# Critical digital game literacies in the English classroom

Alex Bacalja (PhD)

The University of Melbourne

Alex.Bacalja@unimelb.edu.au

# Critical + digital + game + literacies

- Literacies: Socio-cultural practices (Gee, 1996; Street, 1995)

- Digital Literacies: Going beyond the technology and considering what people do with it (Bulfin & McGraw, 2015; Jenkins, 2006)

- Digital game literacies: Relationship between games as texts and games as action, and the literacies and learning that take place around the play experience (Beavis, 2014; Salen, 2007).

- Critical digital game literacies: the skills and practices that interrogate digital texts and produce new texts which transform the world, and reflecting and taking action in the world in order to transform it (Freire, 1972; Avila & Zacher Pandya (2013)

*Research question: How can the play and study of digital games in the English classroom encourage critical digital game literacy practices?*

# Context and the intervention

The case study

An 10-week teaching unit focussed on Indigenous stories across 3 texts (game, animation, short story)
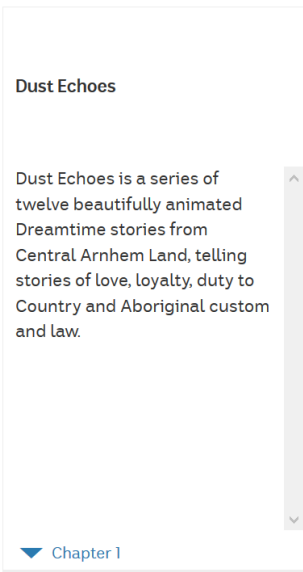
2 campuses of a middle years college, 13-14 year olds

300 students, 15 teachers.

Various teaching, learning and playing activities

Assessment:
- Formative: Digital narration of the game trailer
- Summative: A video essay comparing Indigenous storytelling and themes across two text-types
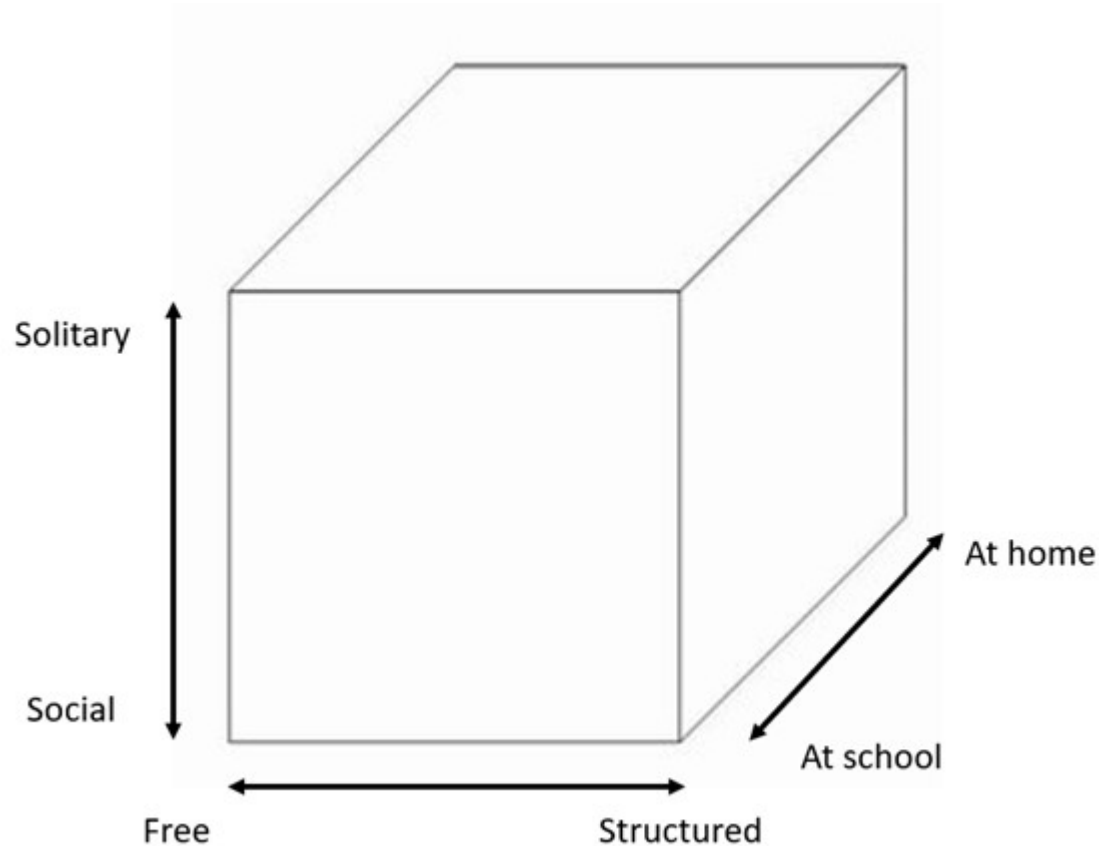
# Teaching and Learning



Figure 1: The Pedagogy of Play Continua (Bacalja & Clark, forthcoming)

- Analysing the game poster

- Double-entry journal writing to record key moments of gameplay

- Character mapping

- Story mapping

- Deconstructing genre

- Discussion of types and purposes of narration

- Building knowledge about Indigenous cultures

- Brainstorming themes

- Comparing print-based and non-print based versions of the two stories

- Examining multimodality

- Digital literacy design skills.

# Exploring critical digital game literacies

How games work

"They both used animated graphics to show the story and various sound effects. For example, in *The Be*...they use sound effects that sound like an Australian forest. Just like in *Never Alone* where the developers used the sound of strong wind to emphasise the presence of the blizzard" – Braydon (student)

"The little cut-scenes were good. They explained the story even more, they add why it was so important"

What games attempt to do in the world

"[The purpose] is to get the stories heard. It's an indigenous story and it's from an Alaskan indigenous group" – Braydon (student)

"[The points was to] take the knowledge from the game to use it in their assessments" (Ned)

"With boys being pretty disengaged with English and reading a lot of the time, I think even just having the one game in there, here's something as a boy, that they can engage with and use the technology and actually use those skills" - Sally (teacher)

Moving students to resistant positions

Largely absent

# Pangrazio's 'Critical Digital Design' (2016,2019)

<u>Critical self-reflection</u>

Exploring prior experiences with games

Engaging with game paratexts

<u>Interpretation and re-articulation</u>

Creating a metalanguage for the digital games classroom

Making word maps and brain-storms

<u>Creativity and visualisation</u>

Activating embodied pedagogies

Mind-mapping relationships and connections (text to self, text to text, text to world)

<u>Transcendental critique</u>

Viewing and reflecting on the practices of others

Collecting, comparing and contrasting screenshots, videos, game characteristics

# Big Questions

What knowledge about a digital text do teachers needs?

How do the literacies associated with a digital text differ from more traditional texts

Contact: alex.Bacalja@unimelb.edu.au

# "What games attempt to do in the world"

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When asked about why games like *Never Alone* should be studied in English, Ned said that students "would learn about the Inupiat people and take that into consideration and not say slurs like some people say"

"With boys being pretty disengaged with English and reading a lot of the time, I think even just having the one game in there, here's something as a boy, that they can engage with and use the technology and actually use those skills" - Sally (teacher)

"The boys far outweighed the girls [in terms of engagements] as in they wanted to play the game and they wanted to get to the end" - Callum  (early career teacher)

Moving students

# Moving students to resistant positions