Julian Sefton-Green

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Working paper

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Introduction

In trying to address the vexed challenge of theorizing learning transfer to make sense of how we learn across social contexts and what learning might mean in more informal domestic circumstances, Stevens and his colleagues offer a series of detailed studies of gaming in the home (Stevens, Satwicz, & McCarthy, 2008). They argue that we need to look at the "dispositions and purposes" that people bring with them to experiences and then consider "what people *make* of experiences in other times and places in their lives" (pp. 63–64). Learning, they suggest, is the process of interpretation as people reach back and forth across experiences (and the meanings that have been attributed to them). Rather than focusing on the learning experience in isolation, we need to pay attention to how learners conceptualize, contextualize, and reflect on experiences and to what resources they use and draw on to do this. Stevens et al. suggest that only by developing methods that allow us to study people across and within a range of settings can we see how people actively juxtapose, reject, select, contrast, or build on experiences. The research focus then needs both an intrapersonal historical dimension, reflecting how individuals frame their experiences over time, as well as a way of describing the types of understanding involved—the language and values that circulate within those experiences.

In this paper, I will build on the proposal that we need to pay attention to both of these frames through characterizing the metadiscourse surrounding learning in the home. I suggest that this metadiscourse is made up of several elements. I will show how a number of families—the subjects of a larger research project that investigates learning across time and contexts—adopt and use folk "theories of learning," and I will consider, in particular, how such theories relate to dominant discourses around learning in school. Second, I will explore how media technologies—and in particular, how the ways that they are purchased and how they are located in the home—also contribute to dominant conceptualizations of learning and at times almost seem to stand for a proxy measure of it. Third, I will draw on observations and accounts of how learning is enacted as a discipline and as a habit within the ebb and flow of family life.

The paper begins with a brief review of the sociological and educational literature regarding approaches to learning in the home and then sets forth the context for the empirical work. The main body of the paper describes how learning is constructed, mediated, and enacted in six families. By showing that who defines learning in domestic contexts, and on what basis, is subject to a series of class-based, inherited, and aspirational discourses and social imaginaries,

the subsequent discussion and conclusions aim to question assumptions about how we talk about learning in the home.

The Home as a Site for and of Learning

The home is a hotly contested presence in educational discourse. Paradoxically, however, it is not a place that is frequently visited by many teachers or even educational researchers. We may see many representations of homes in documentaries and fiction—the lives of the kids in the HBO TV series *The Wire* are a good example of how the lives of "other people's" children can gain great currency in academic circles—and teachers in staff rooms around the world may speculate endlessly about the lives of their charges at home, but we know our own homes best and often use that knowledge metonymically to stand for the idea of home in general.

Home is both a deep and a broad concept with a high degree of emotional resonance (Brooks, 2011). It may appear just to describe the place where we live, but in effect it is also an analytic concept that needs to be distinguished from the idea of both "household" and "family." In the academic literature about the ways that media technologies are "domesticated" as they are brought into the home and given meaning and purpose through often ritualized, quotidian, and everyday use, the home becomes a key site of both consumption and contestation as it is given meaning and purpose by prevailing discourses and social actors (Berker, Hartmann, Punie, & Ward, 2005). The home is not a neutral space, nor necessarily imbued with all the qualities of retreat and security that we find in the more romantic considerations of it; rather, the home is in the front line of current debates about gender, family, and power.

Sociologists of the family have spent much time in the home watching, listening to, and engaging with family members going about their daily business. Although it is always difficult to imagine how any form of academic research could fail to be intrusive and in some ways affect the rhythms of daily life, scholars like Lareau (2003) or Pugh (2009) have found ways to show how talk within the family, the organization of everyday life, the disposition of financial resources, and the materiality of everyday practices all combine to make homes quite particular experiences and key sites for the production of identity and the investment of various kinds of social and cultural capital.

