

Communicative 2.0: Video Games and Digital Culture in the Foreign Language Classroom

By

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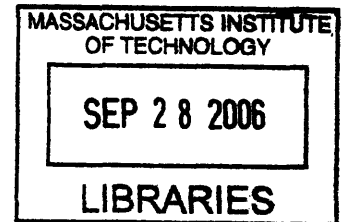
Submitted to the Comparative Media Studies Program in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Comparative Media Studies

At the

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

September 2006

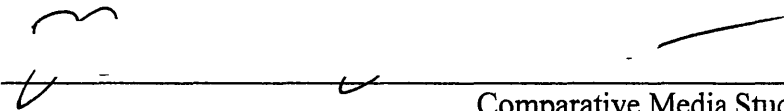
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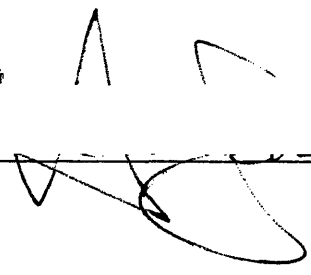
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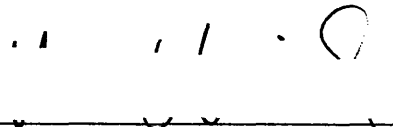
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August 11, 2006

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Ravi Purushotma

Submitted to the Comparative Media Studies program on August 10, 2006 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Comparative Media Studies

## Abstract

I explore two core concepts in today's youth entertainment culture that will increasingly become central in future attempts to design affordable foreign language learning materials that hope to bridge the chasm between education and foreign popular culture. In the process, I outline a series of example applications that apply these concepts to developing rich foreign language materials -- starting with more experimental/long-term approaches such as using video game modding techniques to make language learning friendly video games and ending with more concrete, ready-to-go, applications like extending open source content management applications.

The first concept I look at is that of "Remix culture." In short, Remix culture describes the way in which youth culture today more visibly orients itself around creating media by extracting component pieces from other people's media creations, then connecting them together to form something new. In the video game world this phenomena is more specifically termed 'modding.' In this process, amateur fans take a professional commercial game title and then modify it in creative ways that the original designers may not have considered. Outside of video games, we see terms like "web 2.0" used to describe technologies that allow website viewers to play a role in authoring additions to the sites they are reading, or "mashups" where users use programming interfaces to rapidly create web content by mashing together pieces from different sources.

The second emerging concept critical for curricular designers to follow is that of transmedia storytelling. Traditionally, one might assume a model in which distinct media forms are used to serve distinct cultural practices: television or novels tell stories, video games are for play, blogs for socializing and textbooks for learning. While initially this may have been the case, as each of the media forms above have evolved, they have expanded to cover multiple other cultural practices, often by extending across other media forms. By following the evolution of the interactions between these various media forms and activities within entertainment industries, we can find valuable insight when forecasting their possible interactions in the education industry.

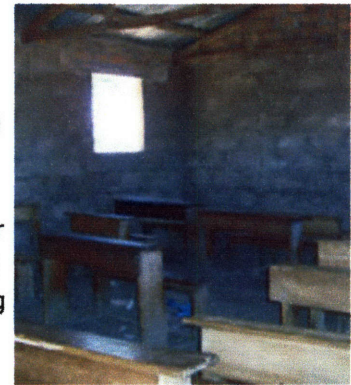


# Communicative 2.0

Click here to suggest a better title

For [one-third of the earth's illiterate population](#), India has

immense pressure to improve its education system. Yet their challenge is formidable, for many of the cash-strapped provincial governments the extensive investment in proper classrooms and infrastructure required to support a modern education system is simply not feasible. Furthermore, even those governments capable of stretching their budgets far enough to provide schools and literacy training to their citizens often encounter lackluster results, as they struggle to motivate students to set aside their work and everyday obligations in order to attend classes and devote time to studying materials that have little apparent connection to the rest of their life. As a result, many adults ultimately choose to live their lives without any regular exposure to literacy training.



If we look at the slums of Ahmedabad city, however, we see a very different picture. While formal schooling is still well outside the reach of much of the population, many people do have some form of access to a television. In particular, many of them choose to watch the popular television series *Chitrageet*, a weekly broadcast of music videos for popular Gujarati film songs. Noticing this, rather than constructing a traditional educational infrastructure focused on dedicated study periods, literacy researchers opted instead to [insert pedagogical interventions directly into \*Chitrageet\*](#).

Building upon techniques previously used for foreign language subtitling, they are able to modify *Chitrageet* to deliver [same-language synchronized subtitles](#) designed to facilitate literacy at a cost of US\$0.0065 per year per person. While initially there were concerns that such a simplistic layering of pedagogical content would simply be ignored by viewers, the results from their study show a significant increase in viewer literacy rates versus a control group over a period of 16 episodes. Interestingly, rather than seeing the pedagogical interventions as detracting from their entertainment experience, 99.5% of respondents (N=704) indicated a preference for the intervention over the non-subtitled version -- as literacy became a tool that could help them better understand the lyrics used in *Chitrageet*. Additionally, many viewers pro-actively requested further educational materials related to *Chitrageet*.

In the developed world, we are fortunate to be able to devote a reasonable portion of our disposable income towards independently developing and delivering dedicated educational content, rather than being forced to build upon already existing popular culture materials such as was done with *Chitrageet*. Overall, this is undoubtedly a good thing; the establishment of dedicated educational institutions grants us considerable latitude in methodically constructing systematic and well structured learning experiences. At the same time, though, we need to question if our current means is *always* the best way of constructing a learning experience. As the work with *Chitrageet* demonstrates, there are often instances in which breaking through the barriers that distinguish entertainment culture from educational culture allows us to construct far more engaging learning environments.

Successfully blending education and entertainment, however, is not always simple task. In the early 90's, emerging popular media like video games seemed a panacea for educators hoping to sneak small fragments of learning content inside the everyday entertainment activities of youth. Back then, "edutainment" titles abounded; however, most failed so spectacularly that video game developers today routinely go out of their way to ensure that people do *not* consider their games as educational. Rather than meaningfully including

learning experiences as part of a larger well-designed game experience, the original wave of edutainment titles unfortunately were built upon poorly designed games that occasionally halted, forcing players to learn educational content before allowing them return to the game.

[\(Jenkins\)](#)[\(Wright\)](#)

(note: all sound files in this document are edited. click author name to hear original source recordings)

If we examine previous attempts at 'edutainment', one clear theme emerges: there must be a strong match between the educational content to be delivered and the content or mechanics of the entertainment media being harnessed -- similar to the way the *Chitrageet* researchers were able to transform literacy into an integral tool that facilitated understanding of lyrics and actually improve the entertainment process.

Perhaps the educational discipline with the greatest possibilities for removing this barrier between formal education and popular entertainment, then, is

► Use of [Story](#), [Play](#) and [Socializing](#) in foreign language classes [alias]

foreign language education. Here, one of the primary goals of the discipline is to allow people to discuss and participate in the consumption of everyday foreign media. It makes sense, then, that foreign language educators already have a strong history of incorporating everyday activities into their lessons.

With the current emphasis on extending communicative language teaching methodology to center around task-based instruction, many of the tasks people engage in outside of the classroom are actually the central core of a foreign language classroom.

*Task-Based Language Teaching proposes the notion of "task" as a central unit of planning and teaching. Although definitions of task vary in TBLT, there is a commonsensical understanding that a task is an activity or goal that is carried out using language, such as [finding a solution to a puzzle](#), [reading a map and giving directions](#), [making a telephone call](#), [writing a letter](#), or [reading a set of instructions and assembling a toy](#) ...*

*The key assumptions of task-based instruction are summarized by Feez (1998: 17) as:*

- *The focus is on process rather than product.*
- *Basic elements are purposeful activities and tasks that emphasize communication and meaning.*
- *Learners learn language by interacting communicatively and purposefully while engaged in the activities and tasks.*
- *Activities and tasks can be either:*
  - *those that learners might need to achieve in real life;*
  - *those that have a pedagogical purpose specific to the classroom.*
- *Activities and tasks of a task-based syllabus are sequenced according to difficulty.*
- *The difficulty of a task depends on a range of factors including the previous experience of the learner, the complexity of the task, the language required to undertake the task, and the degree of support available.*

*[Continued Below]*

While in some cases dedicated individual teachers have been able orchestrate successful and engaging task-based classrooms, we are only beginning to understand how to systematically produce mainstream curricular materials for task-based instruction.

*Because of its links to Communicative Language Teaching methodology and support from some prominent SLA theorists, TBLT has gained considerable attention within applied linguistics, though there have been few large-scale practical applications of it. ... Instructional materials play an important role in TBLT because it is dependent on a sufficient supply of appropriate classroom tasks, some of which may require considerable time, ingenuity, and resources to develop.*

*Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching -- Richards, Rodgers*

*Thus, there is a clear psycholinguistic rationale (and substantial empirical support) for choosing 'task' as the basis for language pedagogy. One might expect, therefore, to find task-based courses figuring strongly in current language education. However, this is not the case. As Candlin (2001:230) points out, there is a 'comparative lack of attention to tasks within language education in the context of educational systems'. Similarly, task-based courses do not figure strongly in publishers' catalogues of teaching materials. Thus, while many published courses often claim to be 'task-based', a close inspection reveals that they are not.*

*Task-based Language Learning and Teaching -- Rod Ellis*

This places curricular designers in a seemingly impossible predicament. On the one hand, the theory pushes them to create activities and experiences ideally as rich and authentic as those attained outside of school. On the other hand, the market conditions for introductory foreign language curricular designers in the U.S. affords them far fewer resources or production times as compared to out-of-school industries. This is particularly the case for homework assignments; yet homework often constitutes a sizable portion of a student's engagement with the learning process and should not be marginalized. Unfortunately, some designers have chosen to lower production costs by designing materials specifically to be content agnostic and instantly reusable. Yet this approach to simplifying the production process entirely abdicates any responsibility to incorporate any naturalistic, task-based or other modern language learning theories -- greatly diminishing the real world value of any communicative theory on mainstream materials for U.S. introductory language classes.

Like with *Chitrageet*, educational designers in the U.S. hoping to fully realize modern theories of language acquisition will need to be extremely innovative in order to do so with the limited resources available. Yet, if we hope to achieve this in a similar manner to *Chitrageet* by better using resources that already exist in the outside-of-school lives of youth, we face a considerable challenge. Far from gathering around a television and singing songs, the complex transmedia consumption habits of youth in America today extend across a dizzying network of interconnected technological and cultural practices that can be difficult for curricular designers working on constrained budgets to keep pace with.

In this document, I explore two core concepts in today's youth entertainment culture that will increasingly become central in future attempts to design affordable foreign language learning materials that hope to bridge the chasm between education and foreign popular culture. In the process, I outline a series of example applications that apply these concepts to developing rich foreign language materials -- starting with more experimental/long-term approaches such as using video game modding techniques to make language learning friendly video games and ending with more concrete, ready-to-go, applications like extending open source content management applications. (This document primarily focuses on U.S. introductory high-school language classes and may or may not be applicable to other contexts)

The first concept I look at is that of "Remix culture." In short, Remix culture describes the way in which youth culture today more visibly orients itself around creating media by extracting component pieces from other people's media creations, then connecting them together to form something new. In the video game world this phenomena is more specifically termed 'modding.' In this process, amateur fans take a professional commercial game title and then modify it in creative ways that the original designers may not have considered. Outside of video games, we see terms like "web 2.0" used to describe technologies that allow website viewers to play a role in authoring additions to the sites they are reading, or "mashups" where users use programming interfaces to rapidly create web content by mashing together pieces from different sources.

Remixing has, of course, always been a central theme in foreign language pedagogy. As media from a foreign country provides students a link to the culture that created it, foreign language educators have historically been at the forefront of devising activities in which students learn to navigate through and reconfigure foreign media. With the emergence of the internet, however, today's youth are finding numerous

new techniques for navigating through and reconfiguring media, both domestic and foreign. As this trend continues, foreign language education designers will need to shift from designing their own activities from scratch to actively tracking what remix activities students from a particular age group are already engaged in, and then inventing ways in which those activities can be applied towards learning a foreign language.

The second emerging concept critical for curricular designers to follow is that of transmedia storytelling. Traditionally, one might assume a model in which distinct media forms are used to serve distinct cultural practices: television or novels tell stories, video games are for play, blogs for socializing and textbooks for learning. While initially this may have been the case, as each of the media forms above have evolved, they have expanded to cover multiple other cultural practices, often by extending across other media forms. By following the evolution of the interactions between these various media forms and activities within entertainment industries, we can find valuable insight when forecasting their possible interactions in the education industry.

## Remix Culture -- Video Games and Modding

Following the early attempts at designing Edutainment software, a sense of hopelessness pervaded through much of the educational software community. After seeing how kids would sometimes even prefer their school homework to the terror of having to play an edutainment video game, many developers began to feel it was simply impossible to think that an Educational title could ever rival an Entertainment focused game. Fortunately, we are beginning to see the emergence of new models in which education and entertainment games no longer need to compete with one another. If we look at today's entertainment video games, many bear little resemblance to the games prevalent in the early 90's when educators first attempted to insert artificial learning moments inside games. Back then, game worlds were relatively fixed, asking the player only to play out the action of a pre-programmed story. Today, however, games are considerably more open-ended, with many of them encouraging players to take an active role in the construction of the game itself through the use of various 'mod' tools.

