

“Games are lit”: The Affective and Pleasurable Reading of Narrative-Based Video Games as
Complex Texts and Implications for English Language Arts Curriculum and Pedagogy

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Abstract

The past two decades have seen a steady decline in reading motivation, performance, and enjoyment in adolescent learners as they progress through secondary school. This has been attributed to current majoritarian tendencies in English Language Arts courses that honour archaic notions of literacy and literary text, and fail to instill a love of reading and lifelong reading habits in young pupils. Exploring an alternative to these common approaches, this thesis research seeks to delineate the ways in which narrative-based video games can be read as complex, multimodal texts to foster affective engagement and opportunities for pleasurable reading. Meeting weekly over the course of a two month-long period at a youth center in Montréal, Canada, study participants played through *Persona 5* (2016): a video game largely centered upon complex storylines, narrative-based technique, and themes commonly found in young-adult literature. With an affect-based perspective and relational materialist methodological approach employed, data were examined according to the unit of analysis of felt focal moments. These methods captured the ways in which meaning-making with new media was an ever-evolving, unpredictable, and embodied process allowing collaborative and felt literacy events to come into being. Findings were utilized to inform an effective and affective pedagogy serving as a tool for English Language Arts educators to better harness the tremendous potential for engaging adolescent students with narrative-based video games. This thesis study addresses a gap in existing research and sets a precedent for future studies to expand knowledge of meaning-making and engagement with new media texts in educational settings.

Résumé

Au cours des deux dernières décennies, on a observé une baisse constante de la motivation et du plaisir de lire chez les étudiants adolescents à mesure qu'ils progressent à l'école secondaire. Cela est un résultat de l'éducation axée sur la majorité dans les cours d'anglais langue maternelle qui honorent les notions archaïques de l'alphabétisation et du texte littéraire, et ne parviennent pas à inculquer un amour de la lecture et des habitudes de lecture chez les jeunes élèves. Afin d'explorer une alternative à ces tendances communes, cette recherche vise à mieux comprendre les façons dont les jeux vidéos narratifs peuvent être lus comme des textes complexes qui favorisent l'engagement affectif et les opportunités pour la lecture ludique. Au cours d'une période de deux mois, les participants se sont rencontrés chaque semaine dans un centre jeunesse à Montréal (Canada) pour jouer à *Persona 5* (2016): un jeu vidéo largement centré sur des techniques narratives, personnages complexes et thèmes souvent retrouvés dans la littérature pour les jeunes adultes. Une perspective basée sur l'engagement affectif et une approche méthodologique "relational materialist" ont été utilisées. Les résultats ont été examinés en fonction de l'unité d'analyse des "felt focal moments" afin d'explorer la recherche de signification à travers de nouveaux médias comme un processus ressenti, imprévisible, et en évolution constante qui permettait la tenue d'événements d'alphabétisation collaboratifs. Les principaux résultats découlant de cette étude ont été utilisés dans le but d'éclairer une pédagogie efficace et affective servant comme outil pour les éducateurs des cours d'anglais langue maternelle qui permet de mieux exploiter l'énorme potentiel des jeux vidéos narratifs. Cette étude établit un précédent pour de recherches futures qui contribue au développement des connaissances par rapport à l'utilisation des textes de nouveaux médias dans les milieux éducatifs.

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A final thanks goes out to my wonderful family and friends: thank you for your continued and unwavering motivation, love, and support. I am where I am today because of all of you.

Introduction & Research Rationale

Reading can change your life, it can inform, motivate, inspire and elevate; but it must be reading you do for yourself, at your own pace, in your own way, and that has a bearing on your own background, interests, values, beliefs and aspirations. Reading that is forced on you in a mechanistic way and formally assessed may have the reverse effect, the major purpose becoming pleasing the teacher and passing tests, and a preoccupation with form rather than substance. (Woods, 2001, p. 74-75)

Bored. Confused. Isolated. When reflecting back to time spent in English classrooms throughout high school, these are the sentiments that come to mind. *Bored* by the tediously repetitive reading material and assessments; *Confused* that unique interpretations and opinions failed to align with those of educators; *Isolated* when nothing read connected to personal experiences and feelings of inadequacy silenced involvement. *Engaged. Empowered. Included.* Fast-forward to literature courses taken in university featuring a diverse range of multimodal texts and pedagogical strategies. *Engaged* during moments of shared inquiry that resisted the dominance of any one voice or perspective; *Empowered* seeing the backgrounds, lived experiences, and interests of all in the classroom shine through the curriculum. *Included* when feelings of connection to literature inspired passionate participation and pupils had a crucial role to play in how the course unfolded. *Engaged. Empowered. Included:* the sentiments English Language Arts (ELA) educators should strive to elicit in their students through moments of exciting, curious, unpredictable, and pleasurable interaction with texts of varied form.

Yet, research has shown that reading for pleasure increases throughout childhood until the age of 12-13, at which point it declines throughout adolescence during secondary school (Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Cremin, 2008; Howard, 2011; International Reading Association, 2014; Clark & Rumbold, 2016). Studies also emphasize a drop in reading performance levels (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2018), and a decline in voluntary reading done by individuals aged 13-17 years old (Howard, 2011; Ivey & Johnston, 2013). This noticeable decline in voluntary reading

as students progress through their educational careers can be attributed to a failure to instill a love of reading and lifelong literacy habits, both through curricular and pedagogical strategies (Cuban, 2007; Gallagher, 2009; Clark & Rumbold, 2016; Niccolini, 2016). These failings are closely connected to the attitudes many high school ELA educators have towards the way literacy development and literary text should be taught, particularly in the higher grades: attitudes, research shows, often begin early in teaching careers (Smith et al., 2017). Such sentiments result in the problematic current majoritarian tendencies in secondary ELA classrooms that can be grouped into three main categories: expecting uniform outcomes to facilitate evaluation, minimizing the role of deep interpretation of literature, and requiring students to read the same standard texts. In addition to causing disengagement and disconnect in language-learning contexts, the popularization of such practices can result in lifelong detrimental impacts to literacy development and reading practices.

My desire to challenge the pedagogical and curricular norms and develop a new and better way to foster pleasurable engagement with text came into being when personal experiences in ELA courses collided with an exploration of the above-mentioned research. Inspiration on how best to proceed with such a goal came during a weekly visit to a youth center in Montréal, Chalet Kent, where I felt the embodied, visceral moments of enjoyment, connection, and affective engagement that permeated when a group of adolescent individuals played *Super Smash Bros. Ultimate* (2018). After a conversation with one of the adolescents at the center about the wide world of video games, I discovered the genre of narrative-based games and their potential to be read as complex text. While initially I had little understanding of gaming, I became driven to investigate how this medium could be used within an ELA context. And so, this study's research objective was born: To explore the ways in which narrative-based video

games can foster affective engagement with complex text and opportunities for pleasure reading with the overall aim of providing an alternative to common approaches to literacy instruction in secondary ELA programs. In order to create the conditions for data collection, the gamesRlit club was formed at Chalet Kent: meeting weekly over the span of a two month-long period, the club's participants played through *Persona 5* (2016), a video game largely centered upon complex storylines, narrative-based technique, and themes commonly found in young adult literature.

The following research question and sub-questions guided data collection and analysis:

- RQ1: How did the gamesRlit club's collaborative play of the narrative-based video game *Persona 5* elicit moments of affective engagement and pleasurable reading of complex text identified through felt focal moments?
 - RQ1a: How were identified felt focal moments of affective and pleasurable engagement with text experienced individually and collectively among the club's participants?
 - RQ1b: How can identified felt focal moments be differentiated according to this paper's definition of pleasure reading (agency, connection, and discovery)?

These research questions were informed by an affect-based theoretical framework, and explored through a triangulation of data sources: participant observations and field notes, video recordings of gameplay sessions, and semi-structured interviews with one adolescent participant after gameplay sessions and over the online chat platform Discord. Data were reduced to the relational materialist unit of analysis of "felt focal moments", in which moments of intensity and energy, produced through affective atmospheres, were felt upon bodies and caused unexpected meaning-making (Hollett & Ehret, 2015). An anthropological methodology centered upon "correspondence" (Ingold, 2013) was adopted in order to allow myself, as researcher and participant, to become immersed in the group's literacy practices in an authentic, embodied way. Findings were analyzed to identify trends assisting in curricular and pedagogical implementation

relating to lifelong literacy development through pleasure reading using narrative-based video games as text.

While researchers have explored the integration of narrative-based games in the ELA context, studies are rare and commonly met with apprehension due to misconceptions held towards video games and narrowly defined views of what counts as literacy and literary text. This study seeks to fortify preexisting research while including the unique dimension of exploring the ways in which affective engagement and pleasure reading are fostered when narrative-based video games are read as complex, multimodal text. As one of the study's overarching aims is to challenge majoritarian tendencies in secondary language-learning courses that fail to help adolescents forge lifelong literacy practices, it became crucial that narrative-based games be explored through the lens of pleasurable reading.

The diverse benefits of pleasurable engagement with text have been well-documented in research: With its ability to improve overall literacy and thinking skills, foster greater success in varying subject areas, and clarify career goals, pleasure reading plays a tremendous role in academic motivation and achievement (Clark & Rumbold, 2008; Steinkuehler, 2010; Advisory Board on English Education, 2011; Howard, 2011; Pruzinsky, 2014; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016; Garces-Bacsal et al., 2018). Furthermore, the connection to texts made possible through pleasure reading allows for the development of “a more nuanced self-identification, self-construction, and meaning-making” (Garces-Bacsal et al., 2018, p. 95). In addition to this “inner work” (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016, p. 29), a deepened sense of social conscience, empathy, and understanding of the world has been identified as an outcome of connecting to a text's characters and experiencing the social bonds forged through literary communities (Cremin, 2008; Howard, 2011; Ivey & Johnston, 2012; Murphy, 2013). One must also not overlook the purely joyous, affective, and

immersive pleasures individuals experience through engagement with text that should be valued and celebrated in educational contexts (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016; Smith et al., 2017).

With such diverse and powerful benefits, it stands to reason that any multimodal text providing students the opportunity to engage in pleasure reading should be considered for secondary ELA curricula. Narrative-based video games are an example of such text, and an equally compelling outcome of their use in language-learning courses comes in the form of honouring the diverse interests and out-of-school literacies of adolescents (Apperley & Beavis, 2013; Beavis, 2014; Burnett & Merchant, 2018). This reorientation of more traditional conceptions of literacy and literary text is important during a time when the new media practices permeating all facets of daily life have become increasingly digitized. While this broadened understanding of text is indeed of great importance, this study's affective perspective seeks to move away from an over-reliance on text-centered approaches that work to standardize meaning-making and strip away opportunities for unpredictable and embodied intensities. The pleasurable and affective experiences felt when reading narrative-based games as complex, multimodal text will instead be a central focus. The following chapter will begin laying the foundations for this research through an exploration of pleasure reading and the ways in which it can be fostered through narrative-based video games.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

This literature review begins with a delineation of definitions of pleasure reading in salient research, followed by a description of how such research has informed the definition of pleasurable engagement with text employed throughout the thesis study. Subsequently, research addressing the particular potential for young adult literature and video games as educational tools to foster opportunities for pleasure reading is detailed. Focus then shifts to narrative-based video games in order to describe the ways in which they can be read as complex texts for pleasurable and affective engagement. The literature review finishes by addressing the current gap in research pertaining to the use of narrative-based games as pedagogical tools in secondary ELA contexts to inspire a love of reading and the development of lifelong literacy practices.

Definition of Reading for Pleasure

Pleasurable engagement with text, defined in heterogeneous terms by academic researchers, has been championed by individuals from varied fields of interest (Clark & Rumbold, 2008; Cremin, 2008; Steinkuehler, 2010; Howard, 2011; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Murphy, 2013; Pruzinsky, 2014; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016; Garces-Bacsal et al., 2018). Burnett and Merchant (2018) attribute this sweeping understanding of pleasure reading to its not including or excluding “any particular kind of textual engagement or reading purpose... It appeals to traditionalists by evoking a golden age before screens, when children escaped into imagined worlds through curling up with classic works, but it also acts as an important counterbalance to policies that focus on literacy skills at the expense of meaningful and empowering encounters with texts” (p. 62). To some, pleasure reading manifests quite literally as “high fun” and imaginative experience allowing for escapism and playfulness (Nell, 1988; Alter,

1996; Ivey & Johnston, 2013). While not inaccurate, such simplified interpretations have resulted in the deficit view of pleasure reading as being a light, recreational, and leisurely activity taking place outside of educational contexts (Murphy, 2013; International Reading Association, 2014).

