Engaging the enemy: Computer games in the English classroom

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ABSTRACT
This article presents findings from a research study exploring the use of computer games as curriculum texts in a Year 9 English classroom. Motivated by a desire to engage students immersed in digital culture with the literature and literacy of the English classroom, the research drew on a ‘sensory turn’ in literacy theories and explores the embodied and sensory nature of meaning-making in the digital realm (Hoyes, 2016). This paper presents data from interviews, artefacts and classroom observations of three students who identified as regular computer game players. The ensuing discussion draws on phenomenological methods to explore the students’ perceptions and their literate practices as they engaged with computer games in English. The findings indicate that bringing computer games into the classroom affords students rich opportunities for rewarding and innovative work that can transcend traditional classroom boundaries and notions of literacy. The paper points to a need for broader, more nuanced understandings of literacy to align with new age literacy practices.

Introduction
This article explores the learning experiences and literacy practices of three middle years students as they used computer games as curriculum texts in their Year 9 English class. The research draws on a larger study exploring the possibilities for literacy learning of including computer games in secondary English classrooms. The article seeks to shed light on the potential for links between classroom literacy practices and the experiences of students who speak enthusiastically and articulately about the computer gameplay they enjoy in their out-of-school lives.

An integral component of computer gameplay is often engaging the enemy, as players attempt to defeat opponents or the game ‘boss’ (a final, intimidating computer-controlled enemy). Engaging the enemy in computer gameplay provides immersive, meaningful and playful experiences, as players push mental and physical limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 3). Players invest time, energy and skills when engaging the enemy in computer game narratives. However, there is often a ‘disconnect between games and classrooms’ with computer gameplay misleadingly seen as antithetical to learning (Steinkuehler, 2010, p. 62). Computer games are thus often perceived as the ‘enemy’ in the classroom. This perceived ‘disconnect’ provided the impetus to further investigate the part computer games might play in engaging students in literacy and learning in a secondary English classroom.

Reviewing the literature on computer games, literacy and learning revealed several articles calling for researchers to recognise and value this new communicative and narrative form in the English and literacy classroom (see Abrams, 2015; Bearn & Wolstencraft, 2006; Beavis et al., 2015; Carr, Buckingham, Burn & Schott 2006; Gee, 2007). Popular media and other education discourses highlighted concerns about student disengagement at school (see Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014; Goss, Sonnemann & Griffiths, 2017; Subban, 2016), further motivating a desire to research ways of connecting learning in the English classroom with students’ existing cultural and literacy practices.
While we acknowledge that the English classroom is a fitting place to introduce students to literary texts outside their everyday experiences, we believe good pedagogy grows out of the connections made between school and students' lifeworlds (Comber & Kamler, 2005). Computer gameplay forms a compelling part of many students' lifeworlds; however, too often in secondary English classrooms games are seen, at best as a reward for completing a 'sanctioned' classroom activity, or at worst as the rebellious refuge of the resistant and disengaged learner. The ensuing discussion seeks to shed light on the way middle years students experience literacy learning when they are encouraged to engage with computer games as part of their English curriculum.

Why computer games?
The declaration *Literacy in the 21st century* (Australian Literacy Educators' Association, 2015) called for recognition and validation of the lived experiences and cultural practices that students bring with them to the classroom from their home and out-of-school lives. The report, *Students, computers and learning: Making the connection* (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2015), showed that, in 2012, 99% of students in Australia had at least one computer at home (p. 18). Key findings from the 2015 Interactive Games and Entertainment Association report (Brand & Todhunter, 2015) stated that 98% of Australian homes with children have computer and/or console games (p. 5). It is not surprising, therefore, that computer and console games play an increasingly significant role in youth culture and have a profound impact on the everyday literacy and communicative practices of many students in Australian schools (Altura & Scott Curwood, 2015; Henderson, 2008). As they play, discuss and critique computer games and associated texts in their everyday lives, both inside and outside school settings, students develop capabilities in both traditional print and multimodal, or digital, literacies (Beavis et al., 2015; Steinkuehler, 2010).

Computer games also offer new opportunities for storytelling and new forms of engagement with digital texts that call on English and literacy educators to expand their understandings of 'the literary text', as they further investigate the potential these new narrative forms may have for English classrooms. Beavis (2014) argued that the inclusion of new narrative forms in the English curriculum 'provides opportunities to bridge between students' in and out of school worlds in powerful ways', while enabling an approach to the study of literature that comprises both print and digital forms, recognises cultural and communicative diversity, and requires students 'to be critical, capable and creative users of digital and multimodal forms of literacy' (p. 88).

