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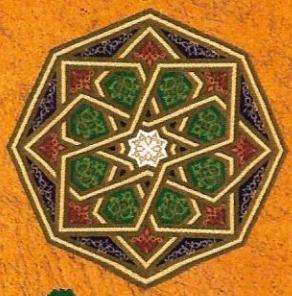

Language Culture Communication

Transformations in Intercultural Contexts

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Edited by:

Wafa Zoghbor, Christine Coombe,
Suhair Al Alami and Sufian Abu-Rmaileh

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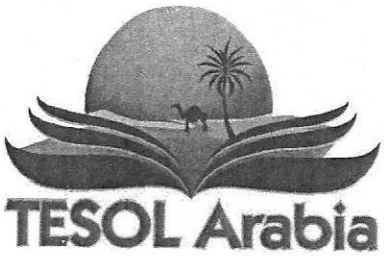

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Gamifying Teacher Professional Development through Minecraft MOOC

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Abstract

This paper examines how a community of language teachers used the game Minecraft to experience gamification while pursuing professional development that met curricular objectives through engaging learning environments, as they gained Minecraft skills with other teaching peers. Participants learned through being in the game that if what they were trying to teach were placed in such a context, it would not only become more engaging to the learners, but their students would be taking their learning into their own hands. This can create a powerful learning environment, but educators need to experience this for themselves in order to understand its implications.

Introduction

Minecraft is appealing to many children and adults due to the compelling way players are constantly pitted against the game. There exists a PVP (player vs. player) mode, but normally players are playing versus the game itself, fighting the clock and avoiding pitfalls and lethal creatures. In this mode, they cooperate with one another to help each other survive by acquiring and sharing resources, and then apply collaborative problem solving and engineering skills to improve their world and explore its infinity. There is a boggling variety of monsters and animals that can be conquered, tamed, or corralled and amazing terrain to explore in a boundless world generated as needed by the program, in a "map" unique to each game environment. Unlike with *Second Life,* another popular avatar-based space often exploited for education, everyone is a maker in *Minecraft*, and for this reason it is perceived by educators as a game that engages students in creative discovery. *Minecraft* has been shown to have remarkable affordances for facilitating learning in a range of subjects, including language learning.

The game is gratifyingly elaborate, yet intuitive. It can be played in two modes, "creative" and "survival." Many people start with creative mode, where their personal inventories are stocked with the complete range of resources available in the game, and the monsters are foreboding, but benign. Players can practice building with the materials and see how minerals and other substances can be

used, for example, how redstone can provide power and light. This is fun and compelling in its own right, but players tend to try survival mode as soon as they feel ready, in order to truly challenge themselves in the game.

In survival mode, players start with nothing – are literally "spawned" with only a plain punch tool for breaking objects like trees and rocks and collecting the wood and minerals. Fortunately, YouTube is full of videos showing newbies how to survive their first night and day cycles (about 20 minutes each). Foraging and building are only possible during the short day. Shelter must be found at night to protect players from lethal monsters who prowl at that time. Players stay in the game by gathering resources, crafting tools and other objects, and eventually setting themselves up in-world in monster-proof shelters complete with chests for storing objects that can be retrieved later. This is handy in case of untimely demise, because when players respawn, once more with nothing, they may be able to find their previous builds intact complete with chests with useful objects inside collected and stored from their previous lives. Respawning is a frequent occurrence in *Minecraft*, so players learn to prepare for this contingency.

More importantly, players forming communities in a game can shelter, and feed, and share with one another (players can also die in *Minecraft* through failure to take on sustenance). Thus players succeed in-world by developing collaboration techniques through intuitive practice just as a sports team perfects passing off the ball by practicing with each other to move it around the field. But in *Minecraft*, the collaboration is language intensive. Players can communicate in-world through an in-built text messaging facility, but many players use voice (VOIP) tools, such as Skype or Discord (http://discordapp.com), to speak to one another in-world while keeping their hands free for manipulating their avatars and other objects in the game.

