There already exist online communities dedicated to game-based learning initiatives. Examples include the Center for Games and Impact, which is about teacher training, and the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop, a developer portal. Game Mechanics for Learning (http://mattfarber1.wix.com/gblmechanics) takes a different approach. It is a "sandbox" for shared best practices, intended to provide a niche, bridging educators with learning game designers (Kraut & Resnick, 2011). Online communities are learning spaces in which members learn "from and with each other" (Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009, p. 7). The purpose of the community is to share ideas.

Background and Methodology

Game Mechanics for Learning explores the topic of the site designer's dissertation: learning goals should align with core mechanics—actions of play—in games. Not marrying mechanics to learning sugarcoat chores with an add-on layer of fun and play. The result makes a task seem like an obstacle. Furthermore, it may interfere with one's mental model about an expected outcome from an action. As such, the conversations in the community are intended to share best practices.

The "Administrators"—featured on a subpage along with a game-like avatar—have specified roles, including technology stewardship (e.g., Twitter chat moderation) (Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009). The intent of the Administrator roles is to drive member commitment (Kraut, Resnick, 2011, p. 84). One example is Steve Isaacs, the Twitter chat co-moderator who set up the community's Nurph channel (Nurph is a platform that sorts Twitter conversations). Isaacs was selected because he co-moderates the weekly EdTechBridge chat. The rationale was to have members perform tasks already of interest to them (Kraut & Resnick, 2011, p. 27).

It was decided that the community should initially include individuals with whom the designer already knew (Millington, 2012, p. 18). Karen Novak, chair of the ISTE Games and Learning community, sent out a listserv email asking members to participate in the inaugural Twitter meet-up. New members to the site will find that each page has a "Join Us" contact form. Over time, a database can be compiled, generated from the contact form, as well as from analytics from Twitter and the Disqus tool. Monthly email newsletters can be sent to existing members, as well as funneled onto social media.

Because Twitter chat participants have an existing social media presence, their followers may indirectly be attracted to the community. (Blogger Alice Keeler, who joined the inaugural chat, has over 22,000 Twitter followers.) Having an existing following means that "participants who have existing social ties to be members of the community increase their bonds-based commitment to the community" (Kraut & Resnick, 2011, p. 89).

<center>Design Decisions</center>

Several community-themed platforms were considered, including Drupal and Ning. Game Mechanics for Learning is non-commercial, so cost was a factor (Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009). Both Drupal and Ning have a monthly subscription fee, which presented an obstacle. Wikia, the fan community, was another hosting option. It offers a free toolset for discussion forums; however, because it is primarily an entertainment forum, it was not selected. Also, Wikia may be filtered or blocked at school networks.

The purpose was to have a simple interface and navigation toolset similar to other educational website portals. The community designer ultimately decided that Wix, the website building tool, offered the most effective solution. It offers community-themed

templates, including the ability to add blogs. Posts can be tagged, thus making them searchable on the site (Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009, p. 52).

Regarding discussion postings, the designer reviewed several third-party applications. It was discovered that Disqus was used on several educational communities, including EasyBib, BrainPOP, and the National Writing Project. Disqus provides analytics and comment moderation. There are social login buttons to enable users to interact without leaving the community webpage. The single sign-on links to a user's social media profile. It removes part of the veil of anonymity from those who seek to "troll." Also, Disqus users can "upvote" others comments, which promote positive discussions. Upvoting can "encourage systematic, quantitative feedback" (Kraut & Resnick, 2011, p. 149). Also, the manager can moderate discussion posts, which may stem potential misuses. Finally, the "Rules" subpage posts the community standards.

Although Wix met the design challenge being educator-friendly, the designer took note of the exchange of best practice that can occur during synchronous chats. Real-time conversations cement online relationships (Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009, p. 179). Providing structure, the community manager created the format, topic, and questions for the inaugural Twitter chat. There were over 160 tweets in the 30-minute chat timeframe.

Not every teacher or game designer is on Twitter. What's more, having an account does not mean that it is regularly or actively used. As a result, it was decided to house archives of chats on the community website. Storify was used to embed archives of Twitter chats onto the site. Storify produces a scrollable list in which users can review ideas and peruse hyperlinks to content shared from members. It also, potentially, can drive traffic to the site, bringing in users who missed the live feed.

Design Approaches

Content calendars encourage members to contribute (Millington, 2012, p. 94). As such, community members can add synchronous events to their own personal calendars. As Google Applications for Education (GAFE) grow in ubiquity, it seemed appropriate to have a calendar tool embedded on the site that teachers may already use. Google Calendar is also available as a mobile application for both Apple and Android users.

Because members may also be on social media, considerations were made to funnel information outside of the community platform. As a result, a Google+ Community page was set-up and a Pinterest page was launched. Like Twitter, Google+ and Pinterest do not require membership to view posts. Pinterest is a virtual pin board. This is crucial when one is seeking to turn lurkers into full-fledged participants who are afforded roles and tasks, like chat moderation (Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009).

The platform attempts to adhere to the principles of human-centered design (HCD). This occurs only after "rapid tests of ideas, and after each test modifying the approach and the problem definition" (Norman, 2013, p. 9). It was therefore deemed necessary to launch the community beyond just being the conceptual stage. Once members participated, the steps of usertesting and iteration—which embody HCD—took place (Norman, 2013).

To meet the challenge of iterative design, feedback was collected from members, including Emily Gover, community manager at EasyBib. It was suggested to move the mini-blogs and discussions threads to the home page, thus immediately engaging users with content. The newly launched Game Mechanics for Learning community is expected to continually evolve, based upon the needs of its members.

Gauging Success

There are several ways to gauge success of an online community. Because of the inherent use technology tools and platforms, analytics can be collected. Retweets and social media shares can be tracked, as are blog hits, return visits, and user interactions. There are also qualitative measures, including reading discussion conversations and checking the involvement of community members in leadership roles. The goal of this community aligns with that for the Games4Ed initiative: to create a sustainable model for games in the classroom ("Games4Ed," 2015). Ultimately, the success of this community will hinge on regular usertesting and feedback analysis, which will lead to iteration to best meet human-centered design elements.

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Appendix: Turn It In Originality Report

Turnitin Originality Report

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