

The Gothic Gamification of Diablo:

A Framework for the English Composition/First-Year Writing Classroom

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Abstract—Gamification in the English Composition classroom needs more research and varying approaches. This article presents a conceptual framework for gamifying the classroom, which is used to model reimagining of a “skill tree” from the video game *Diablo II*. The framework is presented alongside elements and analyses from the game itself, with student feedback and student success data. While statistical analyses are not conducted, the game elements are extrapolated and the success rates and student comments are engaged with to support proof-of-concept. The game elements are also explored through the lens of the Gothic, which is used to assert and support a deep gamification framework, as opposed to the shallow BPL approaches of prior literature. The gothic gamified classroom asserts that this ground-up approach to the redesigned classroom should be a reincarnation of the game, as opposed to stapling a simply metaphor on top of the classroom. Essentially, this article shows how to gamify a classroom by explaining the rationale of the game, details elements of the game used and borrowed into the gamified classroom framework, and supports that framework with an explanation of proof-of-concept student feedback. All of this is presented as a framework to be further explored and tested for transference between other classrooms and disciplines.

Keywords—gothic, gamification, video games, pedagogy, conceptual framework, learning and literacy, English composition

I. INTRODUCTION

In the world of the Gothic, emphasis is on the past coming back to life, or how the past haunts us, or even the ways in which we reimagine, reintegrate, or reinvolve. Thinking through a Gothic lens, in what ways does gamification invite the reincarnation of a video game into a new space? Gamification is the adding of game elements to non-game-related objects or tasks [1]. More specifically, “gamification involves the identification, extraction, and application of individual game elements or limited, meaningful combinations of those elements” [2] (p. 754). Gamification can also be seen in real-world settings observed through apps with reward systems in place to track workout and diet progress [3] or electronic-learning software programs [4, 5].

Documentation has shown that Gamification is used most frequently in learning and education settings [6, 7]. Reference [8] captures this notion well by stating: “...the experience-points-based achievement systems in MMORPGs could easily be transformed into educational-credits-based achievement systems in which students accumulate credits for accomplishing educational tasks” (p. 99). For education, gamification is simple, as reference [9] eloquently phrases: “make learning experiences akin to games, and perhaps students will find them as engaging as their favourite video

games” (p. 2). Reference [10] noted that gaming and learning can be intertwined through the acquisition of skills. While there have been hundreds of studies on gamification, including several studies that synthesized those hundreds [11, 12], reference [13] states that bringing gamification design into teaching is still “a breakthrough” (p. 7).

Gamification studies, frameworks, and use in the English Composition/First-Year Writing Classroom still remain limited- a gap this article helps to fill. Particular gaps are noted by references [14, 15, 16] which remain some of the few studies focused on the English Composition/First-Year Writing environment, and references [17, 18] are some of a few of the conceptual frameworks to follow when modeling or gamifying an environment. Thus, this article presents new and additional ways that gamification can be used in the English Composition/First-Year Writing Classroom. It should be noted though that this framework presented below was modeled largely off of only reference [19] and [8] as detailed below.

While notions of transferability between courses cannot be fully studied in this piece due to length, other researchers are encouraged to adopt and test this framework for transferability beyond the English Composition/First-Year Writing classroom. This paper does not seek to assert statistical bases for gamifying, but this paper does employ a review of success rates of the course over multiple semesters and cohorts of students to track improvements made through the use of this framework. This follows the gap and suggestion made from reference [20] who notes that further testing and implementation of a new framework in an English classroom should be done over multiple semesters with larger cohorts of students. Reference [11] notes that other gaps in previous gamification articles still exist, such as the missing element where details and elements of the games were not explained in the gamified classroom. Thus, this article will also detail more in depth the borrowed, influenced, and strategic elements borrowed from the game of choice – *Diablo II* – that are used in the gamification process. While *Diablo II* [21] is older than, for example, *Diablo IV* [22] or *Diablo III* [23] *Diablo II* received a remastered release in 2021, called *Diablo II: Resurrected* [24] which saw its initial PC-only release extended onto consoles, updating the game and reigniting a player base.

The world of *Diablo* itself will be explored slightly in the analysis section, but it cannot be explored fully in this short piece alone. *Diablo*, which is largely based in the Judeo-Christian religions [25], has been noted to also fall into the genre of the Gothic by [26], noting “allow players the excitement of participating in worlds full of demons and

vampires amid ruins of gothic chaos” (p.189). Diablo’s atmosphere, names, landscape, histories, religion, and more all resonate with the Gothic. By continuing this theme of exploring Gothic elements, the text and narrative of Diablo supports the growth of vocabulary and writing skills that are needed in an English Composition/First-Year Writing classroom, as well as providing the backbone for choices in the gamification process. Thus, following the presentation of the Assignment “Skill” Tree document, a brief literary/gothic analysis will show how Diablo as a game supports the educational environment, and what elements were borrowed from the game into the gamified classroom. On discussing queer Gothic, reference [27] asks: “what if Gothic were, on the contrary, motivated by a wish that social life could be more traumatic, more anxious, more paranoid, more sexually transgressive and bizarre, more overwrought: in short, more interesting than it generally is?” (p. 180). Therefore, the guiding thought for this framework becomes, when influenced from the queer gothic, can a gamified classroom become motivated by a wish that it was more fun, more dramatic, more engaging than it actually is? This article will propose such a conceptual framework based on a video game model to examine such gamification.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Deep Gamification of a Classroom

Gamified course design, as noted by reference [28] “showed more than a 65% decrease in withdrawals and dropouts, 47% decrease in failures, and a 10% increase in grades” (p. 429). Many of the studies on gamification report on “shallow” forms [29], such as badges, points, and leaderboards (BPL) [9, 7]. These forms of Gamification do not take into account more comprehensive approaches. As reference [7] notes, “incorporating game design principles involving game mechanics and dynamics such as challenges, choice, low risk failure, role-play or narrative are still scarce” (p. 10). This is echoed by reference [9] and the more recent call for additional comprehensive frameworks.