Another important communicative aspect of *Minecraft* is recording game play and creating video tutorials for teaching others, or for just showing off. Players often enjoy being able to show their builds and tips and tricks to others, and of course anyone wishing to learn how to cope in-world often resorts to the extensive YouTube archives, predominantly in English. We have documented at least one case where the mother of an 11-year-old attributes his fluency in English to these very aspects of his engagement with *Minecraft* (Smolčec, Smolčec, & Stevens, 2014); similarly, Dodgson (2014) documents how his students in Turkey were motivated to read books in English about *Minecraft*. Adult educators face challenges when attempting to crack this game. *Minecraft* is best learned as a participant in a community, but adults with no credentials in

Minecraft find difficulty gaining access to servers protecting the privacy of young students. The Electronic Village Online (EVO) session *Minecraft* MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) was thus conceived in order to address this conundrum by creating a space where teachers wishing to learn more about the game *Minecraft* could form their own community. EVO Minecraft MOOC has since become an active community of practice where teachers can act as learners among other teachers interested in using *Minecraft* in teaching.

Electronic Village Online

Electronic Village Online (EVO) is an initiative of the Computer Assisted Language Learning Interest Section (CALL-IS) in TESOL International. EVO was started in 2001 when a committee of CALL-IS members was formed to organize a program of online sessions lasting several weeks in January and February on topics that participants in those sessions might then be prepared to discuss further when meeting at the face-to-face conference held in St. Louis in March of that year. In 2002 I proposed my own such session, called "Webheads in Action," and by 2003 I was asked to join the EVO coordination team, which I've been a part of ever since.

One strength of EVO is that it encourages teachers to propose sessions that give them an opportunity to test their personal learning theories by designing courses that put these into practice. In proposing EVO Minecraft MOOC, I was able to design a learning environment to test my notion that if I wanted to learn *Minecraft*, I could announce it as a session and attract others wishing to learn the same thing, and still others willing to guide us in that learning. EVO Minecraft MOOC serves as an example of how teachers can use what they learn through their experience with MOOCs to form communities of practice and manage their own learning according to the Vygotsky/Cormier notion of community as curriculum (Cormier, 2008), which is to say that it is possible to have structured learning in quest of a goal while leaving the means of achieving it to the collective to drive the syllabus. The MOOC framework allows for this to happen.

EVO Minecraft MOOC

In 2015, when I initiated the EVO Minecraft MOOC session so that I and other language teachers might form our own community of practice with intent to meet online in the game *Minecraft* and learn how to leverage the affordances of this game with language learners, I designated this session a MOOC, which stands for "massive open online course." The term MOOC was coined in 2008 by Dave

Cormier and Brian Alexander who were helping develop the first such course attempted that year by George Siemens and Stephen Downes (Herman, 2012). EVO Minecraft MOOC is therefore by definition a massive (in our case comprising a few hundred participants) open (free, and more importantly, freely accessible) course taking place online.

The approach to learning in a MOOC alters the distribution of knowledge typical of traditional courses in that MOOCs leverage the knowledge inherent in the networks of participants associated with them. In conceiving the open online course EVO Minecraft MOOC, the author applied principles supporting the MOOC approach – e.g., theories of knowledge distribution in networks, connectivism, and rhizomatic learning as espoused respectively by Downes (2012), Siemens (2004), and Cormier (2008) – with what we are learning about gamification to produce a framework for teacher training that models learning in a way that teachers could apply that learning when conducting their own courses.

In our modern connected world, we educators are but one class of learners belonging to many networks. The fact that people's networks intertwine and overlap forms the essence of connectivism; that is, that overlapping networks put us in touch with people (other nodes) in each other's networks, and makes knowledge to which we are mutually connected available to us to whatever extent that we are able to identify and access that knowledge. As Siemens (2004) famously put it (at the start of the conclusion to his seminal article on connectivism), the "pipes" we cultivate for keeping open the channels to knowledge in our networks are more important than the content within those pipes.

Thus the underlying pedagogical principle in EVO Minecraft MOOC is that teachers will tend in a community of practice to share knowledge and learn from one another about how to play the game *Minecraft* and help each other survive there, and then extrapolate the higher-order aspects of that knowledge to engaging students in similarly conceived (i.e., gamified) learning environments. This happens when teachers who meet in the game *Minecraft* act as learners in a course (EVO Minecraft MOOC) whose actual goal is having teachers experience gamification in pursuit of their own professional development.

