, in that it points to the important distinction between task and activity—what the teacher would like the learners to do and what the learners actually do (see also Thorne, 2005). Anderson’s study also highlights the relationship between participation frameworks and the relative *stickiness* of particular labels, for example, *successful student* and *failed student* (2009, p. 306).

**Case Study 1: Killer, Guild Founder, Critic: Finding New Positions through L2 Gaming**

The first case study comes from fall 2014—during the third semester of implementation for the gaming unit discussed here. During the 2 ½-week unit, the 27 students in the course engaged in a variety of different practices, including playing digital games and keeping a log of their play in the Wikispaces within which all classmates could read and comment; reading and responding to articles about gaming and gaming cultures; writing a position paper in response to one of the articles; reflecting on various experiences in writing and in audio recordings in German (see Appendix A for more details). Modifications had been made each semester to encourage engagement with other users outside of the classroom, as well as to provide more opportunities for sharing feedback between in-class peers.

Both of these aspects were critical for Jamie, the focus of the first case study. Jamie was a non-traditional student who had learned German at a local community college three years prior to beginning at the university. At the start of the semester, Jamie struggled to complete and submit assignments fully, on time, or at all. In discussions with the instructors and reflective tasks, Jamie voiced general concerns about fitting in at the university and specific concerns about not being linguistically strong enough for the course. For example, when Jamie submitted the first writing assignment of the semester to the online dropbox, there was a message included for the instructors (in English): “It’s way too short, but I’m struggling. I’d like to come see you guys in office hours at some point.” For that assignment, students were supposed to write circa one page in German about
their prior language learning experience, and Jamie was only able to write the following (63 words total):


My first language, English, is also my best. I completed German 202 in community college but that was in 2010. My German is very rusty. I am afraid and worried about this class. I want to do my best. I believe German is important for me because Germany is my birth country. I would like to go back to Germany. I hope that I will be better at German then.

While Jamie was immediately upfront and proactive about having fears and concerns and began meeting with the instructors of the course on a regular basis, it was not until the gaming unit that there was a noticeable change in Jamie’s classroom participation and demeanor. At the beginning of the gaming unit, students completed an online gamer psychology test (Bartle test) to determine their “gamer DNA” and reflected on the results in an audio recording. In the recording, Jamie, who had prior gaming experience, grappled with the results:


Well! I am a killer, with 80% killer and 60% discoverer. Killer seems scary. “Hello, I’m Jamie. My name is Jamie and I am a killer”. That is maybe not good for parties. But except the name, I like the idea. Under “Killer” it says that I strive for challenge, competition and battling with other players. [. . .] It is ok. I feel that it is good because without competition and without competing with other people, I won’t be better than I can be. So that is accurate. I am the happiest when I compete with others.

Jamie is ostensibly talking about computer games here—first mentioning the categories that were identified through the Bartle test and then creating an imagined scenario, playing on the seeming scariness of being labeled a “killer” and
the related lack of acceptance or belonging that someone who has been labeled as such, as an extreme outsider, may encounter in real-life scenarios or in the gaming world. Throughout the three semesters of implementation, killer was a category that only rarely populated, indicating the uniqueness of participants and learners who identified with it. Jamie, however, reflects on the fact that it is just a label and that when one looks beyond that, at the description and characteristics of the so-called killer, it becomes less scary and a role in which someone who enjoys competition can revel. This reflects a general disposition or tendency to thrive in the face of (symbolic) struggle when taking on a more contested role or position.

After determining their gamer DNA, students were provided a list of free online browser games (see Appendix B), with brief descriptions, and they tested three of their choices in class, taking notes on their reactions. They then formed groups based on their game preferences. Jamie selected the game Shakes and Fidget (S&F) and expressed explicitly in a Wikispaces post that he chose this game because of the options for personalization:


You could personalize the Avatar in this game a lot. [. . .] Personalization is a reason why I chose this game. More to personalize gives me more interest in the game.

Jamie’s interest in the possibilities of personalization positioned him in this early reflection as an experienced gamer who has clear preferences and knowledge of the affordances of different games.