For example, the current (2006) number one selling video game [The Sims 2](#) does not prescribe any explicit goal or winning outcome. Rather, the game presents itself as an open-ended "virtual doll house" in which users play out and optionally share stories with one another. As a result of the enormous flexibility of this game, tens of thousands of player created content pieces or game modifications are freely available on the internet.

Surprisingly, so far little has been attempted by educators to use the extensive mod tools available for *The Sims 2* to insert learning content in a way that naturally integrates with the larger game experience. For example, mod tools for many games provide access to all the language data used in all the different international versions of a game. This allows curriculum designers to easily manipulate popular video games to create opportunities for foreign language learning.

► [Overview of The Sims 2 game](#) [external link]

► [Explanation of how The Sims 2 mod tools can be used to make the game more appropriate for](#)

### Examples of Game Modding in Education

► [Revolution](#) -- (U.S. History) -- A modification of the game Neverwinter Nights to change it from a medieval Dungeon game into a virtual recreation of Colonial Williamsburg to give students to role play a key moment in U.S. history leading up to the revolutionary war. [external link]

► [Replaying History](#) -- (World History) -- Taking the game Civilization III, researcher Kurt Squire created a world map and game scenario appropriate for use in History classes. He demonstrates how students otherwise struggling with school demonstrated profound insights into the nature of historical events. [external link]

► [Typing of the Dead](#) -- (Typing) -- Originally a game requiring players to shoot marauderous zombies with an attached gun, Typing of the Dead replaces the gun with a keyboard requiring students to type words of the corresponding zombie in time. [external link]

► [Tactical Iraqi](#) -- (Military Arabic) -- Recreation the

## [language learning](#)

► [Explanation of how \*The Sims 2\* can be used in Foreign Language classrooms](#)

shooter game Unreal Tournament as a game designed to teach soldiers basic conversational arabic skills. [external link]

► [The Sims Teach Foreign Languages -- Frequently Asked Questions](#)

For most educational disciplines, the general rule when selecting a video game to be modded is that the closer the original contents of the game are to the educational discipline involved, the smoother the process will be. For example, in order to make a game like *Civilization III* relevant to a history classroom, one simply needs to edit a few maps, scenarios and variables; however, it would be more difficult to use a game like *Grim Fandango* in a history classroom. While a game like *The Sims 2* actually does have a clear matchup with the contents of the game and the contents of an introductory language textbook (parts of the body, furnishing the house, finding a job/professions, emotions, etc), the fact that almost all games use language in one way or another allows [a far wider range of genres](#) to be modded for use in foreign language learning that most educational disciplines.

► [Explanation of how adventure games such as Lucas Art's \*Grim Fandango\* can be modded to be useful for language learners](#)

The two primary challenges with modding games for education are that (1) you still need to purchase the base game in order to use it and (2) you are constrained to modifying only those aspects of the game the designers made available for modification. With older games like *Grim Fandango*, the game can actually be [cheaper](#) than an appropriate [book](#); for newer games, however, the prices are much higher. In these cases, numerous other options are available for building upon game technologies to create engaging language learning solutions.

## Middleware

Rather than modding existing commercial games, the approach many educational game designers have taken historically is to produce their own games "from scratch." If we look at the games industry as a whole, however, we see that even most entertainment developers can not afford the multi-million dollar budgets necessary to produce a quality title from scratch. It is understandable, then, why most educational games fail to come close to the production quality of an entertainment game.

Instead of working from scratch, most entertainment game companies employ some form of middleware technology. In essence, middleware provides a software framework that attempts to "[pre-invent the wheel](#)" by supplying game programmers with all the basic components necessary to build a game. Programmers then simply customize and connect together the pre-programmed components in the manner specified by the game designer. In the games industry, all game designers learn how to design games that take advantage of middleware components -- allowing them to design a compelling modern game using the same production budget it would take to develop a poor quality game from scratch. Unfortunately, few curricular specialists are currently aware of how to align learning content with middleware components. However, as more educational designers learn how to do this, it will become possible to cheaply produce educational titles of a much higher quality than earlier edutainment titles.

► [An example of how low-cost middleware solutions could be used to rapidly create a commercial quality language game](#)

## Metaverses

As the popularity of *The Sims 2* and [World of Warcraft](#) shows, successful games today have evolved to rely less on "twitch responses" and more towards incorporating elements simulating either fantasy or real world interactions. With immersion often touted as the best way to learn a language and role play a common activity in classrooms, it is understandable that virtual/online immersion has long been hyped as the 'killer app' in language learning.

So far, however, the virtual worlds designed by language educators have failed to create a compelling immersive experience. Following on the success of middleware for more traditional games, numerous companies are beginning to provide "metaverses" that offer middleware-like solutions for rapidly creating compelling virtual worlds by mixing together pre-built components. Already developers have used the popular middleware package [Torque](#) to create [simulated immersion](#) experiences far exceeding earlier attempts not using middleware solutions. As the the next generation of metaverse platforms arrive, language educators looking to design virtual worlds will be able to rely on the metaverse systems to provide the underlying technology needed to create rich virtual worlds, leaving them to focus only on developing solid pedagogical content.

► [Multiverse.net: an upcoming metaverse platform allowing amateur designers to rapidly create compelling virtual worlds \[external link\]](#)

► [Second Life: a highly flexible virtual world \[external link\]](#)

► [Video Presentation on Second Life \[external link\]](#)

## Partnerships

When [Mr. Shih Chi Ning](#) first noticed his daughters' obsession with the number one online game [Neopets](#), his initial response was to try and restrict their use of the game so that it would not compete with their schoolwork. As he describes it, they "would spend hour upon hour at the site to earn enough NeoPoints to buy rare items for their pets rather than working on their homework. I wanted to put their pets up for adoption at the virtual pound but they cried and cried. They were so attached to their pets, I thought that attachment had a potential to motivate the child to do his schoolwork first." A businessman working as managing director of Micromax Technologies, Mr. Shih then went to the Neopets Asia division to work out a successful partnership whereby diligent students could receive virtual money to buy treats for their neopets in exchange for doing their homework. While solutions such as this provide a simple extrinsic incentive for students to do their homework in addition to playing *Neopets*, with foreign language education many opportunities exist to go further and encourage student learning through actually playing a game like *Neopets*.

While much of the focus behind improving foreign language learning materials has called for innovation in creative efforts, perhaps equally necessary is innovation in business models. With [content-based instruction](#) (CBI) now a largely accepted paradigm in the language learning community, that is the use of authentic foreign content originally designed to be interesting for some purpose other than foreign language learning, the greatest challenge lies in finding the best possible base content for adaptation. Thus far we have largely attempted to side-step the copyright and business challenge of this by using historical plays, political news or academic content as a basis for CBI. For youth learners, however, relying solely on historical plays and political news alienates any natural connections to their everyday lives; a physics lesson is scarcely made more interesting by presenting it in French.

While modding allows education and entertainment industries to cooperate on a technological level, changes in new-media business models may also exist for the two to enjoy symbiotic corporate relations. For example, rather than requiring players to pay money for the game, *Neopets* funds itself entirely from advertising and product placement revenues. In the United States, Neopet's immense popularity with children and youth ([39% <12yr/old, 40% 13-17yr/old, 21% > 18yr/old; 57% female, 43% male](#)) has created concerns among parents and media literacy groups worried about children's [poor ability](#) to critically distinguish advertisements from game content. While this has not prevented Neopets from enjoying [over 340,000,000,000 page views to the site from more than 115,000,000 players](#), the company has still been exploring ways to improve their image with parents. One method Neopets has been exploring is the use of [educational content](#).

While branded education in the U.S. has had [a difficult history](#), in Asian cultures where





there are fewer concerns the business model for Neopets aligns well with English language learning goals. A key factor in the success of Neopet's product placement strategy has been how well the game's natural content aligns with its advertisement goals. For example, one of the tasks necessary in the game is for a player to feed their pet food such as a hamburger when their pet gets hungry; one of Neopet's largest sponsors is McDonald's. It makes sense, then, when a player buys their hamburger's from McDonald's in the game.



Similarly, with CBI one tries as much as possible to recreate everyday routines from the target culture out of authentic media materials. Given how strongly rooted commercial culture is in the everyday routines of Americans, it is natural then for some of these authentic materials to be branded. For example, while working as an English instructor in China I was given actual McDonald's menus for students to use when role playing ordering a hamburger and fries in English. In this way, role playing ordering food online from a virtual McDonald's would not be a departure from what is already standard practice in foreign classrooms.

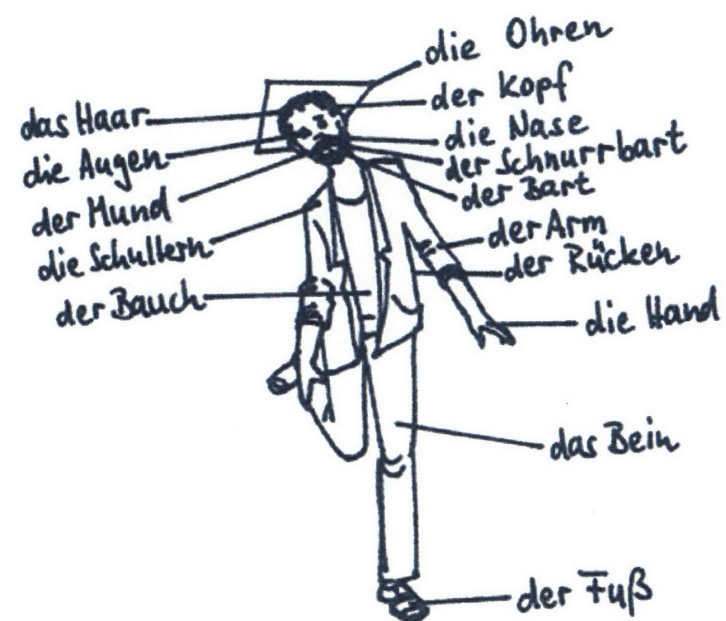
An educational partnership with a company such as Neopets could offer U.S. companies a powerful vehicle for intimately introducing their brand to foreign markets. Foreign ESL learners would receive entertainment-quality educational materials that allow them to role play using English and navigating through everyday commercial environments. A company such as Neopets could enjoy both increased revenues from advertisers and the support of parents enthusiastic about their children learning English.

► [More about Neopets](#)

## Remediation

As video games grow as a cultural phenomena, they will do more than simply give us another distinct media option to choose from. Rather, [like with the emergence of all prior media forms](#), they will both be influenced by older media, and older media will be influenced by them. Already games like *The Sims 2* and *Halo* [are being used to create](#) amateur movies. The history channel [regularly airs shows](#) generated using the games *Brother in Arms* and *Rome: Total War*. Chris Burke [interviews radio talk show guests](#) inside the game *Halo 2*. And, of course, [online comic books](#) created using *The Sims 2* abound.

In the same way that the application of video game technologies to more traditional media formats has allowed companies operating on educational budgets like The History Channel to produce professional, extremely low-cost productions, video games and web 2.0 technologies could allow teachers and curriculum designers working with printed media to generate even cheaper materials.





The picture on the left comes from the [workbook](#) for a widely used [textbook](#) series. The image on the right was generated by extracting a character from *The Sims 2*, then inserting text using [freely available software](#). While the image on the right offers an at least comparable visual appeal, it also brings significant production advantages. Besides being faster to draw, we could also instantly generate closeups of any particular part of the body, rotate them, place the character in any of the contexts offered by *The Sims 2* or its expansion packs (any room in a house, a mall, a job, a night club, bowling, etc), quickly generate pictures of him interacting with any objects, etc. Additionally, if we choose to create movies using the same character or a corresponding video game assignment, we can both save production costs by reusing the same character and have a consistent artistic look across mediums.

In the same way that the relationship between video games and traditional media is really a 2-way interaction, the relationship between the world-wide web and print is even more complicated. While many bookstores may have gone out of business shortly after the rise in popularity of the web, sites like amazon.com have simultaneously propelled the proliferation of print culture. In the same way that video games and image manipulation tools can help facilitate the production possibilities of traditional print media, print-on-demand technologies expand the distribution possibilities for amateur curricula designers. This allows teachers to instantly offer other teachers printed version of any educational media they produce -- with all printing, credit card processing, delivery, customer service and other tasks all automatically managed for them. Combined with the [collaborative filtering](#) and [unstructured tagging](#) technologies built into today's [content management systems](#), ultimately, we will likely see a [lengthening of the tail](#) for curricula print media.