How EVO Minecraft MOOC Got Started

Since 2010 I have been conducting a series of weekly professional development webinars called Learning2gether (http://learning2gether.net/). One of our presenters, Marijana Smolčec, told us about her pre-teen son who had developed his English skills to near native speaker level by playing *Minecraft* with friends and sharing tips and accomplishments via his YouTube channel, and the two of them came on Learning2gether to talk about that. This resulted in our collaboration on an article which we produced jointly for *TESL-EJ* in which Marijana interviewed her son, Filip, who explained to her what he learns from *Minecraft* that so obviously enhances his language proficiency, and she related what he told her in the article (Smolčec, Smolčec, & Stevens, 2014).

My contribution to this article was to research how other teachers had used *Minecraft* to facilitate their students' English learning, and when we proposed our session for 2015, we got two of these teachers to join us as co-moderators. So our team comprised besides myself, two of these authors, Jeff Kuhn and David Dodgson, as well as Marijana Smolčec and her son Filip.

Flipping the Roles of Experts and Learners

Minecraft is an engaging game that has proven quite popular with young people, and we are finding that teachers of all ages are drawn to it as well. One important aspect of our EVO Minecraft MOOC sessions is to flip the assumptions of who gives such sessions. The original organizers of the first EVO Minecraft MOOC were not experts, but experts emerged from among session participants to share knowledge and even set up and host a server so we could play together the first year (and we've been using the same server ever since, maintained by co-moderators Jeff Kuhn and Aaron Schwartz at Ohio University).

Recruiting from the sources we had referred to in our literature search, we were able to add skilled members on the team. Not only did Jeff Kuhn set up our first server for us, but he brought us his expertise and his knowledge of how to introduce novices to the game. David Dodgson gave us a presentation describing his experiences with Turkish learners, who normally could hardly ever be persuaded to read English, poring over the *Minecraft* red book, which was available to them only in English. Our youngest co-moderator Filip brought us considerable expertise as well as his young learner's perspective and knack for having fun, for example, filling our spaces with rabbits (so we could learn how to craft arrows and shoot them).

Minecraft is also capable of reversing the normal student-teacher dichotomy whereby teachers traditionally are older than and assumed to know more than their students. We found through the experience of participants in our EVO sessions that when *Minecraft* is introduced to young learners by experienced teachers, the students tend to take charge of their learning by guiding the teachers into the vagaries of the game. Students delight in this, often crafting elaborate presentations to explain to the teachers what they are doing in the game (with obvious benefits if these are EFL students).

In our first EVO session, for example, the teacher participants were joined by teen and pre-teen players who demonstrated skills in the game that the teachers were keen to learn, flipping the normal student-teacher dichotomy. In this process the young learners increased their self-esteem with respect to their older "teachers," and the teachers gained greater awareness of what it is to be a learner in a game-driven and task-based environment.

In an online presentation via Skype at the International Society for Technology in Education Conference in 2015, Mary Kay Polly, a teacher in the UAE, described how she got her middle school students to justify the use of *Minecraft* in their class by spelling out curricular goals and having them explain how what they did in class with *Minecraft* met those goals. That is, she noticed that the students were obsessed with *Minecraft* not only outside of but sometimes even in class, and she decided to try and harness this intrinsic interest by directing it at curricular goals. This corroborated the claim that it is not a question, as some ask, of whether *Minecraft* is in the curriculum, whatever that curriculum happens to be; rather, the curriculum is in it.

Thus we experienced how teachers can interact in engaging and enjoyable spaces not only with each other but with young learners who might in effect become their teachers.

Gamification of Learning

As I have explained, I had become intrigued with Minecraft as a game with potential for language learning but was having trouble learning much about it because I was unable to find a community of players that would accept me and allow me to interact with them, so I decided to start my own community of practice by creating an EVO session along the lines of the MOOC model. I furthermore conceived this session as something of a game in itself.

