MASSIVELY MULTI-PLAYER ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING
GAMES IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CLASSROOM.

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Abstract

This research suggests applications in an instructional design programme that makes use of Massively-Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games (MMORPGs) in a classroom setting. The report suggests that teaching and learning programmes which use MMORPGs should cross curricula and pedagogical theorems within literacy learning. It hypothesises that without the clear and effective development of instructional design which embodies good planning; the involvement and engagement of students in preparatory work, questioning, rich learning tasks, goal setting and evaluation, and prospective activities, few school programmes will use MMORPGs as powerful and engaging learning instruments.
Glossary

**Blog:** A blog is a website where entries are made in journal style and displayed in a reverse chronological order. Blogs often provide commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic. Most blogs are primarily textual although some focus on photographs (photoblog), videos (vlog), or audio (podcasting), and are part of a wider network of social media. The term "blog" is a contraction of "Web log." "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog. (Wikipedia, 2006)

**Client Application:** a computer programme that accesses a (remote) service on another computer by some kind of network. (Wikipedia, 2006)

**Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game (MMORPG):** an online computer role-playing game (RPG) in which a large number of players interact with one another in a virtual world. As in all RPGs, players assume the role of a fictional character (traditionally in a fantasy setting) and take control over most of that character's actions. MMORPGs are distinguished from single-player or small multi-player RPGs by the game's persistent world, usually hosted by the game's publisher, which continues to exist and evolve while the player is away from the game. (Wikipedia, 2006)

**Multi-User Domain or Dimension (MUD)** is a multi-player computer game that combines elements of role-playing games, hack and slash style computer games and social chat rooms. (Wikipedia, 2006)

**MUD Object Orientated (MOO)** is a type of MUD and is a text-based online virtual reality system to which multiple users are connected at the same time. (Wikipedia, 2006)
**Proxy Server/Service:** a computer that offers a computer network service to allow clients and client applications to make indirect network connections to other network services. A client connects to the proxy server, then requests a connection, file, or other resource available on a different server. (Wikipedia, 2006)

**Server:** a computer that provides services to other computers, or the software that runs on it. (Wikipedia, 2006)

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**Note on student/participant response format**

Where I have quoted verbatim a participant’s written response; that response is formatted as follows:

"*indent, Arial font, 10 point, italics, and in quotation marks. Single line spacing. 1 point border.*"

- *(Participant code)* Response Source. E.G. blog/questionnaire/reflection

This formatting has been used to distinguish written participant responses which form the bulk of raw data, with quotes from referenced material, and quotes from interviews with participants. Interview responses are either quoted in the body of the text in 12 point Times font, or indent quoted 11 point italicized Times font.
Introduction

Imagine a secondary school English classroom where not one student looked at the whiteboard for a whole term. Imagine the same classroom where in every lesson every student worked on their own laptop computer. Imagine a classroom where the teacher never uttered instructions, and in fact was difficult to spot in most photographs. Imagine that (except for one very challenging lesson) the students in this English class never stop talking to one another. And then imagine that for 90 percent of the lessons, instead of traditional classroom practice, the students in this classroom played a computer game.

This is a reasonably accurate image of the MMORPGs research class held at an inner-city high school, in Christchurch, New Zealand during the winter of 2006.

In 2003 the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation commenced a Literacy Decade – 2003 - 2012. The campaign acknowledged a new definition of literacy; one in which literacy was diverse, possessed multiple dimensions and might be learned
in multiple ways. In essence, a redefining of literacy as *multiliteracies.*

(Lonsdale & McCurry, 2004, p. 2)

In the same time frame, the growth and development of Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) environments increased rapidly. Revenue from MMO gaming expected to exceed $US1 billion within the next two-to-three years. And of all online gaming services, MMO environments and games account for the greater slice of income. (Parks Associates, 2005).

A substantial amount of research has been carried out in both the literacy and MMORPG areas. They are both permeated with much change. Research has been ideological and practical. In multiliteracies much has been explored around critical thinking and critical literacy (see Alford, 2001; Condren, Waldrip & Knight, 2003; Wolk, 2003; Michell, 2006; Beck, 2005) where social issues, power-relations, issues of race, ethnicity and gender, and political and economic de-construction become the vehicle for critical thinking and the teaching of critical, evaluatory and analytical skills. Such works seek to re-think the attitudes of students and teachers towards texts of all kinds: traditional print, multimedia, visual imagery, music and virtual texts (Beck, 2005, p. 392). Other concepts explored in literacy learning include; social languages and ‘lifeworlds’ (Gee, 2000); procedural literacy (Guzdial & Soloway, 2002; Mateas, 2005); information literacy, and the new literacies afforded by information and communications technology (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro &
Cammack, 2004; Gabrill & Hicks, 2005; Selfe, 1992; Henderson & Scheffler, 2003) and media literacy (Lacina, 2005; Schwartz & Brown, 2005; Scharrer, 2002).

Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games have also enjoyed a popularity of theoretical discourse. Concepts and abstractions covered recently include: social interaction and social skills (Ducheneaut & Moore, 2005; Ducheneaut, Yee, Nickell & Moore, 2006); interactivity and connectedness (Ng, 2005); use of multiplayer environments for higher education tuition (Delwiche, 2003; Grimley, personal communication July 2006; Herz, n.d.); instructional design and learning principles inherent in computer games (Gee, 2003; Riegle & Matejka, 2005; Dogusoy & Inal, n.d.; Summit on Educational Games, 2006); communities of learning & collaborative learning (Galarneau, 2005b; Eustace, Fellows, Bytheway & Lee, 2004) and military training and education (Bonk & Dennan, 2005).

There is growing acknowledgement that the attributes and principles of good computer games are applicable in literacy learning. These principles and attributes have a place in our conventional classrooms, but they are dependent on robust and thoughtful teaching and learning design. While some commentators argue that a substantial transformation of traditional education and its instructional paradigms is needed to truly harness the power of information and communications technology (ICT) and computer games, this research has been focused on including MMO game-play in a much more pragmatic sense.
I hope to offer some critical suggestions for how and why MMORPGs and similar online environments might be useful in literacy learning. I expect that this report will add further considerations to both the cognition of game-play, and to the wider scope of educational instructional design in so far as it relates to the use of computer games in learning.

**Literature Review**

I intend to divide this literature review into four parts. Part one deals with a brief examination of literacy teaching and learning. This part suggests both scholarly theses which define literacy as reading, writing and spelling and grammar; and those which proffer more transformational ideologies of literacy: multiple and new literacies – including information and communication literacies.

The second section of the literature review is an exploration of the changes that have taken place in what I am calling “information and communications architecture”. This will mean not only examining the technology and its affordance, but also the evolution of social networks, the dynamics created by mobile and internet technologies, and the status of formal education within this revolution. In particular I intend to shed light on the implications of these changes on our students and the worlds they live in. Within this exploration I wish to look briefly at the growing
publication of theoretical arguments attached to how students learn differently today than they might have in the past.

The third part explores the burgeoning discourses around MMORPGs in educational settings. The section includes a review of MMORPGs from an educational perspective, and also from sociological and anthropological viewpoints.

The fourth part is primarily concerned with drawing the three literature sections together in an attempt to create suitable questions for research around MMORPGs and literacy learning.

**Literature Review (I): Literacy Learning: from the ‘two Rs’ to making multiple meanings.**

“New Literacies”; “multiliteracies”; “critical literacy”; “literacy agenda”; “media literacy”; “political literacy” and “effective literacy”. The pedagogical examination of literacy learning in the early 21st century has become an exercise in semantic distilment. In an attempt to critically examine what MMORPGs might teach us about literacy learning in the classroom, an analysis of what is meant by the term *literacy* is required.

Perhaps the simplest definition of literacy is “the ability to read and write”¹. There are numerous journals and resources dedicated to the teaching and learning of literacy as the ability to read and write (and

often, spell). It is not feasible here to discuss the huge range of articles, books and conference proceedings given over to research on literacy teaching and learning where it pertains specifically to reading and writing print. Indeed as more academics add to a theory of literacy learning that goes beyond traditional print literacy, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find commentators who are happy to simply see ‘literacy’ as merely the ability to read and write. However, it is possible to find articles which solely focus on traditional reading and writing. For example:

Students with significant reading disabilities are included in general education classrooms. Often these students are able to comprehend and discuss content area material in classes such as science and social studies. There are some, however, who cannot read their textbooks independently nor compose age appropriate written responses. (Hoffner, 2004, p. 42)

Although the twin principles of repetition and reinforcement-principle 3, enjoy a robust reputation in the history of schooling, the exemplar selected for discussion here is derived from music education. (Rickford, 2005, p.113)

Grammar instruction has long been a troubling issue for many language arts teachers.” (Feng & Powers, 2005, p.69)

Guiding students to "sound the word out" or "stretch out the sounds in the word" seems to be the most popular teacher response when dealing with beginning writers. (Strimple, 2004, p.85)

A reading teacher or specialist has the knowledge to assess and diagnose the children's reading problems and determine what concepts and skills need to be addressed as well as furnish materials and provide constant feedback. (Leal, 2004, p. 16)

In contrast to teachers who strictly adhere to one particular method of teaching reading (e.g., phonics, whole language), teachers who orchestrate take a more balanced approach to teaching reading, by (a) combining skill/strategy instruction with more holistic teaching; (b) using a variety of grouping practices (e.g., partner reading, small group, whole group) to help students to learn, refine, and apply new reading skills and strategies; and (c) incorporating a variety of reading materials (e.g., basis, literature, nonfiction texts) into instruction (Morrow, et al., 2002; Strickland, 1996). (Turner, 2005, p. 34)

A search of journals and publications with the word ‘reading’ in the title reveals hundreds of documents devoted to the educational progression of literacy learning as ‘learning to read’. This is not a criticism of the term
literacy, or a critique of those researchers, teachers and scholars who continue to add to the profession of teaching students how to become better readers. What these quotes serve to highlight is that while literacy learning has been fortunate enough to enjoy a growing breadth of curriculisation and definition, there will probably always exist a formalised approach which views literacy learning as ‘learning to read and write’.

Possibly Brian Street (2005) summarised this perspective on literacy learning best, when he called it “autonomous” (p. 417) See also Street, 1984). He discusses an autonomous model of literacy learning as one that encompasses the practices and programmes of literacy learning without need to consider the social, political, cultural or ideological manifestations of literacy. Street argues that, from this perspective, learning to read and write is considered both neutral and universal. That it is a skill of technical proportions and without bias in this regard (p. 417-418). In this light, the quotes used above clearly relate to the teaching and learning of skills and practices without heed for the cultural or ideological assumptions within which literacy learning takes place.

The last decade has witnessed a growing consideration of the transformational literacies, which in many ways depart from the transmissive notions of literacy most often taught in the compulsory school sector. In 1996, the New London Group used the term multiliteracies to describe both the explosion of varying communications media and the importance and recognition of cultural, social and
language diversity (Cazden, Cope, Fairclough, Gee, et. al. 1996, p. 63). The New London Group’s discourse was highly attuned to both the growing diversity of visual and textual mediums, as well as the increasing contextual appreciation with which these mediums and modes delivered their messages. These dualities demanded a new approach to how educators viewed literacy learning. The idea of teaching literacy through a finite and relatively static set of rules, such as might take place in reading instruction, was impossible. Multiple-literacy learning they argued was in a constant state of rapid change due to its conveyance through new technologies. And secondly, the conditions of these new modes of literacy were strongly linked to notions of identity and context. They argued that traditional print literacies could not impart the complex messages that were increasingly inherent in new literacies. Students (and adults) use communication relationships that traverse cultural, community and national boundaries (p.64). If, they argued, your public and private life required you to communicate in many different languages (or even in just many different "Englishes") (p. 64), then a pedagogy or set of literacy instructions which only taught students to read and write in a traditional sense, were never going to be enough.

In recent times educational administrators have danced a dalliance with such emerging pedagogies of literacy and literacy learning. For example, the Critical Literacy curriculum in place in Queensland schools. (Alford, 2001, p. 238). While this programme has since been scheduled for review and possible removal from the state curriculum (at least in its current form), its adoption by the state bureaucracy, and subsequently schools,
emphasises a broader view of literacy. The department of education in Queensland defined literacy as:

... the flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with the texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken language, print, and multimedia. (Department of Education, 2000, p.9)

Australia continues to provide descriptions of the pluralistic nature of literacy and literacy learning. The Tasmanian Department of Education defined literacy learning as follows:

Literacy is the ability to read and write and use written information and to write appropriately in a range of contexts. It also involves the integration of speaking, listening, viewing and critical thinking with reading and writing, and includes the cultural knowledge which enables a speaker, writer or reader to recognise and use language appropriate to different social situations. (Department of Education, 2006)

While this definition suggests that literacy learning in Tasmanian schools will continue to include, and be primarily concerned with, reading and writing it demonstrates a growing holistic concept of literacy; where ideas of critical thinking, cultural acknowledgement and socio-development are included. This is no small step for a state education department.

In New Zealand, the recently released draft national curriculum has stated:

Using language, symbols, and texts is about working with and making meaning of the codes in which knowledge is expressed. Languages and symbols are systems for representing and communicating information, experiences, and ideas. People use languages and symbols to produce texts of all kinds: written, spoken, and visual; informative and imaginative; informal and formal; mathematical, scientific, and technological. (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 12)

New considerations about what it means to be literate and what it means to work with language, symbols and texts are clearly instilled through the new (draft) curriculum. Literacy learning in the curriculum is no longer
confined to being taught how to read and write print texts in their traditional form.

