classrooms and other virtual worlds

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Background

digital literacies, virtual world gameplay, and classrooms

Gaming and virtual worlds

- Growing popularity of online gaming and virtual worlds (K-Zero, 2008)

- Claims that digital culture can provide powerful learning environments (Gee, 2004; Dede et al, 2006)

- Gameplay engages children and young people in a 'constellation of literacy practices (Steinkuehler, 2006; 2007)

Key questions

- How can educators respond to these digital literacies?

- What are the practical implications of introducing virtual world gameplay into primary classrooms?

- How does this relate to/ interact with dominant conceptions of literacy and literacy education?

The Barnsborough experience

(Barnsley LA; www.virtuallylearning.co.uk; www.activeworlds.com

Project aims

- to explore digital literacy and the educational potential of virtual world gameplay
- to develop a literacy-rich 3D virtual world which children can explore in avatar-based gameplay (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006)
- to raise boys attainment in literacy at Key Stage 2

Participants

- 10 project schools (9-11 year olds)
- Planning group comprising local literacy and drama specialists, ICT advisory staff, primary school teachers and myself as consultant and researcher
- Virtually Learning (using Active Worlds)

Barnsborough

- a number of interconnected zones which are life-like and familiar

- town, complete with streets, alleyways, cafes, shops and administrative buildings

- park with a play area, bandstand, boating lake, mansion, woodland and hidden caves

- residential area, industrial zone etc.

in-world literacies

- **environmental print**

(shop signs, graffiti, logos, posters and advertisements)

- **tool tips**

(environmental features 'looks like someone's been here'; navigational information 'you'll need a code to get in').

- **hyperlinked texts**

(Flash documents, web pages, phone messages, music clips)

- **interactive chat**

(speech bubbles and MSN-type chat window)

KeaneC:	a flash back is when you see the past
KatieB:	yes
KayleyM:	yes
guy merchant:	**Hi Lee**
KatieB:	so whats your favourite place in barnsbrough guy murchant
LeeW:	Hello
guy merchant:	**I like the Park**
KayleyM:	me too
KeaneC:	so do I
KatieB:	why?? ME TOOO
DanielC:	me too
LeeW:	me 2
guy merchant:	**The caves are good**
KayleyM:	i like all the cenerey
DanielC:	yhe
KatieB:	what caves??

The scenario

- previous inhabitants of Barnsborough left in a hurry

- rich media, tool-tip clues, hyperlinked and downloadable texts

- major bio-hazard, alien abduction, a political or big business disaster or suggest something more mysterious

The research

Approach

'the context of social construction', the negotiations of meanings, identities and relationships that occur discursively in and around the virtual world.
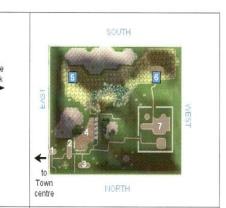
Markham(2004:97)

Methods

- field notes and minutes of meetings
- over-the shoulder observations - classrooms (running notes on timeline plotting screen activity against real-world interaction)
- in-world interviews - children (groups of pupil/avatars)
- in-world interviews - (individual teacher/avatar)
- face-to-face interviews – children (small sample)
- survey – teachers involved in the pilot project

Designing and imagining a virtual world

Designing/imagining

'…an active, willed, human process in which we make and remake the conditions of our existence…' (Cope& Kalantzis, 2000:203)

Town Centre:

Note:
Blue squares in the map are buildings/doors/rooms you can enter.
Orange squares are locations that can have rooms in the future.

1. Town Square and sewer exit.
2. Trinity's Café
3. Internet Café
4. Barnsborough Town Hall
5. Police station
6. Garage
7. Singing Cricket
8. Sewer entrance (leads to a cave – no.5 in Park map)

Victorian Park:

Note:
Blue squares in the map are caves which can be entered.

1. Park entrance
2. Band stand
3. Playground and picnic area
4. Lake
5. Cave (human). This cave will have another entrance at town centre.
6. Cave (alien/monster)
7. Mansion house

A mucky sign (covered in mud and grime) on the pier saying: No public fishing, order of Barns... (the rest of the writing is obscured by the muck)

Navigational Clues: None

Storyline Clues:

On the surface of the lake dead fish should be floating, indicating pollution of the water. The water needs to have an area that looks dirty and polluted (not the whole lake) – possibly scum floating on the water. A knocked over canister could be positioned on the bank with some dark coloured liquid spilling out of it into the lake. On the opposite bank there could be a muddy, torn up area, indicating that perhaps something has been pushed into the lake or something has been dragged itself out of the lake.

Area Three:

Within the bandstand a notice board or information board should be located here. This will full of information. The clues could provide a variety of different clue types – see below.

Vague Clues:
A ghostly sound of brass band music should be played when the avatar is within the bandstand. I imagine the music to be played softly in the background (like it's a long way away – in the distance)

Evidence of people leaving in a hurry - a busker could have been playing within this stand, but all is left is his instrument case full of loose change and his sheet music.