► [Cafepress.com print-on-demand services](#) [external link]

## Remix Culture -- [Web 2.0](#) and Mashups

Besides video games, another popular target for amateur media modders are their own web browsers. Following the decline in popularity of the original Netscape Navigator web browser, Netscape Corporation decided to try a new strategy of making the underlying program code for their browser openly available to anyone who wanted to help improve or modify it. Originally re-branded as the Mozilla web browser and subsequently as [Firefox](#), a large community of worldwide volunteers began tinkering with the underlying structure of Firefox and making it even easier for others with less technical experience to join in. Today, thousands of amateur produced browser extensions are freely available for download from the Firefox site. As with video games, it is surprising how few extensions have been developed for educational purposes given how browser extensions open a rich pool of possibilities for intelligently combining learning content

with a user's everyday activities.

### ► How browser extensions could be used for foreign language learning

In the summer of 2005, Google released [Google Earth](#), a free tool enabling users to navigate their way through satellite or airplane imagery and extensive geographic data. Originally, users of Google Earth would use the tool to help them locate a nearby restaurant, find driving directions or simply view images of their houses from outer space. However, by the fall of 2005, remixers and modders were already co-opting Google Earth as a tool to support extensive fictional universes. In one game, [Google Earth Wars](#), thousands of players would choose to make virtual army bases in real world locations. Their bases would then show up on all other player's copies of Google Earth, allowing them to interact with one another, all from within the Google Earth interface. For anyone playing these games, one level of [learning possibilities](#) is instantly clear: as Google Earth was itself a geography tool, any remix experience derived from Google Earth will naturally teach geography. By placing my personal base along the Ivory Coast such that I would be in easy striking range of the densely populated city of Lagos, I rapidly acquired a far better understanding of North African geography than from my entire formal education. By creating game worlds out of satellite imagery of foreign cities from the target culture, one could rapidly create games to familiarize students with foreign geography, city landmarks and navigation in the L2.

### ► Rethinking how foreign language classes teach foreign Geography

#### From "Authentic Materials" to "Live Materials"

Perhaps the most challenging task in designing an introductory foreign language curriculum is that of representing foreign culture. If we conceptualize culture as an independent-standing entity, what ultimately gets delivered to students in our attempts to "teach culture" is a series of snapshots or editorialized slices of the target culture.

Die gute alte Zeit: der Herr im Haus  
**The good old days: the man of the house**

Eine mögliche Rolle des modernen Mannes  
**A possible role of the modern man**

Die Deutschen essen türkischen Döner griechisches Gyros fast so gern wie Spaghetti und Hamburger.  
**The Germans eat Turkish Kebab a Greek Gyros almost as happily as Spaghetti and Hamburgers**

Die alte Rolle der Frau: Hausfrau und Mutter  
**The old role of the wife: housewife and mother**

Das neue Bild der Frau, die im Berufsleben steht  
**The new image of the woman, in the workplace**

Einwanderer bringen die Kultur und Traditionen ihrer Heimatländer mit.  
**Immigrants bring the culture and traditions of their homeland with them**

Verliebt, verlobt, verheiratet

Er kümmert sich um die Kinder und sie kümmert sich um das Geld.

(images repositioned for fo

For most students in an introductory language class, their goal is often not simply to describe a foreign culture, but rather to be capable of participating in that culture. Thus, our goal should be to provide students with all the assistance appropriate to help them participate in the popular activities they would be participants in had they grown up in the target country: reading the same websites, [using the same social networking tools](#) and playing the same video games *with* their L2 peers. In this way, we give them agency to synthesize their own snapshot of the target culture from their own experiences and interactions within it.

While there are a number of [innovative projects](#) with similar aims already available, what is important to consider here is what a curriculum with the goal of enabling students to participate in a foreign culture would look like if the target culture is a remix culture (as many of the youth cultures in countries for the languages commonly taught in U.S. schools are). As youth culture shifts further from independently constructing media from scratch, to instead constructing media by connecting together and reconfiguring existing media artifacts, we should also be able to construct our cultural representations *directly* from mixing together live target language media, without having to extract them into a secondary context.

Lets begin with the way we create images. Many teachers are already turning to the web and [google images](#) to provide students with more up-to-date or authentic images of a target country than are provided by textbooks. However, copyright provisions prevent any curriculum generated using this approach from being openly published beyond a single classroom for a limited time duration; additionally, it still leaves the teacher in the position of slicing out a snapshot of the target culture to deliver to the students. For those wishing to create publicly distributable curriculum, they often need to still rely on either self-taken photographs or expensive and often dated stock photography.

Alternatively, they could gather images from the [FlickR creative commons](#) photo set. Here, real people from all over the world using the popular FlickR photo service have designated over 13,000,000 authentic/live photos as freely usable (with attribution) in other media creations. Additionally, FlickR [provides](#) an API system, allowing programs to connect directly into the FlickR database. So, for example, a *Google Earth* game teaching Spanish could receive all the information necessary from the FlickR API to automatically change its game content depending on what the contents of the newest photograph someone in Puerto Rico had taken. Students could then interact with the photographer through their FlickR profile, leaving comments in the L2 about that photo and any peculiarities of its cultural representation.

Perhaps the media most desperately in need of live materials is that of music. Once again, music faces similar copyright issues as images: only individual classrooms may use copyrighted music and for only a limited duration. Additionally, musical tastes are so individual and varied that no teacher could possibly find a single song to develop curriculum around that would simultaneously inspire all students to take an interest in the music of that country.

Using a distinction in the copyright system that gives "radio" broadcasts a different copyright status from standalone music, various sites such as [last.fm](#) are emerging offering "personalized radio." Here any student can find people in the target country with similar music tastes as them, then generate a personalized radio station that plays free, full length/full quality songs from around the world based on their preferences. Combined with various [sound spatialization techniques](#), as API's for personalized radio services develop we will be able to create live curriculum that aids students to understand whichever songs in the target culture they themselves choose.

*It has been widely observed informally that if readers are genuinely interested in content, this interest can outweigh other factors to a large extent. In fact, interest in content may be the most important consideration in selecting appropriate texts. It may also be the most difficult requirement to satisfy, far more difficult than controlling for syntax or vocabulary. According to the theory of language acquisition presented in this volume, our goal is to involve students so deeply in the message that they actually "forget" it is encoded in another language.*

*[The Natural Approach -- Krashen & Terrell, Pg. 134](#)*

Ultimately, the real advantage of using live materials is the possibility of then connecting with live audiences. Certainly, the motivational advantages to producing work to be shared with a broader audience than just the teacher can not be over-stressed. As Cindy Evans [describes](#) of her experiences using web 2.0 technologies in her French class in which students were simply told their work would be made publicly available:

*The prospect of creating material for an authentic audience appeared to be the main motivation for the students. Students involved in the wiki project interacted with authentic cultural material on the web and also envisioned themselves as potential teachers to future students using their site. In contrast to researching and reporting on a topic for the class as students had done in previous classes, these students assumed responsibility for interacting with information, assimilating, rewriting, and organizing it in a way they deemed worthy of future students' interest.*

...

*One student's comments revealed a particularly heartening description of the learning experience:*

*I enjoyed the Wiki project more than anything else this semester. I had never made anything similar to it on the computer before, and as someone who usually hates computers, I found myself spending free minutes adding photos or extra links to my site just to improve my pages. I didn't realize it as it was happening, but after completing the project I had learned a lot about the history of art in Quebec and also around the world.*

At the same time, although Web 2.0 technologies provide infinitely more stimulating contexts for students, self-installations of these systems can bring with them major technological headaches for any teacher who doesn't have hours of free time to kill updating their PHP and MySQL libraries. In [Cindy's case](#), it took over half the semester just to get the system running, and even then it did not contain [the freely available user interface modules](#) that would have allowed students to achieve many of the tasks she had hoped for.

Rather than leaving teachers to perform self-installations, it is important that curricular designers work to highlight the different options available for hosted services. For example, [wikia.com](#) allows anyone to instantly create their own wiki spaces in a variety of languages with all server space and configuration provided free. Services like [writely](#), [writeboard](#) and [thinkfree](#) offer considerably more features than a typical wiki, with a cleaner interface and zero server installation. Perhaps the most valuable hosted services for foreign language teachers are the emerging platform portals such as [ning.com](#). Here, teachers can browse through thousands of different social web applications already created by users throughout the world. They then choose "clone this app" to create a copy of a particular application for themselves, then use a suite of user friendly tools that do not require any programming knowledge to customize the application towards their own pedagogical goals. All server management and other tasks are automatically taken care of for them.

► [Ning.com](#) [external link]

**Update:** Due to [newly passed legislation](#)(in the house), [the use of live materials in U.S. public schools](#) will soon be illegal if ratified by the Senate/President (this includes Myspace, Ning, Flickr, Last.fm, Lingualgamers, etc). If you are an American teacher or citizen, please help [take action](#), ideally by [writing your senator](#). [Private school, college and non-U.S. teachers can still use all the materials listed on this site.]

► [Myspace and DOPA discussion](#) [External Link]

With live materials and customized social applications becoming increasingly available to non-programmers, the primary challenge will be to find models for how to connect various web applications together into coherent learning experiences. In the last ten years "webquests," that is, activities designed by teachers "[in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the internet](#)", have

exploded in popularity in schools. According to Google AdSense, search popularity for the term "webquest" is now even approaching that of the term "lesson plan" (85 click per day rate for "webquest" versus 120 for "lesson plan" [Based on a \$100 maximum cost per click estimate]). In a typical webquest, students are given a scenario which requires them to extract information or images from a series of provided websites and then compile their findings into a final report. For example, students might be told they are part of a team of experts brought in to decide on the most appropriate method for disposing of a canister of nuclear waste. They are then provided a series of websites relevant to waste disposal and then asked to present a final proposal to the teacher.

While webquests provide a popular framework for extracting information from new-media sources, little innovation has followed for what to do with that extracted information. For some students, simply compiling information into a report is unfortunately viewed as "[overly structured clicking and reading](#)." As the original webquest creator Bernie Dodge [describes](#) "It's true that most WebQuests are boring, but I think that's because they aren't really well designed, not because they don't have flashy graphics and interactivity. I'd like to think that getting engaged in a problem that requires synthesis and problem-solving is motivating in a deep and useful way that goes beyond Prensky's arcade-game type learning."

Already in the entertainment world we are seeing cases of games entirely devoid of flashy graphics or traditional game elements, yet compelling enough in their synthesis and problem-solving depth to motivate hundreds of thousand of players purely for entertainment purposes. Dubbed "Alternate Reality" games, these games are able to construct massive scale game universes simply by harnessing and mixing together numerous real-world web applications. By studying [the learning that takes place in alternate reality games](#) we can gain valuable insights into how to create engaging experiences around web content from other languages and cultures.

► [Overview of the Alternate Reality game \*I Love Bee's\* \[alias\]](#)

### **This is Not a Test**

What is interesting about *I Love Bee's* is that it was a game constructed entirely out of technologies more commonly used for other purposes. In fact, at no point during the game did *I Love Bee's* even admit that it was a game. For many of the players, the result was a confusingly immersive experience in which they began to see much of the real world in the context of the game world. As one of the players [described](#) in an online posting "here we are, every one of us excited at blurring the lines between story and reality. The game promises to become not just entertainment, but our lives." In numerous cases, sites and mysteries not connected to the game were solved by confused players thinking that they were still in the game.

Foreign language educators have long struggled with how to ensure the language proficiency students gain while studying for a language exam successfully transfer to proficiency outside of the classroom in real life situations. Across all educational disciplines we see examples of how poorly human beings transfer abstract knowledge from one real world case to another. For example, [Ross](#) first trained students on the following math problem: "Sixteen golfers compete in a tournament. There are money prizes for the top nine golfers. In how many different ways might the prizes (first through nine) be given?" While 77% of students were able to solve another problem with the same underlying mathematical concept that was also about golfers, only 43% were able to solve another problem with the same underlying mathematical concept that was not about golfers, and only 23% were able to solve another problem with the same underlying mathematical concept where the story matched a problem previously studied which did not have the same underlying mathematical concept.

As these results and numerous others ([Gick & Holyoak](#); [Lave & Wenger](#)) demonstrate, the situational contexts within which abstract knowledge is associated is critical to its long-term retention and practical value for real-world usage. As new-media usage transforms the entertainment culture of youth, if we do not adapt our curricular materials they will unfortunately bare a diminishing resemblance to the outside of school contexts in which youth live. However, by learning how to remix foreign popular culture and intelligently insert pedagogical aids at the points of connection, we can instantly appropriate automatically up-to-date

media contexts that youth would naturally be engaging with if they were they living in a country speaking the L2.

Additionally, by remixing interventions inside media used throughout the day for other purposes, we naturally blur the lines between time set aside for everyday tasks and time exposed to the pedagogical interventions. For example, when a Google Earth Wars player uses Google Earth to look up driving directions to the movie theater or exploring different cities for an upcoming vacation, there is always the chance that the user will stumble upon a hidden game jewel or a poorly defended city to attack. In this way, players never really leave the game, but continue playing it throughout their everyday life. Foreign language teachers have long advised students that they need to try and continue thinking in the L2 around the clock, yet homework assignments are designed to be completed during a single block of dedicated study time. By closer integrating entertainment culture with educational interventions we can better assist students in connecting these often distinct parts of their lives.

