I, Jennifer E Killham, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies.

It is entitled:
Exploring the Affordances of Role in the Online History Education Project “Place Out of Time”: A Narrative Analysis

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Committee member: Vanessa Allen-Brown, Ph.D.
Exploring the Affordances of Role in the Online History Education Project "Place Out of Time:"

A Narrative Analysis

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D.)

In the Department of Educational Studies

College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services

2014

by

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Abstract

This qualitative, collaborative inquiry project explored the affordances of role enacted in *Place Out of Time (POOT)*, an online, historical character-playing activity designed to promote deeper engagement with historical thinking and perspective taking. The overview of the dissertation presented in Chapter 1 is followed by three distinct literature reviews on history education, *POOT*, and games and roleplay. Methodologically, the principles of practitioner inquiry guided this work. This dissertation aimed to improve the educational activity of *POOT* by answering organic, emergent questions participants had about their experiences during and after participation. This research occurred in two different phases. During phase one, participants expressed a desire to understand the tensions around their firsthand experiences of portraying someone other than themselves. Phase two addressed the opportunities and challenges related to the inclusion of fictional, controversially portrayed, and artistic characters. Consequently, a more targeted investigation into the dimensions of character-play was conducted in phase two. These tensions were worthy of such an in-depth investigation because preliminary research revealed character selection impacted participant performance and the assessment of this performance. Participants included K-12 students enrolled in *POOT* through a participating middle school or high school classroom. Adults in related or supportive roles were also subjects in this research. Data was drawn from semi-structured interviews, and triangulated with written communications, online participation in *POOT*, online postings on support sites, and instructional support documents from iterations of *POOT* taking place between Fall 2010 and Fall 2012. Narrative data, as the primary data source, was analyzed using a polyvocal interpretation technique called McCormack’s Lenses. The use of McCormack’s Lenses involved four separate readings of data, listening for (1) narrative processes (words), (2) language (structure of words), (3) context, and
(4) moments (epiphanies). Data was managed using NVivo. Case histories were then used to present the polyvocal interpretations. The implications of this work are intended to influence the understanding of online playful learning exercises involving character-play and historical thinking in history education, and in turn make these exercises more accessible for educators to implement in their own classrooms. Further, this research sought to improve POOT training material.
In loving memory of my grandparents,
Andy and Claire Killham
With their sacrifices, my education was made possible

To my former fan club president,
The late Mario “Doc” Reda
You knew I would arrive at my destination

To the all of my POOT participants,
Especially Sue,
Thank you for sharing your stories
Acknowledgements

To begin, I would like to wholeheartedly extend my gratitude to my faculty advisors, Dr. Vanessa Allen-Brown and Dr. Prentice Chandler. To Vanessa Allen-Brown, who took me in at a time when I felt orphaned in the academy—you provided me stability, guidance, and Honey Nut Cheerios when I needed them most. Vanessa, thank you for sitting me down and telling me I was going to finish and “let’s keep moving.” To Dr. Prentice Chandler, for your added insight into teacher preparation and history education that I had not considered beforehand—thank you for accepting my invitation to work together in my time of great need. My work became measurably better with the sharing of your insight. May there be many years of working together ahead. I would also like to thank my committee members Dr. Jeff Kupperman and Dr. Sean Duncan for the hours they spent reading my work and providing me with instrumental feedback. To Jeff, who was a stabilizing force during graduate school—thank you for pushing me to think creatively about my research, inviting me to meet your lovely family and neighbors, and always answering my phone calls. To Sean, who was my most rigorous critical reader—this dissertation greatly improved under your guidance. To all, you were just the right combination of committee members for me.

I want to make space upfront to acknowledge additional key mentors: Dr. Stephen Sunderland and Dr. Kelli Jette for the long hours they spent with me since 2007 helping me to be a better student, teacher, and person. I am indebted to Steve for the weekly meetings we had crafting ideas on game development, improving my lesson plans, and for our time in the Peace Village. Steve, you were always one of my biggest professional supporters. Thank you for knowing what to say at the right time. I am forever grateful for Kelli Jette’s friendship, professional advice, and for taking my phone calls. Thank you for letting me into your classroom
to teach for the Preparing Future Faculty mentorship program. When my dissertation is signed off on, we will finally have our toast. I would like to thank Jeff Kupperman’s colleagues from the Interactive Communications and Simulations group at University of Michigan, Dr. Jeff Stanzler and Dr. Michael Fahy. Jeff, you helped me see the world full of opportunities. Inspired by you, I posted a sign above my desk that reads, “Where are the opportunities?” Michael, you shared your infinite wisdom about all of the things that matter to me about POOT. Gentlemen, thank you for the mentorship, trust, belief in my abilities, and use of the POOT site.

I am grateful for the financial support of the Glendale Heights Jr. Women’s Club, Senator Pankau’s Illinois General Assembly Scholarship, the Covenant Foundation, and the University of Cincinnati (UC) Center for Jewish Education and Culture. I would like to acknowledge the diligence and organization of those I consider to be the backbone of my institution, Beverly Reese, Michelle Jones, and Amuna Yisrael from the School of Education, as well as Alphonzo, Cheryl, and Lincoln in the College of Education, Criminal Justice, and Human Services (CECH) library and the amazingly patient and skilled tutors at the UC Academic Writing Center. These are the people I could not do without!

The most important people in my life, my family, have blessed me beyond belief; I would like to thank them. To my mom, who has always been the first person I think to call when I am sick—thank you for your healing hugs. To my father for his steadfast support and reminders that what he wants most is for me to be happy—without your Buick LeSabre I would have been stranded. To my grandparents, Claire and Andy Killham, who I believe helped make this all possible, and to whom I am forever grateful. Thank you for teaching me to raise my hand. To my Grandma Toni, who taught me to set my heart on something I believe in. To my Aunt Marilyn, for checking in on me, providing words of wisdom, and for reading almost my entire dissertation
overnight when she knew my defense date was set. To my Aunt Sandy, who knows how to catch my grammar errors and was more than willing to help read my papers throughout graduate school. To my brother Andy, my very first student when we used to play school in the basement of Jacobsen, and to my other siblings Lauren, Julie, Steve, and Michael who are very special to me.

There are several instrumental people for which a deep appreciation is most fitting. To Hal Bouma, the kind deed giver—you saved my life by recovering important data off of my computer after everyone else said it was lost and who stayed up late to read this dissertation before I hit send. Thank you for driving five hours to save my data. To Rob LaFluer, you were my beacon of hope, source of endless optimism, and the caregiver of ‘ol Gnome1. Thank you for staying in touch since we met in 2002 and giving so much of yourself to our friendship. To Roger and Kyler who supportively reminded me that the dissertation had to be prioritized. To Dana Ng for the 90-day challenge, repeatedly telling me to hang in there, feeding me, and our trips to the library and Starbucks. Dana, our dissertation proposals felt like an adventure we conquered together. And, without you, I would starve. To Fatih Destebaşı, for your strong work ethic, and inspiring me to want to work at all hours of the night to get the job done. Fatih, keep typing! To John Stegall for putting in the long hours—I recall the time you stayed on campus with me until 4a.m. so I could finish my Dutch application and for nudging me to reward hard work with a scoop of Jenny’s Ice Cream. To Ian McKenzie, you believed in me as a conference volunteer for the Game Developer’s Conference in 2012, 2013, and 2014. Through this experience I met key people in the field of games who have shaped the way I think about the material covered in this dissertation. You also taught me that being my best self is a daily commitment.
I have been supported by my dear friends who turned into critical readers after liking my Facebook status updates about my dissertation. To Brian Stanfield, my longest standing critical reader. You helped me get into graduate school and stay in graduate school, all with only having your car towed once. Brian, thank you for your ongoing support over the course of several degrees; I will not forget our conversations about which comma camp we are in. To Michael Young, one of my oldest friends, your jokes reminded me to laugh along the way. To Holger Nawroth, for helping me during times of transition and staying up in the middle of the night to help me edit every single chapter in this dissertation with the precision of German engineering. Your patience was immeasurable and your friendship was sturdy. To Brady Lang, a board game designer, who never bored of reading my writing about games. I passed my comprehensive exams because of your time, devotion, and background knowledge. To Curt Hill, who read my work quicker than I could write. To Charles Dandino, for being the single most honest reader I have ever had. I could count on you not holding back. To Kevin Day and Renko van den Hout, fellow GDC Conference Associates, who read more of my dissertation than most people ever will and provided me with clear feedback for improvement. To Tim Burns, for his careful editing, thoughtful feedback, and willingness to play the games I created. I recall the many times you were willing to sit across the table from me without talking. That’s friendship!

To my readers: Lauren Morgan, Francis, Moira, Hal Bourma, Amanda Dussault, Adonis, Brandon Brown, Aur Beck, and Alan Wight, Alex, Gabriel, Chen, Kelvin, Stephen, Robert, Jeanne, Farrah, Julian, Austin, Vlad, Colleen, John H., Gerald, Kyle, Tammy, and my dad.

I must extend a gigantic thank you to all my friends. There are too many to list individually, but there are several whom I must acknowledged by name. To Aur Beck, you are my solar powered source of energy whose helping hand is continuously extended. Thank you for
the dances that served to recharge me. To Joel Landry, for being my number one Joel and reminding me it is my turn to graduate. To Adonis, for showing me the most exciting way to get to places: by running and dancing. The vitality you have brought to our friendship has been remarkably uplifting. Oh, and thank you for the countless calls just to hear my voice on the other end of the phone, even when I was not excited to take phone calls from people. To Kevin Lin, I will never forget how you would reply to my questions with, “whatever is best for your dissertation.” It was your hospitality that kicked off a writing spree leading to my methods chapter. And, I recall our uplifting walks along the beach; they were the breaks from writing I needed for the long haul. To the Torney family, for their being a true family support network for me during my early years of school. To Marco Meurs, for hosting me during the summer of 2013 when I was finishing my comprehensive exams. Thank you for the boat ride writing breaks and your translation services. To Dylan Marra and Curt Hill, you both brought me good energy. To Alan Wight, you included me on projects that propelled me towards my first publication. To Bertin Ondja’a, your regular check-ins to make sure I was still hanging in there mattered. To Jessica Kestler, your courage and kindheartedness at the end of my fourth year will not be forgotten.

I must thank my pack—the women who run with the wolves (to borrow the name from a book that was gifted to me by Emmanuel’s mother, Florence). To Florence, our walks, talks, and mandalas build my confidence. You believed I was smart. To Ana Vel, you wrote me letters of recommendation, gave me writing tips, and spent Valentine’s Day with me. To Michelle and Alexandria Tichy, your smiles kept me going and your ears never stops listening. Thank you for preparing me for my first faculty position application and sharing so many conference experiences with me. May we have many American Educational Research Association (AERA)
conferences and trips to the pool in our future! To Rosemarie (and Hubert), who serve as guiding lights to the people they care about. Thank you for your invitations to work for peace in the world. To Sharon Doering and Fouzia Ebrahim, you were the kind souls who offered me a guiding light! Thank you for all the gifts you shared, and letting me know that wine and chocolate make up the normal diet of a doctoral student. To Winnie, for sushi study sessions and reminding me to believe. You, too, put in long hours of writing with me at a time when I needed company most. To Anne, for helping me when I was sick. To Sarah Schneider, you were the first to plant the seed of research on our canoe trip. To Peggy Shannon-Baker, for your collaboration on the conceptualization of holistic mentoring and introducing me to logic models. To Gail Headley, who has played many roles in my graduate life, but has been one of my most trusted readers, unbiased friends, diligent students, and passionate POOT mentors. Your daughters should be so proud to have such a kindhearted, driven woman as their role model.

I would also like to thank the people who were ahead of me and helped me pave my own way towards graduation. To Aimee deNoyelles, you mentored me as a member of your interpretive community and I have since carried on the tradition. To Matt Gaydos, your introduced me to a whole host of games folks, got me invited to my first party with James Paul Gee, and offered me support as I tried to stay current in the field of games. To Mark Chen, for all the hours you have invested in answering my questions about games. To Tom Fennewald, for your constant optimism and friendship.

I would like to thank my POOT friends. To Remi Holden, where investments in friendship pay back dividends. To Farrah, I extend much gratitude for your fearlessness as we treaded new ground as POOT facilitators. Thank you for believing me when I said everything can be fixed. To Nance, for your overall faith in humanity and countless efforts to make the
world a better place inside POOT/JCAT and beyond! Together, we have changed the course of POOT/JCAT. To my colleagues, Adam, Evan, and Ashley—your time and honesty was priceless. To the Action Women, who started this journey with me in 2010. Susan Tyler, you have been like a mother to me when I am so far from home. You have always been someone I can turn to. To Amanda, your kindness and intellect will not be forgotten. To all of the Action Figures, but especially to Stephanie Talbot. Thank you for thinking about mentoring and presence with me for hours and hours. My sincere appreciation goes out to all of the participants of POOT/JCAT.

I owe my upward mobility to the professors and mentors who shared valuable lessons along the way. Each and every one has made a difference, but there are a few I must mention by name. To Kathy Hytten, who was willing to write me a letter of recommendation for graduate school and introduced me to a more radical literature on schooling. Dare we build that new school order? To Susan Aud, who first introduced me to the wonders of educational play through her class called Guiding Play as Learning. To Marvin Berlowitz—the national recognized dangerous professor—you welcomed me into every one of your classes, and gave me a platform to practice my presentation skills. To Leigh Wang, you challenged me the most during my first year of doctoral studies and pushed me to be the best scholar I could be. To Tom Lindblade, Gib Egge, and Mario Reda for my earliest faculty mentorship. A special thank you to all those involved in the College of DuPage Field and Experiential Learning Department is in order—you helped me see that education is a fire that lies within. To Miriam, you pushed me to find my voice, supported my grant ideas, and shared my delight about JCAT life. Without you, this dissertation topic would not have been born. To Mary Brydon-Miller, you welcomed me into the world of conferencing through which I have been able to share POOT with the rest of the world.
To Janet Zydney, you offered me a pivotal teaching positions in educational technology and a platform to explore new angles for POOT. To Marcus Johnson, for hiring me as a graduate assistant and trusting my creativity with character playing activities to teach psychology. I would also like to thank all of my conference co-contributors (too many to name), Mathias Nordvall for his big Swedish cheer, and my 2010 Educational Studies cohort for starting me off on the right foot during our professional seminar.

There is a Swedish saying “Otack är världens lön,” which, when translated, means the world repays you with thanklessness. While I have certainly had moments when this saying has felt true, my experience with all of the people mentioned above reminds me of the fierce restorative and generative power of human generosity. You make up my sacred circle. All, never stop sharing your remarkable gifts with one another. To each and every one of you—I conclude with the most heart resonating expression of sincere and profound gratitude for which the English language does not have a word powerful enough to encapsulate.
Preface

While talking to a friend, she asked, “Why did you decide to work on your Ph.D.?” She, too, recognized the laboriousness surrounding a dissertation. In my attempt to answer her question, I realized that understanding my desire to sludge through years of graduate work towards my Ph.D. was inextricably linked to my story.

The year was 1995. I was fifteen years old, and I was a high school dropout. One of my most salient memories is of my English teacher telling me he was going to fail me over my inability to take the end-of-week spelling test. I had asked to take a spelling test earlier in the week, ahead of schedule, but I was denied. I can also recall being denied the ability to drink water throughout the day. We were told we could not carry water bottles with us, and instead had to request a hall pass in order to get a sip of water. This all seemed rather nonsensical to me deny a person water and to base my performance on my ability to take a spelling test at a scheduled time, sitting in a classroom with desks in a row, all the while being monitored by the hovering gaze of the teacher. I wanted a less restrictive learning space where I could learn at my own pace, often faster and more in-depth than the regular classroom.

By the age of sixteen, after my decision to leave high school I was forced to live on my own. I went from dead end job to dead end job before I finally landed a job where I could make ends meet. While this job offered some degree of financial security, it left me unfulfilled. My days were spent gazing longingly at my desktop calendar, which displayed a beautiful mountain vista, all the while dreaming of "something" more.

I began my search for this elusive "something" by enrolling in a few classes at the College of DuPage (COD), but I still lacked direction. In the fall of 1998, I casually enrolled in a weekend canoe class through the COD Field and Experiential Learning Department, an academic
program that combines coursework with fieldwork. I was unaware that this action would forever change my life. I began the weekend with a mind full of uncertainty, and returned with a newfound passion for learning. I was about to become a full-time college student. At the COD, I partook in over 35 field-based courses with learning sites in 14 different states. I had some of the most amazing instructors, many of whom helped reshape my conceptualization of schooling. I am forever grateful for these mentors, especially Tom Lindblade, Gib Egge, and Mario Reda. Through their courses, I performed first aid on a remote wilderness trail, tested soil quality by measuring anthills in a prairie, and worked on teambuilding from the treetops on a high ropes course. As a teenager, I can recall not even liking science and was amazed at this new interest. This hands-on experience served as the foundation for continued academic pursuits. Soon, I was a recognized Honors Scholar and a member of a Phi Theta Kappa, an international scholastic society. I was learning to love school and feeling rewarded for my newfound passion!

Along with a curriculum change, came an occupation change. I found employment with the COD Field and Experiential Learning Department. This apprenticeship expanded my definition of a “classroom” and an “office.” After discovering a pathway to more joyful learning, I wanted to share this with other non-traditional and disenfranchised learners. I realized that I needed a forum in which my voice could be heard, and the student trustee position would be just that.

In the years 1995 to 2001, I went from a high school drop out to the COD student trustee, who represented over thirty-four thousand students of all ages, backgrounds, races, and academic needs. I was a tireless advocate for student rights and showcased an extraordinary attention to detail in representing my constituents on vital college issues. However, my involvement with student rights did not stop there; I was an active member of the Illinois Community College
Trustees Association. I served on the Illinois Community College Board Student Advisory Committee, where my peers voted to award me with the Outstanding General Member Award. Additionally, I was nominated and fulfilled the role as Secretary for the Promise for Illinois Student Advisory Subcommittee.

Goals that once seemed far beyond my reach felt as if they were beginning to brush against my fingertips. I was no longer gazing at a picture of a beautiful mountain vista; I was fully immersed in that panoramic view. During the spring of 2002, I experienced an educational rebirth, as I advanced from a two-year community college to a four-year university. My advancement was made possible by the generous support of the Glendale Heights Jr. Women’s Club, Senator Pankau’s General Assembly Scholarship, and the sacrifices of my grandparents.

From 2002 to 2007, my love for authentic learning environments continued to flourish. It was during this timeframe I committed myself to the goal of getting a Ph.D. so that I could make a difference in the field of education through university-led teacher education program. I wanted to reach disengaged learners, like myself, by working with future teachers from a professorial position. I transferred to Southern Illinois University at Carbondale (SIUC) to continue my education with an emphasis in experiential learning. At SIUC, I met more influential mentors including Kathy Hytten, Susan Aud, and Sarah Schneider. Dr. Hytten was the first to introduce me to key authors like George Counts, John Dewey, Pablo Freire, Henry Giroux, and other progressive educators. Through the reading of these authors, I was given the vocabulary around politics of education I had been searching for since the age of fifteen. Dr. Aud taught a class, Guiding Play as Learning, which planted the seed for my graduate work rooted in playful learning. Sarah was my torch, being the first to introduce me to the world of research. I
graduated Cum Laude in University Studies after designing my own degree program focused on experiential education.

Under the guidance of the Department of Psychology at SIUC, I completed over 300 academic-related volunteer hours for my pre-professional practicum, which helped bridge theory to practice and to become more curious about human behavior. Through my practicum experience, I was offered a teaching position as an Adult Basic Education Instructor at the SIUC Evaluation and Developmental Center. This new position was invigorating and awakened the teacher in me. During my assistantship, I became a certified Special Learning Needs Instructor and deepened my desire to help those who are often silenced through schooling. This certification, coupled with my theoretical grounding in education, enabled me to empower adults with severe learning disabilities to become more integrated members of society and happier individuals.

In 2005, I moved to Cincinnati for a relationship, but continued my search for a progressive graduate program, one that valued democratic teaching and liberation education. In 2007, while at a bookstore in Harvard Square, I serendipitously passed the book *101 Dangerous Professors*. The book jumped out at me. In flipping through the table of contents, I found a professor at the University of Cincinnati, Marxist scholar Dr. Marvin Berlowitz. While my relationship in Cincinnati was coming to a close, I knew I had to meet this professor before I left the metro area. I emailed Dr. Berlowitz to schedule a meeting, but I imagined if there was one radical professor, there might be more. Opening this book is how I found the three most important people in my doctoral career: Steve Sunderland, Vanessa Allen-Brown, and Marvin Berlowitz. I enrolled in every class they taught, soaking up everything I could.
Under the guidance of these Social and Cultural Foundations of Education professors, and in memory of my high school career, time as student trustee, and coursework with Dr. Hytten, I learned the “very notion of being an engaged public intellectual is neither foreign to nor a violation of what it means to be an academic scholar but central to its very definition” (Giroux, 2012). I learned that “academics have a responsibility to enter into the public sphere unafraid to take political awareness, making connections to those elements of power and politics often hidden from the public view” (Said, 2001, as cited in Giroux, 2012). Through this, I solidified my academic and career goals, which are theoretically grounded in liberation education. These goals can be broken down into three basic tenets: (1) to disrupt oppression, (2) redefine the teaching process, and (3) use experiential education as a facilitator.

With these basic tenets in mind, Steve was the first to help me narrow the scope of my research interests towards games. My interest in games as teaching tools emerged from a board game I created to address the obstacles youth face in gaining access to high education, called War Between Suburbs. Games as a way of learning fascinated me, and Steve, Vanessa, and Marvin all allowed me a platform for this exploration by allowing me to present my game to over 20 classes. Based on my work with this game, I was awarded the Most Outstanding Masters Project for Educational Studies at the University of Cincinnati in 2009.

After graduation, I moved away from Cincinnati to The Netherlands. I did not envision myself returning to Cincinnati, but when I received an email from Dr. Raider-Roth about a course she was teaching that would emphasize a game-like learning tool, I gave the idea strong consideration. I applied, received my acceptance, and returned to Cincinnati eager to learn about how game-like learning spaces can help diversify a teacher’s toolbox. This dissertation represents my exploration into this game-like learning space: Place Out of Time.
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<tr>
<td>AERA</td>
<td>American Educational Research Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APA</td>
<td>American Psychological Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Action Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>AYP</td>
<td>Adequate Yearly Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBAR</td>
<td>Classroom-Based Action Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CECH</td>
<td>College of Education Criminal Justice and Human Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CITI</td>
<td>Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COD</td>
<td>College of DuPage</td>
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<tr>
<td>D &amp; D</td>
<td>Dungeons and Dragons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBR</td>
<td>Design based research</td>
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<tr>
<td>ESEA</td>
<td>Elementary and Secondary Education Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDC</td>
<td>Games Developers Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLS</td>
<td>Games+Learning+Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICS</td>
<td>Interactive Communications and Simulations group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB</td>
<td>Institutional Review Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JC</td>
<td>Student Portraying Jesus</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCAT</td>
<td>Jewish Court of All Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMO</td>
<td>Massively Multiplayer Online</td>
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<tr>
<td>MMORPG</td>
<td>Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTS</td>
<td>Michigan Terminal System</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>MUN</td>
<td>Model United Nations</td>
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<td>MUD</td>
<td>Multi-User Dungeon</td>
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<td>NAEP</td>
<td>National Assessment of Educational Progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCES</td>
<td>National Center for Education Statistics</td>
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<td>National Council for History Education</td>
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<td>NCLB</td>
<td>No Child Left Behind Act</td>
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<td>PAR</td>
<td>Participatory Action Research</td>
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<td>Practitioner-Based Action Research</td>
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<td>PI</td>
<td>Practitioner Inquiry</td>
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<td>POOT</td>
<td>Place Out of Time</td>
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<td>SIUC</td>
<td>Southern Illinois University Carbondale</td>
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<tr>
<td>T2SFP</td>
<td>Thesis and Two Statistics or Facts per Paragraph</td>
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<tr>
<td>TLH</td>
<td>Thinking Like a Historian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UM, U of M</td>
<td>University of Michigan</td>
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<td>UC</td>
<td>University of Cincinnati</td>
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<tr>
<td>VOC</td>
<td>Vote of Confidence</td>
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<td>WoW</td>
<td>World of Warcraft</td>
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Overview

During my first term as a doctoral student, I entered my program with a pronounced drive to help disengaged learners through alternative forms of teaching and learning (see Preface). I enrolled in a course with Dr. Raider-Roth, in which her students were required to take part in an alternative educational space called Place Out of Time (POOT). This educational learning space serves as the centerpiece for this dissertation. Chapter 3 discusses POOT in greater detail.

Briefly, POOT encourages the hands-on learning of historical content through a character-playing activity involving a diplomatic trial on a modern-day sociopolitical issue. POOT uses the Internet, e-mentoring, and play to harness the full potential of the participants. Chapter 3 contains a table detailing the different types of participants (see Table 3.2). Students from approved classrooms participate. They do so alongside classmates and students from other participating classrooms. The majority of students in POOT are from middle and high school classrooms from around the world, including North America, Europe, and Asia. These students are joined online by adults, including certified teachers, university students studying to become teachers, and project directors. The university students serve as mentors, whose goal for participation was to: (1) deepen students’ thinking, (2) to “stir the pot” by way of seeing multiple positions on controversial matters, and (3) to monitor for appropriate site usage. Together, participants discuss cultural understanding, civility, tolerance, and acceptance. As described by Jeff Stanzler, a project director of POOT, participants are asked to wrestle with the notion of
whether they are able to conceptualize and process what another person conveys, even if they do not agree with the other individual.

While enrolled in Dr. Raider-Roth’s course, I was first assigned to portray the character Erin Gruwell, the high school English teacher from the *Freedom Writer’s Diary* (1999) to fulfill the character-playing requirement. I quickly began interacting with students as my character, and my curiosity about this learning platform heightened. I wanted to know more about what was motivating people to participate or not participate in *POOT*. My initial intrigue was the start of a five-year relationship with my dissertation topic on participant experience in *POOT*. The aim of this dissertation study was to explore how character-play was perceived by *POOT* participants, most specifically by K-12 students.

Dr. Raider-Roth’s practitioner-based action research course is where I first learned about the ability for teachers to use their classrooms and teaching practices as researchable. I was introduced to key authors such as Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan L. Lytle, David Hawkins, Steve Seidel, Thomas Holt, and Donald Schön, all discussed in more detail in my methods chapter (see Chapter 5). As a result of this course, the key authors listed above, and my firsthand experience, my intrigue with *POOT* deepened. Three other women and I formed a research group we called the “Action Women,” through which we engaged in a three-year study investigating the experiences of university mentors in *POOT* (Killham, Tyler, Venable, Raider-Roth, 2014). Together, as an interpretive community, these women and I learned how to (1) construct data collection instruments such as the mentor interview guide used in this study (see Appendix 5.6), (2) analyze data, and (3) convey our findings to an unfamiliar audience. My work with the Action Women served as a pilot study for this dissertation and helped me refine my line of inquiry in relation to the K-12 students.
At the culmination of my first iteration as an active participant in *POOT* (Fall 2010), I sent an email to the Interactive Communications and Simulations group (ICS) project directors (Jeff Stanzler, Jeff Kupperman, and Michael Fahy). In this email I said, “I was talking to [Dr. Raider-Roth] and my classmates about how much I miss being a part of the POOT experience. I'm curious, is there any way I can be a part of a simulation experience this term? I would love to continue playing the role of Erin Gruwell, if she is not already taken” (Jennifer Killham, personal communications, January 11, 2011). I requested permission to participate in the Spring 2011 iteration of *POOT* because I enjoyed the activity and in order to increase my observation hours related to my burgeoning research questions.

Occurring at the same time, Dr. Raider-Roth recruited me to be the project manager for the University of Cincinnati Center for Jewish Education and Culture. As the project manager, I conducted research related to *POOT* as part of a grant that the Center had recently been awarded by the Covenant Foundation in conjunction with RAVSAK: The Jewish Day School Network. I became the first person to be chosen outside of the core ICS group to serve in a facilitating capacity (starting Fall 2011). This meant attending to the needs of over seven K-12 classroom teachers across North America and Asia, 30 university mentors, and 150 K-12 students for each iteration of *POOT*. I also worked closely with the K-12 teachers using *POOT* in their classrooms, helping to provide instructional support and professional development through an online social networking site and video conference calls. Through this instructional support role, I grew curious about what was happening in the classrooms, something I was unable to see singlehandedly from online observations. My curiosity combined with a desire to know more than what was visible online led to site visits in four states and one virtual visit with a school in Asia, all of which influenced this dissertation research.
There were additional benefits to serving as the project manager for Dr. Raider-Roth. I became well-versed in the procedures of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), received my Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) ethics training, and taught university-level courses that utilized POOT for instructional purposes (e.g., an online graduate-level course in practitioner-based action research and introduction to technology courses with history education majors).

My extended involvement in this project led to the formation of a second POOT research group. We called ourselves the “Action Figures.” Under my leadership, the Action Figures contemplated a concept termed “improvisational mentoring” (Killham, 2013), as well as the notion of presence in online educational forums. This emphasis on improvisational mentoring and presence provided me with a relational foundation and helped me to bridge relational theoretical work with the material presented throughout this dissertation.

**Motivation for Current Line of Research**

My current line of research dates back to a conversation I had with a group of K-12 classroom teachers about student performance in POOT as part of a program evaluation. Seated together, the group of educators and I processed pieces of student work from POOT. I was eager to reflect on this student work with my colleagues who have extensive classroom teaching experience. However, my delight was met with puzzlement and reluctance on behalf of the other educators in the room. The room was abuzz with questions, when alas, one of my colleagues, Alice¹, a seasoned and expressive educator, blurted out: “Seriously!” Our heads turned towards her as she exasperatedly came forth, “Why was this kid sewing?” She pointed to a piece of

¹ Pseudonyms were used for participants and in some cases, the names of POOT characters were also changed to ensure participant confidentiality.
student work where a student had conjured up the idea that she was physically “sewing” as her character Betsy Ross. Alice continued, “This student should be doing something important.” The intensity and conviction in my colleague’s tone struck me. She voiced immense dissatisfaction with the student’s contributions (sewing). I listened, as non-judgmentally as possible, to Alice’s frustrations about this particular student’s level of academic rigor. As a fellow educator, I shared Alice’s concerns about wanting to ensure our students were growing and strengthening their skillsets. In Alice’s mind, “sewing” did not equate to rigor.

I also listened to Alice with an ear towards the betterment of the activity in which we were co-enrolled. I had a strikingly different reaction to the work of this avid, playful sewer, all the while maintaining an open ear to Alice’s underlying concerns. My positionalities within the project afforded me the chance to be in the thick of it (Geertz, 1973). However, while I was a fellow educator, I was not entrenched in the same rhetoric of accountability that Alice was, the one that contributed to Alice’s fear over Betsy Ross’s level of academic rigor. Understanding how accountability measures impact the teaching of academic subjects in K-12 schools, such as history and social studies, was something I needed to be attuned to. This attunement was something I felt I could achieve through having Alice share her own experiences and by conducting a thorough review of the literature related to how others were implementing alternative forms of teaching and learning in formalized settings. Alice’s concerns and fears provided the scaffolding for the selection of my three literature reviews in this dissertation: (1) the review of history education literature, (2) the review of POOT-related literature, and (3) the review of games and roleplay literature.

For this dissertation, my literature review chapters were devoted to better understanding pedagogical matters that impact the K-12 student experience, specifically as it relates to the
opportunities and challenges associated with POOT participation. However, I knew if I were going to comprehend the educational potential happening in this space, I would need to open myself to Alice’s questions and the questions of other POOT participants. I, therefore, positioned myself as a researcher with an inquiry stance, which necessitated the receptiveness to disagreement and ability to maintain a scholarly tone as opposed to the position of advocacy. This was a balance I first sought in my literature review chapters, and carried over to my methodological decisions.

**Dissertation Overview**

This dissertation can be broken down into two main components: (1) my theoretical grounding and (2) my applied methodology. My theoretical grounding places a strong emphasis on the constraints and opportunities related to formalized learning within school systems, as outlined in Chapters 2-4. Chapter 2 outlines how history education connects to this dissertation, specifically defining historical thinking and summarizing the research on how young people learn history. I included this chapter in order to situate POOT as an educational platform within a subject identified as core curriculum by K-12 schools. In this chapter, I outline how the question of “the purpose of schooling” has influenced legislation related to social studies education and the impacts this legislation has on teacher decision making and curricula. Legislation and reform efforts have led to disagreements over instructional methods, content, and assessment procedures. These disagreements are rooted in how educators self-identify philosophically, meaning that it impacts their vision on the essential skills and disposition of a social studies teacher and the purpose of the subject matter itself. The most prevalent philosophical camp often shifts, like a pendulum, depending on the ruling political party. In Chapter 2, I also examine the question Tom Holt raises about whether students are consumers of material or co-constructors of
the making of historical knowledge, and what resources students use to draw conclusions about
the world (i.e., textbooks vs. primary sources). While Chapter 2 positions these so-called “history
wars” within a historical context, educators and students are still entangled in these history wars
today. For example, on September 25, 2014, Colorado high school students protested
conservative changes to their history curriculum (Ferner, 2014). Also, the Ohio Department of
Education\(^2\) has implemented an end of course exam where over 50 percent of the questions on
social studies content will be tested through multiple choice questions. The literature review in
Chapter 2 is intended to better position me to understand the real challenges educators face when
attempting to implement projects like *POOT*.

Chapters 3 and 4 extends the discussion on history education by (1) providing a
comprehensive introduction to *POOT* as an alternative form of teaching and learning about
history, and (2) broadening the conversation to include additional alternative forms of teaching
and learning such as games and roleplay. In Chapter 3, I unearth the pedagogical aims of *POOT*
and determine the intentionality of the project—to promote young people’s engagement with
history in schools. *POOT* also aims to enhance the development of historical thinking skills,
which connect back to terms outlined in Chapter 2. For Chapter 4, I intentionally cast a wide net
to broaden my understanding of alternative ways of teaching and learning. Ultimately, I narrow
my scope to topics based on the pedagogical aims I discerned from *POOT* in Chapter 3. These
topics include games, roleplay, and similar alternative forms of teaching and learning, as
reflected in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 teases out similarities and differences between *POOT* and other
game-like spaces, as seen in the tables I assembled in order to walk the reader through my

\(^2\) Ohio Department of Education test information can be found at
http://oh.portal.airast.org/ocba/students-and-families
thought process. A number of ways to conceptualize games are presented in the chapter, and I ultimately chose my alignment with definitions based on the material I unearth about the pedagogical aims of *POOT*. After introducing and defining game-like learning spaces, I narrow my review in Chapter 4 to three main game genres: (1) serious persuasive games, (2) roleplaying games, and (3) sociopolitical games. Applying a games framework for the literature review chapter in Chapter 4 was extremely helpful in the sense-making process, as I tried to comprehend the *POOT* experience and gain a vocabulary for discussing *POOT*.

Further, Chapters 2 through 4 were essential in developing my understanding around the relational nature of teaching and learning, and therefore influenced how I selected my methodology. My applied methodology placed emphasis on voice, personhood, and the power of listening through multiple modalities. Chapter 5 provides rich logic models and explanations for my methodological decisions. As I sought an appropriate research methodology, I was reminded of Riessman’s (2008) work, which aimed at building trustworthiness in the design of a research study. Riessman discusses the centrality of choosing appropriate design, collection and analysis techniques. Chapter 5 described my methodological foundations and the step-by-step details of my data collection and analysis. For this research, it was important to be able to hear the questions, concerns, and challenges the participants faced while enrolled in *POOT*. Therefore, it was necessary to employ a methodology that would give voice to the participants. To that end, McCormack’s Lenses (2000a, 2000b) served as the primary tool for analysis, which involved the careful attention to the voice of participants through four distinct listenings. Each listening unveiled a different dimension of the narrator’s story. The first lens, narrative processes, focused on structure, word patterns, and plot. The second lens, language, attended to word choice in the retelling of stories and the context in which the story was told, such as the field, tenor, and mode.
The third lens, context, paid particular attention to cultural and situational influences. The final lens, moments, located the points when the participant realized something during the interview through the retelling of the story.

Broadly, my research questions were rooted in trying to learn what was working and not working in POOT based on the participants’ lived experiences and their articulation of their experiences. I strove to reveal people’s first-hand experiences—what were their stories? The act of observing, inviting response, and analyzing their lived experiences can reveal a fuller picture of their story. I endeavored to support my participants’ voice, a term defined in the SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research as a way for participants to express themselves supportively and to feel honored for their contributions (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014, pp. 806-811).

Data is presented in the form of case histories, which emphasizes the creation of the full story for its own sake, based on critical events. These critical events are, by definition, unplanned, impactful, and intensely personal occurrences. They were compiled not to prove a theory, but to give voice to POOT participants. Drawing from the participants’ articulation of their experiences, Chapters 6-9 present detailed case histories of four different lived experiences, ranging from the experience of (1) a fictional character with interrogated membership within the community, (2) an artistic character without a personal sense of purpose, (3) a student who struggled to enjoy the project, and (4) a character who was controversially portrayed.

Research Aims

Research Stance

My research questions stem from an interesting phenomenon I observed while serving as the project director and facilitator of POOT. This dissertation aims to determine whether the observed phenomenon was as compelling as I thought it was during my initial observations. I
employed a practitioner inquiry perspective, one that sought to improve educational settings through collaboration among researchers, practitioners, and participants. I adopted this inquiry stance to honor my multiple positionalities as a teacher-educator, POOT facilitator, participant, and researcher; as well to give voice to the people I worked with in POOT who expressed their joys and frustrations about their experience. In the book *Silenced Voices and Extraordinary Conversations: Re-Imagining Schools*, Michelle Fine (2003) exposes the silencing of “undesirable talk” or critical talk (p. 14). Silencing of this sort only seeks to “[p]reserve the ideology of equal opportunity” (p. 14). Fine explains that students quickly learn the pitfalls of talking and the codes for involvement in activities. Students learn to control what they share with others, often resorting to omission rather than divulging honestly about their experiences. Therefore, the first phase of this study began with organic participant curiosities by drawing on the questions raised by the POOT participants about their firsthand experiences.

**Umbrella Research Question**

My umbrella research question was: What are the opportunities and challenges of participating in an online, experiential history education project that uses character-play? My hypothesis was: As POOT participants engage with the program, they may have emergent questions around the character-playing dimension of POOT. These dimensions may include character selection, accurate portrayal of their character, level of character involvement, ability for characters to contribute to the court case, and the appropriateness of characters. There are some guiding concerns that led me to this umbrella question, such as hearing K-12 teachers and mentors voice concerns about how the character-playing dimension might be impacting, and possibly even impeding, the participation of all the players. Additional concerns have been raised about whether participants are able to balance the demands of taking on a role, and as to whether
character-playing is increasing cognitive load to the point where participants are not able to make sense and/or gains from their experience.

**Embedded, answerable questions**

At the conclusion of phase one, I narrowed my questions to reflect my embedded questions. My embedded research questions are:

1. How do participants describe the character-playing activity in *POOT*?
2. What was the firsthand experience of portraying a fictional, controversially played, and/or artistic character in *POOT*?
3. How does character-playing in *POOT* serve as a scaffold for students’ historical thinking?
4. What suggestions do participants have for improvement based on their experience?

For my hypothesis, I believed I will find that each participant group describes *POOT* participation in relation to what Engeström (1999) calls an “activity system” (curricular activity, self, rules, community, division of labor). Participants describe the character-playing aspect of *POOT* in direct relation to the character they portrayed, the other characters with whom they interacted, and their activity system. For curricular reasons, adults want to restrict character choices without engaging the K-12 students in conversation about their experience with their character from the categories listed in question two. Despite some inherent difficulties, the character-types investigated for this research will have a significant impact on a participant’s understanding of history and strengthen our ability to engage in perspective taking.
Chapter 2

Review of History Education Literature

Overview

Meet my students, Eddie, Carol, Eva and Tony, all preservice teachers preparing to work in schools as secondary education social studies teachers. Here is a conversation I overheard while they waited for a class I taught to commence. Eddie, who has an as-a-matter-of-fact tone, began by sharing with his classmates sitting at his table, “You see, the fascinating thing about the French Revolution was…” But Eddie was abruptly interrupted by a bubbly Carol. Carol threw her arms in the air and declared, “I’m in love with Napoleon.” As Carol spun around the room, the other students turned to look at Carol with both puzzlement and amazement. Carol stopped mid-swirl, leaned over towards Eddie, and pointed as she said explained, “Napoleon was misunderstood, you know.” Tony and Eva spun their chairs around to join in. “True, not everyone thought of Napoleon as a villain,” admitted Tony.3

I begin with this teaching vignette for three reasons. First, as I discussed in the preface, I am a teacher educator with a research emphasis on improving the preparedness of preservice teachers in the field of social studies. I want to be transparent about my positionalities as a way of promoting ethical research and to demonstrate a grounding of authentic interest in the topic of history education. The second reason for sharing is that it reminds me of the hope and enthusiasm of those seeking careers in the teaching profession, particularly in the area of social studies. It is a positive energy that we must not lose sight of as teacher educators. In the subsequent paragraphs, there is a slightly more grim discussion of the current state of history

3 Based on an actual conversation taking place in an undergraduate course I taught. All names were changed to maintain anonymity.
education in America, one that I feel implores our field to remain hopeful and invigorated by future teachers like Carol. Third, I wanted to frame this conversation of historical thinking around often misunderstood or oversimplified “characters” from history. Napoleon is one of many character examples I will provide. I do this by way of providing humanistic context to a more theoretical piece of writing.

In the pages that follow, I present the current state of history education, including an understanding of how students are believed to learn history best. I use the terms “history” and “social studies” interchangeably. Afterward, I define historical thinking skills and make a case for its inclusion and importance of in history curriculum. To close this chapter, I segue to Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, where I suggest an alternative programs and ways of teaching history.

**Current State of History Education**

“History education at the K-12 levels is seriously, urgently, in crisis,” warns Mattson (2008, p. 99). Dating back the mid-1980s, history education has been swept up by political rhetoric, where teachers are consumed with worries of job (in)security and (dis)satisfaction. Teachers are often held to pedagogical regulations matching the agenda of the controlling political party, rather than with the instructional focus of rearing a democratic citizenry—a citizenry who cares for the common good and “disrupts and resists all forms and systems of oppression” (Ellis, 2001; Hursh & Ross, 2000, as cited in Chandler & McKnight, 2007, p. 59). This swinging of the pendulum, away from democratic ideals to “ideologically driven disavowal of critical pedagogy” is something Henry Giroux warns about in many of his writings (e.g., 2012, p. 81). Giroux, a critical pedagogue himself, elaborates on the definition of critical pedagogy as “the civic meaning of schooling, and the role that teachers might play in connecting learning to matters of politics, power, and democracy” (2012, p. 81). The shifting of the
controlling political party and swinging of the ideological pendulum contributed to divisions in
the field of history education, as well as the splitting of public opinion. The swinging of the
pendulum Giroux references is something I explore in further detail in the upcoming paragraphs
related to the different philosophical camps.

Below, I discuss how state mandates from the 1980s to present-day have impacted history
education. Next, I explore how misappropriations of one-right answer thinking have influenced
history education to be wrongly considered a neutral subject matter. I then address how the
misguided foregrounding of history as objective leads to the student-producing-for-teacher
approach to learning. By student-producing-for teacher approach, I mean an approach where the
student engages with the course content to satisfy the teacher’s instructional agenda. After
which, I return to a discussion on how a teacher’s pedagogy or philosophical camp impacts how
social studies and history teachers envision their purpose and method of instruction.

**Political mandates.** The root causes of the history education crisis, Mattson (2008)
contends, are the constraints of “a patchwork of bureaucratic mandates, political infighting, fact-
obsessed high stakes tests, and inconsistent teacher education” (pp. 99-100). Other researchers
have reported similar findings regarding the bureaucracy of history education curriculum
(Williams & Maloyed, 2013). Guidry, Cuthrell, O’Connor, and Good (2010) concur that social
studies education has been marginalized with the influx of standardized testing. This
marginalization of history education is something Giroux (2001) and Chandler and McKnight
(2007) have labeled the “discourse of accountability” (p. 60). This discourse of accountability
obtained significant traction in the 1980s with Reagan’s education legislation, *A Nation at Risk:*
*The Imperative for Educational Reform.* This 1983 report was a foundational shift in the
direction of a more tumultuous discourse of accountability that continues today. This discourse
has helped link education with national economic prowess and patriotism (Endacott and Goering, 2014).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides a comprehensive outline of the reform efforts taking place over the last twenty to thirty years. While a detailed account of these reform efforts is beyond the scope of this chapter, there are a few key things I want to note from the NCES report (Hurst & NCES, 2003). In the 1990s, then Governor George W. Bush, was involved in educational reforms as part of his membership with the National Governors Association. His reform efforts continued into his presidency. In 1994, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) extended the support the standards-based reform efforts in the United States, which tilled the ground for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. With NCLB legislation, valuable instructional time and funding has been reallocated towards courses that meet the NCLB requirements for the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Even further, VanSledright (1997) reported on how teachers were being tugged at by reports of the low scores students received on the 1994 U.S. History National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test. While teachers were blamed, so were the schools where they received their training. R. Neumann (2010) explains, “[p]olicymakers frequently identify teacher education programs as a fundamental cause of bad teaching and poor schooling outcomes” (p. 4). R. Neumann continues by clarifying that “[this] criticism and others contributed to the assault on teacher education in the 1990s” (Hirsch, 1996, as cited in R. Neumann, 2010, p. 4; Kramer, 1991; Sowell, 1993). These reform efforts and critiques made for tumultuous times and contributed to the change in the educational landscape.

The above-mentioned reform efforts from the ESEA and NCLB legislation shifted educational conversations towards outcomes, proficiency, accountability, and the reexamination
of teacher training. Val Plisko, the (former) Associate Commissioner for Early Childhood, International, and Crosscutting Statistics echoed the saliency of this shift. Plisko said, “Issues salient in the 1990s concerning student performance, school accountability, resource adequacy, and parental choice remain as top policy concerns” (Hurst & NCES, 2003, p. iii). Reports regarding the educational impacts of NCLB continue in 2014, such as Eslinger’s (2014) warning of the NCLB’s stressful impact on urban school teachers and Williams and Maloyed’s (2013) analysis of the 2010 revisions to Texas state standards.

**Implications of high stakes testing.** Much of the above-referenced legislation was adopted under the guise of adequately preparing students for life after high school (Warren & Kulick, 2007). Scholars argue these tests are not serving their original intent of bettering education and preparing democratic citizenry (Noddings, 2007). In actuality, high stakes exams have taken priority over cultivating democratic citizens (Giroux, 2012, p. 79). In their edited book, *Knowing Teaching & Learning History*, Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg (2000) stress this same point: there is a “gaping hole,” in how students are taught history in K-12 schools. In response, history educator James Loewen (2010) called for history teachers to help students “bring into being the American future” and to be change agents by learning from the past (p. 211). The momentum of the high stakes testing movement, combined with traditional methods of history instruction, made Loewen’s call difficult to attain.

History in the K-12 classroom rarely uses primary sources, such as documents that originate from the time period under investigation. An example of a primary source is *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which was written about World War II during the time of the war by someone who had first-hand experience with the war. Speeches, interviews, news footage, creative works, and artifacts are all considered primary sources. If used, students are hardly asked to make
substantive meaning of primary sources. Instead, students are forced to adhere to requirements that do not replicate the types of problems students will face outside of school (Goodman, 2010; Mattson, 2008, p. 99; Warren & Kulick, 2007). Students are often asked to memorize facts with test taking as the end goal. Exams take priority over Schön-style (1983) reflection-in-action and neglect to promote Freirean-style (1973) problem-posing. Material is, instead, consumed with little scrutiny. This is problematic because history is all too often told from the position of a single “objective” perspective. This objective positioning neglects the complexities of context, specifically people, places, and time periods. In academic settings, students are taught about Benjamin Franklin the inventor on the $100 bill, not about his reputation as a prankster. Students learn about Helen Keller’s efforts to overcome her disabilities, but very little about her social activism and public association with the Socialist Party.

Schools perpetuate the teaching of history as a regurgitation of facts and dates, as well as the retelling of “already-agreed-on stories” from state approved textbooks (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Mattson, 2008, p. 103; Wertsch, 2000, p. 39). In Loewen’s new book (2010), *Teaching what really happened: How to avoid the tranny of textbooks and get students excited about doing history*, he presented an argument against the “huge” state sanctioned textbook (p. 21). He raised questions about the bureaucratic constraints, such as the 400 benchmark standards students are supposed to memorize from their huge textbook. These bureaucratic constraints are most evident in states like Texas and Florida, where what constitutes “official history” has been declared factual and American-centric. One important reason for mentioning Florida as an example is a legislative bill signed in by former Florida Governor Jeb Bush (Florida Education Omnibus Bill: H.B. 7087e34). This bill states, “American history shall be viewed as factual, not as constructed”

4 Many thanks to Prentice Chandler for making this source available.
(Giroux, 2012). Florida has declared history to be “knowable, teachable, and testable” (Jenson, 2006; McKnight & Chandler, 2009). This legislation is problematic for educators who view history as constructed.

School systems have latched onto what Goodman (2010) termed “puzzle-based learning.” By puzzle-based learning he did not mean puzzle in the literal sense, but a learning modality that emphasized one fixed, right answer as opposed to multiple right answers (e.g., Battle of Waterloo ended in 1815). Kupperm un et al. (2007), as well as Mattson (2008, p. 100), warned about how these narrow “one right answer” approaches limit a student’s opportunities for powerful and meaningful learning exchanges. It is all too common for students to memorize facts and dates that they will be required to regurgitate for a test without being asked to reason about the past (Mattson, 2008, p. 103; Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg, 2000, p. 16).

**Student-teacher approach.** We see the reinforcement of the “students-producing-for-teacher-relationship” (Kupperman, Stanzler, Fahy, & Hapgood, 2007, p. 166). This is what Morton (2000) called the production of “patriotic citizenship” (p. 58). In the absence of rich educational experiences, Goodman (2010) and Kupperman et al. (2007) argued schools have turned out efficient and obedient students, but they have not fostered self-inspired, active learners. However, there has been a resurgence to promote Hirsch’s (1998) concept of cultural literacy with the book series, “*What Every _ Needs to Know.*” Hirsch argues that American K-12 education was undermined by fads like project-based learning and student-centered learning, when students should be learning about information him and his team have assembled as culturally relevant (Giddings, 1998). However, educators do not always share Hirsch’s discontent with active pedagogies. Historian and social studies teacher, James Percoco (1998),

These instructional impositions outlined above—be they governmental or theoretical (as is the case with Hirsch)—are problematic in an age when creative teaching and constructivist methods are called for by educational theorists (Barton, 2005; Garner, 2013; R. K. Sawyer, 2011; Wineburg, 2010). R. K. Sawyer (2011), for example, spoke to this in his book, *Structure and improvisation in creative teaching*. R. K. Sawyer called for an increase in creative teaching to balance out the existing structure. Instructional impositions are incompatible with the aims of 21st century teaching and learning, such as critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, and innovation (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2006), as well incompatible with:

1. dynamic digital media (Squire, 2011),
2. cultural differences, and
3. state-wide position statements for course of study (e.g., Alabama Department of Education, 2010).

**The need to shift the way we think about history education.** Drawn from the prominent scholarly works of Wineburg (2011), Levstik and Barton (2011), Krug (1970), and Musbach (2001), the professor of social studies education, Jessica Schocker (2014) expounded in her recent work, “History teachers at both the college and high school levels are charged to teach the content as identified in the course [catalog].” The course catalog establishes confines placed on the curriculum. Schocker explained how this restriction is compounded by the pedagogical charge “to teach students to think critically about history, avoiding the perpetuation of historic myths, often encouraged by the all-knowing voice of the grand narrative in traditional history textbooks” (p. 424). What Schocker illuminated is the tension faced by teachers who are
bound to a course description and educational mandates. This boundary may restrict their time and creativity to adapt curriculum as they see fit, as well as responsiveness to the individual needs of students. This tension between prescribed and responsive curricula strikes a chord with Schocker because she felt critical engagement with history is “imperative for helping students to develop a sophisticated understanding of the world, past and present” (p. 424). Schocker’s position is relevant because it emphasized the continued struggle to define the field of history education and the implications the ambiguity has on the classroom.

Research has revealed that the curricula in high school history classrooms are predominantly derived from textbooks (Marker & Mehlinger, 1992) and that K-12 students are not “puzzling over data” (D. J. Neumann, 2010, p. 493). By puzzling over data, D. J. Neumann meant that students are using textbooks as their primary source of information with limited exposure to primary sources about the material covered in the textbook. Schocker (2014) warned, “This fact is highly problematic since content analyses of high school history textbooks have found that the most widely adopted texts are boring, incessantly long and tedious, and fail to delve deeply into the true nature of history” (p. 424, as Loewen, 2007, as cited in Schocker, 2014, p. 424). Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg (2000) warned about inherent bias in curricular resources, when they establish that textbooks carry “implicit notions about how history is, how it should be organized, and why it is worth learning” (p. 15). Further, Schocker expounded, “these texts tend to vastly under-represent women, especially women of color” (2014, p. 424). Rather than using these textbooks, Schocker (2014) emphasized that history education research indicates “teaching with primary source documents adds significant value to a student's learning experience, resulting in deeper levels of understanding beyond mere fact acquisition” (p. 421).
In line with the use of primary source documents, many have argued for the importance of reframing history education around the development of a student’s capacity for historical thinking (Blackey, 2014; Kupperman et al., 2007; Martin, 2012). Despite the omnipresence of what McKnight and Chandler (2009) call the “discourse of accountability,” the investment in the development of historical thinking skills is a promising option towards improving history education.

Above, I have explained many of the opposing forces in the discussion around history education, dating back to the 1980s. I have proposed a cultivation of historical thinking skills as a possible solution. Now, I will define history and social studies education as a key framing to the increased use of historical thinking skills.

**Defining Social Studies Education**

**Historical Overview**

Much effort has been dedicated to the meaning of social studies education. In the 1980s, a Blue Ribbon committee was formed at the urging of Arthur Link during his presidential address to the American Historical Association. Link called for an investigation into the state of history in American schools (Metcalf & Jenness, 1990). Donald Bragaw, the president of the National Council for the Social Studies established a task force to follow through on Link’s request. Additionally, in 1987, the National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools was formed by the Organization of American Historians, the American Historical Association, and the National Council for the Social Studies. The purpose of this commission was to study the state of social studies in the K-12 schools, through which curricular recommendations could be made. The Commission put out a report titled curriculum report, "Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century” (1989). This report represented an extensive examination of the
social studies curricula over several decades. However, despite all of these efforts to provide a
degree of clarity about the field of K-12 social studies education, they were unable to determine
how to adequately define and teach social studies.

Thornton (2008) urged scholars of the delicate nature of defining the field of social
studies. He eluded to outside forces that have a vested interest in shaping the definition when he
warned, “[s]ince the social studies curriculum holds potential to shape young people’s world
views, there has always been pressure to preserve this or change that” (p. 15). Jonathan
Zimmerman (2002), author of Whose America?: Culture wars in the public schools, and
Linenthal and Engelhardt (1996), authors of History Wars, provided accounts of these competing
forces attempting to define the landscape of social studies. There have also been university
professors Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn, who drafted a new set of history standards for the National
History Standards Project. These standards would represent a more diverse, multicultural view
on social studies curriculum. But those who followed the social studies wars of the 1990s, will
likely recall the other end of the spectrum: the pre-emptive outcry from the wife of the former
Vice President of the United States, Lynne Cheney, just before the 1994 release of the new
National History Standards. In her scathing remarks, she fiercely spoke out against these new
standards, and commentators like Rush Limbaugh also joined in the debates (Nash, Crabtree, &
Dunn 1997). Cheney’s critique is relevant because it received significant public attention.

Given the rocky state of trying to define history, Evans (2004), author of the Social
Studies Wars, explained, “The key question haunting social studies remains the issues of its
definition,” Evans asserted, “and its vision and of the approaches to the field that will be
against a scope that is overly elaborate. Evans asserted that social studies lacked a commonly
shared definition and vision. While the National Council for the Social Studies outlined six principal problems:

(1) deciding objectives,
(2) constructing courses,
(3) selecting and arranging materials,
(4) determining what methods to use,
(5) preparing teachers, and
(6) evaluation of the foregoing.

Evans said the various ways social studies educators view themselves and their purpose remains central to the problem. Similarly, Thornton (2008) asserted that teachers are gatekeepers to what history is and is not in the classroom. Lee Shulman (1987) believed the “intersection of content and pedagogy” impacts teacher expertise and what is taught. These theoretical differences date back to Jeffersonian views of democracy, Deweyian perspectives of social equalization, and philosophies of economic equalization (1916, 1938a, 1938b).

**Philosophical Camps**

For the purpose of this dissertation, I will outline Evans’ five philosophical camps (Figure 2.1) from which social studies educators subscribe. In his book titled *The Social Studies Wars: What should we teach the children?*, Evans outlined the following five camps, which will be explained individually below:

(1) traditional historians,
(2) social scientists,
(3) social efficiency educators,
Figure 2.1 Evan’s five philosophical camps.

The first group, *traditional historians*, are the strongest and most influential philosophical camp. This group maintains history as factual. They see it as something to be taught with the purpose of instilling societal structure. *Social scientists*, while similar to the traditional historians, have a stronger position of influence given their interdisciplinary vantage point. In addition to history, they draw from spheres of influence such as civics, geography, economics, and sociology. *Social efficiency educators* see their purpose as maintaining preexisting social structures, and are particularly persuasive during times of crisis because of the prevalence of stronger nationalistic rhetoric. Patriotism, problem-solving, security, and productivity are central to this camp. *Social meliorists* are aligned themselves with progressive educational ideals.
Reflective thinking, social improvement, and democracy debates are central. Barton’s humanist approach seems to fall into this category (Barton & Levtik, 2004), and approach discussed at great lengths in their book *Teaching History for the Common Good*. The social reconstructionists camp, most commonly aligned with critical pedagogy, flourishes during times when social activism is higher. The centrality of the work of the social reconstructivists is the disruption of inequalities. Proponents of these camps shift from one philosophical underpinning to another or, perhaps, align with more than one at a time. Noddings (2005) described these pedagogical fluctuations as the shift of the pendulum.