Reference [13] notes that gamification in education engages the teachers to design materials in a way that are more interactive, and the more interactive classroom benefits students and helps them have fun [4]. Reference [19] discusses the notions of what makes a good video game and suggests these also make for good teaching. Instead of shifting small materials and educational activities into a game, like Jeopardy reviews, more design elements need to be incorporated into the course from the ground up to address the underlying themes of the class: becoming deeply gamified.

Despite referring to itself as a game-based classroom, one of the older gamified classroom studies, reference [30], employs the use of this shallow form of gamification. Reference [30] notes that in one iteration of the gamified classroom, they displayed a leaderboard to motivate other students, which was later removed. Another instance of the gamification referenced that the point system also encountered similar problems of motivation [30]. Referring back to the 2024 study [9], this study notes that much of the focus around motivation of students is too thinly focused on these shallow forms of gamification, which also fall back on the “myopic reliance on a narrow band of theoretical frameworks such as SDT and flow theory” (p. 14). Therefore, this framework takes on the theory of the deep gamification, not to motivate students to engage with self-determination

theory (SDT) or achieve a state of flow, but rather to achieve reference [9]’s call for theoretical pluralism. In the case of this article, this author falls back on the combination of reference [29]’s call for deep gamification, along with reference [11]’s call for explanation of game elements borrowed into the gamified course.

B. Gothic and Video Games

On this note of theoretical pluralism from [9], elements of the Gothic and queerness are a welcomed addition into discussions of ludology, video games, gamification, and play. Discussing video games and the gothic, reference [31] states “while acknowledging the multiple meanings of the word ‘play’, as genres go, there is something unusually ludic about horror and the Gothic genre” (p. 15). Further, reference [31] discusses how the “Gothic is a profoundly transmedia genre, constantly assimilating, mutating, appropriating, and blurring boundaries between cultures and formats” (p. 11). From this lens, we can see how the video game built on the Gothic can thus present a transmedia approach to importing itself into a classroom via gamification efforts. The Gothic’s emphasis on things that are abject, grotesque, and uncanny can all be seen further in the world of Diablo through the monsters of whom are reincarnated into the world. In fact, as will be shown below, common themes such as the grotesque or common Gothic monsters like vampires occur in Diablo even through the naming conventions.

What if, instead of viewing gamification as a layer stapled on top of a classroom structure, scholars use [29]’s deep gamification theory as a way to reconstruct the classroom from the ground up: a reincarnation. Where game-based learning suggests a classroom like [32] in which the game is played in class and learning is constructed via the gameplay, the Gothic gamification – Gothification - suggests that the game of choice becomes reconstructed in the classroom affecting the choices, decisions, and reasonings of the entire classroom structure. In other words, the game haunts the curriculum.

Noting the queerly Gothic, reference [33] states: “To be queer in Gothic terms is... to juxtapose the familiar and the unfamiliar, the rational and the supernatural, the past and the present, the acceptable and the condemnable” (p. 2). By these standards, not only can we see how the gamification of a class by inheriting, borrowing, remastering a game into classroom can embody these structures, but we can also see how the classroom thus becomes the juxtaposition of being both a place of work and learning, and a place of gaming and fun, embodying the queer gothic. By tearing down and rebuilding this Gothically structured, queerly embodied, gamified classroom, in what ways are we also going beyond the call for deep gamification, but actually embodying other ‘best practices’ for all classrooms, collated from a variety of resources?

C. Other Educational Best Practices

Outside of gamification, there are several other practices that have been demonstrated to be beneficial practices in the classroom, such as flexibility with deadlines [34], project-based learning [35], multimodality [36], and collaborative learning [37]. As well, a curriculum with emphasis on social and emotional learning [38], culturally sustaining pedagogy [39] and community cultural wealth [40] have been documented to be more interactive and engaging with

students. In the writing/composition classroom, various writing practices have been beneficial, such as revise and resubmit [41, 42], iterative drafting [43], and process-based and reflective writing [36]. These all should be used in conjunction with gamification to further avoid a simple badges, points, leaderboard approach to gamification. These require pedagogical improvements to be made to the classroom, rather than stapling a game on top of poor teaching.

Through the creation of a conceptual framework, this author set out to create a classroom that fuses all of the above best practices together through gamification of the writing classroom [14, 15, 16]. The author infused these components together and mixed in other various pedagogies, like queer methodologies for the writing curriculum [44] and becoming a reflexive practitioner [45]. Additionally, themed classrooms in the English Composition/First-Year Writing classroom have been shown to be positive [46], which is why the theme the gothic, or the gamified elements of Diablo pair well into an English Composition/First-Year Writing classroom.