## Transmedia Storytelling

Traditionally we may think of listening to stories, playing games, socializing or studying each as distinct activities. Thus, if you felt like listening to a story, you may go to a movie. If you were in the mood to play, you might load up a video game. If you felt like socializing you may call a friend or post comments on their myspace wall. And when it was time to study, you would put away all other media and concentrate on completing exercises in a workbook.

While each of these activities (Story/Play/Socializing/Learning) may have distinctive qualities that can draw us to them individually, ultimately they all represent [core experiences that are desirable to human beings](#). Thus, the richest media experiences are those capable of simultaneously engaging all four activities. Of course, doing this well requires media designers have expertise in designing for all four activities and is exponentially more difficult than designing for any single activity alone. Yet, if we look carefully we can see that most of the recent innovations in the evolution of many media forms today have come by designing media worlds that transcend across multiple activities. In some cases this is achieved by including elements and characteristics from multiple activities in a single media format (e.g. World of Warcraft). In other cases, by designing media worlds that connect across multiple media formats (e.g. Yu-gi-oh the cartoon, Yu-gi-oh the game, Yu-gi-oh the club, Yu-gi-oh the system). In no case, however, should we assume that with enough creativity in extending a media world, would any of these four activities need to be distinct or oppositional to one another.

	Story	Play	Social	Learning
<b>TV Shows, Movies and Novels</b>	-	➔	➔	➔
<b>Video Games</b>	➔	-	➔	➔
<b>Blogs</b>	➔	➔	-	➔
<b>Educational Media</b>	➔	➔	➔	-

(Click ➔'s for examples of how media forms have evolved to include social practices traditionally associated with other media forms)

In the same way in which all good video game designers today must stop to ask themselves "have I considered all the ways in which Story, Social or Learning elements might improve my game", tomorrow's Foreign Language Learning designers will need to ask themselves "have I fully considered the ways in which Story, Play and Social elements might allow for a more engaging learning experience?" As we do this, we are likely to see foreign language learning undergo numerous changes similar to other media forms that went through the same adaptations.

### Extending Story and Language Acquisition

At one conference I attended, an educator approached me concerned with the declining youth interest in traditional literature and high culture, asking if I had fully considered the ramifications of promoting media such as video games in a classroom. In his view, the classroom was to be the last bastion for preserving high culture against the onslaught of inferior popular influences in modern society. Yet we know that culture is not a zero-sum conflict. Often engagement with popular culture can [inspire](#) a wide range of traditionally valued activities. For curriculum designers in particular, it becomes critical that we study and understand the ways in which new media [layers](#) upon earlier media -- then work to exploit the connections between layers.

Consider the accusation that prime time television today sustains itself solely on rapid cheap thrills and knows nothing of the carefully constructed of dramatic tension one might find in classical symphony composition. As Jason Mittel [notes](#), prime time television shows like *The West Wing* directly build upon the dramatic tension in classical music to create sustained multi-layered experiences

It is clear that foreign language classrooms today need to teach culture; it is clear that stories are part of a culture. It is less clear what a story is.

If we view a story as a sequence of events (a plot) imagined and written by a single author then broadcast out to readers, we limit ourselves to a highly constrained notion of storytelling which will always be at odds with the world outside the classroom. Similarly, if we misconstrue video games simply as a medium where one can play out the action of a linear story, we limit ourselves to what has already proven to be a dismal way to create video games.

Rather, skilled storytellers and [skilled language teachers](#) are able to conceptualize stories as imaginary (fictional or non-fictional) worlds for participants to inhabit and explore. In this way, each engagement with different media forms -- both traditional and new media -- serve to expand the same story world, and ultimately to re-enforce one another.

Many games like *The Sims 2* already offer a number of characters from traditional stories:





► Case study of extending *The Little Prince* using *The Sims 2* [external link][to be written by someone else]

By taking advantage of the modding capabilities of modern video games or middleware applications, we can greatly facilitate the use of video games to expand a traditional story world. Similarly, by remixing web 2.0 media with existing story elements, we can create [social activities that extend story worlds](#).

### Extending Play and Language Acquisition

Originally, many games relied simply on providing "points" as players made correct choices, similar to the way schools prescribe high grades to students who provide correct answers. If we look at Neopets, we can see a more evolved system of player feedback. The first thing a player entering the Neopets site does is to adopt one of many different species of virtual pets for them to raise as their own. In playing the game, kids

need to take care of their pets: feeding them, playing with them and buying them items. If a player fails to feed their pet when they become hungry, rather than simply losing points, they witness their pet struggling with starvation and begging the player to take better care when they next log online. For kids who spend their lives being told what to do by parents, games like Neopets gives them the chance to [shift themselves](#) into the role of being the caretaker (albeit of a virtual pet). As a result, kids become highly attached to their pets and motivated to constantly maintain their pet's well-being at regular intervals.

(Beck)(Wright)

While we are only at the very beginning of understanding the different reward and feedback structures available to motivate players and learners, Neopets would suggest that two dimensions under explored by learning researchers are those of affect and nurturing. Rather than designing curricular media in which feedback is provided through quantitative scoring or direct responses, we should also explore the possibilities for providing qualitative feedback in which learner responses have meaningful consequences on characters with emotional depth. If the success of Neopets is an indication, this might result in an increased motivation by learners to remain engaged throughout the day.

In



educational settings, curricular designers often try to keep feedback as simple and efficient as possible. Evidence from game studies research suggests, however, that providing rich feedback with an affective dimension could improve motivation and engagement. In [one study](#), researchers wired participants with a series of psychophysiological measuring devices (EEG, EKG, EMG and SCL) and had them play the video game *Super Monkey Bowling 2*. While the underlying mechanics of *Super Monkey Bowling 2* resemble that of traditional bowling, the game replaces the bowling ball with an adorable animated monkey running inside a semi-transparent sphere. In the event that the sphere misses the bowling pins and instead falls outside of the bowling lane, players are presented with an amusing animation sequence depicting the monkey falling off into the void of outer space.

From a functional perspective this event represents a failure condition in which an educational designer might have simply told the user "You failed, please try again." When the monkey instead implicitly gives the feedback in *Super Monkey Bowling 2* by falling off into outer space, all psychophysiological measures indicated a sense of enjoyment by the players. As the researchers describe "thus, although the event in question represents a clear failure [by the player], several physiological indices showed that it elicited positively valenced high-arousal emotion (i.e., joy), rather than disappointment. This is an important finding suggesting that event characteristics such as visual impressiveness and excitingness may be more potent determinants of the emotional response of the player compared to the meaning of the event in terms of failure or success."

The researchers next created a condition in which players explicitly received negative feedback after a poor throw -- more inline with a traditional educational model of feedback. Contrary to their previous findings, they discovered that players "appeared to elicit depressed affect characterized by a combination of negative valence and low arousal. The data of the present study suggest that the valence of the emotional response to game events may vary as a function of the active participation of the player. Recall that a putatively negative event the player actively participated in (falling off the edge of the lane) elicited a positive emotional response. In contrast, [this event] characterized by passive reception of negative feedback elicited a negative emotional response. This finding is in line with our prior research showing that, when playing *Super Monkey Ball 2*, the valence of the emotional response was positive when the player actively participated in a putatively negative game event, but it was negative when the player passively perceived a replay of the same event."

These results suggest that when trying to design appropriate feedback mechanisms for learning content, we must be careful not to break the flow of a user's participation. Rather than breaking from a narrative in order to provide learners with meta-descriptive feedback, we should instead find ways to provide feedback that continues the learner's involvement with the content -- such as humorously playing out possible consequences of a wrong answer. Most importantly, we must rethink our notions of "failure" and incorrect responses to view them as a natural events still capable of continuing a narrative just as smoothly as a "correct" response (though, of course still giving enough context to indicate to the user that their response was not correct). Put plainly: educational designers must strive to make failure interesting.

(Wright)

### Extending Social Media for the Foreign Language Classroom

- B. **Jetzt sind Sie dran!** Now write a little composition about a person you know and what likes and doesn't like to do.

---

**My friend is very nice. She likes to eat ice cream. She does not do homework.**

---

One common goal in an introductory language class is to get students to feel comfortable writing about themselves and their friends in the L2. In some cases, students enjoy assignments such as writing about themselves, their summer, their friends and other personal information; in these cases, students may spontaneously write lengthy and creative compositions. In other cases, students may try to get by with the quickest answers possible to complete the assignment.

One might argue that the latter students are simply lazy or do not enjoy writing. Alternatively, we could speculate the opposite: writing about oneself is such a central activity in the lives of these students, that they have evolved it to be such a rich, multi-participant activity that they no longer see value in

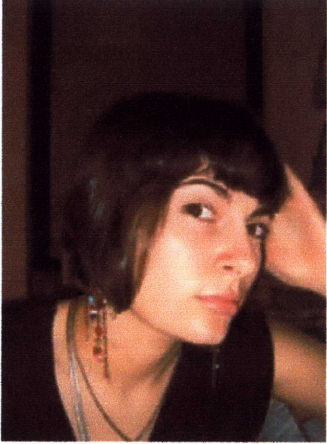
independently writing simplistic assignments for only a teacher to read. Consider the popular social networking website [myspace.com](http://myspace.com):

MySpace.com | [Home](#)

The Web  MySpace   [Search](#)


---

**Sami**



"Respek!"

Female  
21 years old  
PROVIDENCE,  
RHODE  
ISLAND  
United States

 Online Now!

Last Login:  
5/25/2006

View My: [Pics](#) | [Videos](#)

**Sami's Blurbs**

About me:

[how jedi are you?](#) :: by [lawrie malen](#) i'm from san fran that i love. i go to RISD, that's rhode island school of de industrial design, which means i design anything and ev broad and vague and i like it that way, but i enjoy the d things most of all and how they work together as a syst this gibborish?) as well as social responsibility and strivi the root of problems, which right now is comming throu with the sustainability movement. i'm a bit of a tomboy my girly side too ... you can see me riding my scooter d street when there' not too much snow or rain. i love to c play soccer (and often times these two are one in the sa design, and figuring out how to solve some of the world: a tangible way.and all that somewhat typical stuff holds too, like i love learning bout other cultures, i enjoy trave gotten to do much these days, maybe this summer) so i talking about myself now... ur turn please!

---



**Sami's Interests**

General	<a href="#">sustainability</a> , <a href="#">soccer</a> , <a href="#">school</a> , <a href="#">faith</a> : <a href="#">Baha'i</a> ; <a href="#">but interested in all faiths and philosophies too</a> , <a href="#">family</a> , <a href="#">friends</a> , <a href="#">design</a> , <a href="#">travel</a> , <a href="#">scooting (on my razor)</a> among other things...
Music	<a href="#">lately been embracin my jewish roots and listenin to Matisyahu</a> . <a href="#">Also pickn up some random street performer's CD seems to be serving well</a> . <a href="#">But when it comes to it, the purpose of music for me is to dance, and notin gets me goin like some hip hop and reggaetone</a> . <a href="#">though the lyrics are often dissappointing, you can't ignore them phat beats! but it's cool to just chill with music too</a> . <a href="#">and for that, my</a>

---

**Sami's Friends Comments**





Displaying 50 of 199 comments ( [View All](#) | [Add C](#) )

<a href="#">C-ROW</a>	5/17/2006 9:10 AM
  Online Now!	<p>june 9 is my only final! june 7 classes and a final! juen 12 wi in fres-yes Cali.....hey guess anthro professor (peruvian), M asked me to do a mural/painti backyard fence. paid!! woohoc have only 3 weeks to do it if i it done before summer..... can. not. wait. to. see. you!!!! mel</p> <p>two more weeks only! am i co correctly? nos vemos pronto! xoxoxoxoxoxo mel</p>

	<a href="#">bro's tracks are the dopest fo sho! yall should check him our (Razed High) on myspace. and throw ya hands for the bing bong bros too. ha!</a>
Movies	<a href="#">haven't seen a mind blowing movie in a while. so from the past: Matrix (the first one!) Waking life, and Fight Club.</a>
Television	<a href="#">i'm a recovering t.v. addict. but still got love for the tele. seinfeld, simpsons, quantum leap, ali q</a>
Books	<a href="#">been reading "classic slave narratives" EVERYONE should be reading these. African American history is American History so educate yourself. Cradle to Cradle is great for a new design paradigm, cuz we be approaching the new Industrial Revolution, so come prepared. and Flatland is an ol' fav too.</a>
Heroes	<a href="#">this.innerHTML);return false;"&gt;Borat&lt;/a&gt;</a>

Sami's Details

Status:	In a Relationship
Here for:	Networking, Friends
Orientation:	Straight
Hometown:	Earth Country
Religion:	Baha'i
Body type:	5' 6" / Athletic
Ethnicity:	White / Caucasian
Zodiac Sign:	Aquarius
Smoke / Drink:	No / No
Children:	Someday
Education:	In college
Income:	\$250,000 and Higher

<a href="#">Parisa</a> 	5/7/2006 9:14 PM  Hey Sami!! Long time no see! growing up when we used to p at the Baha'i Center? I remem we were in the kids room and drawing stuff and you drew th rose, I was so impressed.
<a href="#">Max is 15!!!</a> 	5/4/2006 5:09 PM  We most definately will be har miss my sami!! I am glad that remembered and even happie e-mailed me. I love it when I birthday messages because or birthday I get a lot but hten I so I get sad! Well maybe that exageration! But thank you fo remembering me.
<a href="#">They call me 'P FOB'</a> 	5/3/2006 8:27 PM  Hello my love, How r finals going? Or, have t yet? I was wondering, will I ge at all this summer?? When do for mexico...I'll try and visit ei
<a href="#">They call me 'P FOB'</a> 	4/13/2006 10:11 PM  I was reading your 'books' sec think you shoud read: "race a reunion:the civil war in americ memory". I am reading it for American Political Developmer can't put it down! xoxo
<a href="#">Aparna</a>	3/31/2006 8:50 AM  That's great... NY sounds fun. heard back on any of your inte applications yet?