This expanding and holistic approach to literacy can be viewed in a wide selection of both popular and scholarly texts over recent years. Lacina (2005) suggests that media literacy is where students learn to read texts both in a visual sense and in terms of its syntax and symantics (p. 118). Street (2005) calls for literacy learning to be viewed as a social application. An application where knowledge is constructed by both reading and learning to read (p. 418). Fairclough (1992) expands literacy learning to encompass a critical approach. The argument states that the standards and practices of language are embedded with political and ideological processes which, for the most part, people are unaware of. Autonomous language study is criticised for ignoring these processes (p. 7).

Wolk (2003) argues that by imbuing literacy practices with a critical agenda, learners become skilled at observing and questioning dominant power themes in society (p.102).

Again, Brian Street provides a clear and tacit term when he expresses this critical and social-practice orientated viewpoint of literacy as an “ideological” model of literacy learning (p. 417)
The proliferation of new-academia demanding a wider study of literacy learning is almost the stuff of bandwagon proportions. In fact it becomes difficult to find commentators ready to criticise these assumptions of literacy and literacy study. But while scholars and academics argue for an ideological and critical approach to learning literacies, and while they demand that literacy learning deconstructs power relations rather than focus on universal practices or generalised rule forming, what is really happening in our classrooms?

Condren, Waldrip and Knight (2003) argue that critical language awareness taught in the classroom lacks performance and application by students outside of formal school environments. There is, they claim, a disparity between what we think we are teaching in regard to critical literacy, and what the students are actually learning (p. 13). While they don’t go as far as to claim that critical literacy learning is a waste of time, they do imply that where critical literacy learning is in opposition to held values and belief systems, adoption of analytical behaviours by students is unlikely.

In summary, the progress of literacy learning has two clear positions. Firstly, there exists an ‘autonomous’ perspective. This perspective continues to explore and develop the teaching and learning of ‘traditional’ literacies – the ability to read and to write, the learning of grammar and of spelling.
While not necessarily in direct conflict to such theses, the variant directs its attentions to a wider understanding of literacy learning as a mode of transformational learning. It is concerned with diversity, social and cultural currency and the inherent ideological messages worked into texts of all types. Such considerations of literacy do not confine themselves to just analysing the teaching and learning of written or ‘traditional’ texts, but argue that literacy learning must embrace a variety of media: film and television, internet-based and virtual media, journalism, political and social multimedia, video and computer games and other oral, written and visual medium.

**Literature Review (II): Change in the Evolution of Information and Communications Architecture**

It is important that this work explores the changes which have characterised the way our students read, gather, use and evaluate information, and the way they communicate. While much of this section will explore on the periphery of computer and online games, they are inextricably linked.

By using the word *architecture* I wish to suggest that I want to explore more than just the physical and virtual apparatuses which have brought about these changes. I wish to also consider the social, cultural, economic and ideological structures and designs that have mediated these changes.

I will use this review to explore five importance facets; aspects I believe play a critical part in understanding how MMORPGs and learning relate.
(i) Knowledge; (ii) socialisation; (iii) internet and mobile technology; (iv) creativity; and (v) formal education. I don’t plan to tackle these one-at-a-time, but will rather use them as interchangeable lens through which the literature may be investigated.

In the past knowledge was the tangible or not-so-tangible understanding and adherence to facts and truisms. It manifested itself in processes and practices carried-out within actions and was both cognitive and meta-cognitive, recognised by either apparent populations and/or specialised groups. Take for example the practice of farming. Knowledge held by practitioners (farmers) included an understanding of which seasons were best for growing crops, knowing when to hold a harvest, when to shear the wool from the sheep, how many cattle could be held in a paddock of any given size and for how long, and so on. This type of knowledge has not disappeared – although if you read enough about the changing nature of knowledge you could be forgiven for thinking that it has. What has changed is the permanence, exclusivity, consumption and learning of this type of knowledge. The fact is, that thirty years ago to know much of the knowledge possessed by farmers I would have engaged in a number of specific learning processes and domains. I would have had to belong to a highly specialised group – farmers, or even horticultural or dairy farmers. Somewhere along the way I would have engaged in learning this knowledge, perhaps by being brought up on a farm with farmers as parents, or by attending a college or university and taking courses on aspects of farming. I would be able to ‘read’ the active and passive signs
and texts of farming. It remains that I am the deputy principal of a school, and I have always lived in an urban environment.

While somewhat glib, I can now, whilst sitting here writing this in my lounge room, go and ‘find out’ each of the pieces of knowledge I used as examples above. Potatoes for instance should be harvested in autumn. If I live in North Carolina, I should harvest onions when they are mature and only when 10-20 percent of the tops have fallen over. Theoretically there are ten months of the year in which I can shear my sheep in New Zealand – because I have a fairly extensive experience of the weather in the South Island of New Zealand, I can surmise that July and August probably aren’t included in those months! I now know that one of the most important aspects to paddock rotation when grazing cattle is the amount of regrowth time required for the different pastures – somewhere between 21 and 42 days as it happens. Does having this knowledge mean I can now go off and start farming? Well, of course not, but it is an interesting example of the change in the exclusivity of knowledge.

Gee (2003) considers these changes in knowledge by writing about learning. He discusses “semiotic domains” – domains or fields (no pun intended) in which reside meanings. These meanings are in the form of things which in some sense can be ‘read’: “images, sounds, gestures, movements, graphs, diagrams, equations, objects, even people.” (p.17).

People, Gee argues, are able to read some semiotic domains better than others. This is because they belong to specialised groups. These groups
practice behaviours distinctive to the group. Socially these behaviours make members evident to each other, and in turn make the texts, symbols and signs of these domains more obvious to members. (p.23)

Learning, states Gee, involves three things: firstly, *experiencing* the world in new ways. Secondly, forming new *affiliations*, and finally *preparing* yourself for future learning (p.23).

If we consider the example of farming, especially from a historical perspective, and compare it to the experience, affiliations and preparation of our students in the 21st century, we can observe a massive shift in the paradigms which shape our understanding of learning, and subsequently knowledge.

Our students experience things radically different than previous generations. There is much to suggest that students have developed a different set of attitudes and abilities because they inhabit an IT and media-rich environment (Oblinger, 2004, p. 5). This is promulgated by their interaction with, and use of, information and communications technology and architecture. At the same time our schools have been “instinctively conservative” (Prensky 2006, p.44, after Gardener) in regard to the architecture. This traditionalism is both a strength and a weakness. When our students learn in ways which fall outside of the conventional norms of formal schooling this conservatism creates conflict. As communities, our schools are well placed to offset some of the more destructive effects of the knowledge economy and its capitalist
aspirations by fostering compassion, community and identity
(Hargreaves, 2004, p.1). This role is an important one. Schools have the
potential to accomplish much with their students through the workings of
community. Our young people are ready and willing to work in teams.

The paradox of our formal school systems however negates the strength
of our schools’ communality. Hargreaves suggests that schools have
become obsessed with curriculum uniformity rather than cultivating
creativity and promoting innovation amongst their students (p.1)

Theoretical writers of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century
have supported this perspective.

Schools famously resist change (Prensky, 2006, p. 44)

Educators often bemoan the fact that video games are compelling and school is
not. They say that children must learn to practice skills outside of meaningful
contexts and outside their own goals; that’s just the way it is. (Gee, 2003, p. 68)

The secret of schooling is that it doesn’t teach the way children learn, and it isn’t
supposed to; school was engineered to serve a concealed command economy
and a deliberately re-stratified social order. (Gatto, 2003)

New and emerging information and communications architecture
demands a re-consideration of learning and identity. Where once our
schooling institutions ignored the passive and active identities of the
students they were serving, today’s schools must seek to incorporate the
changing structures of knowledge, socialisation and technology. Our
students clearly already have. Using information and communications
technology they are able to access, read and work with knowledge in
ways which were not possible twenty or thirty years ago. Students
outside of class are able to work with knowledge content which is
specifically tailored to meet their individual interests and passions.
Consider the consumer-based example of Google mail (gmail), where
adverts are displayed in the free email application directly relating to the content of the email message received. Or take for example students’ use of social software such as Bebo (www.bebo.com), MySpace (www.myspace.com), Facebook (www.facebook.com) and Flickr (www.flickr.com), where students actively mesh the content and knowledge of the web, their friends and their entire peer group to create very real identities that can be shared across the world.

Using information and communications technology students are able to socialise and interact with each other in ways which do not require the geographic proximity of yesteryear – or even yesterday. Young people now communicate more through online social software such as Bebo and MySpace, than they do by email (Gefter, 2006, p. 46). ICT architecture allows for a degree of flexibility around social interactions that our schools simply cannot contest with – yet! Prensky (2005) suggests that if we are to bring our instructional modes up to speed with the changes in ICT architecture then schools must seek to become more adaptive and connected, and so must their forms of instruction. (p. 3).

The changes in information and communications architecture have changed our students from ‘consumers’ of knowledge to both consumers and producers. In the same way that young people create profiles to share across huge networks of friends via social networking websites, so too, people who play MMORPGs are creators in their own right. Rather than simply being readers of the game, they are writers. In a massive multiplayer game such as World of Warcraft, players create virtual, yet
still real, identities, careers and lives through which they interact, work and play with others (Gee, 2005, p. 34). This change clearly indicates that our students are able designers and initiators. That given the right architecture, our students are able to work creatively, and socially.

However, the rapidity and extremeness of this change is a cause of concern for teaching. Prensky notes that our students are already far ahead of their teachers in the inheriting of this architecture: in the reading and writing of this new literacy. He advocates for the specific teaching of these new “programming” literacies. (2005 p. 4).

**Literature Review (III): Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games**

People learn through games. People are engaged by game-play and its inherent affordances. Problem-solving, competitiveness, collaboration, creativeness and imagination, all attributes we wish to see displayed by our young people, are affective outcomes of participation in serious game-play.

For a time, computer game-play was very much a solo activity. However with advent of technological advances such as 3D graphics acceleration hardware, and broadband internet connectivity, computer games have joined their physical, emotional and mental cousins in constructing a dynamic social setting in which to play (Seay, Jerome, Lee & Kraut, 2004, p. 1421).
Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Games are computer games which are played online using an internet connection, either a browser-based or separate client application interface and often have thousands of players connected on large computer servers. (p. 1421). While Korea has an infrastructure and growing youth culture that sees some games with approximately 4 million players (p. 1421), MMORPGs are a growing recreational pastime amongst players in western nations. Blizzard, the developer of World of Warcraft, a fantasy MMORPG, recently announced that the number of subscribers to its game had passed 7.5 million world-wide.\textsuperscript{2}

Much of what has been written about the emerging field of MMORPGs and its epistemological importance deals with the social and collaborative learning affordances of such games. Galarneau (2005a) explores the ideas of Wenger and Lave: legitimate peripheral participation, where people interact and thereby learn, in informally organized clusters (p.2). Such discussions are a valid perspective on how MMORPGs might aid learning for students. MMORPGs might be played by players in real geographic isolation from one another, but the virtual proximity of these players is representative of “communities of practice” (Galarneau, after Lave, Wenger, et. al., p.2). Theorists discuss these communities of practice in MMORPGs and the way participants work collaboratively to solve-problems, undertake quests, engage in social

\textsuperscript{2}“World of Warcraft\textsuperscript{®}: The Burning Crusade\textsuperscript{™} in stores January 16, 2007”, Blizzard Entertainment press release, November 9, 2006
discussion and organise and coordinate activities. (See for example; Seay, Jerome, Lee & Kraut, 2004; Prensky, 2001a; Eustace, et. al, 2004).

Galarneau's work suggests that when players play MMORPGs mastery is attained by players working collaboratively (p. 4). Ideas of community and interdependence are expounded as being critical elements of MMORPG game-play, and that these are valid examples of learning.

Many writers submit the *solving of problems* as an inherently positive aspect of game play in general, and within MMORPG game play specifically. Gee's 2003 text *What Video Games have to Teach us about Learning and Literacy*, includes a number of examples, and many of these are discussed in depth.

A game like Pikmin recruits from the (sic) our six-year old a complex identity composed of related traits. The game encourages him to think of himself [as] an active problem solver, one who persists in trying to solve problems even after making mistakes; one who, in fact, does not see mistakes as errors but as opportunities for reflection and learning. (p.44)

Socialisation and interactive participation are key components of online game play. Many researchers have focused on these key affordances of game play from an educational perspective. Galarneau (2005b) talks of *spontaneous communities of learning* (p. 1). Eustace, et. al. propose that MMORPGs allow the application of very real social and emotional skills. As with other writers they claim that MMORPGs promote collaborative learning (2004, p.2).
Gee argues that “video game [players] often experience a more intense affinity group, leverage more knowledge from other people and various tools and technologies, and are more powerfully networked with each other than they ever are in school.” (2003, p. 194). Further, Bonk and Dennen (2005) describe how long-term associations built up in virtual multiplayer environments actually aid self-actualisation (p. 25).

MMORPGs can claim to imbed constructivist practices and principles in their design. Such principles include learners constructing knowledge within authentic contexts (Galarneau, 2005, p.3).

Ideas of authenticity and situated learning are suggested by Chiuppesi (2005). He suggests that MMORPGs could act as in vitro learning environments, something akin to simulations, to be utilised in an educational space prior to application in the real world. (p.5)

Steinkeuhler (2004) argues that mastery of the MMORPG environment constitutes a form of literacy (After Galarneau, 2005a, p. 4). The ability to navigate in a representational graphic plane (be it two-dimensional or three-dimensional), the reading of symbols and a clear, demonstrable understanding of the semiotics and the highly contextual vocabulary associated with these fantasy role-playing games, shows an engagement with language learning. At least within a more extensive appreciation of literacy learning.
So why should MMORPGs be important when considering how students learn, and how they might learn literacy?

