Bridging the Gap: Video Games as a Gateway to Motivation for Learning

HØGSKOLEN I OSLO OG AKERSHUS

Masteroppgave i skolerettet utdanningsvitenskap med fordypning i engelsk

SKUT5910

Farah Bouyambib

Kand nr. 106

Fakultet for lærerutdanning og internasjonale studier

Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus

15. November. 2016

Abstract

Throughout the last couple of years, the gap between pupils' everyday lives and their education has become increasingly widened. This study attempts to investigate contemporary pupils' motivation in school and how their identity of affiliation has become their primary identity or role, and how this affects their institutional identity. This thesis will therefore look at whether or not contemporary youths' interest and popular media, more specifically video games, may contribute to enhanced motivation for learning. This is done by analyzing the video game series *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) using the *Læreplan i kunnskapsløftet 2006* (LK06), primarily the English subject curriculum, as a tool. The method chosen has been a text analysis, with a qualitative approach. The purpose is to shed a more positive light on popular media, such as video games, as well as to encourage educators to approach their pupils with a broader mindset.

Foreword

I chose this topic primarily because of my own interest in video games. Having played video games and grown up in a society that is highly technologically advanced, and experiencing its benefits first-hand, contributed to my desire to explore this matter further. There was also the additional reason of looking at how both the increase and impact of new media, such as video games among youth, is affecting our society and teachers. The importance of connecting with one's pupils and contributing to making their education an integrated part of their lives, has also been a reason for this choice. There is a stigma connected to gamers and the gaming industry, even within gaming culture itself. Non-stereotypical gamers have been stigmatized, correlating to the negative presumptions about the medium. There was therefore the added motive to shed a more positive light on video games, gamers, and gaming culture. Furthermore, I have a wish to encourage more teachers, school leaders, and people alike to not only use the medium in their work, but also to meet the gaming culture with a more open mind and a positive attitude.

Acknowledgements

It is with both huge relief and a bit of reluctance that I finally release this result of blood, sweat and tears into the world. All praise is due to the One that got me here, and I extend my greatest appreciation to the people that stood by my side during this exhausting but also enlightening process.

I am ever grateful to my supervisor, Colin Haines, who has not only been a role model ever since I first started the teacher education, but also an incredible tutor and supervisor. Patiently providing me feedback, encouraging me whenever I needed, and also teaching me to that not being perfect, is perfectly OK!

The greatest of appreciations goes to my mom, who when I myself gave up, still believed in me. Who comforted me in times of sadness, and rejoiced with me in times of happiness, without your help I would not have been able to become the person I am today.

A huge thank you to my siblings; my eldest for proving that despite your preconditions, getting that MA is perfectly possible! To my brother for being an inspiration for this thesis, and especially my youngest sister, who would root for me, cheer me on, and be there for me when I needed it the most. And an ever so huge "thank you forever" to my best friend, companion, and soulmate Tia, who not only encouraged me to write this thesis, but also patiently endured my frustrations, outcries and excitement! Dude, I finally made it!

Thanks to my dad, whom introduced me to the video game genre at an early age, who incited my love for literacy, and taught me that the pen was mightier than the sword.

I would also like to thank educators such as Tobias Staaby and Magnus Sandberg, for proving it to not only be possible, but also needed to incorporate pupils' interests and everyday lives in education, thus making school a lot more exciting for both pupils and teachers! And of course, a thank you to Ubisoft, for making *Assassin's Creed*, which I have spent a great deal of hours happily frustrated trying to avoid "desynchronization" and excited to learn more history.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

"But nowhere is the current generational gap in technology greater than in game literacy, (…)"

– Richard Halverson, 2005, p. 5

Class is in session, the pupils are doing their tasks, one of the pupils struggles with maintaining focus and catches my attention.[1] He keeps talking to his classmate about this new video game he has been playing. Another pupil hears them talk and joins in on the conversation. I, their practice teacher, interrupt, reminding them that they must finish their tasks first and may continue their conversation during the break. The pupil who initiated the conversation ignores my instruction and decides instead to talk to me about his video game experiences. I ask him the name of this video game, having overheard pieces of their conversation. The pupil looks at me, probably expecting me to be oblivious, but tells me the name nevertheless. He emphasizes that it is a cool game that lets one roam around the city, drive cool cars and even skydive. The video game they were discussing was *GTA V* (2013), rated 18+ for a mature audience, due to the excessive violent and sexual content, as well as strong language.

This class consists of 5th graders. The pupil I am talking to, as well as his classmates, are only 10 years old. I reply: "I'm familiar with the game, having played it myself. I'm also quite familiar with the premise of the game." The pupil then looks at me a bit confused as I continue, "and this game has an age limit, you do know that? You have to be 18 years or older to buy and play it because of the mature content in the game. Are your parents aware of this?" He looks startled and stutters as he replies that he does not play any of the bad parts of the game. He points out that he does not buy prostitutes or kill people, he does not even rob the banks. I look at him skeptically, as this pupil is clearly aware of the video game content. His classmate interrupts asking why playing video games like this one are not allowed in the first place, and argues that playing video games does not make one a criminal. Furthermore, he argues that not all mature rated games are as negative as portrayed, as some carry meaning and teach good lessons. A third pupil joins the conversation as well, claiming that the video games he played are good because he saved Jesus in *Assassin's Creed*, as well as experienced historical events he was taught in school. He then excitedly explains, somewhere along the

---

[1] This is a reconstruction of an informal observation I made during my practice stay a couple of years ago. All statements are not direct quotations, but a recollection of memory.

lines of: "In this one game I was this assassin Ezio, who's an Italian guy and I got to save Jesus from being crucified while playing, and then a lot of things that I've learned in school happened as well in the game, and I also met Leonardo da Vinci!"

Now, I, as their practice teacher, am stuck in between continuing this very interesting conversation about the historical accuracies and inaccuracies in these games, as well as the pupils' learning outcomes, or doing my responsibility as an adult and not encouraging the pupils in playing these types of games as well as alerting their parents. The reality, though, is that these pupils are not alone in playing these games despite the age limit; they are not the first children that I have encountered playing them. They have experiences I would argue that are quite meaningful both in a negative and positive sense, and they have few to no adults to discuss them with. Nevertheless, I opt for the latter option and ask the pupils once again whether or not their parents are aware of them playing these games, and if they consider them harmful or not. One of the pupils explains that it was his parents who bought the games for him and how they do not seem to regard them as harmful, considering they are only video games. He also admits that his parents are not entirely aware of the video games' actual content, but proceeds to explain how it does not matter as "they're only video games, I'm not going to re-enact them in real life." The pupil who initiated the entire conversation admits that the mature rated games he plays actually belong to his older sister and that she is "kind of" aware that he is borrowing them. He also agrees that he is not going to re-enact any of the harmful parts of the games, and that he usually avoids them in play as well. "They rate the games because they think that kids will actually do what they see happen in the games in real life, but of course we won't, we're not dumb. And if some of the parts are scary, then I'll just stop and not play them. That way I don't have to avoid the entire game just because some parts *may* be bad." The pupils then proceed to ask me not to tell their parents, nor other teachers about their gaming habits. They also want to make clear that what they are doing is really just play and nothing harmful, and they promise to do their given tasks if I do not tell. Situations like the one I encountered during my practice period are not isolated events, and appear the be a reality for many teachers and parents alike. Media that creates these types of experiences affect the pupils' level of concentration and motivation, and ignoring these or simply adding more restrictive measures seem to be counter-productive.

Contemporary society has managed to develop itself in a various set of fields and aspects throughout the years. With the further development of technology, electronic devices and the continuous growth of the internet and expansion of social media, contemporary society is on a

different level than that of previous generations. Understanding this in a context of school and education is therefore of importance. The contemporary generation is facing an entirely different and rapidly changing society, making the gap between teachers and pupils wider than ever before. Contemporary youth are being raised in a "techno-cultural" world that keeps updating, while being educated by elders, teachers, and parents who would be labeled as "outdated" and "old-fashioned" (Løvlie, 2003). This gap continues to widen when the pupils' everyday lives are neglected and disregarded in school, as well as viewed as insignificant or dismissed as harmful by the educators and caretakers in the pupils' lives. Looking at how to bridge this gap, as well as why this is of importance, is this thesis' intent and purpose. Central to this study is how contemporary media, and specifically video games, can contribute to motivating pupils in the classroom. By looking at one example of a video game series, *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015), it will be argued that, not only can such media target learning outcomes as defined by *Læreplan i kunnskapsløftet 2006*, but also bridge the gap between pupils and teachers. Due to media such as the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series containing violent and mature content that make the use of it in the classroom a questionable practice, ethical concerns, such as age appropriateness of the media will also be considered.

1.1 Motivation in School

One of the many struggles teachers face in today's school is to engage and motivate their pupils, both concerning their general education and during each individual class. With the emergence of technology and easy access to information, entertainment and global trends, it has become increasingly difficult to engage pupils and keep them interested in school matters and subjects. Most pupils nowadays, particularly in the West, even own smart-phones, or other similar devices, in which they can easily access current trends and news and entertain themselves for hours through a variety of media. The accessibility also makes it easier for youth to socialize with their friends and peers, contributing to their lack of focus in class or their education in general (Gee, 2007; Løvlie, 2003; Prensky, 2006; Steinkuehler, Squire, & Barab, 2012).

There is a rise of pupils that struggle with completing simple tasks such as doing their homework, studying for tests, or just simply paying attention in class. Without taking learning disabilities into consideration, a lot of pupils who struggle tend to do so because they are not able to see the benefit in what is being taught. These pupils tend to complain about assignments being pointless and school not being relatable to their own lives. Various

educators and scholars point out the challenge teachers and schools encounter: "(…) an increased pressure to prepare students for standardized tests, [on the one hand] whereas, on the other hand, they face a generation of students who regard the school curriculum as largely irrelevant to their own lives" (Steinkuehler, Squire, & Barab, 2012, p. 306).

School leaders, teachers, parents and adults alike tend to consider such acts as surfing online, streaming videos, chatting with friends, and playing video games to be but mere entertainment. Platforms and domains with which a large part of young people are concerned, are considered to be unproductive and a waste of valuable time. The truth of the matter is that these activities in fact occupy and affect youth on a different level than perceived, thus making them meaningful parts of their everyday life. Belittling that fact and not understanding why pupils struggle with maintaining focus in school contributes to making the gap between teachers and pupils even wider. It could therefore be argued that one of the solutions lies in making school and teaching more relevant to pupils' lives by integrating various media and multimodal texts, such as video games, into the teaching (Gee, 2005; 2007; McGonigal, 2011; Prensky, 2006).

The last of the pupils previously mentioned struggled with many of these aspects. The teachers around him, as well as his parents, considered him to be a "troubled" child because of his struggle with maintaining focus in class. This pupil lacked the motivation and concentration in the classroom to finish a simple task, and would easily be distracted and frustrated. It is therefore interesting to have him explain with so much enthusiasm how he has finished playing through the story of an *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) game in English and how he was able to extract the main events from the story. Now, he may have misunderstood certain parts, such as the rescuing of Jesus that in fact was a story within the game's story[2], which is not necessarily blameworthy as the game does not make the distinction clear enough. This pupil was still able to draw connections from what he had been taught in school to what he was experiencing while playing this video game. Not only that, he also played it through in English which is not his first language. Seeing this pupil excited about his discovery, knowing he does not usually seem as interested, was like seeing him in a new light. However, knowing that this interest could not be further cultivated because of censorship, as well as how most adults could not have related to the references, made the situation difficult.

---

[2] A stage play that the character one is playing must participate in, he did not actually get to save Jesus himself.

If the intent of censorship is to protect and help youth, then maybe there should be a reconsideration of how and what is to be censored. This is not to say that censorship itself should be abolished, and that boundaries and rules for children and pupils should not be upheld. Rather, it is to suggest that there should be an adjustment or improvement of the notion, especially because of changes that have occurred and are still occurring on both a technological and societal level. There is also the matter of what motivates the pupils, and especially pupils of contemporary society, which is thoroughly technology-based. If a pupil who normally lacks motivation manages to find it outside of school and is able to make connections to his subject material, what greater benefits would he derive were he able to make use of this in the classroom? Imagine if his teacher was the one who helped him make these connections, as well as build on his pre-existing motivation. Although it would have been interesting to further delve into the concept of motivation in school in general, this study will, because of limits in time and scope, mainly focus on the English subject.

1.2 The English Subject

In the Norwegian national curriculum, also known as LK06 (Læreplan i kunnskapsløftet 2006), the subject of English is presented and structured into four main subject areas namely, "language learning", "oral communication", "written communication" and " culture, society and literature". Each of these subject areas have their set of competence aims that are divided according to stages. Furthermore, the English subject is presented as a common core subject for the entire education program. It is therefore stressed in the curriculum that the English subject is to be "as relevant as possible for pupils by adapting each subject to the different education programmes" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). Cross-curricular teaching and the integration of basic skills in all of the subjects are therefore emphasized in the curriculum, as well as the importance of providing the pupils with relevant knowledge (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). The purpose of the English subject in schools is also described in the curriculum to be a tool to succeed in the world, as one of the primary languages used in international communication is English. It is therefore expected that the pupils are taught how to use the language in different contexts, as well as knowing the cultural norms and conventions associated with the language. The curriculum encourages this to happen through encountering a variety of oral and written texts as well as digital media (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d).

The focus in this thesis will be upon the subject curriculum's main subject areas, looking at if

and how they are integrated into the media pupils consume in their spare time, more specifically video games, and further narrowed to the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series as the main example. The main subject areas are divided in the four previously mentioned areas, "language learning", "oral communication", "written communication" and " culture, society and literature", but will be presented as three components in this thesis. *Language learning*, which here will also include oral and written communication, focuses on language acquisition as well as understanding and using the language. This is through listening, speaking, conversing and the application of communication strategies, as well as through reading, writing and proper application of reading and writing strategies. The second component focuses on *literature*, the importance of literature in language learning, the variety of literary texts, literature as cultural expression and how video games fit in this category. This area is implemented in the classroom by working with both literary texts and cultural expressions from a variety of media, according to the curriculum. The last component regards *culture* and *society*, including *history,* and focuses on the cultural understanding of the English language, as a means to acquire and develop knowledge about and respect towards other people (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d).

1.3 *Assassin's Creed* – "History is our playground"

Assassin's Creed (2007-2015) is a fictional action-adventure video game developed by Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft. The series is loosely based on historical figures and events, and was inspired by Vladimir Bartol's novel *Alamut* (2011), set in the time of the Crusades revolving around the Nizâris, also known as the Assassins. The series has become one of the company's bestselling games and it prides itself on having history as their "playground", as the company itself has expressed (Ubisoft, 2014). The reason for this is the series' concern and focus on historical events and figures, having explored a numerous series of events and centuries such as the 12th century Crusades, the Renaissance in Italy, the American Revolutionary war, the Golden Age of Piracy, the Seven Years' War, the French Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution in England. The first game was released in 2007 with a new game released every year after that. The series has also a variety of spin-off games as well as film and novel adaptations.

The series is playable through various platforms, such as a computer, *PlayStation*, *Xbox*, *Wii* systems*,* and on mobile devices. The player gets to play through a new fictional character in each time era and relive the characters' stories and experiences. The game is also played in 3rd

person in an "open world" allowing the player flexibility in choice of play. Though the games evolve around a main story the player must follow, the player is still left with freedom to execute the missions how he or she pleases. The reason behind the series' success includes its ability to allow players to experience historical events and figures firsthand, while making it enjoyable. In other words, one is not required to read through volumes of history books in order to imagine or understand overall historical concepts or events. Although the games are not necessarily 100 % accurate in their depiction of history, the developers have still been successful in at least igniting a spark of interest in history in their players (El-Nasr, Al-Saati, Niedenthal, & Milam, 2008).