These opinions play a role in influencing the decision to implement pleasure reading into curricular and pedagogical objectives, but they are combated by the view that a definition must instead be based upon the deeply profound and meaningful emotional connections pleasurable engagement allows one to make to texts; in school and beyond (International Reading Association, 2014). According to Nell (1988), text navigators partake in “ludic reading” when they experience deep engagement through pleasurable encounters with text. Further, to Cremin (2008), reading for pleasure “is oriented towards finding personal meaning and purpose and related to the human need to make sense of the world, the desire to understand, to make things work, to make connections, engage emotionally and feel deeply” (p. 172). Although many choose to delineate pleasure reading into narrow categorizations and textual forms (mainly print novels), this study navigates a definition built upon numerous facets and perspectives that can be applied to various textual mediums. Such a definition promotes an understanding that pleasure reading is about more than *text*: it’s about *feeling*. From print formats and graphic novels, to film and narrative-based video games: *Pleasurable engagement with text means eliciting feelings of agency, connection, and discovery.*

Agency - Text Choice and Navigation

Agency in text choice and navigation is identified as a key component of reading for pleasure. Yet, in secondary ELA classes, removing the possibility for students to select texts and

the methods of reading and analyzing texts is often common practice. Such tendencies can prove to be detrimental to engagement in pleasure reading and the development of lifelong literacy habits. Conversely, exposing pupils to a wide array of text genres, authors, styles, and formats will foster opportunities for authentic reading and support the development of a lifelong reader profile (Cremin, 2008; Booth, 2014; Clark & Rumbold, 2016; Québec Education Program, 2018b). Print texts are often considered in such discussions, but it is equally important to acknowledge the diverse range of popular and multimedia texts such as blogs, films, video games, and social media platforms (The International Reading Association, 2014). Educators choosing to rely solely on canonical works and other forms of print text are depriving students not only of the opportunity to engage in pleasurable reading, but also to develop the skills to navigate, interpret, and critique different textual forms they will undoubtedly come into contact with outside of the educational sphere.

While there will certainly be instances during which students cannot select the texts they utilize in ELA courses - the reading of a class novel or a specific text included in the curriculum such as Shakespeare's works, for example - allowing freedom in text *navigation* should always be an option. According to Gallagher (2009), "Our students should be reading through many windows, not just a single, narrow window that gives them a view of the next exam (p. 29). When educators choose to guide student reading and interpretation, they limit the vast potential for meaning-making, critical thinking, and connection available in a given text. Focus is instead placed on valuing the educator's interpretation as a "one-size-fits-all" experience, thus discrediting the unique backgrounds, histories, and perspectives of each student in the classroom. Rosenblatt sheds light on this pedagogical issue through a differentiation between "aesthetic" and "efferent" reading (1991). While an aesthetic reading - based on what the reader experiences,

thinks, and feels while interacting with a text - should be honoured in learning contexts, an efferent reading is often encouraged instead, in which the “predominant interest is in acquiring information that we wish to retain after reading has ended” (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 445). The desired aesthetic form of interaction with text is negatively impacted by assessments requiring pupils to lean into an efferent reading, thus depriving them of the “lived through” (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 447) and therefore personalized experience of navigating a piece of literature.

In spite of such valuable differentiations, pupils are commonly hurried away from an enriching aesthetic reading and opportunity to converse with text that is crucial when aiming to foster pleasure reading:

“Consider the nature of what happens when we read a book.... It isn’t like a lecture: it’s like a conversation. There’s a back-and-forthness about it. The book proposes, the reader questions, the book responds, the reader considers. And we are active about the process... We can skim or we can read it slowly; we can read every word, or we can skip long passages; we can read it in the order it presents itself, or we can read it in any order we please; we can look at the last page first, or decide to wait for it; we can put the book down and... we can assent or we can disagree” (Clark & Rumbold, 2016, p. 6).

In order to encourage students to converse with the complex texts they interact with in a meaningful way, such discussions must be on their own terms, and with texts they feel connected to. It is for this reason that agency in text choice and navigation is essential if we are to promote a pleasurable and personalized engagement with texts of varying formats.

Connection - Self and Community

Agency, albeit vital, does not stand alone in the quest to define pleasurable reading. Equally important is the creation of connection, both to self and to community, through engagement with text. According to Wilhelm and Smith (2016), reading provides students with a valuable opportunity to “name themselves and to affiliate with others” (p. 30). This form of

growth begins by fostering a deep relationship with past, present, and future conceptions of self. Oftentimes, texts have the ability to allow an individual to forge connections to past versions of self by inspiring feelings of nostalgia and evoking childhood memories of warmth: “Owning a first book as a child, retaining a text which connects to a significant memory and lending/borrowing a book to/from a friend, all reflect a function of the desire to read, indicate a degree of delight in reading itself and the need to share one’s affective engagement” (Cremin, 2008, p. 6).

These connections to versions-of-self move from past to present when readers engage with texts reflecting current situations or events in life and experience “the potency of recognizing [themselves] in what [they] read” (Naidoo, 2003). Such connection creates the space for “emotional support” (Cremin, 2008, p. 73), “imaginative rehearsal for negotiating difficult situations” (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016, p. 29), and “a more nuanced self-identification, self-construction, and meaning-making” (Garces-Bascal et al., 2018, p. 95). Each reader in the classroom “brings to the text a reservoir of past experiences with language and the world. If the signs on the page are linked to elements in that reservoir, these linkages rise into consciousness. All readers must draw on past experiences to make the new meanings produced in the transaction with the text” (Rosenblatt, 1991, p. 445). Such reflection on the present self allows one to engage in a form of “inner work” (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016, p. 29) that helps forge a connection to conceptions of the future self. In this regard, reading is used to “help [...] construct the kind of people [we want] to become” through an increased “awareness of the deeper layers of consciousness within us and [movement] toward integration of the total self - to actualizing the full possibilities of our human potential” (Smith et al., 2017, p. 171).

These connections to past, present, and future conceptions of *self* are extensions of the connections pleasure reading allows one to make with *others* in varying ways. Naidoo (2003) reflected on Anne Frank's diary being "the first book that made me realise that reading is real... I still feel connected to her voice 40 years on - I still have my first copy - I could not part with it". The connection forged between a reader and the authors, characters, and ideas in a given text open the diverse perspectives of others, and, in turn, create space for a heightened social conscience, sense of empathy, and understanding of the world (Howard, 2011; Murphy, 2013; Smith et al., 2017). These connections can spring from the physical confines of the navigated text and become "inextricably entangled not just with text but with other people, places and things" (Burnett & Merchant, 2018, p. 67). Through the formation of literary communities, both in and out of the classroom, individuals become more socially connected, trusting, and accepting (Ivey & Johnston, 2012; Murphy, 2013; Wilhelm & Smith, 2016). While such connections are immensely varied, they are essential in some capacity in order for a truly meaningful pleasurable reading experience to occur.

Discovery - Playful and Intellectual

Along with agency and connection, discovery completes this paper's definition of pleasure reading. This discovery can take on two different yet equally valuable forms: playful discovery and intellectual discovery. While the playful component of pleasure reading is not novel, it has been described in differing ways by scholars; such as "enchantment" (Burnett & Merchant, 2018, p. 63), "immersive play pleasure" (Wilhelm & Smith, 2016, p. 27), and being "caught in a web of fiction or non-fiction" (Cremin, 2008, p. 172). However varied these descriptions, there is no doubting the importance playful discovery has in inspiring connection

and encouraging individuals to return to a text (Cremin, 2008). According to Wilhelm and Smith (2016), playful discovery is “absolutely necessary to engaged reading, and is prerequisite to experiencing all the other pleasures, functions, and benefits of reading that could potentially follow” (p. 27). While playful discovery is indeed a powerful motivator, the profound joy inspired by intellectual discovery must also be acknowledged.

Smith, Wilhelm, and Fransen (2017) identified intellectual pleasure as a powerful facet of pleasurable reading. The researchers cite Dewey in their description of the ways in which the opportunity to solve problems and “figure things out” through inquiry-based learning provides individuals with a profound sense of pleasure. This intellectual discovery can take on numerous forms for readers navigating varied textual mediums: pondering character development and decision-making while reading a piece of fiction; unveiling new meaning by making connections between image and text in a graphic novel; thinking of an alternative ending while watching a film; or deciding on the best strategy to use when faced with a challenging boss in a video game. Additionally, pleasure reading can reflect intellectual discovery on the more traditional academic and cognitive basis of strengthening literacy skills (Clark & Rumbold, 2008; Advisory Board on English Education, 2011; Garces-Bacsal et al., 2018). Regardless of the ways in which intellectual and playful discovery manifest, they are a key component and work alongside connection and agency to fully form this study’s definition of pleasure reading.

The Particular Potential for Young Adult Literature and Video Games to Foster Pleasure in an Educational Context

While reading for pleasure as defined above can indeed be fostered through various texts and environments, when considering the secondary ELA context it is crucial to integrate student interests and popular culture into the curriculum. This has been proven to be an effective way to

promote not only pleasurable interactions with text, but active engagement and connection between in-and-out-of-school lives as well (Beavis, 2014). Steinkuehler (2010) corroborates this point through the documented growth a young participant underwent when given the opportunity to choose the material he navigated in his English course. While this participant was failing ELA and reading three grades below his age-level, outside of school he was an avid reader of novels based on video game narratives and wrote three books of his own: “His reading and writing gave him authority and social capital in his peer group, where the practices of writing and sharing fanfiction based on each contributor’s specialized game-based interests were overtly encouraged and supported” (Steinkuehler, 2010, p. 62). When given the opportunity to select the topic he could read about, the participant chose a text intended for individuals four grades above his diagnosed reading level: “The difference lay in his self-correction rate. When Julio could self-select a topic, one that he intended to use to improve his subsequent game-play, he persisted in the face of challenges, struggling through obstacles until he got the meaning. He cared. On the assigned texts, he did not” (p. 62). This powerful case study, and many others like it, solidify the argument that when students connect to the texts they interact with, their motivation and pleasurable engagement increases.

Young Adult Literature in an Educational Context

Similar success is documented with the implementation of young adult literature (YAL) into the ELA curriculum. According to Buehler (2016), YA texts, with the common central theme of personal growth and identity formation from the perspective of a teen protagonist, widely differ in content and format:

“Contemporary young adult novels present unreliable narrators, multiple points of view, magical realism, satire, ambiguous endings, poetic dialogue, literary allusions, and

multigenre formats. They explore disability, art, and injustice, along with more familiar topics such as sports, school cliques, and first love. At the same time, young adult nonfiction titles introduce teens to the power of stories based on oral history interviews, archival research, and scientific fieldwork. As much as any other literary genre, young adult literature can dazzle students with an artful sentence, draw them into moral and ethical debates, and stir them to greater critical consciousness” (p. 3-4).

These variances in YA texts allow readers to experience one of the crucial facets of pleasure reading outlined in the paper’s previous section: playful and intellectual discovery. While those opposed to YA texts claim they are not appropriate or viable for classroom use due to mature subject matter or lack of rigor, YAL author Amy Sarig King (2015) believes this is due to a “teen-bashing culture” that devalues the interests and underestimates the intelligence of young people. In actuality, YAL contains complex themes, structures, characters, and issues, thus providing readers with texts to not only be enjoyed, but read closely, deeply, critically, and analytically (Salvner, 2000; Kaywell, 2007; Buehler, 2016; Ivey, 2017).

Further, and perhaps more salient, is the possibility for connection, both to self and community, YAL offers to young readers (another facet of pleasurable engagement with text as outlined in the paper’s previous section). Ivey and Johnston (2013 & 2017) conducted interviews with students and teachers and found that YA texts were meaningful to young individuals and became touchstone pieces in their reading lives. The incorporation of such texts resulted in a more engaged reading process, and positively transformed the classroom community into one of social connection, acceptance, and trust. Similarly, Wilhelm and Smith (2016) argue for the potential YAL presents for young people to name and identify themselves through reading. Such texts honour the interests and varied experiences of adolescents, while introducing them to difficult, often taboo topics such as sexuality, religion, racism, disability, mental illness, poverty, and bullying (Buehler, 2016; Ivey, 2017). According to Buehler (2016), because “young adult literature is rooted in students’ identities as adolescents, and because it is so vast a field, it is

uniquely suited to the goal of helping students develop identities as readers, along with the willingness to read widely and critically” (p. 8).

However, to reap the varied benefits of incorporating YA texts into the ELA curriculum, one must also adopt a pedagogy that promotes “love of reading, improving skills in reading, and connecting reading to real-world contexts” (Buehler, 2016, p. 13), while simultaneously combating the commonly teacher-centered approaches to literacy learning. Through such pedagogical strategies, students will be given agency in both text choice and navigation (this paper’s final facet of pleasurable engagement with text), thus providing them with reading and meaning-making experiences that are relevant to them personally, socially, and academically.