From the different philosophical camps of social studies educators and how they think history should be taught I segue into how students perceive history. In the book *Thinking Historically*, Tom Holt discussed what students perceive history to be, stating they saw it as “the ordering of already known facts into agreed-upon chronologies” and “as sealed off both from the lives of ordinary people and from questions about how the particulars of everyday life become the generalizations of historical knowledge” (p. 2). For many of the students Holt drew opinions from, they saw fiction writers as the authors who shape and interpret material rather than historians. Holt also emphasized that students “think they are the consumers, not the makers, of history. To these students, history was “fixed, final, and waiting to be read” (p.2).

**How Young People Learn History**

The public asserts, “Children don’t understand history,” particularly when asked to comprehend in more complex ways (Barton & Levtik, 2004, p. 13). This is further complicated by parental expectations for what should and should not be taught in the history classroom, as illustrated in Hall’s (2013) recent work. However, from what is the public drawing their conclusions? The draw from performance on standardized tests, for one. The public cannot rely
on standardized tests to tell us what schoolchildren know about history (Grant, 2009). Barton and Levstik (2004) asserted that the public needs to pay attention to what young people know outside of school asserted if the public wish to know what young people know about history.

Educators often hold misleading assumptions about the extent of young people’s historical knowledge and the ways in which their historical knowledge is ascertained. In recent years, a number of studies have been conducted regarding how young people learn history. These studies have produced a wide range of findings, which has made it difficult to draw absolutist conclusions about what works and does not work in the teaching and learning of history. However, in the Handbook of Research in Social Studies Education, Keith Barton (2008) synthesizes the vast majority of this recent research on how young people learning history. Barton offered a succinct and summative explanation of the themes emerging from these individual research projects.

In Barton’s (2008) summary, he explained that there is a misunderstanding or disconnect between what adults believe young people know and what they actually know. Part of the misunderstanding around what children know and do not know stems from adult expectations and what children outwardly demonstrate as their historical knowledge. Adults often expect young people to recall detailed accounts and look for precision in children’s historical knowing (i.e., dates, events, and people such as French commander Napoleon Bonaparte was defeated the Battle of Waterloo on June 18, 1815 in Waterloo which was then part of The Netherlands). Young people, however, display a much broader sense of knowing and big picture understandings. While not readily apparent to adults, young people do, indeed, have strong notions of change, sequences, and patterns.
Research indicates, early in life, children are capable of demonstrating an aptitude for temporal dimensions, particularly as it relates to their awareness of change in technology and fashion. The building blocks of historical knowing have been documented in children as early as Kindergarten, and are even more evident as children enter the elementary years. In the elementary years, children more readily create and manipulate timelines. These timelines, while initially simplistic, demonstrate the child’s ability to group events and it has been documented that their use of timelines increases in sophistication over time. Further, by the age of seven, young people can begin to work with primary sources (VanSledright, 2004, p. 231).

As children age, their knowledge about social and political developments impacts their understanding of the world, both past and present. But, even though young people can begin source work at the age of seven, young people initially focus their interpretations of history through individual psychology. VanSledright (2004) said, young people “often approach sources as decontextualized, disembodied, authorless forms of neutral informants” and “readymade” and “inaccessible” (p. 231). By readymade, this means that young people see material as prepackaged and not in need of analysis or critique. By inaccessible, this implies that young people find the sources difficult to connect with.

Barton’s (2008) summative work illustrated that young people struggle to make connections between the differences individual people held and larger societal contexts. As children age, they can point to the value of history as something that helps people learn from the past. Yet, young people express a preference towards the history of ordinary individuals, with emphasis placed on emotion, morality, and judgment, which is perhaps a key to reaching and exciting young people. For this reason, students report enjoying texts that focus on the individual more than descriptions of reactions to events. They are often fascinated by concepts that are
seemingly foreign and unfamiliar to them, such as the witch-hunts and slavery, yet as they get older students indicate an increased curiosity towards modern history. Their emphasis on individuals, and stated preference towards a more prominent author’s voice, renders them more resistant to traditional texts. It is believed that alternative texts increase comprehension.

Students remember narrative forms of history with the most ease and most frequently. By this, what is meant is that children begin to understand stories of individuals rather than isolated events/dates disconnected from the individual. Very little research on this exists; however the research that does exist suggests that narrative forms of history have shown to help middle school students make sense of trends (Barton, 2008). In the same realm, Schank (1995)⁵, who looked at memory structures, suggested stories aid in maintaining memories of events. He even suggested that not telling a story helps in forgetting. Barton’s work suggested young people often recall factually flawed narratives. Despite these flaws, it is important to note that these narratives are the structure for young people’s understanding. Even with the potential inaccuracies in young people’s narrative, they still demonstrate an understanding of historical themes and patterns through narrative.

The issue to attend to, particularly as educators, is that young people’s narrative knowing promotes the oversimplification of the historical events and concepts. Knowing this is an important part of knowing how history should be taught. Narratives surrounding Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr. are good examples of the types of over simplifications that can occur. Students recount the narrative of Rosa Parks and the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott, but have a narrow scope of the events leading up to the Boycott or other individuals who participated in

⁵ Many thanks to Stephen Slota for offering me this source, as well as his dissertation which addresses stories, games, and learning through play.
similar acts before her (Teachinghistory.org). Rather, students often perceive Rosa Parks’s decision as impulsive and acting on her own. Further, young people have limited knowledge of Rosa Parks’s involvement in a larger movement comprised of many people from various backgrounds preparing her for the act of civil disobedience and the decision not to sit at the back of the bus. For example, little is referenced in terms of Rosa Parks’s training from the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee with a multi-racial group of peace activists, as seen in Figure 2.2. Oversimplification is also demonstrated in terms of how people neglect diversity in societal thought, for example, assuming all Germans were in favor of Hitler’s policies during World War II. Chandler (2007) pointed to the pervasive color-blind perspective in our schools’ textbooks. Further, gender diversity is commonly neglected in young people’s narrative, meaning that children rarely account for the fact that men and women may have interacted with the world differently based on gender. People, in general, have a limited understanding on why people lived differently in the past, often assuming a lack of intelligence or sensibility.
While there are these pitfalls in young people’s acquisition of historical knowledge, research supports that students can better understand material through guided instruction. Instruction has proven to increase young people’s comprehension that historical accounts are a result of a variety of sources being blended together to make the narrative. As part of the development of sound guided instruction, I turn to Barton (2008) again, who concludes that long-term classroom studies in partnership with teachers and researchers remain important so we can better understand the landscape of how young people learn history.

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This guided instruction is essential because many young people view historical sources in an uncritical way: as credible, objective, and containing direct information about the past, as referenced by VanSledright (2004) earlier. Young people often mistake quantity and specificity for reliability. The general lack of criticalness causes young people to neglect acknowledging the author’s bias and/or consider counter-narratives in their synthesis. However, again, with instruction, young people become more skilled at making inferences about the past and aided in using multiple sources in their synthesis. To do this, they need ongoing practice in formulating historical knowledge from multiple sources. This is a skill that, while timely, will later result in an increase in enjoyment in regards to learning history according to the research Barton (2008) reviewed.

Reports show that it can be frustrating for young people to get started, learning to deal with how to read and evaluate information, because they are so often searching for the one right answer. Not only are young people searching for one right answer as Kupperman et al., (2007) and Mattson (2008) warned, they arrive to classrooms having already formulated ideas about the world using information they have learning outside of school from their parents and community. This is documented through theories of situated cognition and social learning. The inseparability of this out-of-school knowledge and the student’s processing of new information through this contextual lens can lead young people to be less critical. When new ideas are presented that challenge their previously held beliefs about the world the capacity to understand differing perspectives is impaired.

Another dimension that impacts how young people learn history is culturally derived. Ethnicity, religion, and social status, and geographic location impact how people think about history. In America, the average student is less likely to point to the value of history education as
building their sense of identity, whereas in other countries or within a stronger ethnic group in America, they attribute ethnic identity as a reason to know history. In the United States, history is also viewed in terms of progress. This is still true, even when contending with the realities of racism and its current persistence. However, minorities tend to be more critical of official history curriculum. Also, young people with stronger religious beliefs may reject or ignore counter interpretations. For this reason, educators need to consider how their instructional decisions coincide and/or conflict with that of their students.

In sum, we know from Barton’s synthesis (2008) that “young people actively participate in the process of constructing meaning from their encounters with history” (p. 250). Formal instruction has also proven to impact the developing ideas students have about history (Barton, 2008, p. 250). Yet, some students struggle with the narratives they learn from environments outside of the classroom with that of the classroom, the use of evidence in shaping their thinking, and societal factors that influence historical events. Therefore, VanSledright (2004), contends that “[s]ource work is arguably the sine qua non of historical thinking” (p. 231). By this, VanSledright means that source work is indispensable. Below, I explore this further through the definitional elements of historical thinking and steps required for sourcing.

The Need for Historical Thinking Skills

Defining Historical Thinking

Historical thinking is what we know about the past and how we know about the past. Thinking historically helps us to get a more accurate picture of the past through multiple primary and secondary sources. Below, I outline the components of historical thinking from the perspective of three of major teaching resources on history education (see Table 2.1). Teachinghistory.org, an online resource center for K-12 history teachers funded by the U.S.
Department of Education, defines historical thinking as the reading, writing, and analysis involved in *telling* the stories of history. Teachinghistory.org says the skills of historical thinking helps people construct more accurate reconstructions of events they cannot experience themselves. In order to engage in historical thinking, Teachinghistory.org recommends five essential elements:

1. the use of multiple accounts, documents, and perspectives,
2. using primary sources,
3. sourcing these multiple accounts by asking questions, looking for agreement, and disagreement, and considering the trustworthiness of a source,
4. understanding contextualization, and
5. the claim-evidence connection.

Advances in AP, a website dedicated to helping advanced placement educators, defines historical thinking by four skillsets:

1. chronological reasoning,
2. comparison and contextualization,
3. crafting historical arguments from historical evidence, and
4. historical interpretations and synthesis.

The Stanford History Education Group, a research group focused on how history is taught and learned, emphasizes reading like a historian, with a focus on four historical reading skills:

1. sourcing,

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7 The website for Advances in AP can be found at http://advancesinap.collegeboard.org/english-history-and-social-science/historical-thinking-skills.

8 The website for Stanford History Education group can be found at http://sheg.stanford.edu/.
(2) corroboration,

(3) contextualization, and

(4) close reading.

Table 2.1 Components of historical thinking skills from three main teaching sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachinghistory.org</th>
<th>Advances in AP</th>
<th>Stanford History Education Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) multiple perspectives, (2) primary sources, (3) sourcing, (4) contextualization, and (5) claim-evidence connection.</td>
<td>(1) chronological reasoning, (2) contextualization, (3) crafting historical arguments from historical evidence, and (4) historical interpretations and synthesis.</td>
<td>(1) sourcing, (2) corroboration, (3) contextualization, and (4) close reading.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VanSledright and Afflerbach (2004, 2005) stress that act of assessing sources is a complex process involving at least four interrelated and interconnected cognitive acts:

(1) identification,

(2) attribution,

(3) perspective judgment, and

(4) reliability assessment.

By identification, the authors mean knowing what a source is. Attribution is the recognition that sources are not neutral and have been written by someone and with a purpose. Judging perspective involves attending to a source with a careful eye towards the author’s positionalities, be they social, cultural, and/or political. The last dimension involves assessing the reliability of
materials by comparing the material to other sources and accounts on the same topic during the same period. With the aid of these cognitive acts, VanSledright (2004) asserts that differences among sources can be properly noted be they attributed to bias, exaggeration, ideology, partisanship or similar. Through this, VanSledright (2004) feels young people can begin to develop the capacity for analytic cognitive activities (p. 231).

The National Council for History Education (NCHE) also has a tool for framing the past and promoting historical thinking skills called *Thinking Like a Historian (TLH)*. This tool grounds “students' knowledge of the past through inquiry and evidentiary support” (Franco, 2010, p. 536). Franco (2010) stresses, “The TLH framework is not meant to be an end in itself, but rather a tool to allow students to differentiate between various modes of thinking that historians use to "do history" (p. 540). This is a similar mindset to the one Levstik and Barton (2011) adopted in their book *Doing History*, which promoted the use of historical inquiry with elementary and middle school students. Further, David Kobrin (1996), in his book *Beyond the Textbook*, promoted the student-as-historian theory. Similarly, Monica Edinger (2000) articulated the idea of students using more primary sources in history in her book *Seeking History*.

**Challenging Passivity in Learning History**

The development of historical thinking skills has been seen as a way to push back against the discourse of accountability in support of democratic education (Mattson, 2008). Democratic education is a positionality that emphasizes “the freedom to question, interrogate, criticize, and evaluate the past and the present in order to create a better world by improving the conditions of people unjustly impacted” (Chandler & McKnight, 2009, p. 64). Yet, how is the primacy of democratic education to be furthered through historical thinking when learners are largely
unfamiliar with assembling historical information and so often assume a passive stance as a learner? Squire DeVane, and Durga (2008) speak to this passivity as a “crisis of engaging secondary students in meaningful learning” (p. 240).

Bain and Mirel (1982), however, suggest a good starting point for the development of historical thinking—with the question, “What were they thinking?” (Bain and Mirel, 1982, as cited in Kupperman et al., 2007, p. 167). This is a similar framing sense in Loewen’s (2010) new book, *Teaching What Really Happened: How to Avoid the Tyranny of Textbooks and Get Students Excited About Doing History.*

The question of “what were they thinking?” models what Mattson (2008) describes as the “students as historian approach” (p. 103), which is constructivist in nature. Bruner (1979) discussed constructivist learning in terms of discovery based learning, where the learning draws on existing knowledge and experiences and teases out relationships through problem-solving. Gee (2008) discussed the centrality of interpretation to understanding. With the question “what were they thinking?” the student has agency and constructs meaning. For example, a student could ask the question, “What were the French Cavalry thinking during the final hours of the Battle of Waterloo?” or “What led the soldier of the French Cavalry to join Napoleon’s army?” Even further, as teachinghistory.org would advocate for, the student can begin asking questions around who wrote the textbook passage about the Napoleonic Wars, what other documents address the same historical event, and how the author’s perspective is indicated in the passage.

Samuel Wineburg advocated for the “students” capacity to confront the written word as an empowered agent, rather than as a passive consumer” (Wineburg, 2005, as cited in Mattson, 2008, p.100). Wineburg’s (1991) other work and Holt’s (1990) work in *Thinking Historically*
advocated for a similar position, seeing content as something that is not fixed. It is in this space of active learning where students can dig deeper into the material, stepping away from the monovocal and linear account of history seen in textbooks, and recognize that those who oppose something may view history in a drastically different way (i.e., Napoleon’s army may recount the invasions under Napoleon’s rule differently than the Allied Forces). Further, Mattson stresses the importance of exploration and further inquiry (Mattson, 2008, p. 106). Manley and O’Neill (as cited in Mattson, 2008) reference the need for learners to “flex their ‘perception and interpretive’ muscles” (p. 106). Mattson (2008) reminded us that children bring a cultural capital of their own (p. 107), which presents teachers with an opportunity to tap into this knowledge set.

**History as a Debate**

From the position of “what were they thinking,” history can be understood as a debate (Mattson, 2008, p. 103) and learners as co-constructors of historical knowledge. Cogan (2013) and Hakkarainen (1998) reminded us about the importance of students doing more than just listening; instead, they must actively engage in reading, writing, discussion, and problem-solving. In this type of space students are not only free to read history but free to make it, as Fernand Dumont said in *Histoire Sociale* (1969, p. 16, as cited in Morton, 2000, p. 60).

By inviting this more active, polyvocal stance, we begin to see the development of critical interpretive methods on behalf of the learner, the invitation of “an embodied form of critical primary document analysis” (Mattson, 2008, pp. 99-108), and the interpretation of compelling stories based on multiple perspectives from multiple sources. One category of primary source documents that has received increased attention recently, particularly with regard to teaching women's history, is the use of images. (Schocker, 2014, p. 421).
This is in contrast to leaving history as a closed, finished product, as the regulations in the state of Florida would have it. Rather, this is the opening up of historiography, as Holt advocated for (Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg, 2000, p. 32). Historiography is the study of historical writing. Here, learners increase their methodological sophistication related to historical inquiry (Shemilt, 2000, p. 17), such as the reading, writing, and synthesis of historical documents. This is similar to what Holts calls the ability to blend “the creative narrative construction and the constraining archival documents” (Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg, 2000, p. 32).

While historical thinking, as outlined above, sounds beneficial, Franco stressed “the practical methods from which to build rich learning environments for students is sometimes vague” (Franco, 2010, p. 535). Further, “knowing the past” is not an easy task, voices Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg (2000, p. 33) and argue that “knowing” the past is not the intention of historical thinking. History is laced with contention and difficulty. Consequently, this is precisely where the importance of equipping learners with the tools of historiography comes into play. With the tools of historiography, students develop ways to interpret history and critique it (2000, p. 33). To attend to this more concretely, I drew from Seixas’ work. Seixas advocated for the use of disciplinary history in schools (p. 34), as a way of equipping “students with standards for inquiry, investigation, and debate” (p. 34). This construction and provocation of curiosity provided “an essential lens for understanding social, cultural, and political questions” (Mattson, 2008, p. 100), be they questions of the past, present, and future. It also has helped learners identify contradictions or alternative historical accounts. This is congruent with Lowenthal’s (2000) assertion that, through the work of historical thinking, people “learn to recognize and weigh different interest, beliefs, experience and circumstance” that influence human’s construction of knowledge (p. 63).
Given a historiography “toolkit,” students can begin to mine the past for solutions to contentious, contemporary problems (i.e., immigration concerns in Europe) (Morton, 2000, p. 16). Lowenthal (2000) advocated for seeing the past as “ongoing consequences” and comprehending its immediacy (p. 63). Lacoursiere reminded us that, “It is through history that we understand the mechanisms of change and continuity, and the many ways in which problems are posed and resolved in society” (as cited in Morton, 2000, p. 59). It is also here were we begin to see how this process can help students participate in a more open society and increase their civic engagement.

If society is to actually advance in the ideas above, then we need to be more specific about what this landscape looks like. Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg (2000) and Mattson (2008, p. 108) suggested we think of this space as an interdisciplinary endeavor. Mattson (2008) suggested a place with rigor and creativity, as well as seriousness and fun (p. 101). In the data chapters of this dissertation, I will explore whether a particular online history education program was able to achieve what Mattson described.

Teaching Beyond the Textbook

Teaching beyond the textbook offers an entryway for history is be brought to life, where students are offered an opportunity to be shocked, corrected, make mistakes and grow in a setting that is interdisciplinary, rigorous, creative, exploratory, interpretive, dialogically agitating, tension-filled, narrative, lived, and respective. In Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts, Wineburg (1999) advocated for the use of narrative. Wineburg pointed out how textbooks are often seen as the only way of transmitting a story, but Wineburg is clear to point out that balancing perspectives through the use of narrative text can be a useful technique in developing historical thinking. Wertsch (2000) also called for increased use of narrative text (p.
40), as opposed to fact-based bullets. Fact-based bullets are often “at the expense of understanding larger concepts” says Squire (2011, p. xiii).

Narrative is just one alternative way of teaching beyond the textbook. Kupperman and his colleagues advocated for a learning environment where learning is “dialogically agitated and tension-filled” (Kupperman et al., 2007, p.166), and where students are heard and what they contribute is taken seriously by others (Kupperman et al., 2007, p. 167). Further, Kupperman and colleagues (2007) point us towards creating a lived experience with history. With a lived experience, students become physically involved in the learning of history through live action.

But, where is this place of educational wonder? Where do we begin to look for this new form of pedagogy? Lamb and Johnson (2010) argued that, “[a]s we enter a new decade, it is time to think beyond convention: to explore new possibilities, to consider innovative ways to synthesize ideas, to invent new ways to think about the teaching and learning process, and to design engaging opportunities for young people to learn and express their understandings” (p. 76). In Chapter 3, I present an innovative educational program called POOT. Building on this notion of innovation, in Chapter 4, discuss a broader view of game-like alternatives for instruction.

**Consequentiality of Literature on Historical Thinking**

As first outlined in Chapter 1, my rationale behind selecting history education for the first literature review chapter was to situate POOT as an educational platform within a subject recognized as core curriculum by K-12 school systems. This literature review enabled me to see the real-world significance of the philosophical identifications of K-12 teachers, and how this adopted orientation impacts both large-scale and small-scale pedagogical choices. Large-scale describes philosophies of assessment or willingness to devote instructional time to a project like
POOT. Whereas, small-scale describes how teachers convey instructions and supervise students. Consequently, this literature provided clarity regarding the range of philosophical identifications from which the educators who participated in this dissertation study may self-identify. Alice, a teacher discussed in Chapter 1, was far more traditional in her thinking about her role as a social studies teacher and about the ways in which her students were permitted to construct their own sense of historical knowing. The contextual and ecological nature of the learning system under investigation (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) became more evident as my awareness increased about the political nature of teaching, the complexities around pedagogical choices, and the potential uniqueness of each participating school system.

This chapter also provided an evidence-based grounding on the key findings of how young people learn history. These findings helped dispel misconceptions related to abilities and capacities for young people’s historical knowing, such as how adults look for precision in children’s historical knowing (i.e., dates, events, and people). Whereas, children begin by displaying a much broader sense of knowing and big picture understandings that are often misconstrued. These findings are of high importance due to the shared nature of POOT, a space where K-12 students and adult educators engage together. Are the students actually better than adults expect? Better understanding of these differences between adult perception and the true capacity of young people is crucial, especially as conversations around assessment and validity of the POOT activity emerge. Does POOT actually improve learning is a common question people ask when they hear about the project? It is essential to have the evidence-based grounding, as presented above in Barton’s (2008) synthesis of over 34 years of research, in order begin to answer this question about the effectiveness of POOT. By way of further illustration,
research suggests that while not readily apparent to adults, young people have strong notions of change, sequences, and patterns.

Also, VanSledright (2004) suggests that young people engage with primary and secondary sources “as decontextualized, disembodied, authorless forms of neutral informants” and “readymade” and “inaccessible” (p. 231). Rather, how young people learn history is more often than not culturally derived. They are arriving to classrooms having already formulated ideas about the world using information they have learned outside of school, once again pointing to the significance of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory. These findings are significant to my understanding of POOT, because in order to better judge the opportunities and challenges of POOT, it is important I begin with a factual grounding on how young people make sense of historical content.

This chapter also highlights how adult involvement can improve young people’s historical knowing, information relevant to my third research question (see Chapters 1 and 5). Because this dissertation aims to improve the project implementation of POOT, this information is useful to me as a researcher to determine if and how these best practices are being implemented. For example, students can better understand the material through guided instruction. With this instruction, young people become more skilled at making inferences and synthesizing multiple sources of historical records.
Chapter 3

Review of *Place Out of Time* Literature

Overview

During my first year as a doctoral student in Social and Cultural Foundations, in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of Cincinnati, I anticipated studying games. For my master’s degree, I developed a fondness for games as a mode of teaching and learning. Much of my earlier graduate work examined serious games aimed at conflict resolution and peacebuilding. I even created a tabletop game to address the effects of affluence and poverty in schooling with preservice teachers. This game was called *War Between Suburbs: How do we achieve peace?*, and was largely a result of my affiliation with the Peace Studies faculty at the University of Cincinnati.

During my first day in a class called “Professional Seminar,” a required course for first year doctoral students, we were warned we would need to narrow our research topics. I was convinced I knew what I was going to do for my dissertation—peace games. However, later that week, I attended Dr. Raider-Roth’s course called Practitioner Based Action Research. I received a flyer for her course earlier in the year, so I knew we were going to be learning more about games, but I expected to only learn theory in her course, not to change my dissertation topic.

On the day of my first class with Dr. Raider-Roth, I was introduced to *POOT*\(^9\), an online teaching and learning tool which uses character-play to engage participants in history education.

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\(^9\) *POOT* is the name of the overarching project. There is a version of *POOT* that is supported by the Covenant Foundation in partnership with RAVSAK’s Jewish day school network called the *Jewish Court of All Time (JCAT)*. For the purpose of this dissertation, all versions of *POOT* are referred to as *POOT*. 
I vividly recall Dr. Raider-Roth’s introduction to *POOT*, and was equally confused and intrigued by the *POOT* platform.

*POOT* is a password protected, custom designed website\(^{10}\). Dr. Raider-Roth’s used a demo-login to walk us through the sign-in process (see Figure 3.1). She explained we would all receive login credentials once we selected a character to portray. I was eager to jump in and meet other participants and explore the site. I quickly chose my character—Erin Gruwell, the high school English teacher who taught inner city youth in Los Angeles after the Rodney King Riots.

Figure 3.1 *POOT* sign-in screen.

The *POOT* website had many facets, and I was not sure I would be able to remember all of the navigational elements without referring to the user’s guide assembled by the creators of *POOT*. I took the user’s guide home with me and began studying it. *POOT* was unlike anything I had encountered up until this point.

\(^{10}\) For the *POOT* website visit http://ics.soe.umich.edu/ and http://poot.icsmich.org/
As a child, I grew up using the kitchen table for *Gin Rummy* and *Scrabble* with my grandparents. My siblings and I turned the basement into make-believe roleplaying scenarios of school or house. Strong childhood memories of playing tabletop games like *Parcheesi* and *Monopoly* with family remain fresh in my mind, along with the sweet victories I had with *Apples to Apples*. Later, my fascination with hidden-role games, like *Werewolves* and *The Resistance*, surfaced, which later led to an interest in more obscure tabletop games, like Bertell Ollman’s game about Marxism called *Class Struggle*, as well as *Killer Bunnies and the Quest for the Magic Carrot*.

I was familiar with video games, as well. I recall the first person on my block to buy an Atari. The neighborhood kids, myself included, lined up to play *Space Invaders*. A neighbor, Benny, invited me over for video game-filled afternoons; we would spend hours playing *Legends of Zelda*, *Mario Brothers*, and *Donkey Kong*. Soon, my brother was gifted a Nintendo, and we would compete at *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and racing games. I almost always lost in the car race. One Christmas, my brother unwrapped a Nintendo Gameboy; his willingness to share is how I discovered *Tetris*. In middle school, my mother worked at a bowling alley attached to an arcade where I split the majority of my time and money between *Skeeball* and *Street Fighter*. Later, I was familiar with the concept of simulations and online learning platforms, such as the city builder *SimCity* and the virtual world *Second Life*. Still, I did not have anything to compare with *POOT*.

Now, after four years of studying *POOT*, I still remain intrigued by its many facets. My early questions were around participant experience:

(1) What promotes and impedes participation?
(2) Is POOT a transformational experience? If so, how?—and,

(3) How do participants influence each other during gameplay?

After several weeks of being a student in Dr. Raider-Roth’s class, I ultimately decided to explore these questions for my dissertation. Since then, my questions have increased in specificity, and are reflected in my methods section (see Chapter 5).

**Introduction to Place Out of Time**

*POOT* is a difficult activity to define. I can recall trying to describe *POOT* during my first year as a conference associate at the Game Developers Conference (GDC), the largest professionals-only game industry conference. Some of the other conference associates, most of them active in the world of gaming, shared my discomfort with the label of game and simulation, whereas others did not. Kevin Day\(^\text{11}\), a GDC volunteer, asked me, “Is a game not a simulation of a real world, regardless if an individual would consider it real or fantastical?” Kevin referenced Steve Swink’s (2008) book called *Game Feel: A Game Designer’s Guide to Virtual Sensation*, as one of the many texts that attempts to address this paradigm. Young et al., (2012) tackle this same question in their article related to how games and simulations are defined. Kevin continued, “I’d argue that ALL games are simulations of something, but that is just me.” Adults outside of the gaming industry commonly (and perhaps mistakenly) use the word game and/or simulation to describe and make sense of the *POOT* experience, whereas younger participants have voiced that the labeling it a game is misleading. To younger participants, the word game conjured up images of *Minecraft*, a wildly popular game about placing and breaking blocks. The younger participants, when asked, describe *POOT* as an interactive, revamped chat room with additional

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\(^{11}\) Kevin Day served as a member of my interpretive community and agreed to the inclusion of his name.
educational components and more options for participation than a conventional chat room. The question over whether *POOT* is a game or a simulation remains contested by those who have either participated or learned about the project through explanation.

In the coming pages, I will discuss this program in full detail and perhaps upon finishing this chapter you, too, will weigh in. For the purpose of this dissertation, I am going to refer to *POOT* as a program and project. A discussion on what constitutes as a game or simulation will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4 and in the conclusion of this dissertation.

Others who have worked with *POOT* have offered definitions. The Interactive Communications and Simulations group (ICS), offer their definition as the creators of *POOT*. Pulling from their website, ICS refers to *POOT* as a “trans-historical simulation” with “a trial, where students play guests who come from a range of places and times throughout history to discuss some of the great issues of humankind.” In their article in the International Journal of Learning, the same group elaborates on their earlier definition. They refer to *POOT* as a social space for creative imaginings, saying,

*POOT* is an online simulation of a diplomatic trial, set in the ancient Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain. Students play roles as guests from a range of historic places and times, communicating with other characters in writing, via discussion and private messages on a custom-designed website. Other characters are not played by their classmates, but also by students at other schools, and by university students taking a special seminar centered on the *POOT* program (Kupperman et al., 2007, p. 162).

Kupperman and colleagues (2007, 2011) have also referred to *POOT* as modern day trial which requires participants to assume the role of a well-known character. Similarly, a K-12 classroom teacher who has utilized *POOT* in his classroom after having taken a course that uses *POOT* at the University of Michigan, referred to *POOT* simply as an online character playing simulation (Kline and D’Angelo, 2011). A participant-researcher who was active in *POOT,*
wrote, “Students assumed the persona of famous characters and used social networking tools a la Facebook to build alliances and decide the fate of the plaintiff (Headley & Killham, 2013). Wellington School, a participating K-12 school, described their experience playing on their school website as the following:

In character, the students debated the [contentious issue of the trial]. The simulation, which involved students from around the country, ended with a “trial” in which the decision was rendered by a panel of judges selected from the student participants. Not only did students participate in the online simulation, but their teachers, as well as students and professors from [the university], who monitored and operated the simulation, did as well.

These are all useful definitions, but I very much enjoy K-12 teacher Nance Adler’s (n.d.) description of POOT on the website for RAVSAK, a Jewish day school network. Nance is a K-12 classroom teacher who has used POOT for four years. She refers to POOT as “an innovative learning adventure.” Building on Nance’s description, I consider POOT to be an online intensive writing project which employs character-play and scaffolded instruction to foster deeper engagement with historical thinking, such as perspective taking, historical document analysis, and synthesis of context-bound events.

In this chapter, POOT will be discussed in great detail, outlining the historical context of POOT, the POOT mechanics, the technical features of the online platform, and existing research on POOT. For a more detailed description of historical thinking, as referenced in my definition, please refer to Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

**Historical Context of POOT**

POOT was created by an interdisciplinary group of faculty members at the University of Michigan (U of M), from the Interactive Communications and Simulations (ICS) Group. ICS has over 30 years of serving K-16 students and educators, primarily with educationally-based web
innovations. Since the birth of ICS in 1984, it has been dedicated to a movement to build global classrooms by strengthening the classroom interconnectivity through technology. For example, since before the advent of computer classrooms, ICS was helping K-12 schools implement interactive tools aimed at promoting active learning. Since POOT’s conception, the simulation has been administered for over 15 years with thousands of students across the world. Below, I discuss the historical backdrop to POOT through the telling of the three interwoven histories: (1) the creation of ICS, (2) similar emerging technologies, and (3) POOT.

In 1958, the first documented political simulation, Inter-Nation Simulation, was held at Northwestern University. This was an activity that POOT closely resembles, but without the computational technology found in POOT. In 1959, the release of the board game Diplomacy is worth noting due to similarity in content. In the 1960s, a key ICS figure, Professor Fred Goodman, began thinking about games as an educational tool. Also in the 1960s, Spacewar! and Pong—two of the first digital computer/arcade games, were programmed and released. This is at the same time the Vocational Educational Act passed (1963), which was in support of more technology in the K-12 schools. Simultaneously, universities’ use of computers for research was increasing in popularity. Soon after, computer assisted instruction emerged on the scene. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act brought more money in for schools to spend on educational technology. It is important to note, that despite these efforts, throughout the 1960’s, technology limited in its effectiveness because of the use of solo teachers for its implementation. In the 1970s, the computer game Oregon Trail was developed by student teachers to recreate the experience of westward migration during the 1840s. Oregon Trail was well-received by students and administration alike, and most children growing up in the 1980s and 1990s played it at school.
In the fall of 1973, another important ICS figure began down a path that ultimately led to *POOT*. This man was Edgar Taylor, a doctoral student at the University of Michigan at the time (Kupperman, 2002). After Edgar returned from an overseas trip to Beirut, he received a phone call from Professor Clement Henry that triggered a series of events. The backstory to how he arrived at *POOT* provides a relevant framing of the educational climate as *POOT* came to fruition. It explains the opportunities and challenges that impacted the early design decisions of the program.

Returning to Edgar’s story, Clement Henry was a professor in Political Science with specialization in studies on the Middle East and North Africa. He was seeking a teaching assistant for a class on the Arab-Israeli conflict and was drawn to Edgar because of his experience in Beirut. Edgar accepted the position to teach under Professor Henry’s guidance, where he taught a section about the Arab-Israeli conflict. In this classroom, they initiated the first iterations of what later became a regularly administered ICS programs called the *Arab-Israeli Conflict*. Edgar first implemented a face-to-face character-playing activity, after he got the idea from an undergraduate student at a party who had taken the course with another instructor. The undergraduate making the suggestion opened with a line like, “you know what would be cool?” Edgar liked the undergraduate’s idea, and presented it to Professor Henry, who also liked the idea. Through the implementation of the activity, Edgar was taken aback by the seriousness and creativity his students put into the activity. Edgar says, “they even dressed up,” as he reflected on how the students portrayed important figures in the Arab-Israeli conflict. A more detailed discussion of Edgar Taylor’s involvement is outlined in Jeff Kupperman’s (2002) dissertation and can be found by watching a keynote address given by Edgar at the 2014 gathering for the Institute for Innovation in Education in Ann Arbor, Michigan.
Edgar began to wonder about student engagement in the conventional classroom versus more innovative methods. Edgar’s inquiry about innovation paved the way for what was about to come next for ICS. Also, this was happening at the same time that computers were being donated to schools, the computer as intelligent tutor idea was emerging, and *Oregon Trail* was being widely purchased by K-12 schools. Further, live action roleplaying games were increasing in popularity, and the first computer roleplaying game, *Dungeon’s and Dragons* was released. This was quickly followed by the release of the text-based game *Zork* and multi-user dungeons (MUDs). With this climate, ICS was well on their way to developing new ideas for interactive learning.

Edgar’s work with the Arab Israeli conflict led him in the direction of an important collaborator—Fred Goodman. In the late 1970s, Fred Goodman received a grant to partner with other universities, and as part of this inter-university collaboration, Edgar shared his Arab Israeli simulation. Following this, Edgar assembled a report titled *International Conflict Simulation*, with the abbreviation of ICS. The present day ICS Group was called something else at the time, but this report’s abbreviation is actually how ICS got its name, according to Edgar.

The year 1984 marks the official formation of the ICS Group. After which, they began having conversations about the potential pitfalls of computer communications vs. face-to-face interactions. In the mid-80s, computers were still rare in the classrooms, even at U of M. Edgar recollects on how resourceful he had to be in order to borrow ten computers for just the weekend. Yet, despite the obstacles Edgar references, he recalls Fred as a visionary, saying that Fred saw great hope in the ICS group when others doubted the use of technology and games in learning. Fred took notice of the simulation Edgar had been administering with his students, and had what Edgar calls an epiphany: Fred realized participants did not need to be in the same place at the
same time. U of M was home to the Michigan Terminal System (MTS), a massive time-sharing computer operating system. The MTS was one of the only one of its kind at the time. Edgar and Fred, acknowledging the sharing power of the MTS system, approached U of M administration about using the MTS system for their classes.

As time progressed, Fred and Edgar recruited a larger team of educators to work on ICS projects. They were soon assisted by Jeff Stanzler, Michael Fahy, and Jeff Kupperman, all of whom are still active with ICS today. Together, this team initiated collaborative activities such as the simulation called the Arab Israeli Conflict (originating in 1974), the Poetry Guild (originating in 1989 under the guidance of Jeff Stanzler), and Earth Odyssey (originating in 1990).

By 1995, not only are computers more prevalent, but the Internet was increasingly available and expanding in use. Sid Meier’s Civilization, an empire building strategy game, was growing in popularity. Additional iterations of Oregon Trail continued to be developed to reflect updates in computer systems. Both Civilization and Oregon Trail helped establish the backdrop for digital history programs. In 1996, the online roleplaying adventure game Meridian 59 was released, which combined virtual experience with the multi-user text chat function. In 1998, ICS project director Gary Weisserman designed a character playing simulation for ICS called Conflx, which helped foreground POOT. POOT came to fruition in 1999, and connections between ICS and the Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies were forged soon after.
Features of *POOT*

Overview

Before fully expounding upon the mechanics, I present a brief step-by-step chart of what happens in *POOT* in the form of a timeline. This may be handy to refer back to as you read the details of these steps, as in Table 3.1. This is followed by a comprehensive overview of the mechanical features of *POOT*.

Table 3.1 Steps for *POOT* participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order</th>
<th>Steps for participation</th>
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| Step #1 | Introduction to topic of the trial  
Select character |
| Step #2 | Research character  
Writing resume |
| Step #3 | General interaction with other characters on the website through introductory messages and posts  
Practice speaking in character |
| Step #4 | Begin to explore issues presented in the trial  
Respond to prompts from the simulation’s host |
| Step #5 | Join a committee or exhibit room to offer a more in-depth look at trial |
| Step #6 | Nominate justices, (apprx. 20 characters out of 200)  
Justices selected  
Justices write legal philosophy |
| Step #7 | Assign votes of confidence to your justice of choice |
| Step #8 | Justices cast a ruling and explain their ruling  
Court case decided |
POOT is an activity best understood in context. I start with an introductory message sent from the POOT project directors to players at the start of the simulation using the custom designed website. The message reads:

Greetings, and welcome to this gathering of the Court of All Time, here on the beautiful grounds of the Alhambra Palace. Some of you may have seen this place in its heyday, but for your stay we have temporarily made it into a glorious and comfortable place for us to spend time together. We start officially on February 6th, but if you are here early, please feel free to make yourself at home, post your résumé¹², and explore this beautiful palace. I am Robert Oppenheimer, your host for this gathering. If there is anything I can do to make your stay here more productive or comfortable, please send me a mail message (POOT site, January 30, 2012).

I will break this introductory message down into the following categories: (1) the facilitated virtual experience, (2) participants, and (3) text-based communication.

**Facilitated Virtual Experience**

POOT is a facilitated virtual experience, both online and offline. Online, the opening message reveals that there is a host character who facilitates online activity (“I am Robert Oppenheimer, your host for this gathering”). The host serves as a guide to all online activities, posting announcements which serve as updates on the flow or happenings of the simulation. These announcements occur at the beginning of each week or when something significant occurs. The host establishes the flow of the program (“We officially start on February 6th”), as well as directives on the best next step (i.e., post your résumé, and explore). The host is generally played by a project director from the ICS group. In Chapters 6-9, the host character was Robert Oppenheimer and was played by either myself or another member of the project director team.

¹² A résumé is a first person narrative introduction in which participants are encouraged to push beyond dates of birth, family lineage, and Wikipedia-style fact gathering in their representation of their character. Participants have to interpret and integrate data from multiple sources.
Offline, facilitation occurs over the course of three to four months, including recruitment and preparation. Preparation involves helping participants select their character and providing them with written resources like the user’s guide and a timeline. Due to the length of the user’s guides they will not be attached as appendices; however, all guides have been made publicly available on the POOT website\textsuperscript{13}. During the activity, project directors request participants to login to the POOT website a minimum of two times per week by way of staying current with the happenings of POOT. K-12 classroom teachers have reported that those logging in less than two times per week experience higher levels of difficulty with program implementation.

Project directors feel that establishing a sense of place for the unfolding story helps provide meaning and creative foregrounding. Guests, therefore, meet virtually at Alhambra Palace in Granada, Spain, a location intentionally chosen because of its rich historical significance and tumultuous past. The Alhambra, or the Red Castle translated from Arabic, was first built as a fortress in 889 by the Moorish. The Moorish were of Muslim decent and came over from North Africa. The grounds surrounding the fortress were bloody from invasions and the fortress had provided refuge for the local Andalusian people.

Strategically placed, the Palace’s positioning allowed for the viewing of the whole city. It was also at the slope near an important Jewish settlement. It is considered to be a palace of the Nasrid Dynasty, the last Arab-Muslim dynasty to rule in Spain. Under Mohammed III’s rule, from the Emirate of Granada with the Nasrid Dynasty, public baths and the Mosque were built. The Palace was lost in a war, and the reign of Catholic Monarchs, Queen Isabella I of Castile and the King Ferdinand II of Aragon, claimed victory over the Palace on January 2, 1492. This day is

\textsuperscript{13} POOT user guides and additional support materials can be found at http://poot.icsmich.org/materials.
still celebrated by the City of Granada with street parades and city-wide events. The end of the ten-year Granada War also marked the end of La Convivencia, a time when Muslims, Christians, and Jews lived in relative peace with one another. La Convivencia was referred to as the interplay of cultural ideas and marked religious tolerance between Muslims, Christians, and Jews, though it is disputed on exactly how peaceful it was. In 1492, Jews were forced to convert to Christianity, and in 1501 Muslims were expected to do the same. The mosque was later converted to the Church of Saint Mary. After the death of Ferdinand II, grandson Charles V (also known as the Holy Roman Emperor) sought to demolish parts of the Palace so it could bear his name. During French domination, the Palace was nearly destroyed. Today, the Alhambra Palace is regarded as one of the most meaningful cultural historical sites.

**Participants**

In the opening line of the message above, participants are welcomed to the large, multi-participant gathering. This gathering is comprised of approximately 150-200 participants from institutions around the world. Participants consist of only registered “guests,” as POOT is a closed network site. Permission to participate is granted by ICS. Each participant has a unique login and character to portray.

The program is a collaborative endeavor with K-12 students/mentees from middle schools and high schools, K-12 classroom teachers, university students/mentors, and action researchers in a more observatory role. A detailed description of the participants, based on institutional level, type of participant, and term used to describe the participation, are provided in Table 3.2.
Table 3.2 Categorical description of *POOT* participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional Level</th>
<th>Type of the Participant</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Description of Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-12 School</td>
<td>K-12 Student</td>
<td>K-12 Student</td>
<td>A younger participant who is enrolled in a middle or high school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentee</td>
<td></td>
<td>A term to describe the specific relationship the younger participant enrolled in a middle or high school has with a designated adult mentor from a university. The term mentee is intended to imply that help is being received from a more skilled other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K-12 Classroom Teacher</td>
<td>K-12 Classroom Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>An adult participant who is a certified, practicing classroom teacher in the K-12 system who has signed up his/her class of students to take part in the program. This individual actively oversees online and offline instruction with their K-12 students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>University Student</td>
<td>University Student</td>
<td>A student who is enrolled in a university level mentoring seminar with explicit goal of developing the educational capacities of the younger players in the <em>POOT</em>. University mentors are assigned mentees to monitor and encourage throughout the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University Mentor</td>
<td></td>
<td>A term to describe the specific relationship, responsibility, and role the university student enrolled in a university course has with the K-12 students with whom they are confidentially partnered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preservice Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td>A university student who is enrolled in the university level mentoring seminar and is pursuing a teaching degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Researcher</td>
<td>Action Researcher</td>
<td></td>
<td>A practitioner-researcher, also referred to as teacher-researcher, who is engaged in field-based research to better understand emergent questions they are having about <em>POOT</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Director</td>
<td>Project Director</td>
<td></td>
<td>A faculty member who is charged with the responsibility of facilitating the <em>POOT</em> project and making large-scale programmatic decisions. They also provide a strong base of support for the K-12 classroom teachers who are learning how to institute <em>POOT</em> in their classrooms. They host instructional video conference webinars for teachers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Teacher Educator**

A faculty member who instructs a mentoring seminar course with university students who will serve as mentors and aids in the preservice teacher’s development.

-or-

A faculty member who instructs a course with action researchers.

**Host**

An adult who uses a portrayed character to advance the storyline and flow of the program.

**K-12 classroom teachers.** K-12 classroom teachers enroll their classes, drawing from courses such as social studies, English, religious studies, and philosophy. Each iteration of *POOT* has approximately five to seven different classrooms participating. *POOT* is incorporated into the curricula, with class time allotted for online postings, as well as *POOT*-related in-class assignments. Each teacher has the freedom to implement *POOT* in a way that is most fitting to their curricular needs. ICS provides teachers with a calendar, a teacher’s guidebook, and a more detailed outline of what to expect about the flow of the upcoming week(s). The teacher’s guidebook contains rubrics, classroom activities, and general guidelines (ICS Teacher’s Guidebook, 2011).

K-12 classroom teachers are asked to be active online and offline. Teachers who have been active online have attributed their involvement to the success of the program on an individual classroom level (Sue\(^{14}\), personal communications, April 2011). Regardless of the teacher’s level of online involvement, the teacher serves as the face-to-face classroom facilitator for support activities. deNoyelles and Raider-Roth (2012) discuss the how *POOT* is implemented in the classroom and the challenges K-12 classroom teachers face in implementing such a program, suggesting the importance of the face-to-face components in the student’s

\(^{14}\) Sue was the pseudonym selected for this participant.
development. In interviews with teachers, this project is reported to be exciting, new, and challenging for teachers, as they try to integrate it into their classroom teaching practices.

**University student mentors.** University mentors play a key part in the facilitation of *POOT*, helping to advance the storyline, encourage participation, and finding academic resources (Killham, Tyler, Venable, Raider-Roth, 2014). Mentors maintain high levels of individual attention for each K-12 student. While they help facilitate, they are not provided with scripted instructions on how to manage their involvement. For example, mentors are asked to think of creative ways to welcome the K-12 participants. As an illustration of a creative welcome message, I turn to a message I wrote as Erin Gruwell to K-12 student played Diego Rivera, which reads:

Hello Mr. Rivera, I read that your paintbrush is your best friend. I was moved by this comment. My pen is my best friend and writing is my life. I plan to journal while I am in [Alhambra]. Do you plan to paint while you are at [Alhambra]? Kindly, Erin Gruwell (*POOT* site, October 8, 2011).

Here, Erin Gruwell gently introducing herself while showing admiration for the esteemed artist Diego Rivera. The message is not overly complex, as Erin Gruwell is trying to hone in on the student’s ability level to avoid intimidation. The message also has an inviting undertone, aimed at making the student feel welcome at the Alhambra Palace.

K-12 classroom teachers and university mentors also monitor for inappropriate use of *POOT* (Kline & D’Angelo, 2012). Santo et al. (2009) reminds educators of the need to demonstrate safe and appropriate use of the Internet with youth. *POOT* is a great introductory platform for discussions around Internet safety. Mentors have “backdoor” access, allowing them to see what is being written to and from the younger participants. The backdoor feature enables the university mentor to intervene if foul language or bullying occurs. Mentors are instructed to
bring anything of concern to the attention of the project directors and their fellow university mentors so they can receive support and the matter can be attended to promptly and appropriately. However, reminded of the words of Henry Jenkins (2009), the adult’s goal should not be to police but to help negotiate online spaces. I believe it is in this spirit, the spirit of helping to negotiate, that POOT functions.

By way of providing individual attention, mentors are assigned 5-15 mentee characters played by the K-12 students. The mentor-mentee system ensures each K-12 student receives individual attention with welcome messages and responses to the mentee’s public posts. By putting a mentor-mentee system in place, project directs and teachers can feel confident that each K-12 student is receiving the proper level of individual attention.

Mentors also help to stir the pot in relation to the unfolding of the court case, which is particularly important if the trial appears lopsided. Referring back to Chapter 2 on historical thinking and the work of doing history, the goal is to challenge K-12 students to see the trial from various angles and accounts. The trial helps provide a setting through which K-12 students can begin to investigate a researchable question, and forms the basis of which students will ask more specific questions about their assigned character and the subject matter presented in the trial.

**Engaging in Deep Thinking**

Below, I have created a visual to depict a broad representation of the historical thinking that is taking place in POOT. The POOT trial provides the overall positioning, a problem to investigate and interrogate, if you will. The child, as himself in real life, begins to ask questions about his character (e.g., Rosa Parks). Specific questions are formed related to Rosa Parks, the
character being portrayed, and about the dialogue happening around the trial extended beyond that of Rosa Parks. In order to participate, and to better understand the *POOT* trial and Rosa Parks, the student is asked to engage in historical thinking through the interrogation of multiple sources as a first step, as seen in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2 Representation of how students begin to engage with historical thinking in *POOT*.

Again, mentors are an important part of deepening the thinking of the K-12 students. In terms of being able to see this online, I turn to Erin’s message to a character portrayed by a K-12 student:

Gosh, this whole situation around the stolen piece of evidence has people questioning. Over breakfast, the other guests could not stop talking about it. I have to ask... do you think Rose Hermann really stole the evidence? I know Rose has been upset a lot, but I didn't expect this! (*POOT* site, December 1, 2011).
We also see mentors using the private messaging capability to stir the pot, pushing young people to advocate for a position. This is true in a spirited exchange between K-12 student-portrayed Emma Lazarus and university student/mentor-portrayed Queen Isabella, where Queen Isabella responds to Emma Lazarus about the reason she began removing the Jews from her land in 1492, as seen in Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.3 Emma Lazarus questions Queen Isabella via private message.
Asynchronous Text-Based Communication

POOT capitalizes on text as the primary mode of communication (see Figure 3.5), particularly as a way to encourage K-12 students to use their verbal skills to communicate ideas. K-12 classroom teachers often positively regard the text-based emphasis, because of the platform’s ability to encourage youth to write and to assess their participation.
Conversations are asynchronous, taking place much like they would in a turn-based game (e.g., PeaceMaker, Civilization, or Chess); yet, POOT is not turn-based in a conventional sense. Unlike classic turn-based games, “player one” from POOT can continue interacting with different sets of participants if they are not receiving responses from certain participants. However, unlike in classic turn-based games, Player One from POOT can continue participating if he or she has not received a response from other participants. In the example below, Amelia
Earhart did not need to wait for Geert Wilders to login and type back to advance the conversation or for her to participate further, see Figure 3.5.

However, I turn to the private messages exchanges between Emma Lazarus and Queen Isabella, where Emma Lazarus had to wait for Queen Isabella to login and type back to advance the conversation between the two of them, but Emma Lazarus was able to engage other characters in conversations and advance her character’s evolving storyline while she waited, as did Geert Wilders in the figure above.

Figure 3.6 is an example of a character’s activity over time. For this example, I chose Erin Gruwell. I include this to illustrate the range of conversations occurring. It also provides a more in-depth visual for the online interface.
In addition, I want to draw on is an email exchange from the host Robert Oppenheimer (the host is an adult who uses a portrayed character to advance the storyline and flow of the program) sent to K-12 student-portrayed Benito Mussolini as a segue to talking about asynchronicity. The host’s post read as follows:
“Dear Mr. Mussolini, I found a hat in the hallway (see image below). Does it belong to you?... Your hat was left on the coat rack in the hallway just outside the dining hall. I believe some of the religious guests in POOT insisted you take off your hat before eating dinner… How are you settling into Alhambra?” (POOT site, February 14, 2012).

The asynchronicity affords players time to research responses (i.e., how should Mussolini reply to Robert Oppenheimer?). Players are encouraged to experiment (i.e., trying to speak from the prospective of an Italian Fascist) and take risks (i.e., taking a position of leadership). This is a drastically different task than students are familiar with in their social studies classes, which more often involve memorizing information without practical application (i.e., facts about Mussolini and Italy in the early to mid-1900s). I also provide an exchange between two students as further illustration of the type of risk taking and character voice experimentation that occurs, as seen in Figure 3.7.
In Chapter 2, I provide an example of Napoleon and the Battle of Waterloo. With *POOT*, the information a participant needs to know is relevant to the work being done during gameplay and often initiated through interactions with other participants. When a participant learns about Italy in the mid-1900s, it is purposeful. This is similar to the gameplay in *Plunkett’s Pages*, which Lynch, Mallon, & Connelly (2013) stated players revisit historical events with purpose. Take Mussolini’s reply to Robert Oppenheimer, in which it is relevant for students to know more about the happenings in the world in the mid-1900s, including Oppenheimer and Mussolini’s roles in the world. Mussolini, after all, was conversing in *POOT* with the father of the atomic bomb. In future chapters, I look for evidence as to whether *POOT* actually serves to scaffold for historical thinking, as it is not entirely clear, at that moment in time, whether Mussolini was able to understand broader social issues and causation. The work in this dissertation seeks to answer how to foster early to advanced historical thinking skills.
Despite the centrality of text, the interface does permit pictures and attachments, as seen with Robert Oppenheimer’s reference to Mussolini’s missing hat. Imagery is, however, limited. Schaffzin (2012) explored text and visual imagery in POOT and to analyze its impact on participant experience. She noted the importance of imagery and advocated for an increase in future iterations. Current use of imagery includes attachments via private message, the “gallery” tab, exhibit halls, and a character’s wall. All of these features will be described in more detail below.

A person sending a private message to another participant via the built-in email feature can attach an image at the bottom of the message. Images have been used to emphasize a point of view and deepen the make-believe play. The most common place for images is in the gallery (see Figure 3.8), which serves as a photo gallery for participants to post pictures related to their character, such as an image of their character, the location in which their character is from, and other important images that help explain who the character is. The exhibit hall allows for attachments, in which participants are encouraged to use images as evidence to support the court case. A character’s wall also allows for characters to post attachments to accompany their text.
A Contentious Political Trial

*POOT* utilizes a contentious political court case as a way to create tension and provide a purpose for the gathering at the Alhambra Palace, also referred to by participants as the Court of All Time. Participants of *POOT* have been summoned to weigh in on the court case based on their character’s viewpoints. Court case scenarios vary from iteration to iteration, but often involve tackling contentious issues facing modern day society, be it reparations (see Figure 3.9),
immigration (see Figure 3.10), the building of a mosque in Sweden (see Figures 3.11), anti-veil legislation (see Figure 3.12), or the responsibility of scientists to the public (see Figure 3.13).

Figure 3.9 Courtroom description of hearing on reparations.

Figure 3.10 Courtroom description of hearing on immigration in Israel.
Figure 3.11 Courtroom description of hearing on building a mosque in Sweden.

The Courtroom

Kadhim v City of Stockholm, Sweden

Hearing description

Muhammad Kadhim, a Muslim and citizen of Sweden, petitions the Court of All Time to rule, on the authority of the Justices and Guests at the Alhambra Palace, in favor of his right to build a mosque in a downtown district of Stockholm, Sweden.

Sweden’s 1991 FUNDAMENTAL LAW ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION guarantees the “right of free expression, whether orally, pictorially, in writing, or in any other way” to all Swedish citizens (with certain restrictions regarding hate speech against any group based on ethnicity, race, creed or sexual orientation).

Following a terrorist bombing carried out by Muslim extremists that caused considerable damage in Stockholm in fall 2010, an injunction was imposed on the building of a mosque, already under construction, that was designed by, and was being built under the supervision of Mr. Kadhim’s firm.

Mr. Kadhim is asking the Court of All Time to render a judgment in favor of his right to continue with the construction of the mosque. Opponents to the mosque argue that following the horrible events of last fall, it would be insensitive and provocative to build a mosque within blocks of where the recent attack took place.

A ruling of “yes” would side with Mr. Kadhim’s petition to resume the building of the mosque. A ruling of “no” would uphold the injunction.

13 "for" rulings or 13 "against" rulings necessary for verdict. Each justice needs at least 14 Votes of Confidence (VOCs) in order to rule.

Rulings for plaintiff: 17 | Rulings against plaintiff: 4
Figure 3.12 Courtroom description of hearing on anti-veil legislation.

Figure 3.13 Courtroom description of the responsibility of scientists to the public.
Nance Adler, a K-12 classroom teacher shares how she introduced the program to her students\textsuperscript{15}. She explains:

I began the unit by teaching several lessons about the situation in Europe related to Muslim immigrants and the wearing of the hijab by young Muslim girls. We discussed the pressure from observant or fundamentalist Muslims for all girls to wear it and related this to pressure in other religions as well for everyone to meet a certain standard of observance. We also learned about the history of secularity in France and their commitment to both freedom of and freedom from religion in the public realm. Armed with this knowledge, and a better understanding of the subtleties of freedom of religion and freedom of expression in a country dedicated to secularity, the students were ready to participate in a meaningful way in the [POOT] trial (Adler, n.d.).

In order to facilitate online discussion on contentious political issues outlined above, the website has a designated space titled the “courtroom” (see Figure 3.14). In addition to the hearing description, participants use the courtroom to access information related to the justices. A small percentage of the participants are selected to serve as justices, approximately 13-28 characters each trial. In order to become a justice, someone must nominate a participating character. The host solicits nominations via a public forum on the website. K-12 classroom teachers also make recommendations to project directors, often selecting students who have either worked hard or need an extra push to remain engaged. Once appointed, justices write a legal philosophy (see Figure 3.15). Justices are the only characters who can cast a final ruling on the court case; therefore each character is given votes of confidence (VOC), which they can bestow upon the justices to show their support. Justices lobby for VOCs, often citing their legal philosophy, as they ask the other players for their VOCs. Each justice must meet the required number of VOCs in order to cast a ruling. Once justices receive a sufficient number of VOCs, the justice is permitted to cast a ruling in favor or against the plaintiff. The ruling is accompanied

\textsuperscript{15} Many thanks to Nance Adler for her permission to cite her work.
by an explanation of the ruling (see Figure 3.15). The court case is won or lost depending on the majority ruling.

Figure 3.14 Overview of the *POOT* courtroom.
In order to facilitate evidence and interest-based discussion around the trial, the exhibits halls features is utilized. Some iterations of POOT refer to this section as “committees,” but the basic purpose and function remain the same. A number of exhibit hall topics are selected for a designated forum space in which they speak in more detail about the court case and post evidence to support their position on the court case. The trial on reparations had an exhibit hall
called the M.S. St. Louis. Participants could become curators for the exhibit hall, which would allow them to post evidence related to that dimension of the court case. An example of a piece of evidence included a telegram sent by a passenger who sailed on the M.S. St. Louis. An example of a committee is the “Muslims for Jesus,” a group created by a group of participants in reaction to unfolding of events.