Jamie ended up in a gaming group with five other students who chose to play S&F, four of whom consented to be included in the current study; they were Adrian, one of the linguistically weakest learners in the class, and Dakota, Bailey, and Tracey—three of the most linguistically proficient students in the class (who also had the three highest grades). Dakota had completed the full four-semester progression of the basic language program at the same university as well as a four-week intensive study abroad program in Germany the summer prior to the course; Bailey was a freshman with six years of high school German experience and had spent four weeks one summer in Germany living with a host family; and Tracey had completed two years of German in high school and three semesters at the university, had been to Germany multiple times in the past, had family in Germany, and her mother spoke German. This group is representative of the varying language learning backgrounds, interests, and motivations of the learners.

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4 Shakes and Fidget is a browser game inspired by a comic. Players can create their own character, choose from eight nations, and complete quests. http://www.sfgame.de/
Although Jamie expressed enthusiasm throughout the gaming unit, his participation was somewhat selective in that he only completed four of the seven required gaming logs. However, those posts indicate Jamie’s developing sense of belonging, purpose, expertise, as well as his tendency to seek out contact zones beyond the unit requirements. As he described in the first gaming log entry, Jamie took the initiative of creating a guild and inviting the other S&F members to join:

*Ich hatte eine Gilde gegründet!! [. . .] Bailey ist jetzt in die Gilde und wir haben der anderen Spieleren eingeladen. Hoffentlich sie werden in der Gilde teilnehmen.*

I founded a guild! [. . .] Bailey is in the guild now and we invited the other players. Hopefully they will participate in the guild.

While Jamie was initially concerned about whether or not the other members would join and participate in the guild, it was through this act that Jamie became the leader for the S&F gamers. In the responses to this post, five other students expressed excitement and gratitude about participating in the guild. The first reply was from Dakota, who was in general not a fan of digital games and quite vocal in the gaming log about lacking interest in S&F specifically. Dakota joined the guild and wrote:

*Danke für die Einladung! Ihr seid so nett. Ich habe keine Ahnung, was ich im Spiel tun, aber mindestens bin ich in einer Gilde.*

Thanks for the invitation! You all are so nice. I have no idea what I’m doing in the game but at least I am in a guild.

Dakota’s admitted lack of gaming experience and interest provided Jamie, who struggled linguistically and academically, an opportunity to assume an expert role that had otherwise not been available in class. The other students recognized this role, as demonstrated in a later exchange, in which members suggested designing a coat of arms for their group. It was quickly agreed that Jamie, as their guild founder and leader, would need to approve it, as shown below in the exchange between Tracey and Bailey, which were comments on Jamie’s first post on the Wikispaces:


Do we have an official coat of arms? It is different every time I see it. I will make a good coat of arms.

Yes Tracey, I want to have another coat of arms, but how? I believe that you can only suggest a guild coat of arms. Maybe Jamie has to accept the guild coat of arms.

Jamie did not ever respond to this exchange, so there must have been either an in-game chat or in-person conversation regarding the coat of arms, because in the gaming log from day five Jamie wrote:

_In andern Nachrichten, meine Gilde hat jetzt eine neue Wappe. Die Gildemitglieder entworfen die Wappe und ich, als Gildechef, hatte es genehmigen._

In other news, my guild now has a new coat of arms. The guild members designed the coat of arms and I, as guild boss, approved it.

In addition to acknowledging his position as guild boss, Jamie integrated the identity, which had been revealed by—or perhaps assigned by—the gamer DNA test taken at the start of the unit. Jamie’s fourth and final game log entry reported an unfortunate in-game battle event:


Today I had to fight a baby elephant. That was sad for me. The baby elephant looks so sad and cute. I am an animal, why did that happen? Must I lie in eternal violence forever? How much more must I kill to be OK? How much is enough?