Video Games in an Educational Context

While the vast potential for popular culture texts, such as YAL, has been increasingly acknowledged and accepted in educational spheres, many teachers continue to show hesitation when the content of these texts transitions to non-print-based formats, such as video games (Beavis, 2014; Waddington, 2015). Misconceptions about video games have been around since their inception, and a negative reputation has followed and remains with many present-day parents, educators, and policy makers in spite of the body of scholarly publications delineating their merits (Ma & Oikonomou, 2017; Young & Slota, 2017; Karsenti, 2019). While critiques targeting components such as the violent and sexually explicit content featured in certain games, and the negative impact gaming can have on young peoples’ social and academic lives are not unwarranted, they are not a reason to discredit the vast learning potential this medium provides when utilized effectively in the classroom (Barko & Sadler, 2013). Proponents of the “serious games movement” (Djaouti et al., 2011) aim to remedy these misconceptions by showing the

power video games have to “attract, engage, connect, and teach game players critical content in the games’ respective focus area” (Annetta et al., 2006, p. 16), while providing opportunities for learning, socialization, and enjoyment (Karsenti, 2019). To demonstrate how video games can indeed be used in an educational context, and more specifically in an ELA context, to foster pleasurable engagement, the following section classifies the diverse benefits brought about through gameplay according to this paper’s definition of pleasure reading. Before proceeding with such, an in-depth exploration of how narrative-based video games can be read as text will be delineated. It should, however, be noted that the intent is not to insinuate that video games could or should replace print and other multimodal formats, but instead to illuminate how they can be used alongside these texts in order to foster engagement based on both pleasurable and rigorous learning.

The Particular Potential for Reading Narrative-Based Video Games as Text to Foster Pleasure in an Educational Context

Given the powerful potential video games possess in eliciting profound joy and connection in various subject areas, their use in an ELA context to inspire pleasurable reading experiences must be explored. However, before such an exploration can commence, selecting the type of video game best suited for such purposes is of great importance. While the diverse range of games available for consumption can indeed inspire a plethora of learning opportunities in various school subjects - *Second Life* (2003) to foster perspective taking in Ethics courses, the *Assassin's Creed* series (2012-2018) to pique interest in historical events, or *Radix Endeavor* (2014) for exploration and experimentation in Math and Science classes - the narrative-based game and its integration into linguistic curricula and pedagogy will be this thesis study’s predominant focus.

Defining Narrative-Based Video Games

Throughout the decades individuals have been whisked away by game narratives. The 1970s-1990s saw games such as *Adventure and Zork* (1970), *The Legend of Zelda* (1986), and *The Secret of Monkey Island* (1990) that provided players with the opportunity to navigate complex narratives and engage in varying forms of interaction with game characters and other players using text-based communications: “Despite the technical limitations during those periods, the growing sophistication of interactive storytelling demonstrated how game content and narrative may be expanded to provide a greater sense of meaning and immersion to the tasks performed by the player” (Ip, 2011, p. 104). Modern games have continued to “push the boundaries of storytelling in a meaningful way” (Ostenson, 2013, p. 71), regardless of genre and quest objectives: massively popular futuristic games (e.g. *Detroit: Become Human* (2018)), games centered on character choices and interactions (*Life Is Strange* (2015)), and fantasy games containing magic and mythical beasts (*Undertale* (2015)) are all linked by their focus on powerful and engaging storylines (Harris, 2020). Healy (2017) reveals how recent reviews and surveys show narrative to be more important than graphics quality and gameplay in the most successful contemporary video games. The tremendous appeal of robust and immersive narrative has even resulted in its incorporation into genres with “traditionally vacuous storylines, particularly those among the action, fighting, and shooting categories, with titles such as *God of War* (2005), *Half-Life* (2001), and *Halo* (2001) being some prime examples” (Ip, 2011, p. 104). While they have gained popularity in the gaming community, in order to effectively harness the power and potential of these “monster-pleasure-makers” in an ELA context, exploring the ways in which games are built as narrative medium becomes essential.

While some scholars argue that the digital storytelling and interactive narratives in video games “represent some of the important storytelling in the 21st century” (Ostenson, 2013, p. 71), the topic remains a contentious one in the academic community (Curwood, 2019). Debate stems from the notion that narrative, considered by some to be prescriptive and passive by nature, is not compatible with the innate interactivity featured in video games (Murray, 2000; Louchart et al., 2007; Reeve, 2009; Ip, 2011). It therefore becomes impossible to equate the relationship between game and player to that of story and reader (Juul, 2001). Although there is validity in these notions, it must be noted that narrative-based games present a form of storytelling that has not been brought into existence to rival or bear comparison to more traditional forms. Much like oral tradition, film, and music, narrative-based video games present distinct methods of composing and communicating story. Ip (2011) details the diverse narrative techniques in computer and video games such as background stories, cutscenes, and environmental descriptions. Particular focus is also placed on the numerous established narrative structures in games, originally defined by Bateman (2005), working to alter the nature of storytelling.

Through the six broad categories of game narrative (linear traditional, branching, parallel paths, threaded, dynamic, and implied), the relationship between author and player becomes increasingly complex and layered. With linear traditional narratives, for example, although actively participating in the unfolding of story through gameplay, the user navigates the game as a passive receiver of information down a path that is predetermined by the game’s author (Reeve, 2009). Conversely, with branching narratives, the player is able to make consequential choices that influence a finite number of available paths, options, interactions, and outcomes within the game: “The game designer determines all the available options but the user decides the route through them... This reflects real life, where every choice provokes an avalanche of outcomes

and where future options are a direct result of an individual's behaviour" (Reeve, 2009, p. 79 & 80). This co-authorship is taken even further with an implied narrative, where, in games like *The Sims*, "there really is no writer-defined narrative per se, but the stories emerge from a dynamic play environment" (Bateman, 2005, para. 7). Louchart et al. (2007) refer to these varied forms of collaborative storytelling as "the emergent narrative". According to this concept, the storyline in a narrative-based game is interactive, and the task of creating it is shared by the game author *and* the players. It, therefore, differs from "the common linear storytelling tradition" (Louchart et al., 2007, p. 22) in that the three-act plot structure (beginning, middle, and end) will vary based on decisions made by players. While the participatory component of video games marks difference from more traditional forms of storytelling, elements such as a logical sequence of events, archetypal and recurring characters, linked plot components, considerations of audience, and narrative technique mark similarity (Reeve, 2009; Ip, 2011).

Reading Narrative-Based Video Games as Text in an Educational Context

For some, harnessing the unique and compelling storytelling potential of narrative-based games in an ELA context will require a necessary reframing of considerations of literature (Berger & McDougall, 2013): "Despite the dominant position the traditional written narrative has assumed in the modern English classroom, we must acknowledge that this is not the only (or even, always, the best) medium for telling stories" (Ostenson, 2013, p. 72). In fact, research strongly supports the incorporation of digital and video games into classroom teaching, and illuminates how games with narrative focus can foster the development of literary practices, critical reading strategies, and engagement in ways traditional texts cannot (Gee, 2003; Steinkuehler, 2010; Berger & McDougall, 2013; Ostenson, 2013; Curwood, 2019). While such

findings provide an evidentiary argument for the study of games as text in an ELA context, theorists believe their unique playable (or ludic) quality must be an essential component of such study: “Being able to collaboratively interact with a narrative is a sociocultural learning experience that is unique to the form, and it is these “characteristics of interactivity and embodiment” (Chen, 2013, p. 414) that scholars agree should be considered when addressing games in the classroom” (Curwood, 2019, p. 5). To Apperley and Beavis (2011 & 2013), this acknowledgement comes in the form of a *critical games literacy* in which games are read both as *text* and as *action*. While the games-as-text layer of analysis is associated with “digital iterations of ‘reading’ (or playing) and ‘writing’ (or producing) in combination and in multimodal forms” and “fleshes out a spectrum of literacy and learning outcomes that are intimately related to context” (Apperley & Beavis, 2013, p. 2 & 5), the games-as-action layer speaks to the “*action*-based processes of digital gameplay” and the “dynamic interplay between game and player” (Apperley & Beavis, 2013, p. 2).

This framework was utilized in a study taking place in several secondary schools with grade 7-12 classes in which teachers developed video game-based units with their students. While the games and activities varied, results showed their integration marked not only “critical and literary forms of reading, response, creativity and literacy practice” (Apperley & Beavis, 2011, p. 139), but also a deepened understanding rooted in production and design achieved through gameplay. Ostenson (2013) corroborated these results in his study on the integration of video games in his English classes. Ostenson found that with certain games, players must take on an integral role in advancing the story, resolving conflict, and undergoing profound character development. As a result, such games uniquely provide users with the task of navigating large

quantities of descriptive text in a careful and critical fashion to effectively participate in the production of narrative through gameplay (Ostenson, 2013).

The challenge, therefore, does not lie in determining whether or not narrative-based video games can help pupils achieve curricular goals when utilized in an ELA context (they indeed can), but instead is related to “contemporary struggles over what English (and literacy) should do and be; with how traditional priorities, forms of organization and concerns might be reconfigured in “a curriculum built for change”” (Apperley & Beavis, 2011, p. 139-140). Curwood (2019) attributes these “traditional priorities” to a lack of case studies exploring the inclusion of narrative-based games in an ELA context. Results from her recent study based on the incorporation of the game *What Remains of Edith Finch* (2017) into a short story unit in a grade 10 English class found that students not only demonstrated heightened engagement and enjoyment, but also a deep understanding of the game as a narrative text, with focus on components such as theme, plot, characterisation, and literary techniques: “a narrative-driven video game was able to successfully engage students in the learning of narratives with little change in teacher pedagogy” (p. 12). This statement speaks to those reluctant to utilize video games in the sphere of education due to inexperience with the medium. While the teacher in the study initially expressed hesitation in fear the game would not be utilized in a way that strengthened his unit, he proceeded with the study employing curricular and pedagogical methods he was comfortable with:

“By conceptualising his teaching of the text through the lens of narrative rather than an explicit focus on the features of the new medium, Mr. Perry was able to fall into a familiar pedagogical rhythm that let him draw on a narrative “metalanguage” that he was “very comfortable with” while teaching an unfamiliar text type. Mr. Perry’s successful integration of *Edith Finch* despite not fixating on the ludic indicates that teachers without much gaming experience could successfully opt for a variety of pedagogical approaches while they acclimatise to the ludic element of the medium” (Curwood, 2019, p. 21).

These results not only evince the way in which curricular outcomes can be achieved through the use of narrative-based games, but also work to demonstrate how all individuals, no matter their backgrounds or histories with video games, can harness their incredible potential in order to inspire pleasurable and rigorous engagement.

Fostering Pleasure Reading through Narrative-Based Video Games

Considering the publication and dissemination of research detailing the potential for narrative-based video games to support learning, as well as their immense popularity globally, one may rightly ask why they have not become a more prominent component of ELA curricula and pedagogy (Barko & Sadler, 2013). According to Burnett and Merchant (2018), “what is often missing from debates about reading for pleasure are nuanced insights into the pleasure generated as children engage with, through and around popular and digital media” (p. 63). Regardless of misconceptions and unfavorable views, it would be difficult to deny the profound engagement and joy video games inspire in those who play them. These positive pleasurable experiences are not only fostered through recreational gameplay, as Curwood (2019) noted: “students demonstrated a consistently high level of engagement throughout the study due to their eagerness to engage with the game as a text and the in-class tasks that accompanied it. The students expressed a high level of engagement with the game because of its interactive, collaborative and visual qualities” (p. 16 & 17). The degree of student-interest achieved through narrative-based games plays a valuable role in heightening instances of joyful and rigorous learning in the classroom (Karsenti, 2019), and provides educators with a distinct opportunity to foster the facets of pleasurable reading defined and described in this paper: agency, connection, and discovery.

Perhaps one of the most notable facets built upon through gameplay is the opportunity for agency in text navigation brought on by the medium's interactivity (Bateman, 2005; Ip, 2011; Healy, 2017; Endacott, 2018). As previously addressed, many narrative-based games are unique from other texts in that they present a form of immersive storytelling that is not only complex and layered, but also *participatory*: "While a reader of a typical text can become lost in the world of the book, he or she is ultimately powerless to control the narrative and can only be a spectator. In video game narratives, however, effort is required of the reader - the choices a reader-player makes in a video game directly impact the outcomes of the narrative" (Ostenson, 2013, p. 76). The decision making and world building present in emergent narratives create the conditions for students to become active participants in the game through an immersion into the storyworld, taking on not only the role of audience and reader, but of writer and maker as well (Louchart et al., 2007; Reeve, 2009; Beavis, 2014). Navigating the text as *participant-players* and working to "take the novel as a literary form and expand and change it" creates a sense of autonomy and control in learning (Berger & McDougall, 2013, p. 146). This agency can be extended to text selection as well, as the vast realm of video games provides an endless selection of options well suited for varying unit topics. Embracing and integrating this facet of pleasurable engagement with text into learning environments will provide students with valuable content knowledge attained through their own active learning and development of expertise (Apperley & Beavis, 2011).