Character-Play

In the opening message I presented at the beginning of this chapter, there are clues pertaining to the type of character in attendance at the Court of All Time. It states that allegedly some people have experienced Alhambra during its heyday hundreds of years ago. Additionally, the email exchange between Robert Oppenheimer and Mussolini provides additional insight to the guest list. For POOT, participants do not come “dressed” as themselves (e.g., eighth grade girl in an English as a second language class) but rather as character-played figures. Staying in-character is the single most important rule of POOT participation. Participants wishing to speak out-of-character can post in the Green Room, which is the only place a participant is permitted to do so. Green Room posts are not associated with a character, as in the other areas of the website. During active programs, participants may create and respond to threads. At the conclusion of the simulation, the Green Room is used to ask evaluation questions about the participant’s experience.

The character-played figures come from time periods throughout history (e.g., Abraham from the Book of Genesis, John Knox from the Protestant reformation, Diego Rivera from the 20th century) and even fictional characters (e.g., Dumbledore from J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter books). There are a few special roles that populate the guest list (see Figure 3.16), which include (1) the host, (2) the chief magistrate, (3) the protagonist, (4) the justices, (5) exhibit hall room
leaders, (6) curators for the evidence hall, and (7) the pollster. The host is responsible for the overall flow of the experience, seeing the big picture, posting announcements, and keeping teachers and mentors informed about what is to come. The chief magistrate is in charge of the courtroom, and oversees the justices, curators, and room monitors. The justices are a small group of characters who cast the final vote for the trial, as described in the section under the courtroom.

Exhibit hall room leaders monitor, recruit, and approve curators. They make sure their designated evidence hall room has sufficient primary source documents to review. Curators are people who elect to join an evidence hall and help present the people of POOT with information to further the cause of their evidence hall room. Below, I discuss the exhibit hall in more detail.

Figure 3.16 Preview of the POOT guest list.
Role as a Means to Promote Historical Thinking

Overview

In this section, I explain how the character-playing dimension of POOT helps support the development of perspective taking skills. Squire (2011) refers to games as “carefully crafted learning experiences” (p. 13), establishing that they are not simply open spaces. As illustrated above, POOT is carefully constructed as a facilitated online asynchronous, text-based character-playing experience. As members of the Court, participants engage in the hands-on (re/co)construction of history and civics education, which can be considered as a form of lived history. This process of lived history begins with an exploration into the character’s past. This is done as an act of becoming a historian. Participants gather information from primary and secondary sources, through which they weave a biographical sketch of their character, a form of interactive “storytelling” which honors both past truths (to the best of the students’ knowledge based on their research) and makes informed predictions about situations for which there is no historical record (e.g., How would teenage Anne Frank, born in 1929, confront Queen Isabella of Spain who expelled the Jews from Spain in 1492?). To borrow from Lynch, Mallon, and Connelly (2013), participants become “digital detectives” as they compile their character’s résumé. One POOT teacher explains this process, where she says initially “[t]he kids end up hunting down things like "where did you go to elementary school" rather than understanding the true character. What I would like them to do is focus more on their body of work, particularly if they are a writer, or someone that is a public figure with a decent amount of press” (POOT Ning site, October 4, 2011). In Figure 3.17, I provide an example of Allen Ginsberg’s résumé where the student does a particularly good job capturing the voice of his character according to a teacher who uses the POOT user’s guide to assess her students (POOT Ning site, October 11,
2011). It is through the multitude of sources that students begin to capture the essence of their character. Another example of capturing the voice of one’s character can be seen in Napoleon’s greeting:

“Hello! As you surely know, I am Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France. I am disgusted that you would even need to read a résumé about my life. I am the greatest leader and military strategist in the history of Europe. You should know about me already! However, I will provide the… Court of All Time with my story so you can properly respect my power…” (POOT site, October 11, 2012).

Figure 3.17 Sample of Allen Ginsberg’s résumé.

A similar approach to history education can be seen in the work of Mattson (2008), as well as Manley and O’Neills (1982, as cited in Mattson, 2008) who use dramatic arts-based
pedagogical strategies such as process drama (p. 101). Process drama uses role and debate to “provoke students into critical investigation” (Mattson, 2008, p. 102-107), which helps them discover worlds far removed from their own (Mattson, 2008, p. 101), as well as deepens “their abilities to critically read the world around them, to think historically, and to imagine and participate in a more just future” (p. 101). To do so, it draws on the participant’s own cultural capital (Mattson, 2008, p. 101). This is the same type of work done in POOT, as students are asked to take on someone else’s perspective while drawing on their own cultural capital.

For the purpose of the POOT court case, the person playing Mussolini needs to balance his own personal views with the views of Mussolini. A question raised here, as we ask students to portray another person, is what if the participant presents false information about their character? Non-participating adults usually ask about the degree to which someone is "making up" their responses as a character, and therefore, how much fact or truth are they learning? A common error is omission of truths, as seen with Rosa Parks and Helen Keller. This is something I discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. I turn to James Paul Gee’s work, outside of history education, to expand upon this answer. Gee (2003) suggested that producers of information (in this case the author of the character’s biographical résumé) make better consumers (students reading historical texts). In other words, the more students are asked to be producers of historical information the more likely they are to increase the accuracy of the information they are reading and transmitting as their character. We know from Chapter 2 how important guided instruction and scaffolding is in the development of this kind of skill, one that critical makes sense of historical material.

The focus in POOT is very much on the process and responsibility of constructing a biographical résumé for your character by trying to mirror the work of a historian rather than
creating a “compendium of the achievements of the character” (Fahy, Kupperman, & Stanzler, 2012). To help with this, one K-12 classroom teacher explained, “I asked them to add "personality" and "pizzazz", not just facts” (POOT Ning site, October 5, 2011). With that said, there are cases where the accuracy of a character’s biographical résumé is disputed (e.g., the spelling of Allen Ginsberg’s name in the résumé). Knowing this, there are a series of things players are asked to do to promote historical accuracy, first being that they consult multiple sources as they draft their résumé. Also, POOT project directors ask that players consult reputable sources, and avoid Wikipedia as their primary source. Teachers and the POOT User Guides distinguish between Wikipedia as a website that can lead you to other information and a reliable, accurate source. Since the résumé can be updated, the POOT community is also aware they can offer suggestions to a character if they notice an inaccuracy.

**When We Take the Perspective of a “Bad Guy”**

Being noticed is an important dimension to POOT (Kupperman, et al., 2007), which is elaborated on in detail in my findings in Chapters 6-9. The task of welcoming guests is not always as easy as it shown with Diego Rivera earlier in this chapter. Scripting a greeting for admired guests like Anne Frank, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Gandhi can be done with relative ease. However, what happens when participants are portraying a less likable character? As an illustration of this, I turn to a private message from teacher-played Paul Bowles as an example of how he approached the more controversial and challenging character, K-12 student-portrayed Osama Bin Laden:

Mr. Bin Laden,
I have done some reading about you after seeing you from down the hall here in The Alhambra. Are you a loner or are you looking for guests to have good conversations with? I lived most of my life as an expatriate in a Muslim culture. I have tremendous respect for the Arabic language and the many different cultures in North Africa, the
Middle East, and Central Asia. I am a little confused by your actions though--can you explain to me specifically what you are fighting for? What is it that you want to accomplish in this world?

Sincerely,

Paul Bowles (POOT site, February 9, 2012).

In an analysis of this message, I draw from Paulo Freire who stated, “The teacher is an artist, but being an artist does not mean he or she can make the profile or shape the student. What the educator does in teaching is to make it possible for the students to become themselves” (Bell, Gaventa, & Peters, 1990). In this message, teacher-played Paul Bowles helps a more challenging character become “himself.” This passage also helps address questions that have risen out of four years’ worth of conversations about POOT. Perhaps out of skepticism, bewilderment, and/or concern, non-participating adults have asked about the Bin Ladens, Mussolinis, and Hitlers of POOT. These adults ask, “What about that kid playing Bin Laden, aren’t you concerned he will warp his mind with Bin Laden’s thoughts?” They wonder why would a child pick Bin Laden anyway and ask about the educational benefit of portraying a villain. To this, I return to the question POOT is asking participants to wrestle with. ICS project director Jeff Stanzler recites this important question: “Are we able to hear what another person has to say, even if we do not agree with them?” Lerman (2011) similarly talks about the importance of hearing what other people have to say, describing this as “find a way to respect something that lives at the end of the spectrum farthest from where you are comfortable” (p. xvi). It is nestled in this type of discourse that participants begin to deepen their thinking about cultural understanding, civility, tolerance, and acceptance. As I will describe later in this dissertation, the ability to hear what someone else has to say even when we do not agree with them is a difficult and often unnatural task requiring practice. At the core of its design principles, POOT asks participants to look beyond the horrific events associated with Bin Laden’s name, to understand what would drive someone to hate
another group of people to the extent he did and to situate Bin Laden contextually. It also
distinguishes between a more passive form of tolerance education, where the learner is simply
taught to tolerate other people, and pushes towards an educational pedagogy that promotes
helping people learning to understand what Mattson (2008) terms “power differentials,
inequality, and injustice” (p. 108).

In conversations with non-participating adults, these concerned onlookers wonder if the
child portraying Bin Laden will receive the same positive attention and admiration as the Diego
Riveras of POOT, or worse. They are concerned the “bad guys,” will receive hate mail or be
ignored. They wonder if these children will become dissatisfied and check out. To answer this I
return to how adults, like Paul Bowles, who model appropriate communications that are
respectful (“Mr. Bin Laden, I have done some reading about you”), thought invoking (“I am a
little confused by your actions though- can you explain”) and content rich (“I have a tremendous
respect for the Arabic language and the many different cultures in North Africa, the Middle East,
and Central Asia”). Bowles’s message is also inquisitive (“Are you a loner or are you looking for
guests to have good conversations with?”), tension-filled (“What is it that you want to
accomplish in this world?”) or provocative (“explain to me specifically what you are fighting
for”). Certainly, Bin Laden will receive messages that are less sophisticated than that of Paul
Bowles’s message, but this is one of the reasons the site utilizes university students as mentors to
track the progress of students and why K-12 classroom teachers are tasked to follow the online
work of their students. Similarly deNoyelles and Raider-Roth (2012) found K-12 classroom
teachers defended their decision to allow K-12 students to portray “bad guys” because the
characters led to “stimulating discussion” (p. 18).
This is not to say that the concerns raised about a child portraying Bin Laden are invalid. This is an unresolved issue in *POOT*, warranting more research as to whether the benefits of portraying controversial characters outweigh the costs. I attempt to address this in Chapters 6-9.

Project directors give much thought to who is best suited to portray “villains,” and the more difficult and easily caricaturized individuals are usually reserved for adult participants. This helps avoid a degree of unnecessary risk when it comes to oversimplifying a character or potential unpleasant interactions. I recall the day I assigned the student to portray Osama Bin Laden, as it was my task for that particular iteration of *POOT*. The student had selected the character as one of his top three choices. Students are given the opportunity to select three character choices. In doing this, they are encouraged to think outside the box, as each iteration of the project can only have one Gandhi. Popular character choices are often not assigned. The more unique the choices are, the greater likelihood the student will be assigned one of their choices. When selecting character options, participants are encouraged to keep the scenario close in mind. Whereas Bin Laden might have something of value to contribute to a scenario on religious violence, he might not have as much to contribute to a discussion around the role of scientists in society. Lady Gaga is another illustration of this. The meat-dress wearing pop star can certainly contribute to a discussion about dress codes, but would be less appropriate to speak about war reparations. Selecting 150 unique and relevant characters is not an easy task for a project director/facilitator. Some participants have to be told they cannot portray Gandhi, but have been selected to play Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk. This was the case for the students portraying Thich Nhat Hanh, Abraham, and John Knox in Chapter 9, all of whom did not receive their preferred characters. The task of the facilitator is to honor the voice
of the participant, while not losing sight of the overarching purpose of the project. As a case in point, Thich Nhat Hanh was selected because he is in the same genre of characters as Gandhi.

Sociopolitical Issues

Building on the task of character development, mentors are asked to help younger participants deepen their thinking about sociopolitical concepts brought up in the program. An illustration of this is an exchange between Charlemagne and Benazir Bhutto (another host character):

Dear Charlemagne (or should I call you Charles the Great?), For a man who died in the year 814, you know so much about current events. How are you getting all this information on current events? I was killed in 2007, and there is so much I still do not know about what happened from 2007-2012… Since you are used to ruling over great lands and being in charge, I challenge you to make a speech that summarizes the things that are happening in [POOT] (your so called new kingdom)? Tell us about the things that you disapprove of and the things that you support in [POOT] if you think you are truly a worthy leader. (POOT site, October 22, 2012).

In this message, Benazir Bhutto challenges Charlemagne for speaking out of character, and tests his willingness to take on a leadership role. The student is still afforded a large degree of freedom, all the while maintaining the grade-appropriate complexity.

Later in the program, mentors are asked to introduce more complicated material to the students in the form of primary documents or more robust arguments. University students utilize the exhibit halls and committee spaces to post information, such as documents from the Human Rights Watch challenging French anti-veil legislation (POOT site, November 8, 2012) or a transcript from a speech given by Jacque Chirac about his policy banning religious clothing in public schools (POOT site, October 25, 2012). Students are asked to read the material and comment on the material’s relevance to the trial.
By way of facilitation, the host posts an announcement at the start of each week. Here is an example of a beginning prompt: “It seems that many of you have also brought things from your own belongings that represent your particular place and time. If you wouldn't mind sharing, please tell us about something you have brought” (POOT site, October 7, 2011). However, to answer this question, participants must first know/learn about the character they are portraying.

Participants begin to explore the other guests in attendance at the Court of All Time. For example, Napoleon was wandering around the halls of the Alhambra Palace (i.e., a metaphor for the online guest list) and took notice that Peter the Great was also a guest of the Court of All Time. Napoleon greeted Peter the Great:

Peter, As great leaders we need to have curiosity and ambition to rule. The notebook is a great idea to record your memories. However, I decided to bring a crown so that everybody at [POOT] would recognize me and know who I am” (POOT site, October 15, 2012).

Quickly, Queen Rania chimed in:

Napoleon, I am royalty, but I don't feel the need to show off by placing a crown on the top of my head. I think royalty should be allowed to be humble and live normal lives. Peter the Great, don't you agree?” (POOT site, October 15, 2012).

Peter the Great replies to both of them:

Rania - I spent much time learning with humble sailors and ship builders - you can't wear a crown doing that…Napoleon - I would hope at 6'8” I am fairly recognizable with or without my crown” (POOT site, October 16, 2012).

Not only does this conversation illustrate the types of early conversations that take place on the site (i.e., dialogically agitated), it also illustrates the need for a below-the-surface understanding of one’s character (i.e., rigorous and creative) and the interactive dimension (e.g., this conversation would be different if Queen Rania was not participating). A conversation with Napoleon, Peter the Great, and Queen Rania would never take place in real life due to the time
these individuals were alive, so a student is charged with making their best attempt at what they would say to the other characters present at the Court. This draws attention to the program’s emphasis on exploration, interpretation, responsiveness, and forgiveness; aspects which will be described in more detail below.

By “exploration,” I mean that I see Napoleon seeking out other royalty on the site. Participants often look for people who have something in common with their character, as further evidenced by Queen Rania chiming in. By “interpretation,” I mean that I see Napoleon determining he would bring his crown rather than a notebook. The participant portraying Napoleon had to make a decision about what the Frenchman would carry along with him. This answer is not readily available on the Internet, but can be deciphered based on what the participant gathers about his character from the sources available. POOT is also responsive, but in a different way than simulations with built in pre-programmed possibilities (i.e., Quest Atlantis, Myst, SimCity, or Quandary). The “responsiveness” in POOT depends on people posting and responding to one another, much like if a group of people were in Second Life who, based on what they said to you, could impact your experience. Another comparison is with alternate reality games, which react dynamically to player interactions and input as a means of directing the progression of the game. Finally, by “forgiveness” I mean that POOT is forgiving as people learn and grow with their character. Napoleon seems bothered that Peter the Great does not want to wear his crown. Next, Charlemagne joins in and says, “They would recognize you by your stature” (POOT site, October, 16, 2012). Charlemagne’s comment seems slightly unclear, but innocent and eager. Peter the Great clarifies, “Are you speaking to me or to Napoleon?” (POOT site, October 17, 2012). Peter the Great “forgivingly” asks the person playing Charlemagne for more information, does not break character, and embeds historical meaning.
The red pen does not come out, indicating a mistake or insufficiency. Rather, we see the principles of forgiveness, responsiveness, and dialogically agitated working in conjunction with the overarching aim of involvement and development in the student-played Charlemagne.

To continue, Peter the Great’s repeated playful references to Napoleon’s stature (“The ceilings are rather low here at [Alhambra] - I would hate to scratch my crown” [POOT site, October 16, 2012]) did not go unnoticed by the ego-filled Napoleon. In response, Napoleon must arm himself with knowledge, in order to give him the ability to be the strong leader he was known to be. He must also be able to see himself as more complex than Napoleon the Diminutive by rooting himself in his time and place (“I believe that my crown is a symbol of the Empire of France” [POOT website, October 16, 2012]).

As the student portraying Napoleon comes to terms with his short stature, he must also come to terms with his warmongering side as well. He was a man who was adored and loathed. Beyond the joy of being a powerful emperor, when the reality of Napoleon’s character sets in, the student must confront what D’Angelo (Kline & D’Angelo, 2011), a former POOT mentor and K-12 classroom teacher, calls a “phenomenological disruption.” They define it as when players “realize that the character they are playing has a completely different set of values for exploration of the world, yet this character’s viewpoint was completely normal in their time and place” (p. 26). For example, the independent, intelligent Queen Elizabeth I of England who gained respect in a man’s world chopped off the head of Mary Queen of Scots since she was perceived as a threat to the throne. Participants must navigate all sides of their character.
Summary of objections to POOT

A summary of potential objections include: 1) false history, 2) portrayal of villains, 3) the use of what-if history, and 4) whether causation and relationships are fully understood by participants. POOT attempts to mediate these concerns through scaffolded and guided instruction, as well as adult attention and monitoring. An overarching purpose of this dissertation is an attempt to see if POOT does the things it is claiming it is doing.

Consequentiality of Literature on POOT

Initially, this chapter was an attempt to describe my research setting, and I quickly came to see this chapter as a more complicated and important task than previously imagined. The setting could not be described in its entirety without addressing the potential pitfalls of the project. The latter half of this chapter summarizes potential objections people may have to POOT. These objections were included as revisions to this chapter, based on material that was written at the beginning of this endeavor. The additions were based on extended conversations I have had with individuals about POOT over the last five years, and most specifically with members of my interpretive community who raised important questions about the potential challenges of learning history in this way. Potential objections included the following: (1) false history, (2) portraying villains, (3) the use of what-if history, and (4) whether causation and relationships are fully understood by participants.

By way of addressing the questions and hesitations of these individuals, this chapter aimed to inform the reader about the POOT project. However, while informative, the aim was also to do so in a way that maintained the integrity and rigor of the study. As outlined in the purpose of this dissertation study (see Chapter 1) and methods (see Chapter 5), I sought to design
a trustworthy study that would investigate genuine questions about the opportunities and challenges of this platform, as opposed to advocate for an activity I had grown fond of and ask the questions that were of interest to me in disconnection with my participants. This positioning was essential, as I identify as a practitioner researcher inquiring about the type of teaching and learning occurring within my own teaching practice (see Chapters 1 and Chapter 5).

The research conducted for this dissertation is an important next step, as much of the current research on POOT involves small, unpublished studies and conference presentations. Further, understanding POOT also meant understanding the evolution of the project and the professors who influenced the earliest versions of it. While I positioned POOT within the subject of history education, this literature review revealed that POOT was not simply history education in isolation but history education within the context of technological and playful innovations to curriculum, hence the necessity of Chapter 4 on games, roleplay, and alternative modes of teaching and learning. I also learned that my work was part of a longer history of programmatic improvement, and should generate more questions and suggestions for improvement. Something I strive to do in the data chapters that follow is influence future programmatic improvements.
Chapter 4

Review of Games and Roleplay Literature

Overview

Chapter 2 of this dissertation provided an extensive overview on what many history professors, historians, and K-12 classroom teachers posit about the teaching and learning of history curricula, many of whom call for the increased use of non-traditional methods of teaching and learning that branch away from academic textbooks as the main medium for conveying knowledge about the past. They assert that students need to be able to formulate questions about history and exercise a capacity to demonstrate their own understanding of events through the referencing of multiple sources, a practice known as “source work.”

Educators like Lamb and Johnson (2010) assert that “it is time to think beyond convention: to explore new possibilities, to consider innovative ways to synthesize ideas, to articulate new ways to think about the teaching and learning process, and to design engaging opportunities for young people to learn and express their understandings” (p. 76). Despite calls to move beyond textbooks in the direction of source work and to embrace innovations, resistance persists and pedagogical divisions on how to best teach history have emerged. Lynne Cheney’s outcry was cited in Chapter 2 as a pronounced example of how volatile these “history wars” have been and can be.

In Chapter 2, I attest to how public education in general has remained enamored with old ways of teaching, with little interest in experimentation. Chapter 2 also introduces the idea of thinking differently about teaching and learning history, to perhaps include technological innovations. One such technological innovation is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 and is
the basis for this dissertation work: the educational project POOT. Chapters 2 and 3 serve as background for why I want to use games to rethink how history education is taught. In this chapter, I first turn to the area of scientific inquiry to frame the openness of other subjects to innovations. Scientific inquiry is an area marked with increased experimentation with alternative methods of instruction. After this framing, the field of games is addressed, including: (1) how games are defined, (2) a closer look at serious persuasive games, (3) games involving roleplay. The field of games and roleplay is expansive, and this chapter will by no means encapsulate it in its entirety. Because the topic of games is a broad one, the scope of this chapter was narrowed to games that relate to the POOT program, as outlined in Chapter 3. This chapter closes with an explanation of how and why I am doing things differently than other researchers who are concerned about games, roleplay, and history education.

Scientific Inquiry

In *Science as Subject-Matter and as Method*, Dewey (1910, 1995) makes a compelling plea for understanding and developing scientific habits of mind (p. 127). This paper was addressed to the 1909 American Association for the Advancement of Science annual conference, He promoted scientific thinking as “[a]ctively participate in the making of knowledge” (p. 127), as opposed to seeing science education as the transition of a set of facts. Dewey advocates for an education that promotes scientific thinking as a way of learning and knowing about the world around us. Scientific thinking, as defined by the National Research Council, is the proficiency in:

1. knowing how to use and interpret scientific explanations,
2. generating and evaluating evidence,
3. understanding how scientific knowledge is developed, and
(4) actively participating in the production and continuation of scientific discourse

(van Zee, Jansen, Winograd, Crowl, & Devitt, 2013).

Scientific thinking, in many ways, represents the building blocks for historical thinking\(^\text{16}\), both placing emphasis on the integration of information, source work, and active production and the construction of knowledge (see Figure 4.1). Scientific inquiry is an area marked with increased experimentation with alternative methods of instruction and emphasizes scientific habits of mind. John Dewey held scientific inquiry at the core of this thinking, believing it to be essential in fostering a democratic society and freeing people’s minds. Over one hundred years later, we hear the same call for the development of a scientific habit of mind, (e.g., Nobel laureate Carl Wieman’s address to the National Science Foundation in 2012). Figure 4.1 helps illuminate the similarities between scientific thinking and historical thinking, and provide reason for why scientific thinking was included in this conversation. This is also a useful frame to further consider Figure 3.2 titled “Representation of how students begin to engage with historical thinking in POOT.”

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\(^{16}\) Teachinghistory.org, an online resource center for K-12 history teachers funded by the U.S. Department of Education, defines historical thinking as the reading, writing, and analysis involved in telling the stories of history. Teachinghistory.org says the skills of historical thinking helps people construct more accurate reconstructions of events they cannot experience themselves.
Alternative forms of teaching and learning, such as games, are more well-researched in the field of science education than history. Similar calls advocate to increase students’ sense of curiosity, openness, and skepticism about educational content. Prominent educational games researchers, like Constance Steinkuehler and Kurt Squire, co-directors of Games+Learning+Society (GLS) and University of Madison-Wisconsin professors, have written about the need to develop scientific thinking and have proposed games as a possible mode of increasing this skill (Steinkuehler & Chmiel, 2006; Steinkuehler & Duncan, 2008). This is also a burgeoning topic presented at the annual GLS conference, a conference focused on game-centered learning systems used for educational purposes (Steinkuehler, 2008).

Lynch, Mallon, and Connelly (2013) found that computers and the Internet have “given rise to the prospect of new tools for today’s educators and learners” (p. 12). These innovative technology tools have paved the way for digital media, such as games and simulations, to enter

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17 The GLS conference website can be found at http://www.gameslearningsociety.org/.
McCall (2014), in particular, voices, “Simulation games can play an integral role in teaching history as a twenty-first-century discipline” (p. 251). These are only a few examples of the research being conducted on the educational implications of teaching and learning with these innovations.

While there has been an increased interest among researchers to investigate the potential pedagogical use of game-based learning (DeKanter, 2004), a sizeable amount of work remains before games can be viewed as a legitimate medium in the classroom (Adams, Mayer, MacNamara, Koenig, & Wainess, 2012; Clark, Yates, Early, & Moulton, 2010). Not all scholars are convinced of the pedagogical importance of games, and educational psychologists like Richard Mayer argue educational games need to increase use of scientific evidence grounded in cognitive theory. In Computer Games for Learning: An Evidence-Based Approach, Mayer (2014) explains that many of the books on educational games “supply examples of exciting educational game projects and help inspire readers to visualize a future for education in which educational games play a prominent role, but they are not intended to provide comprehensive and convincing evidence” (p. xv). From a classroom implementation purpose, Lewis and Fabos (2000) warn that the complications of using games in a classroom must be considered. McCall (2014), a high school history teacher, explains:

While simulation games offer compelling learning opportunities, they come with significant challenges. Success using simulation-based learning in these early stages of the medium progresses equally as much from learning what not to do as what to do. Philosophically, teachers learning to use simulation games as learning tools need to be willing to engage in play. We must take risks, wading into the chaos, navigating the mess, and implementing a sense of order and meaning that helps students learn how to study the past. We must be willing to make mistakes and accept failures, for learning from mistakes enables us to design ever more compelling and effective lessons about the study of the past (pp. 228-229).
In connection with *POOT*, deNoyelles and Raider-Roth (2012) report on the challenges K-12 classroom teachers face when attempting to implement innovative projects. Many of the *POOT* teachers reported limited class time and access to technology as a limitation to these new tools.

I reference the debate over the educational worth of games to acknowledge it exists. However, I am also reminded of the Serious Games Summit at the Games for Health conference in 2011. There, Ben Sawyer (2011), co-founder of the Games for Health project and the Serious Games Initiative, announced that the debate is over and urged the audience to shift their thinking away from research questions of “Are games working?” B. Sawyer asserts that this type of research question erroneously frames the conversation. B. Sawyer proposes a more contextual framing, such as, “How and when does a particular game work?” Richard Van Eck (2006) echoes B. Sawyer, advocating that the discussion around games and learning “move beyond research that has, by this point, already convincingly demonstrated its efficacy as a place for, or site of, learning” (as cited in Sandwell & Lutz, 2014, p. 23). Van Eck (2006) explains the focus must shift towards “practical guidance for how (when, with whom, and under what conditions) games can be integrated into the learning process to maximize their learning potential” (as cited in Sandwell & Lutz, 2014, p. 23).

Further, the field needs to consider the way in which games as successful learning tools are measured, for example, much of Richard Mayer’s work utilizes multiple choice test questions to conclude whether games impact student retention of material. While assessment methods such as Richard Mayer’s should continue to be contested, the field still has a tremendous amount of work to do in establishing the educational worth of games. Jane McGonigal’s (2011) recent book, *Reality is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*, has helped with making the power of games a topic of household conversation. Even Mayer (2014),

a vocal critique of games research, admits to McGonigal’s ability to increase the number of conversations around games. Yet, in order to convince educational administrators and policy makers of the value of games and game-like experiences, much research remains to be conducted. The aim of this dissertation is to contribute to this growing body of research on game-like learning through an in-depth, unique investigation into the POOT project. Up until this point, no one has taken such a thorough look at POOT, and I am the first to employ my particular analytical technique, as outlined in Chapter 5.

Games

Defining Games

The term “game” conjures up an assortment of images from soccer to chess to Grand Theft Auto. The term is used to refer to a range of different media, including teens gathering around classic arcade games like Pac-Man, young boys seated on the carpet near the television using modern video game consoles like the Sony PlayStation, and families playing Dance Central on motion sensing input devices like the X-Box Kinect. The word game also drums up images of mobile games like Angry Birds on your iPhone, card games like poker, or board games people play with their family like Scrabble. In the beginning of Chapter 3, I outline the diverse range of games I was exposed to before deciding to study the topic. This widespread variation in peoples’ understanding of games warrants a closer look at existing definitions of games.

Rieber and Noah (2008), as well as Parker and Becker (2013), point out that the act of defining “games,” as well as “simulations,” is a challenging task. These terms are often misused and result in the “muddling” of characteristics. Many play scholars, games researchers, and game designers have attempted to define games. Introductory game design books often devote a chapter to the topic. Jesper Juul’s book Half Real (2005), Salen and Zimmerman’s (2003) book
Rules of Play, and Jesse Schell’s (2008) book The Art of Game Design all offer insight into how the field is defining games. People commonly quote Bernard Suits’s (2005) for saying, “playing a game is a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (p. 55). Many games and game-like experiences involving roleplay and character-play require what Suits (2005) called a “lusory attitude” (pp. 52-53), the intentional acceptance of unnecessary goals and obstacles (Kupperman et al., 2007). Sousanis (2006), who compiled a comic book-style explanation of the definition of games, suggests a lusory attitude is vital to engagement, particularly with roleplay or character-play. Other researchers have noted the observance of this lusory attitude in gameplay which enabled players to suspend their disbelief during simulation-based learning activities (Jong, Shang, Lee, & Lee, 2008; Kupperman et al., 2007). Squire (2011), the Co-Director of the Games+Learning+Society Center in the Wisconsin Institute for Discovery, states games are “carefully crafted learning experiences” (p. 13) that “give roles, goal, and agency; elicit fantasies…; and designed experiences to manage complexity and learning” (p. 29).

Complicating the closer look for how to define the term “game,” is a discussion Brenda Romero (2014) presented to her audience during her talk I, Outsider. Romero explained the insider/outside divisions in the game industry in terms of what constitutes as a “real game.” The debate over defining games struck a chord with her, as a longtime video games industry employee gone tabletop designer. Her talk struck me, as I recall long conversations with people about whether POOT, as described in detail in Chapter 3, is or is not a game or simulation. I often return to this question. While POOT is commonly referred to as a game and simulation by project directors and K-12 classroom teachers, the more I research games the more unclear it

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18 Many thanks to Nick Sousanis for making his work available to me, and PDFs of his comic can be found at http://spinweaveandcut.blogspot.com/2008/01/possibilities-rabbit-page.html.
becomes. This chapter is the beginnings of an exploration into whether POOT is, in actuality, a game. In the pages that come, I present games in their respective genres, and I follow this with a comparison to POOT and present research taking place in each genre.

As I move towards defining games for this chapter, I note that I do not delineate between digital and non-digital media, but instead include both. While I encourage readers to expand their notion of what constitutes as a game, for the purpose of this dissertation, I adopt Holden et al.’s (2014) conception of “gameful learning,” “a framework that encourages improvisation, playfulness, and social interaction, and which takes into account the unique contingencies of individual people and specific content” (p. 1). Within gameful learning, Holden and colleagues (2014) research “why teachers and students are intrinsically motivated to play, experiment with identity, question, and learn – all within school. The primary objective of [gameful learning] is synthesizing multiple influences into a teaching and learning ‘way of being’ with games, digital media, and play” (p. 3). I chose to align my work with the gameful learning framework because it shared the strongest commonalities with the pedagogical aims of POOT and helped me narrow the game genres I would investigate for this research.

I distinguish between gameful learning and games particularly because of the academic component of POOT; however, other distinctions exist. Jeremiah McCall (2011), author of Gaming the Past, offers a simplified paraphrasing of Salen and Zimmerman’s definition of a game as “a rule-based system in which players undergo a conflict or competition in an attempt to achieve a quantifiable goal, such as winning or losing” (p. 4). McCall (2011) defines a “simulation game” as “a game that functions as a dynamic model of one or more aspects of the

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19 Many thanks to Jeremiah Holden for sharing this resource.
real world” (p. 4). In other words, simulations are artificial, simplified versions of complex, real-world situations (Datta, Upadhyay, & Jaideep, 2012; Sauvé, Renaud, & Kaufman, 2010). These tools, when used educationally, help advance the learner from skills acquisition toward the ability to manage complex interactions and relationships. The game *Lemonade Stand* is an example of this, where players manage a lemonade stand business. Online simulations enable learners to advance from the physical world to computer-based models. In the sections that follow, I (1) establish games as alternative modes of learning; (2) breakdown related games genres by way of discussing *POOT* in juxtaposition with other games, noting points of divergence and commonality within the genre; and (3) present an overview of the most recent research being conducted on the genres. While the work I conduct for this research has not been conducted in a similar way, I do not discuss how my research is distinguished from the other types of work presently occurring until Chapter 5, where I provide an extensive explanation of my methodological choices.

**Games as Alternative Modes of Learning**

Play is a powerful vehicle for learning (LaSeur, 2000) and games, in particular, have been shown to have substantive meaning (Sousanis, 2006). Games researchers posit educators can harness the power of games to promote engaged learning (e.g., Jackson, Gaudet, McDaniel, & Brammer, 2011). Reports indicate learner motivation is higher within games and simulations, (D’Angelo, 2011). Further, a large-scale Youth and Participatory Politics study revealed youth are digitally connected (Cohn & Kahne, 2012, p 8) despite concerns over access gaps. Finally, students who participated in simulations representing multiple perspectives have demonstrated increased intellectual complexity and deeper understandings of perspective (Grant, 2001, p. 101, as cited in Brooks, 2009, p. 225).
Years ago, Boocock and Coleman (1966) attested to the usefulness of games in overcoming shortcomings in American education. After using an experimental design with a multivariate analysis, Boocock (1966) found an “increase in role empathy, learning of factual information and greater feelings of efficacy” (p. 8). Much has occurred in the field of educational games since the 1960s. In addition to Steinkuehler and Duncan’s work cited earlier, James Paul Gee’s (2003) book *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* skillfully reframes critiques of popular media to ponder the educational usefulness of video games. Gee, while not originally a play or games scholar, began to see connections with his work in linguistics and with what was happening in game spaces. The most striking thing about Gee’s book was his list of 36 learning principles related to how games can help improve media literacy skills. Rilla Khaled, a professor at the University of Malta, works with a European organization called SIREN to promote conflict resolution games that can be used with schoolchildren. Khaled and her colleague Georgios Yannakakis created a game called *Village Voices*, which positions children in neighboring villages having to make the decision between cooperation and betrayal. Growing evidence suggests that game based learning is having an impact on teaching in the K-12 system, as evidenced by Kurt Squire’s (2011) book *Video Games and Learning: Teaching and Participatory Culture in the Digital Age*. Sasha Barab’s (Barab, Gresalfi, & Ingram-Goble, 2010) work with *Quest Atlantis*, Katie Salen’s work with *Quest to

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20 Gee is a prolific writer about games and learning. This citation is not meant to encapsulate the entirety of his work in this area. For Gee’s most current written work see his regularly updated blog at http://www.jamespaulgee.com/.
21 A list of Gee’s 36 learning principles can be found at http://edurate.wikidot.com/the-36-learning-principles.
22 A list of Khaled’s publications can be found at http://www.rillakhaled.com/publications.html.
23 Details on the Quest Atlantis project can be found at http://atlantisremixed.org/.
24 Details on Quest2Learn can be found on the Institute for Play’s website at http://www.instituteofplay.org/work/projects/quest-schools/quest-to-learn/.
Learn, Jeremiah McCall’s (2011) book *Gaming the Past*, and Kevin Kee’s (2014) edited book *Pastplay: Teaching and Learning History with Technology*. Most relevant to this discussion is (1) McCall’s work with historical simulation games and the high school history classroom, and (2) Kee’s edited collection of essays on the importance of combining history and technology in order to see the past through a different set of lenses.

McCall, a historian and high school history teacher himself, designs lessons to develop expert thinking with his students, particularly through the combination of simulation games and problem-based learning (2014, p. 246). His scholarly contributions outline ways to bring history-oriented video and computer games into the classroom, such as *Civilization, Ayiti, Rome: Total War*, and *CivCity: Rome*. His book presents teacher-friendly, practical ways of incorporating pre-existing commercial video games with state-mandated curriculum, and helps teachers engage in conversations with their colleagues about their pedagogical decisions to incorporate simulation games into their curriculum. Kee’s book was compiled to convey the fundamental importance of technology in developing a new understanding of the past, and draws from leading experts and educators in the field of history and history education including McCall.

Many of the citations I referenced above illuminate the potential of history related games for use in the K-12 school system. Tordorva and Moffat (2013) point to an under researched area: the influence of game-based learning on teaching practices in higher education. POOT spans both dimensions: using game-like programs to improve (1) K-12 learning and (2) teacher education. In Chapter 3, I address how POOT utilizes university pre-service teachers as online

\[25\] A list of McCall’s scholarly works can be found at http://gamingthepast.net/.
mentors for K-12 students in POOT. William Tierney (Tierney, Corwin, Fullerton, & Ragusa, 2014) and his team of researchers at the University of Southern California, including games researcher Tracy Fullerton, have recently published book titled Postsecondary Play: The Role of Games and Social Media in Higher Education. The first section of Tierney et al.’s (2014) book exposes the changes and challenges in the academy, and was useful in understanding how programs must mediate present-day fiscal constraints. POOT, in particular, offers an online laboratory for preservice teachers to explore creative and alternative forms of teaching social studies curricula under the guidance of senior faculty in teacher education programs and practicing teachers (Killham et al., 2014). In the second half of Tierney et al.’s (2014) book, Tracy Fullerton reminds readers that games are not a “magic bullet” (Tierney et al., 2014, p. 125). Games, while they sound like a compelling fix, are not the holder of all content.

Researchers have also attempted to engage higher education in conversation around game-like learning. Games researcher Ben DeVane, while at University of Florida, worked on a game called Gaming Against Plagiarism, which was used with University of Florida graduate students to promote research and professional ethics (Buhler, Leonard, Johnson, & Devane, 2011). Sean Duncan, a professor of Learning Sciences now at Indiana University, is among many university professors to use games in his previously taught university-level courses. In his article “Down with Dullness: Gaming the Academic Conference,” a game theorist and professor of Media at Indiana University Edward Castronova (2013), proposes the academic conferences incorporate a game concept he calls “Ludium.” Ludium is intended to reinvigorate conference programs by limiting the amount of time one person talks and encouraged widespread participation as opposed to passive absorption of material. For social studies in particular, I posit
that if we are to continue the advancement of game-based learning/gameful learning, it is imperative we begin to experiment more heavily within our teacher education programs.

I return back to this earlier discussion of definitions for “games” to segue to a conversation on the mechanics of *POOT* in comparison with other games or game-like experiences. Like *POOT*, *Dear Esther*, an experimental video game, commonly raises questions about what a game is and is not. It uses first-person gaming mechanics to take the player through a ghost story, where the player uncovers mysteries in an exploratory manner. It is, however, absent of mechanics general associated with video games (i.e., combat and scoring system). While *Dear Esther* and *POOT* are very different experiences, they both speak to the difficulty of defining games outlined above and help to establish that the question over whether *POOT* is a game is open-ended. Below, I delve into the genre of serious persuasive games, as a way of better understanding similar-minded spaces.

**Game Genres**

**Serious Persuasive Games**

**Overview.** Serious games take on many forms. *Typing of the Dead* could be considered a serious game, as players improve their typing ability through gameplay. However, in this section I am referring to what Ian Bogost, academic and co-founder of Persuasive Games Studio, considers persuasive games. Bogost explains that games, particularly persuasive games, embrace the complexities of world issues far better than other forms of popular media. Mary Flanagan, academic and founder of the games research lab Tiltfactor, says games embody human values and provide a forum to play out beliefs about society. Serious persuasive games aim to address societal matters more directly, effectively, and intentionally than others facets of the gaming world. Swain (2007) defines games within this genre as experiences that “let players gain an
experiential understanding of real world issues through play” (p. 805). Gee (2003) and Prensky (2005) discuss how serious games use entertainment to convey a serious message. Digital games within this genre use their mechanics to provide direct, in-game feedback to players, therefore, influencing players to adapt certain behaviors or convey certain messages.

There are a number of digital games I wish to highlight from this category, including the following games listed in Table 4.1. Additional games that include serious content during gameplay can be found on the Games for Change website.

Table 4.1 An overview of digital games from the serious persuasive games genre.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Game</th>
<th>Description of Game</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Papers, Please</td>
<td><em>Papers, Please</em> is about an immigration officer who has to choose who can enter the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Points of Entry,</td>
<td><em>Points of Entry</em> is a game about immigration as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activism: The Public Policy Game</td>
<td><em>Activism: The Public Policy Game</em> addresses public policies such the economy, education, corporations, homeland security, military, and internationalism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airport Insecurities</td>
<td><em>Airport Insecurities</em> is a game that offers a critique of the politics around airport safety and individual rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darfur is Dying</td>
<td><em>Darfur is Dying</em> is a game that represents the realities of trying to forage for water in a war torn region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 12th</td>
<td><em>September 12th</em> is a game about how violence begets violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cart Life</td>
<td><em>Cart Life</em> takes a look at retail work and the struggle to make ends meet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildfire</td>
<td><em>Wildfire</em> was created to address the United Nations Development Programme’s Millennium Development Goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spent</td>
<td><em>Spent</em> is a game about homelessness in America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guess My Race</td>
<td><em>Guess My Race</em> promotes critical thinking skills around race and culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me Tycoon</td>
<td><em>Me Tycoon</em> is geared towards young adults, recognizing that young people often have limited access to career preparation materials. <em>Me Tycoon</em> seeks to improve their job readiness skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Food Force</td>
<td><em>UN Food Force</em> immerses players in the realities of humanitarian efforts to distribute food to areas in need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Lives</td>
<td><em>Real Lives</em> allows players to virtually experience what it would be like to live in other countries around the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixteen Tons</td>
<td><em>Sixteen Tons</em> is a game about labor and debt bondage. It addresses how money impacts social class and privilege.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are also non-digital games for impact. Bertel Ollman designed *Class Struggle*, a game to teach about capitalism and class differences. Terror Bull Games published *War on Terror, the boardgame*, an evocative game created in 2006 about the war in Iraq. Killham designed *War Between Suburbs* (2014), a game for preservice teachers on affluence and poverty in schooling, as well as *Red Beard: the game* (Doering & Killham, 2011), a game on building compassion. Brenda Romero has a series called *The Mechanic is the Message*, such as *Train, Síochán Leat, New World, Mexican Kitchen Worker*, and *One Falls for Each of Us*. She is known for her game *Train*, which teaches about the Holocaust and conformity. *Síochán Leat* (aka *The Irish Game*) is Gaelic for peace be with you. This game teaches about Irish diaspora. *New World* was designed by Romero to teach her daughter about slave trade in the United States. *Mexican Kitchen Worker*, presented at the GDC Experimental Gameplay Workshop in 2013, is about the food industry and immigration. *One Falls for Each of Us* is about the Trail of Tears.

There are also activities that are game-like that are worth noting, either due to serious content, inclusion of history education, and/or similarity with POOT, including *Plunkett’s Pages, Jewish Time Jump: New York* and the *Arab Israeli Conflict*. *Plunkett’s Pages* is an alternate reality game about the 1916 Easter Rising. ConverJent’s game *Jewish Time Jump: New York* uses augmented reality to position the player as a journalist in order to teach about Jewish history in New York City. ICS’s *Arab Israeli Conflict* is a diplomatic character-playing activity aimed at mining for solutions to the crisis in the Middle East. The origin and details of this simulation are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. *Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History* is a mystery solving project requiring participants to gather evidence to find a solution to what the Sandwell and Sutton Lutz (2014) call “micro-historical” matters of “race, gender, ethnicity,
immigration, religious intolerance, terrorism, war, climate change, aboriginal–non-aboriginal relations, wrongful convictions, and child abuse” (p. 32).

**Comparison with POOT.** Unlike many of the games listed above, POOT was not made by a team of independent developers with an adult audience in mind. The list of digital games presented above are mostly single-play games taking place over a short period of time. The intentions were to increase social awareness, which in turn I posit limits their market appeal. Whereas I argue POOT is intended for educational gains with the potential of a more eclectic audience because the program is offered as compulsory by K-12 classroom teachers for a grade.

While all within the same genre, POOT is still distinguishably different from the above mentioned games and programs, as illustrated in Table 4.2. POOT’s mechanics utilize online, asynchronous text in a chat forum style interface. As a gameful instructional tool, there are the four core things POOT tries to do: (1) promote critical thinking, (2) collaboration, (3) playfulness, and (4) problem-solving. To promote critical thinking, POOT encourages participants to create a character profile called a résumé using first person language, navigate the fact versus fiction dilemma, see writing a form of expression and inquiry, use multiple sources to draw conclusions, and engage in contextualization. In regard to collaboration, POOT is a multiplayer experience utilizing various forums for interaction, enabling different ages and abilities in the co-construction of knowledge. In terms of playfulness, throughout the duration of the program POOT asks the participant to suspend reality, be inefficiently playful, use imagery, situate themselves in a drama-induced storyline, contend with an unknown outcome, and participate in character play. In terms of problem-solving, POOT uses a historical, sociopolitical court case as the backdrop for micro-historical mysteries. An additional layer of importance in the design of POOT is that, today, people are inundated with information; yet, recent studies
found that people often do not fact-check information, have difficulty distinguishing bias and propaganda, and often only consult single sources (Bartlett & Miller, 2012; Cohn & Kahne, 2012; Flanagin and Metzger, 2000). Henry Jenkins reminds us that “the potential for misinformation has never been greater” (Cohn & Kahne, 2012, p. xi). Young people recognize the concern over misinformation, but need practice learning the skills of deciphering what information is accurate and what is not (Cohn & Kahne, 2012, p. x). POOT aims to develop media literacy skills, which encourage participants to see primary documents with a critical eye through the combination of the dimensions outlined above.

Table 4.2 Instructional aims of POOT from a design perspective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional System Features</strong></td>
<td>• Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Asynchronous text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Chat forum-style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Critical thinking</strong></td>
<td>• Create a character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Question fact and fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Write as a form of expression and inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Multiple sources of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Engage in contextualization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration</strong></td>
<td>• Multiplayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Facilitated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Public and private forums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher and adult involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Different ability levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Co-constructing knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Playfulness</strong></td>
<td>• Suspend disbelief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Inefficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Imagery through text and imagination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Drama-infused storyline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Unknown outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Engage in character-play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem-solving</strong></td>
<td>• Sociopolitical conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Courtroom/court case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Micro-historical mysteries</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research conducted on this game genre. Rilla Khaled is one of the most active scholars in the area of serious games, where her research is generally conducted from the angle of game design. In her article *Equality = inequality: Probing equality-centric design and development methodologies*, Khaled (2011) utilized a case study to assess *Girl Game Workshop*, a project that aimed to increase feelings of empowerment in young women through the act of game design. Khaled and Ingram (2012) advance a framework for understanding factors that influence serious game projects, such as: project organization, technology, domain knowledge, user research, and game design. In the design of the case study, they draw from Schön’s (1983) notion of “proreflective practitioner perspective.” Others provide reviews of games, as was the case with Scholes, Jones, Stieler-Hunt, and Rolfe’s (2013) analysis of a serious game for the Australian child sexual abuse prevention program. Cowley, Fantato, Jennett, Ruskov, and Ravaja (2014) conducted a laboratory experiment to determine the effectiveness of *TARGET*, a project management game. Bowen et al. (2014) use focus groups to investigate how adolescents describe their learning experience playing a game called *Green Acres High,* a game aimed at developing healthy relationships and preventing dating violence. While the abovementioned research is not all encompassing, it is intended to represent the most current research within this genre, as well as demonstrate the wide range of research occurring.

Roleplaying and Story-Based Games

**Overview.** In his book *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman (1959) asserts that our social interaction themselves are a type of performance. Humans have long since been fascinated with performance, and the stories of these performances. In reviewing the history of roleplaying and the emergence of roleplaying games, the interconnectedness of narrative is apparent. Terms to describe the type of activity taking place in roleplaying and story-based
games include notions of “interactive fiction” and “emergent stories.” Both of these terms speak to the dynamic relationship between the text and the reader. Ryan (2003) speaks to this interaction in her work, describing it as “productive action,” which “leaves a durable mark on the textual world, either by adding objects to its landscape or by writing its history” (p. 205). Ryan’s work speaks to the centrality of the participant, be the participant a reader or a game player, to advance the story. While beyond the scope of this dissertation, I would like to briefly acknowledge the similarities between fiction and games in their ability to evoke the suspension of disbelief, or as Janet Murray (2012) and Jenkins (2003) call “the active creation of belief.”

Players within roleplaying games (RPGs) “take on roles very different from their own and experience the world through a variety of social contexts” (Simkins, 2010, p. 69). Simkins (2010) explains that in RPGs, a player can play “one or more characters in a story. They control the character’s action and make choices for the character. In some games, the player’s options are quite limited, and the player’s choices, successes or failures determine whether or not the story continues. Other games are more open-ended. There are usually still restrictions, but players are allowed a much greater freedom to follow their own interests through the game’s setting, making their own story as they go.” At the mention of “roleplay games,” images of the paper RPGs like Dungeons & Dragons, live action roleplaying (LARP) with warriors in the woods, or popular action video game like The Witcher are conjured up. Simkins references Baldur’s Gate 2, Grand Theft Auto, and Fallout 3 as a RPG that provides the player with a large degree of freedom. Like serious persuasive games, there is an incredibly vast amount of variation within the genre. Commonly thought of digital RPGs include Mass Effect, Chrono Trigger, Final

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27 Many thanks to Gerald Farca for this source.
Fantasy, World of Warcraft, and Guild Wars 2. There are a number of tabletop RPGs, including (but not limited to) the cyberpunk game of Shadowrun and weird fiction game of Cthulu.

In games, players commonly adopt the mindset or perspective of “the other,” and many games not typically lumped into the RPG category similarly use this role adoption dimension. Sid Meier’s Pirates! is an action RPG where players become a pirate. There are more examples: Settlers of Catan (i.e., players become settlers), Diplomacy (i.e., scheming European diplomats), Zork (i.e., the nameless adventurer), Gone Home (i.e., Kaitlin), and Ether One (i.e., a restorer), as well as The Guild 2 and Peacemaker. A distinction between the games I reference in this paragraph and traditional RPGs rests between the internalization and projection of the “other” and the character building function in which a player exercises agency and choice in regards to how their character develops.

Despite the distinctions between traditional RPGs and story-based games, game developers recognize the importance of story. Some game design studios prioritize story more than others, as evidenced in games like Mass Effect with high levels of intrigue and LA Noire which involves plot twists. Squire (2011) points out that Sid Meier’s Pirates! is open-ended, where the story is constructed through the gameplay over time. The construction of story is also seen in games like Minecraft, and arguably in many multiplayer games where players tell the story of what happens to them during gameplay. The open-endedness of Pirates!, as well as POOT, offers agency to the player. While Pirates! offers the player more agency than POOT, or a novel for that matter, both POOT and Pirates! allows the possibility of shaping the ending.
Comparison with POOT

In POOT, participants engage with the program as their assigned character. That character is typically a representation of an actual person with a personal record. This is even true of fictional characters like Dumbledore, from the Harry Potter series, who have a “history” record. POOT, however, straddles this line between projection and development, particularly as the participant/character encounters scenarios of what-if history, as illustrated in Chapter 3 (e.g., Jesus and John Knox never met in real life). The suspension of disbelief is a key dimension employed in games (Bernard Suits, as cited in Salen & Zimmerman, 2003, p. 76), as gameplay depends on the player’s willingness to engage with the inefficiencies of the medium. As the classic golf analogy goes, a golfer must be willing to use a club to hit a golf ball a great distance in hopes of getting the ball in the hole. There are, however, more efficient ways of placing the golf ball in the hole. Whether in POOT or the games listed above, participants are asked to suspend their disbelief during character adoption (i.e. Robert Oppenheimer, although deceased, is addressing a crowd of historical people at Alhambra Palace and later communicating with the Italian dictator Mussolini, as described in Chapter 3). Over the span of the POOT project, the ICS project directors provide Vygotskyian style scaffolding (1978) to aid in the suspension of disbelief and further “gameplay” and academic development. This is achieved through “sign posts,” or supports that aid in forward movement of the player and deepening of understanding for the learner. This is similar to what Squire (2011) calls “connective questions” (p. 20), as he references how Civilization tied together themes in a way that school was not able to do for him as a learner. By themes, Squire (2004) was referring to the examination of “relationships among geography, politics, economics, and history over thousands of years and from multiple perspectives” (p. 12).
Much attention is paid to the story in *POOT*, whether it be the overarching story or the twists and turns in the story over time. *POOT* involves a form of interactive and collaborative storytelling, and relies on interactivity and imagination to persist. The type of character play enacted in *POOT* is closely linked to concepts in play literature such as make-believe and imaginary play. However, in comparison to make-believe and imaginary play, *POOT* and other roleplaying games are distinguished by their sophistication (e.g., more complicated and congruent storyline), introduction of the facilitator role (e.g., a host of the character-playing gathering or a game master), and an adherence to a set of rules (e.g., you must be your character at all times while on *POOT*). With this level of complexity, support, and framing, the intention is to draw the player into the developing story (e.g., wanting Kaitlin to figure out what happened to her family in *Gone Home*, curiosity about the potentially self-serving intentions of Phyllis in *Ether One*, or persuading people with votes of confidence [VOCs] in *POOT*).

*POOT* participation can resemble the work done in an intensive persuasive writing project, necessitating research, source work, perspective taking, and synthesis. The K-12 classroom teachers participating in *POOT* have compared the activity to a quest based learning module, a learning theory that leverages game mechanics. They have also remarked about it resembling interactive chose-your-own-adventure books. There are, however, key differences in the degree of agency a person has in reading a novel, chose-your-own-adventure book, a video game, and *POOT*. In *POOT*, participants are asked to pay particular attention to the developing narrative from week to week, and shape the storyline through their contributions as an author of the emerging story.

Below, I compared *POOT* with three games identified with roleplaying. I use a graph to illustrate my thinking, and selected the scale of six as a way of illustrating difference (see Table
4.3. While the rankings of the graph were discussed with another game developer to increase inter-rater reliability, the graph is primarily for illustration purposes. Seven dimensions were considered based on my knowledge of the four platforms: (1) assumption of role, (2) malleability of the character, (3) collective storytelling, (4) consequentiality in the game, (5) consequentiality in real life, (6) shared party goals, and (7) clear goals. For assumption of role, D&D is the game with the highest level of character embodiment. While POOT does involve high levels of assumption of role, it is primarily focused on the intellectual aspects of the character as opposed to the physical elements. With WoW, the engagement with the intellectual aspect of one’s character is low. For malleability of one’s character, D&D exhibit the most malleability. While the other three platforms do allow for some degree of flexibility in the character portrayal, their flexibility occurs within a set of confines, be it the confines of historical record in POOT or the established responses put in place by the developer in The Witcher. D&D players experience the highest level of collective storytelling, and are the most aware of their agency to impact the unfolding story. D&D and WoW have the highest levels of in-game consequentiality, and actions can result in death in the game. The Witcher allows for the ability to restore to a save point. POOT has lower levels of consequentiality in the game, but social pressure to adhere to the group norms is discussed in Chapter 9 with the controversial portrayal of Jesus. POOT, however, is the only platform with high levels of in-real-life consequentiality due to its linkage with the academic assessment. For shared party goals, I eliminated The Witcher from this category because it is a single player game. I considered how D&D and WoW players engage in shared missions (also known as campaigns), while POOT players understand the parameters but they are not out to gain a shared win. In terms of clear goals, the mission/campaign in D&D and WoW are the primary reason for engaging in play, and play is a choice. Whereas in POOT, the goals
are not clear for all players and are linked back to the context in which the player is coming from and is highly depended on the teacher and their method of assessment.

Table 4.3 Comparison chart between roleplaying experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Game/Dimension</th>
<th>POOT</th>
<th>D&amp;D</th>
<th>WoW</th>
<th>The Witcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assumption of role</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malleability of character</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective storytelling</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequence in the game</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequentiality in real-life</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared party goals</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear goals</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research conducted on this game genre. Research related to this genre is expansive. To demonstrate the breadth of the field, several studies are mention here. Lu, Chang, Huang, and Chen (2014) published a recent study on a location based Context-Aware Mobile Role Playing Game. Their research focused on player likability of game and its features. Bowman, Schultheiss, and Schumann (2012) used survey data to examine pro- and anti-social gaming motivations in gaming. Powers and Kirkpatrick (2013) use session debriefings and student evaluations from Take-A-Chance, modeled after the Prisoner’s Dilemma, to better understand perceptions of fun and learning about self, interpersonal conflict, and some large-scale social conflicts. Castronova (2004) studies online auctions of EverQuest avatars to better understand the price of online bodies. Steinkuehler, Duncan, and Simkins (2007) present qualitative results from a two and a half year cognitive ethnography of the game Lineage. In their findings, they assert massively multiplayer online games to show significant education promise. Simkins (2010) uses case studies with expert game players to examine the structure of ethics in RPGs.
Similarly, Zagal (2011) explores the potential for games to support ethical reasoning. Zagal asserts, “Games can be an ideal medium for providing players with experiences that make them reflect on their ethics and moral reasoning by helping players identify moral or ethical issues, encourage them to assess their own ethical values and the social context of issues identified, and also consider the ramifications of alternative actions” (2011, p. 3). With this, I segue to games on court cases and with courtrooms.

**Sociopolitical and History Games**

**Overview.** There is overlap between this genre and the others listed above. I separated this genre to distinguish between games that explicitly focus on sociopolitical matters. On an entry level, there are games about courtrooms, such as *Argument Wars, Court Quest, Supreme Decision,* and *We The Jury.* These are all online games designed by Filament Games, a game design studio that recruits learning scientists to help design learning games. Another game about a courtroom is *Ace Attorney: Phoenix Wright,* where the player takes on the role of the defense attorney and completes actions during the unfolding of the trial by selecting choices on how to best respond to prompts. Raessens (2006) draws connections between political games and documentaries, explaining that both record the event, engage in persuasion, analyze the issue, and serve as a form of expression. Raessen’s provides *JFK Reloaded* and *Super Columbine Massacre* as examples of this comparison. He explains that both aim to combine factual information in as accurate of a way as possible, calling this “striving for facticity.”