Professor Nicolas Trépanier (2014) argues for the use of video games in education and teaching, using the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series as an example, despite its historical inaccuracies. This is because he encourages the use of a variety of media which his students are familiar with, both to bridge the gap between school and everyday life, and also because of the benefits within this type of platform. Video games such as this particular series, will therefore according to Trépanier be a rather positive tool. It is essential of course, that they are used properly, i.e. by not only playing the media, but rather analyzing its contents, perspectives, and adaptions thoroughly as well (Trépanier, 2014). How the professor implemented the series in his teachings, will be further developed in the third chapter.

Looking closely at the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) game series in the context of school and education, and how the series targets the previously mentioned main subject areas, language learning, literature, and culture, will be this thesis' intent and purpose. In the English subject curriculum there is an emphasis on how language learning is not limited to communicative skills only, but also as a means to cultivate[3] the pupils as well as to be a tool for further education. This should, according to the curriculum, be taught through a variety of media, such as multimodal texts and through interaction with others. This particular video game series reconstructs historical events in an open-world setting were the player gets to re-enact these events as well as encounter historical figures. This study will consequently focus on these aspects and how this particular series is "providing insight into the way people live and different cultures where English is the primary or the official language" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). Combined with being a multimodal text, this makes the series ideal as an example. What limits the use of this medium in the classroom is its mature content,

---

[3] Better understood as "bildung", which refers to the process of personal and cultural development through education and philosophy, in other words, to mature.

such as the use and display of violence as well as the occasional swear word. This issue of censorship in relation to games in general and this series in particular will also be further discussed.

1.4 Video Games, Censorship and Ethics

Video games have throughout recent years become widely spread and more "gamers" of different backgrounds and age groups have now emerged. Where it previously used to be mainly young males with the specific interest in gaming, in recent times this has changed. The medium has recently received a much wider and diverse audience where gamers of different socioeconomic backgrounds, genders, ethnicities and even ages have become the norm. Gaming conventions, gatherings and events are becoming more frequent and global, attracting bigger and wider audiences. Playing video games has therefore become a natural and integrated part of a lot of people's lives in today's society (Gee, 2007). Today's youth, for instance, tend to spend major parts of their free-time on interactive activities such as video games, surfing online and listening to music. Not only do these activities function as a way to spend time, or waste it as some may believe, they enable meaningful play, interaction, excitement, and also knowledge as well as skills (Steinkuehler, Squire, & Barab, 2012).

There are around 100 million active gamers in Europe alone, 183 million in the US, and 200 million in China (McGonigal, 2011). The average gamer spends around two hours a day playing, whereas the 'invested gamer' spends approximately 20 hours a week. There is also the emergence of the so-called 'extreme gamer', who astonishingly spends 45 hours a week playing (McGonigal, 2011, p. 3). In Norway there has been an increase in the time spent playing video games by youth, particularly by boys between the ages of 13-15 (Vaage, 2012). Where teenage boys and girls in 2000 used to play an average of 40 minutes a day, the time spent playing video games has increased in 2010 to over three hours a day for boys and an hour for girls. This is in addition to the time spent on the internet surfing or chatting with peers (Vaage, 2012).

Not only is the gaming culture increasing, but so is the video game industry itself. Since the demand is growing stronger, video game developers have throughout recent years worked hard to satisfy its audience. Being one of the highly valuable industries to date, with continuously renewed technology and improved usability, the industry is one of few that delivers their audience "worthwhile" experiences (Extra Credits, 2012). Video game

developers succeed in creating challenging and meaningful simulations that their audience chooses to play despite their level of difficulty, while stressing experiential and situated learning. This in contrast to a lot of schools and educational institutions that tend to focus on tests and results (Halverson, 2005). The core principle of making games just challenging enough to make the players want to continue playing despite the challenge, is what has given the industry its success. Moreover, having the games themselves teach their players while simultaneously playing and providing feedback contributes to the continuation of play (Extra Credits, 2012). In the educational system there is a dilemma. On the one hand, explicit information is needed for learning efficacy, while, on the other hand, young people in particular struggle with the overload of information. What the learners are in need of, is clear context provided with ample guidance and instruction, in a safe and paced environment. According to Gee, video game developers however do not have the luxury of having this dilemma or problem go unsolved. Not resolving this problem leads to no one playing their games. Video game developers therefore focus on distributing information to their players in clear contexts, with the right amount of instruction and feedback, in an effort not to overwhelm their players (Gee, 2007).

Some parents and teachers may look at this as another bad habit that will affect pupils negatively in terms of their education. What these parents and teachers would then forget is that video games contain much more complexity than what one may assume (Gee, 2005). Not only are video games multimodal texts, they also integrate the five basic skills that the national curriculum emphasizes, namely, oral skills, reading, writing, numeracy and of course digital competence (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2011). This would be an example of how video games are more beneficial than they are given credit for. Sasha Barab (2012), among others, argues for multiple reasons that educators should consider video games. This is because of the "(…) discursive richness, depth of collaborative inquiry, complexity of game play, opportunities for consequentiality, rich perception-action cycles, exploration of situated identities, and the complex forms of learning and participation" (Barab, 2012, p. 271) that video games can provide. Scholars concerned with video game literacy even argue that a lot of contemporary youth have a greater learning outcome playing video games than they do in school (Halverson, 2005). This is particularly when comparing the learning principles in schools to the ones in video games. Where video game developers stress experiential and situated learning, schools tend to focus on results achieved and individual development, thus making the latter rather unappealing (Prensky, 2006).

Claiming that the classroom should be completely revolutionized and having traditional teaching and materials traded in for what are supposed to be tools for entertainment is not the purpose of this thesis. Rather, understanding that our society and youth have developed and that the schools are struggling to keep up is the main point. Therefore, striking a balance, using the tools youth use every day in combination with what is already taught and used in schools is proposed (Gee, 2007; Prensky, 2006; Steinkuehler, Squire, & Barab, 2012; Trépanier, 2014). Entertainment systems, popular media and the newest technology could be used as tools for the teacher; something working for them instead of against them. There are also plenty of educational games that have been and are being developed for the purpose of learning, that either the teachers are unaware of or that the pupils find uninteresting. Of course these types of games have their benefits in their own ways and they should therefore not be belittled. Still, looking at the commercial video games and how they have become such a huge part of young people's lives, integrating these types of media into the teaching is believed to be of major benefit (Gee, 2007; Halverson, 2005; Steinkuehler, Squire, & Barab, 2012).

As the video game industry and its audience have increased, it has simultaneously been criticized and labeled as a waste of time and encouraging misconduct by teachers, politicians, parents and people alike (Gee, 2007; Halverson, 2005). Restricting and censoring content as a way of controlling who gets to play and what they can play, has been introduced and with good reason. Despite the many attempts at steering youth away from what is being labeled as "mature content", a lot of today's youth find a way to gain access, whether it be through uninformed parents, complicit peers or illicitly through the internet. Although there will always be people wanting to further implement restrictions on certain media, society at large has reached a point where it has become increasingly desensitized to a majority of the aspects of the mature content presented in media entertainment as a whole (Gee, 2007; Prensky, 2006). Creating further restrictions will not remove the need to take into account that these are important issues that we as a society need to talk about, as well as find a way to deal with in an appropriate manner.

Regardless of how video games should be rated and how censorship is to be dealt with properly, the matter at hand is that youth are already playing these types of video games, or watching movies that were supposed to be off limits. What is even more troubling is how most adults or supervisors are aware that the youth have access to content that is beyond their maturity level, but seemingly do not want to go into a larger discussion on the topics at hand. The discussion of whether or not video games should be rated differently or have their

restrictions removed altogether is a delicate matter that is not the main concern of this thesis. In terms of education and dealing with youth in the classroom, a shift of focus is proposed. Rather than avoiding the issue at hand and only discussing what should and should not be, dealing with the matter in an open and honest way is suggested. By confronting the matter head on, the possibility for raising responsible and conscious youth increases. Of course, this is not to suggest that violence and mature content should be available for minors nor that such acts should be encouraged. It is rather by dealing with the matter honestly, with understanding and guidance, as children will continue to encounter both the media and real life experiences regardless of bans and regulations.

1.5 This Study

On this basis this study attempts to further investigate contemporary pupils' motivation in school and how popular media affects them, looking at the video game medium, mainly commercial video games. Under investigation is whether or not video games, using *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) as an example, may motivate for and enhance learning, as seen with the pupil who was able to draw connections between what he learned in class and what he played in the video games. It will also be investigated if and how the series contributes to an actual or greater learning outcome using the English subject curriculum as an analytical tool. As the gap between teachers and what they present in class, and pupils and their everyday lives, has widened, a focus on how to bridge this gap is the purpose of this thesis. This is in addition to how contemporary pupils' identity of affiliation has become their primary role, and how this affects their institutional identity. The main focus will be on the English subject and how the main subject areas (that have been modified in this context) are targeted in the video games series, namely *language learning*, including oral and written communication, *literature*, and *culture and society*. As the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series revolves around history, a brief look at history as a part of the English subject will also be dealt with.

The method is a text analysis with a qualitative approach. The *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series has been analyzed using the *Læreplan i kunnskapsløftet 2006* (LK06) as a tool. This study is an argument for the use of popular media that interests pupils in the classroom, as a means to motivate for learning, this as the identity of affiliation now affects contemporary pupils' institutional identity (Gee, 2000-2001). There is also an intent to shed a more positive light on popular media, specifically video games, as well as to encourage educators to approach their pupils with a broader mindset. The primary research question is: "May popular

media, such as video games, and more explicitly the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series, contribute to enhance motivation for learning and increase the learning outcomes in the English subject?" The matter of constraints these type of media carry in terms of age limit and restrictions, will also be further investigated.

The first chapter will deal with motivation in an educational setting, as well as why some pupils find it difficult to maintain their motivation. There will also be a brief presentation of the contemporary generation, as well as the preceding generation. This will also include a discussion of the teacher as a motivator, as well as suggestions to what may be done in order to better the learning environment both for educators and learners. The second chapter deals with the English subject as presented in the subject curriculum, *Læreplan i kunnskapsløftet 2006,* and will function as this thesis' analytical tool. The third chapter will present Ubisoft's video game franchise and series *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015), before analyzing the games through the curriculum presented in the preceding chapter. This will be presented before looking at what advantages and limitations the medium may hold. The last chapter will consider ethical responsibilities and the issue of censorship and restriction of media. This will include looking at the purpose of restrictions of media, age ratings and censorship, before looking at whether or not their purpose and intent are met. The chapter will end with looking at whether or not *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) may be used in an educational setting despite its mature content and age ratings. This thesis will then conclude with a brief summary and emphasis on main points.

2. Motivation in Education

"There are three things to remember about education. The first one is motivation. The second one is motivation. The third one is motivation."

– Terrell H. Bell, (as cited in Ames, 1990, p. 409)

Behind every action there is an emotion and an expectation connected to it. Motivational theory is concerned with how these emotions, thoughts, and reasons are connected and related to actions and why one is prone to these acts in the first place (Imsen, 2006, p. 375). Giving a precise definition of motivation is a rather delicate issue due to the term's complexity and ambiguity. Motivation, used by psychologists and educators, describes the processes involved in behavior, the purpose behind that behavior, and its level of persistence. Motivation is therefore an essential condition of successful learning (Ray, 1992). In other words, motivation is what ignites an action, gives that action purpose, and continuation. Looking at the reasons behind people's actions, i.e., their motivation, is central when trying to understand and analyze human behavior (Imsen, 2006, p. 376).

When looking at the term from an educational perspective, one is concerned with whether or not learners achieve and maintain a desire to learn. There is also greater benefit in the motivation being of an intrinsic kind, where the learner is motivated by an inner desire and/or goal instead of an extrinsic reward (Imsen, 2006; Ray, 1992). With the rapid development and globalization of contemporary society, it has become more demanding to engage youth in school matters as schools often fail to keep up with this development. The current generation of youth, being so involved in their everyday lives, struggle therefore with perceiving school contents and matters as something beneficial and regard the curriculum as something rather irrelevant to their own lives (Steinkuehler, Squire, & Barab, 2012). This of course contributes to their lack of focus and motivation in school.

As mentioned, contemporary pupils face an entirely different society that keeps changing rapidly compared to previous generations. When schools, educators and teachers then struggle to keep up with these changes, the distance between teacher and pupil becomes even greater, making it even more difficult to establish and maintain a relationship. Some of the pupils that I met during my practice struggled exactly with this, and had trouble maintaining focus in class. There was, in particular, one pupil who was regarded both by his peers and teachers as the class's "trouble-maker". This pupil was the same that introduced *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) into the conversation about video games in the previously mentioned anecdote.

Therefore, looking at how to bridge the gap between school and pupils' everyday lives, as well as why this is of importance and how this may increase pupils' motivation, is this thesis' intent and purpose. Before this, understanding the importance of motivation in an educational context will therefore be essential. This chapter will therefore attempt to define the term motivation, before looking at contemporary pupils and reasons as to why they may lack it. Furthermore, looking at how teachers function as motivators in an educational context, and at suggestions on how to manage in this continuously developing society will be considered. This chapter will conclude with recommended initiatives in order to better the learning environment proposed by researchers and educators.

2.1 Understanding Motivation and its Importance

"(…) 'motivation' has been, is, and probably always will be at the heart of teaching and learning" (Maehr & Meyer, 1997, p. 372). The term is rather ambiguous and needs to be properly understood before it is confronted and tackled from different angles. It is important that the concept is specified and that the ones concerned with studying it both as a term and behavior understand its implications, before its importance, endurance, and value is discussed and analyzed (Maehr & Meyer, 1997; Ray, 1992).

Maehr and Meyer (1997) suggest using a different term in order to properly understand the concept and because of the connotations the term "motivation" carry is difficult to defend. Namely, "personal investment" focuses on the specific actions done by individuals. Maehr and Meyer argue that the study of motivation should both start and end with this focus. The term is suggested to also reflect a certain perspective on how motivation functions, the processes involved, and related causes. It also denotes the individual's capacity to possess certain resources, such as: time, degree of energy, and a certain set of knowledge and skills that each individual brings to any situation. Whether or not an individual is motivated, is not of concern when dealing with this perspective. Rather the emphasis is on at what point, and in what way, the individual invests his or her time, talent or skills, and energy during a specific activity (Maehr & Meyer, 1997). This may also be understood as *intrinsic goals* (Imsen, 2006)*,* which will be discussed later on.

Personal investment concerns itself with the direction, intensity, persistence and quality of a completed action or expression. An action's outcome is determined by the individual's choices, directions of behavior, their level of persistence during the action, as well as the quality of engagement of what is done and expressed. Although motivational research has

also focused on performance outcomes, it has nonetheless contributed to redirect attention towards a broader perspective. This is from primarily focusing on standardized test results and scores to the importance of creative and critical thinking, learning strategies, behavioral patterns, social development and self-esteem. In other words, the shift of focus has been from the emphasis on learning outcomes, to the development of life-long learning. The focus is on knowledge and skills acquired, in addition to factors enhancing endured investment in learning (Maehr & Meyer, 1997).

