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Fangirls as teachers: examining pedagogic discourse in an online fan site

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Videogames, such as *The Sims*, are a digital media passion drawing adolescents to online spaces where they create and share content. This article explores how discourses and expectations are taught in one online, video-game-related fan site of adolescents who read and write *Sims* fan fiction. Using Bernstein's pedagogic discourse theory, data from a 2-year virtual ethnography are analyzed to study pedagogic interactions between moderators and members within *The Sims Writers' Hangout*, an online discussion forum. Findings point to the dominance of regulative discourse and how discourses relocated from other media sites serve as pedagogic discourse in this informal digital literacy learning space. This article contributes to our understanding of digital literacy and learning in online environments by focusing on the pedagogy used to teach expectations. The analysis also points to the utility of Bernstein's theory for studying informal online learning.

Keywords: digital literacy; discourse; fan fiction; online environments; pedagogy

Internet use among young people continues to rise, with 93% of American teens connected to the web and 64% creating and sharing content online (Lenhart et al. 2007; Zickuhr 2010). Adolescents are increasingly plugged into participatory cultures (Jenkins et al. 2006), tapping into worldwide networks where they produce and consume media and knowledge. Young people create blogs and websites, share photos and remix videos, write fan fiction and design fan art, and spend hours of their time creating and sharing content that displays their fandom for a variety of media, including videogames. As part of these content-creation activities, adolescents learn to participate in and organize sites of informal learning.

As literacy researchers call for close study theorizing adolescents' online literacies (Alvermann 2008; Leu et al. 2009; Moje 2009), the field knows more about how these online *affinity spaces* (Gee 2004) serve as informal learning environments for adolescents to develop a variety of interests, literacy practices,

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and identities in ways that contrast with traditional schooling (Black 2008; Hayes and Duncan 2012). Through experiential, situated learning (Gee 2007), gaming-related affinity spaces support participants' learning of computational literacy (Steinkuehler and Johnson 2009), scientific reasoning (Steinkuehler and Duncan 2009), and information technology fluency (Hayes and King 2009). They encourage peer-to-peer knowledge sharing (Fields and Kafai 2009), foster interest-driven and friendship-driven genres of participation (Ito et al. 2010), and provide multiple paths for becoming an authentic participant (Squire 2011). While this growing body of literature supports notions that gaming-related affinity spaces offer adolescents varied opportunities for learning, the field lacks an in-depth understanding of affinity space pedagogy.

Unlike previous game studies research exploring *The Sims* in terms of gender and sexuality (Beavis and Charles 2005; Consalvo 2003; Jansz, Avis, and Vosmeer 2010), the social norms it conveys (Martey and Stromer-Galley 2007) and the modding, or modifying the game, it encourages (Sihvonen 2011), my work looks beyond the game, contributing to what we know about players' activities in the surrounding affinity space (Gee and Hayes 2010; Hayes, King, and Lammers 2008; Hayes and Lee 2012). In particular, I conducted a study of literacies and learning in *The Sims Writers' Hangout* (*SWH*; Lammers 2011), an informal learning space made up of adolescents who come together to create and share *Sims* fan fiction. Similar to other forms of fan fiction – fictional stories created by fans and derived from their fandom of a particular media – *Sims* fan fictions are multimodal (Kress 2003; Kress and Jewitt 2003), hybrid (New London Group 1996) digital texts that pair images taken from a player's *The Sims* game with narratives the author writes. The term honors *The Sims* fandom displayed when authors select this videogame platform as the tool with which they tell their stories (see <http://www.thesims3.com/moviesandmore/stories> for examples).

In this article, I turn my attention toward how this online space facilitates *teaching*. I explore the pedagogic discourse (Bernstein 1990, 1996, 2000, 2004) in *SWH*. I argue that there is pedagogy at work within *SWH*. In other words, there is 'curriculum, teaching, evaluation, and social relations' (Davies 2001, 4) in this informal learning environment. The following questions guided my inquiry: What is the nature of pedagogy in *SWH*? How is knowledge communicated (transmitted) to *SWH* members (the acquirers)?

Theorizing pedagogic discourse

To make sense of instructional interactions in schools and the educational policies that shape those interactions, sociolinguists and educational researchers have used Bernstein's (1990, 2000, 2004) theories of pedagogic discourse. Briefly, pedagogic discourse refers to the rules that create specialized content and skills, what Bernstein (2000) calls *instructional discourse*, and rules that create the social order of the learning environment, or *regulative discourse*.