As an analogy, let us say your friends are all playing a game called "*Facebook.*" You want to play too, so you visit the site. There are no instructions; however, the web site is a kind of game board. There is a box on the site that asks, "What's on your mind?" You begin there, add your friends (or they add you), and a community forms. After a while you find yourself seamlessly playing the game of *Facebook.*

I wanted EVO Minecraft MOOC to be like that. I constructed a portal for our game at a Google+ Community page. Everything participants need to know to get them interacting with this community is on or linked from that page. They can start with reading the syllabus. It tells them to purchase *Minecraft* and fill in a form where they give us their *Minecraft* user ID which is used to whitelist them on our server. There is a breakdown of tasks over the five weeks of the course, patterned after Cormier's five steps for succeeding in MOOCs (Cormier, 2010). The five steps, each of which is the theme for one of the five weeks of our syllabus, are:

1. Orient (explore the new online environment)
2. Declare (announce yourself and what you are doing there)
3. Network (start meeting people in the space and interact with them)
4. Cluster (find people with similar goals and passions and "break out" with them)
5. Focus (develop projects you can work on beyond the MOOC with your cluster group)

To generate interest, we call our tasks "Missions." Week 1 missions include filling in the Google form that provides us with demographics and allows us to whitelist bona fide participants on our server, joining and introducing themselves on our Google+ Community portal, reading background material on *Minecraft* such as Dikkers (2015), visiting the server and trying their hand at building in creative mode, and reflecting on their achievements there.

We created a syllabus which we pitched at teachers who would gravitate to a learning experience where we would define our own outcomes, which could not be guaranteed in advance. We put some tutorial materials online, linked to YouTube videos, and gave out the IP address of our server. We used *Doodle*, a free online scheduling tool (http://doodle.com/), to arrange meetings there, and we used Skype group chat for VOIP, to talk each other through what we were learning in the game space, as we interacted synchronously in that space (more recently we have been using Discord (https://discordapp.com/) for communicating with one another in VOIP, the advantage being that we can set

up a group space which others can join on their own without each individually having to be invited to the group space in order to be there.

Note that there are two games going on here. One is *Minecraft*, and the other game is EVO Minecraft MOOC, the game that EVO participants start playing on our Google+ Community game board when they decide to join our session (see Figure 1). In his work on gamification, Gee (2008, p. 24) distinguishes the little "g" game, the software comprising a game such as *Minecraft*, and the Big "G" game or "social setting" that the little "g" game helps to gamify. For example, with *Facebook*, the little "g" game is the *Facebook* interface that you sign up for and add friends to, but the Big "G" game that you really want to play has more to do with social networking, projecting a desired persona, and staying in touch with real friends.

In the present instance, the little "g" game is *Minecraft*, the game that everyone in our EVO session plays and focuses on during the session. But we would be wasting our time if our only purpose in doing this was to direct our avatars to build elaborate structures and slay monsters. We are in fact addressing much higher order skills. To make sure that awareness of the higher order skills emerges through the short-term gratification of navigating the little "g" game space, we designed the Big "G" game board on the landing page of our Google+ Community. Participants play the Big "G" game of EVO Minecraft MOOC by going to the Google+ Community portal and figuring out where the session components are and what they are supposed to do with them.

The lead moderator (and present author) knew little about playing *Minecraft* when he proposed EVOMC15, but he was aiming for an online environment that would itself evolve as a game. That is, the proposal was submitted with the moderators not knowing much about how to play the game let alone how to teach others to play it, or what the outcome would be, apart from their prediction that by setting the process in motion, game-driven task-based learning would occur. Other teachers were attracted to the concept, including some who had some experience in the game, one of whom became our co-moderator (Kuhn, 2015). Participants were attracted to the session for the same reasons – not that they expected that their learning paths had been prescribed for them in a neatly pre-set syllabus (something that EVO moderators are encouraged to develop and which participants typically look for when choosing EVO sessions) but that by entering the Big G game, or session, learning would happen for them in a way that participants would come to understand by experiencing the process of learning a game, a process that Ito et al. (2010) aptly characterize as "hanging out, messing around, and geeking out" (from the title of their published work).

When professionals meet in any space for the purpose of professional development, they learn from one another. EVOMC15 became proof of concept that we could create a gamified learning environment where we learned about the Big "G" game by being in the little "g" game. Online we maximized the number of spaces we had for such meetings so that learning can continue into our evenings and weekends.

