

Chapter 9

Game 2 Engage: Using iPads to Mediate and Develop Social Relationships in College Learning

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Preamble *The setting is a college in the north of England; it's a bleak day and as the two visitors make their way up the steep incline and past McDonald's, the boisterous voices carry chaotically in the blustery wind. The kids are confident and lively, easily carrying their college stuff in fashionable bags. Coming in closer to the college the building is impressive; a strikingly tall iconic multi-storey complex with a spanking-new clean construction situated close to the city's major transport links—buses, trains and trams. Some kids arrive on bicycles—as is the fashion, and in twos and threes the ultra cool clandestinely inhale deeply on cigarettes. Following the long walk leading to the main entrance, the students are faced with a set of barriers; they have to swipe their student cards to access the rest of the building. Proceeding on from these prominent security measures, is a steep set of steps that lead to a noticeably long atrium area overseen by balconies, then further stairs to a canteen area, a lift and corridors to first floor curriculum areas of the College. These teens are 'coming of age', waiting for afternoon classes for re-takes of exams failed at school; for university entrance courses; for professional training in hairdressing, engineering, media ... As the visitors, two researchers enter the vestibule, they become aware of a more muted gathering; they are protectively ushered by two women, caring and attentive, checking off names in notebooks, looking in student bags—a very different melange than the 'youth presence' hanging and geeking out elsewhere.*

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This chapter is the story of how the two researchers got to know the students inside the vestibule; of how their teacher brought together students from a media course to work with them and how iPads mediated relationships between individual and across groups of students, giving rise to a range of encounters that facilitated learning in diverse ways. The chapter is authored by the two researchers (Bronwyn and Julia), and the teacher practitioner (Jamie), now himself a university academic. We use the first-person plural to narrate our chapter.

Introduction

This study is based on a UK Further Education (FE) setting, a sector which traditionally is associated with the vocational provision, and with helping students ‘catch up’ on traditional 16+ qualifications. In England, FE has traditionally supported students deemed to have failed to acquire ‘minimal’ qualifications at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level in conventional schooling. Thus, FE tutors have helped prepare students for GCSEs and also provided a range of basic and additional GCSE programmes to suit the interests of a variety of students of all ages. FE colleges have also often offered subjects that are more diverse than those which schools can conventionally offer, such as additional modern languages, sociology or psychology, for example. In some areas of the UK colleges provide most post-16 education, whereas, in others, the college route is much less conventional. In recent years, FE has been forced to diversify its offerings due to governmental constraints (Simmons and Thompson 2008) and now finds itself delivering various educational routes including pre-GCSE, vocational training and Foundation Degrees. It is with the pre-GCSE provision that this project locates itself. Some of the most vulnerable students’ work within this curriculum area and their vulnerabilities can, as we show, either be helped or exacerbated by college life.

Marsh and Bearn (2007: 133) talk about the sometimes ‘uncomfortable spaces’ that emerge in educational settings where there are discernible gaps in access; where exclusion is a process within communities, so that students may not share the same social spaces; may not have the same cultural power as others; and where individual identities are also in process. In all communities, pedagogical practices can both reinforce or challenge those processes of exclusion as learning happens.

We feel that the project described in this chapter suggests ways forward for all students; we suggest that sometimes the assumptions made about learners and about how those needs are best met, need to be challenged. In this chapter, we show how drawing on students’ funds of knowledge and channelling those to ‘deepen their understandings and broaden their perspectives on their own and others’ lives’ (Moll et al. 1992: 90) can build bridges across relationships as well as help students learn. We also examine how the technology of iPads worked to mediate the relationships in this educational setting, including effects we did not expect, on relationships between students and between students and some members of staff. In addition, we show how students can mentor each other and where transformations can take place within the

student body. This was a ‘strategic intervention’ (Leander and Sheehy 2004), where two quite distinct groups of students worked together and using iPads were able to build meaningful relationships, that promoted a more equitable experience for everyone involved.

The Project Participants

The project was led by Jamie, the College Practitioner, while the two university researchers collected primary research data through observation and playing an active role in the practitioner-led workshops. The three of us are now situated in three different universities and are reflecting back on this project of some years ago, in 2013.