Bernstein's theory makes visible the rules that establish and transmit officially sanctioned knowledge. These rules point to the ways in which issues of power and principles of control shape pedagogic discourse.

In what follows, I explain my understanding of a portion of Bernstein's pedagogic discourse theory, namely one principle within the pedagogic device: the recontextualizing rules. As I will explain, viewing my data through this lens makes visible the ways *SWH* de-locates discourses from their original site and recontextualizes them for the space's purposes.

The pedagogic device

With a focus on studying the sociology of pedagogy, Bernstein sought to answer the question: 'Are there any general principles underlying the transformation of knowledge into pedagogic communication?' (2000, 25). In other words, Bernstein was interested in what governed the decisions about what knowledge is and is not included, and how it gets communicated, in educational settings. To answer this question, he offered the model of a pedagogic device as a way to describe the 'intrinsic grammar' of pedagogic discourse (p. 28). He focused not on the content of the messages relayed by teachers, but rather on 'the constitution of the relay itself' (p. 25), as it exists in a pedagogic relationship between a 'transmitter' and an 'acquirer' (Bernstein 2004). Though many would argue that teachers do more than transmit and students do more than acquire, Bernstein distilled the complex nature of education down to this essential relationship for the purpose of theorizing the general principles of pedagogy.

Bernstein's pedagogic device comprises a set of interrelated, hierarchical rules: distributive rules, recontextualizing rules, and evaluative rules. In brief, the distributive rules distribute knowledge to different social groups and set limits for what is thinkable and unthinkable. Within these limits, recontextualizing rules then move knowledge from its original site into a pedagogic site, constructing the what and how of official knowledge to be relayed. Finally, the evaluative rules provide the criteria transmitted and acquired by students.

Recontextualizing rules

Recontextualizing rules address the process of taking a discourse from its original site and moving it to a pedagogic site. These rules determine the *what* and the *how* of the pedagogic discourse. According to Bernstein (2000), 'pedagogic discourse is constructed by a recontextualizing principle which selectively appropriates, relocates, refocuses, and relates other discourses to constitute its own order' (p. 33). He offers an example of a physics classroom to illustrate that the recontextualizing rules are at play when decisions are made about what physics skills and knowledge will be included in the curriculum, and what will be left out. In particular, he notes that textbook authors play a critical

role in recontextualizing the field of physics, relocating the work of physicists into the pedagogic discourse of physics as they decide what content to include and exclude. In this way, the pedagogy of physics relocates the experimentation, theory generation, and application work done by physicists in the field into the classroom. Determining the order of instruction and how the material will be delivered are other functions of recontextualizing.

Also in his discussion of recontextualizing rules, Bernstein theorizes that pedagogic discourse is a combination of two types of discourse: instructional discourse that creates skills in a subject area and regulates their relationship to other skills, and regulative discourse that creates social order, relations, and identity. Referring back to Bernstein's physics example, pedagogic discourse embeds the official curriculum of skills and knowledge related to physics (the content) within the discourse of management that a teacher uses to create the social order of the physics classroom (classroom management). By emphasizing the dominance of regulative discourse in pedagogic practices, Bernstein's theory points to ways in which schools act as mechanisms of social control.

Through Bernstein's pedagogic discourse lens, the instructional discourse in *SWH* is seen to be made up of interactions providing members with the skills they will need to participate in this online space, including instruction related to creating *Sims* fan fiction and instruction related to navigating the discussion forums. Examples of these instructional interactions are photo-editing tutorials that offer guidance in creating effective visuals, writing exercises that help members generate story ideas, and critique guides that instruct members in how to give meaningful feedback to other writers. As will be further revealed in the findings section, this instruction is embedded within *SWH*'s dominant regulative discourse comprising all of the site's rules and instructional posts that create the social order of the space. It also includes instances when *SWH* moderators either comment on discussion threads to scold members for inappropriate posts or even lock the threads entirely in an attempt to end an inappropriate discussion.

Utility for this study

While others have applied Bernstein's theories to make sense of pedagogy in formal, school-based adoptions of online technologies (Marsh 2007; Robertson 2007; Tyler 2001) and pedagogy related to informal literacies (Moss 2000; Williams 1999), none have similarly explored pedagogy in an informal, online, digital literacy-learning environment. However, structures do exist that impact how knowledge is transformed and how power and control shape pedagogic communication in *SWH*, thus Bernstein's framework provides insights into the pedagogy of this informal learning environment.

