Imaginative Interaction with Internet Games. For Children & Teachers.

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This article explores children's imaginative interaction with internet games in the belief that an understanding of children's life experiences is essential to effective teaching and learning within the classroom. It is underpinned by the idea that imaginative play is, at least in some part, the work of children undertaking identity practice. It focuses on a small group case study of 8 and 9 year old children, from diverse cultural backgrounds, who were regular players on free-access commercial internet games. As children frequently perform imaginative narrative play both privately and in groups triggered from experiences with novels, films and television, (Dyson, 1997; Fisherkeller, 1997), the research initially focused on whether similar activities resulted from experiences with commercially-sponsored free internet game-sites. If so, to what extent might these texts also influence children's creative output? To explore this, the children attended a weekly after-school computer club during which they played on internet games. During the course of the club sessions each child was observed and interviewed about the experiences they had resulting from the game-play. Through consideration of the children's play and opinions, the teacher researcher developed valuable insights into her students and their worlds, to the benefit of her practice.

Keywords:- literacy, imagination, identity, internet gameplay

Why? The Background.

A key factor in contemporary pedagogy is the constructionist philosophy that learning occurs out of experiential episodes and is understood with reference to pre-existing knowledges and within its social context. Moll et al (1992) suggest how rich and layered children's whole life experiences or "funds of knowledge" are, in comparison with the limited range of shared experiences of the teacher/student relationship. These out-of-school knowledges should therefore be valued as a resource for learning and creative expression within the classroom, and Beach and O'Brien in fact suggest that traditional pedagogies will become increasingly ineffective as students adapt more to popular culture (2008, p779). Language, especially oral language, is at the core of sharing and working with out-of-school literacies. As it is through the confident use of language that a child's thinking and learning becomes fixed, expressed and debatable, time spent exploring these out-of-school literacies with students may be viewed as teaching time well spent.

Dyson has looked extensively into the transfer of popular culture into primary-aged children's literacy production, especially with reference to written literacy development (1999, 2001, 2007, 1997). She considers that this kind of transfer is essential for literacy learning; that this is an example of positing new knowledge against existing knowledge in order to learn. "Children must reframe the written medium within familiar social constellations, if they are, not only to make sense of, but moreover, to understand why they might want to make sense through, manipulating written graphics" (2001, p.14). Vasquez (2000a, 2000b, 2004, 2007) has also produced much documentation of effective teaching triggered by students' own literacy funds, in particular to develop their critical analysis skills, for example in the way she utilises the interest with the Power Ranger characters amongst students in her kindergarten class to discuss and explore identity stereotypes (2000b). The primary-aged student is likely to have a wealth of these formative literacy experiences behind them, increasingly sourced through some

kind of digital games. Hagood has determined that research into the intersections of popular culture, literacy practices and identity has centred on three main questions: What texts do they access? What media do they employ? “How do they read and use popular culture to form and inform identities?” (2008, p.532). This project also proceeded in this direction, and was undertaken as a component of some university studies whilst I was employed as a primary class teacher.

Which group am I in? Identity and play.

Identity as a concept and as a lens through which to understand literate practices has been rigorously debated from many fields of scholarship. As a small token towards these discussions which often vibrate on tensions or counterarguments such as fluidity against fixedness within identity performance, and to foreground the writing of contemporary academics whose interest in the use of the term is in relation to understanding literacy and teaching practises, I would like to very briefly touch on two ideas in relation to the usage of this term. As Buckingham (2008) sees it, there are dual elements within the concept of identity, and an inherent paradox, in indicating both an individual’s unique way of presenting themselves in the world, as well as the practice of identifying with groups to give clues to one’s personality. Gee while focusing on the performative aspects of the concept, proposes “four ways to view identity”, the fourth of which is affinity group identity (2000-2001 p100). During my teaching I have observed children’s marked interest in belonging to affinity groups and of knowing of any groups that they might join, such as those developed around games or manufactured by marketers. This impulse to belong, and to be with like kinds, is perhaps exploited by the economic practices of capitalism in this moment of history.

Many commercial entities which market products principally aimed at children, host free game spaces on the internet as a part of their marketing strategy. These sites are accessed in out-of-school hours by children from a range of cultural backgrounds, and as such contribute to the array of literacies and understandings of how the world operates the children experience. Internet games are sites which children use for the expression of or performance of identities through literate

practices or as Gee codifies it “discourse identities”, another of his four ways to view identity (2000-2001 p101). There is a growing body of research exploring the impact of changing technology on the concept of what it entails to be literate, and what we understand this term to encompass. Luke and Lankshear (cited in Nixon et al., 2006, p.120) suggest that a component of the necessary new literacy portfolio is information and communication technologies (ICT) management as producers and critical consumers. To assist children to develop these skills, educators must first understand the what and the how of the semiotic domains that children are already interacting with.