Here Jamie seems to take on the storyline of killer quite literally, by projecting a persona in the game who is doomed to eternal violence yet plagued with remorse. In addition to the gaming log, students were asked to identify key vocabulary words or phrases from the game that they would like to remember. Jamie deviated from the task slightly by choosing two words that were not directly from the game but that were personally relevant to the event described in the log above. They were (1) _Tierquälerei_ (animal cruelty), which Jamie defined as “Wenn man ist grausam gegen tieren” (“When one is cruel to animals”), and (2) _endlos Traurigkeit_ (eternal sadness), which was defined as “Wie ich fuhl jetzt” (“How I feel now”). One of only two screenshots that Jamie posted to the class discussion forum was of the battle with the baby elephant and included the comment “sadness without end.” Through the context provided by the game, Jamie converted a vocabulary task into an opportunity to extend the storyline initiated by the gamer DNA test, subordinating the task to the imagined world.

During some of the tasks, students were deliberately pointed toward functions of the game and spaces affiliated with the game that would enable them to
interact with other players outside of the classroom. Based on the second game log from the fourth day of the unit, it is clear that Jamie had taken initiative to explore these spaces without being asked to do so. In a post titled “Cell phone app,” he wrote:


There was an app for cell phones in the game! Now I can do city watch every hour. The app notifies me when the city watch is ready and I can do the city watch again. More money for me means more money for the guild! In the Play Store there was a critique in German. The critic was not content with the app. He writes: . . .

Jamie first continued the storyline in which he as the guild boss was responsible for the success of the group, but in the final sentence, he shifted position to game user. Jamie then included the 93-word critique of the S&F app, concluding with his assessment:

_Natürlich Ich stimme nicht zu. Das App ist nicht als gut als PC Spiel aber man kann benutzt das App wenn man hat keiner Computer._

Of course I do not agree. The app is not as good as the PC game but you can use the app when you don’t have a computer.

By seeking out the public forum, Jamie revealed a sense of belonging to the larger gaming community. While Jamie did not actively participate in the public game forum—for example, by posting a comment, where the critic and others could have read it—by venturing out of the familiarity of the game and group’s Wikispaces, Jamie took a step further into the broader digital world. This tendency to participate beyond the class community was unique. Although Jamie’s group was the most active in the class, with a total of 192 posts and comments to the class Wikispaces forums from all members, the other students seemed to prefer the sense of security within their own created community. Shakes and Fidget included not only a chat function for guild members but also the option of sending letters to other guilds; however, in an instructor-prompted discussion about opportunities for interaction within the game, the group members were resistant to this idea, as seen in the following exchange from the group’s Wikispaces:

Tracey: _Wir haben eine Gilde und koennen miteinander chatten in der gilde. Es gibt keine Weltchat, aber wir koennen ein andere Leute in der Ehrenhalle finden und Briefe miteinander schreiben, aber das ist zu viel Arbeit._
We have a guild and can chat with one another in the guild. There is no global chat but we can find other people in the hall of honor and write letters to each other, but that is too much work.


We can only chat with other members of the guild. There is no global chat box but we can send letters to other people. I haven’t spoken to another person outside of my guild.

In response to this, two of the other group members discussed the awkwardness of sending a letter to a stranger, concluding that they would not want to do so. This exchange among Jamie’s group members demonstrates that while students were enthusiastic about the possibility to interact more with their classmates (the local community), this group of learners did not interact with the larger group of German speakers playing the game. In Jamie’s case, the incorporation of digital games and gaming spaces enabled a transformation from “newbie” at the university and in the German language to expert gamer. Jamie’s struggle to reposition himself was seemingly alleviated by the ways in which the gaming unit encouraged exploration and playfulness, validated prior experiences and knowledge as an avid gamer, and allowed for sociability within the comfortable space of in-class discussion forums. Jamie thus exemplifies a learner who was able to “develop a sense of voice and purpose specific to a domain or community” (Bass & Elmendorf, n.d.). The community was largely defined as the guild, while interactions with the broader community of German-speaking gamers remained limited. In an interesting coda to the story, Jamie continued in the German program, becoming one of the strongest students and has since decided to pursue graduate work in German studies.

