



COMPUTER GAMES A POTENTIAL LITERACY TOOL

Popular culture is very important to the lives of young people and computer games form a vital part of that culture, especially for middle school students.

Researchers from the School of Education at Deakin University are investigating computer games in terms of what they might offer teachers in their work with students, and what students might be learning from these games.

Chief Investigator, Dr Joanne O'Mara, discusses the work of the Australian Research Council funded project, *'Literacy in the digital world of the twenty-first century: learning from computer games'*, led by Professor Catherine Beavis.

Often the temptation for schools is to ban popular culture from the schoolyard, rather than to consider how they might use it for their own purposes. In addition to being extremely engaging, many computer games require players to learn and use very distinct literacy skills.

The literacy practices young people use in computer gameplay parallel those of other new media and some dramatic play practices. I am concerned that students develop new literacy skills alongside a critical understanding of new media and the cultural practices played out in their usage.

Professional PRACTICE



Value learning. Value teaching.

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 02 | SEPT 2009

Professional Practice is the official newsletter of the Victorian Institute of Teaching and is used to communicate important policy decisions and developments that may affect a teacher's registration. It provides a forum for the discussion of professional issues most relevant to teachers: their learning, their practice and values. The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not of the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

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This project has been very respectful of young people and their use of computer games and of teachers and their work with young people.

The relationships that have been built between the teachers, students, researchers, schools and our industry partners (the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image and the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English) have provided a context where we have been able to work together in productive ways.

One of the highlights of the project for me has been the opportunity to work with English teachers from a variety of school settings, and to see the personal commitment all of these teachers have to their students.

I am always aware of the differences in support that these teachers receive from their school community and how much difference that makes to their ability to try new ideas and make changes to their classroom practices and curriculum.

This is particularly true when it comes to using technology in the classroom. As an education lecturer I meet with many teachers and visit many schools, from those who have complete access to sophisticated technology and technological help on tap, to those where there are very limited resources and no help.

The teachers involved with the project used computer games in many different ways in their English teaching. Some used the games to support and extend literary studies – examining fantasy games as part of this genre. Other classes made their own computer games – designing the games, making and creating all of the sprites. Some classes examined the more serious games and one group studied the gaming practices of younger children.

Teachers reported a range of literacy outcomes for the students, in terms of increased critical literacy, increased code breaking skills and a deeper understanding of how different texts are constructed and shaped. It was widely reported that the usage of computer games in the classroom is engaging for students.

We are currently in the final stages of the project and findings, curriculum samples, a forum and other discussions about the work will be held at this year's Victorian Association for the Teaching of English (VATE) conference, being held on 7–8 December at Deakin University.

VATE is hosting a full strand focusing on the outcomes of the project. There will be a workshop on making your own computer games that features some of the games made by junior students, a workshop on using serious games in the English classroom, and a forum on gender and computer games.

Many of the teachers involved in the project are presenting their work. While the work has a secondary English focus, it would be of interest to primary school teachers and teachers of related subjects.

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Meet our newer members of Council

A number of members of the Institute's governing Council are relatively new to their roles, having taken up their positions in either November last year or February this year. *Professional Practice* profiles seven of the newer members, who share their personal views on the experience of being a Councillor.

Jennifer Costello



Jennifer is the Professional Growth Facilitator at Carranballac P-9 College in Point Cook. A major part of her role is working closely with all teachers to encourage and develop professional growth and to mentor graduates and student teachers who attend the college. She has been a primary teacher for 25 years and has taught all grade levels.

Viewpoint

As a new Councillor, I've observed that the various Council committees work hard to oversee changes and growth in the profession. The Council ensures we have quality teaching practice and high expectations of our teachers through the provision of professional learning opportunities and maintenance of high professional standards.

The many stakeholders are given a voice to ensure what happens is fair and equitable. I now see it as a huge enterprise that plays a very important role in allowing representatives from different areas of education to have a say and a link to the Education Minister.

At Council, issues are debated and opinions are taken into account. I love networking and find speaking with and listening to other members of the profession, and gaining new insights into various issues, invaluable for my own professional growth. I have definitely enjoyed my role so far.

Marino D'Ortenzio



Marino has worked in schools in Melbourne's northern and western suburbs, as well as in London, in various roles covering student management, curriculum development and special needs. He currently teaches maths, science and VCAL and is the Assessment and Reporting Coordinator at the Lakeview Campus of Caroline Springs College.