Using Bernstein's framework as a lens through which to view the pedagogic interactions within *SWH* makes visible the relationship between regulative and

instructional discourse in *SWH* and the ways in which participants recontextualize other discourses as they transform knowledge into pedagogic discourse in this online affinity space. Without a formal curriculum, the participants co-construct the officially sanctioned knowledge needed to become a writer in general and a *Sims* fan fiction writer in particular.

Study design

Research context

SWH (<http://similik.proboards.com/>) is a discussion forum website created and managed by a group of *The Sims* fans interested in the story-writing practices associated with playing the game. The site began as small a Yahoo!® Group in 2005. By 2010, *SWH* had grown to more than 12,000 members who had created more than 665,000 posts (as of 12 May 2010). While *SWH* is not a depository for hosting *Sims* fan fiction texts themselves, its forums support members' creation of *Sims* fan fiction. It has designated forums for sharing story ideas for early feedback, space for sharing links to completed *Sims* fan fiction, and a variety of boards that connect writers with resources such as tutorials, custom content, and a classified section for posting requests for help with photo-editing and proofreading. *SWH* also has boards unrelated to *Sims* fan fiction, including a *Writers Lounge* for sharing non-*Sims* writing and *Chit Chat*, a space to socialize by answering quiz questions or venting about personal relationships.

Though precise demographic information for *SWH* members was not available, by reviewing member profiles I determined that the majority self-report as adolescent or young adult females, primarily living in the USA, Australia, and western Europe. Only seven of the 100 members who posted the most in the space (with 1327–9688 posts each, collectively accounting for 36% of the total posts, as of 28 February 2010) listed their gender as male. As with many online fan spaces, a small group of *SWH* members contributed the majority of the posts, indicating that many members lurk, or spend time on the site without posting messages (Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews 2004). In fact, nearly 9000 *SWH* members did not make even a single post in the space.

Some *SWH* members also have leadership and moderating duties within the space. In keeping with the site's demographics, all of the moderators at the time of my study were female, though there was one male moderator in the site's history. For those who shared the information on their profiles, the 15 moderators ranged in age from 15 to 23 years old (on 12 May 2010). Moderators' profiles and posts display their status with designations of Hangout Helper or Senior Staff listed prominently under their names (see Figure 1 for an example of how a moderators' discussion board posts indicate their status). As a function of their duties within *SWH*, moderators create rule posts to dictate participation norms, monitor discussion board threads, and create and manage various activities and contests in the space.

Figure 1. Screenshot showing Pamela's moderator rank. To the left of every *SWH* post, items from a member's profile appear. This image from one of Pamela's posts illustrates how her Senior Staff status displays on all of her posts. I altered it to remove references to her identity.

Data collection

My study is part of a growing body of research using ethnographic methods to explore virtual environments (Baym 2000; Black 2008; Boellstorf 2008; Bury 2005; Fields and Kafai 2009; Hine 2000; Lammers, Curwood, and Magnifico 2012; Rheingold 2000). To make sense of *SWH*, I immersed myself as an observer, but not a participant, in the space, '[using] that experience to try to learn how life is lived there' (Hine 2009, 6). I drew on Leander and McKim's (2003) conceptualization of virtual ethnography as a 'moving, traveling practice' (p. 237) and thus followed informants' *Sims* fan fiction-related activities wherever they led online, rather than defining my field site as limited only to the confines of the *SWH* website.

From 2008–2010, I conducted an *affinity space ethnography* (Lammers, Curwood, and Magnifico 2012). I began by mapping out the forums in *SWH* and reading the rules posted by moderators within each forum. I noticed teaching that reminded me of pedagogy seen in traditional classrooms, leading to this particular analysis as an effort to make sense of these school-like practices.

I then engaged in repeated observations of the forums, moving from the ‘core to the periphery’ (Androutsopoulos 2008, 6) of *SWH*. My ethnographic observation was more than simply gazing at the artifacts on the site, but rather an attempt to understand *SWH* as a culture.