► [Overview of Myspace](#), one of [a number](#) of social networking websites [external link]

► [Medieval Space](#), example of what happens to a history class when put in a myspace-like environment [external link]

It is ironic that, at the same time foreign language teachers are searching for ways to get kids more engaged in writing about themselves, other educators are looking to [ban kids](#) from doing just that. With [80,000,000 users on myspace.com](#) alone, social networking is clearly *not* a niche activity that will go away if we ignore or discourage it. Rather, the holy grail for educators will be if we could combine that enthusiasm with a learning outcome.

Bringing any pop culture artifact into a classroom is always a challenge. Often the ways in which youth interact with popular culture is so intricate and nuanced, that it becomes impossible for curricular designers to incorporate artifacts without destroying the enthusiasm youth have for them in the process. Often this is because in order to align classroom activities with learning objectives, educational designers find they need to selectively extract pieces of a pop culture artifact and then force them into a curricular structure that goes against the way students interact with an artifact outside of school. However, when done in the L2, most of the activities youth engage in around social networking software *already* align naturally with an introductory language curriculum.

The simplest pedagogical intervention would be to [find](#) a social networking site popular in the target country but not the learner country\*, then have students explore interest groups in the target culture. While this might by itself be an interesting activity, if we apply the various principles outlined in the document so far, we could use social networking software to creatively connect a number of the different themes discussed so far.

► [Transmedia Improv: a case study of mixing Web 2.0 media to rapidly create a Communicative 2.0 activity](#)

### Exploring Mobile Media

In early 2005, The Kaiser Family Foundation published [the results](#) of one of the largest studies on youth media usage to date. The study aimed to track the media consumption habits in the daily lives of a nationally representative sample of over 2,000 youth. For many, the report was expected to provide empirical evidence of the corrupting influences of new media on the lives of youth. Instead, one of the primary headlines of the report read "Young People who Spend the Most Time with Media Also Report Spending More Time With Their Parents, Being Physically Active, and Pursuing other Hobbies", highlighting one of the key findings that "Contrary to most expectations, it does not appear that spending time with media takes away from the time children spend in other pursuits; in fact, it seems that those young people who spend the most time using media are also those whose lives are the most full with family, friends, sports, and other interests."

So far I have argued that stories, play, socializing and learning are core activities that each have a fundamentally shared sense of enjoyment across all human beings. In each case designing media that spans multiple activities is exponentially more difficult than doing so for only one activity at a time. Yet, when done

right, each activity holds a powerful ability to re-enforce and enhance the others activities. To this list, I would like to add physical activity/mobility.

Unlike learning/social/story, mobility is not yet a ubiquitous component of successful mainstream vide games. However, the immense success of otherwise simplistic games like Dance Dance Revolution, and even the popularity of activities such as laser tag, hint that this is currently an under-exploited area. Additionally, if we look at Nintendo's preview video [click "fresh games experience" from [here](#)] of their upcoming game system, we can see that all mainstream games (Nintendo ones at least) will be moving in this direction.

In reality, the greatest single source of inactivity in the lives of youth is actually the 6+ hours they spend in desks for class and homework. As any language teacher using TPR methodologies will testify, this is not because it is the most effective way to create a learning experience. Rather, it is the easiest to design for and to control. As language educators have often been at the forefront of incorporating communicative and physical activities that break the mold of a traditional classroom design, it becomes increasingly important that we learn from the innovations taking place in the entertainment world to find further inspiration for more innovations in mobile learning.

► [Augmented Reality Games: Moving, Beyond Text Messaging Vocabulary to Students](#)

## Conclusions

Historically, education has prided itself as a discipline that enables students to "stand on the shoulders of giants", scaffolding them to see and accomplish entirely new tasks. Today, however, it is the various elements of our popular culture that have learned how to effectively build upon and remix one another to create unprecedentedly rich media experiences. Should we choose to use it, however, the same modular foundation upon which popular media is constructed also provides us the ideal framework for affordably developing rich curricular materials consonant with the latest foreign language acquisition theories. Additionally, it allows us to implement a number of principles that work to address some of the criticisms and challenges of a number of communicative based teaching practices (Natural Approach, CBI, TBLT).

### Teacher Agency

Perhaps the challenge most recognized by theorists today is the need for curriculum designers to develop language curriculum flexible enough to allow for meaningful teacher agency.

*The artificial dichotomy between theory and practice has also led us to believe that teachers would gladly follow the principles and practices of established methods. They rarely do. They seem to know better. They know that none of the established methods can be realized in their purest forms in the actual classroom primarily because they are not derived from their classroom but are artificially transplanted into it. They reveal their dissatisfaction with method through their actions in the classroom. Classroom-oriented research carried out in the last two decades (e.g. Kumaravadivelu, 1993a; Nunan, 1987; Swaffer, Arens, & Morgan, 1982) have revealed four interrelated facts:*

- *Teachers who claim to follow a particular method do not conform to its theoretical principles and classroom procedures at all;*
- *teachers who claim to follow different methods often use the same classroom procedures;*
- *teachers who claim to follow the same method often use different procedures, and*
- *teachers develop and follow in their classroom a carefully crafted sequence of activities not necessarily associated with any particular method.*

*In other words, teachers seem to be convinced that no single theory of learning and no single method of teaching will help them confront the challenges of everyday teaching. They use their own intuitive ability and experimental knowledge to decide what works and what does not work. There is thus a*

*significant variance between what theorists advocate and what teachers do in their classroom.*

*([Understanding Language Teaching -- Kumaravadivelu](#), pg. 166)*

*While approaches tend to allow for varying interpretations in practice, methods typically prescribe for teachers what and how to teach. Teachers have to accept on faith the claims or theories underlying the method and apply them to their own practice. Good teaching is regarded as correct use of the method and its prescribed principles and techniques. Roles of the teachers and learners, as well as the type of activities and teaching techniques to be used in the classroom, are generally prescribed. The role of the teacher is marginalized; his or her role is to understand the method and apply its principles correctly. Likewise, learners are sometimes viewed as the passive recipients of the method and must submit themselves to its regime of exercises and activities. Absent from the traditional view of methods is a concept of learner-centeredness and teacher creativity: an acknowledgment that learners bring different learning styles and preferences to the learning process, that they should be consulted in the process of developing a teaching program, and that teaching methods must be flexible and adaptive to learners' needs and interests. At the same time, there is often little room for the teacher's own personal initiative and teaching style. The teacher must submit himself or herself to the method ...*

*[continued below]*

One language educator at a conference suggested to me "we shouldn't worry so much about the problems with textbooks, because, really, no good language teacher actually uses them anyway." While this may work for experienced teachers with enough free time to construct their own activities, clearly we should also explore possible ways in which curricular designers could have a meaningful role as well.

*However, methods offer some advantages over approaches, and this doubtless explains their appeal. Because of the general nature of approaches, there is often no clear application of their assumptions and principles in the classroom, as we have seen with a number of the approaches described in this book. Much is left to the individual teacher's interpretation, skill, and expertise. Consequently, there is often no clear right or wrong way of teaching according to an approach and no prescribed body of practice waiting to be implemented. This lack of detail can be a source of frustration and irritation for the teachers, particularly those with little training or expertise. Methods, on the other hand, solve many of the problems beginning teachers have to struggle with because many of the basic decisions about what to teach and how to teach it have already been made for them.*

*([Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching -- Richards and Rodgers](#) pg. 245)*

After a long history of oscillating between methods that allow industry to systematize and deliver useful contributions to the language classroom and approaches that foster the contributions of teachers and students -- it is becoming increasingly clear that we need to find ways of achieving both goals. What is key in overcoming this is to recognize that our present struggle is only a small part of a much larger struggle that has always existed between mass culture and folk culture. Outside of the classroom, we have always had choices like [the Matrix](#) or [the Meatrix](#), [Pirates of the Caribbean 2](#) or the [ask a ninja review of it off youtube](#), the latest NBC sitcom or heading down to the local improv theater, playing [monopoly](#) or playing [mafia](#) (Or going further back, reading a book or listening to a tale sung by the local bard). In each case, a medium with a high development cost, but the ability to be mass replicated through a culture, was pitted against folk culture which generally had a lower production quality, but was more responsive to its audience and participatory in its nature.

Today we live in a particularly interesting time, an era of [convergence](#). After seemingly being subjugated by mass culture, folk culture today has rebounded and become more prominently visible than ever before -- thanks largely to the numerous communication channels and participatory practices enabled by web 2.0



technologies. Yet mass media industries are hardly giving up. Rather than continuing to attempt to overshadow folk culture, many industries are now beginning to transform themselves to become "platform" providers that hope to provide tools to facilitate participatory practices.

*Perched on the edge of a bright white power sofa on the supernaturally quiet eighth floor of the News Corporation's global headquarters, the last thing Rupert Murdoch looks like is a fire-eyed revolutionary. Starched cuffs. Courtly manner. A month past his 75th birthday. But then he starts talking. "To find something comparable, you have to go back 500 years to the printing press, the birth of mass media – which, incidentally, is what really destroyed the old world of kings and aristocracies. Technology is shifting power away from the editors, the publishers, the establishment, the media elite. Now it's the people who are taking control." And he's **smiling**.*

*Hold on a minute. Rupert Murdoch is the media elite. His Sixth Avenue office, lined with shelves devoted to dead-tree properties like London's The Sun and muted video monitors tuned to news channels including News Corp.'s Fox and rival CNN, sits squarely within jaywalking distance of NBC, CBS, Time Warner, McGraw-Hill, and Viacom. But these days, midtown Manhattan's valley of old media dinosaurs is besieged by a Cambrian explosion of digitally empowered life-forms: podcasters, bloggers, burners, P2P buccaneers, mashup artists, phonecam paparazzi. Viewers are vanishing, shareholders are in revolt, advertisers are Googling for the exit.*

*Twilight of the moguls, right? Not for the T. rex of mass culture. "We're looking at the ultimate opportunity," Murdoch says. "The Internet is media's golden age."*

*Of course, someone juggling \$60 billion worth of TV studios, printing presses, and broadcast satellites would say that. But Murdoch has been putting his money where his mouth is – and it is his money: His family controls almost a third of News Corp.'s voting shares. Over the past year, he has spent nearly \$1.5 billion on new-breed Internet companies, including online communities devoted to gaming, sports, and movies, plus a startling eruption of youthful energy known as MySpace. And he has put his lieutenants on notice: The days of top-down, force-fed, one-size-fits-all media are over. The new imperative is to deliver precisely what audiences want, when and where they want it.*

[\[Continue reading full article\]](#)

*Think about the cold dread the MTV chief and her coterie of aging hipster executives felt last summer when they heard Rupert Murdoch had outbid MTV parent Viacom for Myspace.com. The exploding social networking community of 54 million registered young people would have been a perfect fit with MTV. Instead, for \$580 million, it went to Murdoch, a steely competitor but hardly an arbiter of hip. The Murdoch deal was no mere acquisition; it was a red flag. In a rare stern message to her senior staff, according to one executive present, McGrath warned that MTV could no longer afford to miss opportunities like Myspace. Not when old business models were blowing up and every week brought a new outlet for doing what MTV had done so well for years -- capturing the niche.*

*So McGrath has declared "a digital Marshall Plan." It signals the end of the one-screen company. The troops must now deliver services across new broadband channels, over cell phones, and via video games. Because MTV is so tapped into its consumers -- "we're more inside the heads of our audience than anybody else" -- advertisers will stay with MTV, she insists. McGrath is willing to shake things up, too ... Her mantra: "The smartest thing we can do when confronted by something truly creative is to get out of the way." That's pretty much what happened when two young producers came to McGrath in the early 1990s with a new idea for a dramatic series that didn't require hiring actors or writers. McGrath was intrigued. The idea was to film seven people living in a New York City loft over several months, following the soap opera of their daily lives and dropping a soundtrack of new tunes behind it. MTV's The Real World debuted in 1992, and reality TV was born. Its 17th season is shooting now in Key West.*

[\[Can MTV Stay Cool? -- Businessweek\]](#)

Perhaps one of the most insightful case of a media industry adapting to the participatory age comes from the games industry.