Thirty to forty years ago, educational research focused much more on children's lives outside of the school. This was for two reasons. First, the research occurred in the context of a public debate about education that was concerned as much with the whole life of the young person— including an entire set of values and capabilities that were expected to exist outside of the curriculum—as it was with formal schooling. Second, it was written from a pedagogic perspective, as a way of understanding what young people brought with them to the school, and therefore how school pedagogy and curriculum might be oriented from such starting points. Academic collections such as *Life in School: The Sociology of Pupil Culture* (Hammersley &

Woods, 1984) typically focused on the ways that the broader aspects of social life—such as housing, ethnicity, family structure, and gender identity—intersect with formal and informal curriculum and social relations within the school. In the United States, the notion of "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) has gathered considerable traction as a way of describing the sets of practices, expectations, social relationships, and folk theories of learning in which young people's out-of-school learning is embedded and which, it is suggested, need to be negotiated by both home and school.

At the same time that educationalists were particularly interested in the sociology of young people's lives, groundbreaking work in linguistic anthropology was beginning to shed light on aspects of language use and learning in general. Heath's classic study, *Ways with Words* (1983), opened a whole series of approaches to understanding the interrelationships between language use in family and in other informal and community contexts and modes of learning. Her study of language in the family and its role in all aspects of family life helped open up the home as a site for and of learning.

However, it may also be fair to say that the gaze of educational research has moved away from exploring the texture and meaning of young people's social worlds toward a more tightly focused concern with learning transactions within the school (Ladwig, 2010). Whereas educational theory in the past was possibly more agnostic about what constituted learning, and certainly more prepared to describe and theorize kinds of learning developed outside of the classroom, the politics of educational research have moved much more into an arena concerned with standardized testing and comparative benchmarking, all of which imply a much more closed understanding of learning outcomes (Schwartz & Arena, 2013). Much has been written about this shift; it is both a political move bound up with the reconfiguration of public education (Berliner & Biddle, 1999) and also an indication of the changing nature and purpose of academic research in this field (Glass, 2008). Some of the complex shifts in the relationship of research to policy as well as in public education were well captured by Luke (2011).

Perhaps paradoxically, contemporary and recent research into learning outside of the school has therefore not started by disinterestedly trying to capture what learning might mean across social contexts as understood reflexively by participants, but has often looked at how the home can be recalibrated as a supplement or complement to the school. In a recent publication, I have explored how a range of research into learning in informal, semiformal, and nonformal learning situations—particularly in after-school and community-based settings—is hamstrung in theorizing and defining the kind of learning that might go on in these sectors by a conceptual inability not to frame learning in school-like terms (Sefton-Green, 2013). At the same time, the very nature of academic research itself plays a part in this process, as the phenomena such research defines as learning and the methods it uses to characterize such learning also define and determine learning outside of the school context. The more we are interested in finding out

about other kinds of learning beyond the school, the more we risk formalizing the informal as we subject everyday practices to the basilisk stare of the academic gaze.

These two dilemmas—finding out what kinds of learning go on in the home and discovering how they are defined as such, and by whom—underpin the substantive inquiry of this paper: what might learning mean in the homes of the 13- and 14-year-olds who were the subject of a recent research project? The rest of this paper will outline what it might mean to research learning in the home and will characterize different learning continua that we discovered. In particular, I will pay attention to how the discourses of learning as defined by the school and the immediate public set of values around education today have penetrated or are negotiated by different kinds of families in these case studies.

The Research Context

The data in this paper are drawn from an ongoing project, "The Class," conducted in collaboration with Sonia Livingstone and funded as part of the MacArthur Foundation's digital media learning initiative.[1] We worked with one class of 27 13- to 14-year-olds. We spent one academic term with them at school, getting to know them and attending all of their lessons across all of their subjects as well as observing them within the ebb and flow of the school day. We were interested in their friendship groups as well as the dispositions, motivations, and interests they displayed or talked to us about at school. We then visited them at home and met their parents. Each child took us on a media tour of the home, photographing all kinds of media and talking about the daily use of them. We became the young people's Facebook friends, and we spoke with them in particular about their uses of social media and the Internet in general. Other aspects of the project that are not developed here include following up with young people in the study who have particular hobbies or interests, such as playing a musical instrument or participating in sports, as well as considering how they all were making academic subject choices and beginning to imagine future careers at this stage of their schooling. All in all, we have gathered an enormous range of data in the study, including participant-observation field notes, focus-group discussions, digital footprints, social network relationships, as well as small-scale surveys and the schools' records of the pupils' behavior and academic progression. We also have interviews with the young people and their friends, families, and teachers.[2]