Not only are these intrinsic motivational and affective factors important for successful learning (Barko & Sadler, 2013), they help young pupils to build positive conceptions of and connections to self. This inner work is often reinforced through another unique component of video games: the ability to assume the identity of a character and experience challenges,

memorable moments, and growth through that character's perspective. Decisions made by participant-players as they navigate the game's landscape impact their chosen avatar's experience and introduce "alternative possible selves, or alternate possible worlds, and the limitless intersecting stories" (Murray, 2000, p. 38). Through this character-identification and role-playing, young people are able to name and identify themselves by pushing boundaries and exploring "the frontiers" of the storyworld (Ostenson, 2013, p. 77). The unique histories and backgrounds of each pupil in the classroom will be honoured as they infuse gameplay with personal experiences in order to create their own stories: stories that are not already designed or written for them, but simply "made possible" by game designers (Reeve, 2009; Healy, 2017). The relationship formed between player and onscreen characters "provokes the empathy of the real player for the imagined characters and improves the sense of presence for the user: it is emotional synthesis" (Reeve, 2009, p. 77). Not only will these formative connections and experiences open opportunities for an exploration of self in a safe environment, they will also lay the path for social bonding amongst peers as they share stories of their unique and varied gameplay, in turn creating a more connected, trusting, and accepting space in the classroom (Annetta et al., 2006). Moreover, these conversations can be carried to virtual communities, as the blogs, discussion forums, and fanfiction pages rapidly gaining popularity can open new worlds of possibility in educational contexts.

These new worlds offer a plethora of immensely varied and meaningful opportunities for playful and intellectual discovery in pupils as well. The strongly supported "vital role of play" (Karsenti, 2019, p. 3) in the development of knowledge and skills was corroborated by Ostenson (2013) in research following the integration of an interactive fiction game into an ELA course. Ostenson noted how the high quantities of reading, attention to detail, and problem solving

required as students navigated the game were sustained by its interactive and entertaining qualities. The unique narrative techniques, challenges, and complex characterizations present in such video games requires a constellation of literacy practices as players must take on an active role in decoding and interpreting a plethora of symbol systems such as text, sound, movement, and colour (Steinkuehler, 2006; Apperley & Beavis, 2013; Beavis, 2014). This process requires what Annetta et al. (2006) refer to as *modern literacy* that features three main components: “First, it includes not only text but also image and screen literacy. Second, it involves navigating information and assembling knowledge from fragments. Third, user-friendly technology when integrated effectively into a learning environment helps engage students in the “active” process of learning (p. 18). Encouraging this form of modern literacy in the classroom is an essential way to build on out-of-school literacies and to promote a critical perspective on the new media consumed in heaps on a daily basis (Burnett & Merchant, 2018).

Addressing a Gap in Research

As detailed in the sections above, given the powerful ability narrative-based video games hold in eliciting profound joy and connection in young individuals, and the unique and diverse storytelling they contain, it stands to reason that this field of immense interest should be widely utilized in order to inspire pleasurable reading experiences and heightened engagement in secondary ELA contexts. There are several problematic factors, however, currently preventing this from becoming common practice: As indicated by Curwood (2019), there is presently a lack of research exploring the inclusion of narrative-based games in ELA contexts. This gap works to exacerbate the misconceptions many individuals hold about the validity of reading games as text and incorporating them into linguistic-learning. Additionally, narrative-based games are not yet

well known to those inexperienced with the medium, thus making the popularization of their incorporation into secondary learning contexts difficult.

The research detailed in this thesis addresses these gaps through a study on the ways in which moments of affective engagement with and pleasure reading of complex text were fostered as the narrative-based game *Persona 5* (2016) was played over several sessions in the gamesRlit club. Implications from this study challenge narrow and archaic definitions of literature, while also providing an alternative to common approaches to literacy instruction in secondary school ELA programs that have led to a decline in reading motivation as students progress through their educational careers. In order for educators to fully reap the varied benefits of incorporating narrative-based games into their curriculum, a pedagogical approach for engaging youth with such texts is detailed in this thesis work.

Students have been playing with stories for decades – it's time for teachers to catch up (Curwood, 2019, p. 25).

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

The theoretical perspective utilized in this thesis study was inspired by frameworks exploring meaning-making and pleasurable engagement with new media texts. While the multimodal and, more precisely, game-studies frameworks popularized in recent decades (The New London Group, 1996; Jewitt, 2008; Steinkuehler, 2010; Barko & Sadler, 2013; Karsenti, 2019) do indeed help in forging understandings about the ways in which adolescents engage with complex, multimodal text, these frameworks have faced critique for their heavy reliance on text-centered approaches. Such frameworks fail to sufficiently consider the emotional complexities, embodied feelings, and “production of intensity” that come into being within, around, and amongst bodies as individuals “move with and through” texts (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 25). The following section delineates such critiques, explores the ways in which an affect-based theoretical framework works to remedy shortcomings, and describes the affective-perspective adopted in order to address my study’s research question and definition of pleasurable engagement with multimodal, complex text.

Multiliteracies Framework

Proponents of the multiliteracies framework advocate the need to expand archaic definitions of literacy for its reconceptualization as “a multimodal (Jewitt, 2008) or multisemiotic practice (Prior & Hengst, 2010)” (Ehret, Hollett, & Jocius, 2016, p. 4). This framework was first presented in the New London Group’s “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies” (1996) which provided a “powerful redefinition of texts and practices moving the field from “literacy” to “literacies,” through recognizing multiple ways of communicating and making meaning, including such modes as visual, audio, spatial, behavioral, and gestural” (Leander &

Boldt, 2013, p. 23). Advocating a “broader view of literacy than portrayed by traditional language-based approaches” (The New London Group, 1996, p. 60) made room for new literacy practices during a time when “the rise of digital technology [...] provided rapidly expanding ways for youth to engage with multimodal texts (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 23). While certain literacies have been (and still are) valued more than others, the acknowledgement of diversity in literacy practices and text as well as “nuanced insights into the pleasure generated as children engage with, through and around digital media” (Burnett & Merchant, 2018, p. 63) has inspired important changes in the educational sector.

One such change has come in the form of the integration of diverse, digitized texts into the classroom, such as video games. In spite of the negative reputation games carry to this day with many policy makers, educators, and parents resulting in their continued omission from educational curricula and pedagogy, proponents of the “serious games movement” (Djaouti et al., 2011) and game-studies framework continue to grow in number and work tirelessly to demonstrate the tremendous potential video games offer to “attract, engage, connect, and teach game players critical content in the games’ respective focus area” (Annetta et al., 2006, p. 16). Recent research champions the integration of video and digital games into learning contexts to engage pupils in a constellation of literacy practices as they decode and interpret a plethora of symbol systems such as text, sound, movement, and colour (Steinkuehler, 2006; Apperley & Beavis, 2013; Beavis, 2014). This form of gamified learning requires a necessary reframing of considerations of literature (Berger & McDougall, 2013), making room for a “modern literacy” featuring the following main components: “First, it includes not only text but also image and screen literacy. Second, it involves navigating information and assembling knowledge from fragments. Third, user-friendly technology when integrated effectively into a learning

environment helps engage students in the “active” process of learning” (Annetta et al., 2006, p. 18).

As multimodal texts have become increasingly studied and championed within the research community, the importance of media, digital, and gaming literacies has become increasingly accepted in the realm of education. This, in turn, has resulted in a necessary expansion of “traditional priorities” in language learning and conceptions surrounding literacy, and has had positive implications for honouring the out-of-school literacy practices of adolescent individuals (Apperley & Beavis, 2013; Beavis, 2014; Burnett & Merchant, 2018; Curwood, 2019).

Ongoing Critique

Although the positive contributions brought about by the multiliteracies frameworks have indeed made way for expansion in conceptions of literacy and literary text, they have come under critique for an over-reliance on text-centered approaches that oftentimes work to “limit, distort, or channel the kinds of meanings that are made” (Burnett & Merchant, 2020, p. 2). Boldt, Lewis, and Leander (2015) express frustration over the ways in which the “fetishization” of testing, standardization, and structured curriculum result in “the disappearance of emergence, the disappearance of actual children in relationship, and the disappearance of affect as produced over, and often against, rationality” (p. 435). What many scholars believe to be overly structured, “narrowly defined” (Burnett & Merchant, 2020, p. 2), and “domesticated” (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 24) literacy practices have worked to lead students down a path of predetermined goals while stripping away moments of empowerment, embodied experience, improvised learning, and feeling. As a result, adolescent learners are deprived of the opportunity to have their “moving,

feeling bodies influence meaning-making in unpredictable ways” (Ehret & Hollett, 2014, p. 430). Instead of honouring traditionally rigid structures, many argue educators must come to the realization that “Texts are artifacts of literacy practice, but do not describe practice itself” (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 25), and work to develop a more enriched understanding of “literacy practices as about more than Text” (Burnett & Merchant, 2020, p. 4). In order to facilitate such development, scholars look toward affect theory with the rationale that “when we begin with the body rather than with texts or design, our attention turns elsewhere” (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 25).

Affective Framework

Following such critiques, an affective framework works to place feeling, connection, and embodied experience above text. Heavily influenced by philosopher Spinoza’s theory of affect (1910), built upon in 1988 by Deleuze, affect-based perspectives make room for considerations of how, through literacy events, bodies (human and non-human, physical and non-physical, singular and collective) perform a continuous, unpredictable, ever-evolving dance that works to illicit intensities, energies, and disruptions. Regarding literacy as being permeable in this way opens new worlds of possibility created through “emergent, material, and social relations” (Ehret, Hollett & Jocius, 2016, p. 3). This concept has immense implications for classroom learning, as it encourages educators to move away from rigidly structured literacy learning and planned outcomes to make room for “those moments in which movement, interest, curiosity, concern, ordinariness, or enthusiasm is generated” (Burnett & Merchant, 2020, p. 3). As Boldt, Lewis, and Leander (2015) frame it: “We believe in the life-giving potential of allowing ourselves to be disrupted and moved into uncertainty by the intensities of the

children/youth/teacher education students in front of us” (p. 432). This disruption and movement has taken on different forms in research utilizing an affect-based theoretical lens.

To Leander and Boldt (2013), a “nonrepresentational emergence approach” describes literacy-related activity as being an emergent and embodied process “fed by an ongoing series of affective intensities that are different from the rational control of meanings and forms” (p. 22). Engaging with text becomes a full body immersion into “the text world”, which requires the acknowledgement of temporality and the relationships between bodies and environments (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 25). Similarly, to Ehret and Hollett (2014) literacy practices are embodied experience (moving, feeling, interacting), propelled by “affective intensities between bodies” and manifest in “feeling space(s)” that impact(s) the composing process (p. 430 & 438). These intensities emanate through “affective atmospheres”: generated by bodies and affecting bodies, connecting physical and virtual worlds, and permeating social space (Hollett & Ehret, 2015). Further, the focus on “social-material-textual affects” developed by Burnett and Merchant (2018) draws attention to the idea that literacy practices are not individualized, but rather “embedded in complex networks of people and things, and as part of what happens from moment to moment” (p. 68). In the context of this thesis study, honouring the unpredictably energized instances produced through literacy events and the deeply saturated emotional movements, embodied experiences, and connection embedded within such practices was crucial.

Adopting an Affective Perspective

The affective perspective utilized throughout this study was largely influenced by the salient work of the researchers mentioned above. However, applying such a lens to explore the affect-driven, pleasurable experiences associated with reading video games as text is a dimension

of the framework that has not yet been explored. To such effect, this study sought to adopt an affective perspective capturing the full-embodied experience of gameplay, and the moments in which affect flowed freely and produced intensities and energies as a narrative-based video game was read as text. The passage below attempts to describe the visceral nature of affective engagement experienced throughout all senses and felt across bodies:

Our literacy event

In the hot months of a Montréal summer, a small group gathered for weekly gameplay sessions of the narrative-based video game, *Persona 5*. While each member of the gamesRlit club entered with uniquely diverse and varied backgrounds, interests, and gaming experience, the club merged as one as the sound of the game's iconic theme song rang out, and a once blank screen filled with colourful dancing images. With the broad study concept of understanding moments of pleasurable and affective engagement inspired through the reading narrative-video games as text, and with careful consideration to avoid overly structured methods, collected data

manifest

in instances of affective intensities and “felt focal moments” reverberating each week through “affective atmospheres” (Hollett & Ehret, 2015). Senses were taken over as we became immersed in the text world. Intensity and energy came into being between multiple bodies, and

was felt

collectively by the members of the gamesRlit club. Lines between researcher, participant, text, and tool faded as all bodies in the space participated in the creation of literacy events forged through rigorous and pleasurable engagement. Literacy was a deeply social practice that still worked to honour the unique “feeling histories” (Ehret & Hollett, 2014), backgrounds, interpretations, and experiences of each member of the club. The emergence of this literacy event was

influenced

by the human and non-human, physical and non-physical: The warm air; The clothes sticking on sticky skin; The smell of popcorn wafting from the nearby microwave; The distant sounds of young people playing in adjacent rooms; The need to slide closer to the edge of chairs in moments of intense gameplay; The smooth and sudden vibrations from the controller opening

portals between real and imagined worlds. Everything influenced the composing process of our literacy event, and the composing process of our literacy event influenced everything.

Our literacy event

was a ball of yarn in a constant state of unfurling. Any and every given moment marked the potential for new possibilities to (or not to) unfold.

Our literacy event

was filled with unpredictability, unstructured learning, engaged play, and pleasure reading.