As stated in part one of the literature review, there is an overwhelming drive for literacy learning to be re-thought and re-formalised. This thesis argues that transformational hypotheses of literacy learning are valid, and given that these literacies are a significant part of the world our school students inhabit, we must begin to be transformational about how we think about teaching.

Our educational authorities want students who are connected and confident, they want learners who can see opportunities and solve problems, they want young people who can work both interdependently and independently. They want school students to be able to work with and ‘read’ diverse texts and languages. (See for example Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 6). All things which are extremely important in successfully playing MMORPGs! What is clear beyond the rhetoric is that the game-based nature of these allowances is not what our governing bodies and schools want. MMORPGs alone in their learning design can not readily be applied to the knowledge and practice of the school curriculum.

It is not until the imbedded affordances (a concept I have coined *circuitious allowances*) of MMORPGs are aligned within a rigorous programme of instructional design for students that MMORPGs can realise a functional teaching and learning role in the classroom.
So how should MMORPGs be used when teaching students, and when working with students learning literacy?

Figure 1 illustrates an emerging model of instructional design utilising MMORPG game play.

Figure 1: Instructional Design with MMORPGs and Students. 2006. (Some "circuitsous allowances" aspects derived from Amory, Naicker, Vincent, Adams, 1999)
This work will suggest applications in an MMORPG-based instructional design programme. One that can be applied to the classroom setting and one that crosses curricula and pedagogical theorems within literacy learning. It chooses to hypothesise that without the clear and effective development of learning programmes which embody good planning, the involvement and engagement of students in preparatory work, questioning, rich learning tasks, goal setting and evaluation and prospective activities, few school programmes will choose to make use of this powerful learning architecture.

**Literature Review (IV): Concluding the Literature Review**

There would have to be, I believe, a prevalence of theoretical and research discourse around what I have termed the *circuious allowances* of playing MMORPGs. These allowances are arguably rich in educational affordance. Many constructs have considered how learning is both implicit and explicit when playing MMORPGs, and how this learning is associated to literacy learning. Socialisation, problem-solving, the reading of symbols and domain-based texts, collaborative learning, logic, critical thinking, engagement, discovery, goal setting, competition, practice, challenge, manipulation and exploration are all critical elements found to make-up patterns and modes of learning when game-players play MMORPGs. However my research suggests that these “interfaces” (Amory, Naicker, Vincent & Adams, 1999, p. 318) in isolation from a pedagogically acceptable system of instructional design, will not be
enough to convince schools and teachers to make use of such productive learning tools as multi-user domains in our schools.

I believe, and research suggests, that MMORPGs are inherently capable of engendering the circuitous allowances presented in the instructional design model in figure 1. In my view, using MMORPGs in the classroom would add levels of engagement, exploration, challenge and motivation to the pedagogical elements listed; questioning, rich tasks and activities, reflective practice, goal setting, evaluation and assessment and prospective strategies.

As Gee (2003) suggests, computer games, including MMORPGs, build into their design good principles of learning. He argues that pedagogies which refuse to abandon skill-and-drill, back-to-basics, test-them-until-they drop practices miss out on many of these principles. (p. 205)

Figure 1 is an attempt to model how the use of MMORPGs situated within well designed learning programmes might better help us understand what MMORPGs can teach us about learning and literacy. It would seem to me that critical research that sought to incorporate MMORPG game-play within a powerful set of instructional design parameters would benefit learners.
This research project has been concerned with asking, if such circuitous allowances are indeed present in MMORPGs and in the playing of MMORPGs, how might we best use them in formal educational settings to further learning and literacy amongst students?

I don’t want to get engulfed in demanding a rethink of the school curriculum. Too many commentators have attempted this and there is little to suggest that schools are about to tear down the foundations of reading, writing and arithmetic. What I’m interested in is the pragmatic use of these incredibly engaging games in learning. How might we serve the ideologies which promote multi-literacy learning, whilst still doing justice to teaching students within the paradoxes of an overcrowded and demanding curriculum. Ideally I picture an outcome which embraced and acknowledged the holistic ideology of multiliteracies, allowed teachers to compose the curriculum and its content to have more meaning and relevance to today’s students and situated learning within contexts which engaged and differentiated for learners.

The fact is that MMORPGs and their multi-user domain cousins – network games, simulation games and pervasive worlds – have and will change the way students learn. Schools need to embrace and use them so that they are not the only thing that students learn.

I will finish this section with what I believe to be a wonderful example of why ideas about conventional reading and writing are still valid within
the changing architecture of information and communications
technology.

Figure 2 shows an information note-card from the pervasive world
Second Life. This card was not written by the game developers, it was
written by a player, and subsequently picked up by me, as I was
searching for some information about where to take educational courses
within the Second Life world. Without the other player being able to
write in a conventional sense, and without me being able to read it, not
only would I have never found out about the courses, but this game
would not work.

![Second Life Interface](image)

**Figure 2:** Second Life interface. Reading about the Electronic Village Online
course/convention
Methodology

In creating a research process that would be both formative in the scope of the findings it would seek to discover, and yet also be a launching platform for further study on the impact of MMORPGs on cognition and literacy learning, the methodology of the research was purposefully left open-ended.

An imprecise research model was employed; partly action-research, partly case-study. Theoretical explorations of this and similar methods can be found in the writings of Bassey (1999) and Yin (1984). However, the parallel functions of these research types were most obviously employed for the following reasons.

Firstly, the research took place in a school setting, as part of a term long class in a course of Foundation English (Years 9 & 10). As the course was almost certainly a first in a New Zealand secondary school, action research type reflection and responsiveness would be needed to mediate the open-endedness of the intended learning outcomes of both the course work and the study. This is cognisant with Chisolm and Elden’s (1993) discourse on action research where “traditional action researchers attempt to improve organizational performance and generate social science theory” (p.6)
Secondly, the methodology would employ some obvious characteristics of case-study research. The understandings and experiences of a fixed and finite group of students would be documented through a number of mechanisms.

Thirdly, as the researcher, I was not an experienced MMORPG player. The course and the embodied research would need to be responsive to the learning I gathered about the operational characteristics of MMORPGs as the project progressed.

**Methodology (I): Participants**

In the original intake of participants there were 27 males and 5 females, with an average age of 13.7 years. Students elected to take this class as part of their timetable of study for the second term of the academic year. A descriptor of the course, some initial learning outcomes and reference to three achievement objectives from the New Zealand curriculum were provided to students in the term schedule. (See Appendix A for a reproduction of this information).

Because the study was conducted in a school setting with school-aged students, permission was required from a number of different quarters. Permission to conduct the study based on the original research proposal was sought and granted from the Board of Trustees, the school’s governing body. Written permission was also granted by the parents of
each student participating in the research. Agreement to divert from the
traditional syllabus offered in the foundation English class was agreed to
by the teachers of the English curriculum team. As a requirement of all
research conducted by the Department of Education, human ethics
approval was sought from the University’s Human Ethics Committee.

Methodology (II): Software, MMORPGS & equipment

At the same time the compliance parts of the study were being
conducted, technical preparations were also carried out. During the early
stages of the study, a list of possible MMORPGs was drawn up as being
suitable for playing for the purposes of this study. Time was spent
playing and seeking background information on five MMORPGs. This
included reading up on MMORPGs through a number of websites,
including Wikipedia, (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MMORPG) which has a
fairly concise entry on MMORPGs in general and on each of the selected
MMORPGs in particular.

The final list was made up of Runescape, Doofus, PlaneShift, Oberin and
World of Warcraft (WoW).

While the initial selection of MMORPGs were chosen because they
allowed students to set-up free accounts through which to play, the most
critical judgement in selecting the MMORPGs was their suitably for use
in a school setting. I judged that Runescape, Doofus, Oberin and
PlaneShift all possessed a level of developer/administrator moderation
and monitoring which meant that students were no more at risk of exposure to inappropriate material than were they accessing websites online through the school’s proxy server. Indeed Runescape, Doofus and Oberin all have a level of administration and user regulation which means users persistent in using the game for inappropriate behaviour have their accounts either suspended or deleted. This was imparted to parents in the information form handed out in the first session. World of Warcraft users were allowed to play this game provided parents signed additional consent. There were five WoW players, and each of them had registered ownership of WoW accounts. This game could not be played through a free guest account.

After some experimentation it became clear that none of the games would be playable without major modifications to the school’s ICT infrastructure. The school’s internet service contract with New Zealand’s major telecommunications corporation was held through an education proxy service. This proxy service prevented access to the servers on which these games were located. As many of the games used client applications (see Glossary), it was not possible to open the network ports needed to allow access by these applications. A decision was made to purchase a temporary internet service account – this account would not run through the normal proxy service operated by the school, but would be a direct line of access to the internet. The router was installed in a secure room at the site of study, and the service was disconnected at the
end of each session to prevent unauthorised access outside of the class times arranged for the study.

Network hubs and Cat 6 network patch cables were purchased. A decision was made to use cables rather than wireless devices for a number of reasons. Firstly any older model computers used on an Airport Extreme network would reduce the connection speed for all computers. Secondly the hubs, purchased second-hand and along with 35 cables, were still less expensive than purchasing a single Airport Extreme device. While in retrospect a wireless set-up would be much easier to administer, it would also be possible for other students in the school to access this ‘direct’ and somewhat insecure line, were students to share network passwords.

Each of the computers was set-up to connect to the internet via the new temporary access. Students were then able to install freeware client applications needed to run those games which did not run through an internet browser.

One of the frustrations experienced at this stage was the degree of technical support required for the thirty-six computers and users in the class. The router providing the access originally only assigned Internet Protocol (IP) addresses for twelve computers, and subsequently had to be re-configured to assign the thirty-six needed in most class sessions. Throughout the course of the field work much technical expertise was required in regard to student use and computer hardware. I would not
recommend embarking on a similar learning programme or research project without having at least some knowledge of network administration, and the ability to trouble-shoot technical difficulties arising when connecting even a moderate number of computers to a single network.

By the beginning of the third week all students had managed to connect to the game of their choice and set-up an account so that they could play.

Methodology (III): Design and Procedures

The definitions of the research were outlined in the author’s research proposal. I wanted to study literacy and literacy learning through student engagement with MMORPGs. Discussion with Education Department supervisors at the University of Canterbury elicited the need to extend my originally limited assumptions of what constituted literacy, and thus literacy learning. Approaches to data gathering required both a practical and theoretical consideration of literacy learning and MMORPGs in formal education settings.

The field work stage of the research was conducted in the form of a class structure, on site at the school. This class was allotted three 55 minute class slots on the school’s timetable. These classes were held on Mondays at 2.10-3.05pm, and on Thursdays and Fridays from 1.00pm until 1.55pm. Students were informed that some independent work outside of class would be required.
In the first three class sessions students were informed of the research by
the author. Loosely based on the ideas originally presented in the
proposal, students were allowed to ask questions and discuss amongst
themselves their original conceptions of the nature of the study. No
deception of participants was initiated at this, or indeed any stage of the
study. Permission forms were handed to students to take home to their
parents on the first day. The second and third classes involved those
students who had been granted permission by their parents completing a
questionnaire. (See Appendix B)

Game play started in the second week. A sometime-science classroom
was used as the network room for field work/game-play. Figure 3 shows
the general physical set-up of the room. Students brought their own
laptop computers (approximately sixty percent of students at the school
own or lease their own Apple Macintosh computers) or borrowed one
from the school’s technical library.

Figure 3: MMORPG Classroom
Students would connect their computers to the network as they entered the classroom, they would then log-in and continue playing the MMORPG from where they had last logged out.

In general there was no strict focus on the game-play during these class sessions. Only twice were game-play sessions directed by the author, and a discussion of how this was carried out follows below. Students were free to play their game of choice sitting or standing next to whoever they choose, although late-comers often had to slip in wherever a space and connection could be found.

Students were reminded to keep their login passwords secure, although this did not prevent passwords from being discovered and shared.

Students were free to play any of the games listed above.

A number of teaching and research strategies were employed to gather data during game play. When I say during game-play, I wish to include the down-time between game-play sessions in class. MMORPGs are not finite games. That is, you do not start at point A and eventually finish the ‘game’ at point Z. The teaching strategies used in the research field work mostly covered a conventional scope of instructional design. For the purposes of referencing the procedural inputs of the research the New London Group’s (See Cazden, et. al., 1996) instructional and pedagogical design aspects were used. (See Table 1). This work was used, not because I believe it constitutes the full scope of learning programme
design, but for the reason that it offers a set of design elements which has been created specifically with multiliteracies in mind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Design Aspect</th>
<th>Teaching (action-research) Strategy</th>
<th>MMORPG Play Aspect</th>
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<td>Questionnaire</td>
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<td>Question and answer lesson</td>
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<td>Blog creation lesson</td>
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<td>Computer setup</td>
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<td>Game-play</td>
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<tr>
<td>Situated Practice</td>
<td>Questioning through blog-quests</td>
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<td>Blogs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overt Instruction/</td>
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<td>Goal-setting sessions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transformed Practice</td>
<td>- next classes, work beyond school, etc.</td>
<td>Game-play</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Future decision making</td>
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Table 1: Relating traditional instructional design to the action-research design (Instructional design aspects from New London Group, 1996)

1. A participant questionnaire was prepared and trialled for students.

The questions used in the substantial second part were mostly the work of Nick Yee, and forms a large part of his ongoing sociological project on MMORPGs. (see Yee, 2006) Students answered the questionnaire in two parts, as the questionnaire was generally thought to be too large as a single document. Students were sent the questionnaires as an email, and replied with their answers quoting the questions in their replies. All students completed the questionnaire. (See Appendix B for a copy of the participant questionnaire)
2. Students were asked to ‘blog’ their game-play – each request from the researcher for a blog, was termed a “blog-quest”. Most student participants created blogs using a free blogging site: www.blogger.com. A session was held with all participants in the first week of the course on setting up the blog. Two students made use of a blog site they had already used for other purposes.