Importantly, the project brought two distinct sets of students together; vocational ‘Digital Media students’ studying at levels 2 and 3 which could be used as university entry qualifications; studying BTEC (Business Technology and Education Council) courses and so-called ‘Practical Skills students’ (Entry Level 1–3, pre-GSCE—General Certificate in Secondary Education), hoping to gain entry to other courses at the college in years to come. This second group of students were being taught basic ‘life skills’, such as cookery, shopping, and even learning to travel by bus from home to college and back, through accompanied travel schemes.

The Digital Media students were confident in using technology both socially and academically; many had strong preferences for gaming technology. All these students carried mobile phones. The Practical Skills students had varying access to technology, but several carried phones with them and occasionally revealed skills of playing Minecraft; others did not possess such items. The Practical Skills of students were often very dependent on staff; support for them included Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) who assisted them not only during class time but also during leisure time around the college. The main focus of the LSAs’ role was to provide additional support to students alongside assisting the teacher in the hands on delivery of classroom activities. Although in some cases students had severe physical difficulties and learning needs we reveal through this chapter, how gaming technologies including the iPad facilitated their learning, independence, identity building, self-empowerment and relationship building. These seemed to challenge the way LSAs perceived the Practical Skills students and positively affected their relationships with them.

Jamie had, in previous years at the college, noticed how support arrangements for Practical Skills students could, counter-intuitively, mediate against their abilities to successfully integrate with other students. It was not simply that the courses they followed separated them, but also that they arrived separately on buses, were required to stay in college at breaks and whose comings and goings from the classrooms were closely monitored. Set against the other students, who came and went when they pleased—aside from checking into register when they arrived; who wandered in groups to college or travelled together on public transport, and who

enjoyed frequenting and selecting from fast food outlets close to and within the college. Close monitoring of the Practical Skills students meant that other youth gave them a wide margin; so friendships remained insular and reified differences, casting an invisibility cloak over any similarities. Thus, bringing together two groups of students from either side of this institutionally constructed ability fence was to mark the bringing together of two distinct social communities too. This was something that Jamie aimed to do, by bringing Digital Media students to the classroom, sharing their expertise in media and hoping to draw out friendships at the same time. Research on motivation emphasizes the critical role relationships can play in developing and sustaining internal motivations (Deci and Ryan 2000; Sheldon 2015). Individuals who perceive that their actions are valued by others demonstrate more persistence in achieving their goals, as well as more satisfaction during and after the process (Norton et al. 2012; Wilson 2011). Of course, the Digital Media students learned too from the Practical Skills students, who despite many seemingly obvious barriers to their learning, including visual difficulties, autism, literacy de-coding problems and physical challenges, did have funds of knowledge they could share. The Digital Media Students obviously also not a homogeneous group, had diverse challenges of their own, and as might be expected, learned much through this project.

Fancy Spaces for Learning

Subject to a multimillion pound development within the last decade, the college boasted modern facilities and developed bespoke areas for specific curricula. This included a custom designed aircraft simulation for aviation courses, tools and equipment for construction courses, state-of-the-art hairdressing facilities and a comprehensive suite for catering and hospitality. However, from a student perspective looking beyond the fancy architecture and facilities for learning, the social spaces created for students only facilitated congregation in atrium areas through the provision of occasional recreational facilities.

Students who had opted for subjects requiring sophisticated machinery etc., thus enjoyed the bounty of the college's facilities (ironically developing *their* 'practical skills'); support for the Practical Skills students meanwhile, existed in a different kind of expensive bubble, one with specialist teachers and support workers, and as mentioned, this support ironically disabled them in other ways, separating them from others and robbed them of independence and any sense of cool or kudos.

Jamie felt that allowing these Practical Skills students access to new technologies, to facilitate greater socialization with other students and to use cool stuff in class, would help effect a more socially integrated student culture within the college. The aim was fundamentally, to dissolve the social isolation of Practical Skills students. Hence the aptly named 'Game 2 Engage' project was born.