Viewpoint

My experience of being on Council has been a positive one, involving a very steep learning curve as I come to grips with the various branches within the Institute and what they do.

It has entailed use of the *Education and Training Reform Act* instead of a curriculum planner, learning how to read a million dollar balance sheet instead of a program budget and aiming for key performance indicators instead of learning goals.

I like being able to bring the perspective of a practising teacher to the Council, and understanding the perspectives of other Councillors, with whom I occasionally differ.

Knowing more about the Institute has meant I've been able to assist my colleagues with matters including registration, renewal and professional development requirements.

As a Councillor I'm also very pleased to play a small part in recognising some of the great work teachers do through the World Teachers' Day campaign and various award programs.

Gail McHardy



Gail has long been one of Victoria's leading advocates for parents of students in Victorian government schools. A mother of two, Gail's introduction to the education sector was not only as an active parent participant at her daughters' schools, but also as a volunteer for and employee of the statewide peak body, Parents Victoria.

Viewpoint

My expectations of being a Councillor were mixed on arrival but so far I've been impressed by the Institute's management, operations, staff commitment and growth in technology.

My role as a parent representative is unique, compared to other Councillors. I'm not a government employee or a teacher. I'm a parent of a currently enrolled government school student.

I believe the Institute has developed a great deal since its inception. Resources for teachers like Pdi, mentoring programs and obtaining views from the profession have improved three fold.

The Institute is often reported in the media in relation to registration of teachers and misconduct. But what is encouraging is the transparency of the process and reporting back to the community in the public interest.

I look forward to completing my term of office on the Third Council of the Institute and working with a great team of people.

Mary-Anne Pontkis



Mary-Anne has been a teacher for over thirty years and finds her profession rewarding and challenging every day. She's currently the Performing Arts teacher (P-6) at Meadow Heights Primary School.

Viewpoint

Before taking on the role as a Council member, I spoke to practising teachers who are already on Council and they filled me in on the expectations, roles and responsibilities. There needs to be a strong commitment and I believed I could fulfil that.

When a new member is appointed to Council they are given a mentor. My mentor, Garry Salisbury, has been extremely helpful. I've also been well supported by other practising teachers on Council and working with these people has been a very rewarding collegiate experience for me.

The best part about being on Council is working with other Councillors, both teachers and educational leaders, to enhance the wonderful profession of teaching.

As many teachers are aware, the Council has a number of statutory and established committees. I'm a member of the Registration Committee and the Disciplinary Proceedings Committee. Both have presented me with a steep learning curve but I have attempted to learn very quickly, and as part of a team, make decisions based on what is best for the profession.

Anne Sarros



Anne is currently Principal of Firbank Grammar School in Brighton, Melbourne. She has researched and written on teacher stress and social support and believes in collaborative decision making and working within collegial teams.

Viewpoint

As a new Councillor, my early experience is of being a part of a group of highly skilled, and dedicated professionals. The diverse membership

of the Council, the expertise each person brings and their genuine passion to do the best for the profession of teaching is an experience I highly value. I hope I can contribute effectively.

What I appreciate most is the opportunity to get to know people in other sectors and with different experiences. I have learned such a lot already, particularly through the committees of which I am a member, and appreciate the knowledge and expertise of Institute staff.

I am also aware of the need for an expert Council to promote professionalism among teachers and to ensure all teachers are accountable to their students and communities.

Being on Council has given me so much more information about the Institute, and insights into its very important work. I have been made aware of all aspects of the teaching profession which the Institute is promoting and developing.

Leonie Sheehy



Leonie is the Literacy Leader and Reading Recovery teacher at St Joseph's Primary School, Boronia. She has enjoyed many years as a classroom teacher and teacher librarian. Mentoring and professionally developing teachers is a particular passion.

Viewpoint

Being a Councillor has provided me with some interesting challenges – understanding the relevant legislation, tuning into the acronyms for the many bodies which are associated with education and learning about the roles and duties of the various committees.

However there is a relaxed, friendly feel, in which all questions and comments are welcomed and given due consideration. The opportunity to work with colleagues from various educational settings is both enlightening and inspiring. I really enjoy viewing education from a 'big picture' perspective.

The process involved in sending information and necessary reading to Council members is quick and efficient, allowing as much time as possible to work around school commitments. My workplace recognises the value of Institute involvement and allows for this when structuring my teaching duties.