There are compelling arguments for the inclusion of computer games as new narrative forms in English classrooms – not least of which is ensuring that school literature and literacy remain relevant to young students (Altura & Scott Curwood, 2015; Auld & Johnson, 2014; Beavis, 2014). However, teaching and learning with computer games in the classroom can raise challenges, even for those teachers willing to embrace them (Beavis et al., 2014). This article seeks to shed light on student experiences of learning when they engage with computer games in class. It invites expanded conceptualisations of the practices that constitute literacy in the digital age (Rowsell, 2014; Rowsell & Walsh, 2011).

Expanding conceptualisations of literacy and learning for a digital age
Much research on literacy in recent years has expanded traditional notions of literacy from a set of discrete, often print-based skills to a range of situated, cultural practices (Gee, 2004; Street, Pahl & Rowsell, 2009). These 'New Literacy Studies' recognise multiple literacies, take account of context and relations of power, and have implications for research in education, particularly in efforts to connect students' out-of-school literacy practices with classroom literacy learning (Hull & Schultz, 2002).

Researchers and academics of The New London Group (1996) collaborated to produce *A pedagogy*
of multiliteracies: Designing social futures, which proposed new theories to account for the range of literacy practices associated with multimodal forms of communication. Multimodal approaches to literacy recognise the broad range of modes employed in meaning-making, including images, gestures, music and sound. This presents some interesting challenges, inviting literacy assessment to move beyond print-based modes and to find a language for describing the dynamic qualities of multimodal design (Wyatt-Smith & Kimber, 2009).

Further challenges for literacy educators arise through changes brought about by the advent of digital technologies. As the affordances of digital media provide new and increasingly divergent means of representation and meaning-making, educators need to call on expanded notions of what it means to be literate in the digital age (Rowell & Walsh, 2011). Howes (2016) described a 'sensory turn in paradigms for literacy research, commending the 'strong focus on extracognitive and extralinguistic dimensions of literacy' (p. xiii). A sensory paradigm in literacy research takes a multidisciplinary approach and draws on areas as diverse as cognitive science and sensory anthropology to explore the embodied and sensory nature of meaning-making. In Literacy theories for the digital age, Mills (2016) introduced the term 'sensory literacies' to describe the 'multisensoriality of literacy and communication practices, including their technologies of mediation and production' (p. 137).

With this proliferation of literacies and paradigms for literacy research, it is challenging to find a suitable approach to researching the literacy practices that students adopt when engaging with digital technologies such as computer games. It is also challenging to form and describe understandings of the embodied, sensory nature of literacy learning in a digital environment. Increasingly, literacy researchers are drawing on phenomenology as a research approach, to develop more nuanced and embodied perspectives on literacy practices (Burnett, Merchant, Pahl & Rowell, 2014; Heydon & Rowell, 2015; Leander & Boldt, 2013; Mangen, 2010; Rowell, 2014).

A phenomenological approach focuses on the lived experience of a phenomenon, as it appears to the individual (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2002; van Manen, 1990). Recent literacy research which draws on phenomenology explores the 'experiential impact of digital technology' on literacy development (Mangen, 2010, p. 415), expands socio-cultural conceptualisations (Rowell 2014) and promotes an understanding of literacy learning as cognitive and sensory, tactile and embodied (Leander & Boldt, 2013). By adopting a phenomenological lens to view research data, this article takes a sensory and embodied approach to understanding students' literacy practices and learning experiences as they played, analysed and designed computer games in their Year 9 English classroom.

Research context: Computer games in the English classroom
This paper reports on a group of three students who were part of a larger, doctoral research study. The data were collected over the period of a school term in a state funded high school. A key priority for the school was to support students who were disengaged and struggling with school learning, literacy practices and achievement. The class teacher, Clarice Warner (pseudonym), was a classical pianist, a music teacher and the Year 9 literacy support teacher. Clarice collaborated with the principal researcher to develop a curriculum unit for her Year 9 English class in which computer games were examined as curriculum texts.

The curriculum unit focused on conducting a critical analysis of the speculative fiction genre, while integrating digital games as 'authentic texts worthy of study' (Beavis et al., 2015, p. 31). As examples of literary texts, the games were examined alongside equivalent examples from novel and movie forms. The games played in class, selected for their narrative content, visual appeal and age appropriate material, were drawn from early versions of The elder scrolls: Arena and Daggerfall (Bethesda Softworks, 1994, 1996), and from Cyan Worlds' Myst and Riven (Cyan, 1993, 1997). Other games were also discussed, providing further texts for identifying the unique features and
structures of computer games as a new narrative form and for use as resources for students to design a game concept of their own.