Our literacy event was raw, rampant, and robust.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In order to build upon the affective perspective flowing throughout this thesis study, methodologies were largely influenced by a desire to capture the ever-evolving, unpredictable nature of the literacy events coming into being each week through pleasurable engagement with *Persona 5*. Such methodological and analytic approaches were not overly structured or rigid: Using an anthropological methodological framework centered upon correspondence (Ingold, 2013), I, as researcher, experienced the shared process of meaning-making, sentience, and embodied movement along with the other club members in an authentic and immersive manner. To develop an informed understanding of the affective engagement and pleasurable reading taking place as the narrative-based game was read as complex text, a relational materialist analytic approach was utilized along with the unit of analysis of felt focal moments (Hollett & Ehret, 2015). Once data were collected and analyzed, implications for the integration of such multimodal text into an ELA context were elaborated in order to address the overall aim of providing an alternative to common approaches to literacy instruction in secondary school language-learning programs. The above-mentioned methodologies are fully delineated in the subsections below.

Case Study Detailed

Research Setting

In the summer months of 2019, the gamesRlit club met on a weekly basis for 2-3 hour gameplay sessions reading the narrative-based video game *Persona 5* as text. The club, composed of 3-8 adolescent members (depending on the week) and three members above the age of 24, was among one of many activities offered at the youth drop-in center, Chalet Kent.

Located in Côte-des-Neiges, a predominantly economically disadvantaged area of Montréal, the center overflowed each week with enthusiastic young individuals eager to participate in varied activities such as kickboxing, FemSpace discussion sessions, Visual Art projects, or to use many of the available technologies like the recording studio and 3D printer. My own introductions to the center were forged several months earlier thanks to pilot projects funded by McGill and led by two of the university's professors: one of which being my supervisor, Dr. Ehret. These initiatives focused on broadening young people's access to technologies in public spaces in order to foster community, personal and social growth, and open opportunities for technological futures. While my initial invitation to the center was intended simply as leisurely experience, I quickly became enthralled by the young people and energy emanating throughout the space and the roots for my own research project began to grow.

Fresh off the heels of the successful creation of an eSports team at the center - led by Dr. Ehret, one of his graduate students, and a PhD candidate from McGill University - several adolescents were eager to join an additional club with video games as its central focus. The study's focal participant, Cam, took on a key role in the club's inception and unfolding: inspiring the creation of the group with his interest in the game *Persona 5*, helping to design recruitment posters that were hung on the walls of the center to encourage other youth to join, attending each week with ebullience, and taking the lead in gameplay. Cam was able to infuse the club with his out-of-school literacy practices, expressing great fervour towards anime culture and video games, and spending much of his free time discussing these topics with friends, engaging in gameplay, participating in online discourse communities, and watching YouTube videos in order to research new games and techniques. As an adolescent navigating Grade 8, Cam described his enthusiasm towards certain subjects in school, but found his language-learning courses to be

difficult and drab, largely due to their predominant focus on texts he did not understand, relate to, or enjoy. He was, however, extremely eager to participate in the gamesRlit club, and to play through games largely centered upon complex storylines, characterizations, and narrative technique, as such texts merged his passions and the literacy practices he thoroughly enjoyed.

Over the course of the six weeks of gameplay in the gamesRlit club, various other individuals sat in for sessions, joined discussions, or stopped by for a few minutes to indulge in a snack and watch an anime scene unfold. Cam, however, was the only adolescent participant that attended the sessions consistently each week and therefore became the study's main research subject. Also in weekly attendance were myself (as researcher and participant), Dr. Ehret (as participant), and his former graduate student Jaf (as participant). In spite of our continued efforts to entice female participants to join the group, the club's regular adolescent players were exclusively male.

While our gameplay and subsequent research took place in an informal learning setting that one perhaps would not traditionally associate with data collection applicable to an ELA context, removing the power-dynamics, conceptions of valued literacy practices, and feelings of judgement commonly associated with educational settings allowed for elaborate meaning-making experiences, profound discussions, and critical engagement with complex text to be led by the young minds in the room. In this informal learning space, adolescent club members were not made to feel as if they were being watched, critiqued, or studied by an "othered" presence. As members entered into the gamesRlit space each Friday afternoon, regardless of age, background, or experience with gameplay, they entered a space of pure, unadulterated acceptance. Feelings and atmospheres of comfort, warmth, and inclusion filled physical confines

before gameplay even began, allowing for the true potential of teen-centered meaning-making, affective engagement, and pleasurable reading of a multimodal text to be featured.

Research Text

Equally important to the study's setting was the choice of narrative-based video game to be read as text. Suggestions for *Persona 5* were originally brought forward by Cam due to his profound interest in anime. While he had not yet played it himself, he had watched its gameplay on several of his favourite professional gamers' YouTube profiles. With its release in 2016, *Persona 5* (developed by Atlus) gained immense popularity in the gaming community worldwide for its eye catching artwork, sophisticated graphics, smooth gameplay, and the over 100 hours of riveting story content presented to players through the dual genres of dungeon-crawl role-playing game and life simulator (Harris, 2020). Set in Tokyo, Japan, the story follows a young protagonist as he attends a new high school and moves through the motions of daily life, while periodically stepping into a "Metaverse" to unveil and defeat the true personas and subconscious desires of the game's villainous characters. With both action-packed quests from first-person perspectives requiring players to beat challenging bosses, and living the "ordinary" life of an adolescent protagonist attending school and working a part-time job, *Persona 5* presents an engrossing and diverse storyworld keeping players on the edge of their seats. True immersion into this world is offered through dialogue options providing opportunities to tweak the story and alter various components of the game, such as character interactions and narrative outcomes (Endacott, 2018).

In addition to Cam's tremendous excitement at the prospect of playing through *Persona 5*, several other features justified its potential incorporation into secondary ELA curricula, thus

further rationalizing its use for this thesis study. With an adolescent protagonist featured, the game brings themes commonly found in YAL to the forefront. While YA texts differ greatly in content and format, they have the common central theme of personal growth and identity formation from the perspective of a teen character (Buehler, 2016). *Persona 5* does a fantastic job of presenting the point of view of a Tokyo adolescent, codenamed Joker, as he undergoes personal growth while simultaneously saving the world from corrupt figures of authority by “improving the human condition” (Farokhmanesh, 2017, para. 2). Cam explained that he could see pieces of his own experience in the game, as Joker deals with issues such as controlling parental figures, keeping up with school work and deadlines, and maintaining a social life all while trying to “figure out yourself and think about the other people around you”. The player’s ability in *Persona 5* to “create a world”, in Cam’s words, based on realistic elements, while also being challenged to think critically about complex ethical conundrums provides teen players with room for inner-work and self-reflection.

Instead of simply showing characters to be good or evil, *Persona 5* presents round characterizations while also working to combat the common video game trope of gratuitous violence (Barko & Sadler, 2013). Rather than senselessly killing enemies, Cam explained that players are required to think critically when interacting with the game’s villainous figures and to make complex decisions about how best to respond to them: reading through different textual response options and selecting the one best suited to overcome that villainous figure. This gameplay mechanic presents a unique feature video games provide adolescent players to think critically and make decisions based on perspective taking and empathy that other textual forms cannot. This powerful feature, along with *Persona 5*’s complex storyworld and clear ability to excite teen players made it a clear choice for members of the gamesRlit club.

Methodology & Analytic Approach

When considering the study's methodologies, it was important to honour the shared process of meaning-making, sentience, and embodied movements experienced by the club, while allowing myself as a researcher to be moved authentically by the affective intensities permeating the space. For this reason, an anthropological methodology was adopted, centered upon Ingold's concept of "correspondence" wherein researchers aim not to observe and describe the experience of participants, but to instead become immersed, to study *with* and learn *with*, in order to evoke the "drawing out or bringing forth of potentials immanent in a world of becoming" (2013, p. 31). According to Ingold's anthropological stance, it is "by watching, listening and feeling - by paying attention to what the world has to tell us - that we learn" (p. 1). As researchers partake in the relay that is meaning-making and discovery, and move forward with the effects and transformations that arise through such study, they evoke a "way of knowing from the inside" (p. 5). And so, throughout the study detailed in this thesis paper, researcher and participant, physical and non-physical, spoken word and silence, travelled relationally along the path of discovery experienced by, in, and through the gamesRlit club.

This methodological framework was informed by a relational materialist analytic approach. Hollett and Ehret (2015) utilized this approach to demonstrate the ways in which a constant state of intra-acting and becoming was experienced by multiple bodies (people and things) through Minecraft gameplay. Their collected data was reduced to the relational materialist unit of analysis of "felt focal moments", in which moments of intensity and disruption, produced through affective atmospheres, were felt upon bodies and caused unexpected movement (Hollett & Ehret, 2015). Adopting a similar approach became important for my thesis study in order to focus attention on how the pleasurable reading of *Persona 5* was

felt through the shared experience of gameplay. In the continuous entanglement of bodies occupying the gamesRlit space (people, cold plastic chairs, energetic sounds from adjacent rooms, feeling-histories), affective atmospheres were felt, pleasurable reading experiences were generated, and unpredictable moments of meaning-making were forged. Identifying these instances through felt focal moments assisted in providing a point of reference for how/when affective and pleasurable engagement with text (1) arose and (2) impacted trajectories of new meaning-making and literacy events through collaborative production in unpredictable ways (Ehret, Hollett & Jocius, 2016). Such methodological and analytic approaches bear valuable connection to the affective perspective that informs this study, and work to feature the particular nature of literacy as being *unpredictable*, *enacted*, and *felt*, rather than *structured*, *derivative*, and *seen*.

Data Collection

Research Question and Sub-Questions

Once case study details and methodologies had been established, the following research question was developed in order to conceptualize practical data collection procedures:

- RQ1: How did the gamesRlit club's collaborative play of the narrative-based video game *Persona 5* elicit moments of affective engagement and pleasurable reading of complex text identified through felt focal moments?

With the study's overall aim of better understanding how narrative-based video games have the potential to be read as complex text and utilized in secondary ELA contexts to inspire affective engagement and pleasure reading, it was important to recognize the ways in which felt focal moments were experienced both individually and collectively within and amongst bodies (human and non-human, physical and non-physical) during gameplay sessions. The club's meaning-making and literacy development was a deeply social practice felt collectively throughout the

network of bodies occupying the space, but the affective movements and intensities were also experienced differently by individuals in the club due to unique and varied lived-experiences, feeling-histories, interpretations, and interests. When applying the study results to a classroom context in which text is explored both collectively and individually, it became important to distinguish the two during data collection through the following sub-question:

- RQ1a: How were identified felt focal moments of affective and pleasurable engagement with text experienced individually and collectively among the club's participants?

Equally important in regard to the ELA context was the development of a thorough understanding of how narrative-based video games could be read pleurably as complex text. In order to address the decline in reading pleasure and motivation that occurs as adolescents progress through secondary school (Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Cremin, 2008; Howard, 2011; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; International Reading Association, 2014; Clark & Rumbold, 2016), a predominant focus of this study was investigating how narrative-based games could be utilized in ELA curricula to combat majoritarian tendencies and instill a love of reading and lifelong literacy practices. In order to demonstrate the potential for pleasure inspired through the reading of narrative-base games as text, distinguishing and differentiating instances of pleasurable engagement during data collection was accomplished through the following sub-question:

- RQ1b: How can identified felt focal moments be differentiated according to this paper's definition of pleasure reading (agency, connection, and discovery)?

Data Sources

In order to gather a broad spectrum of data revealing the ways in which pleasurable engagement manifest in affective atmospheres through felt focal moments, a triangulation of multiple data sources were collected in the form of field notes, video recordings of gameplay sessions, and open-ended stimulated recall interviews with the focal participant after sessions

and over the online chat platform Discord. These methods were not overly structured or rigid so I, as researcher, could feel literacy along with the other members of the gamesRlit club in an authentic and immersive manner. Gameplay sessions were recorded through video to allow for the vivid visual and audio recall of felt focal moments experienced by bodies. Field notes were either taken by hand in a small, inconspicuous notebook and written in pen, or typed on a cellphone using the Notes application, in order to make room for engagement rather than documentation. Field notes were primarily focused on my own individual felt intensities and movements, as well as those experienced by the group as a whole that left an impression on me. Additionally, field notes were used to document the broad questions I wanted to ask Cam once that day's session was complete. The third data source came in the form of open-ended, stimulated recall interviews with the focal participant, Cam. These occurred after each gameplay session while equipment was being put away, and over the online chat platform Discord once the gamesRlit group stopped gameplay of *Persona 5*.

To address **RQ1a**, the video data was analyzed in terms of visible felt focal moments - manifest through bodily movements, and facial and bodily gestures - as well as verbal felt focal moments - manifest through discussions and vocalized outpourings of excitement. The individualized, subjective experiences, meaning-making processes, and attitudes of the focal participant, Cam, were analyzed through the video data and through open-ended interview questions recalling moments of energy and intensity that left an impression on him. This loosely structured format was chosen to make room for Cam to lead the discussion into unanticipated realms. My own individualized experiences as a participant and researcher were also captured through field notes and during review of video data. To address **RQ1b**, felt focal moments were identified through the data sources, and analyzed according to the three broad facets of this

paper's definition of pleasurable engagement with text: (1) felt focal moments fostered by the pleasure associated with *agency* through text-navigation, (2) felt focal moments fostered by the pleasure associated with *connection* forming (to others and to self) through text-navigation, (3) and felt focal moments fostered by the pleasure associated with intellectual and playful *discovery* through text-navigation.