III. GAMIFICATION AND CREATION OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Below explains the creation of a design called “the Assignment ‘Skill’ Tree” that can be used as a conceptual framework for testing gamification efficacy in the English Composition/First-Year Writing Classroom. A graphic of this Skill Tree has been published alongside pedagogical choices, in [47], but has not been explained in detail as this framework explains. In order to explore how this gamified design was created, applied, and used in different settings, the different elements will be explained, including the rationale for the modeled game of choice, and implementation practices. The Assignment “Skill” Tree Framework begins to fuse literacy acquisition, gamification benefits in the classroom, and teaching best practices, to create an all-encompassing framework.

The reasoning for the format of this article and the rationale for choices can be seen from a variety of sources that support descriptive reasoning behind conceptual framework choices. Reference [48] states most articles to date have focused on ad hoc elements instead of design process. Reference [12] complements this by stating that gamification must balance definitions of gamification with practical approaches. As well, reference [7] notes that elements of choice were still scarce from the literature on gamification.

Elements specific to this Assignment “Skill” Tree Framework center around: 1) choice of assignment (pathway), 2) distribution of points (weight of assignment), and 3) increasing difficulty in assignments (scaffolding). Each of these elements not only can be beneficial to the classroom, but can be seen inside of the video game world of Diablo II. The elements of the Gothic, primarily through the video game Diablo, reincarnated herein through the Assignment “Skill” Tree asks students to grapple with the flexibility of managing their own time and deadlines, as well more critical thinking engagement since there is not a prescriptive rubric to follow. Choice, in and of itself, asks students to consider the pros and cons of what they like and want to learn. As reference [27] notes, “In its more Foucauldian mode, queer theory might see the Gothic as an occasion not for diagnosing or moralising, but for the creative transfiguration of the self through the readerly pleasures of fear and abjection” (p. 175). While this framework does not subject anyone to fear directly, in what

ways do classrooms, assignments, and submitting work for judgement emulate that same level of fear and abjection? In what ways do classrooms ask students to creatively transform themselves?

While none of these elements are individually unique, the combination between the elements is what makes the Assignment “Skill” Tree Framework successful. The conceptual framework, called The Assignment “Skill” Tree, was developed, as inspired by a combination of reference [8] and the suggestion for educational-based-credit systems from gaming experience points (XP), and reference [19] with the “37 Learning Principles” while using the gamified inspiration of Diablo II [21, 24] – mainly the skill tree system from the game, as well as the vocabulary and learning details found within the game. Despite both works coming from the early 2000s, they collectively provide foundational details to understanding how video games and education systems interact. In 2025, reference [19] received and updated review to explore the impacts on gaming and learning since the initial debut [49].

While other games feature skill trees that could be adapted and modeled for an educational space, this particular framework was based on Diablo II [21, 24], and not any other games. In 2013, reference [32] saw a different Blizzard Entertainment game get turned into a gamified classroom – World of Warcraft. In this class, reference [32] refers to that class not as game-based learning as reference [30] did, but as gaming pedagogy. This author has too used that phrasing elsewhere [47] to describe a gaymer pedagogy, of which this Assignment “Skill” Tree could be considered one component. While reference [32] also incorporates playing the video game in class, this Framework presented below does not supply that as this is the key difference: while [32] is using World of Warcraft in class to teach through the game, this Framework presented below takes the best attributes of the game – Diablo – and employs them in a gamified way, presented in more detail below.

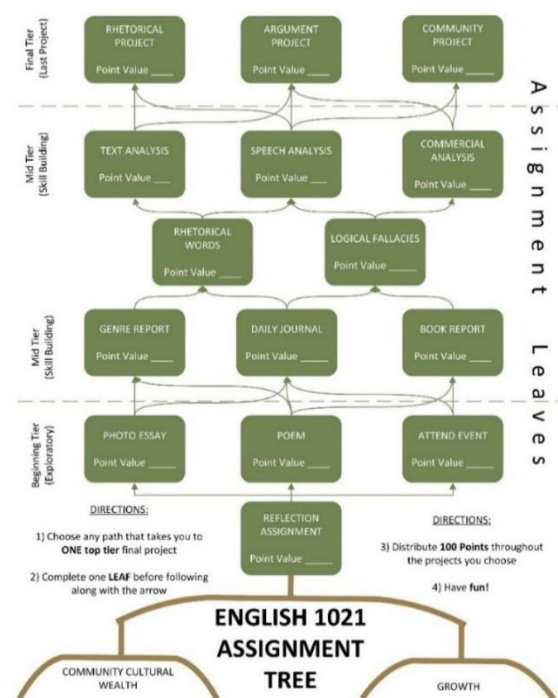


Fig. 1. The Assignment ‘Skill’ Tree Document

A. Explanation of the Assignment “Skill” Tree Document

In a Composition classroom where more advanced materials are scaffolded upon lower tier learning, the author developed the skill tree to model this. The higher the tree grows, the harder and more challenging the assignments become. Therefore, all of the students start in the same place, but can take any pathway from there to combine assignments together to create a path unique to them, that works with their skill sets. Students have 100 points (100%) of their grade to divide among the chosen (6) assignments - essentially weighting their assignments.