After 12 months of systematic observation, I sought the perspectives of insiders, to deepen my understanding of what it means to participate in *SWH* beyond what I could observe as an outsider. I identified potential key informants whose interactions spanned different types of participation, including moderators, longtime members, popular *Sims* fan fiction authors, prolific posters, and newbies. Eight agreed to share their thoughts with me. Table 1 provides a synopsis of Angela, Eastwood, Eleanor, Eve, Missy, Naomi, Pamela, and Zahrah (all names are self-selected pseudonyms). I conducted semi-structured virtual interviews, through email or private message, to get these insiders’ perspectives. I customized interview questions to reflect my observations of each informant’s interactions and artifacts within *SWH*, and maintained ‘repeated and prolonged’ (Androutsopoulos 2008, 8) contact with most of them throughout the next 12 months of data collection and analysis, as they continued to confirm and inform my understanding of practices in *SWH*.

Data used for this analysis were all 59 moderator-created rule posts pinned (i.e., secured, not moving from this position as other posts were added) to the top of each forum and sub-board, including a welcome post titled Finding Your Way. To supplement these data, I analyzed tutorials and posts gathered while observing my informants’ participation (i.e., posts made by my informants or appearing in their threads). Finally, this analysis was informed by virtual interview responses from my informants related to their digital literacy learning in *SWH*.

Data analysis

Gee (2011) defines discourse analysis as ‘the study of language at use in the world, not just to say things, but to do things’ (p. ix). With this definition in mind, I began reading and re-reading the 59 moderator-created rule posts to get a sense of how moderators used language ‘to do things’ in *SWH*. These texts provided rules for what was, and was not, supposed to be posted in each forum of the site. Examining these posts helped me develop a contextualized understanding of how moderators’ language-in-use regulated the space and created officially sanctioned ways of being in *SWH*. With this understanding, I began to develop an initial coding scheme for my data.

I then turned to analyzing discussion forum posts to determine whether they represented a pedagogic interaction. I deemed posts pedagogic if they provided instruction related to how to participate in the space or how to create *Sims* fan fiction. I analyzed these pedagogic discussion forum posts through the lens of the Bernstein’s recontextualizing rules within the pedagogic device (1990, 1996, 2000, 2004), looking for markers indicating an alignment between the

Table 1. Information about study informants.

Pseudonym	Age ^a	Location	Date joined <i>SWH</i>	Posts ^a	Role in <i>SWH</i> ^a	<i>SWH</i> activities
Angela	15	USA	10 August 2009	280	Member	<i>Chit Chat</i> , reading and writing <i>Sims</i> fan fiction, sharing story ideas, posting requests, using proofreaders, writing non- <i>Sims</i> stories
Eastwood	19	England	4 April 2006	633	Member	<i>Chit Chat</i> , reading and writing <i>Sims</i> fan fiction, using proofreaders, entering contests
Eleanor	18	England	24 August 2005	5675	Member	<i>Chit Chat</i> , reading and writing <i>Sims</i> fan fiction, role play, writing My Chemical Romance (a band)-inspired fan fiction, writing non- <i>Sims</i> short stories
Eve	23	USA	17 October 2005	3843	Member	<i>Chit Chat</i> , reading and writing <i>Sims</i> fan fiction, creating <i>Sims</i> movies, entering contests, creating photo editing tutorials
Missy	23	England	17 February 2006	1591	Moderator	<i>Chit Chat</i> , reading and writing <i>Sims</i> fan fiction, moderating and entering contests, moderating forums
Naomi	18	USA	22 May 2008	714	Member	<i>Chit Chat</i> , reading and writing <i>Sims</i> fan fiction, proofreading, using proofreaders, writing non- <i>Sims</i> short stories
Pamela	18	Canada	11 May 2007	3409	Head moderator	<i>Chit Chat</i> , reading <i>Sims</i> fan fiction, moderating and entering contests, moderating forums, welcoming new members, managing the site
Zahrah	22	USA	9 December 2007	2228	Member	<i>Chit Chat</i> , reading <i>Sims</i> fan fiction, answering requests, moderating a contest, creating custom content

Note: All informants identified themselves as female.

^aAs of 1 June 2010.

pedagogic practices in *SWH* and his theory. Those markers included evidence of regulative discourse and recontextualizing discourses from other locations. I took note of who was the transmitter and who was the acquirer in each pedagogic interaction. I also questioned those posts that did not contain markers aligning with Bernstein's theory to make sense of how such posts represented pedagogy other than what he theorized. My analysis led me to make claims about the nature of pedagogy in *SWH* specifically focused on how recontextualizing rules shape pedagogic interactions in this informal, digital literacy-learning environment.

