Virtual worlds as a site of convergence for children’s play

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Abstract

Virtual worlds have made notable inroads into the lives of children, affording online extensions of their offline lives. In this article, we propose a conceptual framework for understanding the space that virtual worlds occupy in children’s play and the ways in which children’s participation in them overlap with their everyday play experiences, both offline and mediated. We argue that virtual worlds can be viewed as sites of convergence for children’s play in that virtual worlds allow for almost all aspects of children’s play to converge, primarily manifested in the convergence of social spheres, the convergence of play spaces and playthings, the convergence of cultures and the convergence of learning experiences. We explain how such convergence, while presenting valuable opportunities for children to learn and develop, will not be fully exploited without a corresponding ability on the part of parents and children to recognise potential risks; and for parents and educators to scaffold these learning opportunities.

Keywords

children, virtual worlds, play, sociability, identity formation, literacy, online risks and opportunities

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