Figure 1 is the cover page of a full booklet the author made to detail the assignments. The booklet starts out with a letter from the author explaining my rationale to the students for making this tree. Included in this rationale is where, how, and why the author built this tree, as well as an explanation of a “no deadline” structure for the class, which keeps students on track, but contains no penalties for a “late submission”. Following, there is a table of contents (hyperlinked in the Word/Online version), and then each assignment is detailed with submission guidelines. There are instructions to each assignment, followed by a “How to Succeed” section, instead of a rubric. There are also point range suggestions for the “weight” of each assignment. Following all three sections of the class/skill tree (Exploratory Tier, Skill Building Tier, and Final Tier), the author also include what is labeled as the “Sunshine Tier” or what helps tree to grow. In the Sunshine Tier, the author explains that all projects can and should be submitted for revisions so everyone can get the maximum amount of points available.

B. Gamification of Diablo II, or Why this Structure?

Diablo II [21] was released by Blizzard Entertainment in 2000, with an expansion released in 2001. The game was remastered in 2021 and re-released on all platforms under the title Diablo II: Resurrected [24]. Diablo, as a universe, comes with a whole host of literacy concepts to learn and get used to, ranging from the vocabulary of weapons/armor/demons to the lore of the game.

In each Act of the game, the player progresses on a randomized, but linear map with the completion of each quest. As players complete quests, advance on the map, and kill monsters, the characters increase in level. The player receives one skill point per level to allocate to a magical ability (unlocking a new one or strengthening an old one). The highest new skill unlocks at level 30, but characters can continue leveling up to 99. The skill tree in Diablo II comes with a range of strategies for game play style based on character and skill choice. Out of the variety of character choices, each has three unique spell types ranging from elemental magic to summoning, or from traps to offensive/defensive buffs. The game can be played with, and success can be achieved with, any class and any combination of skills.

Initially, to the author, Diablo II seemed like not only the right metaphor for the linearity of a classroom curriculum, but with its advanced language and prose, it seemed perfect for the English classroom, specifically with its heavy references to literary texts, such as *the Inferno* [50]. Reference [51] notes rich storytelling of role-playing games (RPGs) invite players to “bring their own histories with them” and “read the world and gameplay tasks as ‘myth’” (p. 394-395). Therefore,

Diablo serves as the perfect inspiration for the gamification of a classroom by bridging together the key literacy and learning concepts noted by reference [19] as well as the growth and experience points that reference [8] points out.

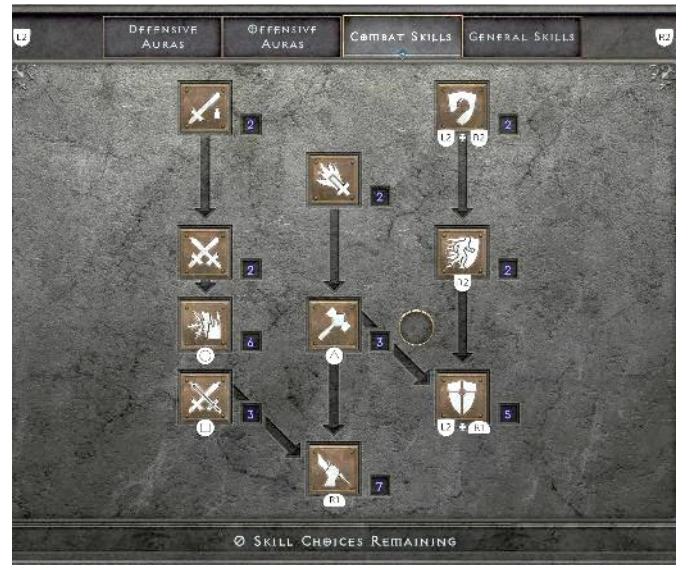


Fig. 2. Diablo II Skill Tree Example (Paladin Character, Combat Skills, Captured On Playstation 5 Console)

Diablo II, as opposed to Diablo III and Diablo IV, requires foresight and planning to achieve success, much like the classroom environment. As can be seen from Figure 2, the skill points must be distributed intentionally among the columns that connect, as well as planning for distributions after unlocking a higher level skill.

Shown below are screenshots from Diablo III's and Diablo IV's skill trees. In Diablo III, the tree acts more of a choice based on type of gameplay (Figure 3), allowing players to freely keep choosing and rechoosing skills. In Diablo IV, while the point system returned (Figure 4), players progressed along the tree in a linear fashion from one category to another.



Fig. 3. Diablo III Skill Tree Example (Demon Hunter Character, Captured On Playstation 5 Console)



Fig. 4. Diablo IV Skill Tree Example (Rogue Character, Captured On Playstation 5 Console)

In Diablo II, players had to plan for the level unlock by strategically choosing how to distribute their points (the weighted grade component) and which assignments would place them on a path to success (choosing your assignment path), in order to get the correct skills to succeed at the final tier (scaffolding difficulty of assignments). Emphasis here is on how Diablo II's skill tree is crucial for supporting the foresight required to complete classroom assignments – the key gamified element – as opposed to the selective skill trees of Diablo III and Diablo IV. While each game and skill tree system has benefits and drawbacks, this particular Assignment “Skill” Tree Framework was developed based on Diablo II, not only as a structural concept, but also the game environment, which will be explored more below. Thus, not only does Diablo II support the efforts to deeply gamify a classroom, but as will be shown below, the worldbuilding of Diablo, vocabulary, and Gothic elements also support a rich learning environment that can help an English Composition/First-Year Writing Classroom. Of note, the worldbuilding of Diablo as a whole, in all games, does support the Gothic gamification notion of rebuilding the course from the ground up (reincarnating the game in the classroom), as similar Gothic elements are in all of the Diablo games. With more space, an article could draw comparisons between the games for which elements from each game are the best when gamifying a course.

