

New Textual Worlds: Young people and computer games

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Abstract: Youth Moves: identities and education in global perspectives

Chapter Three: New textual worlds: young people and computer games

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As new media and digital culture take an increasingly central place in young people's lives, computer games come to epitomise the ways in which contemporary identities, expectations, and understandings about the world may be shaped and influenced by their engagement with the online world. They provide sites in which to explore overlaps and intersections between on- and off-line worlds, the socially situated nature of game play and game playing practices, the ways in which young people are positioned within global culture, and the implications of this immersion in digital popular culture for contemporary youth culture and education.

As multiplayer forms of videogame play continue to grow in popularity, we need to learn more about the kinds of meanings and relationships that are made, the ways young people negotiate these texts and spaces, and the ways in which on- and off-line worlds combine and merge. This includes attention to the forms of semiosis and textual worlds entailed in play, forms of representation and the ways others' representations are interpreted, required negotiations as they connect with other players, and the ways these things play out within and across physical and online settings, local and global communities, differences in geographical location and times, and across age and gender divides.

Online games immerse players in highly complex worlds, in which literacy and communicative practices are significantly reconfigured and extended by the contexts in which they occur. This chapter canvases research into the literacy and social practices of gaming, in particular those entailed in Massively Multiplayer Online Role play Games. It argues that while a significant body of studies of videogames within education focus on the models they provide of distributed knowledge and learning, and the possibilities games structures and engines provide for designing well-resourced learning environments that utilise games' affordances to provide rich learning and curriculum, more is needed. It emphasises the need to more fully understand what contemporary informal learning environments do well or badly before rushing to emulate them uncritically. Crucial here are understandings not just of games and games environments, but also the practices and communities that surround them. While attention paid to the possibilities and affordances of digital media contains much promise for education, particularly with respect to the kinds of learning online texts and sites facilitate, and the multimodal forms of meaning making they present, it is essential that research focuses not just on the sites themselves, but also on the practices, understandings and identities they invite, and the dynamic relationship between these. We need to attend to the texts and spaces of digital media, but also to the uses people make of them, and the interplay between these texts, technologies and communities and the ways people live their lives.