I administered blog-quests through email. Sometimes the blog-quest would be open-ended, and simply ask students to blog their game play for the session. Sometimes the blog-quest would ask them to capture screen-shots of their game-play and write about the screen-shot. Other times I would blog-quest a series of questions and students would answer them. Sometimes I would blog-quest a statement and ask for their response.

This is an example of a Blog-Quest:

“The following task is due by THURSDAY 1PM.

1. On your blog make a new ‘post’ - call it FEEDBACK

2. Write a blog entry of at least three paragraphs suggesting three different things that could be done to make this class better.

3. When you write a paragraph you should use full stops and capital letters, and you MUST use the spellchecker to check your spelling.

4. Use the following structure for paragraphing writing:
   i) Statement - E.g. "I think in this class we need more time actually playing the games."
   ii) Explanation - E.g. "When we come to class three times a week, there is not enough time to really get into the gameplay because many people have technical difficulties, and right when you're getting into the game you have to stop and blog your game-play."
   iii) Example - E.g. "To solve this problem we could set-up the class for those who wanted to every Thursday and Friday at lunchtime before the class starts."

= S.E.X.
So now the first paragraph would look like this.

"I think in this class we need more time actually playing the games. When we come to class three times a week, there is not enough time to really get into the game-play because many people have technical difficulties, and right when you're getting into the game you have to stop and blog your game-play. To solve this problem we could set-up the class for those who wanted to every Thursday and Friday at lunchtime before the class starts."

You need to write three paragraphs

DUE THURSDAY!!!

In a Blog-Quest sections of the ‘quest’ would be colour-coded for students to follow – green for instructions, red for explanations, black for ideas, examples and information (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Example of a Blog-Quest to research participants

3. Focus sessions. Two focused game-play sessions were carried out by the students during the course of the class sessions. The first was a
“no-talk” session where students were admitted to the class on the requirement that they were not allowed to speak aloud in class. The students then blogged their experiences of this session. The second focused session involved students being grouped into teams of 4 or 5 based on a common MMORPG and being asked to set a game-play goal. Students had to write down the intended goal of their team, and in the next session they set about trying to achieve that goal.

4. In the final session students completed a reflective and prospective statement about the course overall. For the purposes of this I used a simple “What? So What? Now What?” framework for students to write to. This work was carried out by filling in the appropriate course goal in the school’s Learning Management System – Inquire. (See Figure 5)
**Methodology (V): Analysis procedure**

I used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to enter and carry out statistical analysis on the data collected from the participant questionnaire.

The students' blogs, and their reflective statements were printed off verbatim from the respective systems, and held securely at the author's place of residence.

No specific qualitative analysis tool was used on the blogs or reflective statements. However where appropriate collective organisation and categorisation was carried out to provide evidence or justify points made throughout the analysis and discussion sections of this document.

**Analysis and Discussion**

It cannot be stated too clearly that this research was very much about constructing ideas for further research on MMORPGs and their involvement in learning in formal school settings. While I will raise a number of findings and discuss issues related to teaching and learning in this discussion, I am convinced that to extrapolate these findings to a level where the generalisations are wholly consequential would be premature.
Analysis of the initial questionnaire presented to student participants found a range of features which allow a description of the participants in general terms, and in relation to their engagement with MMORPGs. I wish to present the results of this background data because it leads directly into the importance of clear instructional design when making use of MMORPGs in programmes of learning.

In the original intake of participants there were 27 males and 5 females, with an average age of 13.7 years. 69% of the participants owned their own laptop computer, and 26 of them had their own computer in their room at home. 15 students were able to access the internet via a broadband connection at home, 15 via a dial-up connection, one student was unsure how they connected to the internet at home, and one did not have access to the internet at home. All students had played some form of video or computer game in the last month; the most popular platforms being a PC computer game, followed by Playstation 2™.

In terms of engagement with formal school classes, an analysis of each student's selection and attendance at courses during the term prior to the field work was carried out. Non-compulsory, student-negotiated course selection at this site of study meant that some students were likely to take more or less courses than others in any given term. The average number of courses taken in term 1, by all 13 and 14 years olds at the site of study was 4.65 subjects (n= 161). In comparison the average number of courses
taken by the participant group was 4.87 (n=32). The two figures show no significant difference between the larger control group of all 13 and 14 years olds at the site of study, and the group who chose to take this gaming class. What is of some interest perhaps, is the perception at this school that those who play computer games are lazy, or unlikely to engage with learning at a level envisioned proper by teachers. Consider this somewhat tongue-in-cheek response from a ‘homebase’ (form) teacher in regard to one of the students in the class:

"Hi A

"Just thought I'd send you an email expressing my concern around *****'s efforts in your MMORPG class. I've noticed an unusual commitment, engagement and enjoyment in their behaviour. Please refrain from whatever it is that you are doing, so I can go back to having my uninspired, disinterested and lazy ***** back!"

While this email was sent as a compliment to the author in regard to the engagement this student was displaying in regard to the MMORPG class, I think it represents an instance of a student who whilst “uninspired, disinterested and lazy” about most of the other learning opportunities at school, was not of this disposition when it came to engaging with the MMORPG class. I had believed that this may well have been the case with most of students in this class, but in fact most of the students taking this course were very ‘average’ students. They were taking the same number of subjects everyone else in their peer group was.

In this group 22% of participants rated their favourite school subject as English, other responses included, information and communications technology (12.5%), mathematics (9.4%), holistic or integrated studies
(9.4%) and physical education (3.1%). Mathematics was the worst subject for 56.3% of respondents, followed by English (12.5%), science, economics and holistic or integrated studies (3.1% each). This analysis is only important in considering that this research class took place as part of an English course.

Students were also asked why they had decided to take the research class on MMORPGs and literacy learning. Many students indicated their enjoyment of games as being a deciding factor.

"Because I love English and mmorpg, 2 in 1!!"
"Games"
"Because I like playing games"
"Because I like MMORPGs"
"I like to play online games and I wanted to help with the research.
"It looks interesting and I like playing games"
"I like mmorpgs and it sounded like a different way of learning"
"Because it sounded like a good class and I like to play computer games"
"Because I like to game"
"Play games"

- student questionnaire

There can be no doubt that for many young people playing computer games in general and MMORPGs in particular is hugely engaging and attractive. As Gee asks: “wouldn’t it be great if kids were willing to put in this much time on task on such challenging material in school and enjoy it as much?” (2003, p.5)
Student's also stated other factors for choosing this course. These included enjoyment of other courses taken by the author:

"Because I took Andy's class last term and enjoyed it so I thought id come back"

"Because I always do English with Andrew its fun"

"Because I like to game, and I liked Andrew's teaching style from his journalism class"

"Because I always do English with Andrew itz really fun!!!"

"I get to play mmorpgs and I get to help Andy"

- student questionnaire

The idea and appeal of doing something 'fun' or 'interesting':

"Because it should be fun"

"Yes, thinking it will be fun .. But in the same time have a goal"

"Because I'm interested in mmorpgs and studying them"

"It sounded like fun"

"Cos it sounds interesting and a lot of fun"

"Because this looked interesting and fun"

- student questionnaire

But also a consideration of the educational or learning value of the course:

"To tell people about what mmorpgs mean to me"

"To help Andrew with his research ... and to play mmorpgs"

"I'll probably learn a lot about computers"

"Yes, thinking it will be fun ... But in the same time have a goal"

- student questionnaire

For five students however the decision was more a result of external constraints, rather than intrinsic factors:
"Because I did not do English in the last block and it seemed the most interesting English course on"

"Because it was the best looking English class"

"Because I liked the write up"

"Just wanted to continue with my English 'with a twist' "

"Because it's the only English I have space for"

- student questionnaire

Figure 6 indicates the popularity of both Runescape and World of Warcraft amongst the participants before the research field work began.

![Graph showing MMORPGs played in the last 12 months]

**Figure 6: MMORPGs played in the last 12 months by game**

From a user perspective these two games are different. Runescape (at least the 'classic' version played for free by participants in the research) uses a 2D 'isometric' graphic interface, where WoW uses a complex 3D graphic environment (See Figures 7 and 8).
Iron ore: shop will buy for 11 coins.
You dig a hole in the ground...
You bury the bones.
Congratulations, you just advanced an attack level.
Largolnem: Fight another 3.

Figure 7: Runescape screenshot – ‘isometric’ graphic gaming environment
Runescape can be played for free, although more features are available when buying a member account. WoW requires users to purchase gameplay periods in one-monthly units. Subscriptions can therefore be suspended.

Students were asked to consider how many hours they spent playing their most-played MMORPG. The average number of hours spent playing was reported as 8.4 hours per week. 22% of participants said they spent no time at all playing MMORPGs.

Participants were asked to record their opinions on certain aspects of MMORPGs and MMORPG play. These opinions were recorded using a Likert scale. Four key orientations were surveyed. (1) Avatar/character;
Figure 9: Avatar/Character questions and response type

The general state of this is even more apparent when only those responses ranking a 4 or 5 are graphed. Figure 10 shows that only one aspect in regard to the player’s character or avatar gained a greater than 50% measure of the response as being very or tremendously important.
Figure 10: Avatar/Character Questions by 'Very' (4) or 'Tremendously Important' (5) response totals

This overall lack of significant peaks in any one area suggests that gamers each game for different reasons, and in turn prepare their characters for gaming according to these different intentions.

Again, in the second orientation of questions, those on enjoyment factors, the response types have a fairly even spread across participants.

Significantly, Figure 11 shows that there are 'very enjoyable' and 'tremendously enjoyable' spikes for getting to know other players, chatting with other players and dominating or killing other players. This is in converse to the 'not enjoyable at all' spike regarding doing things which annoy other players.
Figure 11: MMORPG enjoyment factor questions and response type

Figure 12 again shows a relatively flat level of mean responses to questions regarding enjoyment of MMORPGs. (2.40 > x > 3.54) While it is interesting to note that helping other players, getting to know other players, chatting with other players, competing with other players and dominating/killing other players (all player-to-player interactions) are the highest scoring enjoyment factors, I would not state that their rank is significant over other factors in this brief survey.
Figure 12: Average Enjoyment Index by Survey Question

The general uniformity over the range of responses was an unexpected phenomenon. But it perhaps highlights the breadth of criteria by which players make decisions to play MMORPGs. As this small sample shows, even in students as young as 13 or 14 years, players find quite different things about these games which make them enjoyable and engaging.

While most of this data illuminates background information on the participants as MMORPG players, I believe its real fruitfulness comes in a more transitory perspective.

In light of the instructional design model introduced in the literature review section (Figure 1) the engagement of students with the in-depth
questionnaire was very much a form of *planning and preparation*. Students were demonstrative about how they prepared their avatars, what they believed was important about the game, and about their own gameplay. They were able to state what was most enjoyable for them, and what was least enjoyable. These sessions, as part of a larger considered programme of learning allowed students to reflect on their online socialisation to date, considering interactions they had had with others whilst playing MMORPGs, and how they felt about these. I believe that an introductory activity such as the questionnaire is synchronous with prior-knowledge gathering activities or anticipatory sets encountered in many good programmes of teaching and learning. Teachers making use of MMORPGs (or indeed other multi-user online environments) should consider using a preparation or prior-learning activity to plan for further learning outcomes.

*Analysis (II): Experiencing MMORPG play*

Much around the emerging theories of ideological literacy learning, or multiliteracies discusses the extreme importance of learning as a social activity. Learning in this respect is about learners being part of an affinity group; learners must believe and feel that they are part of a social group.

Analysis of the data collected in this project suggests that playing MMORPGs within an instructional programme can promote students participation in affinity groups. It is my belief that students are able to both *engage* in the social construction of learning through their play of
MMORPGs (a circuitous allowance), and also reflect widely on this engagement – a more formalised projection of student learning afforded by placing the MMORPG game-play inside a programme of learning.

In this analysis I wish to explore social participation and identity, but other areas such as problem-solving, challenge, competition, practice, goal-setting or organisation could easily feature as circuitous allowances worth exploration. I will approach these two elements separately to begin, and cross-reference them against ideas of instructional design to show how they affect literacy learning.

**Social Participation**

Students were constantly engaged in social participation whilst playing MMORPGs and the recall of this is a feature of the blogs written by participants:

- (BW) student blog

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Today me and a few others went into the deadmines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Friday I played wow all I did was do some quests I got like 3 silver from it but O*** gave me 1 gold so its all good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had a lot of convosason with a lot of peopl but it got boring very fast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my First photo I am talking to a mate on Runescape trying to see if he wants to trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my pic im going to run away from a guy coz if I don't hell kile me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am trying to sell my addy pic axes I am trying to rip people off by selling it for 6or7k when its worth 3.2k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- (PZ) student blog

- (WL) student blog

- (WL) student blog

- (WL) student blog
These blog excerpts illustrate socialisation, collaboration, interaction and competition between players in the virtual environment. But of themselves they are not demonstrative of learning. When considering cognitive dimensions, learning which would be considered applicable in formal educational settings is not apparent until a chance for students to be reflective, demonstrate understanding or work analytically about social participation is provided. Again, I suggest that where the instructor or teacher works to create a rich task or activity, or the opportunity to reflect or be creative around the MMORPG, there occurs a duality of learning which makes affective any circuitous allowance already covered in game-play.

Let me explain further. For one of the blog-quests I asked students to imagine they were able to design a MMORPG from scratch, and that time and money were no obstacle. Students were asked specifically to
consider how members would communicate with each other. Students, when faced with this idea, were much more considered about this particular social-participation aspect of the game.