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[1] The London School of Economics and Political Science, "The Class," http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/The%20Class.aspx
For a further description of this project, see the Digital Media and Learning Research Hub, http://dmlhub.net/
[2] We are currently writing up the work as a book. For ongoing details about publication plans, see www.julianseftongreen.net

Researching the Phenomena of Learning

Our work in the home thus addressed activity across a number of domains, from interaction in the family to gaming, engagement in community activities, hanging out with friends, and solitary participation on Facebook or other websites. Determining what constitutes learning across these activities and the relationship of such learning to other more formal educational experiences is thus significantly an analytic question as much as it is an empirical one. Where and in what forms can we "see" or describe any "learning"? Since we set out deliberately to explore all kinds of learning, especially those not captured by the way that school frames it, we were inevitably entering into an opaque or fuzzy terrain.

I report here on three kinds of learning. First, there is the talk—within the family, by the young people themselves, and by teachers—about learning in the home, where what is meant by learning is given particular value. How notions of attainment and achievement as practiced in the school became incorporated in everyday family life was also crucial here. Second, we have pursued the way that talking about learning is now indistinguishable from talking about access to computers and other media technologies, including books,. This is partly a question of how resources are framed in the current era. It also expresses the mediatization of learning. Mediatization is an emerging and by no means uncontested concept that captures not simply the mediation of all kinds of experiences but the specific historical processes by which the media—including their institutions, practices, and texts—are gaining an ever-expanding grip over all aspects of human life (Lundby, 2009). While it is true that we asked the young people to take us on a media tour of the house, thus possibly biasing our focus, we were surprised by the centrality of all forms of media to the dominant conceptualizations of learning in these homes. This opened up for us a theory about the mediatization of learning in the home in general. Finally, we witnessed or heard about certain habits or disciplines involving concentration, motivation, engagement, and, above all, a narrative of development (Watkins, 2011), whether in gaming or playing an instrument. These habits or disciplines and participants' reflections on them seemed to us to constitute an embedded theory of learning, native to each particular situation; and although the observation of such habits is subject to the researchers' privilege, in that we looked for them, they seem to constitute a third dimension of the ways that learning might be said to be constituted in the home. These three phenomena—discourse, mediatization (and associated uses of technology), and habits—constitute the evidence on which our analysis here is based.

I am particularly keen on being as transparent as possible about the interrelationship of methodology to theory because in general the whole field of nonformal learning is not as scrupulous nor possibly secure as discussions about learning in more formal contexts. At the same time, the exploratory nature of theorizing nonformal learning also raises questions about what we take for granted in the contexts that we acknowledge as educational. This double

perspective is an important reason to consider nonformal learning as a conceptual irritant in the day-to-day practice of normalized talk about schools and learning.

School at Home

The most explicit example of the penetration of school-based forms of learning into the home concerns the family of Yusuf[3]. He was the eldest of four children, and his family had emigrated from East Africa when he was very young. His father had been a trained nurse but was now working on the railways in London as a ticket inspector. His mother spoke very limited English but Yusuf, his siblings, and his father were fluent. The family were devout Muslims, and Yusuf attended Koran school twice a week after regular school. He talked to us about the discipline of studying the Koran, which involved a considerable amount of rote learning even when he did not fully understand the content; progression through the *surahs* (the sections or verses of the Koran) was determined by his ability to repeat them by heart. The Koran school also offered a more open, discussion-based lesson reflecting moral and social issues. In addition, Yusuf had previously attended a supplementary school—run by the local education authority—where he worked on his math, science, and English. At school he worked conscientiously in every lesson and was in advanced classes for math and science, although he received remedial attention for his English. He had been screened for various kinds of learning difficulties with a special attention to dyslexia, but no formal statement of his educational needs had ever materialized.