C. Analysis of Diablo/Support of Game Choice

Diablo II proved to be an exciting choice for the gamification of an English classroom. While primarily chosen for the inspiring skill tree system, which served as a unique analogy to the point accumulation of classroom grades, Diablo II also served as an analytical foundation point through its relation to the literary elements found in the game demonstrated through the combination of 1) complex syntax with storytelling and 2) organizational diction. The game also supported Gothic and rhetorical analyses, which strengthened the learning environment of the English Composition/First-Year Writing classroom. As the Composition classes focus on these concepts, the game proved to be a well-rounded example to help connect students with material and aid in the gamification of the class.

The literature and storytelling are important to the world of Diablo, as well as the English Composition classroom. For example, about halfway through Act I, you encounter a tome in the wild that tells you a tale about an optional Act I quest.

...And so it came to pass that the Countess, who once bathed in the rejuvenating blood of a hundred virgins, was buried alive...And her castle in which so many cruel deeds took place fell rapidly into ruin. Rising over the buried dungeons in that god-forsaken wilderness, a solitary tower, like some monument to Evil, is all that remains.

The Countess' fortune was believed to be divided among the clergy, although some say that more remains unfound, still buried alongside the rotting skulls that bear mute witness to the inhumanity of the human creature [21, 24].

In this example, the Countess is painted to be an evil and demonic, yet mythological creature. The phrase “who once bathed in the rejuvenating blood of a hundred virgins” is framed as an aside, meant to define the Countess to the players. The syntax of this passage not only suggests more gruesome details, but the vocabulary and structure also lure players into a more advanced and complex storyline. This subordinate clause is not grammatically needed for us to know she was buried alive, yet it uses an appeal to mythos that provides the player with more details about her. The tower she was buried in was framed in similar contexts, using the simile “like some monument to Evil” to describe it as a tall, foreboding structure, akin to the Countess herself.

The tome itself states that the fortune is likely to still be “buried alongside the rotting skulls that bear mute witness to the inhumanity of the human creature”. Through the use of word choice like rejuvenating blood and mute witness, players are instilled with a creepiness that resembles the imagery that will be found inside the tower: creatures of bone, pentagrams of flames, and blood-stained sarcophaguses, each of which appear to suggest the atmosphere of Gothic. The paradox of horror [52] describes the pleasure people feel within horror simulations, along with fear, and describes it as a reason people may continue to play a game. Through the syntactical choices like the simile and subordinate defining clauses, the player is provided with more background and lore that makes the world richer and feel more realistic, more demonic and sinister. Essentially, the storytelling not only provides a quest, but it provides a literary challenge. The imagery allows for players to learn linguistic details (even strengthening their

vocabulary) while playing the game [19], and even allows for players to learn rhetorical analysis and gothic analysis skills applicable to the real-world through simply playing the game [8].

Similarly, other language and linguistic choices can be found scattered throughout the world, like the shrines players can click on for small boosts of abilities. For example, the stamina shrine, which provides a bonus of not running low on stamina (and thus being forced to walk), projects the phrase “the weight of the world seems lighter” above the shrine when it is clicked on. Instead of describing the effect that was just provided, the game instead opts for a more fanciful approach to the storytelling and gameplay that shows a turn of phrase instead. All of these choices culminate continuously to reinforce the worldbuilding [51].

Additionally, gear will often have an intricate name indicative of the properties it’s bestowing on the character. Instead of saying “gloves of life stealing” the game will instead use a complicated system of prefixes and suffixes that would read instead “gloves of the leech” or “vampiric gloves of [blank]”. The leech, a creature that sucks blood like the mythical vampire, invokes the image of the draining life force of a person: blood. In the game, blood is equivalent to life. The life meter is a giant red glass. Life refilling shrines are pools of red liquid. Thus, the image of the leech or the vampire conjures the idea that the life-stealing properties would be added to this gear, bestowing such properties on the character.

Reference [53] notes this element of the vampiric spells or vampiric weapons has been used in other games, as well as the Diablo series. Reference [53] reaffirms as well the strong relationship vampires have with the Gothic. Reference [54] also lists out other gothic elements, such as “supernatural events, dilapidated buildings, and atmospheric weather” (p. 1), each of which is present in the game that all aid in painting the world of Diablo II as one that can be read, experienced, and played all for its literary value alongside its ludic value, and a game that can be particularly useful for aiding in the learning of the English Composition classroom.

Aside from storytelling word choices, Diablo II also invites players into a complex leveling system employed with an advanced and skilled thesaurus of words. The intelligent diction can be seen through the naming conventions of a variety of mechanics from monster names to armor designs that produce a sophisticated organizational system for players to track progress throughout the game. In the game, a set number of kinds of weapons and armor remain as choices for the character as you navigate and recycle the acts and difficulties, but their names change along with the level requirements with which you can acquire and equip them. In Act 1, normal difficulty, you are initially given access to headgear called “caps” – essentially a leather headpiece. They become slightly more sophisticated with a metal skull cap, and then eventually a helm and full helm and so on. In Act 1, nightmare difficulty, the cap is now called a “war hat”, the helm is now called a “casque”, simply a more nebulous word also meaning a helmet. Similarly to the armor, the same mechanic plays out weapons. The scimitar, a curved blade, is eponymously named in the normal mode, but the name gets changed in nightmare mode to a cutlass, and an Ataghan (Turkish curved blade) in hell mode. Essentially, the more advanced the act/difficulty, the more advanced the linguistic choices and patterns.