Public notice (on official council paper, positioned on the board) which could read as follows:

Barnsborough Park will be closed to the general public as of Saturday 8 September and will remain closed until further notice. This is due to essential maintenance work. For further information please contact the Environment Official on 884357.
We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.
Thank you for your cooperation

Navigational Clues:

The board could provide a basic map of the park – highlighting places of interest or areas that are 'out of bounds'

There could also be an area of the board that is dedicated to the history of this park and its founders, e.g.

Locke Park was given to the town by Phoebe Locke, in memory of her husband Joseph Locke. It opened in 1862. The land is held in trust by Council as a park and pleasure

Imagining and doing

Planning discussions

- Explore
- Discover things
- Make meanings
- Form hypotheses
- Creativity

Classroom activity

- Guided
- Directed
- Comprehension
- Giving reasons
- Control

Adapting the world to fit the curriculum

Back to the curriculum

- Texts you can download

- Officially sanctioned genres

- Material for shared and guided work

'texting and chat are genres in their own right'

- Whiteboard demonstrations

- Pencil and paper follow-up

- Timetabled separation of literacy and technology

The discourse of text types

KM: mystery solving mind maps and notes

KC: sometimes we take notes and mind maps

KB: note taking . mind maps and mystery solving

[several repetitions of this by other children]

LW: stories

DC: explanations

Guy: yeah

KM: perswasive text n story openings

KC: we do things like storys

KB: exsplanations story's and perswasive leaflets also we
         wrote recounts

Oil Drilling Proposal

(Located in the Town Hall)

1. Who wrote the oil drilling proposal?

   _____

   [~ mark]

2. Tick **TWO BOXES** to show which jobs would be created in the town if the oil drilling went ahead.

   _____ Nurses
   _____ Managers
   _____ Teachers
   _____ Labourers
   _____ Librarians

   [1 mark]

3. How many new jobs would be created in Barnsborough by the oil drilling? Circle the correct answer.

   (50 - 100)   (100 - 250)   (250 - 500)   (500 - 1000)

   [1 mark]

4. How would the oil drilling benefit Barnsborough?

   Give **TWO** reasons

   i) _____

   ii) _____

   [2 marks]

5. Look at **page 3** of the oil drilling proposal. Read the second paragraph. Select and copy **TWO WORDS** which indicate the disruption oil drilling may cause.

   [: mark]

   _____   _____

testing....testing

SJ: 2 show teachers how good we r at different subjects!

GP: to test your abilities

GB: to show teacher how good we are

TM: geting a good educhtion

Guy: OK I bet you are!

AH: sats are to test our kolage and get a good education

SJ: we r thank you !!

Virtual literacy learning?

Talking Barnsborough

We stand in a circle just outside the Town Hall steps, chatting, passing the time of day. I'm keen to know what they think about Barnsborough. And the words spill out in balloons above their heads and in the chat frame below us.

JB: *its mint i like barnsbrough because its really adventurous its abosulutly*
    brilliand MINTUS!!

KC: *its a mystery*

JM: *i like it because u get to exsplor the town*

guy: *um*

JB: **brilliant*

guy: *what's your favourite place?*

JB: *thinternet cafe*

Children in avatar play

'it's good because you can walk around and find clues – it's like a game, a virtual game'

'I get put off when I think the world is fake'

'I enjoy the world that much that sometimes I forget what time it is'

'The virtual world is good and not good. I enjoy looking around for clues, I don't enjoy writing about the world when I come out though.'

Hide and seek

KM: *GA do you know how to run?*

GA: *probely why do u wanna no*

KM: *no*

JB: *A let's pla hid"n"seek*

KM: *its altgr and the up button*

T: *Bet you can't find me JB!*

GA: *bet i can*

JB: *gis sum clus wire yu ar*

MH: *JP how do you fy*

JB: *f*

JB: *f12*

JP: *keep tapin it*

Teachers as avatars

'…I am on 'the same level' as them.'

Jade: *I am in the world as 'Jade MacKay' but the children have never asked directly what my role is….*

guy: *mmm i wondered how you felt…maybe too hard to say…*

Jade: *Yes! I oversee what the children are doing and make sure that they are remaining on task but because I am doing all that within Barnsborough it is not like I am 'the teacher'. I don't think the children feel as threatened (not sure that thta is the rt)*

Jade: ** right word*

Which world?

T :   Remember what the focus of this lesson is! What was the park like before whatever happened happened?

SS: we think it must have been busy

T: What makes you think that S?

CM: mm-there are some cake on the band stand so people must have been eating while playing

T: Excellent observation C.

Issues

- Virtual worlds invite us all to re-examine our identities and interactions (children, teachers, planners and researchers)

- What sort of learning environments do we imagine?

- The use of space, disciplinary time and the regulation of activity institutionalises conventional approaches to literacy learning and teaching

Pedagogy

'..the educational value of the game-playing comes not from the game itself, but from the creative coupling of educational media with effective pedagogy to engage students in meaningful practices.'

Squire (2002:10)

The last word...

MP: well barnsborough helps educate u in litrecy

[blog: *www.myvedana.blogspot.com*]