As in many migrant families, in Yusuf's home there was an incredible focus on formal academic attainment, with the belief that achievement at school would lead to earning qualifications and, by implication, a higher income than his parents'. To this end, his father had purchased an integrated series of math and English programs on CD for around £3000 ($4700)—a considerable expenditure for any family, and especially for one with such modest means as Yusuf's. The CDs provide a series of graded activities and tests; when a certain number of tests have been passed, the company that makes the CDs issues bronze, silver, and gold certificates. The family had received a flyer advertising this product from the primary school of one of Yusuf's siblings. One of the family's upstairs bedrooms had been turned into a "classroom" and, as demonstrated in the picture below (Fig X.1), the progress of all of the children was made visible to the entire family. Progression is defined simply by completion of the various tests, shown here as one of the cells in the charts for each child.

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[3] All names are pseudonyms.

Fig X.1

Although the curriculum for these activities was equated with the ways that the national curriculum in England defined outcomes, it was unclear whether the young people made connections between this and the kind of testing that they received in school. The school did not appear to know that Yusuf was engaged in these activities at home, and even though he was given small-group support outside the classroom, the group teacher had no idea about it either.

The family was quite regimented about the disposition of time and resources allocated to supporting progression through the CD programs. When I visited, the father described himself as a sort of head teacher (school principal) within the family, and the whole family very proudly showed me Yusuf's framed certificate that he had received when he had completed the requisite number of tests to attain the bronze award. Although the upstairs room had been fitted out as a study and decorated in ways that we have seen, the rest of the educational apparatus (books, workbooks, television, and computer) were kept downstairs under the surveillance of the adults. In ways that recall the descriptions by researchers 10 years ago of where computers were situated as they came into family life (Livingstone, 2002), the sole computer in this house was shared by all the members of the family and kept under the stairs. In Fig X.2, it can be seen next to the television, facing the family seating and dining area.

Fig X.2

The rack of the CDs for the education program can be seen on the wall between the television and the computer. Books, worksheets, and other tests were all kept in box files in the kitchen next to this room.

The overall impression from a series of interviews with Yusuf as well as from visiting the family was of a highly regulated, controlled use of time. The children's use of the computer was in an open, shared space and therefore could be scrutinized and regulated by other members of the family. Yusuf was quite an avid user of Facebook but did not express any conflicts between desires for privacy and this enforced openness. All the children were expected to complete a certain number of tests—and fill in the appropriate cells in the wall chart—on a weekly basis, and as we have already noted, Yusuf also spent time at a supplementary school and the Koran school. Given that his father frequently worked afternoon and evening shifts and that Yusuf was not that fluent in his home language and therefore in some respects was not able to completely communicate with his mother, the family demonstrated a very high degree of discipline and endeavor. All of these activities, it should be noted, either mimicked or echoed forms of school-based learning, with graded progression and formalized testing. Working your way through this highly structured, regulated system, open to scrutiny, defined learning in this context.

Looking Like School

Across all of the young people in this project, any question about learning activities in the home immediately came down to the provision of computer facilities and desk-like furniture with some kind of private space that looked like an office.

Fig X.3

Of course, many homes cannot provide this much personal space for each member of the family; additionally, the availability and use of laptops as shared communal devices also undermined this model. Whether and in what ways the singular study space was used for educational purposes (however we or the families define this) is also a key question for us.

In several homes, parents clearly strove quite hard to provide this level of study space. However, whereas Yusuf's family—and his father in particular—went to great lengths to replicate in their home an elaborated version of learning at school, we did not see this superstructure created elsewhere. Indeed, what distinguishes Yusuf's learning is not just the use of computer technology but its extension into paper and book forms, its threads and connections to a range of online activities, and its blend of discipline and the appearance of progression. In many other homes, children and parents went to great lengths to create the circumstances for learning, which—as we have explained, and as can be seen in Fig X.3—are almost generic and formulaic, but which in practice act like simulacra, imitating the superficial appearances of study without providing any content.

This phenomenon is obviously related to cultural capital (Field, 2008). In Shane's family, no expense was spared in procuring what his mother had been led to believe was necessary to support his learning. However, to all intents and purposes, the equipment lay unused. Shane's bedroom was clearly divided into activity zones. In one corner there is a bed; in another area, equipment for more physical play—a small air hockey table and a boxing punch-ball; and in

another, the divided computer centers for gaming and work, with an Xbox and—placed diametrically opposite it—a PC. This distinction between work and pleasure was repeated in a number of the boys' bedrooms: a computer is for work, but the Xbox or PS3 and monitor are for fun.