Motivational theory is not only concerned with the individuals alone, rather it also includes the social interactions between individuals. The individual's fundamental values which are instilled and developed with the help of societal input, is one of the variables the theory concerns itself with. Motivation can therefore be defined as that which triggers, continues and gives reason for action within the individual. Furthermore, motivation is conditioned and affected by the individual's values, experiences, self-esteem and expectations, which are not caused or instilled by the individual alone, but occurs by being a part of a society. This can be better understood with educator Gunn Imsen's figure (see below) that divides the human mind into three dimensions; the emotional aspect, the cognitive system and motivation itself. These three dimensions are closely related to one another and are labeled as "the trilogy of mind" (Imsen, 2006, p. 377). The three dimensions connect to one another, as well as with their background (the cultural aspect) in a continuing matter. Emotions feed the cognition with new perspectives, while the cognition regulates the emotions. Motivation then derives in a setting of the individual's cultural background, and from the two other dimensions (emotions and cognition). In other words, the individual's cultural upbringing becomes an important contributing factor as it functions as a background from which the three dimensions receive frequent input (Imsen, 2006).
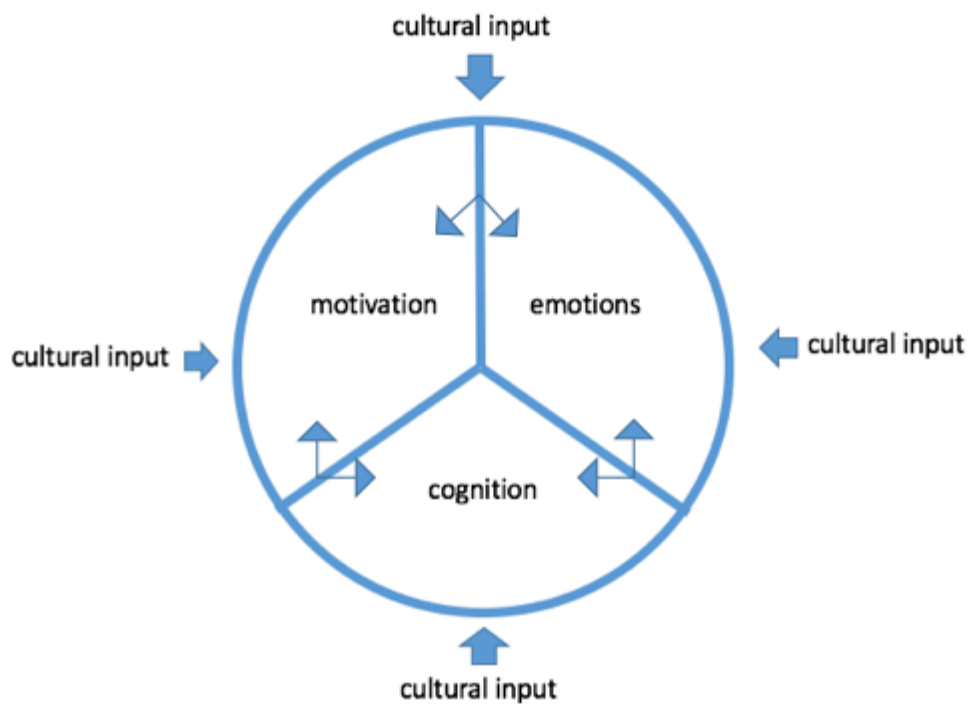
Figure 1. "The trilogy of the mind" **Source:** Imsen, 2006, p. 377

2.1.1 Intrinsic Goals vs. Extrinsic Rewards

Motivation evolves around targeted actions caused by either internal factors, external factors or even a combination of both. The distinction between the intrinsic and extrinsic lies in how the individual perceives their effort or actions. Someone motivated intrinsically finds meaning and pleasure in the action itself, whereas someone motivated extrinsically expects an external reward (Imsen, 2006). Ray (1992) distinguishes between the internal and external as well, in her description of "Locus of Control". The term, developed in the 1950's by Julian Rotter (Svartdal, 2013), is according to Ray a key concept in motivation. Someone with an internal locus of control is motivated by intrinsic goals, such as their internal needs and motives. In contrast, the extrinsic rewards are sought by the individual with an external locus of control (Ray, 1992). The ideal is for the pupils to be motivated intrinsically, that they enjoy learning because of learning in it of itself and the knowledge they gain, and not just to achieve a mere score on a test. However, because of the rather increased focus on standardized tests and

results, being extrinsically motivated has become the dominant approach. The result is that grades and test scores become driving factors in the pupils' education (Imsen, 2006, p. 382).

In relation to the study of motivation the distinction between internal and external motivation has also been of interest. In the field, there has been a focus on what Maehr and Meyer denote as the "person" for some and the "situation" for others (1997, p. 381). The distinctions are quite similar to the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. By focusing mainly on just one of the approaches, such as the one regarding the individual person, the researcher will look for variables concerning the individual's social background. Whereas when the focus is on the situation, one looks for variables such as what the challenge itself entails, what outcomes the individual can expect in terms of rewards and/or punishment, and so forth (Maehr & Meyer, 1997). Maehr and Meyer (1997) suggest three metaphors that have been and are still being used in the study of motivation, that they consider suitable for both the study of the person and situation. The metaphors are in relation to the person and how they are viewed, with "person as machine", "person as decision maker", and "person as creator of meaning", and they show the development or transitions in motivational theory (p. 381).

Because of the contributions of various psychologists such as Hull (1943, as cited in Maehr & Meyer, 1997), a perspective aimed towards the "need-drive" on social behavior arose. Consequently, several varieties of social needs-drives sprung forth as an outcome of the experiences revolving around one's fulfillment of basic physical needs. Later it became evident that there was a dissimilarity between social needs and physical drives. Where physical drives were easily traced and noted as repetitive in nature, social needs where not. It was also presupposed that the need for achievement was a consequence of one's emotional response to certain situations that were connected with one's ability to succeed or fail. Here the metaphor "person as machine" becomes apparent, as noted by Maehr and Meyer. Later on because of this research, another metaphor for motivation arose as the shift from a mechanical perspective to a more conscious perspective occurred (Maehr & Meyer, 1997).

The person was viewed as a decision maker from an economical perspective, but was not until Atkinson's work (1974, as cited in Maehr & Meyer, 1997) that the perspective became one of the predominant views of motivational theory. Several of the features in the metaphor of decision-making have been deemed important in attempting to define and study motivation. For instance, the matter of choice and which direction of behavior have been pivotal points. Looking closely at what alternatives the individual had, then at how the individual negotiated

the choice, they observed the individual's two-fold perception; the desire of obtaining something, and the probability of achieving it. The emphasis was on the individual as a decision maker. Later Atkinson examined how the dynamics within the individual functioned during the process of decision making. Because of his emphasis on the cognition of self and the environment, Atkinson contributed in the occurrence of the second transition (Maehr & Meyer, 1997).

When decision making became one of the predominant concerns of motivational study, there was also a change of perspectives in psychology. The focus went back to studying cognitive processes and consciousness. This time a new view on the matter arose, with a renewed interest in the concept of the self, as well as the emotional aspect of the behavior's reason, direction, and persistence. It was Weiner's (1986, as cited in Maehr & Meyer, 1997) efforts that now contributed to the establishment of the research that led to the third metaphor, more specifically the "person as creator of meaning". This happened because of the role causality plays in the individual's creation of meaning. One of Weiner's limitations, according to Maehr and Meyer, was how his research mainly dealt with the individual's ability and therefore less with value. Still, the concern with attribution led to an improved attention towards another aspect, specifically purpose. In other words, how one defines success and failure and why they pursue or avoid one or the other. This notion has been an important factor in explaining human behavior, specifically in more recent studies, such as in the "theory of goal orientation" (Maehr & Meyer, 1997, p. 385).

The "theory of goal orientation" occurred as a consequence to queries relating to principles of attributional concern both regarding the person and situation. As judgement about one's competence and value as a person was noted to revolve around the belief that a person is a creator of meaning. Furthermore, that the purpose and intent behind action is framed by one's concept of and feelings about one's self. Motivation is therefore regarded as what revolves around the personal constructions regarding one's self-view, beliefs and goals. When the theory of goal orientation was further researched, it was discovered that minorities appeared to regard themselves differently, as well as have different beliefs and goals to the majority. This this was also noted with women, where women regardless of being a part of the majority or not, regarded themselves differently, and had different beliefs and goals than men. One of the reasons as to why minorities and women regarded themselves differently than what the majority and men did, was related to how these groups deemed that others perceived them. Moreover, minorities worried that they would be met with prejudice, where stereotypes about

certain ethnicities increased their level of self-consciousness resulting in a lower self-confidence. Women, feared not being as competent or as skilled as men were. Furthermore, what seemed to have driven goal orientation theory forward was the new perspectives on cognitive motives and intrinsic motivation. It is here that it was established how purpose functioned as one of the core principles in the understanding of motivation. Just by labeling tasks differently, either as "work" or "play", a change in the individual's interest of pursuing the task was discovered. Other factors were also further examined, such as the need or want of social approval and competition. This resulted into the purpose behind and the desired goal becoming focal points when trying to understand not only the direction and intensity of behavior but also the quality. Thus, in contemporary society the "person as a creator of meaning" has become a central metaphor in the study of motivation (Maehr & Meyer, 1997).

2.2 Contemporary Pupils and Their Lack of Motivation

As previously mentioned, having pupils intrinsically motivated, and actually excited for their education, is what both schools and educators aim towards. In actuality most pupils are at a stage far from it, as they tend to regard school and its contents as irrelevant to their personal lives. Some pupils even regard school curricula as a drudge and as a painful event (Imsen, 2006; Prensky, 2006). The generation of youth today is naturally of a different kind than generations before. As society changes and develops, it is only natural that the people growing up in it will follow the changes and development accordingly. Whilst the generations have been through socio-cultural and economic developments throughout the years, there has simultaneously been an equivalent or maybe even more extensive technological development. This development has not only affected the global economy and industries alone, rather this change has also affected the personal life of the individual. Contemporary society's technological progression combined with the ideological developments has led to the preconditions of this generation to be of a different sort than that of previous. Increased accessibility of information and technology, combined with ample opportunities and freedom of choice, almost implies success, making it difficult to accept failure. As society changes and new forms of technology emerge, its inhabitants face both new opportunities and challenges requiring befitting approaches dissimilar to the preceding ones. Contemporary society, therefore, have a different set of values and goals than that of the earlier generations; modern generations seeks purpose, meaning, and the realization of themselves (Urban, n.d).

Studies have found that the time era of one's birth dictates or at least influences an individual's life and personality to a greater extent than their lineage (Twenge, 2006). In what time one is born is of great importance to what kind of culture one will be raised in and experience. This includes world events, social trends and the economic reality of the time and place one lives in, as well as morals and values, and behavioral norms not at least. The society one grows up in contributes to the molding of one's being at a young age, and contributes to fashion one's view of life that tends to stay with one for the rest of one's life (Twenge, 2006, 2013). "Generation Me", a term developed by Professor Jean M. Twenge (2006), denotes the generation of today's youth as they are both perceived and perceive themselves as more independent, self-concerned, tolerant, ambitious, and confident than previous generations. Even though this is how they are perceived, it has been found that there is an increase of depressive, anxious, lonely, cynical, and emotionally unstable youth in this generation. The focus on the self and striving for self-realization characterizes this generation, where work and effort is exchanged for pleasure and enjoyment with the goal of achieving meaning and a sense of belonging. These attributes contribute to creating new conditions for pupils which result in new challenges affecting both educators and the pupils themselves (Twenge, 2006, 2013).

"Generation Me" do not necessarily settle for the same achievements as their predecessors. Today's generation are on a pursuit of happiness, on a pursuit of achieving what was promised to them by their parents and elders. Previous generations, such as the "Silent Generation", raised by the "G.I. Generation" who grew up during the "Great Depression", had different preconditions. Being survivors of World War II and because of the difficulties they encountered, the "G.I. Generation" made sure to raise their children upon the principle of pursing financial stability. Their children were therefore taught to secure their economy by securing themselves practical and stable careers. By working hard and enduring the hardships, one would in the end achieve the goal of financial security and thereby be satisfied and content. This was accomplished to the extent that they had a more positive and successful life experience than that of their parents. They therefore raised their own children, the "Baby Boomers", with a more optimistic point of view encouraging their children to pursue whatever they wanted. This of course was passed down to the next generation again, making "Generation Me" even more hopeful and wanted more than what their parents had achieved. This resulted into having a generation characterized among other traits, as tremendously

ambitious, rather delusional and "more miserable than ever before" (Urban, n.d), due to reality failing their expectations (Twenge, 2006, 2013).

The notion of planning one's parenthood in contemporary society is a relatively new phenomenon, where birth control has become increasingly reliable, abortion and surrogacy legal in some countries, and adoption widespread. This generation has therefore become the most wanted generation of children, as parents have an actual desire and wish to have and raise their child. "Generation Me" has been taught to put themselves first, through media, school and their family. They have been told that they are special, unique, and that they matter. Contemporary youth are raised with the notion of the individual's importance, that one always comes first and that the most important ambition is to be content with one self and achieve true happiness. This has led to their expectations to be of an optimistic sort, where this generation takes it for granted that they will receive higher education, work in a field they are interested in, and some even expect to become famous (Twenge, 2006, 2013). Nick Hornby's novel *A Long Way Down* portrays this generation's mindset quite accurately through one of his characters "JJ":

> *"The trouble with my generation is that we all think we are fucking geniuses. Making something isn't good enough for us, and neither is selling something, or teaching something, or even just doing something; we have to* be *something. It's our inalienable right, as citizens of the twenty-first century. If Christina Aguilera or Britney or some American Idol jerk can be something, then why can't I?"* (Hornby, 2005, p. 23).

Hornby's character, JJ, is comparing this generation to the previous ones, where it used to be enough just doing something in the society, as having a job and making and earning a living, he argues that this generation strives for what is beyond. The contemporary generation has been raised with the notion of them being special and unique, "geniuses". This generation will therefore not settle with what their predecessors did. Simply having an occupation is not enough to satisfy the generation of today. According to Hornby's character, "Generation Me" wants to be something, and not only that, they believe that they deserve to become someone; that this is their right growing up in a society that facilitates for this success. This being recognized as part of this generation's traits as they have been denoted as: "wildly ambitious, delusional, and taunted" (Urban, n.d). Because of being brought up believing that one is special and can achieve anything, "Generation Me" believes that they can in fact become anyone they want to as long as they work for it, hence them being denoted as "wildly ambitious". This generation also believes that their individual wishes and rights are the most

important, and they do not have the interest in allowing societal expectations to stop them. The reason they are denoted as "delusional" is because of the notion they carry that they are unique and different from everyone else. Because of this notion "Generation Me" believes they are in fact entitled to achieve their dreams. They are also considered to be "taunted" due to social media were this generation share moments, statuses, pictures and videos of their proclaimed success. Media, such as music, television, movies and video games, encourage and portray stories of people that achieved their dreams and succeeded. This contributes to "taunt" the people of this generation, as they are constantly reminded that others are achieving the same success they themselves long for (Twenge, 2006).

Additionally, "Generation Me" has been denoted as lazy, entitled and spoiled. This is presumably by their earlier predecessors, who managed to graduate from college without student debts, acquired high-paid work and have or are still planning to retire with a rather satisfying pension (Urban, n.d). Although this may not be the reality for everyone, there are some who believe that the previous generation experienced a less demanding career path that contributed into their guaranteed success of the competitive marked compared to "Generation Me". Where some would denote contemporary generation as rather spoiled, others would argue that their preconditions play a dominant factor in the equation. There is also this notion of how contemporary youth are still living in their parents' basements, how they have not bought homes, vehicles or even saved for retirement due to the constraints they face (San Luis, 2015). As the contemporary generation is growing more confident the society they grow up in is becoming increasingly competitive. Studying at a higher level is not as easy as it may have been, where college admissions are not only competitive but also expensive in some countries. In addition to the fact that acquiring a college degree no longer guarantees that one will also obtain work as there is an equivalent or even bigger competition in finding work (San Luis, 2015). The above mentioned creates therefore a different learning environment for contemporary pupils, and thus contributes to the lack of motivation a lot of pupils therefore face.

2.2.1 Teachers as Motivators

One of the teacher's most important duties is in fact to be a motivator for the pupils. This is also supported by research that indicates the influence teachers have on their pupils' motivation (Ray, 1992). The teachers and the school as an institution also influence, or at least contribute, to what the pupil will learn, how the pupils regard themselves as learners, and how

they will behave (Maehr & Meyer, 1997). The idea of the educator's role in the development and persistence of motivation within pupils was not of much importance when motivational research was at its beginning. Later on the educator was also seen as a factor in the pupils' motivation and not just a factor that itself needed motivation. The research began therefore to look at what the teachers specifically asked and demanded of their pupils. The results were, among other things, that teacher-practices became repetitive and normative, and affected both the direction and quality of the pupils' effort and contributions. It was also detected that the schools which chose a certain way of managing and teaching, in where they did not take the children's need of development into consideration, had an increase of pupils with reduced motivation and abnormal behavior. The school environment contributed to reducing pupils' freedom, choice and individualism, focusing on externally controlling its youth rather than allowing for personal growth (Maehr & Meyer, 1997; Ray, 1992).