In a discussion about internet gameplay as textual practice, Beavis states that “gameplay is not just about literacy, text and play, but is also situated, highly social, and linked to the negotiation and construction of identity” (Beavis, 2007, p.58). Merchant (2005) suggests that the construction of identity may be a prominent component of digital production. Citing Butler and others, he argues that identity is performed and that even relatively fixed aspects of identity, such as gendered ways of acting, are fluid and adaptable. Merchant labels identity behaviour influences as either “anchored” or “transient” and in this way he makes a distinction between discourses “which are profoundly influenced by a long history of socio-cultural practices (such as gender or religion) and those which are more easily made, remade and unmade (such as fandom)” (p.304). He considers that transient identities do not necessarily have less value to the beholder than anchored identities, but may be easier to adopt, and easier to let go. Popular culture may be viewed as a tool of transient identity construction, and, is often used as a point of shared understanding between a text producer (speaker, writer, illustrator or other) and their reader.

This study focused specifically on the popular-culture literacy space of the free internet game, and documented the fantasy experiences which may follow on from this play in the belief that this often displays identity practice. Sutton-Smith (1997) suggests, whilst discussing play from within the rhetoric of “the imaginary,” that it might be viewed as being the opposite to rationalising an experience (p.128). He notes however that movement into and out of rational

thought can be quite fluid during internal dialogue. Sutton-Smith traces the labelling, documenting and valuing of imagination to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the period of Enlightenment, a time distinguished by the challenging of religious dogma by new progress in the sciences. Imagination became the classification of thought that could not be purely explained by rational conceptualisation, for example the acts of creativity and hypothesising. Sutton-Smith notes that the philosopher Kant suggested that the imagination formed a bridge “between sensory knowledge and formal reasoning” (p.131). This definition led to a blurring between the creation of art and of play, something which Sutton-Smith suggests was particularly presumed during the new art directions of the early twentieth century. Gardner’s late twentieth century definition holds that art is the mastery of symbols, and play is the “mastery of anxiety, self, and the world” (cited in Sutton-Smith, 1997, p.135).

One way that the self is transcended is when a player is engrossed in a game and the passages into rational thought become rarer, a state which Csikszentmihalyi has labelled “flow” (2002). He considers that games contain the components that make this state of flow more readily available. This includes the learning of skills and the setting up of goals to improve these skills, and the provision of feedback on this process. These in combination allow the player a sense of control, at least in the game space. Salen (2004) differentiates between play and games by describing a game as “a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome” (p.80). In contrast to this play is considered not to arise “from the game itself but the way that players interact with the game” (p.33).

This Friday. The Club.

My study involved a small number of 8 and 9 year old children from a large, English-language international school in a major European city. The participating children came from Australia, England, Israel, Pakistan and the United States of America. It centred on an after-school club run once a week in the winter term

during which the children played internet games. The club commenced on a Friday with five signed participants, one child who wanted to come and see what it was like, and one younger sister who seemed to need babysitting. The enjoyment of the children after the first club quickly circulated within the student community and the hoped for number of eight participants was reached by the second week. The only requirement for club membership was that participants needed to have access to the internet at home, and regular computer free-play opportunities which were commonly spent on commercial internet sites. Because I wanted to explore the ways in which computer games fed into the children's everyday imaginative play, it was important that club members were regular gamers. Although the club was held on the school premises, it drew on the expertise and experience developed in the children's out-of-school activities within the context of the school. The group was (circumstantially) composed of students with a range of different player experience levels. This appeared to be determined by the amount of exposure to the internet that their parents allowed. This proved to be an interesting aspect of difference within the group and a determinate from which a sense of the elite within the social structure of the whole group was constructed. Only one of the eight children was allowed to play on the internet everyday, four played a few times each week, and the rest stated that they played less than weekly.