### (Wright)

In the early days of the web, most media content followed a publishing model roughly in-line with every other publishing model since the advent of moveable type; it was horrible. Directory services like *Yahoo* would hire legions of editors to sift through the web and slowly write guides. Only a few products had substantive reviews available for them, generally written by staff writers for online magazines. Video game developers were still mostly guessing at what players really wanted -- and weren't really able to do anything about it once they found out after their games had already shipped.

After earlier attempts at creating automated search engines produced mediocre results, Google struck gold by utilizing [an algorithm](#) that essentially generates its results based on the work already done unwittingly by every web designer in the world. The final nail in the coffin for the old edited directory model came when [del.icio.us](#) devised a way to intelligently generate online directories based simply off the bookmarks users worldwide were keeping for themselves ([shadows](#) then expanded this model). Amazon.com reshaped the way we get information about products by offering data generated through the actions of other customers. And, of course, video game developers learned to develop vast catalogs of niche content tailored to individual players by adopting '[pollinated content](#)' models in which creating content for other players to use in their games is a part of the game itself. In each of these models, if something is wrong, the users have the ability to fix it. Furthermore, the process of fixing is either interesting (i.e. video games) or part of a task they would still be doing otherwise (i.e. creating bookmarks).

Today, if teachers are dissatisfied with a method used in a language product, their main channel to "[reveal their dissatisfaction with \[it is\] through their actions in the classroom](#)", or to make their own materials. However, if a school district keeps buying the same problematic materials, a teacher's dissatisfaction with mass-produced curriculum or extra efforts to create their own materials will never have any impact outside of their own classroom. At best, they can contact a textbook representative requesting changes, similar to the way early web users tried to submit suggestions to the *Yahoo* editors.

In the current linear paradigm, content begins with a curriculum designer, is appropriated by a teacher, then delivered to students. Going forward, we will need to devise ways in which mass-produced materials can capitalize on any work done by teachers and students by automatically updating and expanding themselves based on usage of the product. Here, the role of the curriculum designer is not only to provide sample activities, but also to provide the tools that they used to create those sample activities, such that significant derivations can be made by others. [Collaborative filtering](#) and [folksonomy](#) technologies would become critical in making sense of all



the derivations (both of which are offered by the free [Drupal](#) framework). Teachers, then, are offered a wide palette of variants to rapidly configure materials that best suite the dynamics of their classroom and offered tools to make adjustments without needing to be bogged down in production tasks (unless systems are set in place such that those production tasks are designed to be done in the L2 by students). And, of course, students are elevated to a far more meaningful role.



## Student Agency

In spite of whatever innovations we may make to the language learning process, ultimately, the only result that really matters is if the student leaves the class with a positive relationship towards the L2. If a student learns to recall 1,000 vocab words and apply 100 grammar points, that still only represents a fraction of the full complexity of a foreign language; if in the process of learning a language the student becomes frustrated or develops an antagonistic attitude towards learning, most knowledge of the L2 will be forgotten once the class concludes and the whole experience will have done more harm than good. Conversely, if students [derive enjoyment even from failure](#) and begin participating in L2 activities as part of their everyday life, all other learning goals will follow naturally.

Recognizing this, much of the literature recently has emphasized encouraging autonomous learners. In particular, the use of authentic materials is often encouraged to stimulate autonomous learning.

*Activities based around authentic texts [...] can play a key role in enhancing positive attitudes to learning, in promoting the development of a wide range of skills, and in enabling students to work independently of the teacher. In other words, they can play a key role in the promotion of learner autonomy (McGarry 1995: 3).*

*Exposure to, and familiarity with authentic texts also help instill confidence in the face of the TL (Little 1997: 231), an important factor in autonomous language learning, as well as spurring learners towards authentic sources. Authentic sources, in turn, tend to stimulate learners to further independent discovery and learning.*

*[[Designing Authenticity into Language Learning Materials -- Freda Mishan](#)]*

Unfortunately, a culture does not reside inside texts or artifacts: if I give my friends in America a cricket bat and they use it to play baseball, I can hardly claim I was successful in sharing anything of Australian culture with them.\*

*Early Communicative coursebooks were notorious for being besprinkled with realia; broadcasting schedules, bus timetables, newspaper snippets and the like. This use of realia has been accused of making for a 'touristic' rather than a cultural approach (Shanahan 1997: 165), one in which 'culture is conveyed in an anecdotal nonreflective manner' (Kramsch 1998: 82) and which diminishes genuine cultural artefacts into token realia. Kramsch maintains that the cultural authenticity of a piece of realia, a menu, for instance, 'derives from [its] being embedded in a host of social and symbolic relations in the C2 - price of food, taxes and tips, restaurant going habits of customers' (1998: 84), so that it is meaningless as a stand-alone artefact of the culture. This lack of socio-cultural context can even be misleading, according to Nostrand: 'Authentic texts from one culture may give a false impression to a student from another unless they are presented in an authentic context which makes it clear precisely what they exemplify' (Nostrand 1989: 49). The need, in general, for learners to achieve a rounded picture of the language and-culture- cultural awareness - as an integral part of language learning, is elaborated in Chapter 3.*

*[[ibid](#)]*

One line of thinking argues that we simply need to learn how to decode artifacts in order to extract culture.

*The cultural element present in authentic texts is, of course, not necessarily explicit. As Tomalin and Stempleski point out: 'Little benefit will result from merely displaying a cultural document or artefact in class. Students need to be trained to extract appropriate information from the material' (1993: 8). Rather like a page written in invisible ink, the cultural message is there to be read, but only if one has learned how to make the invisible writing appear. Such a skill is known as cultural awareness and involves sensitivity to the impact of culturally-induced behaviour on language use and communication (Tomalin and Stempleski 1993: 5). The implication is that such awareness will lead to empathy - an important step in successful language learning being the capacity to identify with the target language culture (see Chapter 2 Sections 2.3 and 2.4 'Affect').*

[*ibid*]

With today's global culture, it becomes daunting to think about how to even begin to decode culture from artifacts. Consider a Japanese child trying to learn about American culture at the turn of the millennium. No matter how skilled he may be at decoding American kid culture, he would have a difficult time doing so from a packet of pokémon cards. Alternatively we could limit ourselves to only use [residual culture](#) artifacts tied to the historical development of the L2 culture, however, that does little today for our Japanese boy when he tries playing pokémon with his same-age American peers and finds they use their cards in an entirely foreign manner.

While numerous other challenges with using authentic but dead materials could be highlighted, we should instead take a step back and reflect upon why we use authentic materials in the first place and what possibilities the use of live materials could offer the language learning experience. Ultimately, a culture is an entity formed by people's [participation](#) within it -- not just the artifacts they produce.

*The issue of context has, meanwhile, continued to prove the most problematic recurring theme in the whole authenticity debate. From the outset, there was the preoccupation that texts are de-authenticated if their original context is tampered with. On a deeper level, 'original context' came to be identified as a unique and therefore un-replicable occurrence: 'An authentic text is by definition a unique thing. It represents one speaker/ writer's communication to one particular audience at a given moment' (Morrow 1977: 14). 'A text can only be truly authentic [...] in the context for which it was originally written' (Hutchinson and Waters 1987: 15). 'Instances of language use are by definition context-dependent and hence unique' (Bachmann 1990: 310). By equating 'authentic' with 'unique', then re-using such text makes it counterfeit: 'By using it in a classroom for teaching purposes, we are destroying this authenticity' (Morrow 1977: 14). The logical conclusion to this argument is that 'the concept of 'authentic' in language teaching terms [is] unattainable [...]. We cannot recreate absolute authenticity in the texts we use' (Morrow 1977: 1415).*

...

*H. G. Widdowson, has also consistently argued that the use of authentic texts in language learning is a contradiction, since the language forfeits its authenticity once taken out of its context: 'Reality [...] does not travel with the text [...] What makes the text real is that it has been produced as appropriate to a particular set of contextual conditions. But because these conditions cannot be replicated, the reality disappears' (Widdowson 1998: 71112).*

[*ibid*]

While it is easy to criticize textbook publishers for only sprinkling authentic artifacts into curricular materials, to be constructive, theorists need to offer practical alternatives. Short of finding a way to fly all students to the target country, this can prove extremely challenging. For adult learners, one option is simply to teach classroom culture.

*The centrality of the pedagogical task is consistent with the position that the pedagogical context itself*

*as an authentic environment (see Breen's Criterion number 4 above). 'We must' writes Taylor, 'acknowledge that the classroom itself is a real place' (1994). It is unquestionably a reality, as Hughes points out, for millions of children who spend a large portion of their childhood within one (1981: 7). The pedagogical situation itself, it can be argued, is at least as authentic as that of the post office or bank so enamoured of communicative dialoguists: 'We must recognise that the classroom has its own reality and naturalness [...] participants in the language classroom create their own authenticity there as they do elsewhere' (Taylor 1994, see also Kramersch et al. 2000: 79).*

*[ibid]*

For adolescent learners, while it is true that they spend a large portion of their time inside a classroom, it's not necessarily a place where they *want* to spend more time. Some teachers have sought to use the internet to provide authentic contexts like an online bank or foreign postal service. Still, paying bills is also not the first activity adolescent students are rushing to do once school gets out (unless it is for their *Sims 2* characters. For this reason, these tasks should be adapted for use within a [playful approach](#)). If our goal is autonomous learning, ultimately we would like students to learn to participate in activities they would engage in naturally had they grown up in the L2 country -- and to do so in a way that they can continue participating in once the class is over. By taking [live materials](#) and then using web 2.0 API's or creating [proxy programs](#) that remix pedagogical scaffolds inside the materials, we offer students the agency to navigate directly through the L2 culture for themselves. By using sites such as L2 [social networking applications](#), we provide students activities that can continue long after the class ends.

Besides learner autonomy and context transfer, the use of live materials and remixing addresses the much more important issue of basic respect for the learner. When trying to create a learning environment from scratch, production constraints often force us to take measures that have zero pedagogical value and violate fundamental principles of learner respect.

*Answering questions, particularly when the questioner already knows the answer, is an inauthentic and mechanistic procedure, its rationale probably has more to do with classroom management than pedagogy (Long 1991: 45). For example, in one task in a current resource book, learners are asked to read an episode from Steinbeck's novel *The Pearl* in which a couple watch a scorpion drop onto their baby's cot (Eckstut and Lubelska, *Widely Read*, 1989). They then have to answer the question (among others) 'Why do you think Kino and Juana were so frightened?' (ibid.: 52). This is not to dismiss the importance of checking comprehension of texts, but to point out that this has to be done in ways that are respectful of learners' sensitivities and intelligence, via questions or tasks that are appropriate to the texts.*

*[ibid]*

While questions like this have probably never been particularly respectful of the learner's intelligence, if we reflect on the current world for students outside of school we can see why this would be particularly detrimental today. This is perhaps best illustrated if we contrast the struggle a crack team of elite savant puzzle solvers playing the puzzle game *Midnight Madness* go through with the unprecedentedly quick problem solving ability of a large network of amateur players from all age levels playing Alternate Reality Games like *The Beast*.

► [The New Yorker: Meet the Marquis de Sade of the Puzzle World](#) [External Link]

► [ILoveBee's/The Beast Difficulty Level](#) [alias]

► See Also: [The Wisdom of Crowds, James Surowiecki](#) [External Link]

Back when schools were formed in the industrial age, models of intelligence emphasized an individual's ability to autonomously work through and solve problems. In our current networked society, in many cases the intelligence of a given individual is nearly irrelevant as compared to their ability to work in unity and combine each individual's knowledge with one another to form a far greater [collective intelligence](#) network.

► [Howard Rheingold](#) outlines [his account of how everyday citizens intelligently using SMS networking technology were able to topple the Philippino President Joseph Estrada](#) [Excerpt from the book Smart Mobs]

For youth who regularly participate in networks of [one form](#) or [another](#) outside of school, doing so becomes a core part of their identities that can't simply be put on hold for the duration of a school day. [Jane McGonigal highlights](#) one of the forum postings made by one of the players of *The Beast*.

*The 7500+ people in this group ... we are all one. We have made manifest the idea of an unbelievably intricate intelligence. We are one mind, one voice ... made of 7500+ neurons... We sit back and look at our monitors, and our keyboards...our window to this vast collective consciousness... we are not alone. We are not one person secluded from the rest of the world...kept apart by the technology we have embraced. We have become a part of it through the technology. We have become a part of something greater than ourselves [41].*

When we ask students to quietly work independently to answer questions like "Why do you think Kino and Juana were so frightened?" we manage to simultaneously strip them of their collective identities/intelligence AND insult their remaining individual intelligence. Particularly if our goal is to create autonomous learners, homework assignments should in theory have the most meaningful role in the language learning process. So far, innovative teachers exploring new possibilities afforded by the Web are finding numerous activities that successfully respect individual intelligence's.