Making IT Personal (MITP)

‘Game 2 Engage’ developed through previous college initiatives, but principally grew out of a European Social Fund venture ‘Making IT Personal’ (MITP Digital 2017). MITP aimed to tackle digital exclusion by empowering citizens in South Yorkshire to mentor their friends, family and colleagues in utilizing basic IT. This model was rolled out within the College to the Digital Media students who mentored their family members to make use of IT. Two, from many success stories, stood out from the MITP activity amongst the Digital Media group—itsself as mentioned above, like all groups a heterogeneous mix of individuals, with diverse dis/advantages in life. The first, a mentoring experience that involved a student utilizing gaming technology to develop the social skills and cognitive capacity of his severely autistic sister. The second, a level 3 student who excelled in providing diverse examples of helping his family to learn and apply IT; this second student himself severely disabled after contracting meningitis as a child, had overcome extreme challenges in his own learning and was hence in the Digital Media group. Later, we explore the intricacies involved in the relationships formed with this particular Digital Media student and the Practical Skills students. However, it was the first example that Jamie and the Project Sponsor within the College reflected and agreed that we should facilitate an in-house project whereby the Digital Media Students will befriend and mentor the Practical Skills students through a common medium, gaming technology. The intention to aid social engagement, therefore, was envisaged to grow through mentorship initially and friendship ultimately.

Preparing the Digital Media Students and the Launch Event

Before communicating the project goals to the students, the ‘buy in’ from the specialist teachers of the Practical Skills students was needed. In principle, they agreed with the project aims but Jamie had an initial concern to develop the Digital Media students’ awareness of issues that might arise when working with students who have complex physical, emotional and learning needs. Jamie hence set up and ran a training workshop for the Digital Media students to provide them with knowledge relevant to working with the Practical Skills students and to set and manage their expectations.

Following the workshop, a project launch event brought both sets of students together to initially introduce them to each other and to help them begin developing relationships. This workshop was based on a bespoke blog tool developed at The Rix Research and Media centre, which ‘... explores and develops ways of using new technologies to transform the lives of people with learning disabilities’. The blog tool allows students to introduce themselves to others on a private site; it was ideal in helping students explore the theme ‘About Us’, facilitating students to work



Fig. 9.1 The Rix blog tool. With permission from Rix Research and Media

together and populate content based on: Who we are, What we do; Likes; Dislikes; What we find fun; Future goals (Fig. 9.1).

During the launch event, the Digital Media students worked with the Practical Skills students, talking to them about their interests and preferences and helping them upload their responses using the blog tool. The event allowed students to mix and exchange personal information—but with the emphasis on Practical Skills students telling the Digital media students about themselves; the LSAs sat close to the Practical Skills students, ‘monitoring’ the interactions. Physical proximity between the support workers and Practical Skills students meant that Digital Media students sometimes hovered awkwardly on the edges of intimate huddles; in other groups, the Digital Media students seemed to ‘take over’ the technology slightly to the side of the Practical Skills students. But slowly as the day progressed, the task gradually took over and conversations became more lively; the LSAs discernibly and literally moved back leaving space for the young to interact together.

To the surprise of the staff, close to the end of the day, the students seemed to relax and engaged in what might be termed a spontaneous ‘show and tell’ session. One of the students mimed to her favourite pop song; another danced and others joined in; there was an impressive demonstration of break dancing, but the pinnacle was probably the emotional outburst from one Practical Skills student, Lucia, who stood up and loudly proclaimed:

...all I want to say now is that I’ve got some new friends now, I felt like nobody likes me or respects me the way that I am and I thank you a lot for being there for me today, thank you very much

This was a direct response from Lucia, whose major and complex learning difficulties had so far prevented her from being able to read or write beyond the preliminaries of her name; her phrasing echoed familiar schooled discourses of friendship and gratitude. Nevertheless, the spontaneity and the bravery of her words, disclosing her feelings so openly, surprised us all.

The applause that ensued came from both staff and students but it was clear there remained much to be done since during the lunch break on this day, the Digital Media students followed their usual protocol and went out to buy food; while the Practical Skills students were closely supervised inside and ate the lunch provided. But the groundwork was laid.