**Comparison with POOT.** *POOT* uses the court case as a way to create tension in the story and provide a purpose for the gathering of the Court of All Time at Alhambra Palace. However, *POOT* is less about the courtroom and more about generating sociopolitical discussions around the topic of the trial. The type of discussion *POOT* aims for is one that
connects with Dewey’s (1916) notion of democratic communities. In other words, the courtroom is, in actuality, a vehicle for discussion. This discussion occurs within the context of a trial, but without the intent of learning about how courtrooms operate.

Like Raessens’s (2006) notion of striving for facticity, POOT scenarios are intended to be believable but fictional (Kupperman et al., 2007). An example of this is the POOT case of the Swedish Muslim architect that wanted to build a mosque near the site of a suicide bombing. There are many aspects for a participant to contemplate and investigate in relation to reality (e.g., Swedish law, immigration in Europe, identity, and corporate building plans to name a few), while maintaining its imaginative edge. This is different to Argument Wars, which draws from actual historical American court cases.

Another difference between POOT, Argument Wars, and Ace Attorney: Phoenix Wright is the imagery of the courtroom. The POOT courtroom is largely constructed in the imagination, though there are spaces on the interface that are designated as the court room, as described in Chapter 3. Argument Wars and Ace Attorney: Phoenix Wright places the player in the center of a colorful courtroom. While all of these games involve text, POOT almost solely relies on text as a form of communication.

I also note that in games like Civilization, the underlining purpose is different with the experience being designed first and foremost as a game. The players relationship is strongest with the game itself (I-It relationship), and there is generally an absence of what Hawkins (2002, 1974) would call a “Thou.” The game has been used in educational settings, and in that case there would be Thou, but it is not built into the design. POOT on the other hand, is designed as
an educational experience, and the I-Thou (student-teacher) relationship is the most significant one, as seen in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 Comparison between *Civilization* and *POOT*’s purpose and relational dimensions.

**Research conducted on this games genre.** For this section, I reference a wide range of literature. I first turn to research on the simulation *Model United Nations* (MUN), where students take on the roles of ambassadors to the United Nations. Through their enacted role, participants engage in debate on real-world debates. Dittmer (2013) conducted a yearlong ethnography of a university MUN team, in which he examined how humor aided in the geopolitical imaginations. Jhaveri, Chawla, and Shah (2012) present their work with spaces for debate in which they employ game-like conditions to teach about nephrology education. Ferguson and Garza (2011) investigate the impact of action games on civic engagement, specifically looking at *Call of Duty*, in which they found exposure to action games predicted more prosocial behavior online. Zhong
Barthel (2013) used an experimental design to test how an author created video game would impact notions of political trust. Barthel’s work suggested games as a medium may influence civic thought but are more effective when the topics are narrowly targeted. Neys and Jansz (2010) conducted interviews with game developers and game players to understand how political Internet games, such as Airport Security, Darfur is Dying, McDonalds Game and September the 12th, engaging their audience. They employed Raessens’s (2006) conceptual model described above concluded that games have the potential to contribute to political engagement. There are other game researchers who have looked at games as a mode of teaching and learning history, such as Kurt Squire, Ben DeVane, Shree Durga, Vance Martin, and David Simkins. Henry Jenkins also feels there may be some potential for games to foster civic development (Jenkins, 2009).

The early works of Squire (2003) concentrate on the use of games to teach history, such as Sid Meier’s Civilization, a “civically-oriented” online strategy game (Kahne, Middaugh, & Evans, 2009, p. 1). Squire’s work expanded, as he continued to explore the synergy between history games and simulations and learning theories (Squire, DeVane, & Durga, 2008). The work of Squire, DeVane, and Durga (2008) is of particular note because they begin experimenting with the use of adult mentors as models for how to do certain functions in the game. In the end, Squire and colleagues note a tension between trying to bring a game designed first and foremost as a game into an educational setting. Further, Auman (2011) speaks to the reluctance educators (college instructors in her case) may have about changing their teaching styles. Auman speaks from the experience of trying to alter her own pedagogy to one that is more collaborative and active, though she is not directly referring to using technology-based simulations. For these
reasons, I circle back to McCall’s (2011, 2014) work, which outlines ways to align games with the curricular content and implementation procedures that may ease the tension in these spaces as a result of bringing an entertainment game into an educational space.

Abrams (2009), like Squire and colleagues, researched commercial history-like games. In Abrams’s work, she asserts that gaming impacted her participants “comprehension and recollection of historical information” (p. 344). Her findings suggest:

(1) One participant speaks about feeling like he was really taking part in the Battle of Normandy while playing in *Medal of Honor*, a World War II video game.

(2) Another participant talks about how his view of history is informed by a combination of media (i.e., video games, History Channel, podcasts). In the case of the participant who was using multimodal sources, he expressed how the strengths of one medium impacted the richness of the other mediums (e.g., loud explosions, the terrain, and chaos).

(3) *Battlefield 1942* was also referenced in terms of how interactive visual environments promote accessibility of material and meaningful context.

(4) In *Gears of War 2*, the murky lake feature and game’s use of the word “brackish” assisted players in acquiring vocabulary words.

(5) *Total War* was a game a participant cited as helping him learn about civilizations, which was later applied to an English assignment over a reading of the book *Othello* because the student felt the game helped deepen his understanding of Moorish culture.
One participant’s knowledge in an architectural drawing class was credited playing Rise of Nations, a historical simulation where you create, maintain, and expand an ancient civilization.

Also, Abrams (2009) acknowledges factors that limit pedagogical change and adoption of games in the classroom, such as speed of technological advancements, expense, and culture clash particularly with teachers who feel ill-equipped to introduce games into their teaching practices. Yet, educators cannot overlook how prevalent digital media is in the lives of youth (Kahne, Middaugh, & Evans, 2009).

**How My Research is Distinguished From Other Research Presented Here**

The research presented in the chapters that follow offer a unique way of looking at innovative game-like history education projects such as POOT. In Chapter 5, I present a detailed explanation of my methodological choices and how I went about conducting the research which I report on in Chapters 6-9. The foundations of action research comprise the underpinnings of my work. My thinking was also influenced by design-based research, even though this work more strongly represents an action research framework. My extensive, hands-on involvement with POOT as a project direct/host of the online program, led me to adopt a practitioner inquiry stance, one that simultaneously sought to reflect deeply on my work as a practitioner by way of improving and to hear the voices of the people with whom I was working. I employed narrative inquiry as a way of collecting data, which grounded my data in interviews and online postings. By way of attending to the voices of my participants, I used a technique called McCormack’s Lenses (2000a, 2000b) that would allow me to engage with the data multiple times in various ways. For my analysis, I compiled case histories, a technique that is similar to case studies but is
one that emphasizes the telling of a full story for its own sake. In reviewing the literature on games, roleplay, and history, the originality of this dissertation’s contributions became clearer. I now invite you to read the more detailed explanation of my methodology.

Consequentiality of Literature on Games and Roleplay

Above, I addressed how games are defined, and provided a closer look at the following game genres: serious persuasive games, sociopolitical games, and roleplaying games. I narrowed these game genres based on the definition I chose for games and the pedagogical aims I discerned from the POOT project in Chapter 3 (critical thinking, collaboration, playfulness, and problem-solving). This winnowing of sources was crucial, as the field of games is expansive.

I opened Chapter 4 with the framing of scientific inquiry. Scientific inquiry was a useful frame for two reasons. First, prior to winnowing to the three abovementioned games genres, much of the research on games and learning I encountered during my search for literature came from the field of science education. Science games as a mode of teaching and learning have been more widely researched and accepted in formal school settings, as opposed to their counterpart games in the more muddily defined field of history education. Second, this inquiry led me to believe that scientific thinking and historical thinking are the bedrocks of critical thinking. Historical thinking, while more recent pedagogical construct, can now be linked to scientific habits of mind and then dated back to the works of John Dewey (1910, 1995). The lens of scientific habits of mind challenged my initial rationale for selecting Chapter 2 on history education, one I wished to situate within a designated core subject. It helped reveal that the pedagogy in question was less about the approved content and more about a way of thinking, as articulated between the commonalities between historical thinking and scientific thinking that scholars have advocated for (see above). Therefore, in actuality, it is how students are making
sense of material through a certain set of thinking skillsets that matters (as opposed to overly focusing on content mastery). Understanding how students are making sense of material and their first-hand experience in *POOT* becomes even more crucial to investigate given this lens.
Chapter 5

Methodology

Overview

Chapter 5 is divided into 8 segments: (1) research questions, (2) research stance, (3) guiding methodological frameworks, (4) research design, (5) data collection, (6) data analysis, (7) validity, and (8) limitations. Below, I begin with my research questions, followed by an in-depth look at my research stance, including my positionalities and identification with practitioner inquiry as a teacher-researcher. By positionalities, I mean the various roles in which I embody throughout the research experience. After which, I outline my research questions. More specifically, my guiding methodological underpinnings consisted of action research (AR) and design-based research (DBR). Both AR and DBR allow for a multi-modal approach, but I articulate why I chose qualitative research, and more specifically narrative inquiry. This is followed by a section detailing my research design using logic models, as well as detailing the participants, context, and data collection procedures. I explain my data collection procedures, including the use of participant observations, semi-structured interviews, and archived data. The interviews were my primary data source, supported by the observational and archived data. Lastly, I outline my data analysis procedure, including how I use an approach to multi-layered narrative analysis called McCormack’s Lenses (2000a, 2000b) developed by Coralie McCormack congruent. McCormack’s Lenses were chosen as a method congruent with narrative inquiry that allow for multiple reviews of the interview data. McCormack labels these multiple reviews with the term, “listenings.” The listenings are coupled with the assembly of case histories, drawing on plot and completeness of the story. I conclude the chapter with a discussion around validity and limitations.
Researcher Stance

Overview

In the preface, I outlined how I came into this work with a detailed account of my positionalities (see Figure 5.1) as a way of promoting ethical research and transparency. I position myself as a teacher researching my own practice. But, where do I begin as a teacher-researcher begin? I sat down to contemplate which methodology would best suit the type of research I aimed to conduct for this dissertation. With a scratch paper and pen in hand, I scribbled the question, “Who am I in this space?”
Like Lerman (2011) describes in *Hiking the Horizontal*, I had one foot in the project as a participant, playing alongside the other participants, and one foot in the professional world thinking about better teaching and learning through *POOT*. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2007) refer to this tension as the dialectic. As an active participant and educator in the place I sought to conduct research, I was admittedly fearful about my research being labeled bias. This all-too-familiar fear is a feeling Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) say many teacher-researchers experience while conducting research on their own teaching practice. However, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), Wolcott (1995, 2005), and Richardson and St. Pierre (2005), encourage
researchers to break free from the confines of conventional research and to engage in alternative forms of research, such as teacher-research.

Attempting to let go of these conventional confines, I reflected back on the origin and formation of my research questions. I did not begin the process with a set of predetermined researcher-driven questions; rather, my questions stemmed from my first-hand teaching experience as a project director/facilitator. My questions derived from my “classroom” of K-12 teachers and students from around the world and the educational activities we were partaking in (see Chapters 2 and 3).

I returned to the question, “Who am I in this space?” While at POOT’s virtual Alhambra Palace, I was my character(s), an educator, and now a researcher, thinking alongside other educators about how to best improve our teaching practice within POOT by way of furthering our students’ historical thinking. I was actively observing, listening, analyzing, and reflecting on my behavior, the behavior of others, and the context in which we were immersed. I was engaged in what Carini (2001) calls an “ethos of attending” and Seidel (1998) calls “seeing.” Seidel (1998) notes, this act of seeing is not a simple endeavor, as “seeing – taking something in visually and truly considering that thing – is not necessarily a result of looking; rather seeing is the result of deliberate work: noticing, considering, comparing and wondering. It is serious cognitive activity, demanding full attention and engagement” (p. 70). Further, Schultz’s (2003) and Hellman’s (2011) work reminded me of the importance of my act of listening, listening carefully to participants and their creative expressions as a way of hearing the participants differently even when they spoke of the challenges and disappointments of POOT.
From these different positionalities, the participant, educator, and researcher, I remained
struck by the scenario I described in the preface about Betsy Ross (see preface). I was taken
aback by the veracity of the questions raised by the educators with whom I was working. I
picked up the pen again to follow the puzzlements raised by my fellow educators about the
character-playing mechanism: (1) which characters are appropriate for scenarios, (2) what
conversations lead to meaningful interactions, and (3) what constitutes as serious engagement
with POOT. As a PhD researcher, I had the charge and time to devote to this kind of in-depth
investigation, a luxury many of my fellow educators did not have.

During my participation between fall 2010 and fall 2012, I took copious field notes and
kept a reflective teaching journal. The asynchronous nature of POOT allowed me to pull back to
see the fuller picture and to take this reflective stance, all the while being “interactively linked”
to the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.10). Aiding in this reflective stance, POOT had a
“back-door” feature (i.e., “see all posts”) that allowed me to investigate character activity in its
entirety. Now, through this dissertation, I take my reflections and experiences to a deeper level,
making meaning through the systematic inquiry outlined in this chapter. The implications of this
meaning making is the improvement of POOT through the honest and lived experiences of
participants.

Embarking on this research journey was the blossoming of a new phase in my research,
one which represented the solidification of my identity of “teacher-as-researcher” with a
practitioner inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). I recognized that my involvement
was more than simply a participant and educator. I was immersed in this setting—POOT—in
order to conduct active research to improve not only my practice as an educator but also the
practice of other educators involved in POOT. I recognize these roles—participant, practitioner,
and researcher—did not operate in isolation from one another. Rather, these roles were positionalities that contributed to my overall understanding of POOT, and ultimately my research stance: practitioner inquiry.

**Practitioner Inquiry**

Given these positionalities and unique relationship to the research setting, the most fitting stance for my dissertation work would be one that would allow for me to simultaneously engage, observe, and improve the pedagogical setting in which I was an active member. For this, I turn to practitioner inquiry (PI). PI is a lifelong process of improving one’s practice through engaging with questions and challenging assumptions with a community, says Marilyn Cochran-Smith (Wilson, 2008), which begins with the position that teaching is researchable. PI is “practitioner research conducted in practice-based contexts” (Mockler, 2014, p. 147), such as communities, schools, or in my case—POOT.

PI calls for educators to adopt an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Duckworth, 1986; Freeman, 1998; Hubbard & Power, 2003), one that asks questions about a person’s professional practice. From an inquiry stance mindset, information collected can be used to assist with the implementation of curricula enhancements that derive from insider knowledge and experience (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). This brings be back to my interest in drawing on the lived experiences of POOT participants by way of making improvements in POOT.

PI has also been referred to in the literature as practitioner-based action research (PBAR), classroom-based action research (CBAR), and more commonly called participatory action research (PAR), all of which are situated within the wider action research umbrella. While diving
into the particularities of each of these terms is beyond the scope of this dissertation, there are a few definitions to note. Brydon-Miller and Maguire (2009) define PAR as “an openly and unapologetically political approach to knowledge creation through and for action” (p. 79; Maguire, 1987). As a scholar within a social and cultural foundations program, I see this openly unapologetic approach is a necessity. Reason and Bradbury (2006) state that PAR produces “practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives” (p. 2). PAR’s emphasis on producing practical knowledge is a dimension that will aid in this dissertation work. Further, Stringer (2007) suggests that action research is “a distinctive approach to inquiry that is directly relevant to classroom instruction and learning and provides the means for teachers to enhance their teaching and improve student learning” (p.1). Originally most commonly used in community organizations, PAR has blossomed as a method of inquiry in schools and has advanced the field of teaching (Handscomb & MacBeth, 2003). Cochran-Smith advocate for the increased use of practitioner inquiry in teacher education. Similarly, Brydon-Miller and Maguire (2009) contend that “schools are the most fundamental site for social change efforts and that PAR and other forms of critical practitioner inquiry are central to that struggle” (p. 81).

This type of participatory, reflection-based research has radical, historical roots, dating back to Myles Horton and the Highlander Folk School28 in Tennessee. In line with what was discussed earlier about the importance and intention of giving voice to the silenced, this racial rooting also emphasizes “privileging the voices of those with less power” (Mockler, 2014, p.154). By adopting an inquiry stance, this research seeks to “[affirm] the notion that ordinary people can understand and change their own lives through research, education, and action”

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28 The Highlander Folk School, now known as the Highlander Research and Education Center, is a social justice oriented school originally started by Myles Horton to provide adult education to rural residents in Tennessee.
In particular, this researcher stance, one of practitioner inquiry, helps the ordinary players of *POOT* have a lasting impact on the design of the simulated experience and the curricula surrounding it.

**Guiding Methodological Frameworks**

This research is guided by the following methodological underpinnings: action research and design based research. Below, I will outline action research, design-based research, and the commonalities between the two frameworks as a demonstration of why these frameworks were selected.

**Action Research**

“Action research has a complex history because it is not a single academic discipline but an approach to research that has emerged over time from a broad range of fields” (Brydon-Miller, M., Greenwood, D. & Maguire, P., 2003, p. 11). Action research is rooted in the works of researchers like Kurt Lewin (1946, 1951) and John Dewey (1938a; Demetrion, 2012), but is a burgeoning methodology in the field of education and educational technology (He & He, 2014; Lean, Moizer, & Newbery, 2014; Matthews, Andrews, & Luck, 2012).

Ernie Stringer (2014) outlines AR as a systematic but flexible investigation into real world problems with the aim of improving localized conditions. This research is exploratory and experiential in nature, drawing from the emergent questions educators had during and after participating in *POOT*. Such emergent questions included a desire to better understand the opportunities and challenges associated with character-playing in *POOT*. Given the exploratory and professionally rooted nature of this work, action research was selected as a methodical underpinning.
Action research, as an umbrella methodology for practitioner inquiry, attempts to address emergent problems within communities through collective participation (Glassman, 2012; Stringer, 2014). Brydon-Miller and Maguire (2009) stress the importance of respect for people and their contributions. In the *Handbook for Action Research*, Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (2001) define action research as:

>a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (p. 1).

Action research emphasizes collective participation, and the action dimension of action research is intended to challenge the habits and rules of who does and does not participate in the research process (Glassman, 2012, p. 274). Research is seen as collaborative in nature, drawing on the contributions of the research and researched community. Professional researchers assist the community with answering their questions, making this method particularly fitting for the types of work occurring in this dissertation. Further, the research “sets the agenda for proactive social action—understanding the impact of habits and boundaries and how they restrict community goals—and recognizing that habits are changeable through enlightened leadership” (Glassman, 2012, p. 274).

Cyclical and continuous in nature (Glassman, 2012), AR can be approached in many different ways. Stringer (2014) proposes an interacting spiral protocol called, “Look, Think, Act” (pp. 8-9). Kemmis and McTaggart (1999) propose a similar spiral with the following categories: plan, act, observe, and reflect (see Figure 5.2).
Design-Based Research

While this dissertation research is not DBR, I have included it in this dissertation to highlight how DBR has influenced my thinking about methodologies, as well as the parallels between action research and DBR. DBR has been defined as “extended (iterative), interventionist (innovative and design-based), and theory-oriented enterprises whose ‘theories’ do real work in practical educational contexts” (Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, & Schauble, 2003; as cited in Wong, Boticki, Sun, & Looi, 2011, p.1785). DBR permits the data to flexibly introduce the secondary questions and results that relate to real concerns (Dolmans, 2012). Wang and Hannafin’s (2005) define DBR as “a systematic but flexible methodology aimed to improve educational practices through iterative analysis, design, development, and implementation, based on collaboration among researchers and practitioners in real-world settings, and leading to contextually-sensitive design principles and theories” (p. 6).

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According to Wang and Hannafin, the five basic characteristics of design-based research are: 1) pragmatic, 2) grounded, 3) interactive, 4) integrative, and 5) contextualized. By pragmatic, DBR is intended to design interventions to address real-world issues with the goal of solving current real-world problems. DBR is rooted in real-world, emergent questions and theory. It involves collaboration between the researcher and participants, refines through emergent findings, and is recursive.

In the last decade, the lens of design based research has been used in numerous contexts, but is particularly common in educational technology (Yueh, Chen, Lin, & Sheen, 2014) and the Learning Sciences (Wong et al., 2011). DBR is becoming an increasingly popular method of researching games and game-like spaces. Games researchers, Sasha Barab and Kurt Squire (2004) helped situate and distinguish DBR as a research method for games. Annetta et al. (2013) posits “DBR is an appropriate methodology for infusing innovative technologies into standards-based curricula’ (p. 51). DBR has encompassed research on technology-driven and game-like activities, such as the work Wong et al. (2011) conducted on a mobile game, as well as Squire and Jan’s (2007) work with augmented reality curricula called Mad City Mysteries, Barab’s (Barab, 2003; Barab, MaKinster, & Scheckler, 2003) contributions to online learning communities, and Annetta et al.’s (2013) contribution with science-based video games. Also, in searching ProQuest for dissertations using design-based research, we also see an increase in its usage with games, technology and science education (Drexler, 2010; Folta, 2010), preservice teachers in mathematics education (Boyer, 2010; van Ingen, 2013), and instructional design (Siko, 2012).
AR and DBR

Dolmans (2012) outlines five important characteristics of DBR, which are useful in conceptualizing the connection between DBR and AR. Dolman outlines DBR as cyclical, applicable to real-world settings, and with the goal of testing, refining, and advancing practices. Both can be multi-modal and focus on the interactions, sharing, and expertise of multiple participant groups. For the characteristics listed above, I decided to include this information in this chapter.

Qualitative Research Strand

Holloway (1997) describes qualitative research as “a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live” (p.2). Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (1994) define qualitative research as a “multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalist approach to its subject matter” (p. 2). Further, Creswell (1998) states qualitative research “builds a complex, holistic pictures, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducted the study in natural setting” (p. 15).

For this study, I selected qualitative research as the strand that would best help me understand what was happening in my “classroom” while privileging the voice of the participants. In drawing back to my methodological underpinnings, Annetta et al. (2013) suggests qualitative methods are especially helpful during the exploration phase of a design-based research project when models, conjectures or hypothesis are formulated in the context of real-world problems and interventions” (p. 51).

Specifically, I drew inspiration from Ngunjiri’s (2007) qualitative work, which encouraged critical self-awareness and authentic engagement with the participants as co-
constructors of knowledge, as well as Seidel’s learning through looking (1998) and Geertz’s thick description (1973). Seidel advocates for lookers to see beyond what is “quickly and easily noticed” (p. 72). Seidel (1998) notes, “[t]ruly seeing student work is about becoming engaged and entering into the work—naming what we see, noting questions that come to mind, speculating on what the child was working on” (p. 71). Through looking (and carefully studying the child’s work), Seidel believes educators can have a more powerful impact on student learning. Similarly, Clifford Geertz’s (1973) work with thick description draws attention to complex situations, hearing multiple voices, and making interpretations. Geertz states that thick description goes beyond the surface level, or thin description, and makes the leap towards interpretation.

Positioned within the qualitative research strand, this study employed a specific type of qualitative work involving narrative inquiry for data collection and narrative analysis for the data analysis (see Figure 5.3). The data collection and analysis are detailed in the sections below. While this research was qualitative, there is certainly a place for quantitative POOT research, as illustrated by Kline and D’Angelo (2011). More information about other forms of POOT research are provided in Chapter 3.
Narrative inquiry

One of the difficulties this study faced was capturing the range of voices and making sense of the variety of data sources presented in POOT. For this reason, I turned to narrative ways of knowing (Rossiter, 1999). Rose and Granger (2013), as well as Kupperman (2002), describe narrative as a complex, holistic approach closely aligned with storytelling. Both narrative and storytelling are viewed as a basic human experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). "Humans are storytelling organisms” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). However, it is important to delineate that narrative research does not simply retell an account, but rather it deepens our understanding of the meaningful context surrounding the story (Richardson, 1998) and the storytellers involved (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Narrative inquiry is defined as a method for creating narrative structures which elucidate events, plot, and relationships (Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative inquiry values and encourages the creation of timelines, depicting the unfolding events as part of the analysis. It has been used by a wide range of disciplines, including the social sciences (Bruner, 2002), sociology (Glaser &
Strauss, 1994), history (Holt, 1995), educational studies (Behar, 1996; Kupperman, 2002; Kupperman, J., & Weisserman, G., 2000; Rodman, 2007), action research (Caine, 2010), adult education (Gatua, 2014), healthcare (Haydon & Riet, 2014; van der Riet, P., Dedkhard, S., & Srithong, K., 2012), and on a meta-level with qualitative research (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Granger, 2011; Richardson, 2001; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

I turn to Jeff Kupperman’s dissertation (2002), which is the closest parallel in terms of research settings, having done his research on the Arab Israel Conflict simulation hosted by UM’s ICS group. Kupperman employs case histories, as a subset of narrative research. Case studies and case histories have many similarities, including the investigation into a context-bound phenomenon using multiple sources (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998). However, Glaser and Strauss’ work delineates between case histories and case studies. Glaser and Strauss (1994, p. 233) point to the focus of a case history as the creation of the full story for “its own sake,” as opposed to providing “evidence for a particular theory” (Kupperman, 2002, p. 45; Yin, 2009).

The particulars of narrative inquiry lent themselves nicely to this study because narrative inquiries and case histories focus of the “critical events” that have taken place (Webster & Mertova, 2007, pp. 75-85). Critical events are defined as unplanned, impactful, and intensely personal events (Webster and Mertova, 2007, pp. 75-85). Each of the four cases selected in this dissertation represent critical events identified by participants through multiple listenings of interview transcripts. One example of this was when the student who portrayed Jesus was removed from his iteration of program (see Chapter 9). This was a critical event mentioned by a number of participants in earlier iterations of this research.
Narrative inquiry is not without critique (Atkinson, 1997; Silverman, 1997). It is often described in qualitative literature as having a structural focus on the individual (Creswell, 2007), something researchers have warned about as overly focused on the individual (Pitt, 2003; Rose & Granger, 2013). In response to these critiques, Goodson (2006) and Miller (1992) assert narrative inquiry researchers must attend to the importance of the social construction of the narrative as a precaution, while others convincingly arguing that there is already an inherent interdependence of self and social in the narrative method (Elliott, 2005; Kupperman, 2002; Richardson, 2001). Practically speaking, Miller (1992) suggests the interdependence lies in the shift from a unitary story, therefore, attending to the sociocultural context by employing a polyvocal collection of stories (Coffey, Holbrook, & Atkinson, 1996; Hatch, 2002; Wiles, Rosenberg, & Kearns, 2005). While this research did take a personal approach aimed at understanding individual experiences, it also drew from a large sample size across different settings and weaved them together by way of creating a polyvocal voice for the case histories. Further, this research adopted Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis’s (1997) notion that “in the particulars lies the general” (p. 189). I believed that stories of these individuals were worthy of in-depth study and could, indeed, inform our thinking about teaching and learning in POOT. After all, these narratives expressed the “emotions, thoughts, and interpretations” of the narrator (Chase, 2005, p. 656).

In addition to multiple voices, this study employed multiple ways of listening and recognized the voices even when they did not tell the same story. This was achieved by collecting data from multiple sources and including layered text (Richardson, 2001). Layered text, also referred to as laminated discourses (Goffman, 1981, Kupperman, 2002, Prior, 1998), including the following layers: game, surrounding, and meta discourses (see Figure 5.4). Game
discourse is described as discourse related to the POOT project while in-character. Surrounding discourse references strategy talk, talk that takes pace as our in real-life self, emails or break in their character’s voice during POOT participation. Meta discourse is about the educational worth of POOT or POOT related activities/events, Green Room, and interviews. These were also layered with support documents like the syllabi, Teacher’s Guide, or Student’s Guide.

Figure 5.4 Layers text for analysis.

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**Research Design**

Below, I outlined the two phases of my research based on an iterative design. These phases proceed in accordance with a corresponding logic models (see Figure 5.5 and Figure 5.6), beginning with the research idea, which moved to the research design, data collection, and data analysis. The research idea, design, as well as data collection and analysis were consistent with a qualitative research paradigm, specifically narrative research.
Phase One

**Formation of research idea.** Marshall and Rossman (2006) write in Designing Qualitative Research about how qualitative research is “grounded in the lived experiences of people” (p. 2). For this research, I determined the lived experiences I wanted to know more about encompassed the educational activity surrounding POOT. With this scope, my driving topic was then determined to be the emerging questions participants had after participating in POOT. From here, my topic was translated into research questions. Next, a preliminary literature review on history education, game-like learning, and role play was conducted to better understand the landscape of educational activities like POOT and the research surrounding them.

**Solidifying the Research Design.** Because my initial research question stemmed from the emergent questions participants had about participation in POOT, I selected a methodology that would match this query: practitioner inquiry. After selecting my methodology, I outlined my researcher stance (found above) and how I came to this work (see preface). At this point, I identified the contributing voices for phase one, which would later serve as participants in this study for the case histories. A detailed description of my sample is provided in subsequent sections (see participants below). Separate interview guides were constructed for each participant group (see qualitative interviews below). Additional data sources were identified and a comprehensive textual analysis chart was constructed. A data archival method was established using this textual analysis chart. The practicality of the research and overall design was reviewed by my committee. Upon agreement from my committee, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received (see entrée and validity below). An interpretative community was established of 3 critical readers. Critical readers did not have access to any identifiable information and met with the researcher separately.
**Data collection.** At this point, participants were recruited using recruitment scripts sent via email to the respective course instructors. NVivo, a data management software, was established as the mode of data storage. Despite being determined non-human subjects research, informed consent for interviews were obtained by participants partaking in the interview. Interviews were conducted. Details regarding these interviews is outlined later in this chapter. On-site and online observations were completed. Audio and written notes were taken during the observation. Relevant archival data was retrieved based on what was disclosed during the interviews. Interview, observational, and archived data was triangulated.

**Data analysis.** Audio and handwritten data from the educator interviews was converted to a digital format and organized in NVivo. The first phase of interviews were coded using grounded theory, a technique aimed at drawing out emergent codes and themes from the data. A detailed description of this process is provided in the data analysis section below. Audio recordings were annotated using NVivo. Targeted sections of interviews were transcribed based on relevancy to the research questions. Patterns in the data were identified. At this point, material was summarized and presented to my committee for consultation. Based on the identified patterns, key moments were selected.

**Future research.** Prior research was reflected on. This was an iterative design, which marked the beginning of Phase 2 outlined below. Phase 1 is not reported in this dissertation in extensive detail, in order to allow the focus of this dissertation to delve into an in-depth look at role playing with the four case histories selected. In the future, the research growing out of phase 1 will be disseminated in the form of journal articles.
Figure 5.5 Logical Model Phase 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Idea</th>
<th>Research Design</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
<th>Future Directions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Topic selected as POOT, with an emphasis on emerging questions educators have after participating in POOT</td>
<td>• Methodology of practitioner inquiry selected</td>
<td>• Participants recruited</td>
<td>• Educatore data converted to digital and organized in Nvivo</td>
<td>• See phase 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Topic translated to research question (see initial research question)</td>
<td>• Contributing voices identified</td>
<td>• Nuovo used for data storage</td>
<td>• Interview consent for interviews obtained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Preliminary literature review on history education and game-like learning conducted</td>
<td>• Interview guides constructed</td>
<td>• Informed consent for interviews obtained</td>
<td>• Interviews conducted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Topic reviewed by committee</td>
<td>• Additional data sources identified</td>
<td>• On-site observations completed</td>
<td>• Data archival method established using textual analysis chart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase Two

**Research idea.** During phase 2, I narrowed the topic of this dissertation to character-playing as a way to develop historical thinking in *POOT*. This was narrowed based on the emergent questions found in phase one. Participants expressed a sincere puzzlement around the character-playing mechanic in *POOT*. Based on these puzzlements, new research questions were generated. The research questions were reviewed and approved by the committee. Upon approval, a secondary literature review was conducted on roleplaying to extend my understanding of character-playing.
**Research design.** The research design was reviewed to incorporate phase 1, which included generating four case histories to focus on based on key moments that were identified (see Chapters 6-9). Based on these key moments, the sample determined. The contributing voices for these key moments were identified, such as key informants like Dumbledore, Diego Rivera, Langston Hughes, and Jesus. Similar and related characters were also referenced in order to tell a full story in accordance with the case histories technique.

**Data collection.** Participants were selected and recruited. NVivo was used for data storage. Informed consent was obtained when applicable. Interviews were conducted. On-site observations were completed. Archival data was retrieved based on the sample. Interview, observational, and archived data was triangulated.

**Data analysis.** Participant data was digitized and organized in NVivo. All of the audio interviews were coded in NVivo. The following participant interviewees (n=4) were identified for analysis using McCormick’s Lenses based on their relevancy to the research questions (see Table 5.1).
Table 5.1 Interviewees identified for analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases History One</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Dumbledore (Students from Mrs. Myers’s\textsuperscript{30} class)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case History Two</td>
<td>Interviewees</td>
<td>Diego Rivera (Charlie Chaplin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case History Three</td>
<td>Interviewees</td>
<td>Langston Hughes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case History Four</td>
<td>Interviewees</td>
<td>Jesus (John Knox) (Osama Bin Laden) (Yosa Buson)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four separate listening of audio interviews was completed using McCormack’s Lenses (2000a, 2000b). Transcribe targeted was completed on relevant sections in the interviews. Observational and archived data was reviewed, including other relevant interviews. Patterns in the data were identified. Interpretive community was consulted to determine if they identified similar patterns. Similar patterns were identified. Data was read for sense of whole. A draft summary was written and sent to the members of the interpretive community. Results were interpreted and the initial questions raised by educators were revisited.

**Dissemination process.** Upon completion of this dissertation, the following occurred: a defense, job talk, conference presentations, and manuscripts for publication.

**Future directions.** Future directions are discussed in conclusions section of this dissertation (see Chapter 10).

\textsuperscript{30} Pseudonyms have been used in place of real names.
**Participants**

**Participant selection.** In the beginning, fifty-two individuals (N=52) were selected to participated in this study using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling enables the researcher to select participants based on the importance they have to the information sought and the inability to obtain through other sources (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2002). With purposeful sampling, participants were drawn from diverse institutions, backgrounds, experience, and level of education. Inclusion criteria for all participants was involvement in one of the five iterations of *POOT* which took place between the Fall 2010-Fall 2012 (Fall 2010, Spring 2011, Fall 2011, Spring 2012, and Fall 2012).
Participant selection was divided into two tiers. The first tier was comprised of educators, either as a project director, K-12 teacher, or university mentors, as well as students. The different categories of participants allowed for the research to follow the emergent questions, in addition to providing a holistic examination of participant experience in POOT. For the K-12 students, invitations to participate were sent via their respective teacher. Notices were sent home to their parents regarding the study.

As the research progressed, the participant’s narrative broadened the perspective of this study and the subsequent phases. Merriam (1998) suggests, “Once the general problem has been identified [the emergent questions the educators raised] the task becomes to select the unit of analysis, the sample” (p. 60). Therefore, the second tier was a winnowed group of participants from the larger sample in tier one based on their relation to the emerging questions raised by tier one participants.

For confidentiality purposes, each participant was assigned researcher-given pseudonyms. The gender of the participant was changed in cases required to protect the participant’s identity. Original character names were throughout the document when appropriate, with the exception of when the identity might be disclosed. One participant specifically requested his/her identity be strictly confidential. Individual descriptions of participants were not provided in order to avoid a breach in identity.

The tier one participant pool included a total of 52 participants. Participants are listed in alphabetical order in the tables below (see Table 5.2 and Table 5.3), separated by educator and K-12 student status. There were 25 educators (N=25) who participated, all with ties to the field of education or enrolled in a course in a School of Education. Twenty-seven K-12 students
(N=27) from five different schools. Seventeen students were middle school students. Four students was enrolled in high school. Two students agreed to participate but were unable to schedule a phone or Skype interview. Participants received interview questions ahead of time based on request.

Table 5.2 Educator Participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Communication Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Alli</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Andrew</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Angela</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Claire</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Connor</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Deidra</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Serena</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Flaminia</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Gaven</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Jenny</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Jesse</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Jonas</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Julie</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Katie</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Pamela</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Randy</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Roger</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Rosa Lynn</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Fanny</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Samy</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Sue</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Tammy</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Tarun</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Victor</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Wesley</td>
<td>Skype</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.3 Student participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Communication Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Beatrix Potter</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Chaim Weizmann</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Charlie Chaplin</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Diego Rivera</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Dumbledore</td>
<td>Email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Eco-1 Scott</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Eco-2 Anne</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Eco-3</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Eco-4</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Eco-5</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Eco-6</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Gustav Schroeder</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Jesus</td>
<td>Email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. John Knox</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Judah</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Maimonides</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Marie Mayflower</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Michael Collins</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Nini</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Osama</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Poet</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Rap artist</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Roald Dahl</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Thich Nhat Hanh</td>
<td>In person, onsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Werner van Braun</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Yodo Dono</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Yosa Buson</td>
<td>Phone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional demographic information was not collected. None of the interview questions contained sensitive personal information. Additional pseudonyms were assigned to institutions, personnel, and characters in order to prevent the ability to trace the characters back to the participants themselves.

Entrée. Permission from the Institutional Review Board for the University of Cincinnati was obtained as part of a larger study of POOT. Prior to conducting this specific study, additional permission from the IRB was sought. This study was deemed non-human subjects (see
Appendix 5.1). Regardless, individual consent for interviews was obtained (see Appendix 5.2). If the participant was under the age of 18, a recruitment letters to parents was included (see Appendix 5.3). The consent forms provided participants with the following information: (1) their right to decline participation at any time, (2) explanation that no known risks or discomforts would arise from participation, and (3) contact information should questions arise. Participants were informed participation in this study would in no way effect their involvement in the POOT program. If enrolled in POOT for academic purposes, they were informed that their participation would not have any effect on grades.

Entrée was gained via formal requests to the participants via email to the lead instructor of the respective course. Private meetings were scheduled with participants. Participants were informed participation was voluntary and had the right to decline participation at any time. Only consenting participants were included in the recorded audio interview process; however archived data that was not linked to identifying information was used under the permission of the IRB.

**Site selection.** POOT was selected as the instructional site for this study. POOT was selected for its rich ability to contribute to the field of education’s understanding of technology mediated, character-playing activities aimed at developing historical thinking skills. A fuller description of POOT was outlined in Chapters 3 and 4.

**Data Collection**

**Data**

The primary data source for this study was interviews; however, additional information outlined in the textual analysis chart was collected (see Figure 5.7). The purpose for this additional information was to triangulate the data in the interviews. A chart outlining the data,
along with the role of the researcher and the joint role of the researcher and participant is provided in the Appendix (see Appendix 5.4).

**Qualitative Interviews**

An interview was conducted for each of the 52 participants. Most interviews were 60-minutes in length for a single subject; however interview time varied among participants based on their availability. Interviews were scheduled and confirmed by email with the respective course instructor. Times were selected based on the availability of the participant and were conducted during non-academic time as best as possible. Interviews took place over a three year period between 2011-2014 and occurred in person, on the phone, and via Skype. The mode of interview was selected based on the request of the participant and proximity to the researcher.

Prior to beginning the interview, a brief overview of the study was provided, followed by an explanation of IRB protocols. Time was allotted for IRB related questions. Each participant kept a signed copy of the consent form for their records. Each interview concluded with an opportunity for clarification and questions. Participants were advised on how to contact the researcher should the need arise. In accordance with Shank’s (2006) recommendation, reflective notes were written at the conclusion of each interview, but were not used for this study.

Four separate interview guides were created for the overarching research project on *POOT*, including the following: K-12 student interview guide (see Appendix 5.5), university student/mentor interview guide (see Appendix 5.6), K-12 classroom teacher interview guide (see Appendix 5.7), and project director interview guide (see Appendix 5.8). The interview guides were designed to include semi-structured questioning to enhance flexibility in the participant’s
answers (Merriam, 1998). To avoid biasing answers, participants were not provided specific information about the specifics of this study in relation to character-play.

The K-12 student interview guide contained fourteen open-ended, semi-structured questions about their POOT participation. This interview guide was generated by the researcher following the fall 2011 iteration of POOT based on firsthand experience and emerging questions specifically targeted at eliciting the narratives of K-12 students. Interviews ranged from 20-60 minutes, depending on the availability of the student. Special attention was paid to not interfere with academic delivery times. Most interviews were conducted individually; however three interviews were conducted as a group at the request of the K-12 teacher and students. Two K-12 teachers opted to be in the same room at the time of the interviews with their students, but were not involved in the interview.

The mentor interview guide contained ten open-ended, semi-structured questions about their POOT participation. While these questions similarly focused on general POOT participation, they were also directed towards the experience of mentoring. This interview guide was created in 2010 by the research alongside a group of action researchers in order to follow emerging questions from firsthand experience (Killham et al., 2014). Interviews typically lasted 60-minutes.

The teacher interview guide contained six open-ended, semi-structured questions about their POOT participation. These questions centered on their participation as a teacher and as a learner. The teacher interview guide was constructed in 2009, as part of a larger study on POOT/JCAT. Interviews ranged from 30-60 minutes, depending on the availability of the teacher.
The project director interview guide contained 10 open-ended, semi-structured questions about their POOT participation, and most specifically their involvement in the POOT project. One 60-minute joint interview with two project directors took place. One project director elected to continue talking for an additional 45-minutes.

These interviews were digitally audio recorded with a handheld device. Audio files were then transferred to the computer using a password protected program to safeguard their information. Files were then stored in NVivo.

**Observational and Archived Data**

A textual analysis chart was created to outline a detailed list of all possible data sources. When reviewing key informants and key moments, the textual analysis was used to ensure a comprehensive picture of what was taking place. Game discourse was broken down into two sections: online game discourse and offline game discourse. For online game discourse, all postings on the site relate to the key informants and key moments were considered. This included private messages, public postings, and the green room. Offline posts included email exchanges, blackboard posts, or related network posts. All identifiers were removed and replaced with a pseudonyms. Original identifiers were not kept on file. Data also included curricular documentation, such as syllabi, POOT user guides, letters to and from participants, and curricula.

Observational data included copious field notes from site visits and online observation.
Data Analysis

Overview

I chose to use McCormack’s Lenses (2000a, 2000b) to decipher the data collected in this study. McCormack’s Lenses was chosen as the descriptive framework because of its emphasis on multiple listenings and ability to represent the voices of those often not heard. Seidel (1998), Richardson (1998; 2001; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), and Gilligan (2003) all advocate for multiple listenings in the analysis.

McCormack’s Lenses (2000a, 2000b) was also chosen because of its emphasis on the use of language. Unlike Riessman (2002), who shies away from an analysis of language, I wanted language to be a topic of investigation and was intrigued by the lenses identified by McCormack. I wanted to be able to hear the questions, confusions, and challenges participants faced and I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meta Discourse</th>
<th>Surrounding Discourse</th>
<th>Game Discourse</th>
<th>Support Documents</th>
<th>Observational Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Interview (primary)</td>
<td>• Green room</td>
<td>• Private messages</td>
<td>• POOT Teacher’s Guide</td>
<td>• Field notes from K-12 school visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Green room</td>
<td>• Blackboard posts</td>
<td>• Résumé</td>
<td>• POOT Student’s Guide</td>
<td>• Field notes from university visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Blackboard posts</td>
<td>• Email exchanges</td>
<td>• Speeches</td>
<td>• Curricula</td>
<td>• Field notes from online observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Email exchanges</td>
<td>• Ning.com</td>
<td>• Comments</td>
<td>• Letters about the project</td>
<td>• Field notes from mentor seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ning.com</td>
<td>• Mentor log</td>
<td>• Evidence in courtroom</td>
<td>to/from facilitators r teachers</td>
<td>• Interview notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mentor log</td>
<td>• Wikispace</td>
<td>• Wall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wikispace</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.7 Textual Analysis Chart.
needed a methodology that would allow of these voices to be heard. Each of the four lenses revealed different dimensions of the narrator’s story (Dibley, 2011). The first lens, narrative processes, focused on structure and patterns of words, as well as the plot. The second lens, language, allowed me to attend to the choice of words the narrator selected in the retelling of their story and the context in which the story was told, such as the field, tenor, and mode. The third lens focused on context, with special attention to cultural and situational context. The final lens, moments, allowed me to locate the points where the participant realized something during the interview through the retelling of the story.

Data Analysis Logic Model

I analyzed the data in accordance with the data analysis logic model (see Figure 5.6 above), which consists of the following steps: (1) data management, (2) reading and memoing, (3) describing, (4) classifying, (5) interpreting, and (6) representing and visualizing.

Data management. Data management was outlined above, including how the data was digitized, imported into NVivo, and coded in accordance with textual analysis chart using the “nodes” feature (see Figure 5.7 above). File folders were created for the four McCormack Lenses/readings (2000a, 2000b) for cases 1-4 (see Chapter 6-9 for details).

Reading and memoing. The first phase of interviews during the preliminary work for this study were coded using grounded theory, a technique that codes for emerging themes. For the second phase, I coded in accordance with the selected descriptive framework. Interview data was reviewed with the four lenses: language, narrative processes, context, and moments/epiphanies. Using these four readings, initial codes were formed using NVivo nodes. These were coded in NVivo. A master code sheet was compiled. Data was triangulate with
additional data. For discourse related data, the laminated discourse approach was implemented, where the meta discourse from the interviews was strengthened with non-interview data in the meta discourse category, as well as surrounding, game discourse, support, and observational data. To do this, I took references from the interview data identified in the coding and scoured the data within the textual analysis chart for all related material.

Figure 5.8 Meta discourse used to strengthen surrounding discourse and game discourse.

Describing. After all the data was collected, the overall structure, unfolding events, key moments, and participants were described.

Classifying. Data was reread and compiled into an unfolding events summary. Quotes were taken as they were said or written. A polyvocal timeline was created. Patterns were reviewed.

Interpreting and representation. Interpretation summaries were reviewed with the interpretive community. Remaining chapters of the dissertation were compiled. This document
was then reviewed for APA adherence. The final draft was presented to the committee and revisions were made where necessary.

**Research Rigor**

This study addressed validity in three categorical ways: descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity. These categories are based on Joseph Maxwell’s (1992) foundational article *Understanding and Validity in Qualitative Research*.

**Descriptive Validity**

Descriptive validity is primarily concerned with accuracy of the account. To address accuracy, this study employed careful collection techniques, trails of evidence, multiple voices, and an interpretive community (Riessman, 2008; Seidman, 2002). Careful collection techniques were used to ensure what was said was captured correctly, including a high quality audio recording, reviewing of the audio and written transcripts, and attending to the stresses and intonations. Once the data was prepared, members of the interpretive community read the material to cross-check to see if they shared a similar understanding of the data with the researcher. Transparency was both part of the careful collection method and building a trail of evidence. In the chapter above, the methods are described in great detail. In addition, this study drew from multiple interviews, sites and types of data by way of promoting accuracy. This helped to generate layered text (Richardson, 2001) and laminated discourse (Goffman, 1981, Kupperman, 2002, Prior, 1998). The multiple ways of listening outlined in McCormack’s Lenses (2000a, 2000b) helped recognized the voices even when they did not tell the same story and did not speak positively about the *POOT* experience. After all, I was attending to their story not mine. Drawing from multiple dimensions was part of the triangulation process (Merriam, 2002;
Shank, 2006). Triangulation was included to mediate what is commonly thought of as weaknesses in qualitative research (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

**Interpretive Validity**

With interpretive validity, the emphasis is on representing the participant’s viewpoint rather than that of the researcher. The techniques embedded within narrative analysis address this threat to validity by represent the actual words of the participant as a trail of evidence. The semi-structured aspect of the interview allowed the participant to answer in a way they felt fitting, and subsequent questions were based on the participant’s response to the open-ended questions. Further, careful attention to research ethics was adhered. I was careful to create an environment free of manipulation and coercion. I remained aware of the dynamic in the interview, striving for one of respect. I also attended to the power of the recorder and feeling of being recorded. Ethical handling of the data was a priority, and great care went into protecting the identity of individuals. Permission from the IRB was sought.

**Theoretical Validity**

With theoretical validity, it is important not to use the data to confirm your initial findings. Rather, it is important to have an iterative design. This study addressed this by conducting the research in two phases. During the second phase, the hypothesis and questions were revisited to reflect the emergent findings from phase one.

**Limitations**

A limitation of this study is that demographic information was not collected. This is a limitation for two reasons. One, NVivo is a powerful tool which can help to determine relationships with nodes and demographic information. Without demographic information, this
analysis could not be performed. Second, member checking was not possible. We know from Patton’s (2002) work, as well as many other qualitative researchers, that having participants review transcripts and interpretations of findings is a useful way to promote accuracy. In future studies, I would design a more longitudinal study related to POOT where demographic information can be collected and participants can be contacted over a four-year period. Being able to contact participants over the course of 4 years, would also help determine the impact of the activity over time.
Chapter 6
Case History One: Albus Dumbledore

This chapter reports on one set of critical events surrounding the portrayal of a fictional character from Hogwarts: Professor Albus Dumbledore.

Welcome to the POOT Court of All Time

Called to order, the POOT Court of All Time discussed the question: Who is responsible for the wrongdoings of others? Specifically, the court case referenced in this chapter raised questions over whether the relatives of those who perished on the M.S. St. Louis, a ship with 937 Jewish passengers that sought safe harbor from Nazi Germany in the 1940s. The ship sailed from Germany to Cuba, and then on to the United States. Passengers were ultimately denied entry and, with great sadness, sailed back to Nazi Germany where many of the passengers perished in the Holocaust. The granddaughter of two of the passengers, Rose Hermann, filed a claim with the POOT Court of All Time. Rose Hermann sought reparations as recompense for the decision to deny safe harbor to the passengers, as seen in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 Description of hearing on reparations.
People from all walks of life—from different time periods and places throughout human history—gathered to decide on matters of responsibility related to the M.S. St. Louis. Over 150 guests of the Court of All Time gathered online. Guests included Mahatma Gandhi, Rosa Parks, Queen Isabella, Mae Jemison, and even Albus Dumbledore, the legendary wizard from J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* books. Many of the esteemed figures on the guest list had a clear reason for being there—Mahatma Gandhi for his nonviolence principles, Queen Isabella who, herself, had expelled the Jews from Spain in the 1490s. Imagine a heated discussion between Queen Isabella and Mahatma Gandhi, as the Queen challenged Gandhi’s way of life, and ultimately his opinion on the trial. Assignment of these two historical world leaders was justifiable, and yet the assignment the fictional wizard Albus Dumbledore was confusing. Other characters reacted to the assignment of Albus Dumbledore with excitement and befuddlement. The POOT project directors and the POOT User’s Guide do not articulate a clear stance for or against fictional characters.

Shortly after the Headmaster of Hogwarts’s arrival in POOT, a fellow member of the court posted on Dumbledore’s public wall: “*Dear Mr. Dumbledore, Not to be rude, but what is a wand wielding spell casting fictional wizard doing on such a prestigious court?*” In accordance with case histories methodologies, this critical event that motivated a more in-depth investigation into the question explored in this chapter: “What is Dumbledore doing in POOT?”

**Topic Selection Rational**

**Jackson Academy Interview One**

Six months after their program concluded, two cheerful and talkative Jackson Academy students shared their *POOT* experience. A group interview enable more students to be heard in a shorter period of time without disrupting instructional time. Taking K-12 students away from
their regularly scheduled class time to talk about POOT was discouraged, even though, POOT was about an educational activity they participated in as part of their social studies class31.

My conversation with Mrs. Myers’s students resonated, as I sifted through the interviews conducted for this research. Mrs. Myers’s students’ statements contained tenacity and frankness, although the veracity of their statements about fairness remains in question. Were they middle school students who did not get their way and therefore complained about fairness?

We sat at a short, round table in the library across the hall from Mrs. Myers’s classroom. I explained the consent form and the structure of the interview. Space was made for the K-12 students to feel comfortable expressing critique (J: It is okay to tell me about the things you did not like. You won’t hurt my feelings.). Todd, the young boy playing the astronaut Mae Jemison interrupted me. Todd asked, “And, can this also be free speech in a way?” Reassurance was provided. After which, the students proceeded without hesitation to tell me what they thought the project directors should do to make POOT better.

We progressed to the topic of character selection when Todd said he would scroll through the people on the guest list to see which characters were in POOT. He noted the amount of people on the list, and said, “I was like, why didn’t we have the option of them.” By “we,” Todd meant his classmates in Mrs. Myers’s classroom, who were not permitted to select any character they perceived as desirable. His classmate Adriana chimed in, nodding her head and vocalizing support with loud “uh-huh’s.” The boy continued, “I was so jealous. Some people were on there like Walt Disney, J.K. Rowling, and there was Charlie Chaplin.” He said those were the “cool” characters. Todd and Adriana were intently focused on the process of character selection.

31 Mrs. Myers taught middle school social studies and language arts.
Even though Todd distinguished the “cool characters” from the “not-so-cool-characters,” he did not seem disappointed in his character, Mae Jemison. Todd’s online activity was high in comparison to his peers (total number of posts by Mae Jemison = 24), and seemed to have a command of his character based on an overview of his character’s biographical résumé and the quality of his online activity.

Todd continued with a piece of information that he regarded as important. In referencing the characters he called cool, Todd expressed: “[a] lot of them I saw, some didn’t have posts.”

His classmate again chimed in with an emphatic “yes,” also expressing her disappointment with the lack of interactions and effort from some of the other characters. “It wasn’t really fair,” he declared and she repeated almost word for word, “that we got to see all of these characters that I totally would have wanted to be, and a lot of them weren’t even using [their characters]. They didn’t even have a résumé, a picture, or anything.” Todd expressed confused about low participation. He understood POOT was administered in conjunction with participating K-12 classroom teachers and their classrooms, and for the majority of participants in POOT, the quality and quantity of their participation was tied to a performance assessment (e.g., grade, essay, or test). With little pause, he added, “I changed my profile picture twice.” Todd was proud of his involvement.

His classmate Adriana, who had played Harriet Tubman, jumped in. She expressed dismay in the way characters were being portrayed. “When you see something you wanted, and not being done right, you’re kinda like, well, I could have done that better,” she explained. She didn’t stop there, though. Adriana reiterated, “You’re kind of mad when it’s not done to its full

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32 Participation requirements are established by the individual K-12 classroom teacher. No minimum number of posts is established by the project directors. Project directors do, however, request K-12 students log on to the site twice per week.
potential.” This comment about nonparticipation and nonresponse, really stuck with me, having heard many of my university mentors lament about the fact that their mentees (the K-12 students) were not writing them back.

Adriana confessed having really wanted to play the actress Marilyn Monroe33. “I love her personality,” she said emphatically, and proceeded to express puzzlement around why she was not allowed to play her. Adriana had asked Mrs. Myers’s but her entire class was instructed to select characters from a textbook they were reading in class. Marilyn Monroe was not a person in required reading. While Mrs. Myers’s elected to limit character choices to the book she was using in class, the other six teachers used their own discretion for selecting characters that would be most supportive of their classes’ goals. This research did not explore the methods other teachers used to select characters.

**Jackson Academy Interview Two**

Todd and Adriana were not the only students to express their concern with character assignments and the portrayal of those characters. Immediately following my interview with Todd and Adriana, I was joined in the library by the students portraying Gabe and Ellen. Gabe portrayed Sitting Bull while Ellen portrayed Maya Lin. These two students were equally unhappy about character selection. They, too, expressed dismay with characters that were not putting effort into posts; however, Gabe and Ellen were most concerned with the fact that some students in *POOT* were given the option to portray fictional characters. “You could basically

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33 While reading this chapter, two members of my interpretive community who have also participated in *POOT* expressed hesitation around participants being assigned actresses or celebrities to portray, but admitted that “in the right hands” that type of character can offer something of value to the POOT community.
make it all up,” they explained. “You could be yourself the whole time and it wasn’t a challenge,” they added.

Albus Dumbledore was at the heart of Gabe and Ellen’s complaints. Concerned, Gabe said, “it never really says anything in the Harry Potter books what [Dumbledore’s] views are.” Gabe’s feelings were echoed by another user on the POOT website. The user commented, “Greetings fictional character, your life has been nothing but a fantasy” (December 07, 2011). As the interview continued, the students still talk about Dumbledore. Their primary concern was with the accurate portrayal of characters. “There should be something that makes people act like their characters,” they emphasized. Gabe shared a story about his friend who did not get the character he wanted (“I know someone who wanted [character name]”), and yet the person who was assigned the character did an insufficient job participating in POOT (“[he] didn’t have anything up… never posted anything”).

Then, the conversation turned when Gabe said, “The only thing that seemed weird is that the fictional characters sounded most like they did in the books they were in, like Albus Dumbledore, the guy that was acting him was really good, but I don’t think he should be allowed to be Albus Dumbledore.” Ellen jumped in, “Yeah, if [Dumbledore] was someone else, he would have been really good.”

Wonderment remained; why not Dumbledore? Albus Dumbledore was troubled by his past, from a family torn apart by violence, had complex views, was an admired leader, he was a gay man, and a wizard who used to have the goal of making Muggles subservient to non-Muggles, but had a change of heart as he grew older. I asked Gabe and Ellen this same question (J: But, why not Dumbledore? I am curious.). The answer the students gave was based on Dumbledore being fictional (“He never really, well, he never really actually did something in the
real world”). Gabe and Ellen elaborated that it was too easy to be yourself in real life and not your character. They expressed, “You can’t base anything off of it, and it could really be your own opinion.” They were also concerned that Dumbledore was a character too disconnected to the court case (“he doesn’t have anything to say”).

I asked if there was a relevant case in which Dumbledore would be able to make a difference, but they rooted their dissent once again in him being fictional (“a fictional person, you can just write it like they want to write it”). They expressed concern that it wouldn’t be fair because of the amount of work required of non-fictional characters. They proceeded to tell me how many trips to the library they made and how many books they read about their character. Then, Ellen added, “[Dumbledore] just has to read the 7th book…”

I concluded the interviews at Jackson Academy with mixed feelings. Was I to believe what these young people were saying at face value? I questioned how much of their concern revolved around “unfair” character choices. On the other hand, I was proud of the level of seriousness and the amount of rigor these students put into the portrayal of their characters; Mrs. Myers’s students conducted extensive research for the development of their characters. These students sounded like adults trapped in the bodies of eleven-year olds. I had spent a large majority of my time up, until this moment, listening to adults talk to each other about concerns that their middle school mentees did not care enough (since they often did not reply to the mentor’s messages), and the K-12 students express similar concerns about the importance of taking POOT seriously. I was also disappointed, because I saw great potential in Albus Dumbledore as a character. I saw many connection points between Dumbledore’s life and the trial under investigation, so I was also curious as well.
Meet Albus Dumbledore

The afternoon of the October 26, 2011, a tall man dressed in a cloak stood before a group of people in the hallway of the Palace. His hair was gray and long, and almost equaled by his beard. A golden hat sat upon his head, and a pair of spectacles were perched on the end of his nose (see Figure 6.2)

Figure 6.2 Image of Albus Dumbledore.