Findings

In this section, I share data that point to the dominance of regulative discourse and the recontextualization of multiple discourses into this pedagogic site. In sharing these findings, I make a case for how each shapes the pedagogic practice in *SWH*.

Dominance of regulative discourse

Recall that, according to Bernstein (2000), regulative discourse is the 'discourse of social order' (p. 32). Regulative discourse communicates the rules of behavior, moral practice, or code of conduct in a pedagogic interaction. In his research to theorize pedagogic discourse in formal school settings, Bernstein found regulative to be the dominant discourse within which all instructional discourse is embedded. Unlike the formal educational settings Bernstein investigated, *SWH* is an online informal learning environment constructed and maintained by its primarily adolescent membership. My investigation into *SWH*'s pedagogy revealed that neither the informal nature of this learning environment, nor the young age of its participants, precluded it from exemplifying the same principle. Regulative discourse dominates many interactions in *SWH* in an attempt to norm the practices within the space.

Moderators in *SWH* have created numerous posts designed to provide members with information about site expectations. For example, in the *Welcome* sub-board, Pamela posted a message titled Finding Your Way as a means of introducing new members to *SWH*. Regulative discourse dominates even the welcome message, as evidenced in this excerpt:

By reading the rules, you will prove to everyone that you're an intelligent asset to this community . . . So please do yourself and all of us a favor, and learn the rules first! (Pamela, *SWH* post, 1 January, 2010)

As a pedagogic interaction, this welcome message is a new member's first glimpse into the dominance of regulative discourse and the importance of following the rules of the space. In addition to providing directions for how to be

‘an intelligent asset’, the message continues by providing an overview of the various sub-boards in *SWH* and offering instructions for how to participate:

Not everyone on *The Hangout* writes *Sims 2* and *Sims 3* stories . . . If you’re one of those people who love writing, but enjoy writing your own, NON-SIM short stories, poems, and songs, then the *Writers Lounge* is just the place for you. Feel free to post your Non-Sim literature there . . . (Pamela, *SWH* post, 1 January, 2010)

While providing instruction for where to post non-*Sims* writing, Pamela emphasizes what type of writing belongs in the *Writers Lounge* by capitalizing ‘NON-SIM’. In this way, her pedagogical communication draws attention to the community’s regulation about posting messages in their appropriate sub-board.

Regulative discourse communicating social norms is often made much more explicit. The site rules, for example, provide expectations about such concerns as respect, advertising, and posting in the correct sub-forum. They also detail the following consequences for breaking rules: **‘First offense:** Warning PM from staff. **Second offense:** Suspension of variable length, dependent on offense. **Third offense:** Permanent ban’ (emphasis in original; *SWH* moderator post, 12 August 2005). In addition to these rules and consequences, nearly all of the sub-boards within *SWH* contain moderator-created norming texts pinned to the top. These posts make explicit statements designed to norm behavior within that space. For example, the post at the top of the *Help and FAQ* forum contained a bulleted list of ‘what does not belong in the *Help and FAQ* board’ (*SWH* moderator post, 1 January 2010). Similarly, in a post titled, ‘*Where can I find . . . ? Board Rules*’, the moderator distinguishes what does belong in this forum (‘Any questions asking where to find custom content for *The Sims 2*’) and what does not belong (‘Any questions asking where to find the following: photo-editing software, fonts, brushes, hacks and cheats, anything else that does not count as custom content’) (*SWH* moderator post, 18 April 2006). No sub-board was immune to such regulation, which even extended to the *Chit Chat* area of the space. One moderator-created norming text in this area included this regulatory statement: ‘No Homework-Help threads due to the possibility of cheating. Any threads that ask for [homework] help will be locked and/or deleted’ (*SWH* moderator post, 12 August 2005). Such posts exemplify Bernstein’s regulative discourse as they explicitly regulate the social order by dictating expectations for the content to be posted within each area of *SWH*.

My analysis revealed numerous examples of pedagogic communication in which the regulative and instructional discourses are interwoven. For example, this how-to post is both instructional (teaching how to modify a post) and regulative (warning that double-posting is against the rules):

Sometimes you would like to add something new or change your original post but before going to double post aka back-to-back posting, which is against the rules,

please **modify** your post. In the upper right hand corner of every post you make there will be the option to **modify** or **delete** your post.

