



Reframing and refocusing the rhetoric of play

“The very act of playing [...] assumes certain privileges and how we interact with others [...] just the kind of social and financial and cultural capitals that people need to play [...] I think we don’t necessarily think about those people that don’t sit within the same paradigms”- Quote from an interview with a researcher. R09.

Keywords: [dialogue](#), [Ethics and Games](#), [Gamification](#)

Who will find this scenario particularly interesting? [Educators](#), [Policy makers](#), [Researchers](#)

Description

As one of the multiple ethical considerations raised by our participants, a notion of ‘play as privilege’ was posed by one researcher during our interviews, highlighting a specific ethical concern around the assumptions made about the use of video games and gamification techniques in particular contexts. This suggests the need for a consideration of ethics around video games that is

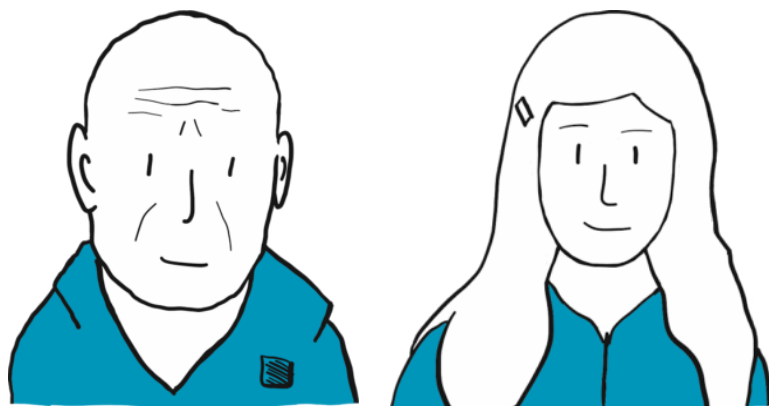


highly contextualised and dependent on the particular experiences of those involved in gameplay. Here, ethics is positioned as being contingent on social factors, rather than necessarily being an inherent feature of the game itself. Moreover, it suggests that any

ethical agenda around video game scholarship should include a careful critique of the context in which the game is situated and the privileges that are being assumed (or otherwise) by the researcher.

This scenario, therefore, is about reframing and refocusing the rhetoric of play in social research. Instead of taking a top-down approach, where a gamified strategy is viewed as a universal 'magic bullet' for improving an educational experience, the researcher adopts a 'bottom-up' mindset, involving the participants in the design of the project.

Meet Iain, a digital media researcher and Ruby (aged 8) a school pupil



Iain has designed a project to look at the affordances and constraints of using a video game in a geography lesson, with a particular focus on the attitudes and experiences of the participants involved. Rather than focussing purely on the educational outcomes of the planned intervention, Iain is careful to explore with the children their perceptions of the task. Moreover, working alongside the children, rather than dictating the approach he tentatively designed, he encourages them to explore their own usage of the game. Taking advice from the children, he adapts the approach to suit their needs. He ensures, for instance, that the intervention allows for independent work, as well as group work as some of the children express their anxiety at being made to play alongside others. Some children also explain that they feel that they need access to more conventional learning materials, such as books and on-screen texts, in order to help them make sense of the learning task.



By the end of the intervention, Iain has developed a complex and multi-layered approach to incorporating a video game into a particular educational context which is perhaps much more nuanced than the original top-down approach he had in mind. While this approach could not necessarily be adopted in every context, Iain's final research output makes a number of valuable methodological recommendations for researchers and educators looking to make use of video games in a range of contexts.

In a nutshell

Play can be powerful, enjoyable, exciting and empowering. However, play does not suit everyone, all the time.

We need to take a critical approach to game play in order to consider more about the context in which it may and may not be most appropriate.

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Partners