“Good day. My name is Albus Dumbledore,” he greeted the group. “I served as headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.” He proceeded to tell the group more about his life, including his love for licorice snaps, the location where he grew up, and a tiny bit about his childhood. He admitted to being at fault for the rise in power of an evil wizard, Lord Voldemort (see Figure 6.3).

\[\text{Image retrieved from Dumbledore’s profile on } \textit{POOT} \text{ on August 31, 2014.}\]
Dumbledore’s presence caught the attention of the other guests. Fran Drescher stepped over to introduce herself. Fran is the actress from the television show, The Nanny. The Nanny is a show “my ex-husband and I co-wrote and produced,” she tells Dumbledore in a nasally New York accent. “Now we co-run a new show called Happily Divorced, which is based on our real life experience. We had marriage problems, so we got divorced, and then two years later he came out as gay” (POOT site, October 26, 2011). Dumbledore nodded politely at Fran, who he regarded as a Muggle or an ordinary person.

“Hey! I’ve heard of you!” Fran blurted out. “You’re the gay professor! Let me tell you . . . my ex-husband is gay, it’s nothing to be ashamed of! You’re great! (POOT site, October 26,
Vanessa Redgrave, an English actress and political activist, tried to hush Fran saying, “WOW, you are extremely rude and inappropriate” (*POOT* site October 26, 2011).

Dumbledore was not offended and replied, “Hi! I’ve heard of you, too! I like to watch American muggle TV . . . well, I did while I was alive . . . and I’m not ashamed of being gay” (*POOT* site, October 26, 2011).

The three of them were interrupted by the assertiveness of King Ferdinand, “Hola mi amigo,” he said as he looked at Dumbledore in the eyes, as Dumbledore stood tall. “My name is Ferdinand, formally known as King Ferdinand of Aragon, and I was born in Sos del Ray Catolico Aragon. I am the son of John II of Aragon and Juana Enriques, and in 1469, I married Infanta Isabel, or Queen Isabella” he said as he looked upon all three of them, Dumbledore, Fran, and Vanessa. He returned his gaze to the wizard and said in a deeming voice, “It is very nice to finally meet you-all this time I thought you were fictional” (October 26, 2011). Dumbledore, chuckled a bit, “you mean you knew about me even though I lived like 400 years after you?! I must be really famous! . . . ahem, your highness . . .” (*POOT* site, October 26, 2011).

The King walked away, and the conversation dispersed. The silence was broken when a woman approached Dumbledore and said, “I really want to see some of your spells and magic. May I?? (October 26, 2011). Another man quickly followed, saying, “Hello Albus, I think that you are extraordinary, and one of a kind.” The man followed his greeting with a request to write about him in the paper. Dumbledore politely declined the request for a magic show and a cover story. Instead, he retreated to his chambers for the evening.

Over lunch, Dumbledore was approached by Gerda Weissman Klein, a Polish-born human rights activist. “Hello,” she said. “I am very pleased to meet you.” Dumbledore replied pleasantly, “Hello, I am pleased to make your acquaintance as well. I read your memoir and it
brought even more to my attention the horrors of the Holocaust.” Gerda continued, “I feel your experiences are what made you wiser. I would love to know what your opinion on the M.S. St. Louis is. Do you believe it should have been let into the U.S.A. or not?” (POOT site, October 27, 2011). Dumbledore replied:

I, of course, believe that the St. Louis should have been allowed to enter the US. The heartlessness of many destroyed the lives of so many others. And that is unforgivable obviously because you can’t bring people back from the dead (unless, of course, you have the resurrection stone, but that’s another matter completely) ... (POOT site, October 27, 2011).

The next day, a friendly Amelia Earhart approached Dumbledore. “Hello good sir,” she said in a fast tone and continued, “I am very interested in your school called "Hogwarts." I have heard that you people fly on broomsticks. That sounds quite interesting!” (October 28, 2011).

“Hello, Ms. Earhart,” he said to the famous pilot who was the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic. With sincerity he replied, “It is lovely to make your acquaintance.” He paused. “I see that you are interested in Hogwarts. That is wonderful, but may I just ask how you heard of it?

Unconvincingly, Amelia said, “I heard about it from a relative of mine. She knows someone that knows someone that knows someone that has a son that went there.” To which Dumbledore replied, “We wizards tend to try to keep our world hidden behind your own muggle one. So I am simply curious.” He looked closer at her, so ambitious and optimistic. “[Y]es, we fly on broomsticks. It’s not the most pleasant of sensations, but there is something highly satisfying about it” (POOT site, October 30, 2011). He gently reassured and assured Ms. Earhart that, should she find herself wondering about the wizarding world, and he was sure she would, she could direct questions to him.

Dumbledore kept mostly to himself, rarely starting a conversation with another guest. He was, however, polite and responsive when approached by others in the hallway. Occasionally,
his encounters were less than hospitable. One day he was approached by a man who said, almost
in an out of line way. “Mr. Dumbdoor” the man shouted knowing full well he had
mispronounced his name. As Dumbledore stopped, he continued, “Not to be rude, but what is a
wand wielding spell casting fictional wizard doing on such a prestigious court?” (POOT site,
November 1, 2011). To this, Dumbledore lifted his head and said with astonishment,
“Fictional?” He adjusted his posture and said, “Why, I don’t know what you’re talking about. I
am completely and totally real. How else would I be here?” Before walking away, Dumbledore
added, “And when you say "prestigious court," are you implying that I am not worthy or high
enough to be here?” (POOT site, November 2, 2011). The man scurried off, without replying.

Later that month, another man approached Dumbledore saying, “Are you sure that
wizards are real?” (POOT site, November 14, 2011). Dumbledore did not bother to reply. He
was busy speaking with several of the other guests about the trial. It seemed that most people
wanted to gush with amazement over Dumbledore or attack his credibility as a member of the
Court; whereas Dumbledore seemed the most responsive to conversations about the trial rather
than his personal life.

Dumbledore found himself in another contentious conversation with King Ferdinand.
Over an afternoon coffee, the King asserted to the crowd of about 17 people who were sipping
coffee on the veranda, “Why are you all conversing about this insolent case?” (POOT site,
November 2, 2011). No one listened at first, so the King slammed his coffee cup down on the
table. The King cleared his throat and said, “I am King Ferdinand, and I say that this Court trial
should be dismissed immediately. These proceedings are ridiculous, why should people care so
much about [this trial].” Heads began to turn. He continued, “any of you that care for these
people of the lowest of society should be banished from this society of higher status
immediately. Furthermore, this is a case that takes place in the past, why should I be called from my grave to care now?” (POOT site, November 2, 2011).

Dumbledore was the first to push out his chair and stand up in response to the King’s assertions. “If I may, Your Majesty,” Dumbledore began. “[Y]ou were not called from your grave; you were invited to join this case, and you took the opportunity.” A few heads nodded. “Your opinion is… critical and inhumane. But, of course, you are entitled to your own ideas and thoughts. But I must ask you to reconsider your ideas and, if you will, ‘walk in their shoes’ to try to understand that the Jews are people too and should be treated as such” (POOT site, November 2, 2011).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer nodded his head in agreement and said to Dumbledore, “Herr Dumbledore…I couldn’t agree with you more!” (POOT site, November 4, 2011). Emma Goldman quickly followed Dumbledore’s comment with, “King Ferdinand, I admire you speaking your mind. It’s great to see that there are others out there who aren’t afraid to stand up and say what they believe in. However, as Professor Dumbledore stated, if you really have no interest in this case, why do you even care?” (POOT site, November 2, 2011).

The King’s wife walked in and ended the conversation, saying, “Ferdinand, can’t you see, it is important that we are part of this trial. We need to make sure our side is represented” (POOT site, November 22, 2011). In walking out the door, on his way to the courtroom, a modern day man with stylish high-top shoes stopped Dumbledore. “Mr. Dumbledore, I was wondering if you could sort something out for me. I was watching the Harry Potter movies the other day with my children and realized that you look awfully different in the third movie in contrast to the first and second. I’ve heard rumors that the first Dumbledore died and that they hired a replacement, but how can that be true when you are the one and only” (POOT site,
November 16, 2011). Dumbledore replied, “Mr. Yahoo, there is something you must understand about my life and the books and movies by J. K. Rowling. I lived a life like any normal wizard. But only after I died did Rowling write her books and make her movies. I was not a part of those movies, and they are not exactly as my life’s events occurred. Dumbledore said nothing else, and attempted to shift his attention to the exhibit rooms and advocacy for a fair continuation of the trial.

**Firsthand Experience Portraying a Fictional Character**

Lori, the student who portrayed Dumbledore, agreed to comment on some questions related to her *POOT* experience. Using the McCormack’s (2000a, 2000b) four distinct listenings outlined in the overview at the beginning of this section and in greater detail in Chapter 5, I analyzed her answers to the interview questions. A multilayered analysis discerned three main themes about Lori’s firsthand experience portraying a fictional character in *POOT*. These themes included:

1. Personal empowerment through accountability,
2. The centrality of the character-student relationship, and
3. How an increase in knowledge lead to an increase in opportunities.

**Empowerment Through Accountability**

Lori spoke mostly with an empowered, strong voice. I drew from Talay-Ongan’s (2004) conception of empowerment, which was defined as “the ability of individuals to be aware of their powers to be a capable decision maker and feeling in charge, often facilitated by personal experiences and interpersonal relations” (p. 2). Lori expressed a sense of personal empowerment, but this accountability was tied to three main aspects:
(1) her responsibility to her class ("we talked a lot in class and held press conferences"),
(2) the court case ("you can contribute to the discussion"), and
(3) her character ("[Dumbledore] has enough mystery to him… I felt like I could make
him more my own").

A clear example of the student’s “empowerment through accountability” emerged during Lori’s
responses. When asked to tell me more about the character Lori played in POOT and whether
she was happy with her character, she replied. “I could make it as factually correct as possible
while also putting my own spin on his ideas and thoughts.” Lori spoke with awareness,
specifically to the responsibility to her character and to make her portrayal factual. Lori
connected responsibility with the ability to construct responses with her “own spin” on it rather
than feeling paralyzed by the uncertainty or vagueness of her character.

Lori’s responses provided a glimpse of her thought process related to empowerment and
accountability. In order to have a deeper understanding of Lori’s sense of self, the “I-voice” was
isolated in the following I-poem.

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“I” Voice       “He” Voice
I knew
I wanted to be
I could do more
I thought