(emphasis in original; *SWH* moderator post, 1 January 2010)

In another example, a moderator teaches about ‘How to attract more readers’ for one’s *Sims* fan fiction. The post offers detailed instructions about attractively creating a story thread, including, ‘Put the title of your Story as the thread subject – Avoid titling it something like “New story“ or “Part 4 out!” It doesn’t stand out, isn’t specific enough and most people would probably skip over it’ (*SWH* moderator post, 25 August 2006). This same post ends with a regulatory reminder, ‘**KEEP ALL CHAPTER ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE SAME SERIES IN THE SAME THREAD!**’ (emphasis in original). As in this example, moderators often use text formatting, such as **bold** and/or ALL CAPS, in their pedagogical posts as a means of emphasizing the rules or social norms of the space. Thus, regulative discourse in an online space like *SWH* takes shape via not only the language but also the presentation of that language through formatting.

One might wonder whether all of this regulation is necessary when *SWH* is just a group of teenagers talking about *The Sims*. However, as is the case in formal educational settings, my analysis reveals the dominance of the regulative discourse, even in this informal learning space wherein adolescents gather around a shared interest in a videogame literacy practice. There are far more regulations about behavior in these spaces than many realize, contrary to misperceptions of online communities as exemplifying an organic, everyone-gets-along attitude.

Recontextualizing other discourses

According to Bernstein (2000), within the pedagogic device, the recontextualizing rules explain the process of circulating and organizing knowledge for transmission and acquisition. These rules account for how knowledge is selectively taken from its original site and relocated into a pedagogic site for transmission. In *SWH*, a variety of other discourses are relocated and reorganized into pedagogic discourse constituting the what and how of *Sims* fan fiction knowledge and practice. Using Bernstein’s recontextualizing rules principle as a lens through which I viewed data made visible the ways community contests and activities, critiques, and reader feedback all relocated discourses from other sites as pedagogic discourse in *SWH*.

Contests represent one means for establishing the knowledge and skills valued within *SWH* and are thus a form of pedagogy. Recontextualized discourses from reality television shows are visible in *SWH* contests. For example, The Hangout’s Next Top Model (HNTM) is a popular contest based upon the similarly named reality show. This contest asks participants to create *Sims* models using Bodyshop (a software tool used to create *Sims*

that is a separate program from the videogame, but was included on *The Sims 2* DVD) and to post digitally edited photos depicting the models in various scenarios to demonstrate creativity and technical skills (see Figure 2 for a sample entry). Each round of the competition has a different theme and *SWH* members can vote for their favorite entry. The models garnering the fewest votes are eliminated and the competition continues through a variety of rounds until a single winner remains. In another example of recontextualizing reality television, moderators adapted an iteration of the Sexy Sim Competition (SSC) to reflect popular makeover television shows. The description for this competition read, ‘SSC: Extreme Makeover. For this challenge, you’re given a Sim to makeover based on certain criteria’ (SWH moderator post, 1 January 2010). Through the lens of the pedagogic device, contests are viewed as a form of pedagogy in which reality television competition discourses are recontextualized as pedagogic discourse to teach digital literacy practices valued in *SWH*.

Posted community activities are another example of pedagogic interaction in *SWH*, providing members with the opportunity to develop writing skills and demonstrate creativity. In one example, transmitters recontextualized book-based discourse into the pedagogic discourse of *SWH*. The story-writing activity, called *To Be Continued...*, was billed as similar to the popular *Choose Your Own Adventure* children’s books. The activity asked writers to contribute possible plot sequences based on a story starter. *SWH* members then voted on their favorite, thereby choosing the direction the adventure would take. Another activity relocated brainstorming discourse in a pedagogic

Figure 2. HNTM contest submission. Pamela submitted this entry in a round that asked contestants to style their Sims models after an iconic actor/actress of their choice.

interaction designed to help members overcome writer's block. The activity directed members to make lists of 50 things, such as sad things or scary things, and see what story ideas develop from those lists. The directions included the following recommendations,

When you are making the list, don't stop just keep going, and don't think to [sic] hard about it . . . when you get to the part where your subconscious [sic] takes over then you get some good things flowing . . . let images of whatever pop into your head. (*SWH* member post, 17 December 2005)

This same sub-board contained another writing activity that recontextualized brainstorming to help members develop their *Sims* fan fiction. This activity provided brainstorming prompts for expanding on a main theme of one's story. In the directions, the transmitter used an example theme of 'death' and asked authors to think about, 'Who, where, what, when, why, how. In your brainstorm, write down all the different causes, reasons, and people that could be involved in death, and explore further into other aspects of death, e.g., funerals and inheriting money' (*SWH* member post, 18 December 2005). When examined using a pedagogic device approach, *SWH* community activities show evidence that other discourses, such as those from books and brainstorming, are recontextualized as pedagogic discourse to transmit literacy practices related to *Sims* fan fiction.