In 2015 we started out in creative mode in *Minecraft*, where we had unlimited inventories and unlimited time for the sandbox (i.e., we could continue to experiment during night cycles without threat from monsters). We all tried our hand at building. Jeff, whose character is Batman, created a huge Batman statue and set up a castle for us to explore. Filip built a McDonald's and another young player who joined us from Spain (age 12) created a tower with a working elevator. Jeff installed a railroad encircling the castle and powered it with redstone. He and his colleague Aaron Schwartz created a house with a switch in it and teased me to go in and flip the switch. It all blew up revealing a pool of lava underneath. We educators frolicked in this strangely compelling, highly collaborative, space.

Then it all turned sinister. Jeff and Filip set the server on survival mode and now it was a challenge to avoid the spiders and zombies at night. I died a few times before I managed to put up some walls around me that kept the monsters out, but the greatest lesson was about the power of collaboration. Jeff had created some shelters with doors with signs outside inviting other players in for the night. These tended to be in mountainsides, so at night we could dig our mines and look for resources like iron for our pickaxes. In the daytime we would go outside and chop trees so we could make crafting tables and on those, other tools and weapons for getting food from the plants and animals with whom we shared our world.

At this writing, as we enter our third iteration of EVO Minecraft MOOC (EVOMC17) we have set up two worlds, creative and survival, with a teleport between the two. When participants enter our server, we have set them to spawn in the survival world, in a longhouse with chests full of materials and tutorial diagrams on the walls showing them how to craft useful objects like swords and pickaxes. There is a button there that will transport participants to creative world if they prefer to be there. We are finding that the participants so far, the ones that have arrived in this space early in the session, are not using the transport to creative world. They are starting in survival and figuring things out there.

How Participants Figure out What To Do in a Gamified Environment

By the second iteration of EVO Minecraft MOOC we had managed to construct a game board at our Google+ Community page where participants could intuitively see how to play the Big "G" game (http://tinyurl.com/evomc16). In the sidebar of that page they can find the link to the syllabus (http://tinyurl.com/evomc16-syllabus), which points to their set of missions (http://missions4evomc.pbworks.com/).

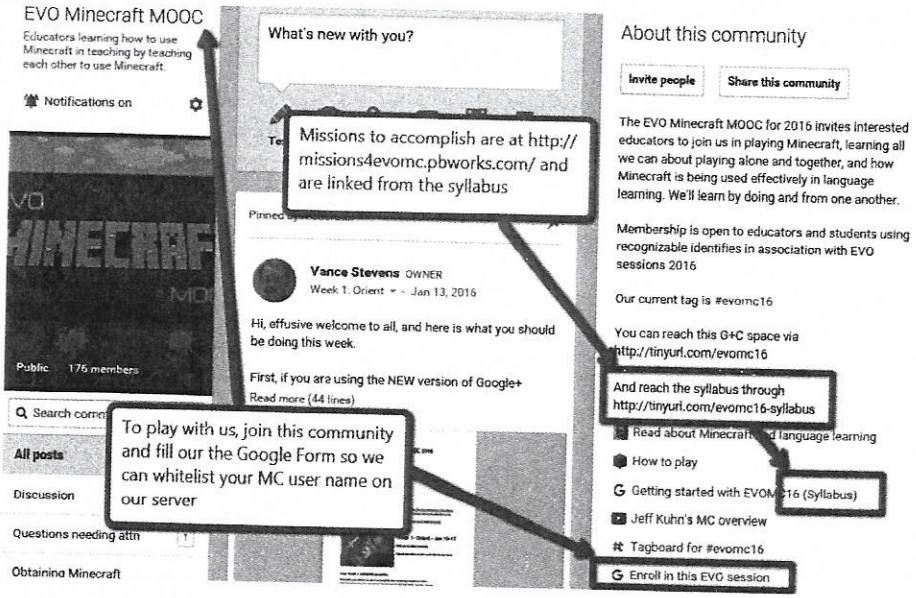

Figure 1. EVO Minecraft MOOC Google+ Community landing page

Figure 1 is a graphic we have at our syllabus to explain our portal, what I call our community game board. As in the *Facebook* analogy, participants come here to figure out what they should do. Think of it as a Monopoly game board. You open the board, lay out the pieces, and perhaps read over the rules (the purpose of our syllabus document). After that, you start playing. You shouldn't have to read the rules after that. If the game has been laid out properly, playing it should be intuitive.

