

DIDACTIC DESIGN, READING THROUGH THE EYES OF THE AVATAR

The purpose of this paper is to discuss and analyze a recent pilot study which aimed to develop and test a series of carefully chosen approaches to reading in the classroom in order to improve pupils' reading skills. The aim was to stimulate readings that were both engaging and critical as well as to develop advanced reading and interpretation skills and the ability to express these skills (Vischer Bruns, 2011). Using Design-based-research (Barab & Squire, 2004), the study used elements from fan-fiction and gamification in order to engage the students in the fictional universe of a novel (Gee & Hayes, 2011). Twenty-five pupils in a Swedish secondary school read a classic novel in the form of a printed book and followed the designed digital learning environment created for the novel in combination with curriculum standards with the aim of developing the students' reading over a two month period. Whilst reading, they created an avatar based on one of the characters in the novel, and this fictional persona was the supposed author of a blog (Coleman, 2011). The analysis of the plans, observations of the lessons, the pupils' blogs and interviews with the pupils yielded two major findings. Firstly, the combination of reading and writing through an avatar challenges the pupils to read more deeply and to express themselves creatively. The difficulties the pupils experienced in reading the classic novel was partially overcome through the use of an avatar. In order to understand the novel, the pupils had to struggle and read some parts several times. Their engagement with their own story maintained their motivation whilst they read a challenging novel.

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