Unfortunately, a lot of contemporary schools are still organized in a way that does not necessarily prioritize the pupils' personal and social needs. Though many schools may claim that they do focus on the psychosocial welfare of the pupil, rules and regulations set by administrators, politicians and people alike contribute to restricting this desire, as contemporary youth have different needs than that of the previous generations. Certain close relationships between pupils and their superiors are restricted in nature, which contributes to restraining the pupils' need of care and support. Exaggerated rules and regulations that intend to discipline pupils' behavior, often lead to a limited freedom of personality as well as their interest in learning and education (Maehr & Meyer, 1997). "(…) we then wonder why children appear unmotivated to learn after we have disconnected meaning from the learning situation, assuming that the learner somehow will attribute the same functional value to the information as the teacher does" (Steinkuehler, Squire, & Barab, 2012, p. 3). In other words, in order for the pupils to actually benefit and be motivated, educators, politicians, teachers, and everyone involved in the educational process of pupils, have to engage their learners in meaningful environments and realize the gap between their own interest and understanding, and that of their pupils. The school has to provide for content with functional value for the pupils in order for them to see its benefit. If the only outcome the pupils receive is a mere score on a test, it becomes rather apparent why contemporary pupils lose their motivation (Steinkuehler, Squire, & Barab, Games, Learning, and Society, 2012). The trait of an effective teacher also includes the ability to instill attitudes and beliefs in the pupils that provide for and sustain ample and valuable engagement in the learning (Ray, 1992).

When trying to understand the individuals in a society and in schools, looking at their identities has proven to provide a broader understanding in the study of human behavior, in this case, the pupils and their preconditions. Professor James Paul Gee (2000-2001) distinguishes between four kinds of identities or roles, within the individual, that he presents as not separate but interrelated in both complicated and important ways. This in contrast to what Gee describes as "(…) the sometimes overly general and static trio of 'race, class and gender'" (Gee, 2000-2001, p. 99). The identities or roles include one's identity of 'nature', 'institution', 'discourse', and 'affinity'. According to Gee, it is the last identity that is of importance in contemporary society, as it is this identity a lot of today's youth have made their primary identity. This way of categorizing one's identity differs from the traditional way of understanding identity. In Gee's point of view, one's identity depends on the context one is in, and can be better understood as a certain role one takes in given situations (Gee, 2000-2001).

The first identity or role, 'nature', entails one's constant state or condition, and is the one that is developed from nature. The second one, 'institution', involves one's position or role in a given institution, such as being a pupil in a school. 'Discourse', concerns itself with those individual traits that are recognizable in a discourse, either recognized externally or internally. The identity of 'affinity' is better understood as one's identity of interest. In other words, those experiences shared with friends of choice. This last category is of importance as it is the category that tends to be in conflict with the pupils' institutional identity, as many pupils have made their affinity their sole identity. In other words, these pupils struggle with taking on different roles during various situations, and play only one role during all situations, namely their identity of affinity.

In order to exemplify this, we can look at someone who plays video games quite regularly. This person would have a set of distinctive experiences, such as regularly playing video games, owning one or more device platforms, owning a certain type or different types of video games, and engaging in "fandoms" (fan domains). It is these types of sets of distinctive practices, that places the person in the category of a certain group or identity. When referring to the identity of nature or institution however, a person would belong to a certain group based on pre-established criteria. The identity of affiliation focuses on a person's distinctive social practices, that are specifically chosen by the individual themselves. These are in turn based on groups that share these interests and experiences, rather than one's family or institution. Being a part of an "affinity group" entails active participation in specific practices

concerning that shared interest. In the example of a "gamer", an affinity group of gamers consist of people that play video games regularly because of self-interest. If a member of an affinity group does not join a certain group voluntarily, but are in one way or another forced into the interaction of the group, they will not experience this setting as something that inherently speaks to "the kind of person they are". To truly be a part of an affinity group entails making a conscious choice to be so. Furthermore, an affinity group may consist of people dispersed across large areas, locally, nationally or even globally (Gee, 2000-2001). What keeps the group together is their shared interest, which can even be divided to further sub-groups. For instance, gamers that enjoy specific video game genres (such as first-person shooters, puzzles, action-adventures, and etc.). Now, if this person made the identity of affinity their sole identity, this would have an effect on the other aspects of the remaining three identities. For instance, an institutional identity would not be considered as an accurate representation of the person, nor would it be of primary concern to conform to the norms that would be required in an institutional setting. Their focus would lie within the development of their affinity identity, and in the previously presented example, this could include placing all their time and efforts into acquiring more games, game-time, developing skills, etc., that would in turn develop their affinity identity further.

In order for educators and parents to be able to specifically address the challenges of identity or roles with their youth, there needs to be a deeper understanding of the different ways identity is expressed, as well as the ever-changing nature of the phenomenon (Gee, 2000-2001). I will therefore argue that by understanding the pupils and their identity of interest, educators, teachers, and politicians, may use this to increase the motivational drives within the pupils as well as create a better learning environment for them.

2.4 Academic Performance in Today's Society

According to educational advisor, Sir Kenneth Robinson, the educational system today revolves around academic performance. From elementary school and up until high school, the central idea is to prepare pupils for their further academic education. This is of course praiseworthy, as a well-educated society results in a well-developed society. However, the matter does not become that of an issue until it negatively affects the people in the society, even if only parts of it. When there is a huge emphasis on the sciences alone at the expense of the humanities and arts, the result is an exclusion of large and important parts of society. The consequence is that academic ability becomes the definition of intelligence and main resource

(Robinson, 2006, 2010). One becomes judged according to whether or not one has obtained an academic degree and even what type of degree. Where one used to be praised if one had obtained a bachelor's degree, and even more so if one completed their master's, today it is expected and therefore taken for granted. Therefore, there is a tendency to stigmatize those who lack the ability resulting in them being excluded from certain parts of society regardless of what other abilities they have. Another consequence is what Robinson denotes as an "academic inflation". Degrees have lost their values; previously one would obtain a certain job after one had obtained a certain diploma. Today the requirements for often the same type of jobs are much higher, where one used to need a bachelor's, one is required to have a master's, and where one used to need a master's, one is now required to have a doctorate (Robinson, 2006).

Robinson argues that public education has been subjected to a reformation around the world for two reasons: economy and cultural identity. Youth must know their place in both the local and international economy so that the economy will continue to expand and grow. As well, they have to be able to maintain their cultural identity and values as the world becomes more globalized and united. These goals befitting today's globalized society are in and of themselves not the issue of concern. The troubling part is how there has not been a reformation in how these goals are to be achieved. In other words, Robinson argues that the school system is being operated as it was in the past intended for a relatively different purpose and generation (Robinson, 2006, 2010) where the main focus in the past was to work hard and do well so that one would get a good college degree that again would result in achieving a decent job. Today's society has a different agenda. Previously schools were driven with an economic imperative, the purpose was to educate the citizens in order to sustain and develop the industries. It was not until more recent times that the focus shifted towards this idea of cultivating the students as individuals well. Perhaps because of this, achieving the preliminary aspiration has become rather challenging. Robinson further claims that this has then resulted into the "modern epidemic", namely the increase of youth diagnosed with disorders such as ADHD. If a pupil does not fit the criterion of excelling in the sciences, regardless of their abilities in other subjects, they are prone to be labeled as "trouble makers" and diagnosed with disorders because of their "rebellion" (Robinson 2006, 2010).

Consultant Yves Morieux (2015) follows up on Robinson's claims and argues that today's increased focus on productivity and accountability at the individual level is making communities rather ineffective and unproductive. This, according to Morieux, has then

resulted into a counterintuitive approach to the issue. Morieux's focal point is that by restricting an organization too much or by applying too many rules the outcome will be inefficiency and unproductivity. What he suggests is that the focus should shift towards the group, community, or society, as a unit, and that the examination should be on how to improve the organization (i.e. schools) as a whole. The huge focus on each individual, according to Morieux, is to undermine the importance of collaboration. Each individual plays of course an important role, however, it is through the efforts of teams and groups that the goal is achieved. "Thanks to co-operation, the whole is worth more than the sum of the parts" (Morieux, 2015, 6:46 min). If not, the claim is that effort will be put to waste by having each individual carry a communal burden by themselves (Morieux, 2015).

Robinson further argues that, when comparing this to today's school and the excessive concern with the individual pupil's performance and test results, the focus on results and scores is still a dominant part of the school system, making mistakes stigmatized and quite frightening. What is happening as a consequence is that the creative individual is deprived of their chance of growth and rather forced into fitting this "standardized" definition of what a human being should be. According to Robinson, this is happening everywhere in the world. There is a hierarchy of subjects where the top subjects are mathematics and languages before the humanities with the arts at the bottom. This further undermines the pupils that excel in subjects other than the top two. The consequence is that important resources found in fields other than the sciences are deprioritized. A society consists of a wide range of various and important factions, only educating one part of it will inevitably lead to an unwanted unbalance in resources. Therefore, appreciating the significance of the other fields and their importance in developing a society is vital (Robinson, 2006, 2010).

2.5 "Where We Need to Go"

Robinson argues that a reformation in the way intelligence and ability is perceived should be the next step. As previously mentioned, only nurturing one resource of a society will bring about an uneven development causing disorder. In other words, rethinking the fundamental principles on which the educational system lies is the direction that needs to be headed towards (Robinson, 2006). Below are a set of recommended initiatives proposed by researchers and educators alike that emphasize solving the issue at hand. Namely, to challenge the way teaching is approached today and the methods that are being used.

Twenge (2013) suggests a couple of measures which she encourages educators to take that she believes will contribute to bettering both the teaching and learning environment. She focuses on establishing a middle-ground where both the importance of the academic disciplines and the pupils' needs are focal points. In order for this to be achieved, she proposes that educators understand their pupils' cultural context and position. There is an emphasis on the fact that youth are a result of the society they live in, the parents that raised them, the media they encounter and consume, and of course their previous teachers. Of course Twenge does not argue for it to be a compromise in the content of what is being taught, but rather that one should adapt the way one teaches to better suit pupils and their understanding. The reason is because of contemporary youth's need for purpose and meaning in what they do and encounter. Today's pupils want to know what the point is in learning what they are being taught, and if there is any other value to it than just achieving a certain score on a test. The notion of striving because it is a duty, is to this generation something incomprehensible and rather unappealing, where what matters is to be personally fulfilled. According to Twenge, this attitude in it of itself is not detrimental. Rather, if dealt with properly, it is something of beneficence to both teachers and learners. For instance, by using this desire to understand purpose and meaning, educators can contribute into instilling more motivation and effort by precisely providing their pupils with meaning. Particularly in today's society that stresses the importance of becoming someone, not just something (Twenge, 2013).

Ray (1992) puts forward various recommendations aimed at educators in order to bring about positive change in the classroom. Firstly, she puts an emphasis on the establishment of a relationship between the teacher and the pupils, of course this relationship being of a professional kind. This includes listening to the pupils, showing interest in their personal matters, and displaying acceptance of their individuality. There is also a matter of making the pupils accountable for their actions and teaching them how to face consequences of their actions. This is in addition to trusting the pupils, as growth constitutes a certain degree of independence followed by guidance. Secondly, the subject and material must be presented in pleasant conditions. The teacher must have a positive attitude, be encouraging and model enthusiasm in order to instill and maintain the motivational level in their pupils. There is also an advantage in utilizing the pupils' personal interests. If the teacher uses these interests as a means to present their material, engaging the pupils will be an effortless task (Ray, 1992). The notion of failure is also something that Ray suggests needs to be dealt with in the classroom. The teacher has to clarify to his or her pupils that failure in it of itself is not failure, rather

giving up is. Understanding success and that it is defined individually, is a matter that needs to be discussed with the pupils as well. The notion of only one definite way to succeed is quite troubling, rather success depends on the individual's definition of it. So is knowing that competition can be stimulating and a positive force if regulated properly, and can be a source of discouragement if not properly facilitated. Thirdly, in order for the positive change to occur and to be maintained, there needs also to be a continuing stimulation of the pupils. If the pupils do not feel stimulated by the activities in the classroom they will look for stimulation elsewhere (Ray, 1992). One of the major reasons that pupils struggle with maintaining motivation in the classrooms is exactly because of this issue. There needs to be an understanding of the individuality of each pupil, and that each has what is valuable and meaningful for them. If one uses that to advantage, stimulating pupils and encouraging them in their learning becomes less demanding for all parties (Barab, 2012).

How teachers and educators may properly execute the propositions mentioned above, is certainly up for debate. The suggestion and example in this study is through media which today's youth are concerned with and in which they spend much of their time on, more specifically, video games**.** Writer and educational speaker, Marc Prensky quotes engineer Donald Norman when he expresses how impressive it is to witness children playing video games with such a high level of energy, enthusiasm, and devotion (1993, as cited in Prensky, 2006, p. 84). The question of how come these same kids do not perceive their education as something equally enjoyable arises. Additionally, the question of why it is the opposite, and how school can be as engaging. Prensky contrasts today's school and education with video games, where school is regarded as something dreadful while playing video games is the opposite. Even while playing the games themselves, it is the process that is engaging and motivating, not the end goal in it of itself (Prensky, 2006). In addition to this, the medium contributes to large amounts of learning, which will be supported later on.

As a society it is highly important to be constantly evaluating the various communities within it and if there is room for improvement and at what times. Looking at today's process of learning and how it is labeled, according to Prensky (2006) as "painful", and then in contrast to a popular medium as video games, the question of why arises. An even better question would be to ask what can be done to make learning as engaging and interesting as media such as video games. The truth of the matter is that video games are not engaging because it is something given, and today's education is not uninteresting because it is given. In reality, these are matters which are constructed and developed, something that makes them open to

adjustment. In other words, there is nothing that prevents making education as interesting and "attractive" for pupils the same way popular media is. The reason why video games are engaging and why children are turning to them and media like them instead of their education is because of the game designers' and developers' objective (Extra Credits, 2012). Their primary concern is to keep their users engaged while playing, as this will result to making more money out of their users. The more a user plays the more value they will receive for their money which again causes them to continue to buy from the same producers in the future. This is how a game designer or developer measures their success, exactly by how engaged their users are with their products. In contrast to educators and academics that measure success by their pupils' test results, and have this as their primary concern, instead of focusing on engaging pupils (Prensky, 2006).

It seems that a lot of today's educators and academics believe that in order to achieve a proper level of academic comprehension, one needs to do so under rigorous and demanding conditions. In other words, having fun and learning is to some dichotomous and irreconcilable. Consequently, they resist making any efforts in reforming teaching the way it is currently done, thus passing down the "pain" of education to the generations after as if it was an academic rite of passage (Prensky, 2006, p. 85). This is of course irrational as this is not proven to be a fact. Just as society has finally removed corporal punishment as a means of instructing the youth in both schools and in general, it is, according to Prensky, about time that the same is done to what he denotes as "outdated" and "dreadful" teaching. Engaging, meaningful, and interesting learning is not only enjoyable and motivating, but also effective and even more so than the traditional "outdated" learning (Prensky, 2006).

According to game theorist Jane McGonigal (2011), reality as it is today has "broken". This is because reality today is lacking what is important for the people living in its society. In the virtual world of video games, the player feels fully alive, focused and engaged. The player even has a certain set of skills and powers that can improve as long as they put in a certain amount of effort. There is this sense of purpose and companionship as well as a sense of accomplishment each time a task is completed. Success is also achieved by making an effort and not put to waste, and even more so when done together with the community one is a part of. This is in contrast to the real world which is much more fragile and unpredictable. Reality does not motivate as effectively as video games do, reality is not engineered to maximize each individual's potential. Reality is not designed from the bottom up to facilitate happiness for everyone. This is among other reasons why a lot of people chose to opt out of reality and

escape to the virtual world of video games. Controlling or engineering reality and unforeseen events that are indeed inevitable in life is impossible. What is possible, is to change those domains that are created and not given, such as the constructed society, institutions, and of course schools. There is nothing that prevents one from engineering or designing the educational system with the purpose of enhancing meaning and value for their users. There is nothing preventing the society from making institutions that encourage and facilitate fun and personal growth better befitting today's technologically advanced youth (McGonigal, 2011).