The missions, checklists of things to do on a weekly basis, are straightforward. They must be, as participants seem to find them and do them without asking too many questions, and when they do ask and the moderators respond, the response seems to get them on task. The tasks are designed to get them interacting with each other in a variety of spaces, but mainly on our *Minecraft* server where the

little "g" game resides. The little "g" game is fun, but the point of EVO Minecraft MOOC is actually the big "G" game, what teachers can learn about designing learning environments through their experience with gamification.

Mission 5 asks participants to request edit access to a Google Sheet set up to let them record their missions accomplished. In this sheet participants put links to their accomplishments, such as in the first week, the URL of their introduction and to the blog where they will keep their reflections. The link to this spreadsheet is set to be visible to anyone with the link (for viewing only; only participants who have requested access can write there). When the participants' URLs appear in the spreadsheet, anyone can see that they have "accomplished" those missions. Other missions include, for example, to join us in-world and post screenshots from *Minecraft* of what they did there, or build a house for survival at night and post a picture of that.

Completing most of the required missions leads to the awarding of an EVO Minecraft MOOC survivor's badge, as explained in the next section.

Badges and Learning Outcomes

When participants have accomplished a certain number of missions, they earn a *Minecraft* survivor's badge. The badge is awarded through Credly (http://credly.com). In the Credly system anyone can award or receive badges, but the badges are meant to have stated criteria for awarding them and a link to the evidence showing what was done to earn them. Our evidence is the spreadsheet where participants record their missions accomplished, each of which is verified by a link to the artifact online showing what was done to accomplish it. Recall that the spreadsheet with those links can only be written to by the participants who have requested write access, but it can be viewed by anyone with the link. We award badges to participants who have met the criteria (i.e., accomplished a certain number of missions and corroborated their accomplishments with the evidence of links in our Google Sheet). The badge is validated online through its accompanying link to the spreadsheet with evidence that the recipient of the badge has fulfilled his or her missions, and the links showing how the missions were accomplished are available to anyone viewing the badge, which in this way shows evidence of what was done to earn it.

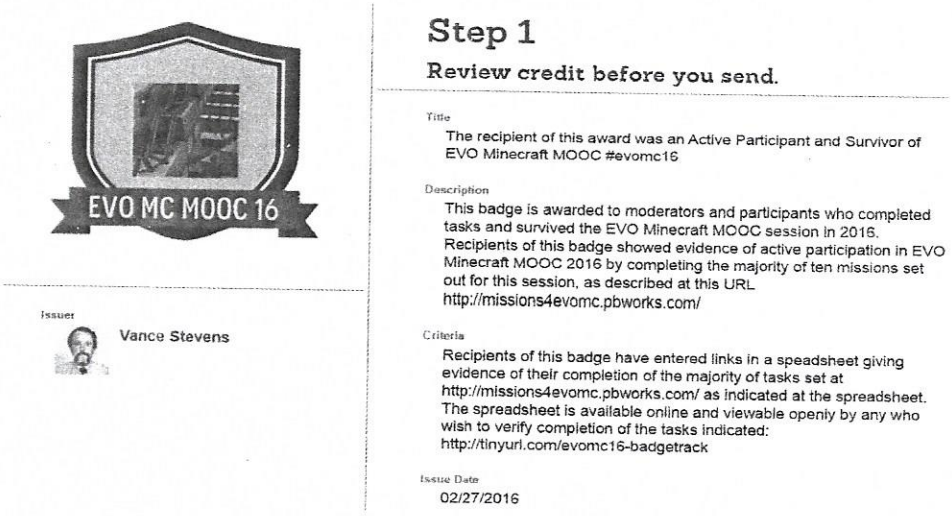

Figure 2. The EVO MC MOOC 16 Survivor's Badge with its description and criteria for earning it, as posted at Credly

Missions Accomplished in 2015 and 2016

In 2015, we had 60 people expressing interest in our course by signing up to our Google+ Community, about 2/3 of whom remained as peripheral members, or lurkers, having filled in our Google form. Six participants provided evidence of completing a sufficient number of missions to receive the EVOMC15 course survivor badge via Credly. There were an estimated three times as many who joined us for various aspects of the course but did not persist to completion.