Technology: Combining the Mundane and the Exotic

An interesting aspect of the way technology is still used in many educational institutions, is the way it is almost revered, kept preciously in separate almost sanitized spaces, away from the pen and paper literacy practices of the mundane classroom world. The practices of digital literacy and ‘traditional’ literacy remained determinedly separate. Hence at the beginning of every lesson, two student monitors were required to ritualistically collect the iPads from the staffroom where they were kept in a filing cabinet under lock and key. The students liked to be picked for this task, taking the responsibility seriously and being trusted not to get lost, ferrying the merchandise safely back to the class. The iPads as precious cargo were solemnly handed over to students, pristine in their stylish, branded boxes, some even still with the tissue paper wrapped around them, lovingly replaced at the end of each lesson. The status conferred on the objects by institutional structures (Miller 2009) became a significant factor in shaping how the students perceived and interacted with the tablets. These items, originally intended by Jamie to be kept by students and taken home, were nevertheless kept on college premises ‘in case students did not take care of them’. This seemed unlikely to be the case since the students often even used the iPads while they were still in their boxes; it was only after some weeks of lessons that they began to use them in the mobile manner which their design affords. For the students, these were highly precious objects, revered and honoured; and we noted how differently both the Digital Media and the Practical Skills students were in their handling of their own personal gadgets, confidently, almost casually pulling them in and out of pockets, consulting them; these were quotidian objects of identity and taken for granted.

This exoticization of the precious objects made them seem almost alien classroom tools; they did not seem like the easy mobile objects described, for example by Merchant (2015) in the early years’ classroom, or children’s easy acceptance of using technologies in the primary school (Burnett 2015). Despite the desire to invest in home practices and transfer them to college, it seemed that the institution’s policy over the care of resources conspired against the normalizing of what was happening. This certainly acted as a barrier to the empowerment of students.

All students had their own college log-in address that allowed them to get online and access their media accounts. These were ‘unfriendly’ codes, generated by the college system and comprising letters and numbers in odd combinations; of course for students with limited literacy skills this was a major hurdle and logging on sometimes took almost half an hour. What’s more, the ‘touch’ interface of the

tablet also became an issue at such moments. While, on the one hand, a strength of the iPad interface was that it allowed students who had limited literacy skills to touch and swipe in order to manipulate images, words, and applications, at the same time, as anyone who has used a touchscreen knows, getting the tablets to respond to a touch requires a combination of precise accuracy and pressure that was a further challenge for some of the students who also had issues with fine motor dexterity or vision. Mastering the art of the right kind of touch was a steep, and often frustrating, learning curve for some of the Practical Skills students as well as a reminder that every form of literacy technology will have unintended consequences with a particular audience. The LSAs would help by noting down the log-in codes on paper in the same little books they carried with them all day—books which held the students' emergency phone numbers, travel arrangements and so on, now had log-on details. These were books the students never held or consulted; even the Digital Media students could not assist since the numbers were all inaccessible to them too. Everything was organized with the best interest of the Practical Skills students in mind; but the LSAs were the custodians of students' access online and therefore the students were disempowered. The anticipated freedom of the Internet was hard to win and students became demoralized and frequently angry at how long it took to get things sorted out before they could begin using them in class. It is also the case, however, that some of the students persisted in trying to master their log-in codes. When, after close to six months, Manj logged on by herself one day, and made a point of announcing that she had done so, it was a clear moment of accomplishment for her. The timeline of this achievement, however, reinforces how the introduction of digital technologies in such a context requires both patience and a long view of what constitutes progress.

Two students would often seek refuge while waiting for things to get going; learning using the mobile phones they brought with them daily, independently from each other they began playing on *Minecraft*,¹ taking time from the lesson to build up their cities or to demolish things. Researchers, Julia and Bronwyn, noticed how these activities were at first surreptitiously executed; but later the two became comrades. They exchanged eye contact with each other and after a while gravitated to sit together for short periods, looking over each other's shoulders to see what each was doing. Not much was said, but occasionally they could be seen exchanging phones, allowing the other to execute actions on their games, and then returning the devices after a while. It was clear in these mainly silent manoeuvres, that a relationship was accumulating; they were sharing unspoken understandings and enjoying each other's company. The project was working—the Practical Skills students were interacting together, learning from each other and building on expertise they had brought in from home. But this was a peripheral activity; and it was a patient waiting game that Jamie played for this kind of conduct to slowly drip feed into the mainstream activities of the class.