Dumbledore is
He also has

I felt
I could make him my own
```

This I-poem revealed a sense confidence in Lori’s voice ("I knew"), hope coupled with intention
("I wanted to be"), a plan to execute creativity ("I could do more"), and a reflective disposition
("I thought"). The above listed attributes are tied to the selection and knowledge of her character
("Dumbledore is"), and what her character can contribute ("He also has"). Lori returned to a
reflective and persuasive stance (“I felt”), as she returns to an empowerment stance (“I could”) and expresses the uniqueness and joy of portraying a fictional character (“make him my own”). This I-poem, in particular the last two sentences, provided clues to Lori’s sense of empowerment tied to her obligation to adhere to the rule of being true to the character’s voice.

Further, a connection was made between Lori’s character and the work she completed online, as well as offline during her face-to-face class. I will break this down in connection with the lenses. During the lens of narrative (the lens that focuses on the narrative used by the story teller), I saw evidence that her sense of orientation in the program was tied to these three aspects of class, program, and character, particularly with the “who” in her narrative. The “who” in her story was the tri-level element I referenced above: her class, others in the program, and her character. She does not reference specific individuals other than her character, but instead references the class and other people in the simulation more broadly.

“Tell me about your overall experience in POOT,” I prompted. Lori opened up with “we,” referring to her class and framed her response in connection to her class. She opened most of the early prompts in this way, using of the word “we” followed by an action verb (“we knew a lot..., we used..., we answered..., we made..., we learned”). This reinforced her connection to her class and the activities they were doing. I noticed the repeat use of “our characters,” acknowledging that she was taking part in this activity with her classmates rather than an anonymous venue or seeing it from an individualistic perspective (see Chapter 9 for a drastically different orientation to I versus we).

In using McCormack’s Lenses (2000a, 2000b), I searched for the words that were used indicating a common language, perhaps unknown to the researcher. In doing so, I saw Lori’s
contributions as much more than isolated online activity, and that her in-class activities with her social studies class had an impact on her experience. My interview questions only asked about POOT, and I did not specifically say online or in the classroom, but she readily offered up information about what happens in her face-to-face classroom offline, such as the press conferences.

Intrigued by the concept of a press conference, I draw from an interview with Lori’s teacher, Mr. Nawroth. Lori was enrolled in Mr. Nawroth’s middle school social studies class. According to the interview, each student in Mr. Nawroth’s class was required to do a press conference, which involved standing in front of the class in character and having to respond to the other students who asked questions of them from the position of their character. I know from the interview with Mr. Nawroth that he puts effort into livening up his classroom (“I don’t like to be bored”), and he searches for ways to interest the students. Mr. Nawroth permitted Lori to be Dumbledore, and did not see a problem with students portraying fictional characters based on his experience offline and online. In his interview, he notes that he was able to get some thoughtful responses from his students both face-to-face and online. Face-to-face, he asked them questions like, “if your characters were in the Hunger Games, who would win?” He was also the most active teacher online, as the majority of the other teachers in his simulation did not participate as their character online. He says some of the most powerful responses he got from students took place when he asked his students “about hot button issues” online. By hot button issues, Mr. Nawroth was referring to the questions like the ones about news reports regarding Penn State University (“Should the university be punishing people even though these alleged crimes happened years ago? And, likewise, in this case, should we be responsible for helping those whose families were victimized several generations ago?”).
The second dimension I explored was how Lori referred to the court case. In answering the interview questions, Lori held the court case constant, tying her participation with the purpose of the gathering ("[her portrayal of an unconventional character] can make all the difference in how the case turns out"). She saw her participation building towards the decision of the trial. She noted, “I want to say that [Dumbledore] was the really thoughtful one who would think of really off the wall solutions and aspects of things… that’s at least what I was going for.” Here, I saw her positioning her character as someone who could contribute to the discussion with “off the wall solutions,” and I sensed her ownership over the execution of this trait when she explained that her efforts were tied to this belief that her character had something of value to add to the trial. Later in this chapter, I discuss how the student’s self-report does and does not coincide with her online activity.

Also, the feeling of accountability tied to personal empowerment stems from her connection with her character. This is the strongest and most apparent theme that emerged during each reading of her responses. She expressed a general happiness with her portrayal of Dumbledore (“I really enjoyed trying to think how he thinks”). There is no evidence of disappointment or shame in her answers, as they related to her character’s contributions. Rather, she was proud of the work she did (“really proud of myself”). There was a sense of contentment, but the contentment appeared to operate in conjunction with an undertone of being watched (“you could always tell”). She very rarely uses the word “you,” and mostly makes I-statements or we-statements when reflecting. However, this was the first time she chose the word “you,” and did so when discussing a more critical dimension of people not following the rules. Her “you” is ominous because it is framed to indicate that “you” can always tell when someone is not following the rules (“talking or writing as themselves rather than their person”). And, while the
students from Mrs. Myers’s class may not agree with Lori on all issues, they would certainly both agree with the principle of being true to one’s character.

Lori and her classmates were aware that Mr. Nawroth was active on *POOT* as the character Jonah. In analyzing Lori/Dumbledore’s online activity, I saw she responded to all three of her teacher’s online private messages. Here is an example of one, as seen in Figure 6.4:

Figure 6.4 Albus Dumbledore responds to Jonah via private message.

![Mailbox for Albus Dumbledore](image)

Re: New question of ethics

Received: November 13, 2011 17:49

From: Albus Dumbledore

To: Jonah

> The recent story at Penn State University intrigues me … it’s a sad case, of course, but one that displays that justice delayed is justice denied. Should the university be punishing people even though these alleged crimes happened years ago? And, likewise, in this case, should we be responsible for helping those whose families were victimized several generations ago?

Why not? Crime deserves punishment no matter how long ago it happened. It’s just the same is the case, if not more appropriate now … Besides, what other way do the Americans have to make up for the tragedy they indirectly caused?

It is not clear how motivated this student was by grades, although the three responses she gave to her teacher’s character on the *POOT* website indicate her participation was tied to a general desire to send/post a reply to those the people who messaged her. This is also reinforced on Dumbledore’s wall, where her character replied to each of the 15 characters who posted on Dumbledore’s wall.

While Lori conveyed contentment with her character selection, there were the occasional seeds of doubt, when she would say things like “he was kind of different,” “most people [did
something different]”, or “I have no idea if that’s really true.” But there was also the sense that, despite being mildly uncertain, she was not only willing to take risks but actively encouraging others to take similar risks (“Don’t be afraid”).

Centrality of the Character-Student Relationship

The strongest theme was the character-student relationship. I reached this conclusion through the multiple readings and its repeated appearance in the coding. One of her most frequently used words was character. When looking for references to self-image and relationship, it also reinforced the importance of her relationship with her character. Her experience was, in many ways, filtered through her character. We also know from what was not said: she never references another person directly.

When I read first for the lens of narrative processes, the resounding story from her was her relationship with her character. When looking at the abstract of her responses, also thought of as the summary, I saw her ability to make her character her own was a critical component of her experience. Further, when she does what McCormack (2000a, 2000b) calls “theorizing,” I also saw evidence of her linking her experience to her character.

When I looked for the overarching reason for telling her story, I saw that she wanted others to know she took a risk by picking an “unconventional” character, and that in taking risks it “can make all the difference in how the case turns out.” This is supported by a private message sent from Dumbledore to Jonah, stating, “I am, however, a somewhat rational and moral person, which is, in my opinion, vital in judging a court case” (POOT site, December 02, 2011). Further, she felt what was “most important in POOT was that people were true to their characters.” Here, again, I saw a distancing of self in the choice of language as the topic of rule-following is
referenced. Lori noted that others did not always do this, but no one was singled out. She then says, “So getting to know Dumbledore and immersing myself in how he talks and thinks was really important to me.” Therefore, I saw a push-pull, meaning she established what players are supposed to be doing, that not everyone does it, reminded me that she did follow the rules, and that it was important to her.

Lori explained that the reason she selected Dumbledore was because he was an “interesting person,” but she does not elaborate in great detail about specific character traits. She stated she had favorite versions of Dumbledore, specifically from the first and sixth book in the *Harry Potter* series. She offered, “He seemed wiser, gentler, and more whimsical then, and that is what I like most about him.” In many ways, I saw her trying to navigate a gentler and wiser version of her character with the way in which she greeted the other guests (“Hello, I am pleased to make your acquaintance as well” *POOT* site, October 27, 2011), her support of the passengers of the ship (I, of course, believe that the St. Louis should have been allowed to enter the US *POOT* site, October 27, 2011 18:21), and her response to being challenged about her views (“But I must ask you to reconsider your ideas and, if you will, "walk in their shoes" to try to understand” *POOT* site, November 2, 2011).

When analyzing the linked events in the narrative, I saw how she discussed the challenges associated with *POOT*, saying playing Dumbledore was not always easy (“it was also difficult to get to know him, and especially his family”). Dumbledore’s private message exchanges revealed that she received a message from Sophie Evans asking to directly comment about Dumbledore’s childhood (“I would love to maybe know more about your childhood”). To this Lori said, “My childhood was painful for me, and it is difficult to talk about. If you really want to know, I can tell you that my family basically fell apart, and I am mostly to blame”
(POOT, November 2, 2011). Perhaps this is how Albus Dumbledore would respond, maybe it is not, but the point I want to make is that the conversation did not progress into a discussion about deeper or more difficult content, nor was there an attempt to connect Dumbledore’s childhood to the trial. The connection between the student and the character remains a connection of an individual story unsupported by source work (in Chapter 9 I present another story that has an individual story unsupported by source work).

Despite referencing the challenges towards the end, Lori brought the story to a close by encouraging others to take the risk of trying out a quirky, unconventional character. This provides a segue to the lens of language, where Lori expressed that she learned about Dumbledore the more she felt her character grew.

**Increase in Knowledge Increased Opportunity**

Narrowing which character to portray was met with confliction; Lori was uncertain who she wanted to portray in the beginning. However, once she committed to Dumbledore as her character, she prioritized learning more about Dumbledore (“[it] was really important to me”). Lori explained that the more she increased her knowledge about her character, the court case, and the program, the more she felt an increase in the opportunities available to her. She expressed the process of trying to understand how Dumbledore thinks increased her enjoyment with POOT. Her remarks suggest she enjoyed being able to “play” with his personality, as she said “I really liked playing with the quirky aspects of Dumbledore,” noting his eccentric personality.

Overall, she expressed a sense of pleasure and pride with her choice (“I think Dumbledore was a good choice for me”), as she referenced his ability to build on prior
knowledge in order to propel the purpose of the simulation forward. Having read all of the *Harry Potter* books and having seen the movies multiple times, she confessed to knowing a lot. Yet, there were also the moments that she was asked questions she did not know the answer to, and really saw these as opportunities to experiment with his personality.

**Impact of Theoretical Framings**

**Evidence of Lori’s Historical Thinking**

This section reflects a careful analysis into Lori/Dumbledore’s online activity to determine how character-play scaffolded her historical thinking. Online activity consisted of 31 public posts, 16 private messages, and the surrounding discourse generated from the above mentioned 47 posts. This analysis sought evidence congruent with the definitions of historical thinking cited in Chapter 2, such as the five essential elements of historical thinking presented by Teachinghistory.org: 1) the use of multiple accounts, documents, and perspectives, 2) using primary sources, 3) sourcing these multiple accounts by asking questions, looking for agreement and disagreement, and considering the trustworthiness of a source, 4) understanding contextualization, and 5) the claim-evidence connection. A comprehensive overview of historical thinking can be found in Chapter 2.

Much can be seen in terms of character work and attempts to speak like Dumbledore (“I am glad to make your acquaintance” and “The wizarding world embraces that a little better than the muggle world”) rather than a middle school student. In Dumbledore’s *POOT* posts we see an attempt to capture the nuance of Dumbledore’s voice, as read in the *Harry Potter* books (“It matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be” said by Dumbledore in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*). It is still however, unclear as to whether she is
speaking as herself or her character when she has Dumbledore reference the court case. Take for example her post:

I hope that you will win your case as well. I am also agree that the United States made a mistake in not allowing the St. Louis to enter. It is difficult to compensate for such a huge mistake, but my opinion is that they should do everything in their power to at least try to make things better. I wish good luck to you (POOT site, November 2, 2011 14:10).

Lori as Dumbledore says, “I hope,” “I am also agree,” “my opinion,” and “I wish.”

However, these statements are not grounded in character-play, but rather general statements of opinion that do not link Lori’s identity with her character. Posted on the same day, there are two more examples of weak participation-character connections.

*Example 1:* Accepting people who are different is one of the things that the Cubans and Americans weren’t able to grasp in the case of the St. Louis. And it caused a tragedy (POOT site, November 2, 2011).

*Example 2:* But to answer your question . . . Did anyone really have a choice? Besides taking their own lives, what else could they have done besides accept their fates? Having never been in this situation, I find it difficult to answer, but I think that I would hope that I make it back to land safely and then try to escape death at all costs. Isn’t that the only thing I could have done? (POOT site, November 2, 2011).

These posts are also missing contextualization, understanding of different times and places, and claim-evidence connections.

While there was a general absence of observable character-connection and source work described above, it is important to remember these are young people learning the skills of adopting the voice of another person and how to engage with source work. The main issue that arose, as I saw it from the analysis, was that the conversations rarely continue towards character development and source work. Unfortunately, the extent of the work taking place offline is something that this study is unable to speak to.

Fast forward one month, I saw this post sent to Jonah:
Mr. Jonah,
I am not (or was not when I was alive) a citizen of the United States of America. I am, however, a somewhat rational and moral person, which is, in my opinion, vital in judging a court case. Having been on [POOT] for a number of weeks, I have gotten a much broader view of others’ opinions and ideas on humanity and crime.

But I must admit, I was surprised by some of the speeches and legal philosophies I had read. It was difficult for me to imagine not choosing to make reparations for this case. The United States is responsible, if indirectly, for the tragic deaths of hundreds of people. Though money is not always the best way to go about solving things, it seems to be the best way for the United States to make things better now. And isn’t that what is important here?
Albus Dumbledore

In this post, written in the final days of the simulation and prompted by the final verdict which was not in favor of reparations, there are several interesting things happening. First, Lori was able to compare her character with citizens of the United States (“I am not (or was not when I was alive) a citizen of the United States of America”). There was evidence of temporal understanding (“was not when I was alive”). The basis of Lori’s understanding was grounded in the character/Dumbledore’s personal narrative, which is consistent with past literature on what is known about how young people learn history through personal narrative, especially those surrounding morals (“somewhat rational and moral person”). Additional information on how young people learn history is presented in Chapter 2. While Lori claimed to have gained a “broader view of others’ opinions,” these opinions and people are not referenced. There was also evidence of the beginnings of source work (“I was surprised by some of the speeches and legal philosophies I had read”), but this fell short of continued source work, attribution, contextualization, and character rooting (“It was difficult for me to imagine”). This post was simultaneously hopeful and unfulfilling. It laid the groundwork for further guided instruction and scaffolding, yet the conversation does not continue—online.
POOT Programmatic Implications

This section considered how a careful analysis of participant contributions can influence improvements in the POOT experience. Several important lessons were discerned from the Dumbledore/fictional character debate that relate directly back to our understanding of POOT as an educational program. Namely, three main limitations to growth in historical thinking skills emerged. While growth in Lori’s ability to accurately portray her character was evident over time (“I’m not allowed to talk about the wizarding world on the Internet, but I am no longer living, so the Ministry can’t do much to me for breaking the law, can they?” (POOT site, October 28, 2011), little to no evidence across the 47 posts indicated growth in historical thinking skills. This was NOT due to:

(1) A lack of interest on the student’s behalf (“Hoping to speak with you soon,” POOT site, October 28, 2011),

(2) The lack of ability to engage in perspective taking (“I suppose we have at least something in common in that our lives and everything we loved were destroyed,” POOT site, November 2, 2011), or

(3) The lack of case specific dialogue (“Accepting people who are different is one of the things that the Cubans and Americans weren’t able to grasp in the case of the St. Louis. And it caused a tragedy,” POOT site, November 2, 2011).

There was strong evidence of student interest, ability to engage in perspective taking, and engagement with the topic of the court case. But, rather, the limitations of growth in historical thinking was a result of the need for an increase in:

(1) Extended conversation,

(2) Adult-to-student interactions, and
(3) Source work.

This claim is supported through the online data, drawing from Dumbledore’s inbox for private messages, and public posts such as speeches, the exhibit hall, and wall posts.

There are several private messages in Dumbledore’s outbox that laid the groundwork for the development of historical thinking that had the three above-mentioned limitations. The first being a reply message from Dumbledore to an adult who did not reply. One month after Dumbledore sent his reply, Lori hears from this same mentor, but on a different subject matter. The next private message I want to reference is the only direct example of Dumbledore being able to make a personal connection between her character traits and the court case, in which Dumbledore talks about his willingness to help people of difference. However, the message is between two K-12 students, received little substantive response, and appears to have gone overlooked by adults in the simulation despite adult access to private messages, as seen in Figure 6.5.
Further, Dumbledore did not make or comment on any speeches, nor did Dumbledore post or reply in the exhibit halls. This very much isolated Dumbledore’s online activity and limited Lori’s exposure to source work. Besides private messages, Dumbledore’s activity was limited to wall posts, as seen in Figure 6.6. Of the 15 wall posts, Dumbledore replied to all 15.
Two of the wall posts were from adults. None of the wall posts introduced source work or extended past a post and a reply from Dumbledore.

Figure 6.6 Wall posts of Albus Dumbledore.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Wall Post</th>
<th>Topic of wall post</th>
<th>Extended conversation, adult interaction, or source work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 26, 2011 14:19</td>
<td>Résumé posted</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 25, 2011 18:47</td>
<td>Question over identity and belonging posed to AD</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 26, 2011 14:29</td>
<td>Gay comment- opportunity to talk about discrimination</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 26, 2011 14:33</td>
<td>Fictional comment</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 27, 2011 13:35</td>
<td>Direct question about St. Louis</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 27, 2011 20:00</td>
<td>Israeli character, Harry Potter</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 28, 2011 12:20</td>
<td>Hogwarts</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 31, 2011 09:35</td>
<td>Loss of parents</td>
<td>From an adult but no introduction to source work and conversation does not continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1, 2011 16:04</td>
<td>Complement on résumé</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1, 2011 18:12</td>
<td>Fictional</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 4, 2011 21:04</td>
<td>Please tell me what you think – about the case</td>
<td>From an adult but no introduction to source work and conversation does not continue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 16, 2011 12:29</td>
<td>Diversity at Hogwarts</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 16, 2011 14:33</td>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 16, 2011 14:36</td>
<td>Who are you?</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 20, 2011 18:07</td>
<td>Books</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implications on Games and Roleplay Literature

While many of the educational games and game-like spaces presented in Chapter 4 emphasize delivery of content and assessment of the that delivery, Lori’s case history reminds us of the importance of investigating the firsthand experiences of players from a more holistic perspective because Lori did not see her POOT activity occurring in isolation. Rather, she measured her activity and success with that activity based on social and contextual dimensions. Future research and literature reviews related to POOT must also take into consideration research related to socially mediated gameplay. Social play is a genre I had not considered when constructing Chapter 4, but upon stepping back from the finding in this chapter I can see the significance of that line of work.

Concluding Remarks

The question over whether fictional characters belong in POOT was raised by some of the younger participants, both in Mrs. Myers’s class and by characters online. This chapter validated their concerns through the telling of their story in an interview format. The interviews provided K-12 students with a space to be heard and to reflect. As Lori’s articulated her experience as Dumbledore, I engaged non-judgmentally. Lori reported that the flexibility her fictional character offered her was instrumental in her experience. She regarded her experience as personally rewarding, and felt her character contributed to the outcome of the court case. We saw her contributions to keeping the trial from being shut down by King Ferdinand, as described above. Three themes emerged from Lori’s interview: (1) personal empowerment through accountability, (2) the centrality of the character-student relationship, and (3) how an increase in knowledge lead to an increase in opportunities. In investigating Lori/Dumbledore’s online activity, it was clear that her capacity to think historically was not enhanced to its full potential.
The limitations to her growth in historical thinking was a result of the lack of three things: (1) extended conversations, (2) adult-to-student interaction, and (3) source work, rather than a fictional character assignment. In thinking about the lack of these three elements, I am drawn back to the participants who started me down this line of inquiry: Todd, Adriana, Gabe, and Ellen. I recall these K-12 students expressing a profound and related remark. Adriana said:

“I was talking to a couple people… But, at first I emailed [character name] a couple times and then he just stopped. And, then I was really confused… Then, some days I didn’t get any emails at all and there was a week when I didn’t get emails at all and I started to get worried, like am I not visible. I started to get really confused.”

Todd shifts the conversation from puzzlement to disappointment:

“Oh and there was [character]. [Character] is just awesome. I love his books. So, I was like, of course, I followed him right away. I messaged him right away. I was so excited. And, it took him, literally, and I almost checked every day, and it took him forever to reply. And, it was only like a two sentence thing. And I was like, uhh.”

These students closed the conversation in agreement with one another, saying, “we’d kinda like someone to talk to.” This was similarly echoed by participants in the Green Room who responded to a reflection prompt at the end of the simulation about how to make POOT more interesting. One individual, respondent 36, said, “I think that if everyone took the website more seriously, it could of been better. If people had taken things more seriously throughout the process, I think that things could have turned out better” (POOT site, December 17, 2011). There were other comparable posts in the Green Room, as seen in Table 6.1. I analyzed 125 participant responses in the Green Room. Only one respondent, respondent 6, referenced characters who did not fit in, “My least favorite was the characters I don’t see how they fit in” (POOT site, December, 14, 2011).
Table 6.1 Green Room posts related to a desire for a response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 1</td>
<td>“My least favorite part was that some people didn’t respond to my E-mails” (<em>POOT</em> site, December 14, 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 4</td>
<td>“My least favorite part was that not everyone participated actively on the site” (<em>POOT</em> site, December 14, 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 5</td>
<td>“My least favorite part was that some people did not participate or post” (<em>POOT</em> site, December 14, 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 36</td>
<td>“I think that if everyone took the website more seriously, it could of been better. If people had taken things more seriously throughout the process, I think that things could have turned out better (<em>POOT</em> site, December 17, 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 39</td>
<td>“My least favorite part was having to wait for responses” (<em>POOT</em> site, December 15, 2011).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent 40</td>
<td>“I did not like how everyone else did not post a lot” (<em>POOT</em> site, December 15, 2011).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adriana then explained, “We know our grade, and we know who everybody is... And, sometimes Mrs. Myers wouldn’t know the answers to our questions, and then I left *POOT* not knowing.” She added, though, that she did like when her teacher would message her in character, saying, “I especially liked, I was kinda late on my résumé, so Mrs. Myers’s sent a private message on *POOT* in her character (see private message below). I loved the being in character thing, and getting out of yourself and talking like they would talk.”

Dear Friend,
I notice that you have not posted a résumé as many have done. I am here to offer you my services if you need assistance. As a famous writer, I am fascinated by the new tools that this 21st century has to offer, and I have learned how to post on one’s “wall” or whatever it is called. Since your teacher informs me that you were supposed to post your résumé many days ago, I suggest that you make haste!
Yours truly,

Then, the Todd finished off the conversation, emphasizing he wanted more interactions with adults who know how things work. He said, “because there were so many, there was the court case, and I had to learn what reparations were, and I had to learn a lot of stuff. And, for the
people who are not as smart, well, I am kinda smart, but not compared to some people in the grade… But, I love writing, but I know this is weird to hear from an eleven-year old.”

It was apparent throughout the analysis that the K-12 students did, indeed, want to learn in POOT, regardless of their character. Thus, my recommendations, if POOT is indeed striving to promote historical thinking skills in young people, is not on whether to allow fictional characters or not, but rather they are as follows:

1. All participants should work to maintain extended conversations with other characters,
2. Understand that integrating historical thinking into a project is not just about seeing evidence of the production of historical thinking skills but the scaffolding and modeling of source work from the beginning,
3. Adults should carefully and regularly attend to the private messages of their mentees,
4. Review how young people learn history with adults participating in POOT,
5. Provide students with more assistance to navigating the POOT website which is not provided for by the Green Room, and lastly, and
6. Understand that POOT is tied to schools and this will drive the decisions and reactions of participants from the preparatory work, the simulation, and the research that follows.

I return to the question, “Why not Dumbledore?” Yet, there is a more important educational quandary warranting the attention of educators: to borrow from the words of one of Mrs. Myers’s students, “if you’re going to participate, you should actually participate.”
Future Research

There are a number of things I did not have access to with this study, which presented a limitation to my findings. I did not have full access to the K-12 classroom teacher’s perceptions, the classroom interactions between the K-12 classroom teacher and his/her students nor did I have access to the face-to-face peer interactions among the K-12 students. While not possible for this study, classroom observations are highly recommended. They will enhance future studies of *POOT* through the enrichment of online data and increase triangulation.
Chapter 7
Case History Two: Diego Rivera

Observations From Teachers

The origin of this case history dates back to a conversation that took place between K-12 classroom teachers using POOT while logged onto an online K-12 classroom teacher forum called POOT Talk. Each week, the teachers met virtually using a messaging format on a platform the project directors called POOT Talk to share what did and did not work for them in their classrooms, as associated with their implementation of POOT. As the project manager for this teacher professional development space, I facilitated POOT Talk. Facilitating often meant I scanned the teachers’ conversations for places where I could help them utilize POOT more easily with their students. In addition to serving as the project manager, I hosted the iteration of POOT under investigation. Both of these positionalities influenced my exposure to the critical event described in this second case history.

Each week on POOT Talk, K-12 classroom teachers posted in the forums section to stimulate discussion amongst their fellow teachers using POOT. Discussion leaders formatted a question that they wanted to talk to their peers about in more detail. Tabatha35, the discussion leader for week 4, prompted her peer teachers. She stated that the historical conversations were going well in her class, but then noted:

The area I am finding more difficult is how to do this with the class in character. I find it hard to connect Larry King, Coco Chanel, Marie Curie, etc to the case [on the M.S. St. Louis]. The students who have either political characters or Holocaust connections are of course a bit easier. I would welcome hearing how you are combining the history with the character play (Tabatha, POOT Ning site, November 6, 2011).

35 Pseudonyms were used for all people and places.
Sue responded to Tabatha, and said:

My students with not obviously related characters are also having some difficulty connecting. Diego Rivera, [the famous Mexican artist\(^{36}\)], asked me the other day "How do I have anything to do with this?" I told the student to look over the biographical material about her character and see if she could find anything. No real luck. She was trying to figure out how to justify wanting to be a curator in a particular area and finally just said it was of interest to her (him). I think it is also hard for them to think about how people acted in other times. Being as serious or courteous or formal as their character would of been is just not even on their radar. A couple were commenting that other characters had referred to them as Ma'am or Sir and they thought it was quaint or funny. Allen Ginsberg is having the most luck being in character I think and he is having a blast!! It has actually been a real breakthrough for this student to be able to embrace this character and his offbeat personality and have it be a real plus. I will read and see what others are doing to help the kids (Sue, POOT Ning site, November 10, 2011).

As the project manager for the professional development space, I empathized with Tabatha and Sue’s concerns (“My students…are also having some difficulty connecting”). Both Tabatha and Sue felt uncertainly about how to resolve the situation around “not obviously related characters” like Coco Chanel and Diego (“No real luck.”). As the host, the question of the student portraying Diego Rivera struck me the most: “How do I have anything to do with this?”

All three of my characters had interacted with the student portraying Diego Rivera. I portrayed (1) Erin Gruwell, an approachable, bubbly high school English teacher; (2) Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the atomic bomb and host of the POOT; and (3) Elena Kagan, United States Supreme Court Justice and the Chief Magistrate who presided over the POOT Court.

From the position of all three of my characters, I felt Diego had a legitimate place in POOT.

Based on online interactions, Diego seemed quieter than many of the other characters. I was also busy managing a 200 person project, so the quietness had not raised concern until Sue commented about it in POOT Talk. After reading Sue’s comments, I wondered, “What was the

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\(^{36}\) Diego Rivera (1886-1957) is best known as the famous Mexican artist who started the Mexican Mural Movement. He is also a political activist, who helped found the Revolutionary Union of Technical Workers and was a member of the Mexican Communist Party.
difference between Diego Rivera and Allen Ginsberg? Why was one student seemingly lost and uncertain about her sense of place while another was “having a blast” and an example of a “breakthrough?” Sue’s discussion post made me pause. I decided to inquire about Diego Rivera’s online activity on POOT.

**Meet Diego Rivera**

**Diego Rivera’s Online Presentation of Self**

With a deep strong voice, Diego Rivera greets the other guests of the Court of All Time in his native language. “Hola,” says the tall Mexican man with dark brown features, as seen in Diego Rivera’s résumé (see Figure 7.1). Diego Rivera was the renowned Mexican painter. He had painted since a young child and his paintings are on display around the world.
Figure 7.1 Sample of Diego Rivera’s résumé.

After a friendly handshake ("I am very nice to people"), Diego Rivera begins to tell guests about what he has in his possession. "In my pocket I have a picture of Frida Kahlo, and a brush." Diego Rivera’s wife, Frida, also appeared on the guest list for the Court. He continued, “I
love to paint. Painting is my life. My most treasured possession is my brush,” he says as he holds up his brush up for you to see. “I have one brush. It is my best friend. The answer to all my problems.” Marc Chagall, also a painter joins the conversation, “I owe all that I have achieved to Paris, to France, whose nature, men, the very air, were the true school of my life and art.” Other artists gather. Vincent van Gogh approaches and says, “There is nothing more truly artistic than to love people. Hi, my name is Vincent Williem Van Gogh.” Andy Warhol adds, “You might distinguish my art but perhaps not me, sadly. You guys know about the Marilyn Diptych--the faces of the beautiful Marilyn Monroe, Mick Jagger, and of course, the Eight Elvises.” Heads nod in agreement. He continues, “Yes I am the creator, Andy Warhol but you guys should call me simply Andy.” The artists continue talking about their identity as artists, despite Andy Warhol’s reference to being best known for his art and not him as a person.

Diego, like the others, continues to root his identity in his profession as a painter, saying “I started painting when I was 3. From the age of ten, I studied art at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City. Then when I got older, I got a scholarship to San Carlos academy. When I was growing up my idols were Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque and Paul Cezanne. Paul Cézanne has had the most influence on me.”

Diego Rivera continues to talk about the influential people in his life. “The most important thing in my life was when I married Frida Kahlo.” This is common conversation amongst the guests to speak of the importance of family and close friends. Diego accredits Frida for being the reason he strove his hardest. He also asserts how influential his brother was in his life. “The most important person in my life was my brother…My worst memory was when Carlos, my brother died. He was my best friend, I will never forget him.” In his résumé, Diego Rivera placed significant emphasis on the people who were in his life, particularly his wife Frida.
and his brother. Then, he changed topics ("My greatest achievement is my mural, "Man at the Crossroads."), and reveals a complicated man.

Figure 7.2 Image of Diego Rivera taken from student’s gallery.

Analysis of Diego Rivera’s Online Activity

**Diego Rivera’s résumé in comparison to others.** Diego Rivera’s résumé was compared to the résumés of 11 other student-portrayed characters. The method for selecting the 11 characters was as followed: (1) a list of all of the POOT characters was generated from the “player summary,” which separated the characters played by K-12 students from the adults; (2) the number nine was quasi-randomly chosen for counting purposes; and (3) every ninth character was pulled to form a smaller sample (n = 12) to compare Diego Rivera’s online activity with (see Table 7.1). Of these 12 students, four were artists, two were authors, two were political, one was historical, one was popular, and one was an athlete. Five different schools were represented. Additional demographic information was not provided. Through this analysis, Diego Rivera’s online contributions were found to be average, and quite similar to the other students from the smaller sample. Below, a description of the comparisons and differences is provided.

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37 This image was a screen shot from the character’s gallery on POOT.
**Table 7.1 Chart for Diego comparison.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Name</th>
<th>Character Classification</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Resume Word Count</th>
<th>Born/Timeline</th>
<th>Curator</th>
<th>E-Voice</th>
<th>Best Known For</th>
<th>Relates to real</th>
<th>Controversial Political Info</th>
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<td>High</td>
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In terms of word count, Diego Rivera’s résumé had 468 words. The average word count was 438, making Diego Rivera slightly above the average. Many of the students have spelling or spacing errors, though Diego Rivera’s résumé has more mistakes than most of the students. All but two of the K-12 students began their introduction with the birth details of when their character. Diego Rivera and Matt Groening were the two characters to start off their résumés differently (“Hola, My name is Diego Maria Rivera Barrientos. In my pocket I have a picture of Frida Kahlo, and a brush.”). Diego Rivera does reveal his birthdate after several sentences, whereas Matt Groening does omit this from his résumé.
All of the characters (except Matt Groening), have low levels of contextual references or stage setting and instead reply on the timeline-flow to establish context. Matt Groening is also the only K-12 student not to describe his character using a timeline of the character’s life. Diego Rivera includes a timeline-style flow, like most of the other students (“I started painting when I was 3. From the age of ten, I studied art at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City. Then when I got older, I got a scholarship to San Carlos academy.”), but includes more personal information and relationship details than more than half of the other randomly chosen students. Diego Rivera is the only one to reference another participating character in his biographical information; however, no attempt to link résumés or foster a connection between characters was executed.

All 12 students used the I-voice when narrating their biographical information in their résumé, as well as explain what the character is best known for. However, none of the characters cite their sources. None of the students reference the trial or make a connection between their character and the trial. This is not to say that characters do not reference the trial, because there is evidence of this in Achinoam Nini’s résumé, but the above analysis did not include her résumé.

As I read for information related to the trial in each of the résumés, I also attended to how the K-12 student presented controversial or political information. Seven of the student had low levels of references to controversial of political topics, were as five had medium levels and no one with high levels. Diego Rivera had medium levels. He referenced one of his best friends having political ties (“My best friends are Ilya Ehrenburg; he was a Soviet writer and journalist, and the leading Soviet propagandist of the Second World War…”), but he does not reference his involvement with political art, union workers, or the Community party.
Ten of the K-12 students present low levels of playfulness in their character’s voice, Diego being one of them. Despite this, there is evidence of the K-12 student portraying Diego Rivera attempting to try speaking as his character (“Although I think I am addicted to art. I have to admit, I do talk to myself. You have probably seen me mumbling to myself all the time. It’s how I deal with stress.”).

**An in-depth examination of Diego Rivera’s online activity.** I then turned to Diego Rivera’s other posts, beyond that of the résumé. Diego Rivera posted 21 public posts in total, with the average from the 12 students from Table 7.1 being 14 average public posts. Diego Rivera’s first public post made on POOT responded to a speech made by the host, Robert Oppenheimer. Robert Oppenheimer’s post took place in the large gathering area of the Great Hall, titled “What did you bring with you?” It read:

> Yesterday, Ms. Bourke-White showed me some photographs in her gallery. It seems that many of you have also brought things from your own belongings that represent your particular place and time. If you wouldn’t mind sharing, please tell us about something you have brought (POOT site, October 7, 2011).

This post received 59 responses from POOT guests, with Diego Rivera being one of them. To this, Diego Rivera responded, “I would bring my paintbrush, colors and a canvas” (POOT site, October 11, 2011). Many classmates of Diego Rivera’s also responded, as seen in Figure 7.3. Many of the response posts from Sue’s class occurred during the same time period, indicative that perhaps the class had been instructed to reply to this post by Sue.

The other artists in attendance indicated they would bring tools to further their craft. Bob Dylan brought a harmonica because it is “small, and never goes out of tune.” Achinoam Nini brought her guitar because she said, “my guitar is my voice’s favorite accompaniment.” Harry Belafonte brought his music “to make people happy.” Woody Guthrie told the crowd, “Well I’m bringing the item with me that I don’t go anywhere without, my guitar. Not just any guitar, but a
Gibson Southern Jumbo with the words "This Machine Kills Fascists" written largely across the body making it very easy to identify as mine." And, Allen Ginsberg said, “I brought my pen and paper. The very fiber of my writing. It brings me closer to life” (POOT site, October 11-16 2011).

A real-life acquaintance of Diego Rivera’s, Leon Trotsky, responded in the Great Hall, as well, stating that he brought his books with him, “those I’ve written and those I love.” He added, “I highly recommend my book The History of the Russian Revolution if you want to know the truth about what happened. Ideas are the most powerful things in the world.” I noticed Diego Rivera did not take this opportunity to get reacquainted with Leon Trotsky. Frida, Diego’s wife, also did not post a reply, and contact between Diego and Frida had not yet been made.

Figure 7.3 Responses to “What did you bring with you” post.

In a response to a similar Great Hall discussion about greatest accomplishments and regrets, Diego Rivera shared, “My greatest achievement is my mural, Man at the Crossroads. My greatest regret is being separated from my most important wife, Frida Kahlo (POOT site,
October 11, 2011. I searched through the images that Diego posted in his gallery, but did not see a posting of his mural in the nine pictures he selected to post on his “profile” (see Chapter 3 for more information on the mechanics of POOT). Instead, he posted El Vendedor De Alcatraces, May Day Procession In Moscow 1956, The Flower Carrier, Retrato de Ignacio Sanchez, Flower Seller II, Sueño de una Tarde Dominical en la Alameda Central, and Young Girl Elenita Carrillo Flores. There was also an absence of photos of Frida posted in his gallery.

As the host, I monitored the happenings in POOT. I watched as the 59 responses trickled in to comprise the discussion around what the guests brought with them. I also believed in using my characters to engage in authentic conversation through private message. Erin Gruwell was the character I used for introductory small talk. Erin is a modern day, approachable English teacher from Los Angeles, CA, which made her an easy character for students to talk to and for her to provide instructional feedback.

Before seeing Diego Rivera’s reply post to Robert Oppenheimer’s speech, Erin Gruwell reached out to several characters on the website via private message. Erin saw a connection between the paintbrush and the pen as an expressive tool, and therefore messaged Diego Rivera. In addition, Erin reached out to K-12 student portrayed Sandy Koufax, Lou Gehrig, and Babe Ruth, since Erin’s father used to work for the Cincinnati Reds baseball team. I used Erin, as someone who likes to write, to reach out to Anna Freud to ask her about her books. I used Erin the teacher to reach out to Maimonides. I also reached out to Coco Chanel, noting the honesty in her résumé, and asked Judah P. Benjamin about how he decided on the case before we had even begun.

In my first message to Diego Rivera as Erin Gruwell, I titled the message “A Paint Brush.” My message as Erin Gruwell read:
Hello Mr. Rivera, I read that your paintbrush is your best friend. I was moved by this comment. My pen is my best friend and writing is my life. I plan to journal while I am in [POOT]. Do you plan to paint while you are [here]? Kindly, Erin Gruwell (POOT site, October 8, 2011).

Around the same time Diego posted publicly about bringing his paintbrush with him to the Court, Erin received a response from Diego that read, “Erin Gruwell, Thank you. Just letting you know, I think I will paint, paint the beautiful view, people, and flowers. What will you write about? The experience or people? Diego Rivera” (POOT site, October 11, 2011). To this Erin replied, “I think I will write about how I am feeling, because I think we will be talking about difficult issues. Does painting help you think about difficult issues? Are you looking forward learning more about why we are here? Erin Gruwell” (POOT site, October, 11, 2011). A week later, Diego replied again, saying, “Mrs. Gruwell, Painting does help me think about my issues. I really do do look forward to the end of this messy thing! Diego Rivera” (POOT site, October, 18, 2011).

In looking through Diego Rivera’s online activity, I saw that while Erin received a reply to the messages she sent, not everyone who wrote to Diego received a response. Suleiman the Magnificent crafted the following message to Diego Rivera:

Hello Mr. Rivera, I am the Sultan Suleiman. I am pleased to make your acquaintance. I too am a lover of art and beautiful things. My time was several hundred years before you, I was born in the year 1495. I have had the opportunity to examine your some of your paintings and have chooses The Flower Seller and The Flower Carrier as two of my favorites. I am a ruler who has dressed in common clothing in order to experience the lives of my people and be certain that they are being treated fairly. I am drawn to these two painting because they show the lives of the subjects you have painted. I have chosen poetry as my artistic outlet. I look forward to speaking with you as we progress through this trial. Thank You. Sultan Suleiman (POOT site, October 11, 2011).

Seguing back to the original POOT Talk post at the time when Sue posted her response to Tabatha’s week 4 discussion prompt on November 10, 2011, Diego Rivera had posted 8 public
posts, including his résumé. Diego received 14 private messages, and had sent 3 private messages which were all responses to incoming private messages. Two of the three private messages were to Erin Gruwell, which are found above.

Diego Rivera addressed the third private message and a public post to Elena Kagan, the Chief Magistrate. Diego expressed an interest in serving as the curator for the M.S. St. Louis exhibit hall (“Curator: I would like to be M.S Saint Luis”) (POOT site, October 25, 2011). Half of the K-12 students compared Diego with in Table 7.1 were curators, indicating that not all students were required to be curators depending on their K-12 classroom teacher. In looking at the students in Sue’s class, I see 14 out of 15 students were curators in an exhibit hall and Sue assigned the curator status to her class.

Elena Kagan replied to Diego Rivera’s request to be a curator:

Dear Sir or Madam, I am pleased to know you want to be a curator for M.S. St. Louis exhibit hall. Before I make your curator assignment official, please tell me why you will make a good curator for the M.S. St. Louis exhibit hall? Thank you and I look forward to reading your message. Sincerely, Elena Kagan (POOT site, October 25, 2011).

We know from Sue’s POOT Talk post that the student portraying Diego “was trying to figure out how to justify wanting to be a curator in a particular area and finally just said it was of interest to her (him)” (POOT Ning site, November 10, 2011). Diego Rivera writes, “I would like to be in the M.S Saint Luis [exhibit hall as a curator] beacouse it was supposed to be docked near my house” (POOT site, November 8, 2011). Charged with this responsibility, Elena Kagan assigned people to the exhibit hall rooms. Most students in Sue’s class requested membership to an exhibit hall per her class assignment.

Given this, there were three characters Diego Rivera had direct interaction with: Erin Gruwell (played by me), Elena Kagan (played by me), and student-played Charlie Chaplin to
date. If we return to Diego’s earlier activity and the personal sharing that occurred, Diego went silent. Seven days later, Diego posts a reply message to Charlie Chaplin within minutes of his wall posting. Diego Rivera replies, “I like your movies…” (POOT site, October 18, 2011), as seen in Figure 7.4.

Figure 7.4: Charlie Chaplin’s Wall Posting.

The Newspaper Intervention

After reading Tabatha and Sue’s POOT Talk posts, I asked the university mentors to help reaching out to characters they feel might be lacking a sense of place. I know from looking at the timestamps on Diego Rivera’s work that this intervention increase the number of post she made to above average. In terms of the intervention, Margaret Bourke-White, a university student began reaching out. Margaret Bourke-White reported for the arts section of the POOT newspaper. She compiled the second issue titled “Artist Among Us.” Below, I included the news
clipping from the POOT newspaper, as seen in Figure 7.5. Coincidentally, Sue nudged her students to submit to the newspaper. Sue told her students, “you know, there’s this newspaper” (Sue, personal communications, April 2012).

Figure 7.5 Diego Rivera’s News Clipping from the Second Issue of the POOT Newspaper.

This featured artwork led to the following public wall post from Robert Oppenheimer, in which Robert Oppenheimer said, “Mr. Rivera, I have been meaning to tell you how much I enjoyed your mural in the 2nd issue of the Masada Mirror [POOT newspaper]. Will you submit more artwork for the next issue? Sincerely, Robert Oppenheimer” (POOT site, November 15, 2011). Diego Rivera replied, “Thank you very much. I had forgotten about that. I will submit another picture now” (POOT site, December 7, 2011).

Meanwhile, Charlie Chaplin contacted Diego Rivera about his art for a second time, as seen in Figure 7.6. There seems to be a building momentum of recognition for Diego Rivera’s art, as seen on his wall. In addition to Charlie Chaplin contacting him, Olivia Chow noticed his art (Figure 7.7). Olivia said, “as you may or may not know, before I became a Politician, I was an artist. I look forward to discussing topic of art with you since it seems that your life has been a lot about art” (POOT site, October, 18, 2011). To this, Diego Rivera replies, “I did not know
that you were an artist. That is really cool. What type of art did you paint?” (POOT site, December 7, 2011).
Figure 7.6 Chaplin’s Wall Posting to Diego Rivera.

Your Art, by Charlie Chaplin on November 23, 2011 16:48

I believe that your art was one way to take peoples minds off of what horrible things were happening in the world. Some people said the same about my films. You can get lost in a piece of art the same way that you can get lost in a film. You are an amazing artist.

~Charlie Chaplin

Comments (2)

1. Diego Rivera
   November 23, 2011 16:51

   Yes.
   I like expaning my stories in art.
   Even though most of my art is random, it really makes me think. About who I am, what my purpose is in life.
   I like your movies beacouse they are hilarious. But also have a meaning.

   Respond to this comment

2. Charlie Chaplin
   November 23, 2011 16:56

   That is the point. To entertain as well as to teach. Your art tell stories. I really enjoy your art.

   Respond to this comment
In a private message, Diego Rivera replied to Oppenheimer once more, stating, “It was really nice of you to comment on my art. Since you like it so much, I would like for you to pick which painting to include in the next issue. There are pictures linked. Please choose. Thank you” (POOT site, December 7, 2011). To this, Robert Oppenheimer replied, “They are all so eye catching. Perhaps we need to have a special farewell art exhibit. Would you like that? If so, I will have it arranged for you. The one thing I would like, if to know a little bit more about each piece of art. Would you like to invite any other artists or musicians? Robert” (POOT site, December 7, 2011). Excited, Diego Rivera responded, “I would love that. Thank you, I will soon send you an email telling a little more about my art. Also I would like to see if you could invite Charlie Chaplin. He is a great actor and a good friend” (POOT site, December 7, 2011).

After publishing the second issue of the POOT newspaper, Maggie sent out the following message to Pablo Picasso, Allen Ginsberg, Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, and Beatrix Potter, “Hi! I hope you like how I displayed your pictures and poem in the lastest issue of the [POOT
Newspaper]. Thank you very much for your help! —Maggie” (POOT site, December 6, 2011). To this, Diego Rivera responded, “Margaret, Thank you very much. Those pictures that you posted is one of my very favorites. I like how you complimented my art and my work. Here is another picture that maybe you can post next time. It is called Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park” (POOT site, November 15, 2011). A series of messages were exchanged between the two of them regarding the posting of Diego Rivera’s paintings in the POOT newspaper.

Afterwards, Maggie compiled the third issue of the POOT newspaper. In her news posting, she connected the POOT artists with the court case by saying, “One important idea that becomes clear in the case of the M.S. St. Louis is that things are not always as they seem. Allen Ginsberg sent in a poem this week about an experience he had while shopping in an American supermarket (Berkeley, 1955).” She proceeds to make connections between the works of Pablo Picasso, Allen Ginsberg, Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, and Beatrix Potter, as seen in Figure 7.8.
Robert Oppenheimer followed up on Diego Rivera’s request to include Charlie Chaplin in the Farwell Festival. “Hi Charlie Chaplin, Diego Rivera and I would like to invite you to entertain the guests on the big screen at the farewell banquet Diego and I are hosting. Which film would you like to show? Charlie and Diego, we will need more entertainment. Think big! Please contact the other guests and let me know who will be doing what at the banquet. We need magic, music, and more! Robert” (POOT site, December 6, 2011).

Diego Rivera answered, “Robert, OK, I will get busy at finding more people to entertain and I will get you a list as soon as possible of who is doing what” (POOT site, December 8, 2011). Diego Rivera immediately messaged Frida Kahlo, Eminem Marshall Mathers, Bob Dylan,
Buffy Sainte Marie, Charlie Chaplin, Harry Belafonte, Fergie, and Walt Disney the following:

“Hello People, Me and Rober J. Oppenhiemer are hosting a Ferwell festival. One problem, We need more entertainment. So if you would like to be in it, Please send me a song(lyrics), clip of a movie/show you were in, or Paintings. Also, please write a little bit about that piece. Thank You! Diego Rivera” (POOT site, December 8, 2011). This was followed by a second message, to a series of artists including Frida Kahlo, which read, “Hello People, Me and Rober J. Oppenhiemer are hosting a Ferwell festival. One problem, We need more entertainment. So if you would like to be in it, Please send me a song(lyrics), painting or clip of a movie/show you were in. Also please write a bit about the piece in the email Thank You! Diego Rivera” (POOT site, December 8, 2011).

Robert Oppenheimer posted an announcement about the Farwell Festival, as seen in Figure 7.9. The Farewell Festival “took place” December 13, 2011, and the synopsis appeared on the POOT Wikispaces.com site, where the POOT Newspaper was published, as seen in Figure 7.10.
Figure 7.9 Announcement for the Farewell Festival.

Figure 7.10 Overview of the Farwell Festival on Wikispaces.com.
The *POOT* Newspaper reported:

During the trial, Diego Rivera and Margaret Bourke-White were busy capturing visual images of what was happening at *POOT*. Diego Rivera was busy painting courtroom sketches with the paintbrush he brought with him, while Margaret Bourke-White was snapping photos outside of the courtroom with her 35mm camera. Thanks to their hard work, we wanted to showcase their artwork at the Farewell Festival (*POOT* wikispaces, n.d.).

The “Art Gallery” tab on the *POOT* Wikispaces featured the characters’ artwork. Many of the other art-minded people Diego Rivera recruited were featured. According to the *POOT* Newspaper, “During the Farewell Festival, *POOT* guests enjoyed cheese and crackers as they wandered around the halls of the Masada Art Gallery (see Figure 7.11). Harry Belafonte's song "Jamaica Farewell" played in the background, as guests viewed the featured art work from world renowned artist Diego Rivera and highly skilled photographer Margaret Bourke-White. A silent auction was held at the end of the evening. Proceeds benefited a fund established for the heirs of the M.S. St. Louis” (*POOT* Wikispaces.com, December 13, 2011).
After the *POOT* newspaper published the Farwell Festival issue, Diego Rivera received an email from Erin Gruwell. “Thank you for organizing the Farewell Festival” (*POOT* site, December 13, 2011), Erin remarked. Diego Rivera ends his time in *POOT* with the following status update repeated three times (as seen in Figure 7.12):

Figure 7.12 Diego Rivera’s status update after the Farewell Festival.
Meet the Student Who Portrayed Diego Rivera

Introduction

I traveled nearby the city where the student who portrayed Diego Rivera attended school. The student’s perspective on her POOT experience was of immense interested to me, particularly because of the extent of the online engagement between our characters. She spoke most frequently to my POOT characters (i.e., Robert Oppenheimer, Elena Kagan, and Erin Gruwell). The student agreed to be interviewed, so I confirmed travel arrangements to visit the school.

The morning of the interview, I drove to school in Sue’s car. I shared my excitement about being able to finally meet the student behind Diego Rivera and the motivating force for the Farewell Festival. Sue informed me Sonya, the student who portrayed Diego, was shy and that she would be surprised if Sonya speaks up much during the interview. Sue explained about how Sonya picked her character. Sonya was born in Mexico, and she wanted a character she could relate to.

The time arrived for my interview with Sonya. I sat down at the long tables in Sue’s classroom where students usually sat during their lessons. I waited until Sonya arrived. The school day was nearly over, but Sonya agreed to talk to me for a while before her mother picked her up. Nothing like the tall, dark, intense man she portrayed, Sonya was a tiny, thin, and timid middle school student.

The room was almost as quiet as Sonya was, but the faint sound of Sue typing at her desk in the corner provided background noise. I chirped a hello as she sat down, and quickly realized my excitement surpassed hers, so I tried not to overwhelm her with my excitement. I said, “I
wanted to talk because our characters talked so much online.” I explained the characters that I portrayed. Sonya politely stared back at me, but said very little. Four months had passed since the end of the program. Unlike Sonya, I had thought about POOT every day since.

Early in the interview, I asked Sonya what it was like to be Diego Rivera. She paused for much longer than I expected, and when she did reply, she only replied with “fun.” The brevity of her replies made me nervous, but in time she gave longer responses and I got the hang of trying to prompt her better. When she did speak for longer periods of time, she had a slight accent and a pleasant melody to her voice. I have interview notes where I wrote, “slow to answer but polite.”

At the end of the interview, I asked Sonya what she thought of the Farewell Festival. As the project director, I was proud of the Farewell Festival, and I had spent hours on its production. Her response was, “it was cool, I guess, it was fun, I guess. I liked how i had to ask people and send them messages about it.” I realized, our interview lasted 36 minutes, and in those 36 minutes, the more enthusiastic person was me. The thought even crossed my mind as to whether the interview would be interesting to analyze. Here was a student whose memory about the program was faint; she did not even recall much of my character Robert Oppenheimer. She was not one of our biggest successes like Allen Ginsberg, Sue’s breakthrough student. She was not engaged like Olivia Chow, who had posted 110 public posts and whose parents had to tell her to do things besides logging on to POOT. Nor was she Dumbledore, who showed tenacity in her reply posts despite repeatedly being asked whether she really belonged in POOT. Sonya was a student who struggled with POOT, and whose classroom teacher identified her as struggling.

I wanted to know what allowed Allen Ginsberg, Olivia Chow, and Dumbledore to flourish, but what kept Diego Rivera from doing the same. I wanted to know what would have
helped Sonya, for future knowledge. I used the four listenings from McCormack’s Lenses (2000a, 2000b) to better understand Sonya’s experience.

**First Lens of Narrative Processes**

The first listening of narrative processes revealed that Sonya’s disinterest in communicating with unfamiliar people. Her interest lied in completing her assignments, as instructed by her K-12 classroom teacher Sue. Sonya said that after she finished what her K-12 classroom teacher assigned, she “didn’t have much to do” and she “wanted to write what [she] had to write.” I know from my time with Sue that she would put the required POOT assignment on the Smartboard at the front of the classroom. Earlier in the day, Sue showed me an example of the types of prompts she would give her students. The PowerPoint slide would direct the students to important posts and provide a list of things they needed to accomplish in the form of bullets.

I asked Sonya if she felt like she was at [Alhambra], the virtual meeting location for POOT. She told me, “I didn’t *really* [emphasis added] see myself there. I felt like I was talking to people, but didn’t actually feel like I was there.” I took out a paper list of the people her character had spoken with. As I listed off the names, she did not respond and showed no signs of familiarity. She indicated that she mostly spoke with the people who were artist and stuff in my class, referring to her engagement with them during classtime rather than online. I then asked her about Charlie Chaplin, to which the level of excitement in her voice spiked exponentially. “Basically, she is one of my best friends.” I pointed out a time when Diego Rivera posted online about how Charlie Chaplin, “he’s a great actor and a good friend.” I admitted to wondering if that was her writing more from the perspective of Sonya in real life, to which she giggled over me as I finished my sentence. “She saw what I was writing… basically she was half the time
looking over my shoulder and half the time looking over hers, basically when I was confused about something she would help me out.”

Sonya’s interactions with her best friend Sarah who played Charlie Chaplin were of more interest to her. Prior to the interview, I had access to a list which detailed where each K-12 student attended school, so I during the program I knew that Charlie Chaplin and Diego Rivera were classmates. The pattern of their posts led me to speculate that they were friends, but I did not know they were best friends who sat next to each other until the interview. Charlie Chaplin was the only character Sonya referenced in the interview by name. She retold how the two of them would type next to each other. She also mentioned her K-12 classroom teacher, but not based on her teacher’s online work. Her teacher, interestingly enough played a character that Diego Rivera interacted with in real life. I am not mentioning Sue’s character name in order to protect her identity.

When I asked her why she decided to play Diego Rivera, she said, “because my parents are Mexican and they know a lot about him.” She elaborated, “basically we had to write a paper about our character and [my parents] helped me. If I had any questions, I would ask them.” I asked her what her parents thought of the POOT project, and she shared, “they thought it was cool, cool how you could get things that kids would want to do with the computer and actually make it learning.”

Sue shared a moment in class when Sonya realized Frida was on the guest list. Sue reflected that Sonya said to her, “Frida is another character, she is my wife, should I say hi to her?” I inquired about whether Sonya had spoken with Diego’s wife, to which she said no. “I tried messaging her,” but she said Frida did not reply. I wanted to know more about why she did
not attempt to reach out to Frida’s character more. When I inquired, Sonya informed me it was more fun to talk to people you know. “You can actually talk to them,” she confirmed.

I inquired about her least favorite part was and she quickly responded with, “when it started out it was really confusing, I just didn’t get it as much. I didn’t know how to do everything.” She continued, “I didnt know my character that well, what would I do, and how would I answer this question. I kinda didn’t write a lot or talk to people because I was confused.” I sought clarification about what she meant by confused. She said it has to do with how to respond as Diego Rivera. I asked her if she ever got asked questions that were too tough and did not know. She replied with a long drawn out, “Yeaahhh.” She went on to say, “some of the questions that I was asked and that we had to anwer were really confusing, so I just tried my best. They were a little bit hard.” I asked her if she ever found herself wondering what she was doing in POOT, to which she spoke over me before I finished to say, “Yeah!” She described those moments, “I was like I have no clue.” She emphasized the words “I have no clue” as she dragged the words out.

With this first listening, things that stood out in terms of how Sonya provided an orientation to her story included her teacher’s in-class facilitation, her best friend who played Charlie Chaplin and other classmates, and her parents who were Mexican like her character. She also referenced the idea of people she does not know and did not list them by name. She also focused on her class assignments related to POOT.

Second Lens of Language

As I engaged in the second listening, I noticed Sonya’s frequent use of the words “I don’t know,” “fun,” and “learning.” When I listened to her speech functions, I noticed how often she
included the following phrases: “I am not sure,” “I don’t think so,” “not really,” “it didn’t seem,” and “not very.” She often used false starts with the phrase, “you had to.” There were many long pauses and short answers. After the interview, I had wondered whether it would have been better for her teacher to interview her since they already had a relationship because her reactions often express a degree of hesitancy.

I listened for self-image, as well as relationship to self and the environment. While she was able to find commonality with Diego Rivera as a Mexican herself, the distance she placed between herself from her character (“I was half guessing”) precluded the meaning making of the connection. This distancing between herself and her character created a state of tentativeness that undermined her trust in her abilities to become Diego Rivera, which perpetuated what Dewey (1938a) called a “divided self.”

Her most important relationships were with her best friend, her teacher Sue, and her classmates. She speaks very little about a connection to anyone outside of her class. She identifies her teacher as a facilitator of her experience, hinting at the things they did in class as opposed to online. Her statements framed that she did not feel connected to Diego’s wife Frida, and did not connect or attribute the lack of communication between them to the in real life tension experienced between Frida and her character. She neglects to reference the significance of her teacher’s character to her character. In fact, as her character, Sonya did next to no reaching out to other characters and instead selectively chose who she would respond to (“It’s more fun to talk to people you know”). She placed distance between herself in real life and her character, but did form of a weak relationship with her character and his artwork (“I should have used my artwork for feelings”).

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I used this lens to isolate the I-voice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>We</th>
<th>You/They/It</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>didn’t like it very much</td>
<td></td>
<td>It was really confusing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I just didn’t get it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t know my character very well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would I do?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t write a lot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t talk to people</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was confused</td>
<td>Some of the questions that we were asked were really confusing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So I just tried my best</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have no clue (slow and emphasized)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I looked at other people’s opinions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got stuck</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I just grabbed other people’s opinions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I liked voting</td>
<td>You had to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I liked reading what they wrote</td>
<td>If you wanted to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You also had to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you didn’t know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you didn’t know</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You would</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Probably because they don’t really know them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If there is something, you can actually talk to them</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I should have used my artwork for feelings (as she compares to herself to her classmate).

**Third Lens of Context**

For the third lens, I listened for context. Sonya expressed the cultural fiction of stranger danger and how activities in real life are more fun. This belief in the cultural fiction of stranger
danger shaped the discontinuity in her online activity. She did not challenge or resist the cultural fictions. Instead, she admitted to her lack of response and limited scope. This was apparent in her online activity.

Next, I turn to my opening and closing question to see what they reveal. My opening question revealed two dimensions of Sonya’s experience: (1) the extent of the back and forth interactions in *POOT* surprised Sonya, and (2) a large degree of emphasis was placed on her face-to-face interactions with her teacher Sue and her classmates like Sarah who played Charlie Chaplin. My closing question revealed that Sonya has given thought to what she would do differently if she were to play again. She indicated she would like to follow the lead of her classmates and use her character more fully. She referenced a desire to use Diego Rivera’s artwork to express more feelings.

I look more fully into her interactions with the other people online, as well as based on what she says and does not say. Online and in her interview, I saw and heard her distancing herself from others and primarily being reactive rather than proactive in her engagement with others (“sometimes they would just message me, and other times I would see their posts and kinda be a little bit interested”). Sonya shared, “I read other people’s opinions, but I didn’t (pause)… I cared about other people’s opinions, because they were really cool and really well written or something like that.” She further expanded, “But I mostly just scanned through what they wrote. I was mostly focused on my character.” I asked her what she meant by focusing on her character. She replied with reticence, “I just wanted to do *mine*, so I didn’t pay that much attention to the others.” I asked for additional clarification. She added, “I didn’t really care that much about what other people wrote.” I followed this up with a question about what her goals were with her *POOT* character, to which she reinforced, “I wanted to write what I had to write.”
She traced a line between herself and her character, saying, “We played other people so it was like easier to say, I guess.” I sought clarification, to which she said, “if you’re playing someone else and it’s their opinion, if someone doesn’t like what you’re saying, they are getting annoyed not at you.”

As I attend to what is not being said, I learn she is not using character names. When referencing people, she used their real names, with the exception of her best friend. For her best friend, she does refer to her character, Charlie Chaplin.

**Fourth Lens of Moments**

The moment that resonated with Sonya most is when her character is being recognized by others for his art work, and in turn she regards posting pictures becomes fun. She ended our interview by saying, “Someone in my class was a poet (Allen Ginsberg). He would put poems up about what he thought.” She regrets not doing the same and expresses a desire to use artwork to express her character’s feelings in a similar fashion.

**Impact of Theoretical Framings**

**Evidence of Sonya’s Historical Thinking**

With Diego Rivera, we see the beginning stages of historical thinking, as exhibited by Sonya’s openness to the instructional scaffolding in the latter half of the game. This was particularly evident in Diego Rivera’s interactions with Maggie for the POOT Newspaper (see Figure 7.8) and Robert Oppenheimer for the Farewell Festival’s art exhibit (see Figure 7.11). We know from Chapter 2 that students can better understand material through guided instruction, and Sonya appeared open to guided instruction but the feeling that her character did not have a sense of belonging in the project blocked her growth. From Chapter 2, we also know that with
instruction, young people can become more skilled at making inferences about the past. Sonya’s online activity made it difficult to decipher the full picture on how she was making meaning of the past, and in order to draw accurate conclusions about this classroom observations are necessary. The online activity only reveals what Scott, Espinosa, Stanzler, and Goodman (2000) called the “Iceberg Principle.” She did not admit to any changes in her feelings about the court case from the start to the end of the simulation, and did not reference any source work required offline. Sonya’s progress was impeded by her inability to identify sources related to her character and the trial, and this speaks to the importance of students make sense of their belonging as early as possible. Her lingering lack of belonging impaired her abilities to think historical.

Throughout the duration of the program, Sonya notably remained at the beginning stages of trying to understand her character and his sense of place in the trial. While I think it is easy to point the finger at what she was not doing and needed to do more of, I think it is important to remember that this is a young person learning a new way of thinking about history and the acquisition of these skills takes time, practice, and modeling through more skilled others (i.e., a more advanced peer like Allen Ginsberg, a university student/mentor, or K-12 classroom teacher). Some students will gravitate towards this work more quickly, as seen with Allen Ginsberg who was the same age in the same class with the same teacher.

**POOT Programmatic Improvements**

The story of Sonya as Diego Rivera presents a missed opportunity, one that many adult participants wondered about how to best address. Puzzling over Diego Rivera’s work stems from real concerns from adult participants in *POOT* about similar K-12 student contributions to the
site. Comments on the *POOT* mentor log from university students/mentors, reveals the type of concerns and deliberations adult participants experienced, as seen with mentor 1 (“I wish I could get some of my other buddy characters to put more effort into their work”), mentor 2 (“I was struggling with how to mentor students”), mentor 3 (“I really wanted to try to get students to expand on their responses a bit more”) mentor 4 (“one of my students has replied to each of my messages with one sentence answers”), mentor 5 (“I am concerned by the lack of participation”), mentor 6 (“but a majority of the responses are minimal or nonexistent. I’ve replied each time trying to get him/her to open up more and really explore the depth of the character, but so far I have been unable to connect with this student”).

While it is not a success story, there are still glimmers of hope and important lessons to learn about how K-12 students experience *POOT*. I turn to Bernard Suits’s (2005) explanation of player types, in which he listed three: “triflers, cheats, and spoilsports” (p. 58). Suits described the trifler using a *Chess* analogy. The trifler is a player who, in a game of *Chess*, makes legal moves but does not aim to place the other player in checkmate. Suits also refers to the trifler as a “quasi player” (p. 58). Sonya’s player type can be best described as a “trifler,” someone who accepts the means but not the purpose of the *POOT* program. Suits explains that triflers often have another purpose in mind. With Sonya, she had completing the assigned work from her K-12 classroom teacher as her primary goal. In our interview, she admitted to working her way down the checklist to complete the assigned tasks. She enacted a disposition that reflected that she is not fully playing, and Suits would argue that Sonya’s lack of adoption to the “prelusory goals” of *POOT* kept her from truly playing in *POOT*. For illustration purposes only, I created a graph to

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38 The *POOT* mentor log was a separate online chat forum for university students/mentors to process their online activity with other university students/mentors and under the guidance of project directors/teacher educators.
parcel out the different dimensions of the rules in which Sonya was asked to adhere to and rank the degrees to which Sonya adhered to rules, (see Figure 7.13). Sonya has the lowest adherence to game-like rules. This was concluded based on Holden et al.’s (2014) definition of gameful learning as “a framework that encourages improvisation, playfulness, and social interaction, and which takes into account the unique contingencies of individual people and specific content” (p. 1). For the second column, adherence to the programmatic rules of POOT, I evaluated how Diego approached the four core things POOT tries to do: (1) promote critical thinking, (2) collaboration, (3) playfulness, and (4) problem-solving. For the category on adherence to her teacher’s rules, I drew from how Sonya referenced her decision making in her interview.

Figure 7.13 Dimensionality of Sonya’s rule adherence.
Suits (2005) attributed this to the player’s lack of zeal towards prelusory goals in the
game. This is one possible explanation. Here are some other possible explanations on what
makes young people participate more fully. First, I posit that a participant’s soft skills are a
predictor in their success in the *POOT* environment. Soft skill have been defined in a variety of
ways. Flaherty (2013) identified the soft skills: interpersonal skills, etiquette, positive attitude,
self-confidence, work ethic, cultural competency and sensitivity, time management, being a team
player, written and spoken communication, critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-
making skills, negotiation, conflict resolution, computational skills, and ethics. Zhang (2012) and
Harris and Rogers (2008) provide a similar list of soft skills. Tough (2012) explained that
psychologists refer to these as “personality traits” (p. xv), and includes “persistence, self-control,
curiosity, conscientiousness, grit, and self-confidence” among the traits (p. xv). The soft skills, or
personal characteristics, I want to draw your attention to most are:

1. imagination,
2. Henderson and Milstein’s (2003) notion of resilience (i.e., someone who “can bounce
   back from negative life experiences and become stronger in the process of
   overcoming them” p. 2),
3. curiosity,
4. desire to please,
5. a lusory attitude about character play, and
6. Duckworth and Quinn’s (2009) concept of grit (i.e., trait-level perseverance and
   passion for long-term goals).

These above mentioned traits all have an impact on a player’s willingness to buy into both the
means and purpose of the experience. Sonya showed little evidence of curiosity or a lusory
attitude towards her character, leaving her character’s relationship with Frida and Leon Trotsky unexplored, as well as the political nature of his paintings. While on *POOT* Sonya mentions Diego Rivera’s painting *Man at the Crossroads*, the controversial elements of the painting are ignored by Sonya and all of the other players in *POOT*.

To better understand these traits, I turn to the online activity of K-12 student portrayed Matt Groening, who was referenced earlier in this chapter (see Figure 7.1 from semi-randomly reviewed résumés). I want to draw attention how he uses imagination, resilience, and curiosity in his online posts. We know from earlier in the chapter that Matt Groening’s résumé was distinctly different from his peers, particularly because it branched away from an acknowledgement focused list and captured his character’s voice with increased sophistication (“I am usually optimistic, but some of my characters aren’t”) and elegance (“My greatest fear would be losing my hands”).

In terms of how Matt Groening employed a sense of imagination, I turn to an interaction between himself and the Chief Magistrate Elena Kagan:

Welcome Justices,
You have been summoned to the Justice chambers…Here is your Justice robe [hands you a robe]…Chief Justice Elena Kagan. P.S. Ehm…Justice Groening, please power off your PSP while you are meeting with us.
Thank you. (*POOT* site, November 25, 2011).

…
Dear Mrs. Kagan,
I apologize for the PSP incident. I have... ermmm... important business on it. I have a couple of questions about being a justice. Do I have to wear this annoying robe all the time? I feel like my grandma. Also, will there be any other evidence or witnesses to the case or something before we rule? I still do not have a clear idea on the case.
Sincerely,
Matt (*POOT* site, November 25, 2011).
In the posts above, the Chief Magistrate attempted to the attention of all of the justices in a group email and to provide the justices with a space to talk about their newly appointed responsibilities. Matt Groening replies to the Chief Magistrate in a playful manner (“Do I have to wear this annoying robe all the time”), but balances his imaginative response with a grounding in the trial (“will there be any other evidence or witnesses to the case or something before we rule”). Matt Groening uses the Chief Magistrates message as an entry way to clarify his position on the case (“I still do not have a clear idea on the case”), which was of particular importance because of the justices’ upcoming task of writing legal philosophies and casting a final ruling. This leads to the question of what enables him to do what Diego Rivera was not able to do?

Next, I turn to evidence of Matt Groening’s resilience. Matt Groening received a long, carefully crafted and potentially intimidating email from the university student/mentor who portrayed Angela Davis, as seen in Figure 7.14.
In Angela Davis’ message, she asked Matt Groening a series of difficult questions (“Do you not believe in equal justice under the law? Do you not think everyone should receive the same treatment in a court of law?”). Matt Groening’s reply demonstrated the characteristic of resilience, as he replied:

Dear Angela,

I am so very sorry for not responding to you faster. It has been ages since I last got hold of a computer. I had push push a hippie of his Mac at Starbucks just so I could send this to you. I have been on the run lately, and I will answer your intriguing questions some other time. The hippie is starting to fight back now.

Matt Groening

sincerely,
Matt Groening chose to reply to Angela Davis in a way that exposed a desire to engage but in a way that afforded him time to reply to her difficult questions. This is a noteworthy technique, as many K-12 students choose not to respond at all, as seen with Diego Rivera’s lack of response to Ben Hecht’s private message that read:

> It has to do with communism, which I admit I don't know that much about. Here it is: If the United States was a communist country, do you think the passengers on the St. Louis would have been accepted?
> Look forward to hearing from you,
> Ben Hecht (POOT site, October 31, 2011).

Matt Groening also demonstrated a sense of curiosity in his post to Robert Oppenheimer, in which he wrote:

> Hey! You may not know me, but my name is Matt Groening. I am the creator of the Simpsons and Futurama, and your résumé really interested me. I have done a few jokes about the atomic bomb on my shows, and I wanted to hear more about your opinion. How do you feel about nowadays video games? I play xbox sometimes, and there is something called a nuke that ends the game. How do you feel about creating the deadliest weapon in history? If you don’t want to answer, you don’t need to. I don’t want to pry or pressure you in any way.
> Sincerely,
> Matt (POOT site, October 10, 2011)

In his message to Robert Oppenheimer, Matt Groening creatively introduced his character, and uses it to segue to his curiosities about Robert Oppenheimer’s views on videos and deadly weapons. To build on this, I know from a video mock-press conference with Matt Groening’s (filmed by his teacher) that when the student was prompted about who his character found most interesting that he cited this exchange between Matt Groening and Robert Oppenheimer. Matt Groening’s activity spoke to the depth of his immersion. We know from Bethanie Horowitz’s
(2014) work that “[t]o exercise agency, one needs to be sufficiently immersed in the context… to operate fluently in it” (p. 31).

All combined, this opens the question of: How can we turn triflers like Diego Rivera into more bonafide players like Matt Groening? How might our understanding of soft skill development aid in this process? While this remains unresolved and warrants further research, Sonya helped illuminate the importance of the assessment piece and her face-to-face relationships, such as her relationship with her teacher and her friend Sarah who portrayed Charlie Chaplin. Can we leverage these classroom assessments and social relationships?

We also saw additional glimmers of hope, such as the beginnings of imaginative work when she engaged with the Farewell Festival, and with her comment about Diego Rivera carrying a picture of Frida in his pocket. While Sonya is a more hesitant and cautious player than Matt Groening, Sonya’s story provides glimpses into what we can learn from a trifler. Her experience has helped determine the importance of naming the soft skills we want young people to embody, as a form of capacity building, so we can begin to develop these skills more fully and move beyond non-specific comments such as the comment made by mentor 1 (“I wish I could get some of my other buddy characters to put more effort into their work”) and mentor 3 (“I really wanted to try to get students to expand on their responses a bit more”), which hastily assumed the student was lacking in academic ability and effort and does not give proper credit to the need to help foster soft skills as gateways to increasing a K-12 student’s access to POOT.

**Implications on Games and Roleplay Literature**

Above, I turned to Bernard Suits’s (2005) explanation of player types, and I determined Sonya’s player type is best described as a “trifler” because she meets the minimum participation
requirements without committing to higher levels of participation “buy-in.” This reference to player type serves as one connecting point back to the games literature in Chapter 4, particularly in relation to Table 4.2 titled, “Instructional aims of POOT from a design perspective.” In terms of the instructional aims I discerned for Table 4.2, Sonya demonstrates how player preference and play habits can impact dimensions of critical thinking and playfulness, and these aims are largely dependent on the player making the choice to engage with the instructional aims.