The name change for players indicates that the newly named item is of higher quality and one that warrants use in conjunction with leveling up, as opposed to ignorance. Instead of crafting more and more styles, complicating the game unnecessarily with visual changes, and possibly complicating a system of deciding which is a better, more advanced weapon acquired through progress and unlock in the game, the game employs the same design with a different name. As noted above, the progress of the game from normal to nightmare to hell is the exact same game in terms of story and unlockable content, but the character continues progression instead of starting over. For reference, the difficulties change every five acts. Leveling is optional, as in most RPGs, but the initial normal difficulty is completed well in advance of the level 99 cap.

Monsters also share in this same journey of name changes. One of the first creatures players meet – a little red imp known as Fallen, later becomes a Carver, followed by a Devilkin. A beastly looking creature walking on all fours is introduced as a Misshapen followed by Disfigured, Tainted, and Afflicted. These name changes, like that of weapons and armor, suggest not only the use of thesaurus to the richness of storytelling, but that the variety of words invokes greater breadth of lore. Through the use of synonyms, a more advanced and sophisticated palate of words starts to build around the mythology and lore that will be explored. As well, with words like Ataghan, players are invited to learn about other cultures and histories, which reinforces the notions of learning. Reference [8] and [19] both remind us that the acquisition of knowledge, language, and skills in a video game can all aid in the learning of content in real life and classrooms. Taken as a whole, this learning also aids in the worldbuilding, myth, and rhetorics that reference [51] alludes to as supporting learning engagement via RPGs.

D. Diablo in the Assignment “Skill” Tree

As noted, Diablo II made a heavy appearance in the Assignment “Skill” Tree primarily through the structure (with the assignment tree mirroring the skill tree), as well as the point distribution system (with the assignment tree points mirroring those of the skill points). The literacy and vocabulary of the game also inspired a few of the assignment choices, like that of the “Rhetorical Words” and “Logical Fallacies” in which students are invited to learn new words and build example sentences. Each of the assignments builds in difficulty, like the progression of the acts and difficulties of Diablo mentioned above. And, borrowed from Diablo’s naming conventions, many of the words change and get more complex as the tree goes, mirroring the games system of modifying words, but keeping the base structure the same. Therefore, based on the above mini analysis, this seeks to fill in the gaps noted by reference [12] where gamification frameworks lack descriptive elements of the aspects of games borrowed for inspiration within the gamification process.

IV. PROOF OF CONCEPT

Modeling the showcase of a new framework, proof-of-concept will be used to demonstrate the effectiveness of the framework, as noted by Reference [17]. Proof of concept was also noted to be missing from many gamification studies [12, 7]. While this article acknowledges both the statistical limitations of not providing any statistical analysis, the college data does not support trials and control groups of students to achieve any meaningful statistical data points, most notably,

because if a student is paying for the course instruction, they cannot receive anything that would be considered “lesser” or not meeting state guidelines. As this intervention and framework was designed, this replaced the prior curriculum, as will be noted with a pilot group of students in Spring 2021.

As well, while the author (researcher) is also the instructor of this course and acknowledges the inherent bias, all of the students were encouraged and supported to report anything negative about the course anonymously, without fear of grade retaliation. Therefore, the honest and ethically collected data presented in the form of pass/fail rates for the classes, as well as survey responses from both course evaluations and an anonymous Google Form survey were the best supporting data available. Thus, a framework is presented, with the supporting data labeled proof of concept (rather than methodology and data analysis) in order to support future studies designing tests for implementing this framework. The author encourages future teachers to use this framework as a model in their own classrooms, and encourages future researchers to test and analyze the framework with further statistical analyses.

This framework was designed as a curriculum redesign in which the intervention was designed, tested, and implemented in all classes beginning Spring 2021. Every subsequent class taught by this Instructor has used this model. Therefore, course success rates are used to test the efficacy of this framework with students before Spring 2021 not receiving the intervention, and students after Spring 2021 receiving the intervention. Supplemental to the course success rates are survey/feedback responses from students who received the intervention.

Participants in the intervention were those randomly assigned/chosen to the English Composition I classroom of Patrick Munnelly at the Community College of Aurora, USA. Demographics of the students are not available, but the Community College of Aurora, USA is proudly a Hispanic-Serving Institution and one that serves a large amount of first-generation students. The total population of students that participated in the redesigned framework was 167 students from Spring 2021 through Spring 2024 (n=167), compared to those that did not receive the intervention prior to Spring 2021 which was 108 students (n=108). The intervention was designed for English Composition I classrooms. The model was designed to meet classroom course and transfer course competencies with approval from the Department Chair. The framework below was presented as a syllabus/contract of the assignments due to complete and pass the class. The design itself was made using a combination of Microsoft Visio and Microsoft Word.

To test out the efficacy of the Assignment Tree, the document/curriculum (Version One) was initially conducted as a pilot test using only one English Composition Classroom in Spring of 2021. This class provided verbal feedback about changes they wanted to see made in the document. The following semester, Version Two of the Assignment Tree was implemented in every subsequent classroom, used in perpetuity without modifications made.