¹*Minecraft* was emerging as a game at that time and the two were early UK adopters.

When Julia and Bronwyn chatted to the two *Minecraft* students about what they were doing, the two realised their behaviour was not against the rules, that this was allowed! The private and surreptitious engagements became more openly collaborative; they more and more exchanged tactics, showing each other how to do things and learn together. The contrast with how these two used their mobile phones, against the boxed up iPads was notable. Not for them the barrier of encoded access to their tools; their games were always on and these students were savvy and connected, relaxed in their participation with online gaming. Later these students used *Minecraft* on their iPads—so that the digital tool represented a tangible link between home tools and college practices.

Learning Support Staff and Tandem Learning

A valuable asset in the lives of the Practical Skills students were the support staff; they were ever patient, knowledgeable about the students' lives, were skilled in defusing the many 'difficult' social situations that could suddenly arise, and threw themselves into the 'digital treasure hunt' that was arranged in the local shopping mall. They would always seize the opportunity to help out in any way they could.

From the outset, however, the LSAs were bemused by the activities that happened in the classroom. They were baffled as to why iPads should be used when pen and paper seemed (to them), easier. They felt somewhat usurped by the presence of the Digital Media students. They told the researchers that they were not so keen on technology and they liked the more practical lessons, taking students to the shops, baking, and going on trips. The focus of Jamie's project on less directly tangible concepts, such as relationships, social groups, and self-representation, were not only part of the familiar curriculum, and were also potentially less easy to control. The assistants' training did not include the kind of curriculum that was the focus of Game 2 Engage, and so it took a while for them to figure out how they could fit into the work taking place in Jamie's classroom. The assistants also confided that at home they rarely had access to computers and that even the TV remote control was not usually available to them—being operated by their children or husbands. The responses of the assistants were a reminder that, while our focus as the project began was on issues of disability, other identity positions, particularly with the intersections of age, gender, and class, were always present and often interacting in ways that we had not anticipated. As time went on, however, while Jamie explained tasks to the class, showing them apps, asking them to populate a range of sites with personal and social information, taking pictures, making comments, they learned alongside and became more confident. They continued to take notes for themselves on paper, and in this way using both traditional and digital tools, they became adept. They started to surf, helping students find pictures they wanted to use in their work; found answers to questions and alongside the Practical Skills students learned in tandem. As they engaged with the technology their ongoing relationships in

working with the students re-emerged as a strength in the classroom, as they integrated existing strategies for working with the students into the various digital media projects.

Negotiating Identities

The idea of involving Digital Media students was that they would be able to support and mentor Practical Skills students in the same way that had happened on the MITP project. Usually, the Practical Skills students would arrive first, having always been marshalled in punctually, lacking the more free and casual privileged rights of the others. The Digital Media students seemed to possess a certain cachet in the classroom, which seemed to emanate from their seeming confidence, carefully styled clothes and other 'accoutrements'; they might, for example have with them a takeaway coffee from the refectory; they might noticeably receive alerts on their phones; they seemed connected to the world beyond that which the Practical Skills students inhabited. Yet this seemed to change over time; the more the students mixed, and sometimes this happened outside the class, the more the differences between them fell back. This was accelerated through some 'digital social' lunchtime sessions organized by Jamie, where gaming consoles, iPads and laptops were used to play games. One of the standout activities involved the Xbox360 *Dance Central* game. This sparked a collective happiness and brought about a true social between both sets of students. In addition to this, the 'Digital Champions' initiative also helped facilitate overcoming the differences. This placed the Digital Media students as gurus supporting staff and students with any personal IT and media related problems. The Practical Skills students felt comfortable enough to drop in from time to time.

The classes became noisier, there was more chat and Digital Media students leaned more closely in and the LSAs sometimes congregated together leaving the younger learners to get on with things together. As they talked about the carefully designed tasks, played games together and discovered they had interests in common (music, shopping, sport, films), they gradually blended as a group.