Before joining Council I knew very little about the workings of the Institute. Now I know more about its regulatory role and the need for detailed accreditation, registration and discipline processes.

Gaylene Watts



Gaylene is the principal of St Philip's Primary School, Blackburn North and a representative for the East Central Zone on the VIEU Principals' Council. She has worked in education since 1973, in both the government and Catholic sectors.

Viewpoint

Being on Council has been a great experience. I feel privileged to be among knowledgeable people who have a wonderful grasp of the education system in Victoria, as well as nationally and internationally.

I value the rigour given to ensuring we have the best qualified and highly professional teachers as well as properly registered educational institutions.

I have learnt the Institute is involved in a lot more than just teacher registration. It also focuses on the standards and values of the teaching profession as a whole and how to raise the profile of the profession.

The Institute looks at ways of supporting teachers in their professional journey and effective channels of communicating all aspects of its work to the teaching profession in Victoria.

Its role is complex, with many legal and political guidelines to enforce. All those working at the Institute are dedicated to ensuring it is always acting in the best interests of registered teachers.

The Institute is governed by a twenty member Council, the majority of whom are practising teachers from government, Catholic and independent schools. Ten members of Council, comprising eight teachers and two principals, are elected by teachers and principals.

Nine members of Council are nominated by the Minister for Education. They include the Chairperson, three teachers, one principal and representatives of key stakeholder groups such as parents, teacher employers and teacher educators.

The Secretary of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (or a nominee of the Secretary) also sits on the Council.



Teach for Australia: flexible pathway, same standards

Teach for Australia is a Victorian and Federal government initiative to attract a wider range of candidates into the teaching profession, with a particular focus on teaching opportunities in disadvantaged government secondary schools.

Victoria is the first state to implement the program from 2010. The initiative is expected to be adopted by other Australian states in 2011.

The not-for-profit organisation *Teach For Australia* won the tender to administer the program nationally and is now working with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, to select and place the first group of applicants in government secondary schools.

Applicants need to have successfully completed a three-year undergraduate degree and must attend a selection day to assess their suitability for teaching through a range of activities, including interviews, group exercises and a short presentation.

Successful applicants will teach in schools for the equivalent of four days a week, working closely with an experienced teacher to teach and manage their own classrooms as well as a *Teach for Australia* mentor/coach. They will also complete a two-year part-time initial teacher education program, similar to a Graduate Diploma of Education, provided by the University of Melbourne.

This program begins in November with a six to eight week intensive phase to prepare applicants for their first classroom experiences. After two years they are expected to graduate as fully qualified teachers.

In maintaining the standards for entry to the profession, the role of the Institute is to:

- Assess the academic qualifications of applicants to ensure they meet academic standards for entry into teacher education and have the appropriate discipline studies for secondary teaching subjects.
- Assess for and grant Permission To Teach under the same requirements and standards used for any other 'non-teaching-qualified' teachers required by Victorian schools.
- Review and accredit the initial teacher education program applicants will undertake, to ensure the program meets the same standards as every other teacher preparation program in Victoria. Once the program is approved, it will be listed on the Institute's website as an approved program at http://www.vit.vic.edu.au/content.asp?Document_ID=132.

For more information about *Teach For Australia* visit their website at <http://www.teachforaustralia.org/>.

School teachers score highly on the trust meter

Teaching is one of the top four most trusted professions in Australia, according to a recent Roy Morgan survey which asked people to rate various professions in terms of their perceived ethics and honesty.

Results of the Image of Professionals survey show nurses hold the most trusted profession (rated most ethical and honest by 89%), followed by pharmacists (84%), doctors (82%) and school teachers (76%).

For Institute Chairperson, Susan Halliday, the survey results are no surprise to those who work with teachers.

"This is a timely opportunity however, to acknowledge and applaud teachers for the expert and sensitive ways in which they conduct themselves given they are in the privileged position of working with our young people," Susan said.

"Research undertaken by the Victorian Institute of Teaching over past years has also demonstrated our communities have particularly high regard for Victorian teachers. Additionally our research has indicated teachers often underestimate the way in which they are valued, and the extent to which they are trusted.

"Overindulged media 'opportunities' that talk endlessly about the very small number of teachers who are not a credit to their profession, can at times impact negatively.

"What a great pleasure it is to read a good news story that reflects the worth, ethics and dedicated professionalism of Victorian teachers. Congratulations to our more than 109,000 registered teachers."