Outcomes for the unit entailed students forming groups to create a new computer game concept, develop a design brief for their game and produce a multimodal artefact to promote their game idea. This multimodal artefact could take the form of a promotional poster, video trailer or game preview. Participating students were expected to share their creative work with peers in a showcase to be held in the school resource centre at the conclusion of the unit.

One group of three boys produced a one-minute video trailer promoting their game *Endurance*, displayed a poster advertising their game and collectively delivered a five-minute presentation explaining the narrative features of their game and its ludic elements (i.e., game play mechanics). The following sections introduce this group of students and discuss the texts that they produced. Drawing on interview data, observations and selected classroom artefacts, the discussion makes use of a phenomenological lens to provide a snapshot of the students’ literacy learning experiences and it explores sensory and embodied practices of meaning-making.

**Research participants: Sci-fi fans and game players**

The three boys who designed *Endurance* were all deeply invested in the world of computer games, particularly in science fiction narratives surrounding those games. As a tribute to this interest, their pseudonyms derive from *Star Trek*, the iconic science fiction phenomenon. The names Kirk, Spock and McCoy are therefore used throughout the following discussion when referring to the students and their work. Their group name, the 'Trekkers', is a term long used to label fans of the *Star Trek* franchise (Star Trek Classic, 2005). To bring these students to life a little for the reader and to provide some context for the ensuing discussion, a short profile of each student follows.

Kirk, to begin with, was new to the school, having joined the class at the beginning of term. An enthusiasm for video games and the science fiction genre seemed to provide him with a sense of commonality with Spock and McCoy, who had obviously been good friends for some time. (Note that the term *video game* in this article refers to console and computer games collectively; whereas *computer games* is used when referring to classwork, as students participating in the study had access to games on laptop computers only during class.) Kirk was friendly, chatty, energetic and happy to demonstrate his participation in video game culture, often including gameplay or game characters in the short pieces of rapid response writing with which class usually began. Figure 1 shows an example of Kirk’s rapid response writing.
The second student, Spock, was a serious, shy and very capable student who was typically reserved, but he spoke with energy and enthusiasm when discussing science fiction narratives and video games. Fluent in both Chinese and English, he paused and reflected often as he strove to articulate his feelings and ideas when discussing his experience of learning with computer games in class and at home. Spock remained consistently on task in class and strove at all times to complete work of a high standard. The only other students he was observed engaging with socially in class were Kirk and McCoy.

Lastly, McCoy presented a confident, calm and sociable manner in class. He seemed to have an easy rapport with most other students, although he consistently sat and worked with Spock. These two boys clearly had a very strong friendship. Also bilingual, McCoy admitted he was better able to understand Vietnamese than speak it. He was sometimes late for class due to involvement with the school instrumental music program, but this did not seem to affect his ability to engage in class and complete work on time. McCoy was the most competent game player of the group, admitting that he ‘used to play competitively’ before he ‘dropped out because of high school’.

These boys were very excited about the idea of studying computer games in English, as evidenced by their enthusiastic sharing of ideas for the final project long before lessons required them to begin planning. Observing these students in class, talking with them as they worked, interviewing them after class and watching the evolution of their project highlighted what it meant to them to have the digital narratives that they so much enjoyed in their out-of-school lives included in the work of the English classroom.

Classwork: Students playing, analysing, designing and creating digital narratives
The students’ classwork involved playing a computer game in class, working in groups to analyse the ludic and narrative elements of games, designing a new game concept and creating multimodal material to promote their game. Ms Warner introduced the lesson for each day with a quick response writing exercise. This ‘rapid write’ provided a link to the lesson content and an opportunity for students to creatively explore ideas, identities and interests. For example, in his response to the stimulus question ‘Who is your superhero?’ (see Figure 1), Kirk created a story about his relationship with Master Chief, a fictional character from the *Halo* games (Bungie, 2001). His sense of connection with gameplay and digital narrative is evident in the personal tone he adopts when reminiscing about times he spent playing as (and with?) the character Master Chief: ‘We had some fun times, him and I. Sometimes we would play *Halo* on the Xbox or watch movies like *Halo: Fall of Reach* but even sense *Halo* cheated on him he became more of an ass with no split screen anymore. Now he is going out with *Cortana*. And she is the ugly step mum. But I will miss our times. I guess I will just play *Halo* 1, 2, 3 and reach for now on. R.I.P Master Chief.