The emergence of Sonya’s player type as impactful reminds us that assessment and evaluation of the learning occurring in game-like spaces, as well as adoption of these curricular tools, must consider player preference. Future research related to POOT should consider the impact of player types and individual preferences in order to deepen our understanding of various levels of participation and satisfaction. For example, what is known about the types of players that excel in the three genres I provided in Chapter 4? Most of the studies I reviewed did not directly address this, and a targeted literature review on player preferences would be beneficial in moving this line of research forward and aid in sense-making process. Much like with Chapter 2, a comprehensive overview of how young people learn in games is needed.

She enacted a disposition that reflected that she is not fully playing, and Suits (2005) would argue that Sonya’s lack of adoption to the “prelusory goals” of POOT kept her from truly playing in POOT. For illustration purposes only, I created a graph to parcel out the different dimensions of the rules in which Sonya was asked to adhere to and rank the degrees to which Sonya adhered to rules, (see Figure 7.13). Sonya has the lowest adherence to game-like rules. This was concluded based on Holden et al.’s (2014) definition of gameful learning, “a framework that encourages improvisation, playfulness, and social interaction, and which takes into account the unique contingencies of individual people and specific content”
Chapter 8
Case History Three: Langston Hughes

Topic Selection Rational

Langton Hughes was chosen as the third case history because Avery, the student portraying Langston Hughes, readily admitted she did not like the POOT program during the interview. My intention was to explore the voice of students who were not readily identified as success stories, as described in my methods (see Chapter 5). Avery’s honesty about her experience was of particular interest due to the volume of concerns raised by adults who want to know what impedes K-12 student participation. Avery’s classmates at Dublin Academy submitted similar feedback on post-project evaluations administered by their classroom teachers (Dublin Academy high school teacher, personal communications, May 7, 2012). This feedback contained positive aspects of POOT (e.g., “liked the fact that it was a “hands on” activity” and “POOT [was] much better than writing a traditional research paper”). Additionally, several participants commented on the writing being tedious (“writing the half-page mini papers…was a drag”), disliking the word-count (“eliminate the word-count limit”), and quantity of writing (“we should write only ONE paper”). Non-identifiable evaluations impeded the ability for individual follow-up questions. Therefore, this analysis of Avery’s experience as Langston Hughes intends to illuminate reasons for student dissatisfaction with the project.

Avery was a bright, young high school girl. Interview notes affirmed Avery’s articulate, cheerful, and expressive demeanor, with several mentions of her level of seriousness (“Avery frequently referenced the word “serious” in her descriptions of her POOT experience”). Decipher

39 Pseudonyms were used for all people and places.
dislike in Avery’s online activity was difficult. Avery spoke with ease and focus, despite the movement in the hallway close to the room in which we sat. Our interview took place in a larger room just outside of the admissions office during one of her free class periods. Avery attended Dublin Academy, a private college preparatory school that had eagerly adopted the POOT project. Avery’s articulate demeanor was evident, though she did not fully recognize her academic talents. Avery expressed insecurities during our interview, particularly related to her writing abilities. I, however, knew little about her classroom performance; I only had access to her POOT participation and interview. Avery’s teachers regarded her as an average academic performer and pleasant during instructional time. Avery was neither the teacher’s pet nor the class clown. Both of my experiences with Avery instilled a sense of seriousness in her academic work and commitment to trying her best, and yet, Avery questioned her writing abilities and spoke of “dislike.” She took great pride in her intellectual gains, particularly when these gains were recognized by highly regarded important adults (e.g., her mother and teachers).

Several aspects of Avery’s experience warranted exploration: (1) her dislike for the project, (2) dimensions of power differentials in conjunction with her sense of empowerment; and (2) her perception of the activity over time. Below, I intentionally introduce Avery through her writing as Langston Hughes because she spoke extensively about in her writing abilities during our interview.
Meet Langston Hughes

“Hello. It is a pleasure to meet you,” Langston Hughes said in his greeting to the other POOT guests. He continued:

I was born in Joplin, Missouri in 1902. I would describe myself as very liberal and open to new things. I’ve spent majority of my life exploring the world, writing about things that come to my mind, sharing my thoughts with others, and speaking out against things such as prejudice and racial discrimination. I enjoy what I do, or else I wouldn’t be doing it, and I enjoy getting to share what I do… (POOT site, February 10, 2012).

Avery opened Langston Hughes’s résumé with his place of birth to establish a sense of place within a historical timeline, and captured the voice and personhood of her character through a strong I-voice (“I was…, I would…, I’ve…, I enjoy”). This is something Avery repeated in her private introduction to a character named Jane Eyre. Avery skillfully rooted her portrayal in her character’s voice rather than a list of his accomplishments, like many of her peers did (e.g., Thomas Jefferson: “I was born in Virginia on April 13, 1743. My father was Peter Jefferson, a planter and a surveyor. My mother was Jane Randolph”).

Avery introduced herself via private message to other guests of the Court of All Time, such as Hamlet, Marjane Satrapi, John Galt, and Mia Hall. Avery wrote to Hamlet, “I am a man of literature so I know much about you but I would be very interested to see what you have to say about yourself! Please post a résumé soon or a picture. –Hughes” (POOT site, February 15, 2012). Langston Hughes’s message to Hamlet sought connection and demonstrated Avery’s knowledge of shared interests between Hamlet and her character. Avery admitted the obligatory nature of reaching out to others on the POOT site (“since we had to write to people”), Hamlet being one of the characters Avery selected to fulfill her class assignment.
Avery’s first set of private messages were remarkably different from other *POOT* participants, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Scout who chose not to send anyone welcome messages or a musician\(^{40}\) who wrote the following to Marjane Satrapi, “i like your art work, and i have your art work in my recording studio. and i like Galts Creed” (*POOT* site, February 15, 2012\(^{41}\)). Avery’s online activity, instead, was marked with connection and depth.

Avery also had her character write to Mia Hall on the same day, but the message caused confusion considering the level of connection and depth in her previously in-character private message to Hamlet. Langston Hughes said:

Hello Mia, It’s very nice to meet you. I read your life story and it is very sad. Very sad. Very Very sa. VERY VERY VERY sad. ANyway, I’m sorry about your life but you handled it so well. I wanted to point out that I really like the fact that you play the cello. Having been in the Harlem Renaissance, i really enjoy musci not neccesarily classical like you but i enjoy music non the less. Well i would like to say that i enjoy poetry and your life sounds like a poem. A Very Very sad poem. I hope you enjoy *POOT* (*POOT* site, February 15, 2012).

The message surprised me because she and I both knew how closely her three participating classroom teachers from Dublin Academy attended to student postings on *POOT*. Avery’s private message to Mia was playful (“your life sounds like a poem. A Very Very sad poem”), lacking in seriousness (“Very Very sa. VERY VERY VERY sad”), and written quickly given the amount of grammatical mistakes (“i really enjoy musci not neccesarilys classical like you but i enjoy music non the less”). Avery referenced this private message during our interview, explaining that her friend played Mia Hall. Avery regarded her interaction with Mia Hall as “goofing around” and “having fun.” What also struck me was that the post that Avery labeled

\(^{40}\) Name removed for anonymity purposes.

\(^{41}\) Most messages from the POOT site were left in their original form, with spelling errors, with the exception of when it impeded comprehension.
with the word “fun” was the only posting (n = 26) in which she could be perceived as having violated the primary rule in POOT (i.e., stay in character).

The following day, Langston Hughes wrote a lengthy private message to Jane Eyre.

Dear Jane Eyre,

My name is Langston hughes. We haven’t had the pleasure of meeting each other but I have had the pleasure of reading your résumé, which by the way is very well detailed and interesting. I was born in 1906. You were born in the early 1800s so we both could agree that there are many differences between our time periods. I notice that you lived in Enlgand. I lived very far in the New York, at least for part of my life. I’ve never been to Enlgand but i would suggest you come to New York sometime.

I spent a lot of my time in Harlem, New York. I played a very important role, and i was very influenced by the Harlem renaissance. At the time, New York was bustling within life. Businesses were blooming, at least before the great depression hit. skyscraper were being built and many artist and architect competed for work. talented artist flocked to New York, me being one of them. I love New York because I had a nice life there.

I don wonder, although your life was full of adversity it lead to good things. Would you repeat any of it. What part of your life was the most inspiring or life changing? What aspects of your life would you have changed (POOT site, February 16, 2012)?

Avery noticeably used her character’s date of birth (i.e., 1906) as a comparison with Jane Eyre, who was born in the early 1800s. Avery compared Langston Hughes’s homeland (i.e., New York) and Jane Eyre’s homeland (i.e., England). Avery executed this comparison by referencing the Harlem Renaissance. She very interestingly positioned the reader to understand her character’s place and time (“skyscraper were being built and many artist and architect competed for work. talented artist flocked to New York, me being one of them”).

After her message to Jane Eyre, Avery shifted her work from private messages to the public forums, where she responded to speeches about who her character admired. Avery said she admired Congressman John Lewis, as she made a connection between Lewis’ work for civil rights and her character’s emphasis on the same matters, as seen in Figure 8.1.
Figure 8.1 Langston Hughes’s response to who he admires.

Noticeably, Avery attached a hyperlink source as a citation to the bottom of her post (see Figure 8.1). She repeats this in Figure 8.2, which depicts her response to the speech, “Who decides what’s right?” Avery included a hyperlink citation at the bottom of another message (a more detailed analysis of this post is presented in the historical thinking skills section of this chapter). Avery included three hyperlinks, which served as a citation and further explanation to the references she made in her post.

Figure 8.2 Langston Hughes’s reply to the “Who decides what’s right?” speech.
The next posting I want to introduce is a response message Langston Hughes made to John Galt about the concept of “what inspires him” (see Figure 8.3). Avery again positioned her character in his place and time by referencing Jazz and the Harlem Renaissance, and deeply rooted him as a poet. Avery cited four of Langston Hughes’s poems in support of her response, as well as how his grandmother influenced his thinking and behavior.

Figure 8.3 Langston Hughes’s response to John Galt.

Wall Comment “What inspires me?” by Langston Hughes on March 08, 2012 21:50

Dear John Galt,

Thank you for taking the time to ask me what inspires me as an artist! Many things inspire me as a poet. Everything around me inspires me, specifically jazz and blues. The rhythm of jazz and blue that I heard in the Harlem Renaissance inspired me and I tried to incorporate those into my poems. Some of my poems that I included rhythm and blues were The Weary Blues and Jazzonia. It also inspired me to write operas and musicals. Music was a positive part of my life but I was also surrounded by many negative things such as discrimination and segregation. That inspired me to write poems such as Democracy and Mother to Son. My grandmother also inspired because she stayed with me for most of my childhood and taught me to never give up. I never did give up and continued to write poetry until I died.

Sincerely,
Langston Hughes

During the final days of the simulation, Avery used her character to plead with the fellow guests. She requested that the other guests carefully contemplate the issuance of VOCs allocated to the POOT justice George Groscz (see Figure 8.4). To emphasize George Groscz’s unreliability, she referenced legal philosophy and previous speeches. Avery adduced from actual quotes to support her thesis; she used George Groscz’s own words to explain that Groscz had contradicted himself.
Figure 8.4 Langston Hughes’s plea for others not to support George Grosz.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech &quot;No Votes For George Grosz, Please&quot;, by Langston Hughes on April 06, 2012 15:20</th>
</tr>
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| I strongly support Mr.Kahdim and the building of the mosque. So of course my first reaction is to make sure that my vote counts and that opinion matters. So while reading through the many philosophies of the justices, George Grosz's stuck out to me! His speech stuck out to me as something that I would say and my impression was that would be someone I would want to give my vote of confidence. My impression of justice George Grosz now is that he is unreliable and inconsistent. I will admit here that I gave one of my votes of confidence to Mr. Grosz. His speech said, "My whole philosophy surrounds this idea of fairness. The law states, every citizen has equal rights. This caught my eye. Then he continued, "Mr. Kahdim like every other citizen has equal rights to creative expression [...] Expression through art is supposedly guaranteed to us [...] Art should be challenging. It should evoke emotions and create a stir up." This biggest thing that surprised me when he decided he would be to reject Mr. Kahdim. Especially after saying, "I believe architecture is a form of art and is guaranteed under the freedom of creative expression. [...] It is not something you stop, I was proud to give my vote to him because art and expression are two things that I feel strongly about, but he was misleading and unreliable."

In explanation on his decision to reject Mr. Kahdim, he stated, "He is being foolish. [...] If I support Mr. Kahdim then his appeal could give him as well as the Swedish public more confidence in the state than they deserve."

But isn't that the whole point of a government and being fair. The government's job is to protect the citizens and their rights, so why shouldn't people trust their government? In Mr. Grosz's legal philosophy he specifically stated that, "Through out history, it [art] is the one thing in this world that has united people of different race and religion together. How can we restrict such a powerful thing? So how is denying Mr. Kahdim his rights going to unite the government and its people? It won't."

The fourteen people that voted for George Grosz were scammed and I ask my fellow acquaintances here at alhambra that if you support Mr. Kahdim that you don't give your vote of confidence to Justice George Grosz.

-Langston Hughes

Avery’s Firsthand Experiences of Portraying Langston Hughes

McCormack’s (2000a, 2000b) four lenses were employed as the method of analysis to better understand Avery’s experience and dislikes. Special attention was paid to her word choices. Avery opened our interview with, “well, I didn’t really know what it was going to be like, I just knew…we did a lot of research…I didn’t know what it was going to look like or anything like that.” Her knowledge about and excitement for the project was limited. Her use of “I didn’t really know” and “I just” were used to articulate the distance Avery felt from the activity itself in a similar way to Sonya who portrayed Diego Rivera in Chapter 7. As I listened repeatedly to her expressions, her doubtful tone became more clearly articulated as insecurities in her academic abilities. While my initial perceptions in the interview notes illuminated her
 academic strengths, the first listening demonstrated that Avery perceived her abilities with less

Avery continued to explain her understanding of the project, and rooted her explanation in what her teacher, Mr. Ashton, had told her and classroom discussions. “I knew it was going to be similar to the ground-zero thing, so we were prepared,” Avery explained. She frequently used the word “we” to refer to a joint experience with her classmates, and positioned POOT as a class project. Avery emphasized the preparedness and amount of research that went into the project.

I asked Avery whether she had a favorite part of POOT. An extended pause followed. Avery eventually broke the silence with, “Um (long pause), not really on the, it was more the stuff we did outside of the simulation that was fun.” I asked her to tell me more about what she did outside of the classroom. Avery explained what participation looked like to her: “There is a lot of stuff that happened in the classroom, like the T2SFP,” which meant that each paragraph had to include a thesis along with two statistics or facts per paragraph to support her thesis. Avery continued, “We had to write a couple times per week for participation and the teachers would check it and grade it.” It became apparent that the more Avery invested in offline activities associated with POOT, the more Avery was willing to reconsider POOT’s likability.

I listened for the reason Avery told her story. In attending to this, Avery’s insecurities in her writing abilities became more prominent. Avery doubted herself and did not self-identify as a good writer. She recounted the story of her POOT experience, in close connection with her teachers and mother. Avery credited her teachers and her mother for discovering that she, indeed, improved her writing skills. This marked the most pivotal moment in her interview.
Avery’s teachers and mother were central to her POOT experience; Avery repeated referenced her character in connection with her: (1) teacher, (2) mother, and (3) writing abilities. This mirrored Hawkins’s (1974, 2002) I-Thou-It relationship (student-teacher-subject matter). What is particularly noticeable is the strength between her character and the highly regarded Thou’s in her narrative (i.e., her teachers and mother). Thus, I created a variation of Hawkins’s relationship triangle presented in Chapter 4 (see Figure 4.2), in which I signified the importance of this relationship with a red arrow in Figure 8.5. Generally, the “I-Thou linkage” is the most significant dimension of the relational triangle; however, Avery’s “Thou-It linkage” was considerably strongly and, consequently, affected her actions in POOT. For example, Avery spoke of how her mother helped provide her with poetry books by Langston Hughes and how her English teacher, Mr. Selma, knew him so well (“He was a Ph.D.”). Consequently, Avery felt an obligation to perform well.

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42 In Figure 8.5, I make note of the Hitler controversy, which was an event Avery referenced related to whether to allow Hitler to serve on the Tolerance and Diversity committee.
Avery admitted that learning about her character was one “fun” aspect of the project. She added, “My English teacher was a huge fan of Langston Hughes, so he really wanted me to play him. So, I was happy to.” When asked how she regarded her character, Avery replied, “I had already picked him before and I was hoping that I would get picked to play him.” She went on to say, “It was easier than if I had played George Washington because [Langston Hughes and I] had the same beliefs and stuff.”

I was curious who impacted Avery’s thought processes outside the abovementioned “Thou” (i.e., Mr. Ashton, Mr. Selma, and her mother). I queried about how talking to individuals outside of her school impacted how she wrote. Avery explained, “yeah a little bit, because you
want to give a good impression, so I was a little more serious… I tried to stay serious the whole
time because I had to play my character.” Avery returned to Hawkins’s (1974, 2002) I-Thou-It
relationship, and how she sought to make a positive impression because she felt a lot rested on
her portrayal. Avery admitted that “one time she said something funny” to her friend portraying
Mia Hall because Avery knew her in person. However, she explained she did not know whom
her classmates were portraying, with the exception of some of her good friends and the people in
her section of POOT from the writing class. She did not know who the characters were in the
two other sections in her school (i.e., Mr. Ashton’s world history class and Mr. Selma’s literature
class).

This analysis exemplified how Avery internalized POOT as a learning experience, one
she did not like in the beginning. She repeatedly mentioned the phrase T2SFP (Thesis along with
2 Statistics or Facts per Paragraph) and the saying “we had to write.” “It was a learning
experience,…because one of the things we had to do was T2SFP.” Avery said, “Basically, it’s
going to help us in the future.” She was referring to how the writing technique T2SFP helped her
and her classmates excel with writing. She continued, “It trained us to know what we are talking
about… so it doesn’t just seem like we are making stuff up or being biased.” I asked if Avery
ever found herself lamenting over the T2SFP. Avery interrupted me with an emphatic, “yes,
every time.”

“But once it was over and I then I read over it I was really happy ‘cause at the beginning
when we had to write to somebody I didn’t do that and it was kinda boring. Towards the end, my
writing got a lot better because of the T2SFP and had a lot more substance to it.” Avery
explained the skill transferred to a current class assignment, a magazine project She was working
on at the time of the interview. “I noticed I put in more facts… and it flows more.” Avery
surmised the T2SFP writing technique aided in her ability to use more relevant information.

Avery continued her contemplation with a description of how the discussions in her class
helped her better understand the material. Avery spoke about a workshop they did with their
acting coach. “We got up and we did different movements. The first movement was to do a
punch and to decide if your character would be like this (movement) or this (movement).”

Avery clarified she spoke in character during class time:

A: We spent an hour in the class on Thursdays, and when we would get out we would tell
our friends about what would just happened. Or I would tell my parents about it.

J: Really?

A: Yeah, at first I complained about the writing we had to do. Then I told my mom about
how much fun it was getting. They had parent teacher conferences between there. My
history teacher, [Mr. Ashton], told my mom about my writing, and [my mom] actually
got to read it. My mom was really happy.

She explained how she and her classmates would share what happened during class once they
would meet up in the hallways after class. Mr. Ashton engaged in what Belenky, Clinchy,
Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) refer to as “connected teaching,” in which he established trust and
connection with Avery by recognizing her work and sharing his professional observation with
Avery’s mother. The interaction between her history teacher and her mother signified what
Noddings (2003) calls the completion of the feedback loop because Avery felt heard and
acknowledged the feedback from both her teacher and mother. In the interview, Avery
continued, “[My mom] was telling me it would benefit me later. So, but, at the time I just really
didn’t like it. But I could see the benefits and [my mom] could see the benefits. So I knew it was
working. The teachers were really happy about it and that’s what they told my mom, so I didn’t
really complain after that.”
Avery’s I-voice was isolated in the following I-poem. This isolation of the I-voice illuminated the power of adult recognition related to an area Avery perceives as a weakness (i.e., her writing).

I/We
I didn’t really know
I just knew
We did a lot of research
I didn’t know
…

It was more the stuff outside of the simulation that was fun … like the T2SFP.

…

She/they
It

We had to write…for participation
The teachers would check it and grade it
…

I just really didn’t like it
But, I could see the benefits
I knew it was working
[My mom] could see the benefits
So, I didn’t really complain after that

The teachers were really happy

Avery’s isolated I-voice demonstrated her approval seeking stance. Avery acutely acknowledged her participation was associated with a grade. The strength of her mother’s and teacher’s recognition of her writing became apparent (“[My mom could see the benefits” and “The teachers were really happy”). Adult recognition was a significant determinant of Avery’s interest level in POOT. The abovementioned I-poem signified how the “more skilled other” factored into her thought process.
Impact of Theoretical Framings

Evidence of Avery’s Historical Thinking Skills

Avery explained, “Before the simulation started, we did a lot of research on our characters, a lot of research [J: yeah you guys did a lot of research]… we did extensive research.” I asked her to tell me about a character that came to mind. Avery brought up John Lewis, a congressman who she had never heard of before (as seen in Figure 8.1). She said, “I read his bio, which it didn’t have a lot of information but since we had to write to people. I ended up looking him up on the Internet.” Avery included a citation for others to research.

I inquired about how Avery mediated the difference between her voice and her character’s voice, to which she replied that they both had similar views, but she would often turn to what she knew about her character to determine if he would think the same way. I took note of how attuned to her character’s political beliefs she was, and how she conceptualized Langton Hughes as more than a poet. This was very different from Diego Rivera, presented in Chapter 7, who knew very little about her character’s political side and did not respond to Ben Hecht’s prompt about communism. Avery spoke about the research she conducted for the scenario in her history class with Mr. Ashton. She compared the scenario with the Ground Zero situation. In explaining her responses to more trial specific dialogue, Avery would often use phases like “I knew Langston Hughes was really big on…” and “I knew [Langston Hughes] would support that…”

Avery demonstrated evidence of historical thinking through referencing multiple sources, as demonstrated when she read John Lewis’s POOT résumé and compared it with his website to gain clarity. Figure 8.2, above, also demonstrated her use of citations to support her claims. She has several posts which include vivid details and references to time periods and literature. I
attribute the evidence of her historical thinking skills to the emphasis placed on the T2SFP writing technique, which clearly outlined expectations related to historical thinking.

**POOT Programmatic Improvements**

Avery provided strong examples of sourcing through sophisticated posts (see Figure 8.3 and Figure 8.4), and yet she explained how the act of writing and researching “a lot” caused her to dislike *POOT* initially. In Figure 8.6, I referred to her “dislike” as a “fracture” between the “I-It” connection. The fracture occurred because Avery’s writing requirements were viewed through her lens of low self-confidence and doubt in her writing abilities. Avery attributes the T2SFP as a required aspect of her participation in *POOT*, and links *POOT* and her teacher’s requirement. She is, therefore, both discouraged by the assessment piece (T2SFP) and motivated by a desire to perform well for her teacher, her mother, and the other participants. As a result, Avery created a pathway to the “It” through a mediated “Thou.” Her relationships with her teacher and her mother serve as the “Thou.”
Details of this study revealed how, in Avery’s relational triangle, her “Thou” represented two microsystems merging in the formation a mesosystem (i.e., merging dimensions of school and home), as detailed in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory\textsuperscript{43}. In other words, this “Thou” mediation is strengthened by Mr. Ashton’s decision to include Avery’s mother in the project by sharing Avery’s writing in \textit{POOT} at a parent-teacher conference. While Avery initially resisted her teacher’s technique for improving her writing, the T2SFP, her resistance diminished when her teacher merged the two microsystems and provided explicit, positive feedback to Avery’s mother coupled with evidence (i.e., Avery’s writing samples) to support the positive remarks. The merger between the two microsystems, to form a mesosystem, was pivotal for Avery in terms of how she perceived T2SFP, \textit{POOT}, and her relation to both (“I didn’t really

\textsuperscript{43} Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory has more recently been referred to as the Bio-Ecological Systems Theory.
complain after that”). Consequently, Avery’s case history opens a conversation around the importance of relational connections mediated by a strong Thou-It relationship, as well as the power of assessment linked to merging mesosystems. This presents a very different case than that of Diego Rivera presented in Chapter 7. While in Diego Rivera’s case, Sue did merge the microsystems for character selection, it is unclear how linked these systems were in regard to assessment.

Implications on Games and Roleplay Literature

When considering the implications on games and roleplay literature, Avery’s experience draws us back to a prior I-Thou-It illustration from Chapter 4. I compared the game Civilization with POOT (see Figure 4.1). I recall this illustration for two reasons: (1) because of how profound the relational dimensions of Avery’s experience were in the findings presented in this chapter, and (2) because of the prominence of the “Thou” in her connection with POOT, specifically her teacher who took an active role in shaping her experience. In seeing this work through the lens of Hawkins’s (1974, 2002) I-Thou-It triangle and Figure 4.1, I begin to see a more sophisticated representation of the I-Thou-It illustration. Jeremiah McCall (2010, 2011, 2014), also a history teacher who uses innovative methods for teaching, presents six steps for the implementation of simulation games in a high school history class. I believe McCall’s work to be relevant in understanding how the Thou-It connection can be strengthened and help to further explain some of the findings presented above. This is contrary to the depiction of a weaker Thou-It relationship in Figure 4.1. McCall (2010) suggests the following six steps for teachers:

(1) Selection of a relevant game,
(2) Selection of supplemental educational material,
(3) Training the students in the use of the game,
(4) Observation of students while they are playing the simulation game,
(5) Structured time for the implementation of educational material, and
(6) Reflection.

In implementing these steps, McCall changes the relational triangle to reflect a more central Thou. I found this particularly similar to that of Avery’s experience, and will now compare this to Mr. Ashton’s work. First, Mr. Ashton selected of a relevant activity—POOT. Mr. Ashton also selected supplemental educational material and trained his students in the use of POOT. While students were active on the site, Mr. Ashton observed his students and provided them with feedback. Together with his colleagues, Mr. Ashton structured time for the implementation of educational material to enhance the material being discussed online. The students were provided with multiple ways to reflect on their experience.

Now, I would like to speak more broadly about how Avery’s case history has impacted my thinking about the I-Thou-It triangle. For example, take Figure 8.7 below, which presents educational material from a textbook in comparison with a video game McCall uses called Rome: Total War. Both the left and the right side of the figure present content to the young person (It), with the left presenting it in the form of a video game and the right presenting it in the form of a textbook. Usually, the teacher has a strong connection with the It (content), but this connection is nearly absent from the relational triangle with the games (on the left).
Figure 8.7 Games and *POOT* I-Thou-It relationships.

What McCall’s (2010) steps for implementation of simulation games allows for is the shift in the relationships depicted in Figure 8.7, to instead look more like Figure 8.8. In Figure 8.8, the teacher is able to strengthen the way he or she interacts with the game to allow for more meaningful and richer outcomes. The student is no longer simply playing the game, but is being shaped by a more skilled other’s scaffolding of the experience. I believe this image can also be presented differently, by replacing *Rome: Total War* with *POOT*.

Figure 8.8 Relational triangle with a prominent Thou.
Chapter 9

Case History Four: The Jesus Controversy

Overview

Chapter 9 explores a series of K-12 students who challenged the boundaries established by their classroom teacher. The controversial portrayal of the character Jesus is the focal point of this chapter. Jesus’s actions became a point of controversy, discomfort, and even anger for other participants in the program, and exploring his case carefully and non-judgmentally was important. In addition to an in-depth exploration into Jesus’s firsthand experiences, this chapter investigates how the Jesus controversy impacted three other K-12 students: John Knox, Osama Bin Laden, and Yosa Buson. For stage setting, or what Gilligan (1990) calls “a naturalist’s rendering of the human world,” a multitude of voices are included in addition to Jesus, John Knox, Osama Bin Laden, and Yosa Buson. In the paragraphs that follow, the reader travels back in time to the actual happenings of the 2012 iteration of the program. This time travel is followed by the first-hand accounts of the participants who experienced the 2012 iteration of POOT.

Welcome to the Alhambra Palace

44 Pseudonyms were used for all people and places.
The Power Outage

The South Wing of the Alhambra Palace was dark and still. The silence was broken by a soft voice from the resident nurse. “Before the fall, do you remember seeing anyone on your walk back?” Florence Nightingale placed a cool rag over the swollen bump on the injured high school teacher’s forehead. Ms. Gruwell had tripped during the night while walking back to her living quarters from the kitchen when the lights in the hallway suddenly went out. In response to Florence Nightingale’s question, Ms. Gruwell groaned and said the name of one of the guests also staying at the Palace. With this new information, Florence Nightingale scurried to the telephone to ring the man in charge of the facilities. “Mr. Oppenheimer,” she said. Then, Florence Nightingale revealed, “She saw Jesus.” Robert put his head down, “that’s what I was afraid of.”

The next morning, many of the guests were gathered in the corners of the courtyard, suspiciously whispering about what had happened. Before hysteria broke out, Robert Oppenheimer knew what he had to do. He gathered the guests of the Court of All Time in the Foyer of the Alhambra, as seen in Figure 9.1. He began his announcement, “Last night a mysterious power outage occurred here at Alhambra.” The crowd hushed. He projected his voice and continued, “All [of the guests] have checked in okay, with the exception of Erin Gruwell who tripped at the time of the power loss. Ms. Gruwell is currently recovering under the care of Florence Nightingale.” He paused to clear his throat. “The source of this outage is still unknown. Many have come to me, pointing fingers at a disagreement taking place moments before the power outage between Richard the Lionheart and his brother prior to the power outage Richard the Lionheart was observed publicly defaming his brother King John of England. Kind Richard was overheard saying, “We had a Holy War—and would a king chosen by God not want to continue the mission of spreading God’s word throughout the whole world? Right now, I question if leaving the throne to you was a mistake” (POOT site, February 14, 2012). Robert Oppenheimer continued his announcement in the Foyer, “Others have suggested the power outage was the doing of Bloody Mary Tudor's army.” Several guests of the Court reported receiving threatening private messages from Bloody Mary Tudor that read, “Be warned, I have joined an army that will destroy anyone that is not a member of God's creation: THE CATHOLIC CHURCH” (POOT site, February 7, 2012). The plaintiff in the present POOT court case, Muhammad Kadhim, vocalized his concern about the threat of Bloody Mary’s growing “army” and how it might impact the outcome of the trial. Mr. Kadhim was a Muslim and citizen of Sweden, who had petitioned the Court of All Time to rule, on the authority of the Justices and Guests at the Alhambra Palace, in favor of his right to build a mosque in a downtown district of Stockholm (as explained in Chapter 3). One issue of contention was that Mr. Kadhim’s proposed mosque was near this sight of a suicide bombing committed by an Islamic fundamentalist.

The concerned host, Robert Oppenheimer, continued his announcement with a stern look on his face and furrowed brows. “I urge you not to point fingers. As your host, I have decided we must change how we conduct ourselves here at Alhambra. As a result,
Figure 9.1 Robert Oppenheimer Gathering the Guests of the Court in the Foyer.

Power Outage Update and Committee Formation, by J. Robert Oppenheimer on February 17, 2012 13:09

Last night a mysterious power outage occurred here at Alhambra. All have checked in okay, with the exception of Erin Gruwell who tripped at the time of the power loss. Ms. Gruwell is currently recovering under the care of Florence Nightingale.

The source of this outage is still unknown. Many have come to me, pointing fingers at a disagreement taking place moments before the power outage between Richard the Lionheart and King John of England (see disagreement). Others have suggested the power outage was the doing of Bloody Mary Tudor's army. I urge you not to point fingers.

As your host, I have decided we must change how we conduct ourselves here at Alhambra. As a result, I will be forming a select number of pre-approved committees in the courtroom to address some of the concerns this event has raised (more details). Later, these committees will be allowed to nominate Justices in the courtroom. The changes are as follows:

- First, I will form a security committee to discuss how we define security. If you wish to nominate someone (including yourself) to serve on this committee, stop by my office (here) or write to me privately.
- We must gather the POOT royalty and other leaders to discuss the responsibility of leadership.
- I will form 3-4 additional committees. Post your suggestions for committee themes here: http://poot.icsmich.org/main/speeches/8002.

In the meantime, to guide our interactions in POOT, I am convening a philosopher's caucus (http://poot.icsmich.org/main/speeches/8003) to discuss the following question: "How does a society and/or person determine the "right" thing to do?"

Your concerned host,
Robert Oppenheimer
I will be forming a select number of pre-approved committees in the courtroom to address some of the concerns [the mysterious power outage] has raised…First, I will form a security committee to discuss how we define security.” Robert explained he would form 3-4 additional committees and take their ideas for committee topics into consideration. The announcement concluded, but the worry and scuttle about the Palace had not.

Mealtimes were dominated by religious debates, some ending poorly. “I am an atheist and do not believe that Allah can guide me” G.E. Moore replied back sharply at Mr. Kadhim when Mr. Kadhim had explained Allah could guide him in determining the difference between right and wrong (POOT site, February 21, 2012). Stephen Colbert aired a controversial reported on his television show, “Guest, Nation, mosques are constantly being built in communities where Christians live, maybe the Muslims are there too. I don't know, but these are our communities. We need to address this” (POOT site, February 21, 2012). Abraham, from the Book of Genesis, pleaded with the other guests, “But that is not what God intended. Does Jesus not preach that we are all equals and that no man is above another? Instead of destroying Islam let us show them the path of righteousness.” L. Ron Hubbard was sparring with the First Lady, Michelle Obama, over religious preferences. Much to the surprise of some, the typically calm Buddhist community was agitated by reform leader John Knox who was heard saying, “Just because I am not of your pagan religion doesn't mean I can't point out the obvious, detrimental flaws to it.” (POOT site, February 14, 2011).

Several days later, Robert Oppenheimer was still receiving messages from guests concerned about safety at Alhambra. To this, he replied publically, “Dear Esteemed Guests, Many have stopped by my office to privately suggest committee topics, as well express safety concerns related to the power outage. I assure you, I am working tirelessly to maintain your safety and wellbeing at Alhambra.” (POOT site, February 21, 2012). Given the heightened religious tension in the air, Robert Oppenheimer sensed the guests were restless.

**Threats of an imposter**

While Robert Oppenheimer was publically disheveled by the power outage, he was privately entangled in another security matter which he feared was related: Was there an imposter among the guests at Alhambra? A number of quests raised questions about whether Jesus was the imposter, and even he had strong suspicions. Jesus was not behaving in the way many of the guests thought he should and his posts were flagged as out of character.

These questions and concerns arrived at Oppenheimer’s desk via several avenues: in-character posts on the POOT website, the Green Room as seen in Figure 9.2, and out of character posts made through email and university course discussion boards. The Green Room is the one place on the POOT website where characters are permitted to speak out of character, as described in Chapter 3. Posts appearing in the Green Room are displayed as anonymous for the K-12 students.
Figure 9.2 Green Room complaint regarding Jesus’s character portrayal.

Processing the Jesus Controversy

Processing as a Project Director

Depicted above, participants began to use the term “imposter” as an in-game way of flagging out-of-character behavior. Imposter was a term first used by John Knox, and later used by a number of other guests in the same manner. Tensions were already mounting, with Bloody Mary on the warpath (i.e., BE CATHOLIC ALL THE WAY, and im queen mary, not elizabeth. Elizabeth is my wretched half sister that DISGUSTS ME).

As a project director, I wrote to a university mentor to ask him to pay closer attention to a series of highly active students, which said, “Characters I’d like you to pay attention to include: Jesus and Bloody Mary” ([name not disclosed], personal communication, February 8, 2012). Based on what I had read from Jesus and Bloody Mary’s posts, I felt Jesus and Bloody Mary
would benefit from increased adult attention to channel their enthusiasm and to challenge their characters through scaffolded historical references.

A chart of Jesus’s early online activity was compiled as a way of better visualizing his contributions to determine if they were in-character or out-of-character (see Table 9.1). Noticeable feature included Jesus’s causal word choice (“well you get the rest”), inaccuracies (“good as always”), directness (“No, wrong”), aggressiveness (“if they refuse they burn in hell”), insistence (“two, Islam split due to…”) and political reference (“you will be forgiven for your democratic views”). Jesus also posted a wall comment to John Scopes, the biology teacher formally entrenched in the debate over creationism and evolutionism (“I have forgave you and am willing to give you a second chance to get in to heaven”). He is also inconsistent with how he capitalizes “Word of God.” Due the amount of errors he makes in his posts, some posts have been corrected for comprehension purposes, there is strong reason to believe the student is not reading back through his posts prior to posting them.
Table 9.1 Jesus’s online activity between February 2- February 7, 2012.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2/2/12 | Wall Comment by Jesus Christ on "I am watching you"  
I am the powerful god almighty creator of heaven and earth... well you get the rest |
| 2/2/12 | Comment on Wall Comment "No title"  
I will now reward you with the eternal fruit of heaven |
| 2/3/12 | Comment on Wall Comment "Please refrain from making a mockery of my religion."  
Have faith in me. My children and you will bear the fruits of everlasting life. |
| 2/7/12 | Comment on Wall Comment "How’s it going Son of God?”  
Good as always. Are you a Christian? |
| 2/7/12 | Comment on Wall Comment "Please refrain from making a mockery of my religion.”,  
No, wrong. I show them and if they refuse they burn in hell |
| 2/7/12 | Comment on Wall Comment "Please refrain from making a mockery of my religion.”,  
Two, Islam split due to Abraham cheating on his wife because he did not have faith in me when I told Abraham to have a child with Sarah. instead you went off with Hegar and had Ishmael who started Islam. So if you hadn’t gone out and impregnated Hegar Islam wouldn’t be around. -Word of God |
| 2/7/12 | Wall Comment "Greetings Mr. Scopes"  
You should follow me Jesus Christ the son of god. I believe that you were unjustly punished or your unchristian beliefs. however I have forgave you and am willing to give you a second chance to get in to heaven. -word of God |
| 2/7/12 | Wall Comment "Greeting from Jesus Christ"  
god day, You should follow me so that we can spread Christianity to all people. I know that you are a roman catholic. and if you are loyal you will follow me and I will bear you with the gift of everlasting life. -word of god |
| 2/7/12 | Wall Comment "Greeting from Jesus Christ”  
Hello, You should follow me so that you will be forgiven for your democratic views. Follow me and convert from Baptist and you will be rewarded with the eternal fruits of Heaven -Word Of God |

The chart reveals examples of both in-character behavior (i.e., “I have forgave you and am willing to give you a second chance to get in to heaven” and “I will bear you with the gift of everlasting life”) and out-of-character behaviors (i.e., “creator of heaven and earth... well you get the rest” and “Good as always”).

In further reviewing Jesus’s inbox with private messages, I observed he elected not to interact with some of the adult characters while he was interacting with the K-12 students in
what some felt like was a questionable manner. Stephen Colbert crafted the following private message to Jesus:

Hi Jesus,
First, I have to say, I’m big fan. In a recent "Yahweh or No Way" segment on my show, The Colbert Report, though, I had to give a big No Way to God getting involved in online dating. Hope you don’t mind.
Good to see you here in Alhambra Palace,
Stephen Colbert (POOT site, February 5, 2012).

Yet, Jesus did not reply to Stephen Colbert’s message. Kathy, the university mentor portraying Stephen Colbert, was not alarmed by the lack of response. Kathy admitted, “I had not been checking on Jesus because he was posting a lot. However, I should have been watching the quality of his posts” (Kathy, personal communication, February 15, 2012).

There was something that did catch Kathy’s eye 10 days later. Kathy sent me an email to describe her concerns. “Jennifer, I just stumbled upon this interaction… I went into the Green Room just to snoop around and saw [Jesus’s] post. He seemed genuinely distressed and picked on” (Kathy, personal communication, February 15, 2012). The post Kathy was referring to was the following Green Room post made by the student portraying Jesus, which was titled “POOT character issues:

Jesus Christ (all character portrayals aside) People hating on Jesus. Calling him Anti-Jesus, Anti-Christ, or fake Jesus, Muslim Jesus. I doubt a lot of you are portraying your characters correctly. This is not real life, this is not life or death. We are here for a grade. This is not Facebook were there are fakes. hate to tell all of you everybody is fake we are portraying a character that we chose. You are able to portray your character however your little heart desires. So to sum this up everybody stay of everyone’s case if you think they are playing there character wrong that’s not why we are here (POOT site, February 13, 2012).

In this post, Jesus questioned why people are “hating” on Jesus. He was concerned with the intensity of the accusations that Jesus was fake. He was also concerned that accusations over
accurate character portrayal were unequally focused on his character, while other students were also struggling to represent their character well.

Jesus’s post in the Green Room received five replies (see Figure 9.3), where people were able to talk about Jesus’s portrayal as themselves without having to speak as their character. One respondent said, “I think we all need to allow each other time to develop our characters” (POOT site, February 14, 2012). The last respondent said, “Since you are Jesus, other people will have definite preconceptions of how you will speak. Do you think you are speaking as Jesus or have you created your own character based on what you want to say in the game? Maybe the feedback is not being given appropriately, but why do you think people are reacting to your statements the way they are?” (POOT site, February 15, 2012). The speech patterns that the last respondent was referring to had to do with the frequency in which this Jesus told people they were going to burn in hell.
Figure 9.3 Replies to Jesus’s post in the Green Room.

February 14, 2012 00:44
Thanks for speaking up. Here are my thoughts: Playing for a grade... can’t it be more than that? Can’t we have fun and do a good job, aside from the grade?// What does staying on someone’s case mean and look like? If you think someone is out of character, ask them to express that thought in the Green Room. Let’s unpack what it means to stay on someone’s case.

Reply to this comment (Remove this comment?)

February 14, 2012 12:59
staying on someones case is alright staying on the actual persons case about how they are potraying their character is a completely different thing.

Reply to this comment (Remove this comment?)

February 14, 2012 20:57
Well, said I think we all need to allow each other time to develop our characters. The idea is to attempt to portray your character in the most realistic light. You are correct, I doubt that any of us are correctly potraying our characters 100 percent correctly.

Reply to this comment (Remove this comment?)

February 15, 2012 02:01
You bring up a good point. We are all trying hard here. How can we help each other? I can help you craft a response to a post. Pick a quote from a character so we can look at it.

Reply to this comment (Remove this comment?)

February 15, 2012 16:25
I do think there is some responsibility to play your character as accurately as possible. That is part of the challenge presented to us. Since you are Jesus, other people will have definite preconceptions of how you will speak. Do you think you are speaking as Jesus or have you created your own character based on what you want to say in the game? Maybe the feedback is not being given appropriately, but why do you think people are reactin... the way they are?

Kathy continued in her email to me:

So I checked on [Jesus’s online] interactions... I was thinking of emailing him privately, too, to have Stephen [Colbert] offer some advice along the lines of asking why [his character Jesus] is judging everyone...that doesn’t seem very much like Jesus, maybe

45 Indented posts indicate that they are a reply to the post immediately above.
some right-wing Christians, but not Jesus. He’s a little more old Testament God it seems; I will smite you type attitude. I know personally that’s not the image of Jesus I see portrayed in society which is part of the reason he’s getting so much backlash (Kathy, personal communication, February 15, 2012).

In her email, Kathy addressed the objectionable posts made by the student who portrayed Jesus (“that doesn’t seem very much like Jesus”). She also drew on the difference between her own image of how Jesus is portrayed in society and that of Jesus in POOT 2012 to make sense of why the student was receiving so much “backlash.” Kathy distinguished how the student negotiated his character’s traits in a way that contributed to the negative attention he was receiving.

Other university mentors commented on Jesus’s online activity, particularly in relation to their thinking about the variation in academic ability levels among the K-12 students. Serena, a university mentor, said, “I mean there were some students who came across as much more capable of negotiating between themselves and their character and staying in character” (Serena, personal communication, August 6, 2012). Serena extended the conversation about negotiating skills to that of capabilities. Connie, also a university mentor, added, “The ability to generate a culturally appropriate character and to recognize the absence of culturally appropriate characters requires the generation of cultural knowledge which may not only be different from one’s personal views, but may also be in direct conflict” (Connie, reflection paper, April 16, 2012).

Kathy, Serena, and Connie were not the only adults to raise concern over Jesus’s online activity. Mr. Lin and his students (Richard the Lionhearted, Osama Bin Laden, and Yosa Buson) addressed the objectionable dimensions of Jesus’s online activity in their classroom, as well (Mr. Lin, personal communication, February 18, 2012). In response to Mr. Lin’s email to me about rising concern over Jesus, I wrote, “I can’t figure out if Jesus feels picked on and is reacting to the feeling of being attacked or not, so your students may consider trying different approaches with characters like Jesus” (Jennifer Killham, personal communication, February 16, 2012), such
as interactions that would put Jesus less on the defense. I offered the suggestion of trying a variety of approaches because, while in conversation with Serena, she pointed out that “some of the students seemed to be jumping on each other right away” (Serena, personal communication, May 16, 2012). Serena felt the kids were verbally “jumping on” each other while online for being out of character. By “jumping on” she meant that K-12 students were focused on how other participants had posts with incorrect grammar and with those characters who did not share their personal opinions on the court case. Students from schools other than the one Jesus attended also reported feeling like others were verbally “picking on” people for being out of character, but offline in the hallways or after class. In an interview with the student who portrayed a musician46 from a different school than the one Jesus attended, he confirmed students in his school verbally “picked on” the other students offline when their posts were not in character. The musician said, “There were a lot of arguments in the school [related to the trial] that really angered people, and [the angered people] said, I’m going to go type it now.” The musician continued by describing an interaction that took place offline after class, “Everyone was telling [boy’s name removed], wow, you’re playing as yourself,” and he explained that the boy he was described would get “mad.” (Musician, personal communication, May 1, 2012).

As the program’s host (i.e., portraying Robert Oppenheimer), I communicated with the student who portrayed Jesus directly via the private message. In a message titled “Out of Character posts,” Robert Oppenheimer wrote:

Dear Jesus,
I write to you as your host. If you wish to speak out of character, I invite you to join the others in the Green Room. Out of character posts in other parts of POOT will be deleted. I trust you will understand, Jesus. If you need to talk about your experience, I encourage you to write me back. As your host, I must maintain order. If we were able to maintain order at Los Alamos, where I created the bomb, we can do it here.

46 The name of this student’s character was removed for anonymity reasons.
Your host,
Robert Oppenheimer (*POOT* site, February 16, 2012)

Up until this point, Jesus and Robert Oppenheimer had exchanged few words. Jesus was, however, aware Robert Oppenheimer was portrayed by an adult. Jesus replied:

What makes you think I am out of character? I am Jesus Christ. I am able to take on any form and be anything. I do not have one specific character. The sky’s the limit. You never know I could be you. Just remember... I am watching you. I might be Jewish, I might be Christian, I could be atheist. I, Jesus Christ have no character. I could be the bird outside your window. I could be your dog if you have one. I am the reason behind your success in life. I bless you in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, amen” (*POOT* site, February 16, 2012).

Immediately following this email, Robert Oppenheimer tried a different tone in his next message, title “Many of your followers have spoken with me.” In this follow email, he told Jesus, “All through the night, your followers and supports have pulled me aside. They have requested I speak with you about how much attention you are receiving.” The email proceeded with a concerned tone and attempted to speak to the boy behind the character to make sure he was ok. Robert Oppenheimer asked, “How are you? Are the comments being made about you upsetting? Please reply. Robert.” To this, the student replied, “Not at all at first. Yes, but then I remembered I am the son of god. I created this universe so might as well curse the sinners who go against me. - word of god (praise and glory in his name) (*POOT* site, February 17, 2012). The answer was evasive, and the usage of “Not at all at first. Yes, but…” expressed the boy’s uncertainty and vulnerability. The vulnerability was quickly masked by the strength he claimed to have found in his character (“then I remembered I am the son of god”).

One minute after the above messages was sent to Robert Oppenheimer, Jesus sent a reply message to another K-12 student who portrayed Stephen Hawking. Stephen Hawking titled his original email to Jesus, “Why are people believing you?” in which Stephen Hawking utilized his character’s scientific stance to raise the question about Jesus’s existence. Jesus responded
aggressively to Stephen Hawkins, repeatedly using the word “you” in a way that further placed distance between the two characters. By comparison, Jesus was making a distinction between how he interacted with adult-played characters, as seen above, and student-played characters. Jesus’s emails to student-portrayed characters, almost exclusively males, were marked with increased aggressiveness and offensiveness. In addition, Jesus’s messages to other boys in the simulation were written more hastily as evidenced by poor sentence structure and frequency of spelling errors.

Within six minutes from Jesus’s reply to Robert Oppenheimer, Jesus had launched a crusade against the host. Jesus sent the following private message titled “POOT crusade” to 30 other players:

Greetings from Jesus Christ son of god. We all must unite under Christianity to put Mr Obienheimer in his place. I do not believe that I spelled his name right but as the son of God I now declare that is how his name shall be spelled now. We must excommunicate him for his sinful ways. If you do not want to join him in hell you should join me. Word of God (POOT site, February 17, 2012).

Jesus followed his initial mass email with a series of additional mass emails, in which he included a statement about the host. It read, “I, Jesus Christ, have come to you to join Christianity and help me serve sacred justice to our sinful host. Mr. J. Robert Oppenheimer is the creator of the bomb and known as the father of the atomic bomb” (POOT site, February 17, 2012). Returning to the original messages in this series, I recall Robert Oppenheimer divulging his past work with bombs to Jesus. I report to the team of project directors that I was not upset by the crusade against Oppenheimer, but rather alarmed at the intensity of the K-12 student’s interactions with other male students on POOT.
Reaching out to Mr. Day

I messaged Mr. Day, the teacher of Jesus, John Knox, and Abraham, all of whom had a part in the above described Jesus controversy. I informed Mr. Day of what I noticed in regard to the boys’ postings. I wrote:

Hi Mr. Day, I wanted to touch base with you about Jesus and John Knox. I have included a POOT exchange between them below. Do you feel they are responding in character? If not, I would like to request they speak in character, unless they are in the Green Room. Please let me know what you think of Jesus’s site activity” (Mr. Day, personal communication, February 15, 2012).

The Green Room post brought to my attention by Kathy was included, as shown above. I also included a wall posting from John Knox to Jesus titled, “We must excommunicate this fake Christ.” In this walling posting, John Knox cited Matthew 22:36-40 in The Bible as a reason for calling the POOT Jesus a fake. The student portraying John Knox said. “If you look at our previous argument, you will clearly see that Jesus said something that contradicts what he said in The Bible. I asked him which of the Commandments are the most important, and he replied that they are all equal.” John Knox had referenced the verse “love your neighbor as yourself” as a verse that received unequal weight.

John Knox’s résumé was assessed to determine whether this was in-character or not. John Knox wrote, “The French government didn’t like me that much. I spoke out against what I believed was untrue or wrong. I was despised by the French government for it. It is this bull-headed-ness that got me later exiled.” Given this, his post citing a bible verse did not seem all together out of character, nor did the veracity in his speech. Yet, in the closing statement John Knox did break character when he ended with, “[Jesus is] just butt-hurt that people found out that he’s not Christ” (POOT site, February 14, 2012). I had to look up the term “butt-hurt,” as it concerned me most of all. I could see the university mentor, Kathy, attending to the post in as her
character Stephen Colbert, who replied “John Knox, you should heed the words you have spoken!” (POOT site, February 15, 2012).

Mr. Day was an attentive teacher, and replied quickly when I messaged him about the concerns. He indicated he would speak with both boys during the next time he had them in his Debate class. He said he would make certain they were okay and to emphasize the importance of staying in character as a fundamental rule for POOT participation.

Mr. Day was using POOT in his debate class at Jefferson High School, a school in a large metropolitan area. Jefferson High School was predominately Caucasian and affluent. Most students in Mr. Day’s class will go on to college after high school. Mr. Day clarified, “We are one of the five or so richest neighborhoods in [name of state] and so in the top 5% of monied suburbs in the country” (Mr. Day, personal communication, September 10, 2014). Ordinarily, his course offered a variety of public speaking activities and roleplaying that focused on a variety of issues and persuasion.

He had used POOT off and on for the last 10 years. A decade ago, Mr. Day was invited to participate in ICS programs by a POOT project director. He reported that he enjoyed the implementation of ICS programs because of the increased opportunities for student engagement with content. Mr. Day noted that “as many half to two thirds of students [at his high school] seem bored and detached from their education. We see an awful lot of procedural display from students who are on the honors track and want to get by with doing as little as possible” (Mr. Day, personal communication, September 10, 2014). POOT, instead, was curriculum he saw as more challenging and engaging.

While using POOT, the students in Mr. Day’s debate class met in a computer lab equipped with one desk top computer per student. While students primarily accessed POOT
during the provided class time, Mr. Day noted that the students also had access to computers at home. He began each POOT-centered session with a mini-lesson about the nature of persuasion and arguments. After the mini-lesson, he allowed time for the students to access the POOT site online. He noted, “as the kids worked, I would walk around the lab and confer. I would share successes students had and try to extend learning when students became proficient at one task. For example, I might have students consider counter claims after they have written an effective argument” (Mr. Day, personal communication, September 10, 2014). One of Mr. Day’s students confirmed that the majority of the work they completed in his class occurred online.

A student I interviewed from Mr. Day’s class said, “We weren’t supposed to divulge who we were [on POOT]. A couple of [the students] did though.” Mr. Day confirmed that in the beginning he had asked the students not to share their character names with their peers. “I didn’t want students engaging in personal attacks and only talking to their real life friends. I tried to insist that they act as the characters they portrayed. It did not work. Kids talked. Sometimes they talked because they were excited about the events of the day and wanted to share. Other times--who knows why?” I asked one of Mr. Day’s students if he knew who portrayed Jesus in real life, to which he replied, “at first I did not, then I was told who it was... I believe I knew of him, but I did not really know him personally.” This student, who had taken a position in the Jesus controversy, clarified that his interactions with Jesus the character were not at all a result of “a personal conflict or anything… and a lot of people followed the argument closely.”

When I asked Mr. Day to clarify how he graded his student’s work in POOT he said, “I counted entries and I counted the substance of entries. Were there a significant number of posts made by a student? Then I looked to see if the entries engaged at points in the substantive parts
of the work.” If entries were perfunctory he noted that in the gradebook, as well. He also said, “I conferred with students and gave them an opportunity to re-engage.”

### Returning to Matters of Security at Alhambra

On the morning of the 28th of February, students awoke to an announcement which read, “From the desk of J. R. Oppenheimer:

Dear Esteemed Guests; I speak to you after a lengthy meeting with Ze’ev Jabotinsky, the chair of the Security Committee (view [the link to the] committee manifesto). We convened an emergency meeting because many of you suggested Jesus may be an impostor. For the safety of all and the good of the trial, Ze'ev and I decided it best to escort Jesus to the South Wing of Alhambra for further questioning. At this time, we cannot comment on the veracity of this accusation, but we can assure you Jesus is in a comfortable quarter (POOT site, February 28, 2012).

In actuality, this was the moment when Jesus’s login was disabled and the student no longer had access to the site.

The following post made by the student was the pivotal point in my decision to disable his login:

Now that I have taken care of Mr. Knoxville I shall now deal with you. And no I am not going around raising a grand army to destroy people I am raising a grand army to humiliate people. Then set them on fire and send them to hell. come on Jesus has to have some fun. Im a nice Guy or being or whatever I am. But piss me of and your going to hell. I will give you once chance for forgiveness. Take back everything you said and I’ ll cease what I plan to do. Keep what you are doing and pay the price (POOT site, February 27, 2012).

Several attempts, both in and out-of-character, were made to discourage JC’s use of the word “hell” and to limit inappropriate words comments like “piss me off,” but my efforts did not prevent offensive posts from occurring. Johnny Knoxville is from the mature rated stunts-and-pranks MTV network’s television show Jackass. JC’s use of Johnny Knoxville can be linked with what Bosacki (2008) terms “aggression”—when one tries to damage the self-esteem of
feelings of others, as JC admitted to using the term as a personal attack (“I got my army to call him Johnny Knoxville because it had some meaning to it. I was indirectly calling John Knoxville a Jackass”).

I suspended my initial reaction of horror in order to look more closely at the statement in context. JC’s reference to Jackass is significant for two reasons. First, Kosovski (2009) described Jackass as a television show that “enthusiastically and insistently violated standards of good taste” (p. 65). This description seemed particularly in line with JC’s style of communication and character portrayal, and sheds light on JC’s influences. Kosovski further explained that “Jackass made a spectacle of the intimate, exposing publicly that which is normally kept private… At its core, Jackass was a juvenile performance by men who would clearly rather be boys, irking “grown-ups” at every turn, undercutting the adult establishment whenever possible (pp. 65-71). This also resonated of JC’s character portrayal, saying:

1. shocking things publically (e.g., “If you do not want to join him in hell you should join me”),
2. irking grown-ups (e.g., “STOP TAXING THE RICH CHRISTIANS THEY ARE GOOD PEOPLE IF YOU TWO DO NOT STOP THIS INSANITY I WILL NOT CONVERT MYSELF INTO THE HOST FOR YOU WHEN YOU ARE FORCED TO GO TO SOME POLITICAL CHURCH SERVICE!!! HA!!”),
3. undercutting the establishment (e.g., “I am able to take on any form and be anything. I do not have one specific character. The skys the limit”).

Kosovski explained that Jackass was intended to shock the audience, as well as to test the limits of the male body (p. 65). This testing of the male body served to reinforce gender ideologies, which are defined by Hall (2003) as images, messages, texts, and symbols which are projected in the media that, as Kellner (2003) argued, reinforce sexism by normalizing and naturalizing domination and subordination. Way (2011) talks about this as a way that culture has coopted
what is considered to be natural. William Pollack’s (1998) feared breaking “Boy Code,” which consisted of the “four basic stereotyped male ideals” (pp. 23–24).

The difficult of the decision was noted, particularly because of repeated offensive posts. I expressed feeling as if my hands were tied, and the needs of the student and the community needed to be considered. I gauged the health of POOT through the site’s recent activity. Upon looking closer into how far Jesus’s reach extended, I noticed the wealth of posts in response to Jesus’s portrayal. A post that received a great deal of attention was one by a Muslim man named Sari Nusseibeh who pleaded for peace in POOT and described Jesus as a peaceful man, as seen in Figure 9.4.

Figure 9.4 Sari Nusseibeh describes Jesus as a peaceful man.

Sari’s posting received a lot of attention, but the attention was only from adults. Meanwhile, the K-12 students were discussing amongst themselves.

I inquired as to what the female characters played by adolescent females said to one another in comparison with the male characters played by adolescent males (see Table 9.2). The females expressed curiosity (“I’d like to know your opinion”) and uncertainty (“I’m not sure of which side to go to right now”) about how to handle the situation, but used the controversy as a
way to engage in conversation with other characters (“I would love to know your thoughts”). The female tone was considerate and timid (“I do hope you consider my input”), as well as friendly (e.g., the salutation “With love”). Bloody Mary, the most antagonistic of all the female characters, both as a character and throughout the program, was largely silent. Bloody Mary did not utter a word about the Jesus controversy. The females wrote more softly with “I’d like,” “I believe”, “I do hope,” and “I would love to know.” The male characters played by adolescent males, on the other hand, fiercely weighed in on the Jesus controversy. The used phrases such as “must never come back” and “should stay banned.” Labels were given (“imposter,” “spawn of the Devil,” “false prophet,” and “like a jerk again”). The males spoke with clarity about their stance on Jesus controversy. The males spoke in terms of would, should, not, and ifs. They spoke of removal and falsehoods. A growing number of male-initiated crusades were brewing.
Table 9.2 A gender comparison of the reactions to the Jesus controversy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female characters played by adolescent females</th>
<th>Male characters played by adolescent males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amelia Earhart</td>
<td>Stephen Hawkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I’d like to know your opinion on the whole Jesus conflict. I’m not sure of which side to go to right now&quot; (POOT site, March 12, 2012).</td>
<td>“Jesus must never come back,&quot; (POOT site, March 8, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna Nikolaevna</td>
<td>Abraham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I believe (as do all of my Christian subjects and the Christian visitors of this palace) that Jesus should be allowed to return. Some of his comments were indeed uncalled for, but I believe now that he has been sent away, he may return with knowledge that such comments won’t go unpunished. I do hope you consider my input&quot; (POOT site, March 4, 2012).</td>
<td>“This man is no Son of God, but spawn of the Devil. He speaks so lamely and declares these petty feuds against those who see that he is not who he truly claims to be&quot; (POOT site, February 27, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angelina Jolie</td>
<td>John Knox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I would love to know your thoughts about Jesus! With love,&quot; as she signed her name” (POOT site, March 15, 2012).</td>
<td>“It would appear that Anti-Christ is no longer with us. Just as all imposters eventually are“ (POOT site, March 2, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloody Mary</td>
<td>Osama Bin Laden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>“Jesus should stay banned… this Jesus was an imposter and a false prophet” (POOT site, March 8, 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yosa Buson</td>
<td>Thich Nhat Hanh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Jesus is a good person, and if he comes back he has to prove everybody that he is good person, and that they don’t have to worry. BUT if he acts like a jerk again, he shall be removed from the Alhambra Palace for always” (POOT site, March 9, 2012).</td>
<td>&quot;Jesus is coming for you&quot; (POOT site, March 1, 2012).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I am reminded of Anyon’s (1984) work, which discussed how adolescents are actively engaged in the socialization process, as seen with the amount of attention the students paid towards establishing what was acceptable in POOT. The distinct difference between the female and male responses prompted a closer look at how boys were reacting to one another around the Jesus controversy. This is not to say that a co-ed sample would not value, as I believe it would. However, for the purpose of this dissertation, the scope was limited. My attention was drawn to the work of four boys with strikingly similarities: (1) Jesus, (2) John Knox, (3) Osama Bin Laden, and (4) Abraham.
Laden, and (4) Yosa Buson. I decided to explore the similarities, as well as differences, between the experiences of these four boys, as seen in Table 9.3.

Table 9.3 Comparison chart between Jesus, John Knox, Osama Bin Laden, and Yosa Buson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character/Category</th>
<th>Jesus</th>
<th>John Knox</th>
<th>Osama Bin Laden</th>
<th>Yosa Buson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attacked by others?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Display of creative agency (crusade)</td>
<td>Crusade against the host, John Knox, and others</td>
<td>Traps against Jesus to promote removal</td>
<td>Formation of committee against Jesus</td>
<td>Lobbied and joined committee in favor of Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position of crusade</td>
<td>Christian domination</td>
<td>Ex-communicate Fake Jesus</td>
<td>Keep Jesus banned</td>
<td>Peace is possible if Jesus changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions to support position</td>
<td>Uses agnostic argument</td>
<td>Cites Bible verses</td>
<td>Unite Muslims</td>
<td>Writes poems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of adult concern</td>
<td>High- high participation with high numbers of out of character posts; was he being picked on?</td>
<td>Was he being picked on</td>
<td>High- low participation in the beginning; was he being picked on?</td>
<td>High- low participation in the beginning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction to adult concern</td>
<td>I’m fine</td>
<td>I’m fine</td>
<td>I’m fine</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accused others of not playing well</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private messages</td>
<td>16 Plus 82 emails</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reacting to someone out of character/objectionable</td>
<td>Others should be punished, too</td>
<td>Jesus has got to go, if he breaks his character, then I will, too.</td>
<td>Natural to be anti-Jesus either way</td>
<td>Even though he personally disagrees, his character would have supported,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I reached out to each of the four boys above. Three of the boys agreed to be interviewed. Jesus agreed to participate, but requested a face-to-face interview. A face-to-face interview was not possible, so data from Jesus was drawn from 82 email exchanges that took place between the
student and I while the program was active. Below, I present the four cases separately, which I later follow up with common themes and conclusions across all four cases. Jesus presented conversations of independence and betrayal. John Knox presented conversations of risk. Osama Bin Laden presented conversations of engagement. Yosa Buson presented conversations of peace.

Jesus: Conversations of Independence and Betrayal

Firsthand Account of POOT Experience

JC and I spoke at great length about expansive topics, such as justice, fairness, ethics, history, leadership, and obligations to the community. I came to know JC as determined, focused, and vulnerable. During this back and forth, a passage stood which captured the tone and intensity of JC’s emails. In order for you to hear his voice uninterrupted, without analysis, I present the following statement from JC:

> I understand the goal of POOT is to debate to a resolution and speak in character. That however is not the point of these emails. I understand that the whole point of this is to be in character. But what still amazes me is everyone is supposed to be in character. Why aren’t people like Knox and Abraham being booted from the server seeing that their characters do not question whether Jesus is fake or real. They go around and preach about Jesus and try to spread his teachings. The point of these emails is to work out a resolution. I understand there are certain changes that the U of M wants that I am not going to comply with. Going back to POOT. I’ll happily take on a second character but I refuse to not have the character of Jesus Christ and I also refuse to stop my portrayal of him. If you please, keep asking questions but whatever happens Nothing is going to change in my ways of Character Portrayal. I am willing to explore the possibilities of a second character which I will happily do. But again, I will not stray far from my terms…Two days into POOT I realized that my character has a lot of influence on POOT and from there my goal was to gather as many followers as possible and lead a crusade against anything that stood in my way of dominating POOT. Make it a Christian POOT…I know it sounds a bit evil but it is what God intends to do when the end of time will come. Well Jesus is technically God and I’m making it come. If you look at the logic that I am putting behind this is that if Oppenheimer never created the bomb there would not be tensions between religions and therefore we would not be trying to come to a peaceful resolution (JC clarified: character view). So get a common enemy
(Oppenheimer) take him down (JC clarified: not actually) and the goal is to have everyone united under Christianity (JC, personal communication, February 29, 2012).

As our conversations continued, I asked JC to expand on his portrayal of Jesus (J: I was wondering if we could talk a little about your portrayal of Jesus and your experience in POOT so far). JC explained, “Everybody has their own interpretation of the Son of God. Mr. Day gave us the assignment of sending letters to four individuals to follow our character and help them with a cause and I think I did a hell of a job. When we started he said just go and argue with people.”

Here, JC pushed responsibility onto his teacher, in a way that mimicked the teacher-as-authority relationship. JC continued firmly in his explanation, “As far as I am concerned, this whole thing is out of line and Jesus should have never of been removed from POOT. I would like to make this also clear. I am not the type of person that will stray far from my terms. If I’m going to be back on POOT there will not be any changes in behavior. We were given a set of instructions and I’m carrying them out.” While he often opened sentences in a way that indicated he was willing to negotiate, his overall semantics indicated an unwillingness to do negotiate (“I will except decisions made by the U of M as long as they do not infringe on my terms and as long as they are reasonable”).

I inquired, “Maybe you can help me to better understand how things are unfolding in your classroom so I am in a better position to speak with the [U of M] team.” JC felt his teacher was pleased with his contributions (“From what Mr. Day told me I have done my job on POOT. He does not have a problem with how I was Portraying Jesus”). JC placed significance on his teacher’s evaluation of this performance and justified his behaviors as occurring within the boundaries of his class’ structure, one that established loose boundaries that should be discovered, pushed up against, and experimented with. JC felt it was other people who had a problem with the way he was portrayed his character. He theorized, “I know it’s from Knox's
character and Abraham’s character who know who I actually am. They have a personal issue with me. They repeatedly went to the host demanding that I was removed.” He distanced himself from the other boys using the rhetoric of me vs. them. Both John Knox and Abraham were student of Mr. Day’s but were not necessarily from the same class. Mr. Day had 55 students from multiple classes participating in the program.

I wanted to know more about JC’s choices behind his character portrayal, in which he exercised high levels of agency in his decisions. JC clarified, “I choose Jesus Christ… In the beginning I was not trying to match any comedy Jesus. My portrayal of him was entirely of my accord… I’m going to let you in on a little secret. At first when I choose Jesus Christ, I did it as a joke.” He detailed his plans for POOT domination. He continued, “I first needed to put an end to Knox’s and Abraham’s campaigning against me. From there I was going to take down Oppenheimer for his creation of the bomb. Gain as many followers as possible and eliminated any road-block in my way. Doing so by either X-communicating, sending them to hell, etc. basically where there is a revolt and Christianity prevails.”

He further explained his portrayal of his character, “My portrayal of Jesus is a bit more relating to the Jesus played on Fox Network’s Family Guy. That is how I see him.” I asked him to tell me more and he said, “I am not trying to be a full Family Guy Jesus. I am just using his crude humor.” While JC discussed his intention for crude humor, he comes across as vulnerable, defensive, and easily agitated.

JC clarified that he was not taking after Family Guy Jesus, and that he was just able to relate that character to his portrayal when I asked. JC sent me several television clips of Family Guy Jesus to watch since I confessed I knew little of Family Guy Jesus. JC further explained, “Just a background on Family guy Jesus he is the basic platform of Christian Jesus but is a bit
cruder in his humor... The Jesus I am portraying is right in the middle between that. Same beliefs just a little more radical, but with a lot of humor. Try to imagine an Islam Jesus (without the whole blow up things and Allah) and mix a little of Daniel Tosh into the personality.” Daniel Tosh is an American comedian whose style is described as envelope pushing. As JC listed television references like Fox Network, as well as crude humor references including Family Guy and the envelope-pushing comedian Daniel Tosh, I sensed undertones of adolescent boy (pop) culture.

I wanted to know how JC’s character portrayal was related to the work we were doing in POOT, beyond what he felt his teacher told him was the objective (J: Can you tell me a little bit more about your vision for Jesus within the storyline of the trial with Muhammad Kadhim? I am curious to know how your positioning of Jesus connects to furthering the trial. You sound like a careful, thoughtful person, so I imagine you have a reason for positioning Jesus the way you have). JC did not respond to this directly, so I asked again (J: Tell me how Jesus, portrayed as the Family Guy Jesus, helps [all the guests/students in POOT] think more deeply about whether we should build the mosque or not... How is leading crusades against people who upset or disobey Jesus in Jesus’s character?).

JC clarified, “What Family Guy Jesus would do would say is defiantly no [to the mosque being built]. and Jesus would say no. They do not believe in Jesus in fact [Muslims] kill Christians and Jews with bombs created by Oppenheimer. [Muslims] do not believe in Jesus who is God so therefore they do not believe in God and according to the Bible, people who do not believe in God go to Hell. Yes, Family Guy Jesus would do that.” JC continued to explain that society cannot determine the personality of Jesus (“nobody knows”). He said that he could
go into some philosophical speech about differences between Christianity and Science but, “at that point is where personal preference come in about how one chooses to portray Jesus.”

I inquired about the crusade (J: I am curious about Jesus’s decision to lead a crusade against the host). JC said, “My crusade against the host was because he created the bomb which kills people so therefore I felt that he must be punished and I wanted to have some fun with it… So get a common enemy (Oppenheimer) take him down (not actually) and the goal is to have everyone united under Christianity. As we negotiated, I offered the idea of JC being able to select a second character that no one knew about. I also suggested the idea of Jesus returning as Seth Macfarlane. JC declined my offer saying, “Seth Macfarlane, although he is a funny guy, I am strongly against his liberal views. I would prefer to stay as Jesus.” He did, however, offer to portray Daniel Tosh or Johnny Knoxville as his second character. Johnny Knoxville was from the television show Jackass, and was the name directed at John Knox by JC and a few other students on POOT.

In the end, I wrote to JC explaining that the Council of Elders voted on whether to allow him back and that, unfortunately, there was a tie vote: 4 YES, 4 NO. I created the imaginary group called the Council of Elder (JC did not know the group was imaginary) as a governing body as a way to playfully explain the reason others provide either for his return or for him to remained banned and to ensure he read the reasons. I drew from the collection of messages I received from participants for the rulings. I provided JC with a summary of their rulings. An example of a ruling include the following from Elder 5, “I found Jesus to be really objectionable. He never references the Bible. He needs to support his statements with evidence and sources. With evidence, I want to know how he is portraying Jesus correctly.” I explained, “If you wish to contest their ruling, please complete this form (a Google Doc)… Due to a tie vote, the Elders
have consented to allow you to observe the discussion in POOT (comments are not permitted), as they seek advice from the Committees in POOT about whether you should be allowed to return. Here is your new log-in information: southwing@mosaic-w12.” JC replied to all eight Council of Elders, but in a cut and paste manner in which he did not reveal any new points to his argument and failed to respond to the points raised by the elders about his “objectionable” behavior.

Analyzing Conversations with Jesus

For the purpose of this section, I will refer to the student portraying Jesus by the abbreviation of JC. For this analysis, I combined 82 email exchanges between myself and JC into one word document and imported the document into NVivo for coding. I used McCormack’s (2000a, 2000b) four lenses to analyze the conversation which required four separate listenings: (1) narrative processes with a focus on structure and patterns of words, as well as the plot; (2) language with a focus on the choice of words the narrator selected in the retelling of their story and the context in which the story was told; (3) context with special attention to cultural and situational context; and (4) moments in order to locate the points where the participant realized something during the interview through the retelling of the story).

First lens of narrative processes. First, I listened to JC’s narrative for the following dimensions: the summary, the reason the story was told, the plotline, the important individuals in this plotline, information JC added to the story that were previously unknown, and times when he theorizes about what had happened to him. I turned to the 82 emails using the four lenses established by McCormack (2000a, 2000b). I hoped a new way of listening would provide insight.
During the first listening, I identified the summary of JC’s story, including three themes: (1) an ethics of justice related to his character’s removal, (2) counter-productive coping mechanisms, and (3) his relational connection and disconnection. These three main themes had subthemes, outlined below:

(1) An ethics of justice related to his character’s removal
   a. Justifications of his character’s actions that semantically gave the impression that he sought explanation for this removal
   b. Arguments for fair distribution of punishments

(2) Counter-productive coping mechanisms
   a. An expressed intent to intensify his behaviors couples with a refusal to adhere to a community-derived code of conduct
   b. Recognition of power dynamics and intent to utilize knowledge

(3) Relational connection and disconnection
   a. Connection to television stars which contribute to his portrayal of Jesus
   b. His crude humor is not received by others as humor
   c. JC responds to conversations with aggression rather than comedy

The first theme indicated to the centrality of JC’s concern over being removed from the simulation at the end of February 2012 (“I still do not fully understand how I was removed from Place Out of Time”). Semantically, JC spoke of confusion (“I still do not fully”), yet he made no attempt to reflect on his contributions to “Jesus Controversy.” I used the term “ethics of justice,” drawing from Kohlberg and Gilligan’s work with moral decision making in adolescents. In her book *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan (1982) discussed how boys have a principled way of reasoning that is formulaic. This principled, formulaic reasoning was threaded throughout the
As the host of the simulation, I removed Jesus from this simulation. The removal occurred after extensive back and forth discussions with JC, JC’s teacher Mr. Day, and other members of the POOT community including project directors, classroom teachers, university mentors, and other K-12 students. Immediately following JC’s removal, the first of the 82 emails was comprised by JC. JC emailed the project directors when he discovered his character was no longer able to log in to the POOT site. JC wrote, “I am just upset that site Admins took me down because all [the other students] did was sit there and complain.” As an extension of the first theme, JC was concerned about fairness (“But what still amazes me is everyone is supposed to be in character. Why aren’t people like Knox and Abraham being booted from the server seeing that their characters [in real life would not] question whether Jesus is fake or real. They go around and preach about Jesus and try to spread his teachings”). JC felt other K-12 students were portraying their characters in questionable ways, and he identified Abraham and John Knox as examples of this. He felt if one person was removed based on violations of their character, that all violations should be handled in the same manner. JC did not, however, cast the same fate to two other individuals that were equally out of character: Rudy Giuliani and Thich Nhat Hanh. Noticeably, both had publically taken a pro-Jesus stance. Thich Nhat Hanh wrote posts saying “Jesus is coming for you” and Rudy Giuliani wrote posts saying “U MAD?” to an individual who spoke out against Jesus.

The second theme was regarding JC’s intent on returning to POOT by engaging with counter-productive coping mechanisms. JC was entangled in the process of internalization, which Crosnoe (2011) defined as “managing their feelings of not fitting in by altering their own
assessments of the self to be in line with their image of how others see them” (p. 104). Meadows (2010) warned that adolescents often live up to the negative expectations placed upon them. This concept is also known as the “looking-glass self” to symbolic interactionists like Mead (Mead & Morris, 1967). JC’s behavior demonstrated this when others expected him to aggressive and poorly behaved. As a result, he ascribed to the bad kid stigma, what Erving Goffman (1963) called a “blemish of character” or “discreditable stigma.”