As mentioned above, one of the Digital Media Students (Lance) had contracted meningitis at five years old. This had resulted in severe physical impairments; his speech was very difficult to understand and he had a support worker who was able to interpret and re-articulate his words. In the past, he had used a computer to articulate his words but he now rejected this, telling Julia, 'it's like being an android. It's a barrier'. Lance was in a wheelchair and also had problems holding objects. Lance was very intelligent and was a highflier in the Digital Media class and although, having been successful in the MITP, he had been keen to work on Game 2 Engage. However, this was not an easy situation; his presence as a severely disabled student was seen by some of the Practical Skills students as very confusing; they would refuse his help and would refuse to try and understand what he was saying. Lance sometimes resisted using his interpreter seeing his presence as an

amplification of his disabilities, ‘I don’t like it’, he told Julia, ‘it makes me look ridiculous ... People should just try harder to understand me’. It was problematic over several sessions with Practical Skills students resisting the help and support of Lance, who having been rejected would turn to work on his own and on one occasion leaving early.

The breakthrough for Lance came when Manj needed to have her photo taken in order to upload it to a profile page. Lance patiently took her photo multiple times, waiting each time while Manj evaluated the images and finally agreed to use one of them. After this, she took a photo of Lance and selected it for her ‘friend’ page. This was an exchange of images as the main mode of communication and so again, we use this as an example to show a levelling of the playing field through the use of technologies. The technology mediated the friendship in this way and Lance was drawn a little closer into the group. Manj had managed this situation and in this case, a Digital Media student had been supported by a Practical Skills student.

Learning at the Mall

Well known to all the students is a large shopping mall a few miles away, a tram-ride from the college. From the outset, Jamie had wanted to get the students away from the college taking the iPads with them. He liked the idea that the students would be able to use mobile devices to help them locate things in the environment and use them to record what they were doing as they went. Whilst many of the students did have access to their own devices, many did not and this was an opportunity for them to experience a trip where they could use devices in the way they had seen others do so. He also wanted the students to ‘get away’ from college. This was a much anticipated outing with a complex risk analysis to be done ahead of time, parental permissions and the schedule needed to sync with students’ timetables.

The day began with students congregating in McDonald’s. There had been an arrangement with the manager that we could exclusively use downstairs where there was good wi-fi. The students bought drinks and set themselves up around tables using their iPads to log details as requested by Jamie and to take photos of items for the treasure trail. They were excited; some acted cool while others talked about how they hardly ever went to the mall; some talked about how boring it would be—but with a careful nonchalance that betrayed otherwise. We travelled by tram, looking out of the windows as if for the first time at the city passing by. They needed to notice things, record them by taking photos and store them in an application folder. The students were competitive, excited to spot things first, but helping each other keep in sync. Only Jamie knew the answers and some questions were obscure, requiring careful observation skills; we were all in the same position, learning together, travelling together, drawn to and unified by the iPads that the Practical Skills students held at all times.

At the mall there was more to do; a treasure hunt which involved locating objects, using their first letters to spell out a word, and then with the solution, even going to the mall's concierge to give the secret password that they had uncovered. Each student received a shopping voucher that they spent immediately, before travelling back to college, again on the tram.

The structure of the day facilitated opportunities for socializing in spaces that the Practical Skills students would normally only go to with their families; in this trip they were there as teenagers, with other teenagers, hanging out at fast food places and at the Mall. They used their digital tools in everyday ways, taking photos, looking stuff up and noting things down. Importantly they were the custodians of the information; they held the iPads, they recorded the quiz answers, they were empowered. The quiz was difficult; students had to work together and all were on an equal footing; the Digital Media students knew as little or as much as the Practical Skills students and were frustrated when the answers did not come easily.

The pedagogical skills Jamie exemplified included staff learning, social learning and learning about the environment they share. Students were given 'real-world' problems to investigate at the mall but also had to resolve difficult social issues in the classroom. They needed to navigate the boundaries across the divisions amongst the student body, as well as those where college technology was 'othered' in comparison to home technologies. The lessons had a connectedness to the world they lived in, where they felt they could bring in home tools and knowledge into the learning spaces. This coming together of students and digital tools allowed them to explore some of the social barriers that whilst unarticulated, nevertheless worked as effectively as the barrier cards when they entered the college.