Critiques are another form of pedagogic discourse in *SWH*, providing writers with instruction related to the text and photos in their *Sims* fan fiction. Unlike more informal reader responses, critique forms provide *SWH* members with categories and/or rating systems they can use to provide feedback to writers in the space. Reminiscent of peer reviews used in English classrooms, critique forms recontextualize school discourses as pedagogic discourse in *SWH*. The following was posted for use as a part of *Critique Week*, a moderator effort designed to encourage readers to provide formal feedback for *Sims* fan fiction:

Title and relation:

(Did it spring out at you? Does it relate to an aspect of the story?)

Cover:

(Was it eye-catching? Was it clear and precise? Was it in anyway confusing?)

Introduction:

(Was it an appropriate scene to start on? Did it hook you on to the story?)

Flow:

(Did the different screens fit together nicely? Did they read easily?)

Characters:

(Could you relate to them? Were they realistic? Did their clothes and processions fit their personalities?)

Dialogue:

(Was it realistic? Did it sound good? Was it something you mght [sic] say?)

Grammar:

(Where there any mistakes you could see?)

Pictures and graphics:

(Did the pictures relate to the text? Were the graphics turned up high?)

Chapter/story ending:

(Was it a suitable place to finish? Would it make you read the next part?)

Most enjoyable:

(What part really stuck with you? What did they do well?)

Ways to improve:

(What didn't they do so well? In what way could they improve? Do you have any pointers?)

(emphasis in original; *SWH* member post, 29 September 2006)

In this example, we see a critique form that prompts readers to give writers feedback about different aspects of their *Sims* fan fiction. The use of probing questions to guide the critique recontextualizes similar prompts given by teachers to guide their students in conducting peer reviews.

Finally, reader responses to *Sims* fan fiction are another form of pedagogic interaction in *SWH*. In comments posted in story threads, readers react to posted stories by offering informal praise, evaluative statements, and suggestions for improvement. These comments to authors thus become a means of providing digital literacy instruction in the space. See, for example, this comment on one of Eve's stories: 'I liked it Eve, the dancing and the kiss in the rain was brilliant! Your Sim guys are really hot! I thought maybe some more description could have been added' (*SWH* member post, 31 January 2006). This response exemplifies how praise, evaluation, and suggestions are woven into reader responses to create informal pedagogy in *SWH*. In addition to pedagogy, this example contains discourse that recontextualizes fan behaviors into what is referred to as a *fangirl* comment: 'Your Sim guys are really hot!' According to Pamela, a moderator informant:

"Fan girl" comments, would be comments that don't particularly serve a great purpose. They're usually like "OMG boy A was so hot. This whole series is super amazing. And hot! Like omg!" ... Even if the story is not very well written, they'll squeal over the creator just because they're friends or if it's of a certain, often stereotypical, genre. (personal communication, 20 March 2010)

In Pamela's opinion, the recontextualization of fan discourse into *SWH* reader responses is not pedagogic, since such comments 'don't particularly serve a great purpose'.

However, *fangirl* comments occurred so often in reader responses that I turned to my other informants to understand their value. Eastwood had this to say about *fangirl* comments: 'The gushing "omg I love your story" is a bit like, well okay but what was good about it? ... That being said, even the briefest and vaguest of comments are still better than no comments at all' (personal communication, 26 March 2010). Similarly Eleanor told me,

Receiving "fangirl" comments isn't really that bad. It's a bit repetitive and sometimes you want something a little more than what they have to say, but at the same

time it's nice having some people who consistently leave nice reviews. It's also nice knowing that someone is reading your story. (personal communication, 23 March 2010)

Whereas a moderator saw the recontextualization of fan discourse as anti-example of pedagogy and did not promote it as an official discourse, *SWH* writers had appreciation for and garnered motivation from fan girl comments. (For more discussion of fangirl behavior in *SWH*, see Lammers 2012).