However, Shane barely used his PC. He was unable to show us any software he used beyond a browser, and (with one exception) in effect used the computer almost exclusively for YouTube, web browsing—mainly shopping—and Facebook and only occasionally for doing research for school work, although the latter was constantly cited to justify and explain using computers in the home. There were no technological extensions (books, etc.) in this house, and no discussions about participation in other focused activities; the only practices in Shane's home that were counted as learning—in that they involved discipline, progression, and a theory of development—were sports related. Shane took his soccer seriously; he was a member of the school club and also played with his friends in a semiorganized fashion during vacation. However, it was very difficult to sustain a conversation with Shane about soccer as a serious endeavor which he was knowledgeable and passionate about, primarily because he was not used to conceptualizing it in this way.

Shane did use his computer to find out information and strategy to support the games he played on the X-box. There is considerable educational research exploring gaming as learning in the home, of which the best known is *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* (Gee, 2004). Shane was a keen gamer, although as for many of the other boys in this class, gaming primarily offered him an opportunity to stay in touch socially with his friends. This is perhaps especially important in an era of enforced anxiety about freedom to roam outdoors. For Shane, learning to play games and to progress within them was absolutely limited by what he needed to know to be able to compete with his friends when they played the popular Call of Duty and FIFA games. As was the case in the discussions about soccer, Shane didn't possess a vocabulary or a language to talk about strategies he might deploy to improve his game performance, and he certainly didn't take an interest in any metatextual practices—like reading magazines or looking up game cheats—beyond those which might be necessary for him to participate at the same level as his friends. For him, gaming was very much a means to a social end, and all learning involved in developing his skills was defined in terms of performativity— that is, what he needed to be able to do to be able to beat his friends. While, as we will see below, some of the other young people were interested in more open-ended gameplay and developing knowledge about games and more complex metagame strategies, Shane's game-based theories of learning were bound up solely in can-do attainment. Ironically, I might suggest, this echoes the emphasis on performance and outcome he might have found at school.

Class and Confidence

I have suggested so far that in some ways, learning in the home cannot escape some of the forms and genres that it takes at school. Although Yusuf and Shane's cases exemplify different kinds of continuity with school definitions of learning, both boys seemed to find it difficult to escape that paradigm. In the more middle-class households, however, some families had moved beyond the simple provision of technology as a proxy for learning and showed ways that they contextualized school-based study within other competing frameworks, suggesting that for these families there was a discourse of learning either beyond or alongside the school.

Dominic and Sara both came from affluent middle-class homes with parents in high-status professional occupations. Sara's mother's family had migrated from India, and both young people lived within a quarter of a mile of each other in large homes where each child had a private bedroom. Both Dominic and Sara enjoyed school and were doing very well academically. They both, in different ways, participated in a wide range of extracurricular and out-of-school activities. Dominic was a serious athlete and a member of both the local cricket and soccer clubs as well as of the school teams. Sara was doing an additional qualification in astronomy and was involved in Shakespeare workshops arranged by the school[4]. They both exemplified the kind of busy lifestyle with scheduled leisure time activities that Lareau describes as "concerted cultivation" (2003).

However, Lareau's analysis of what almost amounts to a form of investment by parents as a form of human capital may not be sufficiently sensitive to the ambiguities and tensions in these childhoods. Unlike Yusuf, both of these young people were given considerable freedom in how they chose to spend their time, and both sets of parents encouraged and supported a wide range of activities. These were not undertaken simply to contribute to the development of a future CV; involvement in them clearly stemmed from deeply held beliefs about the ways that engaging in other forms of learning, alongside that of school, were deemed to be important. Indeed, overemphasizing academic performance was considered in some senses undesirable.

Dominic is the middle child of three brothers, but despite the fact that his was an affluent home—and that the father worked in IT for a bank—the boys and their mother shared two computers between them as a deliberate strategy to encourage sharing, to regulate potentially antisocial behavior, and to mitigate against obsessive solitary game-playing. In fact, as we can see in Fig X.4 below, Dominic's bedroom was unique in our study in that he did not have any kind of screen in an office-like study space.