While the chosen data sources did indeed assist in capturing and categorizing data, it was impossible to fully represent all the energized, dynamic, unruly, and affectively charged moments involved in navigating meaning-making through new media. For this reason, my own body became an immensely valuable tool in feeling the intensities and energies coming into being in the gamesRlit club. Instead of using data to *see* the properties of literacy in action, data was used to recall how I, as participant and researcher, *felt* during the literacy events produced each session through the rigorous and pleasurable reading of complex text. That being said, it should be noted that I acknowledge my own subjective position within the study that limits validity due to personalized claims made. I also acknowledge that not all moments of energy and intensity - experienced in varied ways by the club's members - were evident in data collection. The size of the study population also prevents findings from being applied in a concrete fashion on a larger scale, but instead offers valuable findings at a micro-level that can be used to inform new and better ways of doing secondary language-learning courses.

Chapter 4: Results & Analysis

Over the course of the six-week-long period *Persona 5* was played by the gamesRlit club, countless moments of intensity and energy were manifest in affective atmospheres. For the purpose of data analysis, however, six felt focal moments were identified and described in the following passages. These moments have been paired and placed into three thematic sections that each begin with a small description to set the atmospheric context. In order to capture the full embodied, unpredictable, continuous experience of reading narrative-based games as text, and the moments in which affective engagement flowed freely throughout the study setting at Chalet Kent, these passages are told from the researcher's, my own, first-person narrative based on data collected through field notes, video recordings, and interviews. Each felt focal moment captures an instance in which the entanglement of bodies occupying the gamesRlit space impacted trajectories of new meaning-making experience, pleasurable reading, and literacy events in unpredictable ways. Analysis fleshes out the ways in which this study's results, demonstrating the potential narrative-based games offer for pleasurable reading experiences, can positively inform secondary language-learning courses.

We are gamesRlit.

After planning was complete the day had finally arrived. I wasn't sure what to expect walking into Chalet Kent that Friday afternoon. As an individual with little gaming experience, doubts and anxieties swam through my mind: How much will I be able to contribute? How relevant will my contributions even be? As I entered the center, walking past enthusiastic faces playing ping-pong and listening to music, and climbed up the stairs to the gamesRlit zone, I instantly saw the excitement in Cam's face as he let out a loud "Hey E", accompanied by a wave.

Anxieties eased. As the equipment was set up, the group's collective anticipation grew. Two members who had knowledge of *Persona 5* described the beautiful artwork and captivating soundtrack we were about to experience: "Sometimes I just turn on the game and listen to the opening scene when I clean my room", Jaf joked. Shared laughter followed, as we indulged in the stack of snacks set out by a few of the group's members. Already, in this moment, although gameplay had not even begun, the social nature of our literacy event was coming to the forefront: shared discussion, excitement, and curiosities filled the small room as we huddled on our closely positioned chairs. *Anxieties eased.* Surrounding our cluster of physical bodies was the warm air, the cold metallic chair legs touching ankles, the smell of popcorn, the voices and sounds coming from the nearby kitchen.

As the screen lit up with colorful dancing images, Cam reached out exclaiming "Ugh it's so beautiful!", and Jaf clapped his hands with a "Oh baby here we go". The first half hour was spent navigating the game's interface through a constant stream of effortless discussion: jokes, talk of characters to come, shared experiences, and connection to other media. Each decision made based on textual options came with a "K so which one should we do?", "So what's our course of action?", or a "I feel like in this situation we should pick this option because...". As we played through the interactive cutscenes working to teach the game's controls and set the story in place, we came into contact with a dark scene that worked to lay narrative foundations: When our avatar, an adolescent codenamed Joker, witnesses a woman being attacked and tries to intervene, he is punished by the corrupt adult figures involved and has his life derailed. Collective feelings of anger and frustration filled the space as Cam exclaimed "This part is B.S.". As we discussed and I shared a thought about the situation, Cam arched his neck and moved his chair forward so he could see me as I spoke. This gesture - the physical movement of bodies to

close gaps of distance - spoke to the ways in which our club had formed an embodied sense of connection. *Anxieties dissipated.*

First felt focal moment: “So what should be our name? The magical name that will carry us through this entire game?”

The first felt focal moment, representing the collaborative nature of the group’s meaning-making and affective engagement, came shortly after. We reached a part in the game where our avatar was asked to write his name while signing a confession statement. Almost instantly, Cam asked, “So what should be our name? The magical name that will carry us through this entire game?”. At first there was silence, then Jaf verbalized his thinking about specific avatar characteristics that could help with the naming process. More silence. Then came the suggestion for “something based on C.K.” in order to represent the center (Chalet Kent) and club we were playing in, and tie our physical location into the world we were creating through *Persona 5*. This suggestion put the collaborative nature of gameplay into perspective: *We had become the avatar, and the avatar had become us*. Rather than selecting a generic name, or one based on the anime world presented in the game, “Kent” would represent our voices coming together as one in the form of this avatar, while paying homage to the center and gamesRlit group where this collaborative literacy event was taking place. This moment called attention to the ways in which the affective and pleasurable engagement inspired through reading a narrative-based game as complex text was experienced collectively by all members of the club. While Cam held the controller and physically pushed the buttons for decisions as ‘player’, before this occurred each textual option was read, opinions and thoughts were shared, and selections were discussed as a group of ‘spectator-players’ during negotiations of action on screen. The collaborative nature of play was a powerful and effortless force, manifest in physical movement, vocalized sentiments,

and felt intensities: We learned forward in our seats during intense moments together; We made choices together; We danced together to the game's upbeat music; We laughed together; We pointed at the screen together; We thought critically together; We created a literacy event, *together*.

The collaborative felt experience of pleasurable reading was made possible due to the format of text we chose to navigate. While connections are indeed fostered through engagement with multiple textual forms, the participatory nature of narrative-based video games provides a unique opportunity for groups to create a storyworld *together*. Each member of the gamesRlit club took on the role of participant-writer and participant-maker (Beavis, 2014), and a new process of deepened, complex, unpredictable, and ever-evolving meaning-making took form as a result of such collaboration. Through our shared stories and experiences during gameplay, new perspectives emerged based on the unique and diverse backgrounds of the members navigating the literacy event. Not only was meaning-making influenced by the unfolding of narrative on screen, but also by the responses of each group member taking meaning in varied directions. Jaf fortified such sentiment with a comment about his experience playing *Persona 5* alone versus with us as a group: "I'll have a reaction to something in my head but when you're playing with other people you get other reactions and that influences [decisions]". Unlike other textual formats, the narrative-based game made it so the story was not already written for us, but instead "made possible" by game designers (Reeve, 2009; Healy, 2017). This left room for opportunities to infuse the game with pieces of ourselves in a collaborative and collective fashion.

The flow of experience, meaning-making, and pleasurable engagement pouring out during each gameplay session, altered by human and nonhuman bodies, and influencing literacy events could not have occurred through overly structured or rigid methods. As a researcher, it

was crucial I allowed literacy practice to form itself through moments of affective intensities permeating the space in order to understand an authentic representation of meaning-making and pleasure reading with new media. It is this kind of literacy-in-constant-state-of-becoming that should be promoted in language-learning courses, leaving room for students to become facilitators of learning with their peers in the classroom, and to infuse collaborative literacy practices with unique experiences, knowledge, and opinions.

Second felt focal moment: “Okay, let’s pretend we’re a 14-year-old kid, which is basically me right now”

Leaving students the space to infuse literacy practices with aspects of themselves will also result in a form of individualized affective encounter that, while contributing overall to the collaborative gameplay and reading of text, is felt on a more personal level. As the only adolescent member to consistently attend gamesRlit each week, Cam experienced a different connection to the teen protagonist in *Persona 5* than I did as a 25-year-old player. This was evident in the session’s second felt focal moment that occurred during a discussion of how best to respond to a situation in the game: Jaf asked the group, “So are we playing how we would answer this, or as Joker would answer this?”, to which Cam responded “I think we should play as Joker because everyone has their own way of answering and I think we should all be thinking of the same character. Okay let’s pretend we’re a 14-year-old kid, which is basically me right now, so whatever I would answer!”. While this was a light-hearted remark that resulted in shared laughter for the group, it caused me to pause and consider how Cam’s experience navigating the game and connecting with the protagonist was different from mine by virtue of our ages and current life experiences.

Cam described a connection he felt as an adolescent to a component of the game in which Joker takes on a new persona while fighting to remedy the evils of adult characters: “I feel like this game is referencing how kids use their imagination to escape the real world. That’s why he uses a persona that looks like a demon. Kids build personas or avatars to escape the real world”. I asked Cam what kind of things he thought needed to be escaped, and he responded with, “What position you’re in in society and not being able to speak up about things that happen because you can’t make a change. The chain of life: you try to do the right thing but it doesn’t matter”. Cam reflected on feelings of limitation often experienced by adolescents due to the youth-bashing culture normalized in society (King, 2015). Oftentimes, teens feel as if they are being monitored and controlled because adults fail to provide the space for their voices to be heard or their opinions to be taken seriously (Niccolini, 2016). *Persona 5*, however, works to empower youth by presenting a group of adolescent characters that are the only ones left to remedy society’s evils and find justice. While this form of character-identification can indeed be achieved through varied text formats, such as YA print novels, video games provide players with the unique opportunity to role-play as their avatar. The ability to explore “the frontiers” (Ostenson, 2013, p. 77) of a character’s journey through a storyworld and alter the outcome of that journey based on decisions made has the potential to be extremely formative for young individuals looking to work through potential solutions to difficult circumstances.

Not only was Cam able to identify and connect with the teen protagonist in *Persona 5*, he was also able to play through and think critically about challenging situations many young people encounter, such as dealing with bullying and authoritative teachers. This provided him room to grow through these situations along with the avatar. For older players, like myself, a valuable opportunity was presented through gameplay to reflect on teen experiences and navigate

the difficult situations they must face (both dramaticized such as fighting crime, and more realistic such as rumours spreading at school). The deep connections forged between player and avatar are an essential component of pleasurable reading that must be fostered in language-learning contexts. Moreover, the opportunity to be present with Cam as we worked through the Joker's experiences together and bonded over collaborative decision- and meaning-making was a process I believe all educators should share with their students.

We are created worlds.

As each day of the week passed, the thought of playing *Persona 5* filled my mind with excitement, curiosity, and interest: Feelings I had not experienced while navigating a text in years. The connection I already felt to the world developed in just a few hours of gameplay was somewhat surprising to me, as this was an entirely new form of storytelling and complex engagement. When Friday afternoon finally arrived, it was clear that Cam shared my enthusiasm to continue with gameplay. While we waited impatiently for the equipment to be set up, Cam revealed how he had done some research on the types of hairstyles allowed in Japanese high schools, and what a typical school day was like; a clear indication that his interest in the game had begun to seep into his at-home-literacy-practices. I asked Cam about his favourite part of *Persona 5* thus far, and he quickly chose the characters, their relationships, and the game's storyworld. He explained that the stories in narrative-based video games always catch his attention and keep him hooked, saying "Usually with games I finish the story then I go to the next and the next and the next. Like in *God of War* (Series: 2005-2018)". Cam's ability to interact with a video game's narrative made room for a deepened sense of engagement and feelings of connection. With each choice impacting next steps in the game, Cam carefully read

through the textual options, recalled events and learned information, and thought critically to ensure the best possible outcome for his avatar: a stark contrast to the chapter skimming often taking place with texts commonly used in ELA courses.

Third felt focal moment: “I have so much power in my hands!”

The potential for connection and engagement created through a player’s ability to control game narrative and maintain agency in its navigation is nicely reflected in the third felt focal moment. During a gameplay session, the group was presented with numerous options to choose from based on how Joker would respond to a figure of authority. As we joked light-heartedly about one of the more flippant responses, Jaf reminded us that “What we pick now matters. It changes the game”. Upon hearing this, Cam began to shake the controller lightly and let out a loud “I have so much power in my hands!”. The phrase reverberated throughout the small space, while a look of merriment spread over the group’s faces. In this moment, the true nature of the collaborative storytelling process taking place came to light. Rather than passively absorbing an imposed narrative, the medium provided the potential for story expansion and transformation. This is referred to by Louchart et al. (2007) as the “emergent narrative”, in which narrative weight is shared by game authors and players as both parties work to co-create the story as it unfolds. As we played *Persona 5*, we were creators, we had agency, and our literacy event was in a constant state of becoming along with the game’s plot. Each action came with consequences for the group’s gameplay that could not be undone, thus forging a sense of significance in each decision made, and a complex process of critical thinking and information recall.