Case Study 2: “I Would Rather Read an Entire Book”: Resistant Positioning vis-à-vis Online Discussion Spaces

The digital communities (digitale Gemeinschaften) project was piloted in the fall of 2015. Instead of a self-contained unit, the project was designed to be completed in steps across the first 12 weeks of class. The five-day per week class met once every week in the computer lab, where students worked on tasks designed to connect their forays into digital communities with other course readings, discussions, and writing tasks. One of the key objectives was to give students regular opportunities to compare and apply what they were learning about particular genres and linguistic styles within an active community of users. By focusing more on an active forum and shifting the engagement away from a singular type of activity (gaming), the instructors and Language Program Director hoped that more students would take advantage of the interactive affordances of digital media than they had in prior semesters.
On the first day of the digital communities unit, students were asked what they associated with the word “community.” They then brainstormed as a class general types of digital communities or platforms for social interaction in which they or their peers participate.

Based on that list, students self-selected a topic of interest to them and were grouped off accordingly. The class of 22 students was thus divided into four groups—one focusing on music, one on literature and film, and one on politics (which was later divided into two groups, because of the size). The students were then given time in class on this same day to find online communities devoted to these interests, which they would be interested in getting to know and potentially participating within. At the end of class, the students compiled a list of potential online spaces. Each of the groups included Reddit discussion threads as a potential forum and listed a specific website: the online version of the magazine *Der Spiegel* for the politics group, a site called DJ Forum for the music group, and Fanfiction.de for the literature and film group.

In these small groups, students met in and out of class over the following 11 weeks to complete a series of tasks designed to move their attention from description and observation to the narration of critical moments experienced while observing the digital community and, finally, to the analysis of the forms of interaction and discourse practices of that community. These mini-ethnographic and sociolinguistic tasks were intended to scaffold the group presentations, which they delivered in the 12th week of the project. The final assignment related to the digital communities was a position paper written in the form of an editorial in a magazine targeting German language learners, such as the publication *Deutsch perfekt!* Students were instructed to consider whether, why, and how learners should participate in online communities. Each of these assignments is described in greater detail in Appendix C.

In order to analyze some of the key symbolic struggles that arose during this project, we will focus on one student, Jaden, who was a member of one of the politics groups. In terms of linguistic proficiency and academic acumen, Jaden was one of the strongest students in the class, a fact recognized by other students who would playfully maneuver to work with her during in-class group work. Jaden had started German at the university and, in the semester prior to our course, had participated in a short-term study abroad program in Germany together with nearly half of the students in the class. This also created a shared history among some students in the class, creating in- and out-group positions during some moments of in-class discussion and group work. Based on in-class comments made by students there is also some indication that Jaden’s position as a “strong student” had already become salient during that four-week study abroad course.

In a survey distributed to all students enrolled in German language classes at the start of the term, Jaden indicated “love of German” and “love of languages”
as primary reasons for wanting to learn German.\(^5\) This affective relationship with the language contrasts with how Jaden positioned herself in a linguistic autobiography written in the first week of our course. The one-page account opens with a summary of the courses Jaden had taken and a list of the study abroad scholarships she had received. In a lengthier paragraph spanning about one-third of the page, Jaden then discusses the friends she made while in Germany. Referencing interactions with a tandem conversation partner, Jaden states:

> Wir haben manchmal Deutsch zusammen gesprochen. Sie spricht auch Englisch. Ihr Englisch war besser als mein Deutsch. Also haben wir mehr Englisch gesprochen. Viele deutsche Leute sprechen Englisch. Ich möchte in einem Laboratorium in Deutschland arbeiten also muss ich besser Deutsch sprechen.

> We sometimes spoke German together. She also speaks English. Her English was better than my German. So, we spoke more English. Many German people speak English. I want to work in a laboratory in Germany so I have to learn to speak better German.

In this autobiography, the choice of German seemed to be more practically oriented rather than simply out of love for the language. Later in the same autobiography, however, Jaden returned to a focus on German as a leisure activity, devoting an entire paragraph to the books she had purchased while in Germany and committed to read. In this way, Jaden positioned herself as a learner who instrumentalized her personal enjoyment of German for practical gain.