As mentioned in the case of the pupil that was regarded as a "trouble-maker" because of his lack of focus in class. This pupil would easily be distracted and lack the motivation and concentration to pay attention and finish tasks. Imsen explains a pupil with these characteristics as either someone unsure and perhaps even nervous or anxious to actually do what is expected in fear of failing, or as someone who does not care about their education as they have other priorities in their life. Imsen further explains this as "performance motivation (prestasjonsmotivasjon)", where the pupils' drive is based on the need to achieve something according to someone's standard. Someone motivated by achievement, wants not only to succeed for profit or status, but also simply perform well on what they are doing, just for the sake of performing well. "Performance motivation" deals with intrinsic motivation, a positive attitude towards performing and achieving in it of itself, and does not concern itself with receiving rewards (Imsen, 2006, p. 392). Furthermore, someone motivated by performance or achievement, have two underlying tendencies or concerns, the want or drive to actually complete a task, and the fear of failure. The person may therefore find themselves pulled between the two, and if the latter becomes bigger than the former, completing an actual task may become extremely difficult (Imsen, 2006, p. 394). As in the case of the pupil met during practice that struggled with completing even the simplest of tasks in school, but managed to complete several installments of *Assassin's Creed*, despite the games being in English, and despite a rather complex nature as the games are aimed toward adults. Imsen further explains the nature of a person that is motivated by achievement and performance, by looking at how they react to a task before actually completing it. When he or she is subjected to a task, the first thing that he or she will do is to analyze whether or not they may be able to finish the task and how challenging the task will be for them. Moreover, if the task is strictly routine, or deemed too easy by the person, the motivation for completing the task reduces. The same happens if the task is deemed too difficult. For this person, their motivation is only increased when the task is challenging enough but not too challenging (Imsen, 2006, p. 395-396). This

principle of being challenging enough but not too challenging, is what the majority of video game developers aim towards. If they want their player to continue playing their video game, and spend money on future video games from the same developer, striking that balance of being challenging enough but not too difficult is of their primary goals (Extra Credits, 2012). Although it would have been interesting to further delve into the concept of motivation in school in general as well as to look at all of the subjects, and all of popular media, this study will because of time and page limit mainly focus on the English subject and video games, namely the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series.

3. The English Subject Curriculum

In the Norwegian national curriculum, LK06 (*Læreplan i kunnskapsløftet 2006*), the purpose of language learning is defined as both the acquisition of communicative skills as well as a means to cultivate (danne) the pupils and be a tool for further education. The subject should also contribute to provide the pupils with the insight of how others live, experience the variety of culture within the English-speaking world, and instill a deeper understanding of others and oneself. Furthermore, according to LK06 the subject is to be taught through a variety of media. Multimodal texts, and the interaction with others, can according to the curriculum additionally contribute to inspire the pupils' level of creativity. The language learning is to include knowledge both about and usage of the language, as well as an insight into how the pupils themselves learn language, as well as a focus on self-evaluation both when learning and using the language. 'Language learning' is defined as that which "(…) occurs while encountering a diversity of texts" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). This is further described as that which involves oral and written representations in various forms. There is also an emphasis on the awareness of the strategies one uses when learning language, as this awareness, according to the curriculum, contributes to making language acquisition more meaningful. The pupils are also to be able to see the relationship between their native language, other languages and English. Additionally, the focus on the establishment of clear aims and goals for the learner, and how the learner is to reach these goals, as well as how they are later to be assessed on this, is of great importance in the curriculum (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d).

This section will focus on language learning and acquisition and how the English subject is presented in the LK06. The main subject areas, namely 'language learning', 'oral communication', 'written communication' and 'culture, society and literature' will be in focus and are divided in this thesis into 'language learning and communication', 'literature' and 'culture and society, (including) history'. This in order to give the main component 'literature' its own section to properly deal with and give it adequate consideration. This presentation of the subject curriculum and components will later be used in the analysis of the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series, as a demonstration of what pupils may be gaining on an education level that English teachers and educators may fail, or not be allowed, to see.

3.1 Language Learning vs. Acquisition

Becoming fluent in a language can happen either through language exposure and unconditional practice, or through the study of the language and conscious effort. Linguist Harold Palmer (1905), as cited in Harmer (2007, p. 50), looked deeper into the matter of acquired language versus language studied or learned. Here, language acquisition was understood as the natural ability to acquire language subconsciously, and language learning as that knowledge that was transferred, organized and applied consciously. What Palmer later found was that language acquisition contributed to enhancing one's oral and communicative skills, whereas language learning, to consciously learn and be taught a language, is essential in the developing and strengthening of literacy skills. Children acquire language subconsciously in their first years, as they are exposed to it on a regular basis both by the adults and peers in their lives. They are therefore not learning this consciously nor being explicitly taught, rather their acquisition is based on natural capability. As the child grows and reaches the age of puberty, this natural capability of absorbing evolves to the ability of understanding abstract concept thus enhancing their abilities to learn a language. However, the natural capability of acquiring subsides therefore increasing the need of explicit and conscious learning (Harmer, 2007, p. 49).

Linguist Stephen Krashen (1984, as cited in Harmer, 2007) further developed this notion of differentiating between acquiring and learning a language. Krashen suggested that acquiring a language, versus explicitly learning one, differ both in how they affect the learner and how they are in their forms. He claimed that language acquired subconsciously and without pressure, resulted in the ability to easily speak the language spontaneously. In contrast, the knowledge of the language learned only enhances proficiency on the theoretical level. Not to claim that one is superior than the other, as both are important when seeking complete proficiency in a language. Rather, through language acquisition the learner becomes more natural in their handling of the language (Harmer, 2007, p. 50). Other scholars, such as linguist Kevin R. Gregg (1989), have argued that consciously learned language can also be a part of the subconsciously acquired language processes. They further argue that an awareness of the forms of language with the language learner is both effective and necessary. Although these scholars do agree with and recognize the importance of input and subconscious acquisition in language learning (Drew & Sørheim, 2009), Krashen too acknowledges the importance of filling in the gaps of the learner where needed, by using grammar books and dictionaries as supportive tools (1984, as cited in Harmer, 2007). Today, scholars, educators

and teachers, believe that a combination of conscious and subconscious processes are of importance when developing foreign language competence within a learner (Drew & Sørheim, 2009, p. 27-28).

3.2 The Main Subject Areas and Basic Skills of the English Subject

The Norwegian national curriculum, LK06, presents and structures the English subject into four main subject areas. The main subject areas, 'language learning', 'oral communication', 'written communication' and 'culture, society and literature', have each their set of competence aims that are further divided according to stages. There is a total of five stages, one encompassing the pupils in both 1st and 2nd grade, the second encompassing 3rd and 4th, the third encompassing 5th, 6th and 7th grade, the fourth encompassing 8th, 9th, and 10th, and the final encompassing the first and second year of high school (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d).

'Language learning' in LK06 involves both learning the English language itself as well as comparing it with other languages, in addition to one's native language. The main subject area is to cover knowledge about the language and how the language is used, as well as to develop the ability to evaluate oneself. This includes the ability to evaluate one's abilities, learning needs, and the ability to choose the right method and strategy when learning and using the language (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d).

The main subject area 'oral communication' in LK06, focuses on the development of vocabulary and the usage of idiomatic structures and grammatical patterns. Additionally, the area includes learning correct pronunciation, with focus on enunciation and intonation. Awareness of social and cultural norms in various of situations as well as general politeness, is also to be taught in this subject area. Including the ability to distinguish and to be able to use formal and informal spoken language oneself. This, according to the curriculum, is to be developed through the use and exposure of various and differentiated media and resources, and through cross-curricular teaching (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d).

The importance of understanding and using the English language through reading and writing, is emphasized in the main subject area 'written communication'. The subject area also includes the reading of various texts with the purpose of achieving a broader understanding as well as acquiring knowledge. Additionally, reading various forms and types of texts shall contribute to the individual's further development and maturation, as well as creativity and inspiration. The learner is to write a variety of texts in the language targeting a variety of

audiences in a variety of forms, as well as become able to distinguish and use informal and formal written language. This, is also according to the curriculum, to be developed through the use and exposure of various and differentiated media and resources (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d).

'Culture, society and literature', the final main subject area of the English subject, focuses on the ability to understand culture in its broadest sense. The area is to cover topics connected to social issues, history, literature and cultural expressions in English-speaking countries. The learner is to work with a variety of media, literary texts, cultural expressions, and to develop knowledge and understanding, as well as respect for the lives and different cultures of other people (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d).

Furthermore, in the Norwegian national curriculum, there is a notion of incorporating a set of basic skills that will further enhance learning in school, future work and social life. The basic skills are to be integrated in all of the subjects in the curriculum by being incorporated in the competence aims, and are according to the curriculum: "basic in the sense that they are fundamental to learning in all subjects" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2011, p. 5). Additionally, the skills are a prerequisite in order for the pupil to display their competence and qualifications. Each subject in the curriculum expresses the five basic skills according to the subject at hand depending on the relevance of each skill in accordance to the subject. The five basic skills presented in the English subject are, 'oral skills', 'being able to express oneself in writing', 'being able to read', 'numeracy' and 'digital skills'.

The first skill, stresses the ability to interact, by evaluating and adapting various expressions, being aware of different situations and the receiver when interacting. This skill is to be acquired by learning about the social conventions and customs both in international contexts and in English-speaking countries. The learner is also to acquire the ability to understand the varieties of English dialects and accents that are spoken in different parts of the world. 'Being able to express oneself in writing', is according to the curriculum to be understood as the ability to express one's opinions and ideas and be understood in written language. This entails the process of planning, formulating, revising and working with coherent and communicative texts. The development of this skill also involves the learning of orthography and expansion of vocabulary. The third skill, 'being able to read', is understood as the ability to derive meaning from a variety of different texts. This skill involves working with the reading of English texts of different lengths and levels of difficulty for different purposes. It is also expected to use different reading strategies suited for the purpose, as well as reading more

demanding texts in order to further develop the reading proficiency. The penultimate basic skill, 'numeracy', entails the ability to apply relevant mathematical concepts in English when faced with appropriate situations. This entails being able to understand and use the units of measure used in English-speaking countries, as well as to be able to communicate by using figures, graphic representations, tables and statistics. The final skill deals with the ability to utilize a variety of digital tools, media, and resources. Primarily with the intent of assisting the language learning, by for instance communicating through digital media in English. The development of digital skills in the English subject is through the gathering and processing of information and creating various texts using digital tools. The ability to utilize digital tools when writing, such as adding effects, images, tables, headlines and so forth, is a part of this. As well as using digital sources and being critical and aware of the sources sought and used. It is also a requirement to know and be aware of copyright rules and the rulings regarding personal privacy. All of the skills have their individual grids showing progression through different levels, each containing the requirements in order to progress. This is with the purpose of increasing development in the subjects and reaching the competence aims (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2011).

3.2.1 'Language Learning, and Oral and Written Communication'

Language learning in the National curriculum has not always had the same purpose or methods. Various ideologies and approaches have throughout the years been and are still being developed and tried out. With sociologist and anthropologist Dell Hymes came the focus of 'communicative competence' in 1972 (as cited in, Drew & Sørheim, 2009). Where previously there had been a focus on grammar, translation, repetition and vocabulary, Hymes wanted there to be a focus on not only knowledge competence but also the ability to put knowledge into practice, and argued for the importance of linguistic and sociolinguistic competence. The concept of 'communicative competence' was to focus on the social and cultural knowledge the learner has to acquire when wanting to understand and use the correct linguistic forms. Teachers at this time were seeking new approaches and methods, as they deemed the preceding methods as too restrictive and tiring (Drew & Sørheim, 2009, p. 26).

The Norwegian national curriculum, *Mønsterplan for grunnskolen* (M87), was heavily influenced by the communicative approach and emphasized communication as the most important aspect of language learning. The curriculum introduced activities focusing on communication and development of communicative skills, such as dramatization, role-

playing, and communicative games. Mistakes were now considered a part of learning, and creativity was to be encouraged. The curricula after, further developed this notion of communicative focus, and included the discovery of other cultures in which English was used. The varieties of English dialects and accents were also included, as well as learning about the history and society of English speaking countries (Drew & Sørheim, 2009, p. 29-31). Today the curriculum, LK06, is a more concise version of its predecessor L97 (*Læreplanverket for den 10-årige grunnskolen*), focusing on competence aims and communication, emphasizing the development of awareness in language learning. LK06 was also influenced by the recent European trends in foreign language education, now including a 'Core Curriculum', 'Quality Framework', 'Subject Curricula', 'Distribution of teaching hours per subject' and an 'Individual Assessment'. This is in addition to defining five basic skills that are to be adapted and integrated into each of the subjects, namely the ability to 'read', 'express oneself orally' and 'in writing', 'develop numeracy' and 'use digital tools'. In contrast to L97, LK06 only mentions what competence aims the pupils are to reach, and not what methods are to be used, thus allowing teachers and educators to more freedom of choice in materials and methods used when teaching (Drew & Sørheim, 2009, p. 40-41).

The main subject area 'language learning', as presented in the curriculum, aims to provide the pupils with knowledge, tools and skills that will aid them in a lifelong process of language learning. Through the English subject, the pupils are to obtain, further develop, and maintain strategies befitting them in their language learning and find suitable learning methods. The pupils are also expected to self-assess their abilities and needs, and thereby choose methods and strategies. Additionally, the learner is to understand what it entails to learn a new language in it of itself, and also see how it relates to their native and other languages. The subject areas 'oral -' and 'written communication', focus on the use of the English language as means of communication, through listening, reading, writing, rehearsed speech and spontaneous interaction. Moreover, participating in a range of social arenas requiring adequate levels of abilities, are also included in these areas. The pupil is to learn how to proficiently communicate, through acquiring knowledge, skills, expanding their vocabulary and idiomatic structures, practicing pronunciation and intonation, learning spelling and syntax. This includes knowing cultural norms and conventions and correct manners in given situations, as well as being able to adapt one's language according to audience and situation. Finally, developing a linguistic repertoire across subjects, topics and themes, through various

texts and media is also of importance in these subject areas (Drew & Sørheim, 2009, p. 42-43).

3.2.2 'Literature'

Reading is a life-long skill that continues to develop the more it is catered to. It is also a vital part of learning as it provides for the accessibility of a lot of information. Additionally, reading may function as a type of 'exercise' for the mind, decoding letters, words, sentence structure and overall meaning. Through reading one may also gain insight into how others live and their thoughts. The curriculum stresses the importance of reading and understanding a variety of texts and encourage extensive reading. Reading for pleasure may also provide motivation for reading with a purpose, such as when reading in order to gain information (Munden, 2014, p. 255, 324). Furthermore, in the curriculum, 'being able to read' is one of the basic skills that are to be integrated in all of the subjects, and therefore highly emphasized. The pupils are to work with reading a variety of texts that all have different levels and are targeted at different audiences (formal, informal, long, short, multimodal texts, etc.). In the English subject, reading literary texts is supposed to instill "a lifelong joy of reading and a deeper understanding of others and of oneself" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). There is also an emphasis on creating meaning and understanding text on different levels and in different contexts, as this provides for complex and enhanced learning.

Professor Shelby Anne Wolf (2004), argues for the teaching of multiple ways to analyze text as a means to enhance reading proficiency. By understanding texts through layers and not just as what is being read alone, one is engaging with the text on a much more complex level and gaining more than just superficial meaning. This way, according to Wolf, one is actively constructing meaning and engaging in a "complex interplay of personal, emotional, visual, evaluative experience" (Enciso, 1996, as cited in Wolf, 2004, p. 11). Additionally, the more 'critical lenses' the learner gains, the more adept they will become when interpreting. Wolf also suggests this for younger learners, and argues that limiting the scope is underestimating their abilities, and lists five ways of critical engagement, each focusing on different aspects of the text. She furthermore argues that these five critical lenses would work effective in the classrooms, and even in particular for the younger learners. These are 'genetic criticism', 'formal criticism', 'text-to-text criticism', 'transactional criticism', and 'sociocultural criticism' (Wolf, 2004, p. 24).