Six participants who did enough to qualify for badges was not a bad proportion. MOOCs are often criticized for their high attrition rates, but the point is also made that the proportion of people completing MOOCs is sometimes higher than the number you might expect to complete a more traditionally structured course, and there are a lot of people who join MOOCs for free in order to learn what they can with no intention of completing it. No one drops out of a MOOC formally; they learn what they wish and simply discontinue. So a measure of attrition in MOOCs is not really comparable to the number of people who might formally drop a traditional course they had paid for but decided not to pursue.

When we ran the course again in 2016 we ended with over 185 people enrolled in the Google+ Community, though this doesn't give us a fair indication of who participated in 2016 because we had continued with the same community that we had started the year before. Only 28 non-moderator participants filled in the

Google form enrolling them in the session for this year. Of these, only 8 (plus 6 moderators) provided *Minecraft* usernames, which are needed to whitelist them on the server. So we had fourteen EVOMC16 participants with access to our server, plus everyone from the year before.

In EVOMC16, co-moderators Jeff Kuhn and Aaron Schwartz created whimsical structures such as a towering Sargon's castle and a zombie pit where buttons summon monsters (so participants could practice dispatching them) (https://plus.google.com/+AaronSchwartz_oh/posts/TUqjApWXHZ2https://plus.google.com/+AaronSchwartz_oh/posts/TUqjApWXHZ2).

Mircea Patrascu made some phenomenal builds with secret mechanisms and logic gates, and put train tracks through tunnels around the server connecting them. I made a video of one of the train rides (https://youtu.be/nL02Sh-rmss) which you can find embedded in my blog post at Stevens (2016). Mircea shows where this train ride ends up, at his subway stop, in his post (https://evominecraftmp.wordpress.com/2016/01/28/a-day-in-evo-minecraft-world/).

Mircea's post to the EVO Minecraft MOOC Google+ Community gives his own incredible video overview of the roller coaster at the train station end of the ride, which as you can see in the comments to that post, he created with his son, Vlad (https://plus.google.com/+MirceaPATRASCU/posts/hekx7koKFW6).

Linda Gielen joined us late in the session but set about making our server more user friendly with tracks set out of reach of zombies so we could get around safely in survival mode. She built a multi-story farmhouse with stables and a garden where passers-by could find shelter and get food. She and other participants developed our spawn area with boxes where whitelisted players could leave their worldly valuables in safety. The spawn area is where souls in *Minecraft* are reborn in case they meet with misfortune elsewhere in the game, and our participants would find their possessions safely stored in these boxes on respawning. She also organized a curing facility for villagers who were proliferating in nearby towns and being turned to zombies, threatening EVO Minecraft MOOC participants. Linda and Mircea were invited to join our team as co-moderators in EVOMC17, and both accepted.

Our server in creative mode in 2016 attracted some impressive builds. Most of the active participants posted their achievements on our Google+ Community page, and a sampling is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: *Sampling of Participants' Work through Google+*

***Minecraft* user name**	**Achievement**	**Associated link**
Kaili Silverlash	documented some incredible structures on her Flickr feed	http://yvonneh.edublogs.org/2016/01/26/evo_mooc-minecraft-server-5/
Mactuxman	posted pictures of his builds here	https://paradigmagnus.wordpress.com/2016/01/14/minecraft-mooc-tumbling-down-the-world-of-cubes/
Mactuxman (again)	organized a presentation of a *Minecraft* build project he was involved with where students made a replica of their school and conducted a tour of it	https://plus.google.com/113742735224806254960/posts/QoNJNUKbwkG
Sousani	created a lovely garden	https://plus.google.com/109894618020189345959/posts/epWNDxXccVG
Tofubeth	told us how she had prepared for survival	https://eslbeth.wordpress.com/2016/01/25/prepping-for-survival/
Beth_Ghostraven	created a library house	http://booklady9.edublogs.org/2016/01/24/inworld-maps-in-minecraft/
Weft waif	made a good start on her house	https://mcecsite.wordpress.com/2016/01/23/finally-getting-to-play-around-woo-hoooo/https://mcecsite.wordpress.com/2016/01/23/finally-getting-to-play-around-woo-h0000/

As this is an ongoing community endeavor, activities take place on the EVO *Minecraft* server even when EVO is not in session. In the months between EVOMC16 and EVOMC17, the moderators met frequently on the EVO Minecraft server for "playdates," often following quests set by Mircea, who had found temples in distant jungles and probed them for sources of valuable resources, such as nether wart (e.g., https://evominecraftmp.wordpress.com/2016/09/20/the-jungle-adventure/). He then challenged fellow co-moderators to join quests to re-trace his footsteps and find them for themselves.