You can talk through a megaphone as well people that's not on your screen can see what you have to say works well if you're selling something.

- (AV) student blog

[Members would communicate] through the standard type-and-it-appears-over-your-head interface. I think this is a very useful system because it is useful in market places for example

And through writing a limited HTML page and sending it to a printer and then paying them to print, say 500 of them and give them out as ads for a shop or something.

- (RV) student blog

Type then press enter and it would come up on a little box thing on the bottom left corner of the screen.

- (MY) student blog

through a chat program where you type your message and press enter or click on someone else's name to instant message them or "email" them which leaves a message in their boxy thing.

- (TU) student blog

Players could select another player and talk to them privately, or shout their messages out to everyone. I think chat boxes get to clogged which is why more private messaging would be better. Also said stuff wouldn't come up above your head like in some games. Again if you want me to expand please ask.

- (LX) student blog

A chat window

- (VW) student blog

I've never really taken to the idea of a MMORPG being the best value for my entertainment for a couple of reasons: Because I don't like the idea of having restrictions within creativity and imagination. When building a game you're trying to capture that creativity and imagination in a playable realistic form... and I don't think that's possible.

But then again, it would be cool to try.

My ideas for a MMORPG would be quite extensive: Communication between people on the game will be more of an instant messenger than anything els: where a window will pop up (like msn) and talk (like msn)

- (NK) student blog

What about how would they interact together? By trading, chatting (public, private), completing quests together, fighting together, fighting each other, using different objects to do things to other players e.g
pushing them off the edge of a cliff, digging a hole for them to fall down
or whacking them with things.

- (DU) student blog

Each zone would have its own chat so you could talk to everyone in that
zone, you could talk in a party chat so you could speak to everyone in
your group. You could speak to just one person if you wanted. But you
couldn’t speak to people on other continents/islands. And there would be
a chat system just for your guild to talk in.

- (BW) student blog

There would be ways to talk eg Skype or Ventrillo that the game will
acomedate. – BC

- (BC) student blog

Members would communicate via ‘handheld PDAs’ that are given to each
‘Agent’ (Player). This is for far away communication, local communication
is done by talking.

- (QF) student blog

A chat window would be the used to talk to each other, or TS could be
used for people that actually want to talk to each other.

Members would insult each other until they ignore people, unless you
are in thier guild, then they will be formal and helpful.

There would also be different forms of chat like, trade, guild,
Alliance/Faction and general.

- (QB) student blog

Members could communicate by typing messages to each other or by
using a headset to talk, you would have a friends list where you could
select friends, if people you knew were in your world it would tell you and
you could communicate with them. if they were in a different world you
would have to send a messenger pigeon or something so it is harder to
communicate to people in other worlds.

- (OX) student blog

You could communicate by typing messages to each other but instead of
clicking everytime you could open a conversation and just talk on that, or
if you have a headset you could talk to each other on them.

- (EP) student blog

Communication over long distances would be by smoke signals which
turn into words. When up close when you want to speak to someone you
would have a speech bubble.

- (WL) student blog

PMs, or public chat, you can block public chat from your screen (good for
high level players, when pwnig such uber creatures as dragons etc....)

- (XK) student blog

While students are creative with their ideas about communication, when
you consider the use of MMORPGs in a programme of learning, we
should attempt to have kids generate their ideas about socialisation or communication through good instructional design. It is my opinion that while students may engage in social participation, or networking and while the learning associated with these circuitous allowances is indeed present and apparent, its content is situated and therefore the cognitive association beyond MMORPG play is difficult for teachers, parents and administrators to accept as valid and of worth. By placing MMORPG play in a programme of instructional design, teachers can devise rich tasks which ask students to work at different levels of the cognitive domain. When this happens, learning and student achievement of rich tasks is more visible.

It is a bit like asking: “okay, yes we know that when kids play video games, and when they play MMORPGs, they work socially – cooperatively and in collaboration to solve problems – they work together to complete quests, to achieve their own goals – but so what? That’s in a MMORPG. Can they transfer that to working in other situations?”

Least the reader think that such a question is too obviously a staged attempt to lower the meaning of video game play for generation ‘y’, and instead augments the politics of learning whereby power relations between those who set the curriculum and those who must learn it continue to be played out, consider this: how often do you see commercial games used in formal educational settings as part of
programmes of learning? The fact is that the power relation exists in learning. This is neither a neo-liberal attempt to divert the ideological forces which direct curriculisation, nor is it an attempt to sit in judgement over what constitutes good content in our curriculum. Instead this is a pragmatic view on using ideas about student-centred learning, and the powerful engagement that comes when students learn through contexts that they have vested interests in, and when modes of literacy combine both traditional texts and the multiliteracies embedded in the experiences of our young people.

**Identity**

A consideration of identity and MMORPG play is akin to considerations about socialisation and communication in MMORPG play. Students in this research each had developed identities in the form of an avatar or character for their MMORPG play. Yee (2006a) suggests that players’ real personalities dictate the types of identities that they will create for themselves. His research suggests that introverted players will create avatars or identities which are idealised versions of themselves, where extraverted players are more likely to experiment with different types of identities.

Student’s creation of identities for the purpose of playing MMORPGs is a circuitous allowance of game play — *identity*, but also working *creatively* and *organising* (see Figure 1). The dichotomy for educators in regard to this is that the creating of avatars for the purpose of playing a
MMORPG has no value in formal school settings – at least not with administrators and the majority of teachers! However, when students engage in a task which allows them to analyse the creation of new identities, the evidence of learning data suggests that MMORPG play can provide us with ideas about literacy learning.

Students in the research were given a blog-quest that asked them to do the following:

1. Describe your (most often used) character.
2. Describe the ways in which your character in your game-play is like you in real life.
3. Describe the ways in which your character in your game-play is different from you in real life.
4. Do you think YOU can tell what another person is like in real-life, by ‘talking’ with them during game-play?
5. How come?

This blog-quest was designed as an analytical task which enabled students to consider how their characters related to their game-play, and to themselves – both as players and as people in general.

The responses of students varied from the observable and functional to analytical and in-depth. For example, of the 24 participants who completed this blog-quest, half (12) the responses showed some analytical depth to the response for question 2: *Describe the ways in which your character in your game-play is like you in real life.*

```
My character is a level 60 paladin. I am not a paladin. This is a good statement to describe what similarities their are. I am not my character

-(QF) student blog

Well...Im nice, and trustworthy =)...etc
```
This character was built for solo farming but I also need to work in duo for underworld because I need certain spells that I cant kill other things with so I need someone to help kill which is like me cause I dont like doing things in large groups.

- (IA) student blog

he is like me in real life because he is cautious, dont take no crap from anybody, and will kill an orc if needed.

- (QB) student blog

...I make her quack all the time, and people usually quack along with her or say "Shut up, duck", which suits her fine as she doesn't get offended like that easily.

- (DU) student blog

well my char is me as i am controlling her in every way.

- (YM) student blog

The only thing about my character that is like me is that he is very focused in getting to his goals and he keeps trying. Also he likes training the same as I like learning.

- (LX) student blog

he isn't like me or different from me i control him completely he has no personality at all

- (TU) student blog

The only way he is like me is the way I talk to other people.

- (MY) student blog

is friendly who likes to chat and help

- (FZ) student blog

he's not like me unless I am chatting with other players

- (HQ) student blog

Well my character isn't really like me in looks, but I do control him, so really the entity of such a programmed genome must, in essence, be subject to my thoughts, therefore, in essence, it really is me. I do not think my character is different from me, since afterall I am the person behind the screen

- (VX) student blog

While these responses vary in the level of analysis that students make, each suggests a consideration on the part of the participant in terms of thinking about the characters they have made for game-play.
Students are able to comment on the personality traits they see in themselves and indicate that these traits (which are in general all very positive ones) are indeed part of their character’s identity. For example: “friendly who likes to chat and help”, “focused in getting to his goals”, “likes training the same as I like learning”, “doesn’t get offended easily”, “cautious, don’t take crap”, “nice and trustworthy”.

Students also seem to be quite critical if they feel that there might be some implication that they are their characters. A number of the participants took the blog-quest as an opportunity to state clearly that they, as the human creator, were in control of the character/avatar and the resulting identity: “he isn’t like me or different from me i control him completely he has no personality at all”, “my char is me as i am controlling her in every way”, ”I do not think my character is different from me, since after all I am the person behind the screen”.

Further research could well explore further on Yee’s work to see if these types of responses to identity and character development relate back strongly to personality type or some similar variable.

In terms of placing the exploration of character and identity within the instructional design programme, teachers need to create rich tasks and reflective activities which enabled students to answer questions in order to make use of the highly specialised language of MMORPGs and to explore identity in terms of values and beliefs. As a researcher and
educator I am also keen to share some creative ideas and applications which have arisen from my thinking about the results of the data, and which could be used to form the basis of instructional programmes using MMORPGs and/or further research into MMORPGs and literacy learning. Students and future research participants could be involved with the following rich tasks and reflective activities:

- Using Venn diagrams to compare and contrast differences between avatars and between real and virtual identities
- Experimenting with different identities and avatars, and then reflecting on the success of each in game play
- Setting goals and then developing avatars specifically created to achieve goals and quests
- Independent research on concepts of virtual identity
- Imaginations with characters in situations; discussions and tasks on how the character might react or behave.
- Writing descriptive responses to conflicts encountered in gameplay
- Creating a news article on a tragic or significant event where the character is central
- Developing and sharing backgrounds, history and childhoods for characters
- Undertaking historical studies. For example, which ‘real-historical’ belief and value systems existed which would seem to correlate to the setting of the MMORPG? How do these systems
affect the behaviour of characters in the game? How did it affect the behaviours of real people in history?

These are only a small selection of rich tasks and activities which could be adapted and used with classes and individuals making use of MMORPG game-play in an educational setting.

Discussion on how important the instructional design process is for developing formal (both autonomous and ideological) literacy learning tasks from MMORPG play leads into the next part of this report. In the next section I want to explore both autonomous literacy learning – especially as it pertains to writing in our schools – and also emerging theories and understandings of literacy, as they occur in this case-study.

**Analysis (III): Literacy and MMORPG play**

If the written word is a vehicle for learning higher cognitive skills, as much as any oral or visual medium, it is not worth dismissing the importance of traditional or conventional reading and writing. Written texts have a part to play in our growing understanding of what it means to be literate, as much as any social, visual, multi-media or cultural text might. In fact for many, the important artefacts, understandings and inheritances of their cultures are embodied deep in conventional written texts.
During the game-play sessions participants were asked to keep a blog. This blog was used for a number of purposes throughout the field work. As discussed in the methodology of this research project, there was some intention that students would blog their game-play, and/or take screen shots and blog about what was going on in the screen-shot. It soon became apparent that any unstructured or unfocused writing blog-quests were not terribly practical in gathering data.

The response of students when asked to simply blog their experiences during game-play was of a lower representational quality than I had originally hoped for. By this I mean that I had envisioned that because students were writing, both on a computer, and about something they were obviously highly engaged in, that the quality of their writing would automatically lift in terms of its awareness of audience and purpose, its content and ideas, its structure and organisation and its surface features such as spelling and grammar (See Table 2). I want to share some of the samples of these unfocused blog-quests, because they are important when contrasting the same student’s work when engaged in more focused, rich tasks.

Firstly let us take a moment to define ‘rich learning tasks or activities’. Flewelling suggests that rich tasks are learning tasks which allow students to make use of their own knowledge and skills in a way which not only integrates the skills and knowledge, but helps students to make connections, allows them to be creative and is done so with purpose.
Such opportunities allow students to solve problems and undertake inquiries and investigations. (2006, p.3)

Rich learning tasks give students the opportunity to use and to make sense of knowledge:

Rich learning tasks should relate literacy teaching and assessing to young children’s interests ‘funds of knowledge’; and home life ‘cultural capital’; and 'linguistic capital', providing opportunities for children to demonstrate their growing understanding about literacy. (Tasmanian Department of Education, 2006b)

To this end they are about connection making.

In this research students wrote blogs which, while related to the playing of MMORPGs, (which as we know from many theoretical musings are of themselves something of a rich task, if not a collection of rich tasks) were not necessarily embodied with the opportunity for students to use a broad range of skills in a creative or ingenious manner. Such tasks usually involved the author asking students to ‘blog today’s game-play’.

Below are a few examples of the blog responses students wrote following the instruction: ‘blog today’s game-play’:

- **(WL) student blog**

  in my pic i just got up a lival of hath by kiling goblins
  im runing away from a liva 34 who wots to kil me coz i kild hes mate

- **(JO) student blog**

  it was my fist time playing runescapse it was not so good but today is much beter i am about half way thought tutorial island i didn't do much with the team but m.f help me i cann't think of what elsa to say

- **(LX) student blog**

  Here i am running across the square in the city l started in.

  In this screenshot i am about to talk to a NPC. i am hoping he is a merchant so i can sell some rat eyes.
This screenshot is on runescape, where I chose to take on a mission to find a character lost in a castle. This shot shows me lost in front of my favourite kitchen.

- (NK) student blog

Today I mined 108 iron and 4 coal. I was going to make steel but I don't like mining coal so I have decided to specialise in coal for a while. I had an annoying guy who tried to trade with me something I didn't want. At the end of the hour I managed to mine.

- (MY) student blog

This is me just running around town. Yay. I'm walking around town killing birds, there is no point.

- (QF) student blog

Today's class I was farming herbs again for gold. Just running around on my mount gathering. I also was doing a quest to kill plaque bats. It wasn't so successful today but I'll try to get more next time :D.

