

# Videogame Walkthroughs in Educational Settings: Challenges, Successes and User Attitudes

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Digital games have increasingly become of interest to educational researchers and theorists. In order to address the unique skills and needs of this new generation of students, it has been argued that classroom practice must specifically accommodate the 'digital affinity' of the net generation who are connected, creating, and likely know more new technological developments than their teachers (Jenkins, 2006, 2009). The belief that youth exhibit a digital affinity undergirds the push towards an inclusion of digital games in the classroom. Supplementing a curriculum with games builds on the out of school activities of these digitally connected youth, as many are already playing games in their leisure time (Stanley & Mawer, 2008; Prensky 2006). Furthermore, it is argued that – at least for some students -- games may be more engaging than the books, worksheets, or lectures commonly used as teaching tools (Prensky, 2006; Steinkuehler, Alagoz, King, & Martin, 2012; Steinkuehler & King, 2009).

Games have made their way into a variety of in/formal learning contexts with both negative (Steinkuehler et al., 2011) and positive impacts (Vie, 2008, Galarneau & Zibit 2007, Gee 2003/2007) on the learning outcomes. However, reporting on the results of these investigations remain heavily focused on gameplay and/or student interactions with

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the technology, less on the peripheral materials that can also make up key components of the gameplay and educational experience.

In this paper we describe various uses of one such peripheral text: the videogame walkthroughs. Describing three different contexts - 1) an informal learning environment where 11-12 year olds used text and video walkthroughs to supplement their *Legend of Zelda: Windwaker* play during an optional, lunch-time video game club in their school library 2) a formal learning environment where grade six students used a written walkthrough for *Lost Winds 2: Winter of the Melodias* played as part of their Language Arts classroom and 3) The use of walkthroughs for both students and teachers in the piloting of a proprietary educational game designed to instruct elementary schoolers core geography curriculum - researchers explore the value of the walkthrough as tools for learning with games as well as user attitudes to these supplementary texts.

## **VIDEOGAME WALKTHROUGHS**

Videogame walkthroughs are a form of paratext that are now typically produced by fans or the enthusiast press, rather than officially released by game developers or publishers. Prior to the widespread availability of the Internet, walkthroughs were circulated via magazines (an early example being Scorpio's text adventure guides in *Computer Gaming World* circa. 1983). More recently, the walkthrough format has gone audio-visual in the form of the "Let's Play" video.

Consalvo (2007) has argued for the inclusion of peripheral materials in the study of digital games and their surrounding communities as such sources "serve a specific role in gaming culture and for gaming capital; they instruct a player in how to play, what to play, and what is cool (and not) in the game world" (p. 22). Beyond developer-created texts (e.g. instruction manuals, advertisements) there also exists a vast array of player-created knowledge about particular games including artwork (Carter, 2014), calculations about the underlying mathematical mechanics of the game (Malone, 2009; Paul, 2011), third-party modifications and 'add-ons' to the game client (Chen, 2012; Taylor, 2006), and the conversations that exist on message boards and forums devoted to the discussion of MMOGs and other games (Braithwaite, 2014; Brock, 2011; Paul, 2010). Building on Consalvo's foundational work, our goal is to add to the growing discussions about games and education by means of reporting on the use of paratexts in both formal and informal learning environments.

## **CASE STUDIES**

The case studies presented in this paper come from two larger research projects: the studies involving *WindWaker* and *Lost Winds 2* were part of a multi-year federally funded project entitled Study 1 (the anonymized name we have attributed to the study to ensure blind review); *Sprite's Quest*, a game developed by the [Anonymized Region] Ministry of Education to supplement the existing geography curriculum, was part of Study 2.

### **Study 1: Adding Walkthroughs to a Lunchtime Gaming Club**

In this first case study, students were invited to participate in an optional lunchtime club using *The Legend of Zelda: Windwaker*. This club was part of a pilot study conducted to determine the level of intervention required if digital games were be used to supplement

the existing Grade 6 Language Arts curriculum. A study in three phases, walkthroughs were introduced at the end of phase one and immediately deemed a “cheat” by supervisory teacher and student participants. This section explores the politics of cheating in games (Consalvo 2007) as well as the classroom (Murdoch, Miller & Kohlhardt 2004) and how these issues impact learning.

### **Study 2: Using Walkthroughs to address Language Arts Curriculum Objectives**

The second case study was a two-week classroom intervention where students played a game as part of their Grade 6 Language Arts curriculum. The goal of this study was to add more empirical evidence to support the claim that games can act as a learning tool in formal educational environments. Playing the age-appropriate and accessible game *Lost Winds 2*, walkthroughs were presented as being an essential text to be used as part of the unit, uptake by the students was less than optimal. While walkthroughs provide “lists of actions to perform to complete the game” (Juul 2002) and share similarities with other technical documentation (Vie 2008), students preferred to ask peers for help than consult the walkthrough. Kringiel (2012) argues that walkthroughs contribute to both confidence and competency with technology for students, however, classroom ecology, in this case, played a role in the value and usage of peripheral texts.

### **Study 3: Walkthroughs as a Teacher Aid**

The final case study explores how walkthroughs support classroom teachers in order to help them implement games for learning. Reporting on the findings of a study of 30 teachers across 10 school boards in [anonymized region] in which an original game was used to teach elementary level geography, this section demonstrates the value of support documents (walkthroughs) and training for educators since knowledge of games is required in order to create effective pedagogical strategies (Lankshear & Knobel 2006).

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