CERCLL Games To Teach Project White Paper
Framework for Game-enhanced Materials Development

Our white paper series is comprised of short, practice-related documents that serve as introductions or overviews to issues related to digital game-mediated L2 learning and teaching. This paper may be cited as:

1. Introduction

The Games To Teach project framework for game-enhanced materials development reflects a "new literacies" approach to L2 teaching and learning (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). From this perspective, an activity like digital game-playing is understood as a literacy practice, that is, something people do with linguistic and other semiotic activity, in socially recognized ways (Gee, 2007). Games are understood as socio-cultural texts, or artifacts, at the same time they are as socio-cultural practices. From the first perspective, a game is created by game developers as a rule-bound, narrative artifact, while from the other, when the game is played, the player has a meaningful experience by interacting with those rules and narratives, or discourses. By interacting with other players about those discourses, new discourses emerge through and around individual games. The cultural practice of digital gaming therefore gives rise to millions of affiliation groups and communities, with shared and individual literacy practices and attendant discourses. Game discourses can thus be seen as designed by game developers on one hand, and designable by game players on the other. From a new literacies perspective, then, we can understand the activity of game design as 'designing', as something done by developers and players. Designing involves interaction with, through, and around game discourses.

2. Game discourses: The language of narratives and gameplay

Game discourses involve all the language used in and around games, with all of the associated linguistic, pragmatic, and socio-cultural meanings[1]. Depending on its genre and other design parameters, a game may involve all sorts of discourse types (see Thorne et al, in production), but we think two types are the most important: the **narratives** of the fictional game context, and the language of **gameplay**, which focuses on rules and strategies. The game narratives are the game texts and stories that give the game its fictional content, while the gameplay language is what has to be understood in order to play the game.

When playing a well-designed game, the two discourse types are intertwined, so that you learn the rules of the game by interacting with the narratives. In other words,

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[1] When Gee talks of this sort of discourse, he refers to it as 'big-D Discourse', as opposed to 'little-d discourse', which is discourse in the more clinical, linguistic sense. We prefer to include both meanings in our use of the word whether we capitalize it or not.

game narratives contextualize gameplay. For example, a game might tell you to "feed the snagit a zop by dragging the snagit icon to the zop." When you put your mouse over an odd-looking object and a bubble tells you that it's a snagit, and then you learn another thing is a zop, and then you experiment by clicking, dragging, and dropping icons, finally learning what the game responds to, you figure out what to do. You learn that according to the game narrative, snagits eat zops and you must feed them, and as you learn how to drag one icon to the other, you learn the language of gameplay. There might also be a story about the origin of the zops, and why they must be fed snagits, but if knowing it isn't important to playing the game, you may not focus on it once you've mastered the rule.

In this way, players learn to play a game by interacting with the **in-game** discourses, placed there by the developers. They can also learn a game by interacting with other players through or around the game—in multiplayer games, players may interact through the game interface in text or voice chat, or they may be sitting next to each other with multiple controllers. These **emergent** game discourses arise from the context of situation and the identities or roles of the players, and may focus on the narratives, gameplay rules and strategies, or other players. When playing with each other, players may assume the role of leader, teacher, learner, helper, or one of the specific roles assigned by the game. They may be cooperative or competitive with each other. Many popular games have **attendant** game discourses as well, meaning player-produced discourses about narratives and gameplay, often mediated by the Internet in the form of online discussion forums, blogs, and wikis. The sites focused on gameplay tend to center on rules, strategies, and tactics, and critiques of the game design. There are also sites where players discuss and extend the game narratives, posting and discussing fan art, videos, or fiction they have created themselves.

In sum, a literacies-oriented game-enhanced pedagogy should take into consideration how player-game interactions afford, and are afforded by, game discourses. These interactions may be with, through, or around a game, and discourses may be in-game, emergent, or attendant. Discourses focus primarily on narratives that contextualize gameplay, and gameplay rules and strategies. Table 1 summarizes how player interactions work with game discourses.

Table 1. Game interactions and discourses

interactions	interaction **with** the game content	interaction **through** the game	interaction **around** the game
discourses	**in-game**: game narratives or fictional content, and game rules	**emergent**: situational and role-dependent, about rules and strategies	**attendant**: about game strategies and tactics, and extended narratives