'Genetic criticism', involves looking at the text in focus and comparing it to its author. The text is regarded as a reflection of the author, their life, and the time era they lived in. One looks at what meaning the author tried to convey in the text, by looking at the author's life, values, and perspectives. 'Formal criticism', deals with looking at the text in it of itself, and analyzing it based on language, vocabulary, sentence structure, etc. The reader engages in close reading of the text in order to analyze how the text works, both on micro and macro level. The criticism involves looking in depth at how the smaller passages and overall larger structures together work to convey a certain meaning. This way of criticizing argues the impossibility of knowing the author's intentions and what meaning the author wanted to convey, and dismisses the author's life and background when analyzing. It also disregards the reader's personal response, due to the fear of it being biased. The meaning lies in the text itself and how the language is used, according to this criticism. 'Text-to-text criticism', entails looking at the text in relation to other texts, depending on how the text fits within the larger body of literature. This is either texts from the same author, texts in the same genre, or through just reading various texts. This criticism focuses on comparing and contrasting, also looking at potential connections and devices used. 'Transactional criticism', looks at the relationship between the text itself and the one reading the text, here it is the reader that brings their experience to the text, making it a personal experience. It is through the eyes and life of the reader that the understanding is derived. The text is to be understood from the perspective of the reader, and is therefore a subjective interpretation of the text. Finally, 'sociocultural criticism' is when the analyzer is looking at the text in a sociocultural perspective. It focuses on the political and sociohistorical dimensions of the text. When analyzing one looks at what perspectives, values and norms are voiced in the text. The question of representation of culture, class, gender, and minorities is thoroughly examined and of importance in this criticism (Wolf, 2004, p. 23-35).

Although one may consider literacy as only the ability to read and write, the terminology and what it entails has throughout the years gone through changes. Literacy is now regarded as the "ability to construct and understand the different possibilities of meanings made available" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, as cited in Ajayi, 2009) and not only meaning through traditional texts, but including other platforms, domains and media, such as the internet, video games, visual images, sound and film (Ajayi, 2009; Gee, 2005). This means that encouraging contemporary pupils to read does not have to be done entirely by making them read literary texts in forms of books, but also allowing them to read the text of their choice. This is also a

competence aim in the curriculum, to "understand the main content of texts *one has chosen*" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d), allowing the pupils to themselves chose what types of texts to read.

3.2.3 'Culture, Society (...)' and History

The fourth main subject area of the English curriculum in Norway, is 'culture, society and literature' and focuses on cultural differences and understanding and tolerance towards them. This subject area also includes looking at the history of English-speaking countries. Literature has already been dealt with, and this section will therefore include the learning of history in the English subject. The subject area as it is understood in LK06, is to focus on teaching cultural understanding. The focus is therefore on English-speaking countries, and connects social issues, history, literature and other cultural expressions in those countries. The point is to instill and develop knowledge within the pupils about how others live, what others value, and what the others' culture is like. One of the ways the curriculum suggests that the pupils may learn this through, is through a variety of literature. LK06 also emphasizes cross-cultural comparison, where they include the importance of learning about minorities, both in Norway and in English-speaking countries. Additionally, an increased focus on the history and geography of English-speaking countries has been included, as well as looking at English as a world language and its historical roots. The pupils are therefore to work with a variety of different texts of different genres, and a variety of media, such as film, music, pictures, etc., with the intent of making the cultural encounters interactive, interesting and engaging (Drew & Sørheim, 2009, p. 43-44).

Furthermore, according to the curriculum, schools are to encourage tolerance and coexistence and instill a positive attitude towards communities and the overall society. This is while also encouraging the pupils to follow their own convictions, allowing them to grow towards what they identify themselves with. Culture can be understood as both Culture, as in fine art, cuisine, artefacts, and culture, understood as "collective behavior and shared ways of understanding the world" (Munden, 2014, p. 309). When looking at the purpose of learning culture in curriculum, the latter is of importance, although Culture is also a part of the curriculum with its own subject. Associate Professor Juliet Munden (2014), sets forth reasons as to why and how to use the English language in order to develop understanding of English-speaking cultures and societies. Reasons why, according to Munden, are to be able to communicate with people other than oneself, because importance of cultural awareness when

communicating in another language. Learning about other cultures, lifestyles and different values, contributes to enrich personal and professional lives. Lastly, learning to communicate with people from other cultures contributes to promoting tolerance, respect and empathy. Munden further suggests using a coherent intercultural perspective when teaching, with three central components, culture and language being inseparable, establishing and maintaining relationships, and stereotypes. The first component mainly concerns itself with how and why people express themselves the way they do, as people interact according to the culture they grow up in. There are also the connotations implied with expressions and words in general, that vary from culture to culture and context to context. The second component focuses on communication being more than just the exchanging of information, but also on the establishment and maintenance of relationships. For instance, the concept of upholding good manners and politeness in accordance to the culture, as it displays understanding and respect. When wanting successful long-term communication, politeness and manners are essential. The final component mentioned by Munden is the awareness of stereotypes and how to be skeptical of them. As stereotypes are broad generalizations of national groups, or minorities, that contribute to instilling negative prejudices of people and encourages xenophobia (Munden, 2014, p. 306-311).

Furthermore, one of the competence aims under the subject area 'culture, society and literature's states the following: "explain features of *history* and geography in Great Britain and the USA discuss and elaborate on different types of English literature from English-speaking countries" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). As this is something that was previously not given the same focus in the English subject, it is now considered an important part of language learning. Learning about how English developed into a world language contributes in the understanding of the world and how world cooperation works. Additionally, learning about the history of English-speaking countries is necessary when wanting to improve the understanding of the English language and the varieties of the language, for instance, the meaning behind idioms, connotations attached to words, and manners and etiquette (O'Driscoll, 2009).

3.3 Methods and Level of Freedom

While L97 stated methods and specific texts that could be used in the different subjects, the current national curriculum does not do so. In other words, teachers and educators are given a

quite larger level of freedom when teaching what materials and in what way they want to teach as long as the various competence aims are reached. Some may then claim how this will provide for more challenges, seeing how it involves more effort and work in putting together suitable lesson plans at all times. Particularly, when wanting to meet all the competence aims and criteria set in the curriculum, as the competence listed in the curriculum are not stated for every year, rather for several years at the time (1-4, 5-7, 8-10, and vg1/2) (Drew & Sørheim, 2009, p. 44).

On the other hand, this level of freedom given the teachers can be of great benefit when taking differentiation and creativity into account. This in particular, as previously mentioned in the first chapter, when contemporary pupils find it difficult to be motivated in school, as they find the gap between their everyday lives and classroom to be rather big. By giving the teachers the freedom to choose their own methods and materials, they may be more easily able to keep up with trends and adapt their teaching accordingly. The next chapter will therefore deal with how this level of freedom could be used by teachers to better differentiate and increase motivation in contemporary pupils, by using commercial media consumed by contemporary pupils. This will be through the example of video games, namely, the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series and by looking at how contemporary pupils receive knowledge outside of school that most teachers and educators may be unaware of.

4. The *Assassin's Creed* Franchise

"But some of us have woken up. They remind us that we all have a choice. To stand, not kneel. To oppose, not obey. To live, not just exist."

– Edward Kenway, *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (2012)

Ubisoft is one of the contemporary leading creating, publishing and distribution companies of interactive entertainment and services. Mainly focusing on video games, the company has created several original and immersive virtual worlds. Titles such as *Far Cry* (2004-2016), *The Crew* (2014), and the popular series *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015), are some games the company is known for (Ubisoft, 2014). Perhaps their most popular game, the *Assassin's Creed* franchise with a new installment released annually since 2007, uses the video game platform to reconstruct historical settings, people and events, thereby allowing the player to re-enact historical eras such as the Crusades, the Renaissance, both the American and French Revolutions, the Seven Year War, as well as the Industrial revolution in England. During these eras, the player encounters historical figures such as Rashid ad-Din Sinan, Suleiman I, Leonardo da Vinci, Niccolò Machiavelli, Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Napoléon Bonaparte, Queen Victoria, Charles Darwin, and Karl Marx among others. The player controls a fictional character presented in the third person in an open-world, and follows the course of the fictional character's story throughout the game's sequences. The player is also allowed to roam freely in the historical settings and to an extent freely discover places and meet figures. Nonetheless, the series follow "main" stories the player must complete in order to have successfully completed the games. This is done in the action-adventure genre and through historically based fiction and real-time historical events (Spring, 2015).

The series' premise is a century old rivalry between two ancient secret societies, the *Assassins* (based on Hasan-I Sabbah's Assassin's Order) and the *Templars* (based on the real Knights Templars). These rivals are in search of ancient artefacts, named "Pieces of Eden", that belonged to a species pre-dating humanity. The species were destroyed due to a massive solar storm, but left behind the "Pieces of Eden" containing supernatural powers and messages for the human beings. Since both the *Assassins* and *Templars* do not know what the true power these pieces contain, and have different views concerning what to do with them, they are racing towards finding them and doing with them what they deem be the most appropriate. The *Assassins* deem the artefacts to be too dangerous for humans to deal with and wish

therefore to stop the *Templars* from obtaining them. The *Templars* on the other hand, want to discover the artefacts' true power and use it to control humanity in order to make what they deem to be a better society. All games in the series are from the perspective of the *Assassins*, except for one that is in the perspective of an *Assassin* turned *Templar*, *Assassin's Creed: Rogue* (2014). Until *Assassin's Creed: Rogue* (2014), the *Assassins* were viewed as the series' "heroes" and the *Templars* the "enemies". The series follows two story-lines simultaneously during each of the game, the story of the contemporary character and the story of the ancestor. In the first games of the series, namely *Assassin's Creed I – III* (2007-2012), the contemporary character is played in third person through the perspective of an *Assassin* descendant named Desmond Miles. Desmond Miles must fight the *Templars* in his time and race towards finding the "Pieces of Eden" by reliving the memories of his ascendants that were able to hide the artefacts. After *Assassin's Creed III* (2012), Desmond Miles dies in an effort to save the world from another massive solar explosion, thereby removing him from the modern day story. The games from *Assassin's Creed IV* (2013) and onwards are therefore played in first person by the player themselves when following the contemporary story-line (*Assassin's Creed*, 2007-2015).

The preceding chapter listed the main subject areas and purpose of the English subject as stated in the Norwegian curriculum. This chapter will deal with looking at how commercial media such as the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series may contribute in enhancing language learning and reaching the curriculum's competence aims. The question of what contemporary youth may gain from the consumption of digital popular media, such as this series, that teachers and educators may not or are not allowed to see, will be of the main focus. This will be done by looking at what injunctions and aims in the curriculum may be found in digital popular media, following the same order as the preceding chapter looking at, 'language learning and communication', 'literature', and 'culture, society' and history.

4.1 "History is our playground."

Ubisoft's slogan for their *Assassin's Creed* franchise, "History is our playground", denotes their desire to combine what usually becomes separated "work" and "play". The franchise turns away from the usual practice of study and cramming, in their effort to make academic disciplines fun, interesting and acquirable through play (Ubisoft, 2014). In an interview with Ubisoft's senior producer, it was revealed how historically accurate the producers aim their series to be, and how they take advantage of what is not documented. They therefore "play"

with history in their presentation of it, suggesting alternate events to where there are uncertainties. The senior producer explains how they in *Assassin's Creed Unity* (2014), tried to be as accurate as possible despite the game being set in a complex period, in this case, the French Revolution. Because the period is unclear and complicated to explain, the senior producer and his team decided to exploit this by presenting what is found as the background to the main story that they created themselves (Judge, 2014).

The franchise has received praise for their rich historical details with regards to their presentation of society and culture as they were in the different eras. With accurate details concerning characters' clothing, accessories, weapons, vehicles, as well as the presentation of the economy, the political and social system. The infrastructure and architecture have also received ample praise, as the designers have focused on accuracy and minor detailing in terms of historical buildings, monuments, landmarks and streets (Judge, 2014; Spring, 2015).

Figure 1. Screenshot displaying the rich details in walls, furniture, floor, paintings and etc. as well as in playable and non-playable characters. **Source:** *Assassin's Creed: Unity* (2014) ©Ubisoft

There is also a chemistry between the non-playable characters (NPC) that contributes to provide for the accurate historical background. The player will encounter this during "main missions" of the games, during "free roaming" by visiting inns or taverns, and during cut-scenes (Spring, 2015). Nonetheless, even though Ubisoft has given a lot of thought and detail in making their franchise as historically accurate as possible, the series does contain a lot of

inaccuracies. As mentioned by their senior producer, the makers have exploited the lack of records and differences in opinions, and used them to their advantage in adding alternate scenarios as well as including fictional characters. The main character that one is playing the games through is as mentioned a fictional character made by Ubisoft and fitted as they have deemed appropriate in the contexts of the historical eras. This may be deemed as limitations of the series or as something that may invalidate the experience for some. Professor Nicolas Trépanier (2014) begs to differ, as when he taught history using the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series as a tool in his lectures, he discovered that the inaccuracies displayed could function as a pretext for important discussions. He realized that it is important to make it clear to his students that history is not just the course of actions, but rather "the result of research, source criticism, and debates in theoretical approaches" (Trépanier, 2014). By analyzing content that display inaccuracies meaningful conversations and debates can take place.

Trépanier (2014) argues for the use of video games in education and teaching, using the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series as an example, despite its historical inaccuracies. This is because he encourages the use of a variety of media which his students are familiar with, both to bridge the gap between school and everyday life, and also because of the benefits within this type of platform. When speaking of *Assassin's Creed*, Trépanier argues that it is exactly because of the games' inaccuracies that it provides for such a benefit when used in teaching. What the games do is to enable the students to think critically by analyzing the piece at hand, i.e. the video game itself, using the tools and methods they have been taught during class. For instance, he had students look at what parts of the games that were in fact historically accurate, and which were not and thereby support their statements with adequate arguments and reasons. Video games such as this particular series will therefore be a rather positive tool, provided of course that they are used properly, i.e. by not only playing the media, but rather by analyzing its contents, perspectives, and adaptions thoroughly as well (Trépanier, 2014).

Trépanier (2014) also suggest that working with material like video games that convey subjects untraditionally creates different and positive learning opportunities. In the example of historical games, the point of focus is not the mere occurrence of events, but rather the result of research, source criticism, and debates in theoretical approaches. In Trépanier's case he made his students play a couple of historically themed video games while they had to read academic articles related to the time era in focus. Not only did the professor choose one type of game, as video games are categorized in different genres, such as action-adventure (e.g. *Assassin's Creed* [2007-2015]) and empire-management (e.g. *Total War* [2000-2016]), but he

instructed them to play different games. This he did in an attempt to show them both the historical backdrop of the time era, while allowing them to simulate sociopolitical and economic processes as well. At the end of the teaching period, Trépanier had his students write a paper on the topics ranging from political schemes and conflicting cultural perspectives of war, to architectural aspects and motivations behind historical events, such as the Viking Raids (Trépanier, 2014). This way the media was not used as mere play, but rather as a tool of academic research.

The result of Trépanier's lectures was students who were now aware of critical thinking and how there is not one real objective history, as the historical records gathered are biased by the one telling them, thereby allowing the students to engage in the processes that historians go through. At the end of the semester, the professor had gathered papers from his students on a broad range of topics, from politics and church architecture in Renaissance Italy, to popular ideas of nature in early-20th-century America. Yet, what Trépanier regarded as the biggest benefit was his students' level of motivation. Particularly among those students that would usually not be as engaged in class, Trépanier had managed to make a gateway for those pupils with what interested them in their daily lives and at the same time engaging them with the academic discipline. What the professor also intended, was that his students not only leave his lectures with historical facts, but also with how these facts have been obtained and how perspective plays an important factor. The students were now equipped with a more critical and analytical perspective when approaching the discipline. Trépanier also mentions how the conversations between his students have changed when discussing video games; where they used to discuss only the mere play of it, they now analyze the game even in their spare time (Trépanier, 2014).