Each semester, the researcher used an anonymous class survey using Google Forms. The researcher surveyed classes twice every semester, once within the first 5 weeks and once on the last day of class. The Google Forms collected no identifiable information, and students were advised not to include any identifiable information in their responses. To

date, no student has disapproved of the Assignment “Skill” Tree, and one different Instructor has followed in the implementation of the same Assignment “Skill” Tree. This will be expanded upon below, including the limitations in the statistics and analysis for testing the framework.

A. Success Data

Out of a total population of students (N=275), 108 students did not receive the intervention of the revised framework and 167 received the intervention with the Assignment “Skill” Tree framework. From Fall 2019 through Fall 2020, 108 students (n=108) took an English Composition class, prior to the design and implementation of the Assignment “Skill” Tree. These students received a curriculum that still met state guidelines and outcomes, and the cohort succeeded at a rate of 54%.

As of Spring 2021, when the Assignment “Skill” Tree was first piloted and implemented, 167 students (n=167) have taken an English Composition Class through Spring 2024 using the Assignment “Skill” Tree, succeeding at a 75% pass rate. This demonstrates that the intervention of the Assignment “Skill” Tree (Figure 1) had an increased success rate of 21%. No other format was changed for the class (including lecture materials); only the Assignments (and of course grading breakdown – the weighting of assignments) were changed according to the Assignment “Skill” Tree.

This increase of 21% can be attributed to the flexibility of assignments, increase in autonomy of choice, and ability to weight assignments to students’ own benefit. Taken as a whole, the gamification of the classroom assignments suggests that students who have more choice, flexibility, multimodality, and fun have a higher likelihood of success in the First-Year Composition course. Although, more studies should be conducted beyond just success data, including reviewing other courses alongside the gamified classrooms, plus student readiness and capabilities prior to class.

B. Survey Responses

In addition to the pass/fail rates for the course mentioned above, supplemental student feedback is provided herewith. In the first 5 weeks survey, the researcher asked “Do you like the assignment tree?” For the most part, all of the answers came back positive. A few students each semester were apprehensive in the first four weeks about it. Table 1 below shows a sample of these responses.

TABLE I. SAMPLE OF RESPONSES FROM WEEK 5 SURVEY

Student	Response to “Do you like the assignment tree?”
1	Yes, and No. I say that because I feel that it is very helpful to be able to choose which assignment I want to do, but having to be the judge for my own grade is what makes it a little confusing.
2	It’s different, this is my first time seeing something like this, but I am willing to give it a go
3	A bit confused about it.
4	...can't tell quite yet

Sample responses 1 through 4 shares insight into some of the students who paused at the confusion of the new format of

the class. Many students had trouble deciphering the weight of the assignments, as well as which pathway to follow. These apprehensions, such as the comment from Student 2, show that this was a new framework they had not seen before, but was willing to try it out.

Despite the initial apprehension, however, by the end of the class, every single semester, the researcher received buy-in support from the students. Of the 167 students who received the redesigned intervention of the Assignment “Skill” Tree framework, 75% succeeded, marking a grade of C, B, or A. Out of the 75% who succeeded, they were able to provide feedback either through course evaluations or the anonymous Google Form survey. In both the course evaluations and the anonymous Google Form survey, no negative appraisal of the Assignment “Skill” Tree was received. Thus, the researcher presents below a sample of the responses with the following 10 student responses to showcase the variety of take-a-ways the students had regarding the skill tree of assignments. As well, more studies should use more data beyond survey results, including interviews and focus groups.

TABLE II. SAMPLE OF RESPONSES FROM END OF CLASS SURVEY

Student	Response to “Do you like the assignment tree?”
5	I personally do enjoy the skill tree of assignments because it gives you an outlook on what we need to do which then also lets you prepare ahead of time for said assignments.
6	I enjoyed the assignment tree very much. It allowed me to pick my own path and personally it helped so much.
7	Yes! I felt the least amount of stress about this class than any other because there weren't unexpected expectations or pressuring deadlines coming from you every week.
8	Yes I enjoyed it a lot! I wish all my classes were like that
9	Yes, I was fun to pick my own adventure and try new things.
10	I actually really enjoy this idea because it lets me pick what assignments I'll do, based on my strengths but still gives me some more challenging ones to make sure I work towards bettering my understanding of English.
11	Yes, the assignments are short, but they maximize the efficiency of learning and doing assignments separately.
12	Yes I did, in the beginning of the class I felt it would be weird since I don't do video games, but turned out to be great.
13	Yes I enjoy this skill tree assignment because it so simple and yet so fun. What I like about this is that I never seen something like this before since the instructor told this skill tree assignment is basically an RPG game which I used to play a lot back then that you choose your pathway all the way to the end which this is an enjoyable and great idea for people like me to get more encouragement doing this fun assignments.
14	Yes I do. Options and no set dates are very nice especially for a mandatory pre requisite

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In sum, this framework can be viewed as a success with an increase of pass rates for a First-Year Writing/English Composition classroom being 21%. As well, an overall success rate of 75% is incredibly high for both a First-Year class, as well as a Community College with an incredibly diverse student body. As well, the general positive feedback in terms of student responses about the framework can be seen as successful as well.

As can be seen from the responses from students, by the end of class, students approve of the framework. There are a variety of reasons for that from the flexible deadlines to the choice of assignments. For example, students 7 and 14 both note that the flexible deadlines allowed for them to consider pacing for the class that worked for them. And, Student 12 describes how someone can buy-in even if they are not a gamer. This comment showcased an interesting lens from students who perceived themselves not as a gamer, but still could engage with the class structure. Other comments regarded the “fun” aspects of the class as noted by students 9 and 13, which showed that students engaged with the learning, and enjoyed that the structure of the class allowed them to have fun, not simply learn. And other students noted that the choice based elements were important to them like students 5 and 6. All together, these comments support the success data in showing that the students all got something different out of the class, supporting the combination of the framework – from the flexible approach to the slow-build of experience into the final assignment.