*Figure 1. Kirk’s ‘rapid write’ response*
would play Xbox or watch movies ... now he is going out with 343 and she is the ugly step mum. But I do miss our times.’

Appreciating the meaning-making practices involved in this snapshot of Kirk’s engagement with digital narrative requires expanded understandings of literacy. Kirk’s ability to make sense of the stories he created, as he played Halo and engaged imaginatively with the world of the game, calls for ‘a view of reading where embodied actions perform stories as opposed to stories eliciting particular reactions and sensory responses’ (Rowssell, 2014, p. 119, emphasis added). Kirk’s meaning-making practices involved ‘reading and playing with text’ in ways that move beyond a text-centric perspective, and create ‘unexpected, emergent combinations that take flight into something new’ (Leander & Boldt, 2013, pp. 33, 43), such as Kirk’s playful creation of an imaginary friend with which to ‘play Xbox or watch movies’.

Kirk also demonstrates considerable knowledge of the video game industry in this short piece of writing, making humorous reference to corporate issues within the industry: ‘no split screen anymore’ because ‘bungie cheated on him’ and is now ‘going out with 343’. ‘Going out with 343’ is a reference to the company named after the robot character 343 from Halo. This company was created by publisher Microsoft Game Studios to oversee development of the Halo franchise after a corporate split with Bungie, the game developer. To write spontaneously about these corporate issues in a five-minute rapid write, Kirk called on knowledge gleaned from ‘the online community that emerges around any successful game title’, including discussion threads, YouTube videos and fan sites (Steinkuehler, 2010, p. 61). Kirk’s rapid write drew on a ‘complex constellation of literacy practice’ to decode and encode meaning in the multimodal world of video games and their paratexts (Steinkuehler 2010, p. 61). His writing exemplifies and points to literacy practices involving sensory, embodied engagement as game player, actively constructing stories during and after gameplay and reading, viewing, writing and producing print and multimodal texts.

Classroom observations also revealed the complexity of literacy work underlying the students’ playfulness and enthusiasm. While working together on their promotional poster, the Trekkers discussed how to complete the task, helping each other with drawings while simultaneously making plans for their video trailer. There was a lot of energy in the interaction. Kirk was excited, energised and speaking quickly; he had left his desk on the other side of the room and spent group time standing beside McCoy’s desk, looking over the work, leaning forward over the desk, occasionally adding a drawing to their work. Spock was drawing. McCoy had the laptop open searching the internet. The students’ freedom of movement as they worked stimulated connected, sensory and embodied learning. They drew on multimodal literacies as they gathered around their poster to present their analysis and ideas in visually stimulating ways. They used touch, gesture and movement to point out videos and pictures on their laptops as they shared work and ideas. The students’ learning experience called on ‘perceptions, senses, emotions, associations, memories, relationships with each other and literacies’ (Heydon & Rowssell, 2015, p. 469) as they worked together on their multimodal artefact in class.

The Trekkers were so enthusiastic about their final project for the curriculum unit that they created both a poster and video trailer promoting their game idea. The promotional poster for their game Endurance showed an innovative solution to the technical difficulties of representing game characters in a two-dimensional medium. This poster is shown in Figure 2.

The image in the foreground represents the captain of a space ship and the player-character. The smaller figures set further back on the ‘deck’ represent non-player characters. There is clever use of perspective with the main character facing away from the viewer to represent the third-person perspective of the player-character. The minor, non-player characters are smaller, more distant and facing the viewer, just as they would appear in a third-person role-playing game. The player character is also looking back through space towards a distant view of Earth, presenting a brief glimpse of the game narrative and purpose, to ‘save humankind’.
While the poster provided a multimodal artefact which the boys could work on together in class, they created their digital artefact, a promotional video trailer, at home. As the Trekkers discussed ideas for their video trailer, Kirk energetically described a Lego battleship he had built at home and offered to ‘destroy it’ so the group could rebuild it as a ‘star ship’ and spacecraft for their trailer. There was empathetic consternation at the idea and an understanding of the work that had gone into making a large Lego construction. They eventually used the intact destroyer before breaking it down to build other props. Figure 3 shows a still image from the video trailer.