*Its fluid, ever-changing nature is one of the most motivating aspects of the Web to exploit for language learning. The example has already been given above of online newspapers which carry breaking news stories more up-to-the-minute than any other news media except, perhaps, TV networks such as Sky News. Language learners can have the satisfaction not only of doing real-world tasks such as redrafting incoming news information as written or oral news reports (see above), but of knowing that they may actually be beating their real-life equivalents to it.*

*[Designing Authenticity into Language Learning Materials -- Freda Mishan]*

Yet simply *knowing* that they may be beating real-life equivalents may not be satisfying if outside of school they can *be* the real-life equivalents by participating in larger collective intelligence efforts.

► [Wikinews in the London Bombings and Hurricane Katrina](#) [Excerpt from the [ProjectNML](#) Whitepaper]

By having students [participate in live sites such as Wikipedia and Wikinews](#), we send the message that if they produce work of a high enough quality it can potentially impact thousands of people (and if they produce low quality work it will be ignored or washed away).

Ultimately, rather than viewing the classroom as a protected sandbox divorced from real-life, we need to identify instances where students have expertise in a specific area and then offer them opportunities to share that expertise with speakers of the L2. As [Rebecca Black's work](#) would suggest, this expertise should be something other than L1 knowledge. [The Cultura project](#) at MIT provides an excellent model of how to do this for contrasting general cultural differences with students in an L2 classroom. Teachers looking to create live activities in specific areas or who wish to connect with non-classroom L2 participants can find numerous web tools that are freely available and ready to use. [Wikipedia](#) and [Wikinews](#) offer avenues for working with articles and news respectively. [Google Earth](#) allows students to annotate local geographic data to create perhaps the most comprehensive L2 tourist guides for their hometown available (individual teachers with medium or low technological expertise may prefer the geographic tools in [Ning.com](#) for this purpose; textbook publishers or programmers may want to try connecting Google [Earth/Maps](#) to [Drupal](#)). And of course, L2 fansites for pretty much any pop media phenomenon today offer online forums where students can post their opinions on a topic relevant to them.

Of course, not all curriculum will result in a real world product. In these cases, we need to also respect 'play' as a complex and meaningful activity

► [Playing Politics in Alphaville](#): Case study of a middle school player of *The Sims Online* running for President of 'Alphaville.' While she can't vote in real life, she is

worthy of a central role in designing learning experiences.

extremely actively engaged in thinking about politics and democracy by being given a meaningful opportunity to do so in the game. [External link]

## A Playful Approach

If our goal is to create language classes that re-enforce the activities youth are already engaging in outside of an academic context, we need to help them operate in activities of play, storytelling and socializing in the L2. Of course, when done right, any one of these activities will naturally draw upon the others. Given this, play seems to be a useful starting point for thinking about curriculum development -- both because of its readily available production tools and its alignment with current Task-Based theories and practices.

The terms "games", "problem solving" and "tasks" have surfaced continually throughout the literature on language pedagogy over the years. As mentioned [earlier](#), games are essentially collections of problems to be solved\*. Similarly, if we design tasks together such that each individual task connects to the next and has a meaningful relation to a larger context, they become games: having a teacher tell you to answer a telephone is, by itself, a task; having someone or something on the other end of the telephone that then gives you a scrambled radio fragment to decrypt to get a GPS coordinate to get another payphone call in a closed down Alaskan library to give you another message is a game\*.

In other words, well designed language learning games should include all the benefits of a TBLT assignment -- since from a functional perspective they are simply a meaningful concatenation of tasks. Additionally, a play-centered approach to curricular design encourages the extensive [learning that comes with play, reduces the affective barrier of failure](#) and provides a robust framework for non-linear sequencing. The downside is, naturally, the increase in production costs required to produce a play experience even remotely comparable to those designed by professional outside-of-school entertainment media developers. Yet this can be dramatically reduced by intelligently drawing from game design production techniques and remixing already existing components.

Ultimately, our goal when encouraging play in the language classroom is to bring students into what [ludologists](#) call the "magic circle." In their book [Rules of Play](#), game designers [Katie Salen](#) and [Eric Zimmerman](#) use the magic circle as a metaphor for the psychological shift that takes place when humans or animals engage in activities of "meaningful play." Once inside the magic circle, players shift into a play-state in which there is a shared understanding among participants that everyone is inside a game and that they are free to

*Since input cannot be utilized by adults for acquisition if the affective filter is high, the value of all classroom activities is measured by the degree to which the affective filter is lowered ... for us the most important goal of the early stages of the Natural Approach is to lower the affective filter.*

[\[The Natural Approach -- Krashen & Terrell\]](#)

be adventurous in transgressing boundaries that might be prohibitive outside of the magic circle. As they describe it, you "experience a *protective frame* which stands between you and the 'real' world and its problems, creating an enchanted zone in which, in the end, you are confident that no harm can come."

Additionally, the magic circle functions to create meaning out of constraints that ordinarily would be unnatural.

*If the goal of a boxing match is to make the other fighter stay down for a count of 10, the easiest way to accomplish this goal would be to take a gun and shoot the other boxer in the head. This, of course, is not the way that the game of Boxing is played. Instead, as Suits points out, boxers put on padded gloves and only strike their opponents in very limited and stylized ways.*

*Suppose I make it my purpose to get a small round object into a hole in the ground as efficiently as possible. Placing it in the hole with my hand would be a natural means to adopt. But surely I would not*

*take a stick with a piece of metal on one end of it, walk three or four hundred yards away from the hole, and then attempt to propel the ball into the hole with the stick. That would not be technically intelligent. But such an undertaking is an extremely popular game, and the foregoing way of describing it evidently shows how games differ from technical activities.*

This should be of particular interest to language curriculum designers.

*The concept of 'purposeful' or 'meaningful' communication became central to the methodological implementation of CLT. Many of the by-now classic activities conceived to implement the approach, e. g. information-share, information-pooling, jig-saw listening, text or map completion, following directions or instructions and such like (see activities described in Littlewood 1981: 2236, Johnson 1979: 201, Brumfit and Johnson 1979: 20711), have to be critically reassessed, however, for our more authenticity-oriented era. This means keeping in mind the other factors regulating task authenticity, especially adherence to original communicative purpose, appropriacy and realism. Assessed in this light, many Communicative activities deflate into mere pedagogical tasks. This is the case with such typical Communicative activities as listening to an audio piece and rearranging a jumbled printed text, drawing something from someone else's description and converting drawings into written instructions. While the communication has a purpose in the narrowest sense of completing the set task, the other factors are absent.*

*[Designing Authenticity into Language Learning Materials -- Freda Mishan]*

Interestingly, each of the activities mentioned above were performed by players of [I Love Bees](#) throughout the course of the game (albeit variants with infinitely more complexity and challenge than would be found in any classroom). It is perhaps paradoxical that in a classroom outside of a magic circle we struggle to create meaning out of these tasks, yet they exist as a natural part of our authentic culture when circumscribed within the magic circle of *I Love Bees*. This is because, in essence, the role of a good game designer is really to create meaningful communication out of otherwise meaningless tasks.

*Learning to create great game experiences for players-experiences that have meaning and are meaningful-is one of the goals of successful game design, perhaps the most important one. We call this goal the design of meaningful play, the core concept of our approach. This concept is so critical to the rest of this chapter that we are going to repeat ourselves: **the goal of successful game design is the creation of meaningful play.***

*[Rules of Play -- Salen & Zimmerman]*

Clearly, then, it behooves language curriculum designers to understand the craft of game design. Salen and Zimmerman outline two characteristics they consider crucial for game activities to successfully build meaningful play: they need to be 'discernable' and 'integrated.' By discernable, they emphasize that any action a player takes needs to result in clear and discernable feedback about the consequences of that action. This has always been a challenge for communicative classrooms where the main source of feedback for tasks is often fellow students who are equally uncertain about how they should respond to actions. However, by using [well designed interfaces](#) inside [collaborative multiplayer games](#), we can greatly increase the discernability of [rich feedback](#).

Similarly, integration and sequencing have received considerable attention in SLA literature over the years. Looking retrospectively, many would consider the [for curricular designers] convenient linear breakdown of an old audio-lingual syllabus to have been a horrible mistake that managed to systematically produce the worst possible organization of materials for students. Thanks to the efforts of numerous communicative language advocates in the '70s and subsequent proponents of contextual sequencing, the organization of curricular materials today appears to be received by students far better than earlier ones. Still, if we look closely, much of our curricular organization remains largely "[logistical rather than logical.](#)" In recent years, cognitive psychologists have developed far more robust models of sequencing and learning. Perhaps unsurprising for anyone studying the role of play within cultures, many of their models confirm that Play is



an excellent organizational principle for the way human beings learn.

### ► [Cognition, Learning and Play](#)

## Communicative 2.0

For anybody who followed the initial euphoria (by parents & theorists) and subsequent collapse of the now defunct 'edutainment' games market in the early nineties for general out-of-class educational software, the approach being used for popular (by teachers & theorists) in-class Computer Aided Language Learning applications such as Quia and Hot Potatoes should look frightfully similar. While, back then, there were no shortage of educational game designers -- none of them could come remotely close to competing with the best selling (at that time) entertainment title *Civilization*. Ultimately, the schism between fun products and educational products grew to the point that educational designers simply had to concede that they had neither the budget nor the appropriate development schedules to compete with entertainment games. They either went out of business or shifted to focusing on younger demographics. Not until more than a decade later, when teachers who had grown up playing *Civilization* in college entered the profession, did we then find out that actually, *Civilization*, offered unprecedentedly rich learning content [that could enable kids to learn complex concepts many years beyond their level. We simply had to use it.](#)

In 1997, Levy [surveyed CALL practitioners](#) looking to determine the greatest roadblocks to successful CALL deployment. Despite a number of different responses, the two answers 'Lack of time' and 'Lack of funding' alone accounted for the majority of perceived blockages. In 2006, he published [a book](#) outlining much of the current state of CALL. In it, we can find a reoccurring theme of teachers and CALL designers combating their students.

*In their paper, Appel and Mullen (2000) described the pedagogical advantages of their program over traditional e-mail tandem learning. Because students have password access only to their own account, they are not able to write messages to anyone other than their partner. As Appel and Mullen pointed out, "In this way, the environment is specifically oriented to the task of language learning, and concentration is focused, preventing the usage of this environment for other purposes which may be a distraction for the students and more properly accomplished through the use of their personal email accounts"*

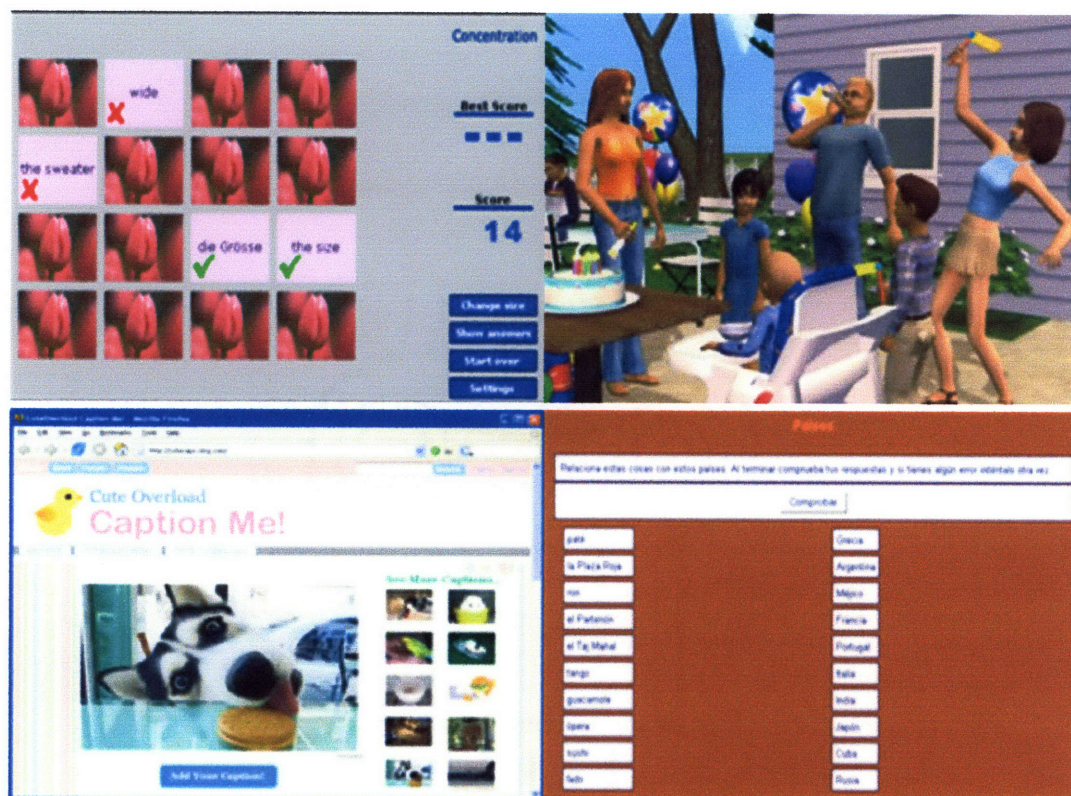
...