Together these examples of contests, community activities, critiques, and reader responses illustrate that digital literacy pedagogy in this informal learning space is a product of recontextualizing discourses from a variety of sources. To construct and transmit the official knowledge of *Sims* fan fiction, *SWH* recontextualizes discourses from media genres, schools, and fan practices.

Conclusion

My initial inquiries into *SWH* led me to seek out a way to theorize moderators' practices related to maintaining order in the space (Lammers 2012). I wondered what insights could be garnered if such policing of the discussion forums was examined as pedagogic discourse (Bernstein 2000). Thus, in this analysis, I pursued questions exploring the nature of pedagogy in *SWH* as a means to understand how digital literacy knowledge is communicated (transmitted) to *SWH* members (the acquirers). To answer these questions, I viewed discussion-forum interactions, *SWH* activities, and moderator-created norming texts through the lens of the pedagogic device, paying particular attention to the recontextualizing rules. My efforts revealed insights about the dominance of regulative discourse and how discourses from many different sites are recontextualized as digital literacy pedagogy in *SWH*.

Like the formal school environments upon which Bernstein developed his model, pedagogic interactions in *SWH* embedded literacy instructional discourse within a more dominant regulative discourse. Moderators posted numerous norming texts and reminders about the rules within discussion threads. Such regulative discourse was designed to maintain social order within the space. Yet, despite moderators' best efforts to norm the practices by encouraging members to read the rules, many did not. For example, one of my informants had this to say: 'I should have read the rules when I first came here. I sort of picked up the rules as I read responses from the mods [moderators]' (Naomi, personal communication, 15 April 2010). While other research has informed our understanding of learning in online affinity spaces (Black 2008; Fields and Kafai 2009; Gee 2004, 2007; Gee and Hayes 2010; Ito et al. 2010), little attention has been paid to how these spaces regulate and norm behavior. *SWH* is a site of more than 12,000 members from all over the world who gather virtually to participate in the online forums. Online fan spaces create a culture of their own and must communicate the norms and expectations to

members using the technology available. Perhaps all of this regulative discourse is necessary for such a large, geographically dispersed, virtual group to function. In addition, Naomi's comment reveals that at least some members do not read the rules, suggesting there is a need for regulative discourse, such as the moderator-created norming texts and reminders throughout the forums. Future inquiries into pedagogic discourse could compare *SWH* with other gaming-related affinity spaces to explore what factors influence the amount and nature of regulative discourse in these sites. For example, is the age or gender of the participants a relevant factor shaping the amount and nature of regulative discourse?

The official knowledge of *SWH* is constructed through recontextualized discourses from multiple sites, including media genres, schools, and fan practices. Contests, for example, evidenced reality television discourse recontextualized as pedagogic practice to transmit *Sims* fan fiction knowledge. Not only does formal schooling pedagogy often dismiss pop culture as a means for transmitting digital literacy knowledge (Marsh and Millard 2000), schools often shy away from contests as a form of pedagogic discourse because they fly in the face of the mentality that 'everybody is a winner', which is so often encouraged in school. Through recontextualizing discourses from multiple sites, *SWH* broadens what counts as legitimate *Sims* fan fiction pedagogy. By demonstrating how multiple discourses shape acceptable writing instruction in an online learning environment, this finding can inform practice with an eye toward how classroom literacy instruction might similarly be shaped. What would it look like for classrooms to broaden what counts as legitimate digital literacy pedagogy? Beyond including media texts in the classroom, what if the discourses of media genres were taken up as literacy pedagogy? We need more models in the literature for how this might look in actual classrooms. Also, continued research into pedagogic discourse in online affinity spaces might reveal issues of power and control related to these recontextualized discourses. For example, who votes in the contests, and how does that shape what is considered legitimate and valued knowledge and practice?

As a model of pedagogic interactions, Bernstein's pedagogic device (2000) articulates the distributive, recontextualizing, and evaluative rules as a complex structure for making sense of the complexity of pedagogy in *SWH*. Bernstein's model was useful for focusing my attention on the dominance of regulative discourse and the various discourses recontextualized as pedagogy in this informal learning environment. Continued research is needed to more fully explore how the distributive and evaluative rules align (or not) with pedagogy in online affinity spaces.

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