When it came time to choose groups, Jaden did not work with the students who were focusing on literature and film but instead opted for politics.\(^6\) It became clear early in the project that Jaden felt uneasy about being asked to engage with digital communities. In the group forum discussions and in individual journal reflections written over the course of the unit, Jaden expressed two intersecting reasons for this. In reply to a group mate’s post in the Wikispaces forum about the relative civility of discussion in the forum Politik sind wir (We Are Politics), Jaden wrote:

> Ja manchmal vergesse ich, dass ich bei dem Internet bin und ich frage mich selbst “Ist jede deutsche Person total verrueckkt oder . . .?” und dann ich atme tief durch und erinnere mich, dass

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\(^5\) This survey was designed by the previous Language Program Director in order to evaluate the experiences and motivations of students taking German. A detailed discussion of the survey and the results prior to 2014 were discussed in Ecke & Ganz (2014).

\(^6\) Although it is not possible to ascertain this from the data, both instructors speculated that this might have been because of existing friendships—most of Jaden’s closest friends in the class who had also been in Germany for the study abroad course were also in this group. The most academically successful students also dominated this group, so the decision may have also been strategic on Jaden’s part.
das Internet die Schuld hat. Das Internet ist nicht einen guten Volksvertreter.

Yeah, sometimes I forget that I am in the Internet and I ask myself “Is every German person completely crazy...?” And then I breathe deep and remind myself, that the Internet is to blame. The Internet is a not a good representation of people.

Jaden characterizes the Internet not as a set of social spaces or communities of shared interests but as an agent with the ability to misrepresent a collective culture of people. Later, in a post-midterm reflection in which students were asked to reflect on what they had learned in the course thus far, Jaden took the opportunity to express her dissatisfaction with the digital unit:


Yes I like German and yes I like digital communities but if I were interested in world politics then I would go to international newspapers. I feared this course, when we were doing the digital communities.

Jaden’s group was in fact working with online discussion forums associated with German news sites, in particular the highly reputable magazine Der Spiegel—many of the posts in their Wikispaces forum came directly from news sites. Later in the same reflection she noted:


I would have rather read an entire German book—like in a little literary group. Then I would have been happier—and have learned more.

This comment echoes her reflection from the beginning of the semester in her autobiography when she had described one of her many learning objectives as being able to read more in German, in particular literary texts related to key moments in German history. This is something Jaden reiterated in the final course reflection, when she noted that a short story depicting the crimes of the Holocaust was her favorite text from the class. For Jaden, more traditional literacy objects, such as newspapers and literary texts, are more appropriate representations of a culture and more desirable materials to engage with in the L2 classroom.

In spite of her dislike of the project, Jaden completed all of the related assignments in full. She posted more in the Wikispaces than almost any other student in the class with a total of five original posts and eight replies. It is also worth
noting that all of Jaden’s posts in the group’s Wikispaces forum focused on German responses to the refugee crisis and in particular on comments she viewed as “extremist” or “racist.” In their presentation, Jaden’s group was particularly attuned to the differences in register between the sites they observed: *Politik sind wir*, a platform for “critical discussions on political topics,” and threads devoted to German politics on the social news aggregator Reddit. One of the other group members presented examples from a discussion of Israel in *Politik sind wir* and commented how surprised they were to see such a civil discussion about such a controversial topic, citing examples of polite speech from the excerpt. Jaden and a fellow student co-presented on Reddit discussion forums during their part of the presentation, noting that German users were generally polite and only seemed to get mean (*schlecht*) when someone said something racist or made jokes about “the ugly part of German history,” that is, the Holocaust and Nazi Germany. In fulfilling these assignments, Jenna maintained her position as a successful student even as she remained resistant to the idea of participating in the online forums. In other words, even as Jaden was academically succeeding in tasks that asked her to “attend to forum participation as a genre of communicative behaviour” (Hanna & De Nooy, 2003, p. 80), this seemed to decrease rather than increase her desire to participate in these spaces. This was further evidenced during class discussion immediately following the presentations, when Jaden stated if the students wanted to learn about these topics, they could simply read about them in English. Jaden at this point still did not seem to recognize the elements of discourse, perspective, and ways of speaking, which she and her group had analyzed so thoroughly for the in-class presentation, as important for developing literacy in German.

