

Chapter 9

Communication, Cooperation, and Competition: Examining the Literacy Practices of Esports Teams

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ABSTRACT

While scholars have examined various ways that video games can promote learning and influence communication, limited research has examined the literacy and communication practices of esports teams. This study utilizes a content analysis methodology to examine the literacy and communication patterns of two esports teams who competitively play the popular video game Rocket League, a soccer-like game in which players control vehicles and try to hit a ball into their opponents' goal. Findings demonstrate that the esports teams utilize both oral and written communication in a variety of ways in their esports endeavors. The primary types of oral communication the teams used related to strategy, encouragement, and general commentary, and the primary types of written language included pre-game schedules, in-game and post-game chat, and post-game stats. Ultimately, this study demonstrates how esports teams engage in communication and literacy practices as they cooperate with their teammates and compete against their opponents.

INTRODUCTION

Conceptions of literacy have evolved substantially over the last couple decades (Kalantzis et al., 2016; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; New London Group, 1996). Scholars have shifted from more traditional perspectives on literacy that focus on the reading and writing of printed texts and towards more expansive views of literacy practices that are increasingly digital and multimodal (Buckingham, 2016; Coiro et al., 2014; Kress, 2010). Digital and multimodal literacies and communication are crucial skills and processes for the 21st century (Serafini, 2015), and it is crucial that researchers and educators continue

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to develop their understanding of evolving digital literacy practices to both understand and support their students. While these digital literacy practices are vast and complex, one area that has received limited attention in the literacy research literature is the literacy practices of video gaming.

Researchers have recognized for decades that video games facilitate learning in a variety of ways (Granic et al., 2014; Prensky, 2005; Squire, 2011; von Gillern, 2018; von Gillern & Alaswad, 2016). Much of the existing literature focuses on how video games can promote learning in a variety of disciplines (Clark et al., 2015; Clark et al., 2016; Tokac et al., 2019; Silva dos Santos et al., 2020; Thompson & von Gillern, 2020). While some research has examined video games in literacy and English language arts classrooms, most of the game-focused education research examines other content areas (Clark et al., 2016; Wouters et al., 2013).

The scholars who have examined the video games and literacy (e.g., Gee, 2003; Squire, 2014; von Gillern, 2016a) illustrate that video gaming and in-game communication are complex processes and represent a “constellation of literacy practices” (Steinkuehler, 2007, p. 207). The array of literacy practices involved with gaming and game communities has been examined in a variety of ways (Bourgonjon, 2014; Harvey, 2018, Marlatt, 2020; von Gillern, 2016a). However, research investigating the literacy and communication practices of esports teams and communities is in a nascent stage but shows significant promise given the rapid expansion of esports throughout the world (Gerber, 2017; Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017).

Thus, this study aims to develop an understanding of the ways that esports teams engage in literacy practices to understand how they participate in this popular social endeavor and consider ways educators can nurture and support student learning. The findings of this study illustrate how esports teams engage in literacy practices involving both oral and written language that revolve around communication, cooperation, and competition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand how esports teams engage in a variety of literacy and communication processes, this chapter reviews research on video game literacies and esports.

Literacy and Video Games

While traditional conceptions of literacy focus on written language, scholars over the last 25 years have expanded their perspectives on literacy to include multimodal and digital communication (Cope & Kalantzis, 2016; New London Group, 1996). These broadened conceptions of literacy recognize the social nature communication and how people convey information to one another in a variety of ways, which have become increasingly mediated through digital technologies in recent years. As technology is constantly evolving and new platforms for communication emerge, new digital literacy practices evolve as well. For example, Twitter debuted 15 years ago and begin with a limited user base but has ballooned into a global communication platform with hundreds of millions of active users who regularly use their Twitter literacy—or Twitteracy—skills to participate socially with other users around the globe (Greenhow & Gleason, 2012; Omnicore, 2021). Given the variety of new technologies and social literacy practices constantly emerging and evolving, it is important for researchers and educators to develop an understanding of these digital literacy practices, so they can help young people develop their digital literacy skills

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