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[4] At 16 on completion of statutory education, students sit examinations in England called GCSE's. These examinations are offered in subject areas, English, Maths, Geography etc etc. Typically students will sit around eight subjects but able students may sit additional subjects earlier taking up to 12 exams in total.

Fig X.4

While Dominic did have access to an iPod touch, the family was very determined keep the boys from engaging in private screen-based activities in their bedrooms. The family did have an Xbox in a dedicated playroom for the boys, who therefore had access to virtual and online lives; however, studying in this home was organized to support directed purposive work with very clear boundaries. Dominic used the laptop in his room to complete assignments, but it didn't "live" there. The technologies in this house were not simplistically and directly equated with what it means to learn, and indeed Dominic's progress in his performance in sports was considered as important as his progress as in academic study. He was encouraged to take sporting activity as seriously as anything else. Shane played as much soccer as Dominic, but Dominic took preparation for games, commitment on the field, and collegial relationships with his friends on the team far more seriously as something at which he could always improve and develop. Indeed, Dominic's club soccer coach had made him player of the year because of the way that Dominic concentrated during the game and was consistently serious in considering strategy and talking to, encouraging, or leading his team-mates, as well as in paying attention to the work rate of the whole team.

In a similar fashion, Sara was encouraged by her family to take her hobbies seriously. When we first visited, she was making a whole series of Play-Doh sculptures, and she brought to whatever activity she was engaged in the same level of earnestness and commitment that she brought to her academic studies. While the family was obviously aware of the difference between earning a qualification in astronomy and making Play-Doh figures, it was noticeable how Sara approached everything with a similar intentness. In her home, there was an emphasis on achievement and on developing skills across all domains.

I would not suggest that either Dominic or Sara's family did not take school seriously, but they both clearly had the confidence to see learning at school in concert with achievements elsewhere, and they were prepared to support their children's growth and development across all domains, possibly—although we never asked this question—because they realized that there is a transferable ability to learn across different contexts. To be sure, the idea of achievement and progression was equally important to them. However, it may be that the family discourse about learning took place at this metalevel, where doing your best, working hard, learning from your mistakes, working with others, and other more intangible character traits were rewarded and sustained by this range of family practices.

A Hierarchy of Learning Practices and Knowledge Domains

One of the features, then, of more privileged middle-class homes is that the members have a more general understanding of learning than a narrow instrumental view that only recognizes the outcomes that schools have come to measure so explicitly (Schwartz & Arena, 2013). Our observations of our final pair of young people, Adam and Giselle, begin to shed light on how participating in more marginalized but recognized communities of practice can constitute another perspective on learning in such middle-class households. Both of these young people came from relatively well-off homes, and both, as it happened, had one parent who had moved to England from another European country. Both sets of parents were highly educated.

Giselle was interested in a wide range of art-related practices. She drew, performed, and played music and had a sense of herself as an emerging artist who in some way would be able to develop a career in the arts. At home she played Minecraft on a server run by one of her cousins, and she also developed a Tumblr blog, among other things. Her parents encouraged both of these practices, and they discussed her progress in both domains with her and supported it. Besides encouraging her to practice for her music lessons—and transporting her to them and back—Giselle's mother, herself a trained artist, also worked with her daughter on her art. Giselle described to me how when they went on vacation, she and her brother used dedicated sketchbooks as part of the holiday ritual. Giselle's mother had also run a small after-school club for art when Giselle was younger. Thus, professional practices—such as using the sketchbook and criticizing and developing art together or talking about and sharing photography—were normalized within day-to-day family activities. In addition, the structure of such activities framed the development of less conventional pursuits like Tumblr and Minecraft.

Giselle's father, who did not play Minecraft himself, knew that Giselle and her younger brother were very active on the cousin's server and that Giselle also played a dominant role in supporting and advising new players and legislating about behavior and developments in the fictional universe on the server. Neither parent directly supervised Giselle's online play, although there was a certain publicness to it, in that she used her laptop in a corner of the living

room, and of course her parents knew the cousin. Her father was extremely interested in talking to us about her play on Minecraft and, without knowing about any research about gaming and education, clearly saw the activity as incorporating a range of learning processes. Unprompted, he spoke to us about how the play developed technological fluency and also about learning to behave in a virtual social world. Giselle and he talked about some of the game's design issues, such as developing customized skins for building textures. He clearly treated her participation with a certain equality and seriousness, recognizing that it involved a degree o responsibility on her part. He had no qualms about supporting her in this fashion in engaging in Minecraft.