What inspired the professor to include popular media in his classes was in fact a student who once asked him a question about the authenticity of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise. The student raised his hand in the middle of a history course and asked whether or not *Assassin's Creed* were based on facts or not. Trépanier did not want to disregard this student and his interests outside of school and mentions that this type of mindset, belittling the students' leisure activities, was a mindset his was tired of. He knew how many of the students that attended his classes and were interested in the subject of history was in fact because of a video game they had played set in a historical period. For Trépanier, using his students' experience was something he had viewed as an advantage and was something he wanted to exploit. Nevertheless, the professor understands why others may regard the use of video games in

academia as problematic, as the medium alone is not beneficial for the students. Rather, it is the in the use of the medium, combined with the theoretical framework of the discipline, that makes the medium an excellent complement to the courses, especially when wanting to engage and motivate contemporary youth (Trépanier, 2014).

4.2 'Language Learning, and Oral and Written Communication'

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in the matter of language, the difference between acquisition and learning has been distinguished by linguists such as Krashen (1984, as cited in Harmer, 2007) and Harmer (2007). In the English subject curriculum, however, the terms are not presented in distinction as they are used interchangeably. Yet, their implications are similar to that of, for instance, Krashen's, with regards to how language learning and acquisition should take place. As explained in the previous chapter, according to the subject curriculum, language learning is defined as that which "occurs while encountering a diversity of texts, where the concept of text is used in the broadest sense of the word" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). "The concept of text" is further described as multimodal texts. As seen in Krashen's case, he defined successful acquisition as how much exposure the learner received. This continuous exposure had to, according to Krashen, be comprehensible to the learner, one level higher than what the learner already knew (comprehensible input I +1), and occur in a setting the learner felt comfortable in (1984, as cited in Harmer, 2007, p. 51). In other words, the most successful acquisition of a second language is done by receiving frequent input that is on the level of the learner and a bit above in a relaxed setting, such as through playing video games that gradually expands the vocabulary used in game.[4] Although the curriculum mentions that learning is more successful when one is aware of the strategies used, which could imply that language consciously learned is greater to language subconsciously acquired, there is no specific injunction suggesting that to be the case. Therefore, applying Krashen's theories in language teaching does not contradict the curriculum's principles, rather it enhances its purpose. According to Krashen, the combination of the previously mentioned input, comprehensible input I + 1, aids the learner in their language acquisition. Explicit language instruction or input, where there is a focus on specific graded language, combined with conscious learning does not enhance or aid the learner's

---

[4] This varies from game to game, some games allow for the difficulty in language to be chosen by the player, while others provide explanations as one encounters new vocabulary. In the case of *Assassin's Creed*, their approach is that of the latter while providing for visual support.

acquisition, implying that the most efficient way for the language learner to achieve spontaneous and fluent communication would be through frequent exposure in comfortable settings (Harmer, 2007, p. 51).

With that in mind, looking at if and how video games may be this 'relaxed setting' that allows for 'frequent and comprehensible exposure', and more specifically the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series, will be dealt with here. Recently there has been an increase in the awareness of and interest in including digital popular culture when teaching in the English classroom. The main subject area 'written communication' in the subject curriculum does not just focus on the ability to write itself, but also includes reading as a means of broadening understanding and gaining additional knowledge. Reading in the subject curriculum involves reading a broad range of various literature in the attempt to facilitate for broader language understanding and competence. Furthermore, the subject curriculum puts emphasis on reading different types of text, as it can contribute to increased personal growth and creativity for the learner (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). As already mentioned, the term 'different types of text' is not specified in the curriculum, and could therefore also be understood as multimodal texts. High school teacher and game educator Tobias Staaby, argues that playing video games could be considered as "reading": as when playing the player is "reading" the game by trying to understand, analyze and reflect on the output received, thereby utilizing the same decoding skills as when reading. He further explains that the reason literature, and in particular fiction, is brought in language learning and school, is to further encourage future reading and making it more meaningful. Staaby also argues that video games have been reduced in school context to mere tools, and how the video game medium is rarely discussed the way film and literature is. Thus, Staaby encourages schools and educators to regard the medium as multimodal texts and forms of cultural expression, rather than mere tools, or even perhaps meaningless toys (Staaby, 2016).

Researcher Catherine Beavis has closely looked into this phenomenon of bringing digital popular culture into the English classroom. Beavis, having studied the evolution of text and how it has affected the literacy and education of contemporary youth, looks into reasons for why digital popular culture, such as commercial video games, may be enriching tools with much to offer the curriculum. According to Beavis, video games contribute in developing critical perspectives within the learner. Critical perspectives deal with understanding text on different levels, analyzing various parts and identifying underlying meaning (Beavis, 2012). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Wolf argues for the teaching of multiple ways to

analyze texts as a means of enhancing learning outcomes. By combining the use of digital popular culture and critically engaging in them, instead of just consuming the media, teachers may provide their pupils with 'critical lenses' to extract learning from what they played, thereby allowing for a much more enhanced engagement, rather than mindless play (Wolf, 2004). This will be further considered under the section dealing with literature. Additionally, Beavis argues that helping learners understand the richness of the video games they usually enjoy, the meaning behind them, and looking at them critically, is as important as it is to be able to analyze other forms of texts. She also suggests the importance of being aware of how different texts and multimodal texts affect the way we understand the world and think (Beavis, 2012).

Another reason listed by Beavis on why video games should be included in the classroom, is because of their potential to contribute in the creation of texts. Beavis refers to the English subject curriculum in Australia that mentions the importance of creating one's own texts in English and literacy learning. The competence aims she mentions are similar as the ones found in the Norwegian English subject curriculum. The purpose states: "Reading different types of texts can lay the foundation for personal growth, maturation and creativity and provide the inspiration necessary to create texts" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d), thereby focusing on providing the learners with a broad range of texts as source of inspiration. Furthermore, the learners are to "use digital tools and other aids to find relevant information and to create different types of texts" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). Beavis argues that video games offers great inspiration to contemporary youth when set to create their own digital or printed stories, and therefore recommends the use of them in the English classroom (Beavis, 2012). As we can see from the Norwegian curriculum, Beavis' argument is well suited to the Norwegian context as well.

In the English subject curriculum, learners are to "listen to and understand variations of English from different authentic situations, express oneself fluently and coherently, suited to the purpose and situation" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). During each of the franchise's installments, the setting, characters and language used, are different variations of English in authentic situations. For instance, in *Assassin's Creed III* (2012), the characters are set in 18th century America. Set in Boston and New York City, the player gets to play through the life of the fictional ancestor Ratonhnhaké:ton, also known as Connor Kenway, and listen to authentic (or as authentic as it gets) Boston and New York City accents. There are also other variations of English as well as accents throughout the other installments, such as British (*Assassin's*

Creed: Syndicate [2015]*)*, Scottish and Irish (*Assassin's Creed: Rogue* [2014]), Caribbean (*Assassin's Creed IV* [2013]) and Indian (*Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* [2015]).

As previously mentioned, when allowing for subconscious and pressure-free language engagement, the ability to speak spontaneously increases (Krashen, 1984, as cited in Harmer, 2007). A study conducted in Sweden with the aim of examining the relationship between digital gameplay outside of school with English learning as a Second Language in the classroom, found that children and youth who played video games in English developed a richer vocabulary both in oral and written communication. It was furthermore discovered that those who played more received better scores in the English subject than peers who played less or not at all. The subjects in the study also admitted to preferring learning foreign languages in settings of play and interaction in contrast to traditional classroom teaching (Sundqvist & Wikström, 2015).

Associate Professor Lisbeth M. Brevik, conducted similar research and discovered that the subjects in her study scored better in the English subject than they did in the Norwegian (Brevik in Rødal, 2016). It was found that those children who played online video games received better grades in English than their peers who did not play. Some of them also scored higher in the English subject than they did in the Norwegian subject (Brevik in Ingebrigtsen, 2016). Brevik gathered data from 10,331 pupils in their first year of high school on how they read in the Norwegian and English subject. She found that a lot of them struggled in the Norwegian subject, but at the same time did a lot better in the English. Although 74% of the subjects scored evenly in both subjects, Brevik discovered that 4.5% of the subjects who were below the critical line in Norwegian had a score of 60% or more in English reading proficiency. What was even more interesting for Brevik to discover was how of these 4.5% the first language was Norwegian and not English. She further investigated this matter by interviewing this group of subjects. The pupils interviewed admitted to perceiving themselves as better in English than Norwegian because, according to them, they used the English language a lot more than Norwegian in their spare time. The same pupils also admitted to playing video games on an average of three hours daily online. In addition to this, they also admitted to watching movies and television series in English both with and without subtitles, as well as listening to music and reading news in English on a daily basis (Brevik in Rødal, 2016).

Brevik raises also the concern of how the teaching is conducted in class, as these pupils are not as engaged in class despite their abilities. In order to get these pupils' attention, she

suggests incorporating their off-school interests such as video games, in the teaching. This way they will be motivated to engage in class, and test their abilities in a learning environment (Brevik in Ingebrigtsen, 2016). Brevik suggests further that her study implies that video gaming done in pupils' spare-time also has positive impact on their performances in school, and that this should be used to the teachers' advantage. If teachers incorporate their pupils' interests in class and discusses their gains outside of the classroom, the learning can become more meaningful (Brevik in Rødal, 2016).

4.3 'Literature'

In the purpose description of the English subject in the National curriculum, the importance of reading and its proficiency are stated and argued for. Literary and multimodal texts may function as tools in language learning, as they may instill deeper understanding of oneself and others, and further inspire and encourage personal development, creativity and expression (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). The curriculum puts great emphasis on the importance of reading and understanding a variety of texts. By encouraging and facilitating for extensive reading, there is also a wish to thereby further motivate for intensive reading (Munden, 2014). As stated in the previous chapter, the basic skill, 'being able to read', is a vital part of education and therefore highly emphasized. As pupils are to read a variety of texts of various forms, both formal and informal, demanding and less demanding texts, and even multimodal texts, all in order to instill joy of reading and deeper understanding (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d).

Librarian Ellen Forsyth, conducted a series of interviews in relation to her paper where she wanted to examine whether or not the characteristics that appealed a reader to read were that of the same for a gamer. Her intention was to look at how games may also be used and applied in library settings, seeing how they could also function as referential and informational tools. Forsyth explored the use of readers' advisory skills in order to investigate how to suggest titles that gamers might want to read and vice versa. This could easily be applied to language teachers when wanting to encourage, or further broaden, reading of their pupils (Forsyth, 2010).

Forsyth compares the two mediums, video games and books, when looking at stories and narrative and how they can be compared and used interchangeably in language learning. Among other examples, she compared the social interaction of playing "co-op (co-operative)"

or multiplayer games online could be equivalent of attending book clubs or reading circles (Forsyth, 2010). She also discovered this in interviews done with pupils, students and learners who described their experiences in reading to that of playing video games. One respondent compared her joy of playing video games and reading to be the same, as what she liked the most was to experience the life of someone else through their perspective, either by "getting inside a character's head and know them from the inside out" when reading, or "get inside a character's body and direct their actions" when playing video games (Forsyth, 2010, p. 123). Either way the respondent enjoyed the feeling of being immersed in the role of the character, especially when playing well designed video games that allowed for that immersion to be further increased. Yet, other players preferred video games over other mediums due to two factors, the ability to engage in activity with others, and the ability to be in control. When compared to other mediums, like reading or watching film, the respondents claimed to have little to no interaction with others. Whereas when playing video games, they could easily co-operate with friends, peers or others and make it a social gathering. Also in the way the video games demand action from the player, video games allow for greater freedom of choice, just like in real life. When watching film or reading a book, according to these respondents, that same freedom of choice was little to none (Forsyth, 2010).

Nevertheless, Forsyth suggest there to be great benefit derived from combining the two mediums in the library. This is, according to Forsyth, because of how they complement one another and can be used interchangeably to instill and maintain interest in young people. Furthermore, Forsyth gives the example of this using *Assassin's Creed II* (2009), the second major installment in the series set in Venice, Italy, during the Renaissance. Forsyth suggests the gateways to reading for someone who enjoys this particular game to be through story, character and setting, as these are richly detailed in the video game. Following up, one will then read history, the Renaissance and sociopolitical situation of that time. Furthermore, learning more about the historical figures that the player encounters throughout the game one could read their biographies, such as Leonardo da Vinci's, Pope Alexander VI's and Niccolò Machiavelli's. Additionally, she argues that the claim that video games are meaningless consumers of time is nothing but prejudiced thinking, as games are only another form of media which can be of benefit if used properly (Forsyth, 2010).

According to Beavis (2012), the video game medium is a new and enriching way of telling stories. Video games that are based on narrative and usually follow the outline and form of traditional storytelling that the player must keep up with and remember in order to fulfill the

game's purpose, as with the case of the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series. Each installment features a story about an individual's past and how they lived, that the player must control. Additionally, each story is actually a story within a story, as the player also follows the story-line of the contemporary character. To be able to understand that there are in fact two parallel story-lines, as they interchange throughout the course of the games, requires knowledge both about the game, games in general and stories. As Beavis suggests, this knowledge has to be taught in order for the player to obtain them (Beavis, 2012).

There is another reason as to why Beavis would vouch for including video games in the English subject. This because of the ways games challenge the player. She puts emphasis on how video games require the attention of the player on another level than that of stories told in other media, such as books and films. The interactional play between player and game, is far more complicated and demanding than when watching or reading a story. When playing video games there is a continuous interaction between the game and the player, what is received by the player is something the player themselves contributed to inputting. In other words, games are dependent on the player providing enough input for it to generate adequate output. Beavis further claims that according to certain game study specialists, this is why video games cannot be regarded as narratives, but rather forms of action. Beavis emphasizes this argument as an important factor when looking at video games as digital texts, and further regards video games as "multiliteracies in the wild" (2012, p. 18), because of their usage of various elements (sound, image, words, actions, art, music, etc.) when conveying meaning. For players to fully comprehend and complete the game, they must understand and recognize how the elements complement one another. One thing is how there may be a narrative that the player must recognize and follow, or as in the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series several narratives, but in addition to this most video games provide for additional information in the player's interface, namely "head-up display" (HUD) or "status bar". The HUD displays information vital to the player simultaneously, such as the character's health, possessions, story progress, hints, and the like. The HUD can be compared to the informative boxes that are found in encyclopedias and articles.
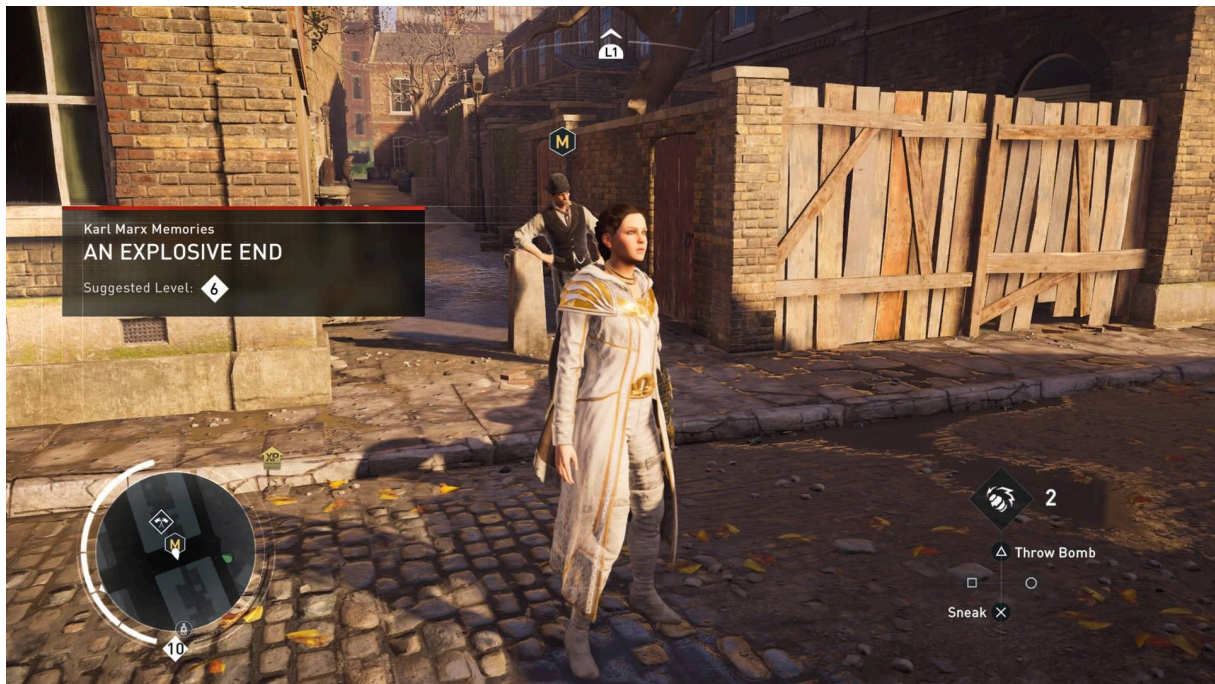
Figure 2. Screenshot displaying the interface including HUD when controlling the character: "health bar" and mini-map on the bottom left, actions on the right, and "context-sensitive information" on the top left. **Source:** *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (2015) ©Ubisoft

Not only does the player focus on the character they control, but also on the environment around them, as the HUD changes according to the progress of the game, input the player releases and according to what kind of output the player receives. This makes video games complex multimodal texts containing great learning benefits (Beavis, 2012).