We argue that whilst we saw the effectiveness of this project, as a standalone enterprise it could not independently empower students and create a college-wide integrated community. The project reflected the first steps in this endeavour and we would argue that for such a project to enjoy success and bring about lasting change, these kinds of practice need to be integrated into the educational institution's *modus operandi*.

Conclusions

In this chapter we identified a problem caused by institutional structuring, that Jamie sought to address by drawing on students' funds of knowledge and helping them engage socially with others through literacy work. From this we would draw out some principles that we think would be helpful in replicating and developing this kind of project further:

Meaningful Engagement: One notable focus of the Game 2 Engage project was the emphasis on meaningful engagement for the Practical Skills students. While other parts of their curriculum did indeed offer important skills for negotiating daily life, Game 2 Engage emphasized the importance of offering the students a

technology and space through which they could express their ideas and negotiate relationships. Not only does perceiving of a task as meaningful increase motivation, but such a perception also can have a significant effect on an individual sense of agency, particularly in the context of literacy practices (Wenger 1998; Eodice et al. 2017; Williams 2017). Unfortunately, too often digital technology projects begin with the selection of a technology or software, and then try to incorporate it into student learning and life. The success of Game 2 Engage came, in part, from Jamie’s clear goal, from the beginning, of trying to find a way to strengthen bonds of community and social belonging for students. He turned to the technology, with the goal already in mind.

Reciprocity and Collaborative Learning: In bringing together the Practical Skills students and Digital Media students, there was an emphasis from the beginning that they could, and would, be learning from each other. There was not a sense that one group was being asked to come in and ‘take care’ of the other. Instead, Jamie’s approach to the project reflected the concept of ‘hospitality’ in an educational setting (Haswell and Haswell 2016). Haswell and Haswell propose that hospitality, in its more traditional sense, is a disposition in which, in contrast to a one-sided teaching and learning relationship, emphasizes that reciprocity is not only possibility, it is expected. Both sides are expected to be open to learning, and to teaching, not in an expectation of unlimited good feeling, with an expectation that people and ideas will be welcomed and considered, even when that may entail some risk. The Game 2 Engage project illustrates how technology can mediate relationships by helping to create an environment in which hospitality is possible. In this case, the digital technologies created a new landscape for interacting and a new means of interacting between the Digital Media and Practical Skills students. What’s more, the tablets helped reset the cultural context in a way that, instead of further separating the students, refocused the means and methods of learning and collaboration. Finally, we, as teachers and researchers, all worked to try to create for the students an environment and expectation of reciprocity and collaboration—both between students and between the students and us—that was crucial to the context of this project.

Unintended Consequences: The introduction of any new literacy technology will result in unintended consequences. Such unanticipated challenges may be, as we noted in examples above, struggles with technology interfaces or software, or concerns of power and identity, or issues of institutional systems and rules. Regardless of the reason, the objects that we bring into any context will shape the behaviour, at the same time that culture and experience will shape the uses of the objects (Miller 2009) New technologies change the landscape, both in the embodied classroom and in digital domains. While it is impossible to plan for specific unanticipated challenges, it is possible to build flexibility into a classroom and a project. Adjusting classroom plans, and leaving time for such adjustments, is the most obvious form of flexibility. There are, however, other ways to build flexibility into a project. For example, leaving time for conversations among participants that

can address concerns or problems that arise, or taking time to reflect on an unintended consequence in terms of the overall project. The initial response to an unanticipated problem might be to see how to 'fix' things and eliminate what hasn't been planned for. Yet, to step back and rethink what has happened may, in fact, lead to the understanding that the unintended consequences, rather than a problem, are an opportunity.