In the final writing assignment, a magazine publication for German language learners on using social media to learn about the language and culture, Jaden departed from what she had posted in the Wikispaces forum and had presented in terms of both thematic focus and stance. Instead of recounting her own experiences in the discussion forums devoted to contemporary German political discourses, Jaden focused on an event in American history, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In Jaden’s article, “Internationalen Außenperspektive von 9/11: Wie die Deutsche Leute diskutieren 9/11 in der Kontexte der Amerikanischen Politik und Krise” (“International Outside Perspectives from 9/11: How the German People Discuss 9/11 in the Contexts of American Politics and Crisis”), she makes a case for intercultural perspectives on historical events, writing:

*Dadie Thema ist so heikel in den USA, dass sie sehr schlecht diskutiert ist—manchmal scheitert die ganze Diskussion wegen starken Emotionen und Perspektiven. Also ist es leichter, wenn Leute von anderen Ländern diese Ereignis diskutieren, weil sie ein emotionelle Distanz—and auch so einen größeren und kläreren Ausblick—haben können.*
This topic is so controversial in the USA, that it is difficult to discuss—sometimes the entire discussion fails due to strong emotions and perspectives. Thus it is easier, when people from other countries discuss this event, because they can have an emotional distance—and thus also a larger and clearer view.

While there is no reference to the discussion forums she engaged with or the Wikispaces forum, through this reflective observation, Jaden implicitly provided an explanation and perhaps even a defense for the vitriol that she had noted between participants in the German forum discussions related to the refugee crisis. Just as German users had not remained composed when discussing those topics, Jaden claimed U.S. Americans are not able to do so when discussing 9/11. In the conclusion of her article, Jaden emphasized the differences in register and ways of speaking about topics when there is more emotional distance:

Jede Person soll an diesen Foren kommen, um die Deutschen besser zu verstehen. Man wird doch sehen, dass Deutschen bei dem Internet höflich sich betragen.

Every person should come to these forums, in order to understand the Germans better. One will then see that Germans behave politely in the Internet.

This statement contradicts the opinions Jaden had expressed while doing the digital media unit regarding reading forums. Jaden seems to have had a change of perspective here, in that she has recognized that the discursive indiscretions she had earlier noted in the German discussion forums were in part a consequence of the topic at hand. While the position she took up for herself remained much the same—the external observer soberly looking in on social activity—this is also linked to the ways in which she preferred to participate in German, for example, reading newspapers and literary texts. However, in her final reflection for the course, Jaden was able to understand the position of other learners and what they might have gained from the digital communities unit, commenting that the unit had not been so good for her, but perhaps had been for other students in the class.

**Discussion and Implications**

In this chapter we have argued that digital media are a means of exploring the complexities of speech as it manifests in social spaces beyond the classroom and of enabling students to position themselves in alternative ways. We also used the two case studies of Jamie and Jaden to highlight some of the symbolic struggles that can emerge when instructors and curriculum designers change the language game, by bringing together instructed contexts and digitally mediated social spaces. Some of the tensions in the classroom and extracurricular social world that
arose within Jamie’s gaming group, and in particular in Jaden’s initial frustrations with the digital communities project, are quite similar to earlier findings from Hanna and De Nooy’s (2003, 2009) accounts of learner experiences in online discussion forums, Ware’s (2005) research on intercultural email exchanges, and Reinhardt et al.’s (2014) study on digital gaming in instructed language contexts. Each of these studies found that even when given opportunities to interact in social worlds, learners tended to orient toward the participation frameworks of the classroom, often at the expense of meaningful social interaction. These and other studies have established some of the pedagogical principles that undergird the tasks designed for these two units: the Wikispaces forums and in-class collaboration provided opportunities for support from classmates and the instructors while the literacy-oriented tasks facilitated learners’ awareness of elements of style and genre. But the cases of Jamie and Jaden pose a different question to curriculum designers who might want to implement digital social media in their language classes—what do we do when students reject or at the very least seem disinterested in (actively) participating? Since active participation in the online forums and other interactional spaces was encouraged but optional, we were able to see how many students were resistant to communicating with interlocutors outside of the class. Requiring students to communicate in online forums seems to us to pose questions of ethics and expertise that Language Program Directors may not want to take on, but does this mean that engaging with these digitally mediated social spaces is not worthwhile? Based on the case studies we have discussed, we argue that the answer is no.

