Chapter 4
Videogames and Sensory Theory:
Enchantment in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

The act of playing video games is a multimodal experience, immersing the gamer in a sensorial experience in the digital world. Video games incorporate sensory literacies such as haptics, graphics, sound effects, music, auditory dialogue, visual text, and character movement. The sensory literacies allow gamers to connect the digital world to the physical world, becoming engrossed in the world and story of the video game. Thus, due to the multimodal and sensorial nature of video games, they have the potential to be a beneficial tool for increasing student engagement within the classroom and assisting students in further increasing literacy skills and content knowledge. In addition, a review of literature of classroom use of video games as an instructional tool found increased engagement, use of video games as texts, cross-literacies that supported traditional literacy processes and skills.

INTRODUCTION

The first author has been playing videogames since she was four or five. Her parents bought a Sega Genesis for her; this was her very first game system. She remembers playing through the Disney simple story role-playing videogames (RPG) like *Aladdin*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Pocahontas*. *Aladdin* was her favorite because it was easy; as a four-year-old, she could beat it. Then she got older and started playing more intricate RPG games. For example, one of her favorite games was *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time.* As she played, she began to get more and more immersed in the story of the game.

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The game was filled with complex characters like Link, Zelda, Sheik (Zelda's secret identity), and the evil Ganon, and expansive environments like Hyrule, the multiple temples, and Jabu Jabu's (whale-like fish) belly. These characters and environments were brought to life by the visual innovative 3D graphics (for this time period), audio features, and textual story-telling components of the game. The graphics displayed the characters' facial features and reactions, body structures, clothing, weapons, and items with eye-catching colors, artistic lines, and unique character movement. The environmental graphics included details both big and small, from artistically mapping out large structures such as mountains and castles to forming small features such as bushes and trees. The game used music and various sound effects to bring the game to life, drawing her into the game causing various emotional sensations such as excitement, sadness, and terror. After being drawn in visually and audibly, she was further enamored by the game through the textual components: the game's story and the dialogue of the characters in the form of the written word throughout the game. The textual components gave her more insight into the inner-workings of the characters and their world. And, though this game was more difficult and frustrating than the games she had played as a younger child, she persisted, being compelled to discover the ending of the story; she beat the game to know the story.

All of these interactions, visual, auditory, and textual, within the game, created a cohesive and engaging sensory experience, allowing her to know and love the story of the game. Videogames, having complex stories that are compelling and engaging, beckon gamers to revisit and complete the game multiple times. As an adult, she still enjoys playing RPG videogames. She has revisited many games such as *STAR WARS: Knights of the Old Republic*, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, and *Kingdom Hearts* due to her love for the story or stories that lie within them.

Like traditional literature, videogames have timeless stories that continue to be relevant and exciting. In addition to the sensory experiences that immersed and enchanted her, they also require the use of traditional literacy skills in order to define, interpret, and make-meaning within and of its virtual worlds. However, unlike traditional literature, videogames provide gamers with an engaging sensory experience in which they are digitally immersing themselves into worlds and stories of their favorite characters. Videogames are a multimodal experience, stimulating the gamer through sensory elements and literacies, causing the gamer not only to become part of the story but for the videogame to become part of the gamer's story. Looking back on her experiences, the first author recognizes videogames as a form of literacy, specifically a form of multiliteracies. In her current roles as a teacher of students with identified learning variabilities with personalized Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and as a doctoral student intrigued by the possibilities multiliteracies hold, she is curious about the harnessing potential of videogames as a learning platform for her students, and all students. Her personal experiences and curiosity about the potential of videogames as an instructional tool inspired this review of the literature on utilizing them in classroom contexts and the potential of an emerging literacy theory that may explain the enchantment it has over gamers.

Using a multiliteracies understanding of text expands the notion of text from a static form of paper pages and alphabet to a representation of content and communication of ideas in a variety of evolving forms. This broader representation of texts includes traditional linear texts that are read from top to bottom and left to right (depending on the culture) to non-linear forms that include multimodal texts such as gestures, sounds, and images (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, 2015; Walsh, 2010). An expanded view of texts includes everything from traditional print-based books to podcasts, movies, images, infographics, webpages, and videogames. Therefore, videogames can no longer be considered 'just a game' (Berger & McDougall, 2013; Gerber et al, 2014; Altura & Curwood, 2015). Rich content such as story, substories,