JC provided a list of bolded conditions, which he referred to as “terms” (see below):

- **Full access to the U of M Place Out of Time Program.**
- **Keep the Character of Jesus Christ.**
- **Use of the account jesus@mosaic-w22.**
- **Freedom to portray Jesus Christ as I please.**
- **No limitations on page access** (JC, personal communication, February 29, 2012).

JC established, “if I come back as Jesus Christ I plan to continue [playing in the same way]”. JC’s insistence on returning was fueled by the recognition that his character had power on the website (“The more direct power quicker power”).

For the third theme, JC found connection with television show stars, and consequently JC roots the portrayal of his character in crude humored. This crude humor led to disconnections with others on the site. As defined by Miller and Stiver (1997) these psychological disconnections refer to ruptures in the relationships. Miller and Stiver assert that when disconnections intensify, as they did with Jesus’s relational contacts on POOT, they leave the person feeling unstable, unable to know or to trust, and feeling a loss of self-esteem (Miller & Stiver, 1997). This instability, lack of trust, and low self-esteem was seen in JC’s POOT activity. JC neglected how his postings impacted others on the site. JC became fixated on the two most vocal boys, but did not see how the rest of the community was impacted. JC resolved conversations with aggression rather than comedy or satire, with frequent use of the phrase “burn
in hell.” In discussing the opportunity for leadership and a possible second character, JC made it clear that his intent was to portray the new character (e.g., Daniel Tosh or Johnny Knoxville) in a similar way to his controversial portrayal of Jesus.

Next, key people in his narrative were identified. The first most prominent key person was himself, split between JC as himself and JC his character. JC established himself distinctly separate from his character, such as when he said “I have been removed from the website due to of character comments.” He did not claim ownership over his character or his character’s comments. However, he at times saw himself as the actor intertwined with his character (“Allow me to introduce myself. I am JC, but you know me better as Jesus Christ.”). The second key person is his teacher Mr. Day, whom he sees as the facilitator of his experiences (“My teacher has informed me” and “Mr. Day gave us the assignment”). In the introduction of his teacher, he uses “has informed” and “gave us” to emphasize the structure and authority under which he operated under. The third and fourth key people are his nemeses, John Knox and Abraham, who he often referred to with distanced language (“those individuals,” “they,” and “them”). The last key individual(s) was termed “U of M.” By U of M, he meant the project directors of POOT. As the overseers of POOT who removed his character, he saw U of M as menacing and ominous but equally bound to rules of the University and society. He wrote:

For being as liberal and open minded as the U of M is made out to be. Limiting how one decides to portray a religious character. A religious character that may not have existed. A character that nobody knows how he acted what he looks like, or what his personality was like. That is not very open minded in my opinion and I’m pretty sure that’s not very open minded to Fox News Detroit who I’m very sure would love to have input on this and so would the U of M campus paper (JC, personal communication, March 7, 2012).

His comment was considered in context, as a boy who is in a high school debate class trying to persuade U of M to let him back in while simultaneously demonstrating to his teacher that he formulated a sound argument. His arguments demonstrated his experimentation with autonomy.
I turned to JC’s reason for telling his story, in which there is overlap between his summary, as stated above. Here, he paradoxically teetered on inquiry and lack of ownership (“What I do not understand is how I was out of character?”). JC stated, “I am actually very curious to what I did.” There is a silence in his comments. He did not acknowledge or validate the allegations brought against him. In his refusal to stop his portrayal, again, he teetered between negotiable and firm when he explained, “I am willing to work this out [with U of M] but my terms are going to be very clear.” I asked JC, “when you say "terms," does this mean these are the things you would like but would like the U of M team to make a "counter offer" of their terms or that you will not accept anything but your terms?”

In this first listening, I examined the storyline for linked events. The first linked event related to JC’s understanding of Mr. Day’s instructions (“When we started he said just go and argue with people”) and how that impacted his interpretation of his online activity (“As we all can see I did an amazing job at that”). He noted, “my character has had a very big impact on POOT and that was one of the main points of the assignment.” The second linked event was that JC felt his removal from POOT was connected to multiple complaints from John Knox and Abraham. What JC did not know was the number of pressing concerns I received from other members of the POOT community. The last linked event was the removal of JC’s character led him to find the email addresses of the project directors of POOT online to debate his removal and request he be allowed to return.

**Second lens of language.** In the second listening, I attended to how he responded to my question about his interactions with the other K-12 student (“I want to ask if you feel at all ganged up or picked on by them. I would like to say that Knox and Abraham were not the only participants to raise concern. Jesus is a tricky, and often contentious, character to play”). JC

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responded, “I did not feel picked on them what so ever. I just felt like they were making a point to take down Jesus so I thought I would play along and do the same to them. I did not care but they took it a bit far.” Since our conversation was taking place online, I explained, “I don’t ever want you to feel like you have to be put on the defense. My ideas are meant as suggestions and points of conversation. I also want to be able to be honest with you, so at times I am ask direct questions because I really want to hear what you have to say.” JC replied, “I’m trying not to be on the defensive side but my personality makes me go either offensive or defensive.”

Because we were not speaking, assessment of false starts and tone was difficult. I was, however, able to attend to his use of specialized language, the silence in his replies, and written speech functions. JC spoke in detail about popular culture references, many of which I was unfamiliar with (e.g., Family Guy, Johnny Knoxville, and Daniel Tosh). He also spoke in detail about societal-level religious debates (e.g. religion vs. science, The Bible, and agnostic beliefs). He expressed an understanding of John Knox and Abraham, although it was not clear he had read their résumés. There was silence in several of his statements. He explained he was removed “due to of character comments” but did not elaborate in detail about the types of character comment he felt led to his removal. The same occurred when he said, “I am very curious to what I did.” He did not make references to the things he may have done, but instead left this vague.

I attend to his speech functions. He frequently says, “I am.” He uses this term in three ways, as seen in Table 9.4. The first two ways placed him as an active agent, one as an active agent with limited control and the second as an active agent with control. The third “I am” voice revealed isolation and vulnerability.
As an active agent with limited control JC used “I am” to express that he felt something unjust has that happened to him that was beyond his control but that this was something he wished to be active in changing (“I am actually very curious” and “I am suspecting”). He simultaneously placed blame on others without taking blame himself and expressed helplessness.

Strong declarative statements marked the second use of “I am.” JC said, “I am strongly against” as he asserted his independence. JC clarified, “I’m making [God’s return] come” as he confirmed his conquest. He often paired his first “I am” voice (“I am willing to explore the possibilities”) with his second (“I am not going to comply with”); however he favored the stronger second “I am” voice (“As far as I am concerned…. I am not the type of person that will stray far from my terms…. If I’m going to be back…. I’m carrying [my instructions] out”).

The strength in his first two “I am” voices masked feelings of isolation. His third type “I am” voice expressed his vulnerability: “I am actually very curious…, I am just upset…, I’m trying not to be on the defensive side but my personality makes me go either offensive or defensive…. I’m running out of time.” I noted his frequent use of the word “just” (“I just felt”) as he uses the third type of “I am” voice.
In Chu’s (2004) work, she found boys evidence of how boys resisted the norms of emotional stoicism, autonomy, and physical toughness. This work found JC to be clear examples of adherence to the norms of what is means to be a man, and subtle traces of JC’s resistance to stereotypes as he struggled with how convey how he experienced isolation, betrayal, and vulnerability.

**Third lens of context.** I attended to the third lens of context, which revealed his focus on the mission, betrayal, and masculinity. JC placed significant emphasis on the assignment aspect of *POOT* (“Mr. Day gave us the assignment”), in which he tried to simultaneously please his teacher by operating within an established framework and explore his agency by shaping his learning context. He framed Mr. Day’s class as a space that was both bound to rules and one that is flexible enough to push against the boundaries. The following posts provided insight: (1) Knox’s post titled, “We must excommunicate this fake Christ,” (2) JC’s statement “Knox’s and Abraham’s campaigning against me,” and (3) his question about “why aren’t people like Knox and Abraham being booted from the server.” Given this lens and positioning, his concerns about the other characters were heard differently. JC was entrenched in feelings of betrayal and competition with John Knox and Abraham. He spoke of John Knox and Abraham with frequency and intensity. A paradoxical nature dominated his speech. I was perplexed by this, but the third listening illuminated his feelings of betrayal which were connected to a masculine evaluation of success (“But I want to make it clear that John Knox must play nice with Jesus. I still get to portray him as I wish”). JC expressed the feeling that characters like John Knox had stifled his mission of domination.

For the third listening, the cultural fictions to which JC ascribes were examined. JC adhered to a cultural fiction of dystopia. As I considered JC’s him-against-me positioning, *Lord*
of the Flies surfaced. In Lord of the Flies, the question over individual welfare is pitted against the common good in a way that emphasizes a need to care for oneself as a means of survival. JC also ascribes to the cultural fiction of masculinity of the west (“So get a common enemy (Oppenheimer) take him down”), which emphasized achievement and status (“the goal is to have everyone united under Christianity”), and more specifically in his case “domination.” This is what Connell (1995, 2005) referred to as “hegemonic masculinity,” which is marked by dominance and power, and is the most valued by mainstream society.

Fourth lens of moments. Three defining moments were revealed in the fourth listening. The first was how JC perceived the original instructions from his teacher (“Mr. Day gave us the assignment”). Jesus placed significant emphasis on the relationship between him and Mr. Day as a facilitator of the work to be done in POOT. This was particularly relevant because we know that “resilient, trustworthy relationships in school are the bedrock of learning” (Raider-Roth, 2005, p. 19). Mr. Day afforded JC a safe place for experimentation. The second was how JC’s actions were fueled by power and tension (“Now that I have taken care of Mr. Knoxville I shall now deal with you”). The third was the removal of Jesus from POOT (“I still do not fully understand how I was removed from Place Out of Time”). It was his removal that led to the exchange of 82 emails, an affirmation of his desire to be a member of the POOT community. To understand the significance of the third moment, I turn to Frankel (2012), who noted that children develop a sense of moral understanding through experimentation in a social world combined with a desire to be part of that social world.

Conclusion. During this period of mid-to-late adolescence, JC lingered in a period of boyhood, a world marked by passing off of responsibility and perceived vulnerabilities. This was juxtaposed by JC’s quest for manhood, a voyage spiked with hyper-masculinity. While we know
that boys are often seen as outsiders to adult norms (Sexena, 2013), we also know from feminist scholars that boys are often “accommodating to conventions of masculinity as they reach late adolescence because they have few options given the American culture of “hyper” masculinity in which they live” (p. 261). Further, Galambos, Almeida, and Petersen (1990) found socializing influences from peers to heighten the emphasis on masculinity. Boys’ actions are often a reflection of this initiation phase, where they transition from boyhood to manhood. This reflection is often a result of a learned behavior. Moss (2012) asserts boys learn they must prove their masculinity. Chu (2014), who pulled from Moss’s (2012) work, noted that boys “learn that they must continually prove their masculinity, which can be called into question by anyone at any time.” The most common way we Jesus exercising his masculinity was in his crusade to take down anyone who did not support his portrayal of Jesus.

As JC teetered in the rocky space-between boyhood and manhood, JC ascribed to the dystopia of self-survival. JC privileged his needs above others, and feelings of isolation and vulnerability increased. These feelings gave rise to counter-productive coping mechanisms deemed unacceptable by other participant. Others labeled him an “imposter.” Despite the labels, JC continued to experiment with increased autonomy, as his teacher granted him permission and provided a safe place in which to do so. JC’s experimentation was often met with resistance on behalf of the other POOT guests. Consequently, his increasing sense of autonomy sowed seeds of a two-way betrayal and further distanced JC from others. JC’s “behaviors” were put on trial and tried under an “ethic of justice,” which emphasized swift punishment, abolishment of the questionable behavior, and prioritizing oneself over others. Jesus was removed. His removal was a pivotal moment for JC, as well as the others in POOT. As JC and I exchanged 82 emails that followed this pivotal moment, Mr. Day wrote a group email to the team of project directors
which said, “To date—10 years of school—this has been the most engaged JC has been” (Mr. Day, personal communications, February 29, 2012). As objectionable as JC’s behaviors were, educators are faced with the very real challenge of what to do under these circumstances. Many educators find themselves confused or turned off by boys who have “misbehaved.” Niobe Way (2011), however, offers the following advice:

> [t]he challenge for those interested in helping boys is to both reveal the thin culture that creates the problem in the first place—the naturalizing of behavior that is not only a product of culture but is bad for one’s health—and use that knowledge, once acquired, to create social change, even if it means...changing out definition of manhood, maturity, and human nature more generally (p. 261).

I posit, that if we are to create positive change for your adolescent boys experiencing the space-between, we need to broaden the scope beyond changing our definition of “manhood,” to include the embracement of an ethic of care, engagement in meaningful reflection, and acts of perspective taking.

As the second step in supporting this claim, I delve into the stories of three other boys who were impacted by the Jesus controversy. The rational for their inclusion stemmed from Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) notion of “mutually-shaping systems,” which suggested that systems of individual development are located within a social context where variables are impacting one another. Therefore, I assert that if we are to understand the development of the student who played Jesus, it is indeed worthwhile to look at the Jesus controversy more contextually. I, therefore, placed value in seeing Jesus through the eyes of his peers.

**John Knox: Conversations of Risk and Belonging**

I interviewed the student who portrayed John Knox, and I came to know him as intelligent and articulate. For this chapter, I will refer to the student by the pseudonym John. He was driven by good grades and a deep personal belief in his religion. He expressed genuine
curiosities, particularly with his desire to know more about the rationale behind Fake Jesus. He also expressed vulnerabilities, much like Jesus did. Specifically, John spoke about what it meant to risk speaking up in POOT.

John was also a student in Mr. Day’s debate class but was younger than JC. He informed me about his knowledge of the person who portrayed Jesus. He said, “at first I did not, then I was told who it was... I believe I knew of him, but I did not really know him personally.” He assured me, “It wasn’t a personal conflict or anything.”

As I looked at John’s first few private messages as John Knox, I found it difficult to distinguish his work from the work produced by university mentors. It was marked with sophistication in the level of writing and he immediately asked others about their stance on the trial. He wrote, “I am John Knox. I lived during the 16th century. I was a large figure in the Protestant Reformation that fixed many corrupt practices of Catholicism by breaking off into a new branch of Christianity, Protestant. Always known as a bold and courageous man, I always spoke my mind and I was respected for it, though not all of the time. For speaking out against the Church, I was exiled to England, where I started my work for the Church. The Lord has blessed me very much through my time on Earth.”

I listened to John’s story using all four lenses, which revealed the centrality of “Fake Jesus” to John’s experience. John identified two key moment: (1) when he read Jesus’s résumé, and (2) when Jesus was being removed. Fake Jesus served as a way for John to become his character John Knox, the man who was exiled by the French government for speaking his mind about unpopular religious perspectives. At first, John did not have an attachment to his character. He requested John Calvin because he wanted a character from the Protestant reformation and shared a middle name with John Calvin. “I wanted to be someone who was Christian,” he said.
John Calvin was already taken by another student, so I had suggested John Knox to Mr. Day because John Knox was influential in the Reform.

Through the religious debates on POOT, John was able to see himself as an integral part of the POOT community. John spoke in great detail of his feelings of belonging. John also spoke extensively of his big picture knowledge of historical events and people related to the Jesus controversy. I asked what it was like to play John Knox. He replied, “In today’s society you’re not supposed to be talk about religion. John Knox was a character who spoke out about the protestant revolution, so [my character] kinda of had to. It was nice…. I wouldn’t walk up and say that to people in real life.”

I asked John about his intentions in POOT. He explained, “My goal was to stir up a bit of controversy.” John and JC shared a similar goal. Mr. Day had said that when students stir the pot, “[i]t puts students in touch with the way their character thinks.” John commented, “My teacher said conflict is good, so I decided to target the people who could cause the most discussion,” John revealed, “I looked at the list of characters [on the guest list], and was like, I am going to talk to this person, this person, and this person.” He did not indicate who the other people were, but I saw he emailed welcome messages to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Louis Armstrong, and the Dalai Lama at the start of the trial.

John admitted, “At first I was not going to say anything to Jesus, but then I read his [résumé] and knew I had to say something.” He added, that his character and the “so called Jesus Christ had a couple of spats.” “I just psted something on [Jesus’s] wall, please stop making fun of my religion, and that’s where things took off. [Jesus] said something like, don’t question me, go burn in [hell]..., he say that a lot.”
John announced, “I don’t think the person who played Jesus played him well.” I recalled Jesus taking a similar stance in his interview, feeling that John Knox and Abraham did not play their characters well. The boys pitted themselves against one another. “In his bio description he puts a lot of, I would say, subtle stabs at Christianity, enemies of his work, he put logic under that, basically saying it is only logical to conclude that Christ is false,” he shared. John used his character to place “a couple traps for Jesus.” He said, “I asked him what the most important commandment was.” John quoted the bible while he shared this information with me.

John admits that he wanted to be able to talk to the other students on the site. “I actually wanted to talk to the person portraying Jesus.” He explained he was unable to talk to Jesus in real life. “I am still disappointed about that. Thought I really would want to see how he would react first, because it seems like he got really mad. I also really wanted to talk to Buddha,” he explained. Buddha was another individual John Knox had managed to rile up. John Knox was able to achieve his goal of stirring the pot.

I asked him what he learned from the experience. He responded, “I learned about human neurological sciences, how people react if they are insulted that much. It makes them forget that they are playing a character and go back to their 15-year old selves and then they get mad.” He explains when they are made it is “easy to see they are not their character… I made sure I had my guy not get that upset.”

I ask him to tell me more about his experience, since he admitted to upsetting some individuals. He replied, “I think it was pretty fun. At first it was kind of annoying, but then I realized I should not take it extremely seriously and that I should have fun with it and say what I thought my character would say. They gave me the nickname Johnny Knoxville. I cracked up.” I wondered if that had actually upset him. “I remember a lot of people calling me Johnny
Knoxville.” I asked if he was upset by that. “Oh no, I’m fine,” he reassured me unconvincingly. We spoke about the notion of online bullying for a moment and the worry that had risen in the minds of some of the university mentors. He explained that he had the protection of his character and that the anonymity kept him safe. However, he added, “I thought that if people found out it was me, they might yell at me and I would say chill out it’s just a game.”

John and I spoke about the removal of Jesus. I informed him that I was the one who made the final decision. As he heard this, his tone changed. I went from an average interviewer to someone he knew as Robert Oppenheimer. This was strikingly different than Diego Rivera’s reaction to me from Chapter 7, who did not recall Robert Oppenheimer well. John recalled how his character and I had spoken at great lengths, and regarded Robert Oppenheimer as important. John and I also spoke a great deal about video games, in which he was at times more conversant than I. We returned to the discussion around Jesus’s removal, in which John explained, “In game speak, when I took down Jesus, or Fake Jesus, the final boss was defeated.” This was interesting on several levels, particularly his framing of Jesus as the final boss and a level to complete.

In my conversation with John, I heard two stories, one of conquest, while the other was a story of loss. Thematically, this was strikingly similar to JC’s story. John was committed to bringing justice to POOT, by ridding the community of someone who was not willing to follow the rules and abide by his character (“I knew I had to do something”). He also spoke in terms of loss, with frequent use of the words “I did not” and “I just think.” He recalled his time in POOT with both victory (e.g., taking down the final boss), and of inappropriate posts made by other K-12 students. He recalled a student who sent him a message with the repeating phrase, “you mad bro.” He also shared how “Fake Jesus had as his staus John Knox has insulted me, let’s all destroy him.” Some of the conversation I had with John I am unable to share, as he asked me not
to include it in my writings. What he shared, however, does resonate with me when I think of stories of victory and loss.

**Osama Bin Laden: Conversations of Engagement**

My interview with Osama Bin Laden started with a long conversation between myself and his teacher, Mr. Lin. Mr. Lin joined us during the interview to help with translation, should the need arise. Xavier, the student who portrayed Osama Bin Laden was shy and struggled with English. In my post-interview notes, I commented that Xavier sounded different than I expected for a boy who selected Osama Bin Laden as his character. He spoke slowly and softly. He was deliberate and thoughtful in his responses.

Throughout the simulation, his character was on the quieter side. He posted infrequently, but decidedly spoke out against Jesus. In our conversation, he revealed his desire for more power on the site. This surprised me, as he had not interacted much on the site and it was easy for me as an online evaluator to take the position that the student was disengaged with the program. His interview, however, revealed high levels of engagement with the program and made me pause to think about how little I can see as a researcher when I only looking in on the learning space from online.

Xavier explained that he felt “a lot of people were off subject.” He was bothered by this and wanted people to listen to him as he spoke on topic. He did not provide any examples of the types of posts that bothered him. I returned to Xavier’s comment about wanting power (J: Why would you want to gain more power?). He responded, “so people will pay attention to me, people who will listen to my arguments.” He then shifted the conversation to speak of another character, Rudy Giuliani. “I was thinking that [Rudy Giuliani] was talking like all Muslims are terrorists.” Xavier, from the position of himself as a student, did not like this accusation. I said,
“it sounds like you wanted to correct [Rudy Gulliani]. Osama Bin Laden and Rudy Giuliani had an extended conversation after a post made by another K-12 student was made on Osama Bin Laden’s wall titled, “Terrorist! A mosque should not be built and let the likes of you on it! (POOT site, February 5, 2012). The post received a lot of attention from the guests (number of posts = 33), but was enough to leave a lasting impression in Xavier’s mind.

I explained that I had studied his character’s online activity. I wanted to know why he interacted with Jesus (J: Why did you write to Jesus?). He replied, “I didn’t want him to be near me. He insulted me. He acted like he had all the power.” He went on to express that “the person playing Jesus, not the real Jesus… I felt like ...feels like you’re the boss of something.” As he spoke of Jesus being boss like, he distanced himself from Jesus. Earlier in the conversation he was able to combine his concern with the name of the individual causing the concern, as he did with Rudy Giuliani. However, here, in explaining that Jesus felt like he was the boss, Xavier did not include a direct reference to Jesus.

While he distanced himself from Jesus in this moment. I was surprised at how solidified Xavier’s views were about Jesus. He seemed offended by Jesus’s portrayal, enough so to act and attempt to persuade people. Xavier came up the idea that his character should form a committee in the courtroom to represent Islam (“I would like to create a committee for my islam religion. i want to start this to know all Muslims in this castle and gather up all of them and start a group.” POOT site, March 8, 2012). I regretted not seeing his message earlier. The first private message he sent to anyone on the site was about wanting to form the committee. He addressed this message to Robert Oppenheimer. He explained to me that he wanted to form his committee and lobby against things like the return of Jesus. He firmly established that he would not have allowed Jesus to come back in because he was "fake."
I applied McCormack’s Lenses (2000a, 2000b) to Xavier’s interview. In the first listening, I learned that Jesus was central to how he engaged with the program. While he did reference Rudy Giuliani directly, he primarily processed the experience in relation to the Jesus controversy. Preventing Jesus’s return gave him purpose. In the second listening, the distance he placed between himself and Jesus became more apparent. He often referred to Jesus by placing emphasis on him and he (“I didn’t want him near me…, he insulted me…, he acted like he had all the power [emphasis added]”). He did follow this with repeated use of the words “him” and “he.” In doing so, he made strong reference to Jesus, where he said, “the person playing Jesus, was not the real Jesus.” In the third listening, it became clear that Xavier felt there was a power structure in place in POOT. He also arrived with a pre-conceived notion of who Jesus is, and applies this to his critique of Jesus’s portrayal. The fourth listening revealed the significance of the Jesus controversy to his online participation.

Yosa Buson: Conversations of Peace

Yosa Buson was portrayed by a boy named Renko. Renko had displayed a keen capacity to name the complexities he faced while a participant in POOT. He expressed himself clearly during the interview, and at times paused to formulate his thoughts. Both the character of Yosa Buson and the student who portrayed him were able to model the segue from preconventional thinking to a higher order of moral reasoning.

Renko often laughed during the interview. His laughter was triggered by my discoveries, as he revealed things that I clearly did not know. His character, Yosa Buson, was a Japanese poet best known for his romanticized Haikus, a particular style of poetry. He lived in Japan during the 18th century Edo Period. At the start of the interview, I asked Renko about how he selected his character. He explained, “last year, we were learning about poetry… I thought it would be
cool to be an artist.” In my notebook, I referenced this statement that Renko thought being a poet would be cool. Poetry did not have a negative connotation for him, even as a teenage boy. I wondered how Renko found out about his character, given how it seemed little has been published about his character, let alone his character’s political views. Without hesitation, he explained his mom\textsuperscript{47} had read about Yosa Buson and shared information with him. He showed no signs of insecurity about his mom’s involvement. Renko said, “I showed my mom the \textit{POOT} site and she thought it was interesting.” Like the other art-oriented character I wrote about from this dissertation, Diego Rivera from Chapter 7 and Yosa Buson both involve their parents in what they are doing on \textit{POOT}.

I asked Renko what it was like to play Yosa Buson, to which he replied, “at first I thought he was a weak poet, but later I realized how a poet could change everyone’s mind.” I noted this shift, from a poet being cool to a poet being weak at first until he discovered his persuasive powers. Much like Xavier who portrayed Osama Bin Laden, Renko was quick to talk about power dynamics and persuasion as relevant to his experience with \textit{POOT}.

Renko was a curious participant, one who was eager to communicate with other characters as a way to better understand their character’s point of view. He also articulated a desire to use \textit{POOT} to better his academic skills, such as his writing. I reviewed his online activity with him, and noted that he wrote to Adolf Hitler, Anne Frank, and Harry Potter. For example, he wrote to Anne Frank, “Hello Anne, My name is Yosa Buson, and I am a Japanese poet. I am also a peace keeper. I would like to hear more about you because i heard that you had a un-peaceful life and that you suffered alot. Is it possible for you to talk about your past?

\textsuperscript{47} Renko referred to his mother as “mom” so, as a result, I chose to use his terminology in my description.
because I am really curious” (POOT site, March 24, 2012). I asked why he chose to write to those characters. He replied, “I knew they were all different and I wanted to know how they feel.” He expressed a strong interest in understanding the feelings of people, particularly people who were representing different points of view. He seemed successful at getting others to respond to him. I told him that I noticed he was one of the only ones to get T.I. the Rapper to respond. Renko laughed as I finished my sentence. “Yeah (laughter).” I asked if they were friends. Renko shared, “Yeah, he is my best friend actually.” He laughed pleasantly.

I asked Renko what the hardest part about POOT was. He responded, “the topic was pretty hard… I didn’t know much about it. I had to research a lot about it, (pause) about the topic.” I asked him to explain in more detail. He clarified, it was difficult to “make good decisions” and “to communicate better with others.” I was curious what he meant by communicating better with others. He revealed, “before I didn’t have the guts to talk to other people.” English was not Renko’s first language, nor do I believe it was his second. He did not indicate how many languages he spoke. He explains that he was logging in to the site but not writing. He spent his online time looking at the recent posts, and said he found the developing plot interesting.

Renko self-identified as “nervous” and “shy.” He shared, “I think I was afraid of my grammar.” I noted his insecurity with his skill level, but not in his willingness to assess his own ability and share it with me. He continued, “I felt more comfortable at the end.” Renko’s high level of activity, maturity, and ability to stay in character was one of the reasons he was nominated to serve as a justice. As expounded upon in Chapter 3, justices are nominated to serve and cast the final votes on whether or not the Court will rule in favor or against the plaintiff. (Mr. Kadhim) I wondered how he found the courage to post more frequently. Renko said, “I knew
everyone was not perfect with their spelling and grammar.” We both laughed, as we recognized the truth to this statement. Many of Renko’s peers were not checking the spelling of their posts.

The subject changed, and the opportunity came up for me to ask him, “if you played again, what would you do differently?” Renko replied, “at first I didn’t put that much effort into it (pause). I only put effort in at the end.” Renko explained that he would be more active from the beginning if he was given the opportunity to participate again. He referenced the possibility of participating during the next iteration of POOT, but the next time as a villain. He explained his interest in the program, so I asked him what he liked best. He said, “When I opened the site and you can see if someone responded to your message, when I saw that, I got really excited. I wanted more people to respond to me, and then it got more interesting, and then I talked to more people.” I noted this in my journal because I wanted to return to it because I had been thinking about the importance of young people being heard. In this analysis, I return to this concept again. I wondered how much of the power seeking Jesus, John Knox, and Osama Bin Laden were doing stemmed from wanting to be heard.

Our interview continued, but in comparison to the other boys Renko said much less about the Jesus controversy. I recalled several public and private messages Yosa Buson made about Jesus. The first was a private message he sent to another K-12 student. He said, “Hello my name is Yosa Buson. I am a japanese poet and i like to have a peaceful world. But since i am a poet i cant do much about keeping peace. I get stressed when i see someone fighting or if there is a problem with racism because it gives me a sign of the world not being in peace” (POOT site, February 19, 2012). The second was a public speech his character made publicly, in which he used poetry to ask the other guests if the agreed or disagreed with the decision to bring Jesus

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48 The student did participate in the next iteration of POOT.
back (“Jesus the person who set the world in peace”). The third was a private message to Jesus titled, “Hey.” It read, “Hello Jesus. My name is Yosa Buson, and I am a Japanese poet. Everyone was blaming you for the attack, but I always believed in you. and im happy to have you back in the palace. I’ve been posting things on the speech section, about you if we should give you one more chance. welcome back. I will always be on you back. -Yosa by Yosa Buson (POOT site, March 23, 2012). With directness, I queried him for his opinion on the Jesus situation (J: what did you think of the whole Jesus situation?). Renko said, “I thought Jesus was a bad person.” This label surprised me because Renko used his character to influence people to let Jesus back in POOT. He continued, “Humans are not perfect.” I knew from earlier conversations about his spelling and grammar that he included himself in this statement. He continued, “I thought everyone needs another chance. That’s why I tried to convince people to get [Jesus] back.” He admitted that the Jesus controversy made the program more interesting for him, but mostly because he said it made his class discussions in Mr. Lin’s class more interesting. I asked Renko if he thought I should have kicked Jesus out, to which he quickly said no and again explained everyone deserved a second chance.

It is all too easy to dismiss Jesus as a bad kid. It takes courage to do as Renko/Yosa Buson did, and advocate for a second chance and promote forgiveness. Further, the ability for Renko to recognize what Jordan (2008) calls “discordant relational images” aided in his ability to think differently about the Jesus controversy. By discordant relational images, Jordan meant images that contrasted with the negative relational images. This inconsistencies provided hope and potential for relational repair between Jesus and Yosa Buson.

Of the four boys, Yosa Buson demonstrates the highest level of ethical maturity and the most attuned with the community needs of POOT. To be clear, though, I do not say this to ignore
the need to attend to the safety and well-being of people in online spaces. In no way to I condone
the name calling of John Knox, as Jesus resorted to, and I demonstrated this with the removal of
Jesus as a result of repeated references to Johnny Knoxville. I am also not saying what Jesus
posted was right. I do, however, note that in online forums there is a degree of inevitability that
“spats” will occur, to borrow from the words of John who portrayed John Knox. One explanation
for the boys’ competitive and aggressive behaviors certainly could be the anonymity web-based
forums provide, as seen in many anonymous chat rooms. In Fitting In, Standing Out, Crosnoe
(2011) discussed this emerging, complex digital culture youth must learn to navigate. But, given
that many of the boys know who one another are in real life and that they are aware that the
adults on POOT have the ability to see everything they write and that they are being assessed for
their contributions, the transition from boyhood to manhood felt more relevant.

Renko, as Yosa Buson, was included as part of this chapter as a way of diversifying our
understanding of how K-12 students reacted to the Jesus controversy. This resistance is
something suggested by de Waal’s (2009) work. Renko was an example of a boy who often
resisted the norms of masculine behavior, and illustrated that not all boys accommodate to
messages received from society and mainstream media about what it means to be a boy.

Concluding Remarks

In the four interviews above, JC, John, Xavier, and Renko spoke earnestly about their
experiences with this same crisis. Their interviews revealed complexities of their relationships in
POOT, particularly with how they relate to the Jesus controversy. These boys shared how the
Jesus controversy impacted them, and often provided detailed accounts of their reactions to
direct communication with Jesus. I am reminded of a conversation I had with a university mentor
named Alli. She shared with me how she used the Jesus controversy as a way to reach out and
connect with the K-12 students. She said, “no matter what the character is, everyone is dealing with the same crisis” (Alli, personal communication, June 4, 2012).

Yosa Buson, as well as many others, presented person-centered critiques of Jesus that emphasized and blamed the person (“Jesus…was acting like a jerk”). The person portraying Jesus was being held accountable for his actions by the other guests. In turn, the student portraying Jesus became at risk of what Goffman (1963) calls a “spoiled identity.” By “spoiled identity,” Goffman was referring to when the person cannot see past the objectionable traits described and emphasized by others because they are so heavily focused on. In Yosa Buson’s comment, he does not point to the thin culture as a source of the issue of contention; rather he only points to the boy. The very nature of participants calling it the Jesus controversy further reinforces the person-centered complaint.

As complaints are labeled, we need to be reminded that these are boys growing up. In the four interviews above, a desire for increased independence and agency was exhibited by all four boys. New ways of being gave rise to feelings of isolation and uncertainty, and that amidst their efforts to gain status or to please their superiors the feeling of loneliness and vulnerability existed.

JC and I exchanged 82 emails, and all three of the other boys report that the Jesus controversy increased their activity and level of engagement with POOT. In Table 9.5, I outlined what the boys self-report as increased engagement. All of the self-reports cut across the Jesus controversy. I turned to Table 9.5 again, with an eye towards relational theory, and what is of particular interest is that as all for boys experience a disconnection with the character Jesus, their relationship with POOT strengthens. For this purpose, I borrowed from Miller and Stiver’s (1997) definition of “relationship,” which is explained as ongoing interactions that occur
overtime. Jesus, for example, experienced a disconnection with the character he was supposed to portray. At the same time, JC’s intellectual activity related to POOT increased, as evidenced by the exchange of 82 emails. As Jesus became more objectionable on the POOT site, John Knox and Osama Bin Laden found purpose to interact with other participants and to connect with the POOT site. While the relational rupture occurred between the portrayed Jesus and the Jesus Yosa Buson thought he could be, Yosa Buson found connection with the site through the ability to set aside his fear of writing improperly in order to use POOT to persuade people to be more tolerant and accepting of difference.

Table 9.5 Self-reported increases in engagement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>What they considered increased engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus</td>
<td>Crusade against the host Robert Oppenheimer for building bombs, John Knox for not following him on POOT, and others for not following or converting to Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Knox</td>
<td>Setting traps against Jesus using Bible verses to promote Jesus’s removal based on false portrayal of his character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osama Bin Laden</td>
<td>Formation of a committee for Islam in order to persuade the vote on whether to allow Jesus to return to the Alhambra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yosa Buson</td>
<td>Lobbied publically for the peaceful return of Jesus and joined a committee to vote in favor of Jesus’s return</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the boys report the Jesus controversy as interesting. Foregrounded with this, I echo Niobe Way in saying that I believe this data speaks to the significance of more actively helping adolescent boys with a healthy transition from boyhood to manhood.

The challenge, then, for educators is to model an ethic of care in their own actions and to help young boys implement an ethic of care in their own lives, one that cares not just about one’s own survival as Lord of the Flies paints for us, but one that equally cares about the health and well-being of the community in which they are an active member. This speaks to Mead’s (Mead...
& Morris, 1967) assertion that the ability to for the boys think about themselves and others is influences by their peer relationships.

I return to the question of the affordances of role in the overarching research questions, which I will explore briefly here and again in the final conclusions section of this dissertation. These four boys illuminate that this work should be less about the affordances of role and more about the capacity to engage in perspective taking and empathy in a way that can allow a participant to see beyond Gilligan’s (1982) notion of “preconventional thinking,” one that is engulfed in survival mode. For the concept of empathy, I drew from Hoffman’s (2000) definition, which explains empathy as the ability for someone to feel what is appropriate for another person rather than through their own lens.

Jesus is an example of a character who was engulfed in survival mode, and therefore unable to prioritize his character above his personal feelings. For another example, both the characters of John Knox and Yosa Buson afford the opportunity to advocate for Jesus, disagreements of Jesus’s character portrayal aside. The distinguishing factor between John Knox and Yosa Buson rests in Yosa Buson’s ability to (1) engage in perspective taking, (2) maintain his character’s views despite personal differences of opinion, and (3) engage with an ethic of care. This also speaks to the importance of the caring versus justice orientation, or as Hoffman (2000) called it the caring-justice dilemma which is “clash between considering others and more abstract issues such as right, duty, reciprocity (p. 4) and the need to foster Gilligan’s (1982) care orientation. For this, Freire’s (2000) notion of action and reflection are necessary to stimulate development.
Evidence of JC’s Historical Thinking Skills

While JC was certainly not passively consuming historical knowledge in the traditional sense, he did not demonstrating high levels of meaning making with the historical content. I saw some evidence of JC’s historical knowledge early on when he commented on Mr. Scopes’ wall, as referenced in Table 9.1 above. In order to make this comment, JC need to know that Scopes was the biology teacher who stood trial in the creationism versus evolutionism debate. However, JC’s objective was deeply rooted in the structure of Mr. Day’s debate class, and did not make the leap to fuse the two subjects in an academic sense. How he measured successful participation in POOT was primarily based on Mr. Day’s debate class, and Mr. Day’s debate class alone (“From what Mr. Day told me I have done my job on POOT”).

There is reason to believe JC understands notions of change, sequences, and patterns based on his references to agnostic beliefs, Catholicism, and Oppenheimer’s involvement with the Manhattan Project. While often inaccurately referenced and oversimplified, he does demonstrate knowledge of patterns as part of his understanding. JC interprets history through individual psychology, with low levels of societal references. It is also apparent that his knowledge of his character is culturally derived (e.g., JC’s views on politics, JC’s views on religion, and JC’s references to popular culture). This is all quite normal for adolescents and matches what we know about the way young people learning history, discussed in Chapter 2.

In terms of noting evidence of historical thinking skills, it is clear that JC is skeptical of material that presented an absolute version of Jesus. As I looked over VanSledright and Afflerbach’s (2004, 2005) definition of “sourcing” I would be led to believe he understood the concept of identification, attribution, perspective judgment, and reliability assessment. The one
thing missing, however, was the use of a source. There is no evidence that Jesus used any sources outside of pop culture comedy seen on television to craft his arguments. While he does craft arguments, they are not historical arguments and lack the support of historical evidence. He mastered the concept of being critical as evidenced by presenting an alternative view of Jesus, but was unable to explain the blending of multiple accounts and perspectives in his portrayal. There is also no evidence he looked for points of agreement or disagreement between his popular culture references and more traditional sources like *The Bible*.

As JC spoke about his *POOT* nemeses, he prioritizes real-time relations in his plea to return over using historically based argumentation. Rather than crafting an argument to remove John Knox and Abraham based on evidence-supported violations, he calculates that since he was removed for something he sees others reportedly doing that they should be removed as well. He did not attempt to connect his argument to historical evidence.

In sum, I saw little evidence of JC engaged with historical thinking skills. Why was this? On a micro level of analysis, (1) we know that young people need to be guided in the skill building of their historical thinking muscles, (2) the development of historical thinking skills was not how he perceived his assignment, and (3) many of the individuals who would be able to aid in guided instruction and modeling, peers and adults alike, were too distraught by JC’s “objectionable” portrayal to engage in the type of commitment required to scaffold historical thinking in a program like *POOT*. However, on a macro level, the Jesus controversy served as a platform for the development of historical thinking in other students.

**POOT Programmatic Improvements**

In reflecting back, I return to my concluding remarks written above. I suggested that the challenge for educators is to model an ethic of care in their own actions and to help young
people, boys especially, with implementing an ethic of care in their own lives. I believe my work with improvisational mentoring (Killham, 2013) to be relevant here in the development of this ethic of care, one that is compassionate and empathetic. I define improvisational mentoring as: (1) responsive interactivity, (2) a disposition of care, (3) pedagogical moves, and (4) assessment. I refer to this term because I think it blends the same kind of attention to best practices and rigor that Alice wanted of her students, as presented in Chapter 1, with the type of responsiveness and care needed in handling delicate situations like the Jesus controversy. In future POOT training material, this material is an essential inclusion.

**Implications on Games and Roleplay Literature**

I trace back to a quote I used in Chapter 4 from Swain (2007), which defined serious games as games that “let players gain an experiential understanding of real world issues through play” (p. 805). The above quote encourages experimentation and exploration in a similar way to that of critical thinking (i.e., historical thinking and scientific thinking). Through this experimentation, K-12 students would be able to interpret, evaluate, compare, evidenciate, and produce (see Figure 4.1 on bedrocks of critical thinking). I draw on this quote and these concepts around think processes because I am reminded of how the adults in this iteration of POOT lobbied to limit these young boys from gaining an experiential understanding on real world issues out of fear the boys would misbehave and the Jesus controversy would escalate out of control. It is worth investigating why young people enjoy and gravitate towards games. It is also worth looking at their reasons for enjoyment in conjunction with how they evaluate their independence and how they perceive supervising adult who are involved in these games.
Chapter 10
Conclusions and Future Research

Revisiting the Study

Revisiting the Participants

This study sought a diverse sample of participants. Students from four middle schools and three high schools were highlighted in this study. The selected students were guided by 10 teachers, from subjects including social studies, history, English, literature, debate, philosophy, and creative writing. The list of subject matters teachers taught was much more expansive than I originally thought in the framing of Chapter 2 on history education. Each classroom and teacher brought their own set of curricular needs, objectives, rules for participation, methods of assessment, and political mandates and pressures. This study also drew from the work of university mentors from eight sections of courses taught at three universities over a four-year period. The case histories presented in Chapters 6-9 drew from four different iterations of the program over a four-year period under investigation.

Revisiting the Methodological Choices

The case histories presented in this dissertation emerged from authentic questions voiced by the participants during phase one. An iterative design allowed for the focus of this dissertation to be narrowed in phase two. In Chapters 6-9, I sought to amplify the voice of the K-12 students in a way that could help educators shape their capacity to learn from their students, as well as to unearth the complexities of the students’ firsthand experiences with POOT. Paley (1986, 2004) explains the essential nature of careful listening, and Raider-Roth (2005) reminds us that “[c]areful listening is not an innate skill for most people, including teachers” (p. 154). A voice-
centered methodology was chosen as a technique that would allow for careful listening and an analysis rooted in the actual words of the participants. I recognize there are many ways one could go about this research, but I sought to break new ground with the adoption of a methodology that has never been used to understand POOT or similar spaces (e.g., McCormack’s Lenses (2000a, 2000b)). The use of narrative analysis methods, such as McCormack’s Lenses and case histories, allowed me to contribute to the knowledge base through rich depictions of events and firsthand accounts. This also added to the knowledge base related to relational research on how young people learn history and to an underexplored dimension of the alternative forms of teaching and learning referenced in Chapters 3 and 4. These firsthand accounts were then supported through the triangulation of data sources from a multi-layered listening and plot assemblage. The summative findings presented in this conclusion chapter are derived from the themes that emerged across the four different case histories presented in Chapters 6-9 with consideration to the theoretical and methodological underpinnings outlined in Chapters 2-5.

Research Aims

**Umbrella question.** I endeavored to understand the umbrella question related to opportunities and challenges of participating in an online, experiential history education project that uses character-play. I hypothesized that, as POOT participants engaged with the program, emergent questions around the character-playing dimension of POOT would arise. This did indeed occur. The topics of these emergent questions included character selection, accurate portrayal of one’s character, level of character involvement, ability for characters to contribute to the court case, and the appropriateness of characters. K-12 classroom teachers and university mentors voiced concerns about how the character-playing dimension might impact, and possibly even impede, participation. Additional concerns were raised about whether participants are able
to balance the demands of taking on a persona, and as to whether character-playing was, in actuality, increasing the players’ cognitive load to the point where participants would be unable to make sense and/or gain from their experience.

**Embedded questions.** The second tier of research questions, embedded within the umbrella question, examined how participants described the character-playing activity in *POOT* with particular attention paid towards the firsthand experiences of fictional, controversially played, and/or artistic characters; how character-playing served as a scaffold for students’ historical thinking; and what programmatic improvements grew out of listening to firsthand accounts. I hypothesized that participants would describe their *POOT* participation in relation to what Engeström (1999) calls an “activity system” (i.e., curricular activity, self, rules, community, division of labor). I believe this to be true, as their descriptions vividly detailed the contextual and relational nature of their experience with a strong emphasis placed on their positionality, rules, and assessment. Participants described the character-playing aspect of *POOT* in direct relation to the character they portrayed (e.g., JC as Jesus), the other characters with whom they interacted (e.g., Jesus’s description of his interaction with John Knox), and their activity system (e.g., Jesus describing his action within the framework of his K-12 classroom and the rules established by his teacher for students to follow). This was a different way of experiencing role than seen in the roleplaying games described in Chapter 3.

Further, I predicted adults would want to restrict character choices, but I did not predict that K-12 students would also want to enforce these restrictions. I predicted fictional, artistic, and controversially portrayed characters would have an impact on a participants’ understanding of history and strengthen their ability to engage in perspective taking. This research provided strong evidence for the inclusion of fictional, artistic, and controversially portrayed characters as
a way of fostering engagement. However, results suggested an increase in adult scaffolding and the act of sourcing to be necessary to see gains in historical thinking skills. A writing technique utilized at Avery’s schools, T2SFP (Thesis along with 2 Statistics or Facts per Paragraph), showed the most promise for increasing historical thinking skills (see Chapter 8). Results also indicated the need for students to reflect in order to reach higher levels of perspective taking. In the next paragraphs, I will provide more concrete examples of the results I just described.

Data Chapters

The power of being heard. The first data chapter, Chapter 6, attended to the befuddlement of Mrs. Myers’s students (Todd, Adriana, Gabe, and Ellen), who expressed concern over the inclusion of fictional characters in POOT, such as Hogwarts’s headmaster wizard Albus Dumbledore played by Lori. Chapter 6 presented Lori’s firsthand experience portraying Albus Dumbledore, which illuminated her sense of personal empowerment through accountability to the following: her classmates and teacher, the court case, and her character’s “historical” record. Further, Chapter 6 highlighted the strength of the character-student relationship, as well as how Lori’s increase in knowledge pertaining to her character and the trial led to her sense of increased opportunities. Results indicated that, in the right hands, playing a fictional character can be personally rewarding for the person portraying this character, and that a fictional character is fully capable of contributing to the unfolding of the court case. Rather than restricting fictional characters, confirmatory evidence suggested the most pressing concern for project directors to address is the need for full participation and increased player response rate.

Capacity building. Chapter 7 introduced the struggles of the student who portrayed the political painter, Diego Rivera. Teachers classified Diego Rivera’s POOT character-type (i.e.,
artist) as one with playability concerns. Without finding a resolution to their quandary, these teachers pondered methods to foster a sense of belonging and purpose for the artistic characters in their classroom. Sonya, the student portraying Diego Rivera, was equally mystified over her character’s sense of place and the ability for her character to contribute meaningfully to the court case and overall purpose of the project. This chapter exposed how participants see POOT as inextricably linked to their academics and a grade. Congruent with Lori’s experience in Chapter 6, Sonya’s experience established the POOT-school connection, and therefore complicates the understanding of POOT as a game. Sonya, best described as a “trifler” (Suits, 2005) was someone who accepted the means of her participation but not the purpose of the POOT program. Sonya had another purpose in mind other than “playing” POOT, which was to meet the requirements of participation established by her teacher. Analysis revealed the influential nature of soft skills, or personal characteristics, which might promote higher levels of success with the project. The soft skills most in need of development for success in POOT include imagination, resilience, curiosity, a desire to please, a lusory attitude about character-play, and grit. Sonya’s experience helped determine that capacity building depends on the explicit naming of the soft skills that teachers hope young people will embody.

**Mesosystems for learning.** Chapter 8 centered on a topic initiated by unidentified post-program evaluations. This chapter sought to better understand the experiences of students who expressed aversions to POOT. Avery, who portrayed Langston Hughes, was chosen because she spoke honestly about displeasure with the program, but indicated her perception of the project changed over time. Evidence from the interview suggested the significance of the relational dimensions of learning in accordance with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Ecological Systems Theory, particularly the power of merging two microsystems (i.e., home and school) to discuss academic
performance and evaluation. Avery’s perceptions were also heavily influenced by a specific writing technique (T2SFP) employed by her teacher. This technique initially led to feelings of irritation, which later contributed to academic gains and an overall senses of personal satisfaction once it was filtered through the mesosystem described above. Avery initially resisted to her teacher’s technique for improving her writing, the T2SFP. This feeling of loathing, however, diminished when her teacher merged two prominent microsystems. Mr. Ashton, her history teacher, provided explicit, positive feedback to Avery’s mother about the improvement in her writing and argumentation skills. Mr. Ashton coupled his compliments with evidence (i.e., Avery’s writing samples) to support the positive remarks he shared with Avery’s mother. In comparison with Sonya’s case, parental involvement in the positive evaluation of Avery’s work was a critical difference.

**Boyhood to manhood.** Chapter 9 explored how four adolescent boys, JC, John, Xavier, and Renko, challenged the boundaries for POOT participation which were established by their classroom teacher. Evidence pointed to increased levels of engagement across all four boys. Each of the students spoke earnestly about their experiences with a shared pervasive crisis: the controversial portrayal of the character Jesus. The relational ruptures related to this controversy served as the focal point of Chapter 9. The interviews with the boys revealed the complexities of their relationships with others and themselves. Collectively, all four boys demonstrated a desire for increased independence and agency in their POOT play patterns; and yet, this increase in autonomy gave rise to feelings of isolation and uncertainty. Amidst their efforts to gain independence, raise their status, and please superiors responsible for assessment, feelings of loneliness and vulnerability persisted. This was a stark difference between the togetherness Lori from Chapter 6 painted with her repeated use of the word “we.”
**JC as Jesus.** JC was engulfed in survival mode, and therefore unable to prioritize his portrayal of Jesus above his personal feelings of insecurity and betrayal. Data surrounding JC’s participation revealed broad notions of independence combined with a strong sense of perceived disloyalty from other K-12 participants. The following themes emerged in the analysis of JC’s interview. The first was how JC employed an ethics of justice by condoning his actions and the pursuit of fair and equal punishment. JC engaged with counter-productive coping mechanisms, which distanced himself from others, including adults. As a result of these disconnections, he strengthened his connections with hyper-masculine pop culture figures like Johnny Knoxville from the television show *Jackass*.

**John as John Knox.** Data from John’s participation, the student who portrayed John Knox, represented conversations of risk, as he expressed vulnerabilities much like Jesus did. John also expressed a sense of belonging related to two key moments (when he read Jesus’s résumé and when Jesus was being removed). “Fake Jesus,” as John called him, was the catalyst for John’s adoption of his character John Knox, the man once exiled by the French government for speaking his mind. Later, we see John embracing this character trait of speaking out against the grain. John began the program with a weak attachment to his character because he had hoped to play a different character who shared his middle name in real life. However, the religious debates over the Jesus controversy enabled John to see himself as an integral part of the POOT community and to speak extensively of his big-picture historical knowledge.

**Xavier as Osama Bin Laden.** Data from Xavier, the student who portrayed Osama Bin Laden, spoke of increased engagement as a result of what he perceived to be an offensive portrayal of Jesus. Until the Jesus controversy was sparked, Xavier’s site activity was minimal. After this, he decidedly spoke out against the potential return of Jesus, and admitted this was
more from his in-real-life self than his character. Xavier was bothered by off-subject postings and, therefore, wanted people to listen to him as he spoke on-topic. This scenario led Xavier to volunteer to play in another iteration of POOT the following school year.

**Renko as Yosa Buson.** Of the four boys, Renko demonstrated the highest levels of ethical maturity and was the most attuned with the community needs. The capability for a young person to engage in higher order moral thinking was supported in data from Renko. This is noteworthy, because despite societal pressure to succumb to hyper-masculinity and ethics of justice (e.g., JC’s portrayal of Jesus and John’s portrayal of John Knox) Renko paints another picture for us related to teaching conflict resolution. I attribute Renko’s ethical maturity to his ability to engage in perspective taking, maintain his character’s views despite personal differences of opinion, and engage with an ethic of care. This speaks to the importance of the caring versus justice orientation and the need to foster Gilligan’s (1982) care orientation in young people. The challenge, then, for educators is to model an ethic of care in their own actions and to help young boys implement an ethic of care in their own lives. The majority of the adults in POOT were unable to demonstrate this during the Jesus controversy. This analysis illuminated that this is less about the affordances of role, and rather, more about the capacity to engage in perspective taking and empathy in a way that allows participants to see beyond Gilligan’s (1982) first level of moral development, the “preconventional thinking” stage that is focused on an ethics of justice and self-survival. The example of John Knox versus Yosa Buson, which is further outlined in Chapter 9, is a case in point. Both of these characters afforded the student the ability to engage in empathy, but the missing component in the case of John as John Knox was Freire’s (2000) notion of action and reflection. While John, JC, and Xavier were taking action, the necessary component of structured reflection was absent.
Revisiting the Literature

Implications for Game-Like Learning and Roleplay

With this in mind, an important two-pronged question resurfaces. Is POOT a game and is it roleplay? The emphasis participants placed on inauthentic assessment connected to grades complicates this discussion. Games also have strong assessment features, as Gee (2003, 2008) discusses in his work. However, the nature and consequentiality of the assessment in games compared with POOT are dramatically different. Many of the K-12 students indicated their activity was dictated by their teacher’s method of assessment. In other words, the students were participating by way of earning a grade, as seen strongly in two very different cases, the Sonya as Diego Rivera case and the JC as Jesus case. POOT, while it does borrow from games and play, is also about story, sociopolitical matters, history, and roleplay/character-play embedded within a cultural context. It is both a game and not a game at the same time, as it wrestles with the involuntary participation and academic assessments measures that students attribute to being key aspects of their experience.

Building on this, I return to the literature on roleplaying. While I believe the so-called “roleplaying” in POOT is born out of the same thing as more traditional roleplaying games, POOT involvement diverges from roleplaying and more accurately should be labeled as perspective taking. Unlike in games, POOT participants view the use of “voice” as an assignment and do not articulate a sense of agency related to storytelling. In roleplaying games, players assume the role of a character to collaboratively create stories. Collaborative storytelling, while a design principle and aim of POOT, is not part of the K-12 participants’ articulation of their experience. Further, POOT participation is compulsory, whereas players who engage in roleplaying games have self-selected to take part in that type of play experience. We know from
games studies that there is a wide range of player/game preferences. The difference in player preference and forced play may account for the variations seen in levels of POOT participation and engagement.

Implications for Teaching and Learning

Returning to POOT, it is important to note that POOT is more than the act of visualizing life from someone else’s shoes; it is the task of embodiment of a character as a way of generating critical dialogue around problems. This is much like Freire’s (1973) notion of “problem posing,” which promotes the conscientization through critical reflection and action. Freire’s problem posing begins with the assumption that education is political and institutions are not neutral (Smith-Maddox & Solorzano, 2002). Smith-Maddox and Solorzano (2002) summarize the three phases of Freire’s problem posing: (1) naming the problem, (2) looking at the causes of the problem, and (3) mining for solutions. This describes POOT, on the larger scale. On a smaller level, players start by approaching the research on his or her character in a way that embodies the complexity and politicization of the character, and later move to seeing the same rhizomal facets of the court case as they co-construct the trial. In recognizing these complexities, participants may begin to challenge passivity in learning, and the learning dimensions cannot be separated from this experience. This process requires more than just the adoption of role; it requires perspective taking coupled with historical thinking skills that are embedded in a scaffolded process by a more skilled other and enhanced through reflection.

This is something that must occur on the communal level, as POOT tries to do with the sociopolitical content of the court case, but also on an individual level. Take Dumbledore, Diego Rivera, Langston Hughes, and Jesus; these are four characters with the potential to engage more deeply in sociopolitical issues raised by the POOT trial. The act of becoming someone else has
disruptive powers, and can alter the lens through which the world is viewed. Others have also stressed the importance of problem posing, particularly the framing of problems that are relevant to today’s society (Cromer, 2010; Johnson, L. & Adams, S., 2011). This embodied approach provokes a personal investment in issues at hand, while still allowing the participant to engage at a safe distance because, in the end, the participant is not the character (see analysis of Diego Rivera in Chapter 7 and John Knox in chapter 9 for more details on how participants experience this safe distancing firsthand).

**Revisiting Historical Thinking**

It is important to consider what we know about how young people learn history. This research indicated similarities with the way young people learn history, as outlined in Chapter 2. As mentioned in Chapter 7, it is important for educators to remember that the development of historical thinking skills takes time, practice, and that modeling done by a more skilled other is essential in young people’s ability to grasp concepts. Some students will gravitate towards this work more quickly than others, as seen in the difference between Diego, Dumbledore, and Langston Hughes. The strength of the student’s connection to the content and a more skilled other are determinants. Extended conversations between young people and adults (or a more skilled other) are essential to increasing source work. To reiterate this with the case history of Lori from Chapter 6, the limitations to her growth in historical thinking were attributed to the lack of three things: (1) extended conversations, (2) adult-to-student interaction, and (3) source work, rather than a fictional character assignment. The T2SFP, a writing technique used at Dublin Academy, clearly outlined expectations. The clarity had the biggest impact. Students need to be encouraged to engage in meaning making with historical content. We learn from Jesus that it is not enough to only be critical of character or event but sources matter. Drawing back to
Chapter 6, with Lori as Dumbledore, the telling of an individual story unsupported by source work.

In sum, I saw little evidence of JC engaged with historical thinking skills. Why was this? On a micro level of analysis, (1) we know that young people need to be guided in the skill building of their historical thinking muscles, (2) the development of historical thinking skills was not how he perceived his assignment, and (3) many of the individuals who would be able to aid in guided instruction and modeling, peers and adults alike, were too distraught by JC’s “objectionable” portrayal to engage in the type of commitment required to scaffold historical thinking in a program like POOT. However, on a macro level, the Jesus controversy served as a platform for the development of historical thinking in other students.

In Chapter 6, would Albus Dumbledore call someone Mr. Yahoo? In Chapter 7, would Diego Rivera really display child-like excitement about his birthday? In Chapter 8, would Langston Hughes write to Mia about a sad poem? In Chapter 9, would Jesus argue with John Knox? Maybe or maybe not, but in POOT, failure or inaccuracies are judged differently than they would be in school. Games, in general see “mistakes” differently than traditional schooling, says game designer Raph Koster. Koster stresses effective learning environments are ones where failure is not only tolerated but welcomed because the aim is to be able to take risks and tap into a person’s creative abilities (Stuart, 2011).

Through this lens, the freedom to try things out and to experiment is essential, be it Dumbledore trying to establish his sense of belonging in the Court or Jesus trying out different voices for his character. In the case of all the characters mentioned above, learning how to portray one’s character involves trying. The most successful games are ones that allow for this
experimentation. This can be refer to as the ability for the player to acquire, test, and master. I posit that the most successful educational spaces are ones that also allow for experimentation.

As project director Jeff Stanzler encourages mentors to ask: “Where is the opportunity?” Remember, asking an adult to portray any of these characters with great historical accuracy is a difficult task, let alone a young person. It requires research, digging in, and ultimately making a decision and taking a risk with the decision on how to portray one’s characters.

With the lens of “where is the opportunity,” it is not historical perfection POOT aims for, but rather that the participant has the opportunity to learn the skills of a historian- synthesizing and critiquing multiple sources and documents to draw conclusions about people, places, and times. This distinction between being given factually accurate information and being asked to engage in the act of synthesizing and critiquing is a distinction McCall (2011) and Squire (2011) make in their work with simulations and games, as well as a distinction Wineburg (1991, 1999, 2005) makes in establishing what we should value in teaching history.

**Future Research**

Building on this research, future studies must seek to create a rich picture of participants’ experiences. This must include collecting identifying information in order to track student progress longitudinally, as well as to allow for member checking during analysis. Having access to the K-12 classroom teacher’s perceptions and curriculum, the classroom interactions between the K-12 classroom teacher and his/her students, and the face-to-face peer interactions among the K-12 students is essential. This study revealed the importance of observing instructional time as a way of more completely and accurately understanding the work done in POOT. Through observation, the researcher can establish deeper levels of trust that can lead to more in-depth and
honest disclosure during interviews. Observational data can then be triangulated with online data, interviews, and surveys. Given the complexity of social organization, such as schools, multiple research sites should be included to increase sample diversity and generalizability. Other ways to increase the credibility of this kind of study include situations where the classroom and teacher can be held constant. Investigating the personality traits of participants is a worthwhile pursuit. A digitized questionnaire would allow for larger sample size and more correlational work. The research design should account for pre, post, and delayed-post interviews, as well pre, post, and delayed-post as well as writing samples from K-12 students.
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Appendices
APPENDIX 5.1

STUDY DETERMINED NOT HUMAN SUBJECTS
Notification of review

From: Justin Osborne
To: Jennifer Kilham
Re: Study ID: 2013-1341
Title: Understanding the Educational Environment of the Place Out of Time

Your submission referenced above to the IRB has been reviewed. To navigate to the project workspace, click on the above ID.
APPENDIX 5.2

SAMPLE CONSENT FORM
Title:
Understanding the nature of learning in Place Out of Time: A web-mediated educational program

Introduction:
A participatory action research study in the Place Out of Time web-mediated educational program in which your child is a participant is being conducted. Please read the following explanation carefully and ask questions about anything you do not understand. If you are a parent reading this consent form, the term “you” refers to your child.

Purpose:
The purpose of this research study is to better understand the nature of the learning that occurs in the Place Out of Time program.

Duration:
You will be interviewed 1-2 times for approximately one hour each time. Every effort will be made to interview you during non-academic times during the school day.

Procedures:
The interview will take place during the school day at non academic times if possible. A digital audio recorder will be used. Your postings during the 2011 JCAT/POOT simulation will be studied.

Risks/Discomforts:
It is not expected that you will be exposed to any risk or discomfort from participating in this research study. None of the questions involves sensitive personal information. You may choose to withdraw from the research study at any time.

Benefits:
You will not receive any direct benefit from your participation in this research study. However, your participation may help the research team form the next steps of our inquiry. It will also helps to build a better understanding of the learning that takes place in this educational simulation.

Alternatives:
Participation in this study in no way effects your participation in the Place out of Time simulation. Participation in this study will also not have any effect on your grade in school. If you do not want to be audio taped you should not participate in this research study.
Payment:
You will not receive any money for participating in this research study.

Confidentiality:
All research data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in Miriam Raider-Roth’s office. Audio recordings will be kept in a password protected computer file. The transcript will not contain your name or other private information. Research data (including the audio recordings) will be stored for three years after the end of this research study and then will be destroyed by shredding or deleting. The data from the research study may be published; however, you will have the option of whether or not to be identified by name in any published work.

Offer to Answer Questions:
If you have any questions about this research study, you may contact Dr. Miriam Raider-Roth at 513-556-3808. The University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board reviews all research projects that involve human participants to be sure the rights and welfare of participants are protected. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences at (513) 558-5259. If you have a concern about the study you may also call the UC Research Compliance Hotline at (800) 889-1547, or you may write to the Institutional Review Board-Social and Behavioral Sciences, University Hall, ML 0567, 51 Goodman Avenue, PO Box 670521, Cincinnati, OH 45221-0567, or you may email the IRB office at irb@ucmail.uc.edu.

Voluntary Participation:
You do NOT have to participate in this research study. You may choose not to participate or you may withdraw AT ANY TIME by having a confidential conversation by phone or in person with Miriam Raider-Roth. Neither your participation in school activities nor your grades will be affected by a decision to participate or withdraw. Partial data from any withdrawing participant will be used in the study unless you requests otherwise verbally or through written communication with Miriam Raider-Roth.
**Agreement:**

I have read this consent document. I have indicated my decision by checking the boxes and signing below. I will receive a copy of this consent document for my reference.

| JCAT site public postings and mailbox messages | ☐ Yes, use my JCAT site work for the research study.  
☐ No, do not use my JCAT site work for the research study. |
|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Interviews | ☐ Yes, I agree to be interviewed once for the research study.  
☐ No, I do not agree to be interviewed for the research study. |

_____________________________________________
Print Name of Participant (if under 18 years of age)

_____________________________________________
Signature of Participant (if 18 years of age or older)  
Date of Birth

_____________________________________________
Signature of Participant  
if under 18 years of age  
Date of Signature
Parent/Legal Guardian Signature

for participants under 18 years of age

PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT/ASSENT:

I have reviewed this form with the participant and/or representative. An explanation of the research was given and questions from the subject were solicited and answered to the subject’s satisfaction. In my judgment, the subject has demonstrated comprehension of the information.

________________________________________  ____________________________
Signature and Title of Person Obtaining Consent/Assent     Date

(This line will not be used for parent signatures done at home.)
APPENDIX 5.3

RECRUITMENT LETTERS TO PARENTS
Dear Parents,

We have enjoyed learning from your children during this year’s Jewish Court of All Time simulation. We are really interested in the ways that students and teacher use and learn from Place Out of Time (POOT) and the Jewish Court of All Time (JCAT) and are conducting an action research study about the nature of Learning in JCAT/POOT. Action research means that we invite all members of the simulation to participate in many different roles in the research process. We know that your child may have some questions about POOT/JCAT and we are eager to hear them. We would also like to learn more about what your child thought about JCAT/POOT and understand more about student learning in this program. In order to do this, we would like to study your child’s postings in JCAT/POOT (both public and private messages) and interview them 1-2 times for about an hour each time. We will make every effort to interview them during non-academic times during the school day.

Participation in this study in no way effects your child’s participation in JCAT/POOT in the future and will not have any effect on your child’s grade in school. We assure you your child’s name will be kept confidential and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you allow your child to participate in this research study, please sign and return one copy the consent form (see attached). Please return this consent form to your child’s teacher. You may keep the other copy for yourself.

If you have any questions about the project, we would be happy to answer them. Please do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

Miriam Raider-Roth
Director, Center for Studies in Jewish Education and Culture, University of Cincinnati
raidermm@uc.edu,
513.556.3808

Jennifer Killham
Graduate Assistant, Center for Studies in Jewish Education and Culture, University of Cincinnati
jenniferkillham@gmail.com
513.556.4542
APPENDIX 5.4

CHART OUTLINING THE DATA, ALONG WITH THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Data Source Details</th>
<th>Role of the researcher</th>
<th>What the researcher and participant do together</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Interviews  | Open ended, semi-structured interview questions which allow for deviation from a script in order to follow the participant’s train of thought | -Researcher creates interview guide  
-Researcher creates a safe climate free of coercion  
-Researcher follows the interviewee | -Together, the researcher and participant engage in meaning making through shared exploration into curiosities and reflection on their experiences  
-The researcher adapts inquiries based on interactions with the participant, if necessary |
| Observation | Online  
-POOT website  
-Online forums  
-Conference calls  
-Blackboard | -Researcher is actively immersed in the research space as a participant and practitioner  
-Researcher knows what (s)he knows by being in the thick of it  
-Researcher engages in full POOT participation, including roleplay  
-Because of this level of involvement, the researcher has the ability to alter the environment but not as a researcher so much as a co-constructor and collaborator | -This research breaks the observation as “me watching you” cast type, for a stance that is relationally rooted and mutually explorative  
-Interactions and power dynamics based on mutual respect  
-Acknowledge the participants co-existing in POOT  
-The watching has the potential to take place with all parties  
-Respond to one another in the POOT |
| Site Visitations | University mentor seminars  
-K-12 visits | -The researcher’s interactions with the space and participants are contextual and do not occur in isolation  
-Researcher aware of observer effect  
-Researcher observes without imposing values of beliefs  
-Researcher takes copious field notes. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archived data</th>
<th>- <em>POOT</em> website data</th>
<th>- Researchers scour data for all related material to key moments referenced in interviews</th>
<th>- Participant shares answers in interview, which lead the researcher to investigate other related data sources for all related material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Online forums</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Reflective notes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Support documents</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- See textual analysis chart for visual representation and full list of data sources</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 5.5

K-12 STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE
1) Before the simulation started, what did you think the simulation would be like?
   a. What did your teacher tell you about the simulation?
   b. Did your opinion of the simulation change over time? If so, how?

2) Which character did you play in the simulation?
   a. How did you pick your character?
   b. Was your character assigned or did you get one of your choices?

3) What was it like playing your character?
   a. What were the hard parts about being your character?
   b. What were the fun parts about being your character?

4) What did you do in class to help you learn about your character?

5) What was your favorite part of the simulation? What was your least favorite part of the simulation?

6) Did you talk to other characters? If so, who?
   a. Why did you talk to these characters?
   b. Were you ever surprised by a conversation you had with another character?
   c. Did people listen to your character?
   d. Did you get the responses you wanted?

7) Did you ever feel overwhelmed? Was there ever a time when you were nervous or confused?

8) Were you able to pretend or use make-believe in the simulation?
   a. Did others play along with what you made up?

9) In what way did you try to influence others through your character?
   a. Why did you choose to try to influence them?
   b. Tell me about a time when you talked to another character.

10) Some of the characters were played by university students or teachers. What did you think about your interactions with the adult players?

11) What would you do differently if you participated in another JCAT simulation? What would you change about JCAT?

12) How did JCAT help you learn new things? What new things did you learn?
13) Did you opinion on the court case change overtime? If so, why?

14) How did you decide to whom you were going to give a VOC?
1) Before the simulation started, what were your hopes and expectations related to the experience?
   
a. Did your hopes and expectations change over time? If so, how?

2) What were your driving thoughts (intentions, guiding principles) in the game? Can you tell me how you put this into action? Can you tell me a story/memory you have of putting this into action?

3) Did you find an opportunity in JCAT to apply your previous knowledge about mentoring/teaching? If yes, can you explain how?

4) What kind of participant drew your attention most?
   
a. In what way did you try to influence others through your character?
   
b. Why did you choose to try to influence them (other than the reason “because they are my mentees”)? Tell me about the exchanges you had with this character.

5) If you initiated contact/dialogue on JCAT with mentoring in mind, what was your primary purpose for making this contact?

6) What were your experiences related to drawing out responses from students? Can you tell me a story/memory you have of this?

7) What opportunities did being in character give you to mentor students?

8) As you played the game, what did you think about most related to the mentoring process?

9) What would you do differently if you participated in another JCAT simulation?

10) What did you find most applicable from this experience to your future teaching?
1. How did the JCAT Talk discussions support you as a learner? As a teacher?
   a. What prompts/discussions were most useful for you?
   b. In what ways could JCAT Talk/Connect support you further?
   c. What were the drawbacks of the Talk/Connect support?
2. How did the Connect discussions support you as a learner? As a teacher?
   a. What prompts/discussions were most useful for you?
   b. In what ways could Connect support you further?
   c. What were the drawbacks of the Connect support?
3. How did the Talk/Connect contribute to your ability to run JCAT in your class?
4. How challenging was the JCAT Talk and Connect technology for you to use? What kinds of support did you need? What kinds of support did you receive?
5. One of our goals for the Talk/Connect interactions was to facilitate a collaborative learning community. How effective were the Talk/Connect interactions in helping you feel like you were part of a collaborative community?
   a. What elements supported community? What was lacking?
   b. In what ways could we build a stronger/more effective/more cohesive community?
APPENDIX 5.8

PROJECT DIRECTOR INTERVIEW GUIDE
1) Can you tell me more about your connection to the ICS program?
   a. How long have you been involved in the program?
   b. How did you become involved?
2) In your own words, how would you describe POOT?
   a. What is the purpose?
   b. What is the value of participating in POOT?
   c. What is POOT fostering and reinforcing?
3) How would you describe the rules of POOT? Implicit and explicit?
   a. How are the rules negotiated?
   b. How are the rules broken? Can you tell me a story when someone broke the rules?
4) How would you define your role as facilitator in POOT?
   a. What were/are your driving thoughts and intentions as a facilitator?
   b. What are your goals and expectations for the program?
6) Tell me more about what it was like to be a facilitator.
   a. What opportunities?
   b. What obstacles or challenges did you face?
   c. Can you tell me about a difficult decision you had to make?
   d. Can you tell me a story about being a facilitator?
7) How would you describe your participation in POOT?
8) What would you like to do differently during the next iteration of the program?
9) What helps and hinders your experience as a facilitator?
   a. What type of support was helpful?
   b. What should we consider doing differently?
   c. What type of support would have been helpful?
10) What advice would you offer future facilitators?