While the medium’s interactivity left room for participation, its limitations were felt at times during gameplay when varied choices brought us to the same outcome. In a specific

moment during our gameplay session, Joker was asked to sign a document, and while players were presented with the option to select “No”, we were unable to continue on without selecting the “Yes” option. I remarked: “That’s interesting that they give you the choice on whether or not you want to sign when in reality you don’t really have a choice because you have to sign anyways”. Jaf agreed, but reminded me that “the game really couldn’t go on in terms of the story without you signing though, right?”. Another method of guided gameplay in *Persona 5* came in the form of a “story facilitator” (Louchart et al., 2007) in place to help the story unfold in a cohesive fashion. To us, this character was Morgana, a savvy (and sassy) figure providing information on quests and unveiling hidden items. While creative potentials were, in a sense, limited, the participatory nature and immersive storytelling presented to us through *Persona 5* created a sense of autonomy and control. It is this form of engagement that should be promoted in language-learning courses, allowing students to take on the role of players, makers, and writers as they actively participate in the creation of complex literacy events and develop meaningful connections to texts.

Forth felt focal moment: “The game kinda shows the bad guys can kinda be mis... Misheard. So like talking to them to see how they’re feeling is important.”

These connections, forged through the co-creating of game narrative, are deepened through the relationship built between player(s) and avatar. As we played through *Persona 5* and became increasingly immersed in our storyworld, we had more opportunities to infuse Joker’s character with the qualities and personality traits we thought admirable. We built Joker to be who we wanted him to be, and, in some ways, who we wanted ourselves to be. To us, Joker was brave, fought to protect the innocent, and worked to find the good in people. Not only did these features reflect the value-based judgements developed by the group, they also impacted the ways

in which we could navigate the game: “There are different personality traits. Let’s see we have guts, intelligence, proficiency, charisma. And you level them up in certain ways. So our “guts” level isn’t high enough for us to make that comment [in regard to a flippant comment Cam tried to select as a response]”, Jaf explained. To build intelligence points, for example, we periodically played through classroom scenarios in which we could answer questions. Through this character building and subsequent identification, we experienced challenges, memorable moments, and growth through Joker’s perspective. Our attachment to the game’s outcome and presence while playing were heightened as we had infused so much of ourselves into the decision-making process.

As we engaged in complex role-play based on Joker’s character, we also had to consider the relationships he formed in the storyworld. Cam’s favourite part of *Persona 5* was “the interactions between the characters” because of all the complexities we needed to consider. We got to know each character in the game, and carefully selected our responses based on the knowledge acquired: “I feel like we might put our friend down if we choose that option”, Cam said as we played through one of Joker’s interactions with his friend Ryuji. The game often presented reductive captions for characters when they were first introduced (e.g. “vulgar boy”, “woman in suit”, “cheerleader girl”), and we had to build our own interpretations of those characters throughout gameplay to shatter the initial descriptions we received. “Vulgar boy”, for example, turned out to be our closest confidant in the game: A young boy with the best intentions to help others, Ryuji, or “vulgar boy”, was followed by a bad reputation after he stood up to the school’s abusive volleyball coach, Kamoshida.

The level of critical thought and unpacking required of us players as our avatar interacted with other characters was evident in the forth felt focal moment. As we played through a scene in

which we navigated Kamoshida's palace in the Metaverse, we came into contact with various "villainous" characters that needed to be defeated. Rather than killing these characters mindlessly in battles, we were first asked to think critically about the best way to appease them through verbal communication. Cam reflected on how he enjoyed this component of the game: "The moment you hear *villain* you think of the bad person: The bad guy who steals the princess. The game kinda shows the bad guys can kinda be mis.... Misheard. So like talking to them to see how they're feeling is important. Like I feel like in a lot of games you just like kill the monsters but in this one you talk to them to see how they're feeling". Not only does Cam's observation emphasize the ways in which *Persona 5* moves away from the gratuitous violence trope commonly presented in video games, it also features a riveting form of intellectual discovery resulting in pleasurable reading experience. The pleasure of "figuring things out" (Smith et al., 2017) was deeply embedded throughout the game, as it came with the challenge of knowing our decisions and interactions had consequences.

As a key component of pleasurable reading, intellectual discovery can be achieved through numerous texts and formats. Narrative-based video games, however, provide a unique opportunity for players to think critically about their decisions, and see the benefit of their hard mental work unfold in front of their eyes. Not only does this foster a sense of control in the learning process, but it also reflects a lived and authentic intellectual engagement where any one decision "provokes an avalanche of outcomes" (Reeve, 2009, p. 79). This unique form of pleasurable textual engagement should not only be honoured by policymakers, educators, and parents, but also promoted to foster deep connections to text that will inspire the kind of lifelong literacy development language-learning courses aim to achieve.

We are community.

While a spirited energy commonly permeated Chalet Kent, on this Friday afternoon in late-July the loud *boom* of an outdoor DJ setup reverberated through the walls. As I made my way to the gamesRlit space, I was met with a constant stream of “heys” and “how are you doings”. This day was warm. This day was filled with joy and laughter. This day would be a memorable one. As we started to set up our equipment, curious faces passed by with looks of intrigue. I went to collect a few extra chairs to widen our usual circle, and they were quickly filled as two of Cam’s friends from the eSports team decided to sit in for the session. I watched as Cam chatted with them, exuding a more radiant energy than usual, and filling the space with positivity as he bobbed his head to the loud music. Several additional faces filled empty spaces; asking questions about the game and indulging in the snacks set out by a few of the club’s members.

Fifth felt focal moment: “Welcome back guys to another gameplay of Persona 5!”

As the screen lit up and the familiar sound of *Persona 5*’s opening scene rang out, this playful atmosphere began to merge with gameplay as Cam eased into the fifth felt focal moment. While holding the controller, eyes were on him as he exclaimed: “Welcome back guys to another gameplay of *Persona 5*! Make sure to subscribe and leave a like!”. In this moment, Cam had taken on his own version of an alternate persona while he filled his friends and the rest of the group in on events from the previous gameplay session. His sharing was an embodied process, as he waved his arms and altered facial expressions in an animated fashion to convey excitement to his audience. I was moved, watching as he merged our gamesRlit club’s literacy with a form of new media he was tremendously passionate about: YouTube. Cam had told me countless times

about how much he enjoyed watching his favourite YouTube gamers play through and comment on video games, and, in this moment, he felt so comfortable with his surroundings that he playfully began integrating elements from his at-home-literacy into our gameplay session at Chalet Kent. Cam was *morphing* into a literacy practice he valued.

When I spoke to Cam about this felt focal moment in an interview, he explained how exciting it would be to start a YouTube channel for the gamesRlit club, or have a live-streaming component to share thoughts and opinions with others as they watched our gameplay. The opportunity to broaden the collaborative processes involved in the pleasurable reading of games is a component unique to the medium. Not only do narrative-based games create the conditions for deep and meaningful conversation between reader/text and reader/reader, but the ability to live-stream these conversations to an additional group of spectator-players opens up new worlds of collaborative meaning-making and embodied movements as streamers are not only heard but watched by their audience. This audience, in turn, can respond in a chat section of live-streaming platforms in order to share thoughts and opinions as gameplay occurs live. These technologies have the potential to break through barriers and pave the way for expansive connection that other textual mediums cannot.

Over the course of the time spent in the gamesRlit club, Cam was given the platform to speak, share his opinions, and infuse his passions and interests into gameplay. Unlike in his teacher-centered language-learning courses at school, as he described them to me, Cam felt like an equal in this space: an equal with valuable knowledge to contribute and honoured literacy practices to infuse. In turn, strong feelings of confidence and passion developed that he was now eager to share with his friends both in person and virtually. The space created at Chalet Kent - the physical space, the technologies made accessible, and platforms opened in physical and

virtual realms - allowed Cam to insert himself into the new media world in a tangible way.

Providing pupils the opportunity to engage with narrative-based games leaves room for far more than simply engaging with text; it paves the way to reconfigure often oppressive formal learning settings through a “curriculum built for change” (Apperley & Beavis, 2011, p. 139-140) that empowers students and opens up new possibilities for them.

Sixth felt focal moment: “No! It’s not a movie! It’s a game called Persona 5!”

The confidence Cam had built became increasingly evident throughout that day’s gameplay session. He was eager and proud to provide details about the storyworld we had worked to build to his new audience at every opportunity opened to him. As members of the Chalet Kent staff stopped by periodically to ask questions, the sixth felt focal moment occurred when one commented, “Oh you’re watching movies” after seeing one of the game’s cutscenes. Cam quickly responded with “No it’s not a movie, it’s a game called *Persona 5*!”, and proceeded to fill the staff member in on character and plot developments he thought were of importance, and a description of how a rich storyline fused with gameplay in this particular text. As he described the game, more individuals were drawn into the circle, and our small community of learners in the gamesRlit club was broadened to include the Chalet Kent family. As we all gathered around the large screen reading text and chatting through decisions, new attendees began to participate in decision-making. When they tried to chime in with a response option that, in our minds, would not have been a plausible option for Joker, we would describe our idea of the character to that individual so they too could become immersed into our storyworld.

Soon everyone in the circle was contributing to the unfolding of our literacy event, and diverse perspectives were being brought to the forefront. An expanded literacy community was

in a state of rapid becoming, as we forged effortless bonds of connection and acceptance. Spectatorship was quickly transformed to an indirect form of pleasure reading requiring active participation from even those unfamiliar with the text. Unlike with other textual mediums, narrative-based games create the space for a “sociocultural learning experience that is unique to the form” (Chen, 2013, p. 414). The connections forged that day were not bound by the physical confines characteristic of certain textual mediums. Instead, the game was accessible to all and the subsequent meaning-making was “inextricably entangled not just with text but with other people, places and things” (Burnett & Merchant, 2018, p. 67): Everything surrounding the group that day - the loud music, energetic bodies, seating arrangement, smiles, and laughter - contributed to the affective atmosphere and influenced meaning-making through gameplay.

This felt experience could not have been planned or rigidly structured, as literacy-learning so often is in educational contexts. It lived in the present moment and unfolded by the second with each word read, echo of laughter, movement to music, and enthusiastic response generated. Teachers must strive to create this kind of natural setting where adolescents are free to fully experience their curiosities, interests, concerns, questions, and enthusiasms and, ultimately, to flourish through collaborative interactions with complex texts. After all, the aim should not be simply to teach texts, but instead to create the conditions for students to learn how to navigate texts in meaningful ways with their peers: a navigation that will harness the true potential of pleasure reading and foster opportunities for lifelong literacy development.

Chapter 5: Discussion & Implications

When planning for this thesis research began, I, admittedly, had very little knowledge of video games: the ways in which they could be played, connections they fostered, or the true nature of the benefits they inspired in the lives of players. While preliminary research opened my world to the tremendous potential for pleasurable engagement and learning opportunities offered through games, nothing could have prepared me for the deeply profound immersion into literacy I had the opportunity to experience as a member of the gamesRlit club. My participation during the collaborative gameplay of *Persona 5* elicited the need to address and expand my initial research question: This work is detailed in the first subsection of the passages below. Following, the second subsection delineates an *affective* and *effective* pedagogy for the integration of narrative-based games into ELA classrooms built upon by my own positionality and personal experiences as participant, researcher, and educator.

Expanding Definitions of Pleasure Reading

The pleasure experienced as a member of the gamesRlit club represented much more than simply playing through a video game: It permeated the air in affective atmospheres each session before gameplay began; It followed me home and consumed my mind while I worked and spent time with friends as the days slowly crawled by in my anticipation for another session to come; The storyworld created through *Persona 5* seeped into my dreams, and the representations of adolescent protagonists and authentic discussions I had with Cam changed the way I interacted with my students. This far-reaching and deeply embedded practice can be attributed to the full-embodied and immersive literacy experienced at Chalet Kent: With each person entering the

space, each smell permeating the air, each textual option *Persona 5* threw our way, each question discussed or researched at home, our literacy event was further developed and unfurled.

The newfound knowledge acquired through my embodied, authentic, participatory experience of literacy forged through gameplay caused me to reflect on this thesis study's research question. While the chosen data sources did help in providing a well-rounded overview of the collective and individual felt focal moments, differentiating these moments according to this paper's definition of pleasure reading (RQ1b) left room for reflection. As indicated in this paper's Results section, pleasure reading flowed freely throughout affective atmospheres and literacy events in the gamesRlit club. While the three facets of pleasure reading (agency, connection, and discovery) were indeed identified countless times during data collection, they could not be simply and neatly categorized as is done more easily with other textual mediums such as print formats. There were no specific "instances" of identifiable pleasure reading occurring. Rather, the pleasurable reading of text was deeply embedded throughout all aspects and angles of our practice: agency in text navigation and story-building was continuously required in order to propel the narrative; connections were effortlessly forged through engaged discussions and shared experience; and discovery was ongoing as each corner turned during gameplay opened new worlds and opportunities for meaning-making. In response to my once fruitless attempts to differentiate the overarching facets of pleasurable reading while using narrative-based games as text, it became clear to me that pleasurable engagement with games cannot be defined in the same way as pleasurable engagement with print text.