- (BW) student blog

Look guys here I am owning at Castlewars. I will update my stats pc tonight =p

- (TU) student blog

Today I played runescape... it was something different. It took me awhile to navigate through the main page and get my guy created but eventually o=i got to the create guy screen so I was sweet first I spawned in this room with some guy with an arrow above his head and he said go down get the lane and cut down a tree then get some wood then talk to some women and she told me to get some shrimp and get the log to make a fire and cook the shrimp...

- (SC) student blog

"sigh" my current job is mining ore, smithing ore and banking it "sigh" I wish I had all my stuff back, I would have mined a lot easier "glances to my left and glares"

- (RV) student blog
Today I did a few quests for the goblins of gadgetzen killing buzzards and trolls. The trolls were a problem because they live in villages, so if you attack one of them, all of the village attacks you, that was a very pointless lesson, but I did get some XP probably enough to level next class.

- (BC) student blog

Clearly students possess a range of writing abilities. In these blog quests there was no compulsion by the author on students to produce work with accurate surface features such as spelling. The instruction was kept as simple as possible. The examples above demonstrate writing which is for the most part concise and simple. Students are able to write about what they have done, but make no inference or analysis about this. There are a number of reasons for this, and they have some critical impact on designing rich learning tasks in a programme making use of MMORPGs as a learning vehicle.

Firstly, the teacher sets the parameters of any learning design. In the example above, the level of cognition I asked for from the students was minimal. Little more than remembering was required in this task. Students essentially had to remember what it was that they did during that session’s game-play and recall it. Some students made use of screen-shots to aid this recall process.

Also, as the learning and teaching designer, I left the instructional parameters wide open. Almost non-existent in fact. There was no
requirement for students to edit their work. There was no requirement for spelling to be checked and corrected. There was no engagement in peer-proofing or other literacy instruction.

Secondly, the students were not asked to engage in any pre-writing task or activity which would help them to write better. There was no modelling of other blogs, or journal entries considered appropriate by the class teacher. There was no class discussion on what a good blog entry regarding game-play would look like. There was no teaching or learning activity that allowed the students to gain understanding about who they should be writing for, or the purpose of their blog entries.

So while we could argue that the playing of the MMORPG allows students to actively engage in the circuitous allowances – for example, working collaboratively, discovery or goal setting, students don’t actually engage in any learning that directly relates back to learning outcomes typical of an English programme of learning in an even moderately conventional classroom. Furthermore, while the multiliteracies that are related to the circuitous allowances of MMORPGs are present, without the inclusion of what Cazden, et. al. (1996) term “overt instruction” and “critical framing” (p. 85-86), learner transference of multiliteracies beyond the situated context of specific MMORPGs is negligible.

Consider the difference in blog entries when the tasks are designed to include overt instruction and the higher cognitive domains of Bloom’s Taxonomy. In the following examples the research asked students to
consider how they might develop a new MMORPG, taking into account the graphic interface of worlds, communication and new ideas.

Players would communicate by just typing, there would be a minimisable and movable interface with low opacity.

- (JB) student blog

Using a chat window that would have different tabs for different groups such as Guild chat all chat and party chat and so on or you could just have limited communication only whispering. nah that would be lame.

- (IA) student blog

I would have a modern mmorpg because all the mmorpgs seem to be medieval so I would have a modern one with guns and cars and tanks etc. instead of getting up levels it would be like evolution you start off as a child then a teenager then adult then you can join the army, navy, air force, police officer or stay as an adult and become a criminal. And in any of these you would get up ranks when you get to the heist rank you can choose what you want to do you.

To get up higher (eg from child to teenager) you need to kill animals like when you are a child you can only set traps or something to kill possums, rabbits etc. When a teenager you can get a handgun but you have to get a gun license and you can get a drivers license then buy a car when adult you can buy better guns like shotguns and snipers and go hunting with your friends in the wild (bush). Quests well there a different quests on each path you take like in the air force or navy or the army.

So basically my mmorpg will be like a life of a person only on a computer and you control what they do A

They would be photo realistic or as close as I could while not looking like earth. My world would (does) have a lot of jungles and subterranean caves and mines. And not a lot of snowy mountains and boring flat desserts. There would be teleporter hubs that connected everywhere spread throughout my world.

Members would communicate with each other through the standard type-and-it-appears-over-your-head interface. I think this is a very useful system because it is useful in market places for example And through writing a limited HTML page and sending it to a printer and then paying them to print, say 500 of them and give them out as ads for a shop or something.

What new thing that is currently not available in MMORPG would you include?

A crafting based economy being only able to buy weak weapons ECT from NPC.

set in the far future

Sims style house builder (although you have to have the items before you can use them)

FPS style combat

Billions of items

Usable computers (as in you can do things like buy a game and put it in and play it)

Built off the source engine (the engine used to half life 2 and counter strike: source)
They would look just like runescape worlds all varying from nice scenic grasslands to deep cavernous caves and pits crawling with dragons and monsters ready to destroy at first sight and mountainous regions riddled with mines and dwarven folk.

Members would communicate with each other through a chat program where you type your message and press enter or click on someone else's name to instant message them or 'email' them which leaves a message in their boxy thing.

What new thing that is currently not available in MMORPGs would you include in your game? How would it work. It would be a place where you can kill all people and be killed your self with no limit on who you could kill but I would have this place in only a small area but one filled with towns and places with monsters and evil creatures with certain shops and mines that you can only get to when you are in this certain evil place of death and destruction.

It'd be set closer to this time than other rpgs. It'd still have swords, bows and daggers etc. but muskets and pistols would be available. Magic wouldn't play a big part in the gameplay, until you had got to higher levels. Monsters wouldn't be monsters so much, just phychotic humans and wild animals. The world itself would be big, bigger than runescape, but with the graphics of WoW with a more pirate era theme. There would be a number of big cities, some outlying towns and a few small rogue camps. Players of high status could create guilds. Players who are the leader of such a guild could if they wished by a house, especially for their guild. Wars between guilds could be declared at any time by the guild leaders. Quests would be undertaken through guild leaders and some NPCs that roamed the world. NPCs would only play the part of travelling merchants, shop keepers, guards etc. There would be laws in most cities. Different laws for different cities. The guards of the city would enforce these rules. For every bad thing that you did would count towards where you were headed at death. If you had a number of these bad points you'd go to a kind of hell place. Here you could decide to try and get out of "hell" or decide to give up everything you own, apart from your weakest weapon and your money, as a payment to get out and go back to playing. If you had done good deeds then you'd end up in "heaven." Here you could decide to try to get out with lots of items on the way and many chances to get xp or you could just ask to go back to the living. Doing this you wouldn't lose anything or gain anything. Xp would be given out when you completed quests or killed creatures. After a sufficient amount of xp you'd level up and your stats would go up, and get progression points which you could trade in for extra stat increase.

Doing Boats could also be chartered to different regions. Bandits would often attack these boats so sea faring would only be advised for the higher level status or people travelling in a group. If there's anything else you'd like me to include or expand A or anyone else please post a comment and I'll put a few more ideas on.

Players could select another player and talk to them privately, or shout their messages out of everyone. I think chat boxes get to clogged which is why more private messaging would be better. Also said stuff wouldn't come up above your head like in some games. Again if you want me to expand please ask

What new thing that is currently not available in MMORPGs would you include in your game?
The inclusion of several early age firearms. Also ship warfare would be included leading to the land to be less clogged hopefully.

- (LX) student blog

There'd be deserts and rainforests and lands that are like constantly burning and beaches would have half sunken ships around the place with unliving pirates. and like some sort of cities kind of. There'd be lots of different places. The desert would have white sand and sandstorms would happen randomly. Rainforest - it'd be sort of lumpy and have shrubs and would be constantly misty. It would be very green. Creatures made out of trees and shrubs and stuff would live there. there'd also be like tigers and gorillas that were green and stuff of that people couldn't see them and stuff. burning places - it'd be reddish and have big volcanoes that had burnt out. Lava would be everywhere and there'd be ruins of old destroyed buildings. Lava fountains too. Cities - they'd be kingdoms with special buildings and castles and chapel buildings. There'd be a king in each main town who'd live in the middle of the town.

Members [would] talk to each other or they could type messages to each other. You can private or party chat to people. For everyone to see you conversation they'd need to be quite close.

I think there should be flash travel. You'd just click on the place you want to go to on the map and you'd get there. You would have to have gone to the place first by walking before you could do this. Maybe you'd have to save a lot of money before you could purchase the stone of flashy magiciness. Or maybe you could get it for killing a monster.

- (SC) student blog

My ideas for a MMORPG would be quite extensive:

1. There would be numerous amount of different Medias of worlds that you could choose from:
   - Heaven related world,
   - Earthly (of different era's,
   - Underworld
   All of these genera's of worlds have lots of mini worlds within that...

2. The Character Creator will be really extensive too with:
   - HEAPS of Costumes of all different variations (wizards, demons, human, warriors)
   - Hair creator (beards, moustaches..)
   - Ethnicity
   - Detailed area for facial features

3. communication between people on the game will be more of an instant messenger than anything els:
   - where a window will pop up (like msn) and talk (like msn)

and finally it will always be modified because like I said .. it can never be perfect to everyone ...

- (NW) student blog

It would be made up of zones, each zone with different level creatures and maybe a different terrain. There would be cities and towns in each zone and mountains, trees, water etc... You could play different races, classes and get different trades/professions. The map would be enormous and made up of big continents/islands with transport you can pay for to get between them. There would be dungeons to explore and bosses to defeat, quests to obtain and rewards to recieve. There would
be thousands of items, weapons, equipment, bags, food and drink, spells, pets. You could get a party of heroes to do quests if they are to hard.

Each zone would have its own chat so you could talk to everyone in that zone, you could talk in a party chat so you could speak to everyone in your group. You could speak to just one person if you wanted. But you couldn't speak to people on other continents/islands. And there would be a chat system just for your guild to talk in.

What new thing that is currently not available in MMORPGs would you include in your game? How would it work?

I cant really think of anything but a bigger map, even tho most games have huge maps, i like to explore so real-life size map would be awesome!!

- (BW) student blog

There would be one big land, with a scattering of small islands surrounding it. The islands to the south would be cold, windswept and rocky, generally portraying an air of evil, with sea monsters like giant prehistoric beasts scouring the rocky shores, while the northern islands will be full of boiling lava and tropical trees snakes, burning souls and elementals.

The main land will be broken in to different parts according to the player's skill, the quests will be given by random NPCs.

And players will be able to communicate with NPCs eg if a player is polite to the NPC the player will gain reputation faster.

There would be ways to talk eg Skype or Ventrillo that the game will acomidate.

- (BC) student blog

My worlds would simply be nothing. It would be the internet as described in the book 'Snow Crash.' Worlds would be player designed, it would be a virtual world. I believe that a world that is perfect, as described in your questions would not exist to everybody, so they would be imagined. For my MMORPG I would not want a big fanbase, so everything would be done technically. The world that players are encouraged to develop is a world which breaks the 4th barrier. Players are supposed to play as players.

Members would communicate via 'handheld PDAs' that are given to each 'Agent' (Player). This is for far away communication, local communication is done by talking.

This would be a 'hacking' MMORPG. Leveling up is not done by simple clicking, it is done by the players skill. There is no tutorial for 'Noobs' there is simply it.

Extra: My MMORPG is a skill MMORPG. It is based in a 'cyberspace' world. Players level up by hacking into the game, not literally obviously. The game can sense such as if the player hacks into the client too allow them too teleport. Obviously it would not be overly easy so a noob can become a pro in a few hours. Challenges can be made by players. There would be too screens, a 'world' screen and a 'web' screen. Most of the game would also be open source, but some parts would be encrypted to encourage source hacking.

- (QF) student blog
These blog responses show a higher level of literacy taking place. Whilst students are not necessarily adhering to long-established conventions of structure, the content, audience awareness, language resources and ideas demonstrate a general ability to work both with the content of MMORPGs and with the functions of writing more typically demanded in an English classroom.

When student (IA) states “Using a chat window that would have different tabs for different groups such as Guild chat all chat and party chat and so on…” they are clearly aware of the purpose and audience for whom they are writing (a class of MMORPG players and their teacher!). The student is confident in their use of technical terms such as “tab”, “guild” and “party”. Each of these terms has a quite focused definition inside a MMORPG environment. When they expand on the idea of communication by suggesting that players “could just have like limited communication only whispering…” they are developing the vision of their writing. This representation is a deep feature of transactional writing in our classrooms, but is also of considerable importance as a multi-literacy: it demonstrates an ability to think creatively.

Other participants seem to welcome this opportunity to write technically too. Student (JB) suggests “players would communicate by just typing, there would be a minimisable and movable interface with low opacity.” By designing a rich learning task, one where students are asked to use what they know in a purposeful and integrated way (Fwelling, 2006, p.3)
the learner has a purposeful setting in which to think creatively, and write
the same. In the same function, such suggestions are asynchronous with
problem-solving. The design of activities demanding higher cognitive
behaviours than merely recall, allows students to synthesise their
knowledge of the MMORPG and evaluate the importance of having
windows with low “opacity” so that the play behind can still be viewed,
or minimisable and movable for the same reason.