At the outset I asked the children to list their favourite play-site addresses to ensure that they would have access to these sites via the school network, as a large proportion of game portals are blocked by the school technicians following requests by the teaching staff. The children's choices were quite diverse and of the twenty sites listed in total, only three of them were mentioned by more than one child. Of these, *Club Penguin*, a site administered by the Disney Corporation, stood out as being by far the most popular, having been listed by six of the eight children. This website, which has been investigated extensively by Marsh (2010, 2009, 2008) was also the most frequently played during the club sessions. Two other sites were listed twice, *My Scene*, which is part of the interlinked sites administered by the Mattel toy corporation, (another site linked to this, *Everygirl*, was also listed) and *Webkinz*, (Ganz toy corporation) a site critiqued by Black

with regard to its (variable) usefulness as a site of production and literacy attainment (2010).

(Insert Table 1 here)

Each participant was interviewed on several occasions during the running of the club using a semi-structured format. These interviews were either audio-taped or written manually. To analyse the data, the tapes were transcribed onto word documents and all data connected with each child was collated. Using a grounded theory approach, ongoing notes were made coding emerging themes across the group. Quotes were selected which best indicated the typical (and atypical) responses to each thematic category of data. The project was instigated and analysed from a critical paradigm, a perspective through which constructions of race, class and gender are challenged; a lens which is useful in the planning of learning within a culturally diverse community.

The initial questioning was about whether the children played make-believe games in their own time, perhaps out in the school playground, which were influenced by the narratives of their favourite sites. These questions produced an equally divided response between those who did and those who didn't.

Who? Interview Snapshots.

Yasmin was the most aware of commercial, consumerist trends within the group. She was a fan of the character Miley Stewart, and her alter ego Hannah Montana; both personalities have webpages and are part of a Disney media package which includes a film, television series, music products and much spin-off merchandise.

In this example of appropriating a marketed group to find like kinds, Yasmin said that she often made up co-operative, imaginative plays in which someone is Miley and someone is Lily (the best friend). She enjoyed it because “you are them in the games” and they gave her an opportunity to sing the songs out loud. She said that it wasn’t a fun game by herself, but she played it with her friends at school, or with her sister at home who was also a fan.

Noa, a bright child and a prolific reader, also used the texts of her favourite computer games in her lunchtime play at school. Her favourite sites were generally linked to toys that she owned, such as her Polly Pocket dolls. She said that occasionally she and her friends brought their knowledge of the Polly Pocket game texts, as well as their Polly Pocket dolls and accessories, onto the school playground. When she and her friends did so, they played in a parallel but cooperative manner intertwining fantasy narratives with the traditional doll play of dressing-up. They particularly chose to do this when there were problems between her and her friends. Incorporating this popular culture world into their real life relationships was initiated by Noa’s mother, who had suggested playing with their Polly Pocket dolls in this way as a strategy to resolve an impasse after the girls had become stuck in a disagreement within their gang of three. The affinity-identities provided by their Polly Pocket play enabled them to negotiate ‘real world’ problematic relationships productively.

Caitlyn was also an avid reader with a preference for fantasy texts. Her fondness for traditional doll play, and her conservative dress style, marked her as different from the other girls, but her robust self-confidence enabled her to be easily accepted despite this. She was actively involved in the co-operative side of play within the computer club, which mostly comprised conversations about the action happily shouted out to other players while independent play proceeded. Caitlyn mainly liked internet dress-up games especially those featuring rock star and princess characters. She said that the internet games influenced her play as she often dresses up her dolls like the characters on the sites. She played games like this mostly with her sister at home as it did not fit with affinity groups from her wider play community. She commented that all the characters on the sites she likes to play on are “good” because they wear the kind of clothes that “good

people” wear although, she stressed, the rock star characters wore rather tight jeans.

Justin had arrived into the school community twelve months earlier. He had found it very hard to adapt to his first life experience in a new cultural surrounding. He cried frequently both at school and at home, and found it hard to make friends, partly because of his socially isolating tendency to repeatedly talk about the benefits of his previous situation and criticize his current one. Justin was very happy to be interviewed about his play, and his mother reported that he favoured computer play over all other activities as a recreational choice. It appeared that the games gave him a site in which to maintain some control in his world, at a time when life circumstances had seemingly limited this. He was a fan of the Lego Bionicles site and said that sometimes he used the names of the Bionicle characters in his own play. He said that the narratives he saw on sites like this influenced him to play “games with good guys and bad guys having epic duels until someone gets hurt”.