Time and Patience: The speed of digital technology often leads to rhetoric and expectations that introducing it into any classroom setting will produce faster and more efficient results. Certainly, the discourse in the culture at large, promoted by technology corporations, reflects this bias as well. Yet, in a project in which the building of relationships as well as agency was the goal, it is important not to fall into a trap of expecting quick results. Indeed, because new technologies take time to learn and incorporate into daily practices, there is actually the need for more patience, for a longer timeline, in a project such as this one. Someone coming into the Game 2 Engage classroom early in the project, and seeing the combination of tentativeness and frustration that marked some of the early attempts to use the tablet, might have had doubts about the efficacy of the undertaking. Six months later, however, a routine of daily practices had developed in which students, who almost all had, in some measure, more facility in using the tablets, could be seen logging on, manipulating images, browsing the internet, and creating their own texts that would represent their own idea. Technology is not magic. Yet, as in the case of Game 2 Engage, it can prove to be disruptively productive and genuinely empowering.

Student Centred Technology Enhanced Learning: Throughout this project, we have experienced how a student-centred approach can be enhanced by technology. Carl Rogers, who is considered amongst the founding members for the client-centred approach in psychology; influenced education to adopt student centred practices (Matheson 2015). Drawing upon Rogers (1961), (Motschnig-Pitrik and Standl 2012) emphasise three of the conditions that are imperative for significant learning to occur within a student centred approach:

- Realness, transparency,
- Acceptance, unconditional positive regard,
- Understanding, empathy.

We were able to foster and enhance these conditions by allowing the technology to become a platform that facilitated expression for both sets of students. The tasks designed by Jamie facilitated transparency from both sets of students and through this they were able to find commonalities amongst each other. These commonalities seemed to begin to erode the structured inequalities that had become institutionalised. Through student testimonies given by the Digital Media students we came to the understanding that they had developed an unconditional positive regard which developed sincerity along with understanding and empathy; thus positively

contributing to building relationships. This form of student centred learning was unique because it wasn't just between student and teacher it was co-created; Jamie creating the environment and the Digital Media students enacting a humanist approach in their mentoring and befriending of the Practical Skills students.

The Rix blog tool was supported by the iPad's operating system in a way that enabled the students to create, edit and save digital artefacts all from the one device. Each Practical Skills student would create their own artefact and as a result, become influenced by student centred technology enhanced learning. It is clear that the role of technology in this project was not only key to learning but also in facilitating the development of relationships between both sets of students.

Afterword

As we, Bronwyn and Julia, left the building for the last time at the end of the project, we noticed that while the students waited by the main door for their separately organised transport, the Learning Support Staff notebooks were less in evidence and the Practical Skills students were nodding towards friends as they passed to go home. It would have been even better if they had been waiting outside with the cool kids, or if the cool kids hung out indoors—but small steps towards this had been made.

The Game 2 Engage project later received the accolade of a Further Education Innovation Award demonstrating leadership in innovation.

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Author Biographies

Jamie Caine is a Senior Lecturer and Course Leader at Sheffield Hallam University. He has a track record of developing staff with technology enhanced learning and has recently developed standards for student feedback via screen cast technology. Jamie has a diverse teaching background covering information systems, web development, entrepreneurship and IT infrastructure. He is currently reading for a PhD in Enterprise and Business Architecture.

Julia Davies is a Senior Lecturer and Faculty Director of Technology Enhanced Learning at The University of Sheffield. Julia teaches and researches in the field of digital text making practices and is interested in the interface between our uses of technology in everyday life and in academic contexts. She co-edited *New Literacies around the Globe: Policy and Pedagogy* and *Virtual Literacies: Interactive Spaces for Children and Young People*; she co-authored *Web 2.0 for Schools: Learning and Social Participation*. Recent work on Facebook includes, 'Facebook Narratives' in *The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies* (Rowell and Pahl 2014).

Bronwyn T. Williams is a Professor of English and Director of the University Writing Center at the University of Louisville. He writes and teaches on issues of literacy, identity, digital media, and popular culture. His books include *Shimmering Literacies: Popular Culture and Reading and Writing Online*, *New Media Literacies and Participatory Popular Culture Across Borders* (with Amy Zenger), and *Identity Papers: Literacy and Power in Higher Education*. His current project is the forthcoming book, *Literacy Practices and Composing Identities: Perceptions of Agency* (Routledge), to be published in 2017.