In consequence of their decision to keep the initial Lego construction, the Trekkers modified the setting for their game narrative, opening with a scene on Earth before moving to outer space. Their literacy work in this instance demonstrated knowledge of game narratives and the science fiction genre. For example, they used a Lego model to depict a large ship in mid-ocean. This was used in the opening scenes of the promotional video trailer for Endurance and represented the last remnants of civilization on planet Earth. In the filming of this video trailer, the boys displayed an adaptability to plan and structure their game narrative around the materials available to them in their everyday life, such as a blue-green blanket to represent the ocean. The QR code provides a link to a 20-second excerpt from the video produced by the boys.

The Trekkers approach to resolving visual representation difficulties when using digital media showed adaptability to new ways of making meaning. For example, the space ship and shuttle were filmed on dark carpet to represent outer space. This can be seen in Figure 3. Students made use of camera angles to create the illusion of distance and size and they used string to animate their props. Kirk and Spock worked together on the Lego constructions and the filming of the trailer at Kirk's
home one weekend, providing a most eloquent example of learning which connects school with out-of-school worlds (Hull & Schultz, 2002).

All three students worked consistently in class on their poster and presentation and they regularly shared work through emails outside of class time. Their literacy work required sensory, embodied engagement with the material stuff of their everyday lives and the immaterial affordances of digital media (Burnett et al., 2014). Using a phenomenological lens to explore the complexity of these literacy practices draws on ‘notions of the sensory, unfolding material world and the multimodal, textual and “imagined” digital world’ and presents a view of literacy as ‘multiply and flexibly situated’ (Burnett et al., 2014, p. 101).

The social interaction and peer-to-peer learning occurring in the Trekkers’ literacy work evoked a sense of focused enjoyment and meaningful play: meaningful in terms of the narrative and ludic elements of gameplay; meaningful in the application of print-based and multimodal literacy practices, such as representation, characterisation and interpretation of visual images; and meaningful in the development of the social skills required for effective collaboration as students interacted with ‘peers, teachers, individuals, groups and community members in a range of face-to-face and online/virtual environments’ (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016, p. 12).

The literacy practices involved in this ‘meaningful play’ required students to be competent and creative in the use of digital and multimodal media ‘alongside the traditional print curriculum’ (Beavis, 2014, p. 88). The Trekkers’ critical and creative work with digital narratives provided an active, energetic and embodied learning experience and required an ergonomic fluidity which is very much restricted in a more formal classroom arrangement. As students conducted their analysis of narrative,
Focus group interviews: Students talking about computer games, literacy and learning

The following analysis explores how Kirk, Spock and McCoy made sense of their experience of using computer games in class through their retelling of the experience and the co-construction of meanings with other participants in the dialogue. Drawing on phenomenological methods to provide rich and detailed descriptions of the students' learning experiences, the analysis explores how these students experienced learning. It also investigates the practices that count as literacy as they worked to analyse computer games, design a new game concept and produce their multimodal promotional presentation.

In an interview shortly before their presentations were due, the boys spoke about how their interest in games shaped their learning experience in the unit on computer games in English, expressing a genuine 'love' of video games. For example, Kirk, when talking about their decision to make both a poster and a trailer to promote their game concept, stated, 'We didn't have to do it but I love video games.' The boys' attitudes and actions reflect Steinkuehler's (2010) words, as she declares video games a 'legitimate medium of expression' and argues that 'because they are an area of passionate interest for many young men, they are one place where you can see what they are truly capable of' (p. 63).

The boys' passion for video games was also evident when they spoke about their pride in 'being the best at something' and the connection they felt when discussing games with other players. For instance, Spock said, 'I think games [give] you more ways to actually talk about something, to connect with other people, because it gives you something common to talk about'. His words echo an attitude to video games and gameplay expounded by Bradford (2010), who argues that the combined narrative and ludic affordances of video games engage players in 'energetic action and (in many cases) interpersonal and social processes' (p. 54).

When asked whether they thought computer games might assist learning in English class or help with literacy skills, the students were very clear that games supported their school literacy practices. McCoy, for example, stated, 'I learned just about all my vocabulary from game wikis because they use very descriptive words.'

When asked to elaborate on this process McCoy said: 'for example they use “synopsis” which means overview so ... I go check it (on Google) and I can probably use it in my English'. Game wikis form part of the paratexts surrounding computer and video game industries (Consalvo, 2007). These paratexts include guidebooks made by game producers, discussion forums and 'wikis' (information websites developed for a community of users who may add and edit content). McCoy's statement about learning vocabulary from game wikis points to the significance of paratexts for literacy work incorporating computer games, 'because they resonate with adolescents' lifeworlds, in ways many school-based texts do not' (Beavis et al., 2009, p. 171). Thus, literacy learning and computer games can be seen as connected on many levels, including the social connections the boys make at school and the connected online community of other game players.