Half of the children in the group reported that they did not play any games with others away from the computer influenced by the narratives of their favourite sites. This response may have been expected for Kimberly, who, due to a behavioural disorder, found it hard to place herself within the simplest dynamics of playground interaction, let alone the possibly more complex, risky performance of co-operative imaginative play. Play can only proceed within that which Salen labels the “magic circle” (2004), a space regulated by a set of rules, and this is as relevant to older children’s imaginative play as it is to more stable games such as ball sports. In imaginative play rules are often discreet and guided by group social norms. Gardner (1982) suggests that children may use play to master their understandings of the world. Kimberly’s difficulty in reading the social norms of other children hindered her capacity to use play in this way. While Kimberly was playing her favourite games on the computer, she never appeared to immerse herself into the narrative instead focusing singularly on fulfilling the task with

comments like, “I have to reach the goal. Oh man, I didn’t even reach the goal. Not yet”.

For the three others in the group, imaginative play mattered far less than other sports and pursuits. Zane’s favourite kind of play involved outdoor pursuits such as bike-riding, skiing and swimming, and he was interested in animals, plants and environmental issues. He had been anecdotally reported by another teacher as not typically involving himself in imaginative play even when he was younger, and a little like Kimberly, he leant towards taking a literal approach to texts. Edward was one of the best football players in the year level and was therefore accorded high social status. Edward’s outside play was almost always centred on improving his impressive football skills. This use of time correlates with Csikzentmihalyi’s (2002) outline of the attainment of happiness, allowing Edward to obtain some control in this part of his life, playground socialising, which attained for him not only an increased sense of self mastery, but high peer eminence. Lauren, had very good computer skills and was the most obviously ambitious student in the computer club. She was constantly scanning the other players to see what they were playing. Lauren thought however that she did not extend ideas from computer play into her other playtimes. This may have been due to a variety of factors, particularly, from my observation, her relative maturity, which seemed to have moved her on from participation in imaginative play scenarios. She did not seem to be part of a fixed friendship group within which such games were developed, but maintained a number of friendships with children from higher grades who travelled on the same school bus.

Whose Learning? One small example.

The use of internet games as resources for reliable information could be viewed as a risky choice of research tool for young students, and this is rarely the intention of these game sites. On one occasion I was fortunate to be able to follow this as a

line of questioning with Edward, because he had presented himself as an authority on precious stones during the reading of a shared text in the classroom the preceding week.

Edward—He got an emerald bonus. He got an emerald, he found emeralds.

Researcher—You were telling me the other day that emeralds are more valuable than diamonds? Was that right? What did you tell me?

Edward—Rubies are more expensive than emeralds because they... But first they have to be rounded.

Researcher—Are the emeralds more valuable than other gems in this game?

Edward—Yes. It's a hundred point bonus.

Researcher—Had the information you gave me about emeralds the other day come from Club Penguin?

Edward—No. That had come from a game called Motherload but where you dig down and look for things. It's Motherload and you dig and what you do is you dig down and you try to look for diamonds. And the further down you dig, the more things you get like it's, and once my brother got a diamond which was more than a ruby and, but emerald is his favourite and he found diamonds before emeralds.

Researcher—Do you think that internet games are useful for information?

Edward—Sometimes it depends which. Sometimes it's true but sometimes it's not. I'm not sure.

Researcher—If you had to do a presentation about gemstones for something at school, would you use the information which you found on internet games?

Edward—Um not all games, not, I don't know, I'm not sure, probably... not..., but if I already knew that I'd put it on.

Researcher—But if you already knew it, might you know it from the internet game?

Edward—If I already knew it I probably, umm...

Researcher—If you think you know something, do you stop and think where you got the information from?

Edward—Umm, not really

This discussion with Edward over the value of information discovered in internet games was very interesting to me as his teacher. When he is playing computer games he is tightly focused in the competitive perception of having fun through achieving the best possible score in the game. It could be possible that, while he focuses on winning, the information content of the games, such as herewith the relative value of precious stones, may become incidental information that he passively absorbs and regurgitates later. Edward is an intelligent student, but perhaps as this knowledge had no emotionally-loaded value to him, he did not become alert and analytical about its value. This is a small example of the complex problematics of the internet as an information source in students' life both in school and out, a problem which in Fabos's view lies even broader than the management of webpages and search engines to a concern about the commercial manipulation of the entire internet (2008). I stand in full agreement with Alvermann when she proposes that foregrounding critical literacy pedagogies is important ongoing practice in classrooms so that students are supported in their management of knowledge and texts (2008, p17).

A pause in play. The Production.