Critically here we are talking about the surface features of writing and of
learning to write, and of deep features – audience awareness and purpose,
content and structure, the use of language resources; for example,
hyperbole, dialogue, onomatopoeia. Table 2 shows a breakdown of
typical writing features assessed in New Zealand English classrooms. It
is not the purpose of this thesis to argue the forbearance of these factors
in a time of changing ideology around literacy. As I have already stated it
is not my intent to argue for the reform of the secondary school
curriculum. Smarter commentators than I have held aloft this torch, with
minimal effect. Instead, I believe that by making use of changing ICT
architecture in our classrooms we can offer our students the opportunity
to learn both the new ideological refrains of literacy, and still meet those
learning outcomes around transactional and creative writing which are
important in many subjects in New Zealand schools. While a re-think of
content in our schools is overdue, we cannot leave the learning of
substance and matter up to osmosis if we are to truly serve the needs of
our students and prepare them for life-long learning, and an effective role
in society. In my mind any theorist, commentator, scholar or academic
who argues (‘writes’) that the learning of how to read and write written texts is no longer applicable for our students is guilty of hypocrisy, and further, perpetuates a power-relation of destructive proportions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progress Indicators</th>
<th>Key factors</th>
<th>MMORPG Blog-quests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience Awareness and Purpose</strong></td>
<td>• The use of a range of means of engaging the audience.</td>
<td>• being creative when required; being descriptive when required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The personal voice of the writer.</td>
<td>• answering questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The idea of targeting the audience.</td>
<td>• suggesting improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Logic.</td>
<td>• written for understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content/Ideas</strong></td>
<td>• Sustaining a strong central idea.</td>
<td>• sticking to the point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The use of substantial illustrations, interpretive comments etc.</td>
<td>• suggesting new ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A range of ideas.</td>
<td>• creative ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Convincing the audience (for argument).</td>
<td>• responding to others work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure/Organisation</strong></td>
<td>• Coherence/wholeness.</td>
<td>• ideas are organised to achieve purpose of blog-quest;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Experimentation with structure.</td>
<td>• variety of sentence structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The use of a variety of sentence structures.</td>
<td>• blog is a journal log</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Appropriateness of structure for form and purpose</td>
<td>• Use of copy &amp; paste to transfer blog-quest elements/questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The use of a variety of sentence structures.</td>
<td>• Correct use of paragraphing, lists, numbering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Resources (called &quot;vocabulary/language&quot;)</strong></td>
<td>• A greater range of vocabulary.</td>
<td>• uses both general vocabulary, and specialised semiotic vocabulary – the language of MMORPGs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Providing information (e.g. about a character) by implication.</td>
<td>• Uses language features and resources to convey information. EG. simile, metaphor, hyperbole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A greater range of language features, including vocabulary.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Control and intent in the employment of language features.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Surface Features</strong></td>
<td>• Using the writing conventions of grammar, spelling and punctuation with few intrusive errors lists.</td>
<td>• correct grammar, spelling and punctuation with few intrusive errors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Key literacy factors when writing about MMORPG game-play
(Developed from the AsTTLe manual for assessing Reading and Writing in the New Zealand Curriculum.)
In the blog-quest examples above students can be observed producing key writing factors when undertaking this synthesising and creative task. Each one of these students is being creative and suggesting improvements and new ideas. Student (TU) has made an effort to write coherently so that his/her audience is able to understand the improvements he/she wishes to make:

"It would be a place where you can kill all people and be killed yourself with no limit on who you could kill but I would have this place in only a small area but one filled with towns and places with monsters and evil creatures with certain shops and mines that you can only get to when you are in this certain evil place of death and destruction."

- (TU) student blog

Most of the students have organised their blog to answer the blog-quest. This is evident in the examples above and on their actual blogs (see Appendix C for a list of blog websites) where the answers appear underneath the questions posed in the blog-quest. Most students used 'cut & paste' from the blog-quest email to achieve this structure.
Figure 13: Screenshot of student blog-quest response

Student (RV)'s writing shows the writing of lists – a structural/organisational indicator of writing at level 5/6 of the English curriculum in New Zealand. Similarly student (NW) makes use of numbering to achieve a key factor of writing structure.

All the blog-quest examples provided above use a range of general vocabulary, but more importantly show the depth of specialisation by research participants with the technical and highly specialised semiotic vocabulary belonging to MMORPGs. For example:

  minimisable
  teleporter hubs
  type-and-it-appears-over-your-head interface
  HTML page
I would argue that by making use of new ICT architectures such as MMORPGs, pervasive worlds, computer-based simulations and ICT development tools such as game engines, and placing them a rigorous programme of instructional design we get the best of both worlds. The chance for our students to work collaboratively, creatively and analytically, as well as learning specific skill-sets and knowledge.

In the next section I wish to elaborate on this critical relationship between instructional design, the situated practice of MMORPG play and transformed practice.
Analysis (IV): The importance of instructional design

There were times when a blog-quest was designed to be a rich learning task. That is, it asked the students to work at a much higher cognitive level than merely recalling what they did. It is my hypothesis that where activities represented important features of good instructional design (see Figure 1 & Table 1) the quality of student literacy was raised.

What seems critical at this point in analysing the data is that lifting the quality of student literacy is possible by making use of MMORPG gameplay, but must be done so in correlation with robust instructional design. My data shows that where instructional design caters for preparation, planning, questioning, rich tasks and activities, goal setting, reflective practice, evaluation and prospective work the use of MMORPGs in the conventional classroom setting is of significant effectiveness. Take for example the work of student (QB). This was a student who was “withdrawing from work”, who was “finding school boring because [they] hadn’t done anything”, was “struggling with confidence” and who had avoided weekly progress meetings with their learning advisor (teacher) for over a month. Yet this student’s written work from the research project shows (1) engagement with the instructional design elements of the course – questions:

Do you think YOU can tell what another person is like in real-life, by ‘talking’ with them during game play?

| usually i can tell what a person is like in real life, from how he/she(yea, like there's actually girls playing WoW) deals with problems when in groups, sometimes they just give up and swear alot, other times they try and try until...they fail, and then there's the people that just die once and |

---

3 Data accessed from school Learning Management System on 10 January 2007, relating to comments written by teacher between June 20 and November 28 2006.
then leave.
when my friends are on i can usually tell if its them or their brother or friend, because their attitude is different when they are talking to me.

- (QB) student blog

1. Writing: When you play a MMORPG what things do you do that are related to writing?
Sending messages to players, logging in, making macros

2. Reading: When you play a MMORPG what things do you do that are related to reading?
Reading messages, reading your log in details, quest text and reading macros

3. Signs & Symbols: Why do you think that reading signs and symbols is important for being able to play a MMORPG?
Being able to tell what spells and skills are without having to read them, that’s pretty much what they are for really, I can’t find any other use for them

- (QB) student blog

Rich tasks and activities:

Imagine that you were able to design a Massively Multiplayer Online Game and money and time was no obstacle...

I’d be happy.

2. What would your worlds look like? Describe them in-depth to me.

It have landscapes based on old Japan, with sprawling landscapes, beatiful waterfalls.

Also, it would have cities in a slum state and Japanese style buildings in the better off bits.

Temples Etc.

And legendary creatures, like phoenixes

3. How would members communicate with each other?
A chat window would be the used to talk to each other, or TS could be used for people that actually want to talk to each other.

Members would insult each other until they ignore people, unless you are in thier guild, then they will be formal and helpful.

There would also be different forms of chat like, trade, guild, Alliance/Faction and general.

4. What new thing that is currently not available in MMORPGs would you include in your game? How would it work.
This is a hard one, most MMORPG’s I play have gone to their wits end to make their game perfect, for a game like WoW, it takes alot of work trying to maintain everything

I would like to have an actual territory system, like in WoW there is contested territory, but there is no way of taking it over.
I'd like to have a war system that lets users join a faction, then take over other territory.

- (QB) student blog

Goal setting:

Today during class we were visited by some people from the university of Canterbury.

we were asked to plan an activity on Tuesday that we can play out during the class on Thursday. We got a few friends together, and made a plan to assault the deadmills, a low level instance in Westfall.

we had a hunter (myself), a warrior, a warlock, a priest and a rogue, i was the highest in the group so i was leading, taking out everything quickly, but at some point the warlock decided that he was the most powerful and took control of the journey, pulling every NPC there was, then he started being a ninja, opening the chests and stealing ore, he also started spamming the chat with a macro he created, in the end we decided to kick him from the group.

after that we had to stop and quit the game, anyways it wasn’t so bad, we got pretty far and almost got to kill Van Cleef, the evil rebel pirate guy that was running the operation.

maybe next week

- (QB) student blog

Reflection and prospective work;

in this class i played world of warcraft and realised that runescape wasn’t good enough to meet my gaming needs, i also spent a lot of time playing WITH people in a group instead of playing on my own, it was difficult to play sometimes due to patches and lag. i also learned how to make and maintain a blog.

I thought it was a great idea for a class because i got to play one of my favourite games and spend time playing it with my friends, i enjoyed the homework and i really liked making blogs, they are a great way to keep work.

- (QB) student reflection

How will this impact or guide what you do next?
from now on i will use a blog to keep track of my work, i now have a new way to keep track of my work, and it will be useful for future work.
(2) affectation through the circuitous allowances of MMORPG play – interaction and working collaboratively when setting and working towards game-play goal, creativity and reading symbols and texts as part of game-play and as a blog-quest:

- Lightning Javelin. Spell. Send out a Lightning Javelin that strikes for 15-43 lightning damage if it hits. If Lightning Javelin strikes an attacking foe, that foe is interrupted. This spell has 25% armor penetration.

- meteor. spell. call down a meteor upon target foe and all adjacent foes that deals 80 fire damage

- duel shot. spell. shoot two arrows simultaneously at target foe but these arrows deal 25% less damage than normal

- consume small child. hungry. consume small child in the area, you gain +5hp for each child you eat

- swipe. swipe attack. swipe at a guy and scratch him till he dies
chase small child. hungry. chase small child until it is tired and ready to be consumed

antidote signet. signet. cleanse yourself of poison, disease and blindness

cyclone axe. axe attack. throw axes at people that until it creates a cyclone and kills the city

throw swords. melee. throw swords at target, deals 25 dmg to target and all adjacent foes in the area

axe attack. axe attack. attack someone with an axe

tattoo. spell. give yourself a tattoo to make people think you are cool and not kill you

jump. jump. jump over someone to show your agility and then kill them from behind to show your killing ability
His work in class also demonstrated *competition* and *challenge* as he sort to over-take a fellow class member's playing level and *organisation* when he arranged fellow team members into different roles to assault the dead-mines as part of a class/game goal setting activity; and (3) creativity and achievement in written tasks, both in a comparative sense against achievement and work output through the year, and against those progress indicators highlighted in Table 2.

While I have only displayed the work of one case-study from the 32 student participants available, I believe this example reiterates the critical link between making use of MMORPGs (or similar game vehicles) in the classroom, and the necessity of good instructional design when doing so. Instructional design which includes *overt instruction*; the chance for teachers and educators to model, intervene with direction and questions, to help learners focus on the important relationships between the intentions of the class and the practices and embedded in their gameplay. Instructional design which allows for *critical framing*, whereby students are able to frame their learning within strongly recognised systems of knowledge and social practice (Cazden, et. al. 1996, p. 86). In classrooms and learning programmes where strong use is made of vehicles such as MMORPGs, the programme design will also incorporate opportunities for transformed practice: opportunities for learners to reflect on their work and achievement, and to put into practice new learnings.
Conclusions

This research has produced a range of issues concerning MMORPGs, literacy learning, instructional design and the conventional classroom. While it has not produced definitive findings in light of the theoretical work of others, it has raised a number of questions which add to the body of research on virtual multi-user environments and their place in formal education.

The imprecision of the research was a critical limitation. The discoveries of the project were a consequence of undertaking the research as a whole. The research did not support or negate a hypothesised phenomenon about MMORPG use in classrooms.

The special character of the site of study needs to be considered. While research such as this ought not to be impossible in conventional schools, it probably would be. The school used for this project was very open to trying new and innovative things in teaching and learning.

The need for me to be so heavily involved with the technical issues of the project meant that a good proportion of my in-class field work was spent troubleshooting rather than data gathering. This impacted on the number of direct-observations and participant interviews I was able to conduct.

A reluctance to focus on a more narrow definition of literacy in this research has resulted in making the data limiting. If I had decided to look
at how MMORPGs could be used to improve student’s keyboard skills, or whether playing MMORPGs improved reading skills in seven-year old boys. Or if the research had observed how students organised themselves in MMORPGs in comparison to their organisation in the real world, I would have been able to be considerably more valid in my generalisations. However, by being broad in this work, and looking at multi-literacies, new literacies and the circuitous allowances of MMORPG play (of which there are many), I have sign-posted some interesting areas of examination for the future of MMORPGs in education.

It is my conjecture that when making use of MMORPGs in the classroom instructional design is key. Further it is my belief that good instructional design is complex.

Change in student’s writing depends on the instructional parameters set by the teacher.

The design of the learning programme – in particular overt instruction and rich tasks – encourages writing that would not otherwise take place.

The use of blogs, blog-quests and online computer-based reflective systems was constructive and many students commented on the usefulness of blogs for keeping a record of their work.
I think the English I learnt will help me writing CVs and blogs for a company
- (AV) student prospective work

I will use blog to keep track of my work
- (SC) student prospective work

I plan to keep blogging all my interesting online experiences.
- (DF) student prospective work

In using blogs, and in particular using blogs for a purpose associated with a rich task students are using a conventional literacy: writing, but they're also writing about a new literacy, and making use of a vehicle which reflects new considerations of identity, community and context.

Further research could well consider how we might use MMORPGs to teach some of the content or knowledge of our traditional curriculum. In this respect some aspects of our school curriculum can already be found in the games. For example, navigation and geometric measurement in the forms of compass bearings, maps, legends and keys (see Figure 14). However with other things you would need to establish a clear instructional design process to illicit the learning. For example, historical examinations of guilds, clans or tribes would have some reflection in the way guilds or clans are used in MMORPGs, but they are not the same. Rich tasks that asked students to compare and contrast guilds in real-world contexts and in MMORPGs would be needed to make use of MMORPGs in this situation.
A clear understanding of multiliteracies is difficult. On the surface it appears that multiliteracies is a pedagogy, and literacy learning a practice. In this research I have dealt with the concept in two manners. Firstly, in an abstract sense, where multiliteracies is the analysis of multiple and variable types of texts. That is, understanding the explicit and implicit messages that abide in not just conventional print texts, but in multi-media texts, film, television and radio texts, posters and texts which combine both text and graphics, gestures, public relations, games, websites, news media, and texts which bypass conventional modes of publishing.