Spock further elaborated on connections between English and computer games, stating that 'English and writing the narrative stuff and games are more closely related than people think. [Games]
give you more control, it feels like you're more intertwined with the character because you're actually controlling them and you're part of, you're sharing the experience, even though it's not real'. In his 'controlling the character' and 'sharing the experience', Spock was creating a game narrative 'out of the 'verbs' made available within a game design' engaging in 'a back and forth between reading the game's meanings and writing back into them' (Steinkuehler 2010, p. 61). Spock's understanding of the relationship between 'English and writing the narrative stuff and games' is a reminder that computer games call on complex and sophisticated literacy practices, providing what Steinkuehler (2010) described as 'narrative spaces that the player inscribes with his or her own intent' (p. 61).

The classroom observations, multimodal artefacts and focus group discussions presented in this paper provide compelling examples of the positive impact and learning potential of computer games, when appropriate samples of this digital narrative form are included as curriculum texts in English. The Trekkers called upon sophisticated literacy practices to play, analyse, deconstruct games and create a new game concept and design brief with a promotional poster and video trailer. In creating their multimodal and digital artefacts, they made use of the material stuff of their everyday life – cardboard, pens, Lego models, blankets, string – and the immaterial affordances of digital technologies (Burnett et al., 2014). For example, they engaged their physical senses, playing computer games and creating props for their video. They collaborated effectively through the sharing of ideas and resources. They navigated the complex learning environment and ‘constellation’ of literacy practices required for computer gameplay (Steinkuehler, 2010, p. 61). Drawing on a range of digital and print-based literacy skills in their work with computer games in class, the students demonstrated the cognitive, connected, sensory and embodied processes required for literate practice in a digital environment (Heydon & Rowsell, 2015; Rowsell, 2014).

Conclusion

This article demonstrates how a challenge to the deficit discourse which sees computer gameplay as the enemy of classroom learning has considerable potential to engage middle years students in meaningful, playful learning. Including computer games as curriculum texts in English encouraged the participants of this study to find ways of making the secondary English classroom a place where students’ everyday cultural and literacy practices are recognised and respected (Australian Literacy Educators’ Association, 2015).

Much valuable research on computer games in English has highlighted the potential benefits that games provide and the challenges for educators and researchers when trying to incorporate them into the classroom (Altura & Scott Curwood, 2015; Bearn & Wolsencraft, 2006; Beavis et al., 2009; Carr et al., 2006; Steinkuehler, 2010). However, as Rowsell (2014) has commented, while a great deal of literacy research takes a socio-cultural approach, much less research explores the embodied, sensory nature of literacy learning. This article has sought to address this gap and to extend literacy research, through the adoption of a phenomenological lens for reflections on the literacy learning experiences of one group of students when they engaged with computer games as curriculum texts in English.

References


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Paper


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Literacy Learning:
the Middle Years

Guide for authors

Purpose and audience

Literacy Learning: the Middle Years, a journal of the Australian Literacy Educators' Association, is produced three times a year. It:
- documents and disseminates effective and innovative literacy teaching approaches for students in the middle years of schooling (Years 5–9) and recent research findings;
- publishes medium length articles in accessible formats, with illustrative material;
- caters for an audience of teachers, pre-service teachers, teacher educators and others interested in the teaching and learning of literacies in the middle years of schooling.

Types of contributions

The editor of Literacy Learning: the Middle Years invites contributions, including:
1. non-refereed articles up to 5000 words in length that discuss innovations, classroom practices, pedagogies and research appropriate to literacy learning in the middle years of schooling;
2. peer reviewed articles up to 5000 words that are research based and focus on literacy learning in the middle years;
3. articles that explicate practical classroom and education strategies related to literacy and the middle years of schooling and appropriate for the Practical Strategies section;
4. reviews of high quality teaching resources and publications. These include books suitable for young people, books for literacy educators, iPad apps and other resources relevant to literacy teaching and learning in the middle years of schooling. Reviews are generally 350–500 words in length.

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Prospective contributors should use the following simple style guide:
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- Use APA (6th ed.) for in-text citations and the reference list.
- Embed tables in the text and provide a caption for each.
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