As our year with this class progressed, Giselle actually began to lose her interest in Minecraft as she developed other social foci. She devoted a fair amount of energy to her Tumblr blog which, at that time, was predominantly driven by concern with a developing identity—expressing and sharing feelings—but which was als a way of developing her aesthetic sensibility, in that many of the images she collected were of interest to her from a specifically artistic point of view. That was how she explained why or how she chose the images for her blog. Again, her interest in Tumblr was intense for a few months, and then it too declined. In the context of this paper, I want to suggest two important features about Giselle's participation in Minecraft and Tumblr that relate to her family's conceptualization of learning. First of all, the family was agnostic about what constitutes a learning domain and was therefore quite happy to respect her participation in Minecraft as what we might term a "community of practice" (Lave and Wenger 1991) in ways that clearly identified that participation as a form of learning progression with serious and valuable but intangible outcomes. Second, she had learned to frame her activity on Tumblr as in some ways an extension and development of her other embedded artistic practices. In that sense, this hobby contained a series of types of learning that were quite explicitly related to other more formal outcomes and that drew on a wider set of formal discourses, in this case about aesthetics and taste.

By contrast, when we first met Adam, he was very keen on constructing himself as a serious games player. Unlike Shane, Adam clearly engaged with the challenge of gaming and the world of the games themselves with a high degree of affective investment; it seemed as if gaming was the most important thing in his life. Indeed, his mother certainly was very anxious about the amount of time he spent playing games and had in her own mind positioned gaming and schooling as in some ways oppositional domains within family life. From her point of view, Adam was enthusiastic, motivated, and obsessively interested in gaming, and, in contrast, uninterested and demotivated with respect to schooling. The games themselves were a source considerable family conflict, as Adam's parents found his interest in militarized shoot 'em ups problematic, and his mother talked to us about her concerns about him appearing to derive sadistic pleasure from inflicting pain and the enjoyment he seemed to take from fictional killing. Adam himself was very clear to us about his interpretation of the meaning of these kinds of

games (in particular, Call of Duty). He was frustrated that his parents did not allow him to buy games that had been certified for people older than himself; indeed, he revealed a range of strategies that he deployed to get hold of such games. He clearly found game-playing absorbing and challenging in ways that he and his family explicitly counterpoised with his experiences of school.

This is not to say that his family had conceptualized game-playing as educational in any way, although they were familiar with some of the broader public arguments about such claims, derived from the scholarship referred to above. Rather, they contrasted Adam's enthusiasm, commitment, emotional investment, interest, and focus with regard to game-playing with the opposite behavioral traits that he exhibited with regard to schooling. Unlike Shane's family and the families who had set up work/play bedrooms, Adam's family characterized this opposition, in some ways, as a conflict between modes of engagement.

It was certainly true that Adam's game-playing was qualitatively different from that of the other young people we interviewed, with the exception of Giselle's engagement with Minecraft. Adam had access to PC gaming as well as an Xbox and was as interested in more exploratory, open-ended games—like Skyrim and a skating game that allowed him to experiment with moves and sequences and to be led by the qualities of the game in a less directed fashion—as he was in more scripted games. The first time we visited Adam's home, he was less concerned with the kind of social interactions that we observed in relationship to Shane and more focused on mastering the game, rather than simply being measured by leveling or other forms of outcomes-defined metrics. He showed us a number of surrounding texts from magazines, websites, and other sources that he explored in relationship to gaming. I am suggesting here that for a variety of reasons, both negative and positive, Adam and his family had in some ways the confidence to define his interest in gameplay as a form of learning—one that, furthermore, stood in opposition to what school might offer. Yet this was a contradictory and fraught position. Did he and his family use the idea of learning in gaming as a way of justifying and giving status to what in other terms was characterized as a form of troubling and delinquent behavior? Structuring gaming as an oppositional domain to schooling at least implicitly bestowed some of the status of schooling onto Adam's achievements in the virtual world. Or do we interpret the fact that he characterized game-playing as possessing deep values that we associate with learning as a resistant insight that he generated himself as a way of marking off his adolescent identity from the childhood narrative beloved by his parents? We cannot know the answers to these kinds of questions, but the interesting thing in the context of this paper is how game-playing had become imbued with the qualities of an educational discourse, albeit one with negative connotations.