Secondly I see it as a demonstrable series of actions and interactions which learners might demonstrate when engaged in working with the expansive range of texts mentioned above. In this research I have called them circuitous allowances. Learners who are multi-literate will be working creatively, discovering, interacting with others, creating and maintaining networks, socialising, organising, reading symbols and texts,
using logic, thinking critically. They will be engaged, they will set goals, they will form and share identities, they will compete and work collaboratively. They will practice, challenge and be challenged, and explore and manipulate their environments.

MMORPGs strengthen multiliteracy learning in terms of their own context – instructional design parameters need to be added by educators to extend this learning beyond the literacies embedded in the MMORPG.

Further research might work on creating more overt links between the pedagogy and ideology of multiliteracies and the practice of learning to read and write oral, written and visual texts, process information and think critically.

MMORPGs are expansive and less traditional sorts of texts. They communicate semiotics, symbols and signs, but they do not obviously reflect the political and social issues which exist in the real world. It would be unwise to assume that as educational tools or instruments they can easily lead our students to understandings about complex issues such as race relations, ethnic conflict, political influence or inequality in all its forms and contexts. This research states that in order for multi-user/player domains to be affective in an educational sense in regard to these issues, a process and practice of instructional design is needed before using MMORPGs or other MMO environments.
The use of pervasive worlds to conduct research from an educational perspective would be interesting. Especially as the scope to build and create is greater, as is the real-world transference of many domains, including: architecture, entertainment, systems organisation (for example, running meetings), economics, entrepreneurship and social organisation.
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Appendix A

Course Descriptor

Foundation English
Unlimited Paenga Tawhiti
Term 2.1 & 2.2, 2006

Massively Multi-player Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) & Literacy Learning in the Classroom

This English class is intended for those students wishing to expand their literacy learning through playing MMORPGs. We’re also going to look at what new literacies students need in the 21st century. Students attending this course will be provided with a full account on a selected MMORPG. This course will also be involved in a research project, so you’ll need to be able to discuss and write about your online experiences. Most classes will be dedicated to game-play, and you will be expected to log 3-5 hours per week playing the MMORPG during the term.

Curriculum Achievement Objectives

English
Written Language: Processes - Processing Information
Level 5
Students should/can/will: using appropriate technologies, retrieve, select, and interpret information from a variety of sources, and present accurate and coherent information for a range of purposes, analysing the processes used

English
Written Language: Transactional Writing
Level 5
Students should/can/will. write coherent, logical instructions, explanations, and factual accounts, and express and argue a point of view, linking main and supporting ideas, and structuring material in appropriate styles in a range of authentic contexts

English
Written Language: Personal Reading
Level 5
Students should/can/will: select and read fluently and independently a wide range of contemporary and historical texts, beginning to adapt reading processes and strategies for different purposes

Specific Learning Outcomes

- play a selected MMORPG as part of the class for 9 weeks
- write accounts and explanations of my adventures
- answer questions about my game-play habits
- reflect on my adventures and game-play using ICT
- write about my experiences playing the MMORPG
- participate in an interview about my game-play
- discuss ideas about literacy and multiliteracies with my class
- participate in Andrew’s research project
Appendix B

Student Participant Questionnaire

Part One

Massively Multi-player Online Role-playing Games (MMORPGs): Cognition, Learning and Literacy in the secondary school classroom.

This questionnaire is intended to gather information about your individual game-playing habits, and to find out what you currently think about MMORPGs and their relationship to learning at school.

Type your answers out underneath each question and return via email to me. Please answer the questions as best you can.

A. Background details (About you!)

1. How old are you?
2. What year are you in?
3. What subjects do you take normally at Unlimited Paenga Tawhiti (majors)?
4. What subjects do you sometimes take at Unlimited Paenga Tawhiti (minors)?
5. What is your favourite school subject? Why?
6. What would you say your worst school subject is? Why?
7. Why have you decided to take this course?

B. Computer knowledge

1. Do you own a laptop?
2. Do you have a computer in your room at home (include your laptop)?
3. Which platform do you prefer to work on?

Windows    Mac OSX    Linux    Other

4. Do you use a dial-up or broadband to access the internet?

C. Computer Games

1. Tick all of the following that you have played in the last month.
   - Playstation 2
   - XBox
   - Nintendo
   - PC Game
   - Mac Game
   - PSP Game
2. Using the same list as above rank the types of consoles and games you play (6 – 1, insert a 0 if you never play this type of game or console)
   - Playstation 2
   - XBox
   - Nintendo
   - PC Game
   - Mac Game
   - PSP Game

3. List some of the games you have played in the last year. (Do NOT include MMORPGs)

D. Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games

1. Which MMORPG games have you played in the last year?
   - Runescape
   - World of Warcraft
   - Illarion
   - Guild Wars
   - Everquest 2
   - Final Fantasy XI
   - Lineage 2
   - Maple Story
   - Plane Shift
   - Tibia
   - Mu
   - ROSE online
   - Other ______________________
   - Other ______________________
   - Other ______________________

2. Which MMORPG do you play the most?

3. How often do you play the MMORPG you entered in Question 2?

   ___ hours per DAY

OR

   ___ hours per WEEK

4. Describe for me the avatar (or character) you most usually play as.
   i. Name:
   ii. Physical description:
   iii. Gender:
   iv. Personality:
   v. Age:
   vi. Other features:

E. QUESTS

Tell me about the last major quest or adventure you had when you played as this character.

1. What was the major objective?
2. Why did you undertake this quest?

3. How did you manage to solve it?

4. Was it harder than the other quests you have done?

5. What did you learn by doing this quest?

6. Have you ever worked with anyone else in the MMORPG to solve a quest or problem? Please tell me about what you did?

7. Have you ever been helped by anyone to solve a problem or quest in a MMORPG? Tell me about what happened.

8. Have you ever helped someone in a MMORPG? Tell me about what happened.

9. Why do you think MMORPGs might be important for learning?

10. What sorts of things have you learnt by playing MMORPGs?

Part Two

F. Game Play

1. Are you a member of a guild?

2. What guild are you a member of?

3. What does it mean for you to be a member of this guild?

4. Have you ever killed another player’s character?

5. How did you feel?

6. Have you ever created a detailed background story or history for your character? (i.e., your Dwarf character was kidnapped and brought up by Gnomes.)

7. Do you ever role-play when playing your character? (Skip this question if you are unsure what it means)

8. How important is it to you that your character is optimized for their profession / role?

- Not Important At All
- Slightly Important
- Somewhat Important
- Very Important
- Extremely Important

9. Would you rather be grouped or soloing?

- Much Rather Group
- Rather Group
- In-Between
10. How much do you enjoy working with others in a group?
   - Not At All
   - A Little
   - Some
   - A Lot
   - A Great Deal

11. How important is it to you to be well-known in the game?
   - Not Important At All
   - Slightly Important
   - Somewhat Important
   - Very Important
   - Extremely Important

12. How much time do you spend customizing your character during character creation?
    - Not At All
    - A Little
    - Some
    - A Lot
    - A Great Deal

13. How important is it to you that your character's armor / outfit matches in color and style?
    - Not Important At All
    - Slightly Important
    - Somewhat Important
    - Very Important
    - Extremely Important

14. How important is it to you that your character looks different from other characters?
    - Not Important At All
    - Slightly Important
    - Somewhat Important
    - Very Important
    - Extremely Important

15. How much do you enjoy exploring the world just for the sake of exploring it?
    - Not At All
    - A Little
    - Some
    - A Lot
    - A Great Deal

16. How much do you enjoy finding quests, NPCs or locations that most people do not know about?
    - Not At All
    - A Little
    - Some
    - A Lot
    - A Great Deal

17. How much do you enjoy collecting distinctive objects or clothing that have no functional value in the game?
    - Not At All
    - A Little
    - Some
    - A Lot
A Great Deal

G. WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU?

How important are the following things to you in the game?

1) Leveling up your character as fast as possible.
   - Not Important At All
   - Slightly Important
   - Moderately Important
   - Very Important
   - Tremendously Important

2) Acquiring rare items that most players will never have.
   - Not Important At All
   - Slightly Important
   - Moderately Important
   - Very Important
   - Tremendously Important

3) Becoming powerful.
   - Not Important At All
   - Slightly Important
   - Moderately Important
   - Very Important
   - Tremendously Important

4) Accumulating resources, items or money.
   - Not Important At All
   - Slightly Important
   - Moderately Important
   - Very Important
   - Tremendously Important

5) Knowing as much about the game mechanics and rules as possible.
   - Not Important At All
   - Slightly Important
   - Moderately Important
   - Very Important
   - Tremendously Important

6) Having a self-sufficient character.
   - Not Important At All
   - Slightly Important
   - Moderately Important
   - Very Important
   - Tremendously Important

7) Being immersed in a fantasy world.
   - Not Important At All
   - Slightly Important
   - Moderately Important
   - Very Important
   - Tremendously Important

8) Escaping from the real world.
   - Not Important At All
   - Slightly Important
   - Moderately Important
   - Very Important
   - Tremendously Important
H. ENJOYMENT FACTORS

How much do you enjoy doing the following things in the game?

1) Helping other players.
   - Not Enjoyable At All
   - Slightly Enjoyable
   - Moderately Enjoyable
   - Very Enjoyable
   - Tremendously Enjoyable

2) Getting to know other players.
   - Not Enjoyable At All
   - Slightly Enjoyable
   - Moderately Enjoyable
   - Very Enjoyable
   - Tremendously Enjoyable

3) Chatting with other players.
   - Not Enjoyable At All
   - Slightly Enjoyable
   - Moderately Enjoyable
   - Very Enjoyable
   - Tremendously Enjoyable

4) Competing with other players.
   - Not Enjoyable At All
   - Slightly Enjoyable
   - Moderately Enjoyable
   - Very Enjoyable
   - Tremendously Enjoyable

5) Dominating/killing other players.
   - Not Enjoyable At All
   - Slightly Enjoyable
   - Moderately Enjoyable
   - Very Enjoyable
   - Tremendously Enjoyable

6) Exploring every map or zone in the world.
   - Not Enjoyable At All
   - Slightly Enjoyable
   - Moderately Enjoyable
   - Very Enjoyable
   - Tremendously Enjoyable

7) Being part of a friendly, casual guild.
   - Not Enjoyable At All
   - Slightly Enjoyable
   - Moderately Enjoyable
   - Very Enjoyable
   - Tremendously Enjoyable

8) Being part of a serious, raid/loot-oriented guild.
   - Not Enjoyable At All
   - Slightly Enjoyable
   - Moderately Enjoyable
   - Very Enjoyable
   - Tremendously Enjoyable

9) Trying out new roles and personalities with your characters.
   - Not Enjoyable At All
10) Doing things that annoy other players.
- Not Enjoyable At All
- Slightly Enjoyable
- Moderately Enjoyable
- Very Enjoyable
- Tremendously Enjoyable

I. SOCIALISATION AND RELATIONSHIPS ONLINE
1) How often do you find yourself having meaningful conversations with other players?
- Never
- Seldom
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

2) How often do you talk to your online friends about your personal issues?
- Never
- Seldom
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

3) How often have your online friends offered you support when you had a real life problem?
- Never
- Seldom
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

4) How often do you make up stories and histories for your characters?
- Never
- Seldom
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

5) How often do you role-play your character?
- Never
- Seldom
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

6) How often do you play so you can avoid thinking about some of your real-life problems or worries?
- Never
- Seldom
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

7) How often do you play to relax from the day's work?
- Never
- Seldom
- Sometimes
8) How often do you purposefully try to provoke or irritate other players?
- Never
- Seldom
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

THANK YOU FOR ANSWERING ALL THESE QUESTIONS.
Appendix C

List of Participant Blogs

http://www.iyamaduck.blogspot.com
http://adventuringbrewdis.blogspot.com/
http://jogsxmmopgexp.blogspot.com/
http://mohekin-man42-7.blogspot.com/
http://qwertytyper.blogspot.com
http://gushokoharo.blogspot.com/
http://248000.blogspot.com
http://mmoforlife.blogspot.com/
http://aimeez-blog.blogspot.com/
http://nz-andyz-english.blogspot.com/
http://allorhan.blogspot.com/
http://glzmo.blogspot.com/
http://dr---j.blogspot.com/
http://runeplayer-leetone.blogspot.com/
http://ashokaisan00b.blogspot.com/
http://trundlebug.blogspot.com/
http://ftm-mmorpqs.blogspot.com/
http://mmorpgdofus.blogspot.com/
http://twokeyblog.blogspot.com/
http://school-mmorpqs.blogspot.com/
http://vanagew.blogspot.com/
http://thehunters.blogspot.com/
http://runescapeloathingrabbit.blogspot.com/
http://bucklerq.blogspot.com/
http://woods4u.blogspot.com/
http://mjmmorpblog.blogspot.com/
http://runepletter-leetone.blogspot.com/
http://leprapomsblog.blogspot.com/
http://rustysprings.blogspot.com
http://spaces.msn.com/chills29/
http://morepeg.blogspot.com/
http://pico-n00b.blogspot.com/
http://work.eponym.com
http://www.blogoftheblogness.blogspot.com/
http://sirjakos.blogspot.com/