*Hacking into the source code to view the answers to questions is perhaps an inevitable aspect of using online quizzes (Arniel & Holmes, 2003). As described earlier in the chapter, client-side activities such as Hot Potatoes embed the answers to the questions in the questions within the source code, making it possible for learners with sufficient computing knowledge to access this information. The problem can be alleviated to a degree through the use of server-side quizzes, but this has the potential to reduce the interactivity of the activity, because information must be sent back and forth to the server rather than accessing all the information from one location, as is done in client-side applications[\*]. As Arniel and Holmes noted, rather than technical solutions, the ideal key to solving this form of cheating is to make sure that supervision of the quizzes is sufficient to discourage such behavior.*

When we find ourselves advertising our need to ban kids from being able to access sites like Myspace so that they are forced to instead use our self-created CALL applications, it should perhaps be read as a sign that we need to instead [rethink our approach to CALL](#). Similarly, if a student finds that hacking the source code to a hot potato provides them with a more stimulating challenge than [matching tasks](#) that are [otherwise only found in a chimpanzee lab](#), then rather than expending extensive effort reprogramming our hot potatoes with server-side code, we should recognize that the cheapest solution is simply to translate the source code into French\* and let students hack away at it all they like instead of making them go through the potato.

With autonomous learning now recognized as a central goal in the literature, it should also be recognized that any need to restrict students from engaging in more interesting activities is counter productive and could not possibly be sustained once a class ends. Additionally, it is likely to worsen the students affinity for

that language -- the single most important contribution we can give students for long-term success. If we look side-by-side at many of the computer activities youth are engaging with outside of class, with the placed-on-a-screen activities regularly cited as computer aided language learning popular among teachers, we can see that the schism between fun products and commonly used CALL products has widened as deep as it had once been between *Math Blasters* and *Civilization*.



With *The Sims 2* as the most popular game ever and social web applications like those created with Ning.com exploding in popularity, it is likely that a decade from now some descendant of these products will still be popular. It is perhaps inevitable, then, that teachers who are in college now will push to have these experiences incorporated into foreign language learning. Yet, what happens in the intervening decade?

With the rise of the internet, our world today is radically different from even a decade ago. It is my belief that we can leverage these advances to greatly facilitate the evolution of actual communicative approaches into digital spaces. At the core of this is a recognition that meaningful communication is already happening inside entertainment media not explicitly designed for educational purposes. Thus, computers provide us not just devices for aiding language learning, but are an intrinsic part of the cultures for the L2's commonly taught in U.S. High schools. As such, we need to focus more on devising systematically and scalable ways of extend Communicative and TBLT methodologies to use existing new-media content in manners similar to the ways we use any other authentic media materials.

Although basic materials for this approach are naturally cheaper than for specially created materials, the real cost is, of course, the requisite teacher training and technological infrastructure maintenance. Thus, it becomes critical that we adopt the remix practices now ubiquitous in digital culture to make the use of real-world web applications more teacher friendly, and take advantage of the numerous hosted services available to give teachers the agency to bypass any technological infrastructure roadblocks imposed by their school's IT services. Additionally, it is critical that we understand the intricate ecosystem of transmedia storytelling practices used in entertainment media so that we can seamlessly weave different media practices and our curriculum into a single unified experience, rather than needing to separate and objectify digital media.

([This German television commercial](#) became immensely popular in the united states through viral sharing over the internet. Numerous funny international commercials can be found on sites like [youtube](#))

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## User Contributed Comments

### **Some feedback on Communicative 2.**

Submitted by Russ (not verified) on Thu, 2006-08-03 19:17.

Rather than simply praise what I think is a very creative and thoughtful piece of work I thought I'd make one extended point concerning an assumption running through your argument.

I really like the way this works at the boundaries of formal and informal education moving between observations between what young people are doing with new media in the home and how this might be adapted to support language learning activities in or beyond the classroom. However, I do find myself wondering what is lost when you attempt to adapt an activity that has evolved spontaneously in the context of popular culture (whether this be gaming, transmedia storytelling, mobile blogging or the use of social software) and attempt to turn it into some kind of experience in which learning is the primary objective. Of course most of the activities you describe already offer a rich learning experience it's simply that learning might not be the overriding goal or objective.

You yourself identify the key problem as how to incorporate these kinds of activities into classroom based teaching without robbing them of the qualities that make them so appealing. But if this is indeed a problem, perhaps we should question the logic of taking these activities out of the informal contexts in the first place. Alternatively, we need to think very carefully about what the motivation to participate in these kind of informal activities is in the first place and then think very carefully about what happens to this motivation if and when you change the objective and context of the activity.

The adaptation of social software you propose provides perhaps the most obvious example. Kids are no doubt developing all kinds of literacy skills by writing and posting testimonials for their friends but why then assume an activity that involves exploring a social software site in a foreign language would also be engaging and fun? It seems to me that this then becomes a fundamentally different kind of activity. Student agency is certainly at the heart of the argument. In the world of MySpace.com, for example, students participate on a completely voluntary basis. No one is there telling them that they should contribute or how to contribute. It seems to me that the whole thing is motivated by a desire to construct a particular kind of identity that is confirmed by friend's testimonials. Thus it's essential that one's personal page is written and accessible to this self same group of friends or potential friends. What happens to this prime motivational factor if a

student is told / instructed to produce a personal profile in a foreign language? Sure it might have some kind of novelty value but it is no more authentic than asking students to role play an imaginary scene in class. To make it authentic you need to give people a real reason for using their language skills and it seems to me that this requires that they are writing for an authentic audience in the target language. Most young people will put an awful lot of effort into most tasks if they feel that their efforts will be recognised and appreciated by a community they wish to be a part of. But even then they have to care about the opinion of their audience. One approach would be to use social sites to facilitate cross-cultural exchanges between real people in different countries– but again how do you make their opinion matter? That seems to be the real challenge.

This critique is influenced by readings in activity theory that encourage one to think about the object of an activity. These readings made me realise that people can be interacting with the same medium, and even look like they are doing the same thing but have very different objectives / purposes in mind. From a language learning perspective it seems to me that there are an abundance of resources now available on the web that could support all kinds of self directed informal language learning curriculums. Indeed, in contexts where there is an authentic need to learn the target language these resources will be readily appropriated. The problem is how do you motivate kids, who are not self motivated, to decided for themselves that they want or need to learn a foreign language in the first place? How do you create an authentic need? This problem seems particularly acute for English speakers living in an increasingly English speaking networked (and globalised) society where there is less and less real need to speak any other language.

regards

Russ

[reply](#)

### **Hey Russ! -- You're totally**

Submitted by ravi on Fri, 2006-08-04 07:03.

Hey Russ! --

You're totally right about Myspace being problematic for the kind of stuff I'm talking about here. I don't think that's so much tied to trying to impose language learning or formal/informal contexts so much as, as you say, the core of Myspace has to do with friendships and personal relationships – which would get lost if it were dumped into a language classroom. However, pretty much every social networking site other than the early myspace/facebook/friendster/orkut block that joined the game too late to be able to rely on pre-existing friends in the database have worked their way into the space by including ways of connecting that aren't dependent on having all your friends in the database. I.E. Tagworld is trying to facilitate connections based on musical tastes, so that would be really useful for a kid in the U.S. To be able forge connections with kids in, say, Germany who share the same tastes in English language music as her to explore what European music she might also be interested in. There's my favorite social networking site is 43 things; sites like that are designed specifically to form communities with strangers and have content that already matches perfectly with a foreign language class. So there's definitely potential emerging for social networking applications in their broader use.

Ultimately, though, I think this is an area that's still emerging, which is why I focused the social networking part of this site primarily on doing fictional social networking. I think that role playing, if done right, is an authentic activity of itself. Especially if you consider that Cyworld is, per-capita, many magnitudes more popular than Myspace – even though technically you're social networking for an avatar in Cyworld. It got kinda mind bending for me to think about the notion of 'authenticity' writing this because there's both the concept of 'cultural authenticity' that most language educators think of when you talk about authenticity and then the kind of 'authentically meaningful' activity I think you're getting at.

So, I dunno, I guess to throw out a scenario, lets say you used the organic groups module in Drupal to create a social networking site around The Little Prince. After reading the story, students are assigned to create a character inside the Little Prince Universe and fill in a profile for that character. Their next assignment is to read through blog posts that other students in other states have written and write an in-character response. The next assignment is to create blog posts of their own using digital media found from French-language sites.

So, what are the advantages of this over writing a one-page story set in The Little Prince universe and handing it in to a teacher to grade? At a minimum there's the no-particularly-impressive advantage that if any kids from this class moved to France they would already be familiar with the process of setting up a social networking account in French and could do so with whatever friends they find there. Yes, in the worst case scenario, this may be it. However, with the above assignment, when you make them explore other student's from other place's work and they know they're going to be making a comment, there's a not inconsequential chance, with appropriate intelligent matching technologies, that they'll find one that resonates with them. The author of the other story then thinks their comment is insightful and makes comments back on their blog post. It goes back and forth. All of a sudden, you've got an activity that very much looks like one of the communities Rebecca Black talks about existing in informal spaces. Even though it started as something architected, as soon as a meaningful connection between students was made it became authentically meaningful in my mind.

I mean, we've always had tandem email systems that try to create 'authentic exchanges' – and I guess which do when the participants find something meaningful that connects them, but the success rate for that when randomly matched is, imho, dismal. I think the above approach simply uses technology to take the work that students would be doing for a similar assignment otherwise to intelligently increase the probability of making that successful connection.

So, what of those students that didn't find anything meaningful in the little prince activity? They went through it rather quickly – though they got at least as much out of it as the traditional version. They go onto the next activity: coming up with creative captions for photos on a French equivalent of <http://cutecaps.ning.com/> . Maybe the person who did get sucked into the little prince activity turns out to be completely bored with cutecaps, so the teacher allows them to use some of the continued correspondence they're having in the little prince network instead of having to make so many cutecaps. Contrawise, one of the students who didn't really get into the little prince activity is getting all these comments about how creative and witty her cutecaps are, so she's motivated to try and understand all the French comments she's getting with the time she breezed through the little prince network. A third student hates both activities, but it turns out he's a Sims-2-a-holic . He writes a couple cutecaps and moves onto The Sims 2 activities.

So anyway, I think the point here is that all of these activities encourage gateways into authentically meaningful activities. So, then what about 'culturally authentic' ? In my mind the French cute-caps exercise is as authentic culture as you can get (unless you're focusing on Culture as high culture only). Maybe there's people who disagree with me on that, but I guess I'll wait to hear from them. The social networking example is maybe challenging in that it potentially didn't involve French kids (unless they happened to find their way into the network and wanted to participate, which might happen). So is it culturally authentic other than using The Little Prince and exploring French websites? I dunno.

I guess if that was a priority and you wanted to do social networking – using Rebecca Black's work as a guide here – the focus, in order to 'make their opinion matter', would be to take issues where they're experts on that issue. For example, one social networking site, WAYN (and to a degree 43 places) connects people based on where they live versus where they plan to travel to – so anytime a student in Germany on the WAYN network is coming to Boston I get an email with their profile incase I'm I know of anything in the area that would be of relevant interest to anything posted to their profile.

This kind of relates to your comment about English as a global language, I think if the Cultura project here is any indication, that just helps create opportunities for U.S. Students to play the role of 'expert' and make their opinions only more valuable. I think specifically of my experiences in China where I was

an instant celebrity, constantly mobbed by hordes of people wanting to know more about what it was like being American (which was in itself weird because I still don't know if I consider myself 'American'. I think my personal identity is formed more by my religion than any geography).

I know this seems like a super cultural imperialist answer, but I think in the process of trying to play expert, American students also get to learn how other cultures appropriate and adapt U.S. culture and send it in directions totally different from how it was created. Also there's another huge twist in all this of what happens if Japanese is the other language; certainly Japan exports a lot to kid/youth culture in the U.S. Although, as Henry discusses, that's its own extremely complicated bi-directional/interactional relationship.

Anyway, I should probably stop here before I scare off anyone else from posting comments. You're definitely right though, Myspace is still useful for thinking through these things, but for an immediate application in the language classroom it's not appropriate. Then again, though, the medieval space project sounded pretty successful and they changed far more of the core of mspace than would be necessary for a language class to reach their learning objectives; so, who knows.

[reply](#)

### **Ravi, This is fantastic**

Submitted by russ (not verified) on Fri, 2006-06-02 07:30.

Ravi,

This is fantastic stuff. A genuinely fascinating and educative read. I love the way you play on the boundaries between formal and informal modes of education, picking up on what young people are all ready doing and thinking through how this could be adapted into powerful tools for learning. A potentially ground breaking study that is so far ahead of the vast bulk of stuff I've read in so called E-learning journals. And the examples you use are so rich and suggestive. Can you submit in this in hypertext format? Is it ok to send this link to my supervisor. He's really into thinking about how to bring people who have missed out on formal education back into lifelong learning using things like browser extensions that you talk about so well. The conversation I had with him recently was more along the lines of using addition layers to encourage users to be critical and self reflexive about their use of ICTs. We want to make people more mindful of their own media environment and how it can help or hinder them in life long learning.

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