In order to gain concrete evidence of imaginative engagement, or the lack of it, in one session I set up an opportunity for the children to demonstrate this dimension of their worlds, or to take them further. Two possibilities were offered to the children, to draw something and talk about it, or to write a story involving the play-world of the game. All children chose to draw. Edward and Zane produced something similar, both writing Club Penguin on the top of their drawing and then making relatively accurate reproductions of some of the characters. They were somewhat reluctant participants in this task as they wanted to get back to the

computer play, but it was interesting to hear fantasy creeping into Edward's analysis of his drawing and a glimpse of the inner personality of Edward, a boy who dashes out onto the football field with speed and energy every breaktime.

(Insert Drawing 1 here)

Edward—I have written Club Penguin and then drawn a penguin with a puffle. It's walking the puffle and I haven't coloured anything in yet so the paper is all white. I didn't have enough space to write the whole word so I just ...

Researcher—So where are you going to take this from here?

Edward—The penguin is walking the puffle out of the house, out of the igloo. Its walking ... for the puffle to get fresh air and it lets him run around. But if it doesn't, it gets het up in the igloo and it gets very bored.

Lauren and Kimberly settled into the task easily, although they both had difficulty extending their images into stories. When Kimberly was asked to imagine a story into her artistic production she returned again to the mechanics of playing the game.

(Insert Drawing 2 here)

Researcher—So can you remind me where Cody comes from?

Kimberly—(in a surprised voice)—It's from the Suite (pronounced as suit) Life of Zack and Cody. Tipton hotel? Disney? I forgot to draw the thing that goes around his head.

Researcher—Turn it into a story for me.

Kimberly—Well I was playing on the computer in the computer lab and then I saw Lauren on Disney and I wanted to go on, and so I had a friend called umm I don't remember their name, but her mum Lisa she told me how to go on Disney so that's how, and my father saved it on our favourites, so I can play on it everyday and I like to play Tipton Trouble.

Researcher—Why do you like it?

Kimberly—Because ... I'll tell you how to do it. You have to use the computer key, the arrow keys to move it, you can point it up and he moves up the elevator or up the umm, what's it called again, up the stairs. And if you push down you go down the elevator and down the stairs. Move left and right to move them ... and you have to try and you've got three chances of outs. So, and you've got to put up posters, you've got to put up posters. And if you've finished the level you go up a level.

During her drawing time Lauren planned a modification to the game rules of the site she had chosen. She explained that if the Demon Dog touches you and you don't roll over, you die. Lauren decided to change one character into an angel and planned that if you touch the angel you get another life. "I think that's a better way of playing it. And they are still Demon Dogs but some are angels".

(Insert Drawing 3 here)

One of the ongoing topics of conversation throughout the club was the management of "scary" images such as skeletons and devil figures. It was

interesting that two of the girls independently chose to draw “bad” characters from sites as angels; the same look and names as the website images, but they had added wings and were now proclaimed to be “nice”.

(Insert Drawing 4 here)

Caitlyn—I came up with devil bunnies. I was going to make a devil bunny with wings, and I also thought of angel bunnies (uses a high pitched babyish voice). They are all devil bunnies that kill you so I made a drawing of an angel bunny instead.

Let’s Bounce. The Reflection.

Edward—You see how other people use their language. Some people say “Hi”, some people say “S’up,; some people say “Goodbye,” but some other people, like my brother says, “Let’s bounce”.

Noa—Some games you might learn but others are like inventive games and you just play.

Lauren—On Club Penguin also you learn how to earn your own money. You learn skills like moving your fingers really quickly and sometimes if you are typing something to someone, on Club Penguin you can say your own words like, and learn where the keys are better, that’s how I learnt where the keys were.

As though they had prepped by reading Gee’s list of 36 Learning Principles from video gameplay (2007), in this excerpt from a group discussion, a number of valuable and sophisticated learning points are raised by these 8 year old students. For his language teacher, Edward’s comment about developing an awareness of language and voice, drew a direct parallel with a curriculum outcome of

understanding and using appropriate voice for different purposes. Carrington, (2008) while documenting the blogging of two youths, reminds us that the purpose of being literate is “to participate effectively with text in a range of social and economic contexts” and Edward’s comment shows that he has an initial, grounded awareness of this, and is perhaps ready to pursue this understanding in his classroom. Lauren indicates that for her, computer games provide an authentic purpose for writing, and as Alvermann notes, this may become the “reason(s) for becoming literate” for many children (2008 p16). This authentic purpose for literate production is one of the frequently stated assets of gameplay throughout the research in this field, as is powerfully evidenced in both the fanfiction writing documented by Rebecca Black (2007) and Victoria Carrington’s account of the blog of an Iraqi youth (2008).