For more details on the survey, see the *Herald Sun* article on the Institute's website at www.vit.vic.edu.au under 'Latest News' or visit www.roymorgan.com/news/polls/2009/4387/.

International teaching conference report

At July's meeting of the Institute Council, Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Lus, reported on the recent International Teaching Councils' Conference he attended in Cardiff with Chairperson, Susan Halliday. An edited version of Andrew's report is provided below:

The 3rd International Teaching Councils' Conference was held in Cardiff, Wales, from 24th to 26th June, hosted by the General Teaching Council of Wales.

It provided an opportunity for the 50 participants to:

- be exposed to international research relevant to the work of teacher regulatory authorities
- hear from a range of teacher regulatory authorities on topical aspects of their regulatory work
- be challenged on what might be considered best practice approach to regulatory work
- contribute to an expanding international network of teacher regulatory authorities.

Of interest to Victoria was the experience of Canadian authorities, in particular the Ontario College of Teachers, with their 'alternative resolution process'. This process allows for agreed resolution of an inquiry, with accepted sanctions, without the need to undertake a formal hearing.

The conference plenary session agreed on a range of recommendations, including, as a key priority, the establishment of a communications network to facilitate the sharing of policies, knowledge and experience across the authorities.

The Victorian Institute of Teaching has agreed to assist in setting up this network, in a manner similar to that established for the Australasian authorities, that is, a list-serve facility and website.



LATEST UPDATES

Pdi supports your professional reading

Professional reading support is the latest offering from the Institute's professional development search engine Pdi.

An excellent way to keep up with changes and developments in all areas of education, professional reading connects teachers to research, resources, knowledge and practice.

Pdi now hosts links to professional reading groups, an ever growing list of online readings, and a professional reading forum. You can access these links at <<http://pdi.vic.edu.au/>>.

Through the reading groups link you can also download a handy fact sheet including key questions to consider when discussing your professional reading.

The professional reading groups and forum allow you to contribute and respond to collegial discussions around areas of professional interest.

You can workshop and share your views on the latest professional literature. And keep track of your professional reading as you meet on or off line for collegial discussions.

For more information email <pdi@vit.vic.edu.au>.

Field Officer's note

When speaking to teachers about the new process for Renewal of Registration and the Professional Learning component, Field Officer Mary Walker finds many teachers simply need clarification and reassurance about the straight-forwardness of the process.

Schools are invited to contact Mary at the Institute on (03) 8601 5845 or email <mary.walker@vit.vic.edu.au> to organise a date and time for a field officer visit.

Twilight Seminar

Effective strategies for teacher professional learning was the subject of the Institute's third Twilight Seminar for 2009, held on 27 August. Guest presenter at the seminar was the Chair of the Victorian Parliament Education and Training Committee, Mr Geoff Howard MP.

The fourth seminar will be held on 26 November. If you'd like to be included on the invitation list, please contact Valmai Lee at the Institute on (03) 8601 5849 or email <valmai.lee@vit.vic.edu.au>.

Exciting World Teachers' Day competition

To help promote World Teachers' Day on 30 October, the Victorian Institute of Teaching is inviting your students to make a three-minute film exploring the question: 'What makes a great teacher?'

A fantastic prize is on offer for each winning entry in the P-6 and 7-12 categories – a set of iPod touches for classroom use. Gift vouchers to the value of \$100 will be awarded to each student (up to 4) in each winning category.

Open to all Victorian primary, secondary and P-12 schools, this exciting competition is designed to be a school-supervised activity, with entries submitted by teachers on behalf of their students. Closing date is Friday 16 October.

For further details, including your entry form and a sample short film to spark students' creativity, visit the Institute website <www.vit.vic.edu.au>. You can also call 1300 888 067 for more information

Institute donation helps teachers in bushfire affected communities

A donation of \$44,000 from the Victorian Institute of Teaching will help more than 100 teachers in bushfire-affected areas receive specialised training to support their school communities.

Career Expos

The Institute was a popular exhibitor at the *Herald Sun Melbourne Career Expo* from 24-26 July and *The Education Show 2009* on 7-8 August.

e-delivery of Professional Practice Online

We successfully delivered the first issue of *Professional Practice Online* to around 25,000 teachers and the offer to choose electronic delivery remains open. If you'd like to do so, please call 1300 888 067 or email <vit@vit.vic.edu.au>.

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