As noted, some students were apprehensive going into the semester, but later reported buy-in and acceptance. It should be re-posted here that the success rate in the class, while it rose, was not 100%. This apprehension could be understood as some students did more collectively buy-in to the RPG-style classroom, while others did not. 25% of the students did not pass the class, receiving a grade of a D, F, or W. Unavailable to the researcher would be reasons or answers as to why a student did not succeed, or in what ways this gamified environment could be further reconstructed to aid in their learning process. Despite this, the success of a 21% increase in pass rates could still be labeled a success, as 75% success is in line with the rest of the classes at this level (English Composition I). Other outside factors could of course affect these success and failure rates such as circumstances outside the control of the instructor like family events and financial constraints. As well, the impact of the instructor's clarity, teaching praxis, and the cohort of students all vary slightly each semester and class. For this author/researcher, the teaching materials, including lectures, were not updated with this change – only the assignments and grading system.

Throughout the above, the students repeat similar phrases that approve of the flexibility and choice within the curriculum. Based on the above feedback, extensive research, and support within the gamification literature, the Assignment “Skill” Tree is not only a beneficial curriculum for supporting students with a variety of educational best practices, but the gamified approach invites students to feel a sense of control over their educational journey, similar to a role-playing game (RPG) that invites players to choose their own pathway and skill loadout that feels comfortable, exciting, and enjoyable for that playthrough.

While reference [9] claims that simply adding points, badges, and leaderboards to a classroom does not address true gamification elements, but several of these in conjunction with one another does go beyond the badges, points, leaderboards (BPL) approach of shallow gamification, such as the presentation herein of choice of pathways, weighting of grades, and scaffolding of difficulty, all modeled from video games like Diablo II. The mention of choice by reference [7] can also be seen here in the framework, allowing for students to not only choose assignments, but choose the point values of the assignments. Moreover, as stated in the literature [48, 12], more comprehensive forms of gamification are needed. As mentioned by reference [12], references to games are needed, as well as explanation of the added game elements.

A. Impacts of Gamification and Game Studies

The author believes this framework is important to the work of gamification and game studies through the idea of a comprehensive and well-thought out and tested framework that can be applied in future classes. As well, by including choices, rationale, and reasons for choosing a specific game could lead future researchers to build other classes off of other game models and genres of games. The author does not assert that this is the only game that could be used to gamify a class, such as [32] and the success of another Blizzard Entertainment game. Asserted herewith is that in order to deeply gamify a class [29], one must rebuild a course from the ground up. Rebuilding from the ground up suggests taking a Gothic gamification approach which is to reincarnate the game into the classroom – not simply play it or use it as a metaphor – but to invite themes from the game into the learning process, harkening back to [19] and [8] and their original concepts for gaming and learning.

This article also shows continued impacts that gamifying a classroom can have positive impacts on success rates [28]. This article adds to game studies another confirmatory example of the ways to gamify a class, noting particular success for this type of classroom. While this article does not go into depth on the other branches of game studies, such as play and game-based learning, the well-researched lens behind the choices and gamified elements helps to progress the field further by continuing to address and improve gamification work.

Returning to the framing question for this work: when influenced from the queer gothic, can a gamified classroom become motivated by a wish that it was more fun, more dramatic, more engaging than it actually is? Viewed from the success rates, as well as the student responses, it can be seen that not only do students enjoy the framework, find success, and have fun, but this author attributes that to not only the design of the framework, but also the game of choice, attributing to the gothic gamification presented in this article – that a game should be reincarnated to gamify it well. Or, borrowing from Diablo II's remastered title: the game should be resurrected into the class through gamification.

B. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This framework is limited in that it has not been tested for significance outside of the classroom in which it has been implemented. While other professors have begun using the same model, there have not been any data collected to determine success. The author of this article acknowledges the inherent bias in being the researcher/author of the article as

well as the designer/instructor of the classroom being used. With this bias, the author also acknowledges the lack of statistical analyses available beyond success rates, and notes that the data is limited in disaggregating by other demographics such as age and race, or even gamer/not gamer status. Despite this, the creation of the framework has been well researched, tested, and ethically reported herein, allowing for future researchers to also test and retest the framework.

Future research into both this conceptual framework and other gamification models should look more closely at student opinions as well as quasi-experimental methods between frameworks and success in the classroom. Outside researchers could interview past students and collect longitudinal data, which would strengthen the validity. Moreover, since many studies focus on motivations of students [55] and student engagement [13, 18], this and future studies could more intentionally test these elements one at a time. Also, more studies need to focus on the fun of gamified elements [4], further researching play and ludic pedagogies. Additionally, more case studies are needed into the English Composition classroom [20]. This author hopes to also continue the work with this framework to include more nuanced tests and models such as the individual elements like choice or deadlines, as well as the “fun” of a playful, game-based, ludic classroom, including how Gothic can show up in these styles of game studies too. As well, further exploration into the Gothic world of Diablo, as well as a comparison between the best gamification practices from each Diablo game warrants discussion, which this author hopes to continue exploring.

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