Lauren also illustrates the advantage of gameplay for developing technical computer skills. There were different levels of player skills and confidence which, as earlier noted, won respect and status within the group and the children viewed this as being the most valuable reason for gameplay. The key to owning this experience appeared to be having an older sibling, as did Edward, Caitlyn and Lauren, which resulted in these students having more flying hours observing play, and often more relaxed parental restrictions. Edward, for example, opened a second window and navigated to www.youtube.com to get some music while I was watching him playing on Club Penguin one day. No other child had been observed with multiple windows open. He said that he usually only had two pages open at a time as he listens to music while he plays a game “but”, he said with eager respect, “my babysitter has ten tabs on when I come home”. On this occasion I observed Zane copy Edward’s move to YouTube, but to do this Zane navigated away from the page he was on without seeming to register that Edward had opened a second window to do this. I am sure it is a common experience with teachers of this age group that computer use in the classroom is greatly hindered because of slow keyboard skills. This was Burnett’s conclusion in her account of a project organised by trainee teachers (Burnett et al., 2006), and in my own teaching, an email buddy project was not repeated in the subsequent year, despite the children having a happy and valuable experience, because my American

teacher friend and I decided neither of us could justify the actual amount of classroom time that three letters over the course of the year took, almost solely due to keyboard skills.

So what? The Conclusion.

The particular focus of this study was concerned with imaginative engagement in the game texts and there was much evidence of this during the club sessions. Even when students, such as Edward and Zane, did not carry the game narratives into other imaginative production outside of their play, when they were observed playing they were totally involved participants in the imaginative narrative moment, excitedly calling out comments like: “I’m going to beat him!” “He’s chasing me!” “He took my gun!” thereby revealing at least some evidence of imaginative immersion. There were a number of examples of imaginative play that threw interesting light on aspects of a child’s outlook and expectations, such as their future ambitions for academic success, which was useful for my work in a team evolving language curriculum across the whole primary school. In the case of Kimberly, my observations of her play in comparison to the others, particularly her lack of imaginative play, became one the most useful demonstrations of her patterns of thinking, and enabled us to subsequently have a much more successful teacher/student relationship.

While the children were eager to identify themselves as being fans of *Club Penguin* (*Italics here?*) or of dress-up games, the children’s exploration of being “a certain kind of person” was not always a matter of simple identification with a game-linked affinity group (Gee, 2000-2001). The complexities entailed became highly evident when games were encountered with themes that the children viewed as adult behaviours, such as kissing or the drinking of alcohol. At these times the children became highly animated and attentive, and appeared to be sometimes in rehearsal for future affinity groups, according to their childhood view of how this might be played out by adults. This conclusion is drawn from my

view that imaginative play is, in some part, the work of children undertaking identity practice, a belief which underscores the analysis of these observations.

Overall, my teaching greatly benefitted as a result of this involvement in the children's out-of-school lives. Designing ways to incorporate such observations into a teacher's practice would, I consider, be highly beneficial. This might be achieved by hosting occasional after school computer clubs as in this example, or allowing (and observing) short periods of play on the internet during reward or recuperation moments in the classroom. This study gave an opportunity for me to understand more about both the importance to all the children of this play and what it helped them achieve. I developed a useful familiarity with the characters and possibilities of the game sites, so their intertextual referencing in the children's creative output became apparent, and dialogue about how they were redesigning these texts could be undertaken. As in the example of Edward's use of a game text as a source of information, many opportunities opened up for discussions shaped from critical literacy pedagogies, about the authorship and intentions of the texts encountered. And finally, but importantly, this teacher, as an example of her own transient identity transformation, was awarded a coolness boost by her students for demonstrating knowledge of these literacies.

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Table 1

Favourite Internet Games	Number of Children
http://www.clubpenguin.com/	6
http://myscene.everythinggirl.com/home.aspx	2
http://www.webkinz.com/	2
http://www.worldmaths.com/	1
http://www.nickjr.com/	1
http://pbskids.org/	1
http://www.nick.com/	1
http://www.linerider.com/	1
http://www.gamesgames.com/	1
http://www.starfall.com/	1
http://tv.disney.go.com/disneychannel/hannahmontana/index.html	1
http://beanie-babies.ty.com/modules/login/tyfree.cfm	1
http://www.sweetdressupgames.com/	1
http://www.neopets.com/	1
http://www.everythinggirl.com/home/home.aspx	1
http://www.puterdolls.com/	1
http://www.girlsgogames.com/	1
http://www.puffgames.com/	1
http://www.lego.com/en-GB/default.aspx	1
http://www.fupa.com/	1