This kinds of activities not only serve to boost the skills of the co-moderators between EVO Minecraft MOOC sessions, but they illustrate once again how projects can be implemented in-world to facilitate learning objectives. They show us experientially how learning through gamifications can be fun and rewarding.

Conclusion

Effective networking is the key to success in the Big "G" game. This is modeled in the design of the EVO Minecraft MOOC sessions, and in how the sessions are conducted. Not only do participants learn a lot about *Minecraft* but they are finding their way around the EVO session itself. They're figuring out that the session is itself set up like a game, where players interact with each other online. The participants in EVO Minecraft MOOC tend to be other teachers who either already use *Minecraft* with their students or who are hoping to do so. As they interact with others there, they discover that there is a sharing of resources and expertise so that other players are their teachers in the game, and that some of these might be young enough to be their students, flipping commonly held notions of who teaches whom in more traditional learning settings.

EVO Minecraft MOOC models gamification through design:

- The Google+ Community portal was designed as a game board to help teachers experience what gamification actually feels like when they enter the big "G" game.
- The Big "G" game of EVO Minecraft MOOC has rules with flexibility, goals and challenges, and awards in the form of badges.
- Participants have to figure out the rules. As with many games, the components are designed to promote their being discerned as a built-in part of the game, and as in any game, it's more fun if it doesn't play out the way anyone especially anticipated.

Users who download apps on modern mobile devices intuitively incorporate similar heuristics when using them. When people use *Facebook* and Google+, they neither get nor expect clear instructions. They are thrown into an interface and they see what's there and work out what they are supposed to do and how to use the app so it will benefit them. So participants who want to play the Big "G" game of EVO Minecraft MOOC go to our Google+ page where they find a sidebar with links they can click on. One of the links is to a syllabus, an outline of what they will be doing each week during the session. The weeks are themed

on Cormier's (2010) well-known five phases of coping in MOOCs (see Stevens, 2015, for elaborated explanation).

The syllabus alludes to missions that must be accomplished each week, and links point participants to the wiki where there is more information about each of the missions. The missions have participants do basic things like purchase *Minecraft*, get a username, introduce themselves to the community, join us in-world in creative mode in order to practice for our shift to survival, and fill in the Google sheet where participants track their missions accomplished in pursuit of the one badge on offer at the moment.

We are all learning about gamification here; it is not so much about *Minecraft*. *Minecraft* is the little "g" game, the enabler of our emerging knowledge of gamification. When participants enter survival mode, they find that they are assisted by others in-world. With such help participants stay alive and learn to thrive. So gamification turns out to be learning through teamwork and mutual support and meeting challenges and achieving personal goals, whatever they are. In this game participants set their own goals. By achieving their goals in the game, they come to realize how what they are learning in EVO Minecraft MOOC might work to meet their real world challenges.

And with that in mind, participants in EVO Minecraft MOOC, teachers who are learning through experience to use gamification with students, can see that their students will likely learn to play the game by absorbing its rules and techniques from YouTube and from peers. Wouldn't that go better in class if teachers learn through a similar experience in the same way they expect their students to learn? In other words, if we are going to gamify our classrooms, don't we have to experience that by first gamifying aspects of our own professional development? Providing a space for coming to that realization is the underlying higher-order purpose of the Big "G" game of EVO Minecraft MOOC.

The "aha" moment occurs when the players succeed and realize that if what they were trying to teach were placed in such a context, it would not only become more engaging to the learners, but their students would be taking their own learning into their own hands. This can create a powerful learning environment, but educators need to experience it for themselves in order to understand its implications.

Note: The following colleagues have specifically given their permission for their real names to be used here: Jeff Kuhn, Aaron Schwartz, Linda Gielen, and David Dodgson. In addition, Marijana Smolčec has given permission for both her name

and her son Filip's name to appear here, and Mircea Patrascu has given permission for both his name and his son Vlad's name to appear in this chapter.

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Edited by:
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