Jamie’s case reminds us (thinking again of Gee’s theorization of affinity spaces) that non-participation and non-belonging are not equivalent. The imperative to communicate, that is, the legacy of communicative language teaching, is in some ways at odds with the participation structures of many digital spaces, which afford users the ability to lurk or observe in comfortable silence. While Jamie’s decision not to post a review online might be viewed as a missed opportunity to engage in the online community, actions such as taking an informed oppositional position vis-à-vis the published game critic and establishing a leadership role in the S&P gaming group enabled Jamie to position himself as a legitimate contributing member of the classroom community—a position that had previously been difficult for him, perhaps because of the self-described “struggling student” comment that emerged in the first several weeks of the semester.

Jaden’s case poses questions about what counts as success in a curriculum that connects a multiliteracies focus on design and discourse awareness—abilities in which she excelled—and social pedagogical principles of relevance, which she resisted. Social pedagogies almost inevitably make assumptions about which communicative contexts and communities are relevant to students. Jaden’s stated motivations to learn German echo some of what Kubota described in her discussion of language learning as serious leisure activity. This also resonates with the
“global economy” model of community found in the World-Readiness Standards, in which languages are a source of cultural capital and enrichment to be consumed by learners. Perhaps this helps to explain why studying literature was more compatible with Jaden’s view of appropriate texts for classroom-based language learning, which did not extend to digital social spaces. This seemed to result in a disconnect between the symbolic awareness she exhibited in her academic work and her initial perception of the relevance of the digital spaces for her language learning; however, she was later able to expand her understanding of what counts as appropriate and to see the potential for other learners.

One of the advantages of social pedagogies visible in our case study analyses is that it encourages students to entertain, and sometimes create, alternative positions for themselves. For curriculum developers, this has implications for how we measure the successes and failures of activities involving digital social spaces. Echoing Kubota’s (2011) answer to a question posed at the end of her essay on language learning as a leisure activity—how could this “contribute to critical reflection and action for social transformation?”—we might consider the “personal benefits […] which might be vital to [students] at a certain point of their life trajectory” (p. 487). This means making space in our curricula for paths that are not immediately obvious as transformative (see also Leander & Boldt, 2012). In some senses, the units we designed did exactly this by introducing the possibility of new positionings into a curriculum in which students were most often put in the roles of discourse analysts and language learners. At the same time, the literacy-oriented objectives provided a frame that made it easy for a student like Jaden to resist—but not fully deny—other possible positions.

Unpredictability is by definition hard to plan for. One of the most difficult things that social pedagogies ask instructors to do is to let go—to surrender control of carefully designed tasks and curricula. For Language Program Directors who supervise groups of typically novice instructors, working with digital social media can provide a chance to guide teachers in how to develop responsiveness rather than control. Perhaps we should have pushed Jamie more to post a response to the game reviewer online? Perhaps we could have found a way for Jaden to participate in an online reading group instead? While instructors may not always get things right, opening up the walls of the classroom pushes us as educators to let students negotiate our pre-established notions of success, failure, participation, and relevance as they position themselves in ways we may not have imagined.

References


Appendices

Appendix A: Gaming unit overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Related Task(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction to Gaming</td>
<td>In class: Brainstorm topics related to gaming and choose one for group project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gamer Types &amp; Game Genres</td>
<td>Out of class: Gamer DNA Bartles test and audio reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In class: Test games</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Games &amp; Identity</td>
<td>Gaming pre-survey</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Out of class: Create an avatar and written reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In class: Form gaming groups; introduce Wikispaces</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Ongoing out of class throughout remainder of unit: Gaming log, vocabulary list, group project, and individual position paper</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Avatars &amp; Sexism</td>
<td>Out of class: Read article</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In class: Avatars in our games</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gaming &amp; Sexism</td>
<td>Out of class: Read one of five articles</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In class: Mini-presentation in small groups on articles; sexism in our games</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gaming &amp; Violence</td>
<td>Out of class: Read one of two online articles</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In class: Violence in our games</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Gaming as community</td>
<td>Out of class: Read article</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In class: Collaboration in our games</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Language Use in Computer Game Chats</td>
<td>Out of class: Read article</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In class: Chatting in our games</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bonus: Create German versions of English chatspeak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Group Project Work Day</td>
<td>Out of class: Work on project</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Related Task(s)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Language Use in Computer Game Forums</td>
<td>Out of class: Read article on the denigration of the German language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In class: Denigration of the German language in our games</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Game Genres &amp; Language Use (<em>Sprechakte</em>)</td>
<td>In class: Analyzing language use in our games</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Gaming &amp; Learning</td>
<td>Out of class: Read online article/interview</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In class: Vocabulary quiz (based on gaming group’s collaborative vocab list)</td>
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<tr>
<td>13–15</td>
<td>Group Project Presentations</td>
<td>Out of class: Written group project reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Position Paper</td>
<td>Out of class (throughout and after the unit): Three drafts of a position paper pertaining to one of the gaming topics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendix B: List of computer games**