As delineated in this paper's Literature Review, pleasure reading has been defined in a plethora of ways for the texts most often engaged with in formal learning environments: books. However, these definitions do not account for the expansion in multimodal texts becoming

increasingly honoured and incorporated in educational contexts. It has become clear to me that more research must be done in order to develop a new definition that works to include the authentic, visceral, full-bodied immersion into new worlds experienced through engaging with digitized texts like narrative-based video games. The effects of stimuli such as audio, visual, and tactical sensory experience must be considered in this emerging definition. Music, for example, played a key role in our immersion into the *Persona 5* storyworld. As each session began, the iconic theme song pulled us in and elevated energies and excitement. As gameplay continued, we sang, danced, and jumped in accordance with whatever score was pumping through the speakers. In addition to reading the game's narrative text, the beautifully created visual components of the medium made for a complex and elaborate experience working to imprint images that remained in our minds once gameplay had finished.

While the stimuli provided through this digitized text did result in a pleasurable immersion inaccessible through other textual mediums, the use of a narrative-based video game did bear its limitations. One such limitation came in the form of having gameplay altered or controlled at specific times; such as through longer cutscenes, forced battles, or exploration scenes. This however, would not be a consistent issue with every narrative-based game that could potentially be integrated into ELA curricula. Many games, such as *Life is Strange* (2015), *Emily is Away* (2015), and *Gone Home* (2013) do not feature fighting and present varied methods of textual interaction and narrative technique. Considering these varied options, it is important for educators to have an understanding of what a specific game has to offer players before its incorporation into classroom learning. Ideally, educators would play several games before selections are made, but for novice players research can be done online and gameplay can be watched through YouTube videos.

An additional limitation came in the form of technological issues: a problem faced with the use of any form of digitized device or text in the classroom. Such was the case at Chalet Kent due to an occasionally weak Wi-Fi connection: Cam once sat crossing his fingers and said “I hope we don’t have Wi-Fi problems. Please just connect so I can play this”. This issue also prevented the incorporation of a live-streaming option during the first few sessions of gameplay. However, it was easily remedied with the purchase of an Ethernet cable allowing for better network access. While such disruptions can indeed arise with the use of technologies and digitized texts in the classroom, the diverse and varied benefits provided to pupils are worth the additional effort required in ensuring smooth function.

Integrating Narrative-Based Games into the ELA Context

As a high school educator seeking to improve the experience in secondary ELA courses, I realized after only a few hours of gameplay that narrative-based games could effectively combat the majoritarian tendencies currently stripping opportunities for pleasurable and affective engagement away from pupils. However, as I am no longer an adolescent learner attending such classes, it was important to speak with Cam about his opinion on the use of texts like *Persona 5* in language-learning contexts. In an interview, he explained that he could indeed picture himself playing a narrative-based game in class: “I think it would be great for the students. You can put them in those interesting situations, but in groups of less than twelve. With more it might be hard to have good conversations. You could play the game and chat about it and it’s nice you’re not stuck on the same topic for a long time”. I asked if Cam thought pausing for discussion as a group would interrupt gameplay, and he explained “Well a big part of the game is pausing to make decisions so that’s a good place to have people talk about what each decision means, so no

it would be fine. You kinda have to stop and talk with this game”. As an individual accustomed to playing games recreationally, it was promising to hear that Cam would still enjoy navigating a game like *Persona 5* with his peers in a classroom environment. While student interest is indeed a promising place to begin, there are other factors to consider when incorporating a new, multimodal text into the curriculum.

Persona 5 as literature

Due to my experience as an educator - teaching varied courses such as ELA, French, History, and Art in Grades 7-11 - I understand the pressure from colleagues, parents, and administration to utilize more traditional texts during classroom teaching. More specifically, the use of video games in the classroom is still a contentious topic in spite of the “growing body of scholarly work in literacy studies investigating their merits” (Steinkuehler, 2010, p. 62). One such merit comes in the form of integrating students’ out-of-school literacy practices into the curriculum (Beavis, 2014). ELA educators choosing to rely solely on canonical works and other forms of print text are depriving students not only of the opportunity to engage in pleasurable experiences with multimodal text, but to also develop the skills to interpret and critique the “21st-century media” (Hansen, 2015) they will undoubtedly come into contact with outside the educational sphere. Navigating and decoding this new media requires a constellation of literacy practices as a plethora of symbol systems such as text, sound, movement, and colour must be considered (Steinkuehler, 2006; Apperley & Beavis, 2013; Beavis, 2014). This process helps a “modern literacy” to develop, featuring text and screen literacy, assembling information from fragments, and active learning processes (Annetta et al., 2006, p. 18). While the use of narrative-based video games in the classroom will certainly work to help students develop this modern

literacy, they also work to teach more traditional narratological literacies typically honoured and legitimized in language-learning contexts.

Through the reading of narrative-based games as complex text, educators are offered the opportunity to promote pleasure reading, critical strategies, and the development of literacy practices in ways traditional print texts cannot (Gee, 2003; Steinkuehler, 2010; Berger & McDougall, 2013; Ostenson, 2013; Curwood, 2019). Over the course of our time playing *Persona 5*, the gamesRlit club was immersed into a tremendously sophisticated storyworld that we remained connected to due to complex textual elements and characterizations. There was no desire to skip through text or narrative components, as our engagement and connection to the game left curiosities peaked. As noted by Ostenson (2013), the large quantities of reading, attention to detail, and problem solving required as students navigate narrative-based games are sustained by the interactive and entertaining qualities. The Québec Education Program (2010b) - a provincial program set in place for all subject areas that must be followed by Québécois educators - for secondary ELA even describes the use of such multimodal texts as “essential to the development of critical thinking” and the promotion of “active engagement in integrated language contexts” (p. 5). While considerations for new and varied textual inclusions are a necessary step for language-learning educators, understanding how best to utilize such texts in the classroom requires an effective pedagogy.

Persona 5 as affective and effective pedagogy

My experience participating in the gamesRlit club and as a secondary school educator helped in fortifying an understanding of the need for a games-pedagogy that is affect-based, loosely structured yet rigorous, student-centered and participatory, and that encourages critical

thinking in adolescent pupils. The most important component of this pedagogy must be a predominant focus on affect: giving students the space to *feel* through their meaning-making and literacy practices. As delineated in the Results section of this thesis study, feeling flowed freely throughout affective atmospheres and produced intensities, energies, connections, and embodied experience. Room was left for movement and surprise that took meaning-making and literacy events along paths that were not “rational or linear or obviously critical or political” (Leander & Boldt, 2013, p. 44). As a researcher, if I had tried to implement rigidly structured data collection methodologies, the caliber of authentic and rigorous engagement would not have been experienced: We would not have enjoyed deeply profound discussions and decision making; We would not have infused gameplay with our collaborative and individual identities; We would not have felt a genuine and full-bodied immersion into the *Persona 5* storyworld. This must be a consideration for educators who choose to guide student reading and interpretation, and therefore risk limiting the vast potential for meaning-making, critical thinking, and connection available in a given multimodal text. Instead, “improvisational or responsive approaches” (Burnett & Merchant, 2020, p. 4) to teaching new media facilitate “the construction of active, sensing bodies” (Hollett & Ehret, 2015, p. 1850), while giving adolescent pupils the opportunity to infuse literacy practices with unique and diverse feeling histories, interpretations, and emotional movements, and to become facilitators of their own learning.

This pedagogical approach will require teachers to move away from being the authoritative presence in the classroom, and instead relinquish this role to students. In turn, the community of learners fostered through the integration of narrative-based video games will allow for social interactions around text and social practice around meaning-making. Educators should participate alongside students as equals in constructing “a shared kind of reader reception”

(Berger & McDougall, 2013, p. 147), while assisting young minds with critical reflection about the information they consume through approaches such as Race, Gender, and Youth Lenses. Adopting these approaches was helpful during gameplay of *Persona 5* when problematic constructions of youth (e.g. recklessness and emotionally unstable) and sexist representations of female characters (e.g. promiscuous and weak) emerged. While these representations were eventually subverted as gameplay progressed and characterizations became increasingly complex, their presence in the game opened opportunities to critically unpack and dismantle stereotypes and imagery that pervade varying text genres and formats youth commonly interact with daily. When educators work to adopt an affect-based, student-centered pedagogy, pupils will leave the classroom with feelings of empowerment, increased critical awareness applicable to the media consumed out of school, and a profound connection to texts that will foster lifelong literacy practices.

Conclusions

Engaged. Empowered. Included: the sentiments ELA educators should strive to elicit in their students through moments of exciting, curious, unpredictable, and pleasurable interaction with texts of varied form. The research done over the course of this thesis study has substantiated the use of narrative-based games in language-learning contexts to achieve such outcomes. Adopting an affective perspective and relational materialist analytic approach allowed for an exploration of the ways in which affect flowed freely and produced intensities and energies identified through felt focal moments during the rigorous and pleasurable reading of *Persona 5*. In turn, the meaning-making and literacy events coming into being were embodied, collaborative, and unpredictable in nature, allowing participants to forge strong connections with complex text in influential ways.

Harnessing such potential through the incorporation of multimodal texts like narrative-based video games into ELA curriculum provides educators with a valuable and enriching opportunity to combat majoritarian tendencies that have resulted in the domestication and standardization of literacy practices: stripping away moments of empowerment, embodied experience, and improvised learning. Focusing instead on varied textual media and affect as pedagogy makes room for moments of connection, energy, intensity, and feeling to emerge. Implications also carry over to out-of-school literacy practices, as adolescent pupils leave the educational realm with a strengthened understanding of critical engagement with new media and modern literacy practices, which may positively alter the way they choose to navigate, interpret, and critique multimodal texts and digitized activities intended for recreational use.

In order to truly harness the varied benefits achieved through the incorporation of such multimodal texts, focus must not solely be placed upon *textual selection*, but also upon *textual*

navigation. Educators should strive to facilitate an authentic, visceral, and full-embodied immersion into the textual world by avoiding restricted navigation. This form of interaction with text is best facilitated through the adoption of an affect-based pedagogy in language-learning courses. Providing students the space to feel and be authentically moved by the new media they navigate will influence meaning-making, while also creating the conditions for adolescent pupils to infuse literacy practices with unique and diverse feeling histories, interpretations, and emotional movements. Giving Cam the ability to guide gameplay and discussions during our time at Chalet Kent had the most meaningful impact on collected data, and such a practice must be incorporated into the classroom context as well.

Although the data collected in the informal learning setting did indeed breed implications transferable to the educational realm, there are hindrances that should be noted. While there is certainly importance in respecting what the navigation of popular culture texts means in the out-of-school lives of adolescent learners (Beavis, 2014), the classroom context comes with considerations that were not taken into account during data collection for this thesis research: such as assessment methods, access to technology, and class sizes. This epistemic issue marks a relatively large limitation encountered during research, which requires further consideration and investigation in future study related to learning with new media that takes place across varied environments (Barko & Sadler, 2013). Furthermore, the study's time constraints eliminated the possibility of playing more than one narrative-based game due to the length of time required to play through these texts in a rigorous fashion. In order to develop a more thorough understanding of the use of such narrative-based games, a more complex understanding of the texts as genre must be developed.

These noted limitations mark tremendous potential for avenues of future research. With additional investigation into narrative-based games - particularly those with themes commonly present in YAL such as *Persona 5* - a working-definition of YA narrative-based games could be formulated and disseminated. This denotation would greatly assist with the popularization of such texts in the classroom context, and help in clarifying the forms of engagement that foster pleasure for youth applicable across YA texts of varying formats. Just as students are currently encouraged to build reader profiles through exposure to a wide array of text genres, authors, and styles (Québec Education Program, 2018b), the use of varying multimodal formats could allow for a *transmedia profile* merging in-school texts and literacies with those navigated and honed outside of the classroom. If such a profile had been developed for Cam, for example, it would have incorporated his interests in anime, video games, and YouTube culture in order to develop a better understanding of how this background with texts impacts and influences his literacies and meaning-making. A final line of inquiry emerging from this thesis study caused pause to ponder the varying technologies available for use in classroom contexts. This inspired interesting questions meriting further investigation: How would a live-streaming component (e.g. Twitch or YouTube) alter the ways in which students play and discuss narrative-based games collaboratively and individually? How would hand-held, portable technologies (e.g. Nintendo Switch, iPads, or cellular devices) alter the ways in which games are played in the classroom? How could the use of virtual reality games impact the embodied nature of gameplay and immersion into textual worlds?

While originally setting out to better understand an alternative to common approaches to literacy instruction and combat majoritarian tendencies, this thesis study opened the gateway, so to speak, to much broader curiosities concerning the integration of narrative-based games into

the secondary ELA context. This demonstrates not only the tremendously vast potential for the use of such texts in the realm of education, but also highlights the need for research to continue in the quest for a more informed and broadened understanding of pleasure reading, affective engagement, and meaning-making with new media texts such as video games. My experience in the gamesRlit club truly showed the potential narrative-based games have in enveloping readers in every sense of the word, and the time is now here to unleash the full potential of these multimodal texts. The educational realm must work to amplify the enthusiastic sentiment that has been echoed by gamers for decades: nicely encapsulated in a quote from *Persona 5*'s Ryuji "This effin' rocks!".

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