When we finally visited him later in the year, Adam had moved away from this position and was eager to stress how game-playing had become a more neutral, disinterested domain that

allowed him to connect with his friends. He told us that he could often maintain parallel conversations and interactions online at the same time as playing either in competition with or alongside his friends. He seemed to have reached some sort of rapprochement with his family about game-playing, and they now had less concern around questions of violence and killing. In this interview, he strongly resisted the idea that he was a serious gamer and was anxious to characterize his gaming as a form of sociality. Although he was still happy to show off his prowess, his interest had drifted away from open-ended exploration toward a more managed relationship with gaming as a leisure pursuit. In some ways, then, I would speculate that gaming was beginning to lose its status as a learning domain and that Adam had additionally become far more involved in his schoolwork; in particular, he took a German public examination early, as he was bilingual. It is difficult to say quite how we can configure and calibrate the interrelationship of reward and interest in formal schooling alongside the negotiation positions in the family and how much informal domains like game-playing act as the terrain for these kinds of conflicts.

However, prowess and interest in nonacademic domains were characterized by both Giselle and Adam and their families in ways that clearly embedded the young people's activities as part of a larger and longer-term trajectory of the development of what has been characterized as a learning identity (Wortham, 2005). In these homes, the child's interest and engagement was immediately framed by such a discourse, and although the story of Giselle and Adam's development shows both incorporation and conflict, respectively, what unites them is a shared family concern with the nature of learning itself. Both homes had very different attitudes about the value of constructing learning in these nonformal domains—almost with their own separate hierarchies—but the two families shared a common frame.

Conclusion

In some ways, I am tempted to suggest that the definition of learning is a bit like those elusive definitions of art—subject to opinion, personal preference, tradition, and ideology. Claiming learning in the home *as* learning almost always seems like a plausible strategy, but only if there can be consensus and mutually understood points of reference. The tensions over the value and meaning of computer games illustrate this both positively and negatively. The work that Shane was putting into developing his social relationships remained present but almost unarticulated, except to us. In Giselle's household, learning domains were extended to include art and Minecraft, while in Adam's, nonacademic activities were much more problematically acknowledged as learning. The contrast between dominant versions of schooling and learning for Yusuf, on the one hand, and for Dominic or Sara, on the other, show that any simple idea about learning in the home needs to be considered from a sociological perspective.

Building on Stevens et al.'s (2008) work, discussed in the opening of this paper, I have argued that we can break down learning experiences across what has too often been seen as the singular entity of "the home" into three dimensions. First, there is the tacit agreement among family members about what is meant by learning; second, there are the activities associated with such a definition in terms of disciplines or habits; and third, there is the role of media technology as medium, surrogate, or proxy for the learning itself. I have suggested that for any one child, these frames determine the meaning of learning in an ever-changing process of definition and redefinition.

As we explored how change over the year-long course of our research constructed particular kinds of opportunities and directions which were either taken up or rejected by, for example, Adam or Giselle, we could see this struggle for meaning within the trajectory of one young person over a period of time. The learning we observed in these homes is clearly not a constant entity. This too should counsel us against any simplistic notion of what it means to talk about learning in the home.

Finally, it is worthwhile considering, as Wegerif has recently suggested, that learning is only really enabled, constituted, produced, or made visible—there is no simple verb to choose here—through dialogue (2012). In this respect, as we probed into the lives of these young people, made enquiries about what they took for granted, and asked them and their families about both their everyday and long-term aspirations, the research process itself had to play a key role in facilitating a reflection about the very nature of learning. Adam especially—but probably all of these young people in different ways—found our interventions helpful in constructing gaming as a more serious form of endeavor than his family discourse conventionally allowed. In other words, the very act of talking about—and certainly of researching—learning in the home gives it a validity that it does not normally possess. It grants it status and constitutes it as a phenomenon. The more we are interested in expanding our understanding of learning in the home, the more we look for it, the more we bring it into being.

Acknowledgments

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