Participants were provided the following list of games with brief German descriptions and asked to choose three of the games that they found the most interesting:

- Siedler Online: [http://www.diesiedleronline.de/de](http://www.diesiedleronline.de/de)
- Goal United: [http://browsergame.goalunited.org/de](http://browsergame.goalunited.org/de)
- Grepolis: [http://de.grepolis.com](http://de.grepolis.com)
- Farmerama: [http://www.farmarama.de](http://www.farmarama.de)
- Shakes and Fidget: [http://www.sfgame.de/](http://www.sfgame.de/)

**Appendix C: Digital communities project**

The following tasks were originally in German and were shared individually on the course management website as they were assigned. Unless otherwise indicated, these activities were conducted in class, which gave students a chance to collaborate in their groups and gave the instructors opportunities to check in with students.

1. **WIKISPACES POSTS**

Each of these Wikispaces posts was assigned as homework prior to class in the computer lab. During class time, students would work in their groups to share and elaborate on their posts. This was typically supported by questions or meta-language introduced by the instructor to help them describe and analyze what they saw in the digital communities. At the end of each class, students would briefly share some of their thoughts and findings. These tasks worked to scaffold the formal presentation, which was one of the culminating projects of the unit. Students were asked to write in German as much as possible, but code-switching
was allowed and considered appropriate. They were told to aim for around 100 words, but that a clear and coherent contribution was of most value.

Post 1: What are your first impressions?

Post 2: Getting to know your site (description). Who participates in this community? What does participation look like? How do they behave and interact?

Post 3: Which norms, beliefs, values, and interests are represented in your online communities? Do the participants belong to identifiable social groups? How do you know? To what extent are the site and the discussions targeted at a particular audience?

Post 4: Recount a critical moment from the interactions in your digital community, for example, an argument or a misunderstanding or a heated discussion. What happened? What was said? How did other participants react?

Post 5: Copy an interesting dialogue or discussion from your community. (It can be one you took part in or one you observed.) Analyze the interaction. How do people speak? Is the tone formal or informal, friendly or aggressive? What languages are used?

2. GROUP PRESENTATION

You will work with your group to prepare and deliver a presentation about your digital communities. Report on your own experiences and observations and consult additional resources, such as news articles, research reports, and studies.

Consider the following points in your presentation:

- Design of the website: What does it look like? Which function does it offer?
- Participants/Target audience: Which beliefs/values/interests/attitudes are represented and how? Is it to speak of a particular social milieu? Why, for example, is that stated directly on an “About Us” page? In the user profiles? Is the audience indirectly conveyed through choice of topics, word choice, or ways of speaking?
- Critical and exemplary moments: Choose two to three typical or interesting interactions or contributions from the digital community. Analyze these interactions. What do these moments say about the community, the participants, and the topic?
- Your impressions: What do you like about this community? What don’t you like?

3. PAPER

In your group, you have explored digital communities in online spaces. In the third and final paper you will report on these communities. Now imagine that you are writing an article for a publication for German learners, for example, Deutsch
Perfekt (http://www.deutsch-perfekt.com). It is your task to show what learners could learn from this space about the topic you chose.

Consider the following aspects:

- Which communities did you explore and why did you choose these spaces?
- What were your reactions to the discussions you encountered?
- Which topics were discussed in these online spaces?
- Would you encourage these communities to other German learners who want to learn about this topic and interact with German speakers?