



Game literacy in the curriculum

“I feel like our school system [...] is not very game friendly in any way, shape or form. I think that’s a big problem. I think they really need to start – because there’s so much tremendous opportunity there.”- Quote from an interview with an educator. PE02

Keywords: [Formal education](#), [Game-based learning](#), [Literacy](#), [serious games](#)

Who will find this scenario particularly interesting? [Educators](#), [Researchers](#)

Description

Many of those who took part in our interviews enthusiastically described the ways in which video games *could* be employed for educational purposes, but it was clear that these are often talked about as *opportunities* that are not yet being fully realised. In part, these ideas of what we are calling ‘game literacy’ involve enabling students to understand games; how they are



conceived and constructed, the lives and stories that they represent, the cultural and global context in which they are created, even giving young children hands-on opportunities to develop their own games. In addition, interview participants talked

about games as multimodal texts that can be actively read but also 'lived' and experienced by players, as a cultural and empathy-building experience.

Drawing on our interviews and workshops, these ideas are framed in relation to particular understandings of literacy, rather than necessarily being aligned with the computing or information technology aspects of the school curriculum. As such, these perspectives focus on multimodality and cultural enrichment, underpinned by the need to develop an alternative understanding of literacy. This involves the educator valuing (and being enabled or even *permitted* to value) multiple modes of meaning making, moving beyond common conceptions of school-based literacy that involve only written texts and rigidly defined outcomes.

These understandings of literacy already exist and are established in the field of new literacies and multiliteracies, through the work of James Gee, Brian Street, The New London Group etc. However, they are not the dominant conceptualisations of literacy that are currently being drawn upon by policy makers, who tend to favour a skills based approach that generates measurable outcomes.

In the first dimensions of this scenario, therefore, we envisage a classroom that is open to the use of video games as educational resources and experiences, working around existing curricular restraints through a generous interpretation of the curriculum. In the second dimension, we strive to imagine an educational system bolstered by policy which actively acknowledges the cultural value of video games and even *encourages* their use, drawing on the extensive research around new literacies as a basis for creating this shift.

Meet Simon, a primary school teacher



Simon is a primary school teacher in the UK, in his fourth full year of teaching. He is currently responsible for a class of 27 ten-year-old children, as well as coordinating Literacy across the school. He enjoys his job and has developed a positive rapport with his class. In part, he attributes this positive relationship to the fact that he values the interests of the children and strives to make his teaching relevant and interesting for them. He is aware that many (but not all) of the children in his class are regular users of

technology at home and feels that his classroom, and the school more widely, should reflect and take account of this 'real world' situation.

Faced with a Literacy curriculum that makes no mention of using technology – let alone games – in lessons, Simon has nevertheless made his classroom a place where videogames are valued as a relevant cultural resource alongside other media such as films, books, and other print media. He has used games on various occasions, thinking of them as 'texts' that contain and generate meaning, in similar ways to more traditional print based texts. He has used video games as a stimulus for descriptive writing (using the visually intriguing exploration game '[Myst](#)'), explored the idea of personification (using the independent, narrative puzzle game '[Thomas was Alone](#)') and helped children to create their own text based games (using the free game creation software called '[Twine](#)'). He has also run a club at lunchtimes where children play '[Minecraft](#)' on the school iPads, working together in small groups to create virtual play spaces. He is always enthused by the social interactions that this generates during the club.



Many other teachers in the school are less confident with using games in their classroom. However, through a series of staff meetings, Simon has introduced them to some possible ways in which video games could be brought into their classrooms often with little technical knowledge on the part of the teacher. This often involves the use of paratexts – print based and video texts that refer to video games – rather than directly using the games themselves. So, in other classes, teachers have been encouraged to supplement their existing resources with 'how to' guides for popular video games such as '[Assassins Creed](#)', and even use video trailers for games in lessons as a means of discussing issues around critical literacy. As a result, the literacy curriculum experienced

by the children is one enriched by a mixture of traditional texts with video games and other media from popular culture.

All of this has only been possible with the support of the headteacher, who believes that teachers should be encouraged to innovate in order to provide exciting, relevant learning opportunities for pupils.

Meet Andrea, Educational Policy Maker and Curriculum designer



Andrea has a role in designing the literacy curriculum for primary school children in the UK. As part of a new government assembled team, Andrea has listened to teachers, educational professionals and researchers. They have expressed concerns that the existing curriculum is limiting the opportunities for teachers to deliver exciting, relevant and innovative literacy lessons that reflect the way in which literacies (as social practices) are lived and experienced in the 21st Century. Having grown up playing video games herself, Andrea also has a good sense of the cultural significance of the form and understands that video games have a potentially significant role to play in the lives of children, at home *and* in school. At school, this involves educating children about video games, as well as using video games as a educational resource, all the while encouraging and promoting a critical approach – just as learning in school traditionally involves teaching *about* books, and *using* books.

With this in mind, rather than being driven purely by outdated notions of literacy simply as a pre-defined set of skills to be taken on by children, Andrea and her team develop a curriculum that takes a broader view of literacy. Amongst other things, this supports teachers in understanding and using video games as multimodal texts with multiple affordances. This refined curriculum includes examples of the ways in which specific video games could be used by teachers as rich, multimodal texts that allow children to explore ideas of narrative and character; to consider issues of representation and motive in games; to explore the ways in which different game environments and settings influence or interact with the player. Suggestions on how some games can be used in social contexts can encourage teachers to look beyond outdated and limiting notions of video game play as a purely solitary pursuit; instead, teachers can consider

how collaborative play experiences offer their own educational potential. There is also suggestion that paratexts around video games can provide excellent resources for prompting creative responses, written, spoken and *performed* by children alongside, of course, more established and traditional print based texts.



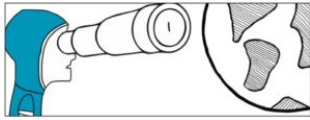
As well as being framed as texts to be read, video games are also positioned as artefacts to be remixed and created by children, alongside other visual and audio media. This ranges from early stages of design, through to hands-on video game creation, afforded by pre-existing and specially commissioned software designed to scaffold the game creation process for younger users. This curriculum is published online, featuring a significant interactive repository section that enables teachers and educational professionals to upload and link their own resources and ideas, making this a truly collaborative vision for an innovative and exciting curriculum that can finally be considered *'game friendly'*.

In a nutshell

There is a significant and relatively untapped potential for using video games in educational contexts, often held back by the restrictions posed by standardised curriculum requirements.

This has been a recurring theme throughout the project, with the overarching recommendation being that we all need to move beyond the realm of 'serious games' to include what might otherwise be considered 'entertainment' games into the classroom. This process of inclusion has more to do with literacy, than with the computing or information technology aspects of the school curriculum.

Resources



- [Blog post on Minecraft Club](#)
- [Interviews Report: 3.3.2.2 Literacy, narrative and gaming's potential for education and cultural expression](#)
- [Cathy Burnett and Guy Merchant: The Challenge of 21st Century Literacies](#)
- [Fiona Maine: Monument Valley in the Classroom](#)
- [Andrew Burn: Mission Maker](#)
- [Cathy Burnett: Literacy and New Media](#)
- [D.A.R.E: Playing the Archive](#)
- [Catherine Beavis et al.: Serious Play](#)
- [Assassin's Creed](#)
- [Kodu](#)
- [Minecraft](#)
- [Myst](#)
- [Thomas Was Alone](#)
- [Twine](#)

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Partners



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