Furthermore, what expands the experience of playing the video game, is not only the interaction with the game itself but also with others regarding the game. These interactions may be through playing together, either physically or online, through discussing the game and game theories outside of the game, or from reading information given by the developers or from other players (such as 'gaming wikis'[5]). This way the player is involved in a wide range of literacy practices. Using both oral and written communication, the player works out strategies, solves puzzles, creates alternate endings, and finds explanations for unresolved issues, thus bringing the experiences from the "virtual world" in to the "real world". According to Beavis, video games function as a contemporary example of the type of text youth concern themselves with, hence making them even more relevant to use in the classroom (Beavis, 2012).

---

[5] Sites made by fans for fans functioning as encyclopedias for the given game, in other words, a Wikipedia for video games or other popular media.

Additionally, one could introduce Oliver Bowden's novel series *Assassin's Creed* (2009-2015), which follows the video game series and takes on each of the main characters' background stories and endings which are not featured in the games. Each novel is about 500 pages long and uses rather complex language, but due to the vocabulary exposure during the video games, even younger learners who have played the series will be able to read without much difficulties. The reading suggestions may also be differentiated according to the learner's level of abilities and as well as level of interests. If the learner is already interested in reading and has high reading proficiency, it would be suggested to use more challenging reading such as in depth history and biographies, as well as scientific articles and history of arts that further explains events and subjects from the games. If the learner on the other hand finds little motivation in reading, or has a low level of reading proficiency, it would be suggested to use fictional reading that further expands the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) experience as a way in. If it is about lack of interest, suggesting Oliver Bowden's novel series could also be a good way in, especially since in some of the game installments the story is left with a rather open ending, making the player want to look for closure, or just understand the relationship between the characters. For instance, *Assassin's Creed III* (2012) and *IV* (2013), feature grandfather and grandson. The main character Connor Kenway in *Assassin's Creed III* (2012) is the grandson of main character Edward Kenway from *Assassin's Creed IV* (2013). Both are *Assassins* in their installments, but Connor's father, Haytham Kenway, Edward Kenway's son, is a *Templar*. The reason as to how this happened and how it really affected the three generations is not dealt with as thoroughly in the games. In the adapted novels *Forsaken* (2012) and *Black Flag* (2013) answers to these questions are to be found. If the learner has a low level of reading proficiency, a gateway could be through the introduction of the *Assassin's Creed: Graphic Novel* (2007), which also has its own series, and comic books *Assassin's Creed: The Fall* (2010).
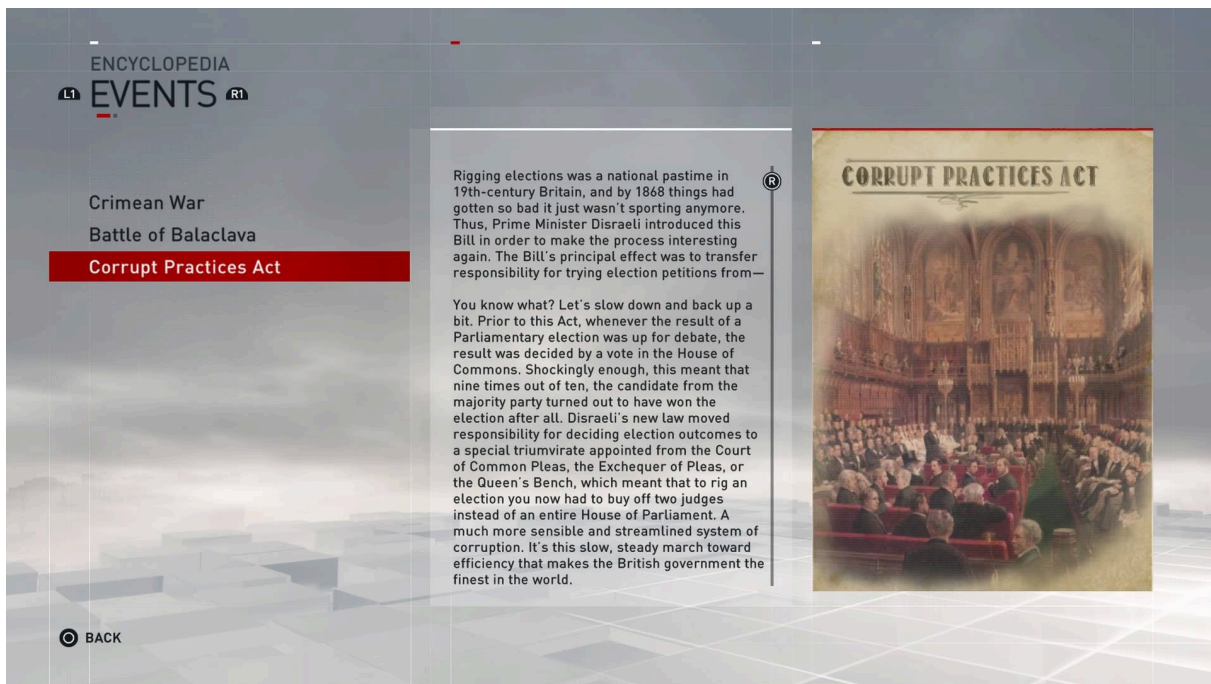
Figure 3. Screenshot of an encyclopedia entry in the game's database, where players can read up on historical events, among other things. **Source:** *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (2015) ©Ubisoft

Additionally, the learner may also read the encyclopedia that is already in the game. Each of the installments has a database found in the game menu, where they will find the game's progression log, an encyclopedia, and additional information. In this database, the player may read up on the characters and historical figures encountered in the games, as well as important historical events, monuments and geographical locations. If a player discovers an important artefact, or a piece of diary from someone important, this too will show up in the database. These entries usually "pop-up" during game play when the given context is encountered. This also reminds, or gives the player the option of reading closely on the historical facts of what they just encountered. The entries are also sometimes written in a rather informal tone, depending on where the player got the information from. This is because the player is supposedly getting these entries from in-game associates that are helping the player in their pursuit of "beating" the *Templars*. This makes the entries not too complex and rather interesting to read. The entries are also varied in their length, sometimes short and simple, and at other times a bit more detailed.

Throughout the games, the complexity of image, symbols and sound, demands attention and awareness of the player. For a "non-sophisticated" consumer, this may be too overwhelming, in terms of perceiving information and understanding context (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006). As

seen in the example of the pupil during practice, who understood the theatrical sequence in *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* (2010) to be a real part of the game's narrative, and thought that he rescued Jesus himself from being crucified, despite the narrative being set during the Italian renaissance. Sequences and additional information throughout the games, such as the previously displayed encyclopedia and the upcoming tidbit, could therefore be used as differentiated tools in creating meaning and understanding contexts. Here, there is little visual image and/or objects, as well as reduced noise and sound with focus on the text and the information it provides. The texts are also divided into longer and shorter passages, categorized, and written in different styles and formats.

Additionally, in a context of video games, the previously mentioned 'critical lenses' by Wolf (2004) could be applied accordingly. For instance, if the series were to be analyzed through the genetic lens, it would be looked into the developers' background. In this case, it would have been looked at when Ubisoft was first established, what their country of origin is, what other video games have they made, and who the team behind developing the games is. Furthermore, in the case of Ubisoft, paying enough attention right before the games load, gives an indication to who is behind developing the game.
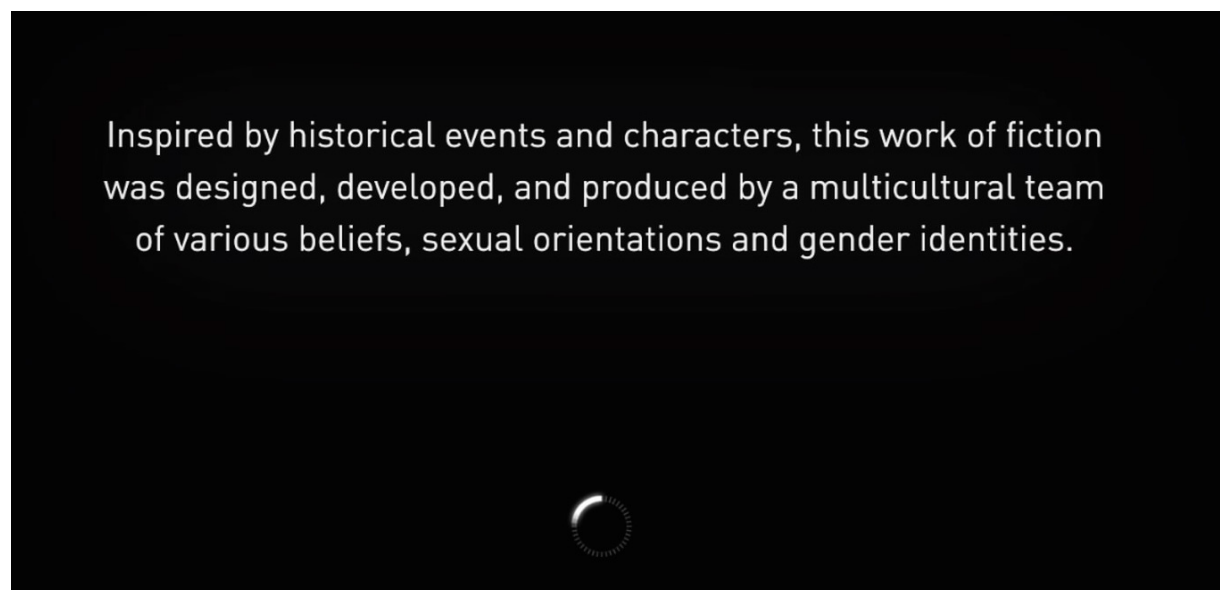

Inspired by historical events and characters, this work of fiction was designed, developed, and produced by a multicultural team of various beliefs, sexual orientations and gender identities.

Figure 4. Screenshot displaying boot-up screen. **Text:** "Inspired by historical events and characters, this work of fiction was designed, developed, and produced by a multicultural team of various beliefs, sexual orientations and gender identities". **Source:** *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (2015) ©Ubisoft

The last part (…) "produced by a multicultural team of various beliefs, sexual orientations and gender identities" (Ubisoft, 2015), informs the players of the video games' developers

and brings insight into what kind of people are behind the series. One may therefore further look into who the actual team is, and see how this relates to the topics and characters that are brought into the video game series.

Analyzing this particular series formally, would entail looking at the video games and each of the installments in them of themselves. This includes looking at game play, video game mechanics, graphics, HUD, soundtracks, and both playable and non-playable characters, both separately and how they intertwine and co-operate in conveying message and experience. Through this lens, the focus will not be on the player's individual experience nor on Ubisoft's intentions, but rather on how the video games themselves manage to successfully or unsuccessfully convey meaning and how the player may complete the games' objectives both through narrative and game mechanics. An example from the franchise, is the amount of criticism the installment *Assassin's Creed: III* (2012) received based on this particular analysis. The criticism included poor game-mechanics, making basic functions in the game as parkour and attacking rather difficult, and also having its share of gaming glitches.[6] Furthermore, even the game's soundtrack was criticized, claimed to fail in the attempt of giving the game enough dramatic feels when played (Hamilton, 2012).

Applying 'text-to-text' criticism to the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series, entails comparing either each installment to one another, one installment to another historically based video game, the entire series to another video game series, or even to historical fiction. For example, one may look into how the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series display history in comparison to the *Sid Meier's Civilization* (1991-2016) series. The series also has installments such as the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series, and is a turn-based strategy game that has the purpose of building empires based on different historical periods, from the Stone Age to the Information Age. Both series could also be compared to how the game mechanics function, as well as what view they are presented in, as the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series are played in third person open world, whereas *Sid Meier's Civilization* (1991-2016) is played with a top-down bird-eye view.

'Transactional criticism' would entail looking at how the video games affect the player, therefore looking at what how the player experiences and how they interpret narrative and game play. This would include, looking at the player's and game's relationship, how the player solves the various puzzles and creates meaning from narrative. As in the example of

---

[6] Incorrectly displayed graphics, sound errors, screen freezes, etc.

the pupil met during practice who through his experience of playing *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* (2010) believed that he was able to save Jesus himself from being crucified. Regardless of what the intent of the video game really was, when analyzing video games through this particular lens, looking at what the player derives from the game is of importance. Therefore, making this particular pupil's interpretation of the game valid and important.

Lastly, if analyzing the series in a sociocultural manner, it would be looked upon how the games portray historical figures, from what perspective they are perceived, who is deemed 'hero' and 'enemy', and what connotations are being used. For example, in *Assassin's Creed: Unity*, the portrayal of the French politician Maximilien de Robespierre created stir among contemporary politicians. Among others, French politician Jean-Luc Mélenchon expressed his concern claiming that the portrayal of Robespierre was propaganda, depicting whom he claimed to be liberators as barbarous monsters. He further claimed this to be a rewriting of history and an attempt to discredit the Republic, as the game portrays Robespierre as a mass murderer only focused on achieving his goal (Mosendz, 2014). This could be further considered with pupils, discussing both sides of the case, Ubisoft's portrayal and Mélenchon's reaction while looking at how Robespierre is portrayed in history books. This would critically engage the media the pupils consume, in order to enhance learning outcome, rather than it only be mindless consumption.

4.4 'Culture, Society (…)' and History

In LK06, the fourth main subject area concerns itself with culture, the understanding of cultural differences and tolerance. Additionally, as described in the chapter preceding this one, the subject area includes learning about the history and geography of English-speaking countries. This makes one of the purposes with the English subject to develop knowledge about how other people live, understanding others' views and values, and understanding their culture and cultural norms (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). This section will look at how the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series may contribute to enhance the learning and understanding of cultures, their differences and history.

Four Professors and PhD students wrote a collaborative review of their multi-cultural experience playing *Assassin's Creed* (2007). Two were of middle-eastern background and the other two of western. In their review, they suggested that games are "experienced and

perceived differently by players from divergent cultural-linguistic situations" (El-Nasr, Al-Saati, Niedenthal, & Milam, 2008, p. 1). Maha Al-Saati, therefore, notes his experience when playing *Assassin's Creed* (2007):

> "Walking towards the city of Jerusalem evoked much emotion; my heart beats as I approach. As I hear the chanting of the monks, the sounds of the church bells, I know I am closer to this magical city—this place of conflict. As I reach Jerusalem, I listen carefully; perhaps I can hear the sound of an Athaani[7] piercing through the skies. To many people of the Monotheistic religions, Jerusalem is a holy land. To go there, is a journey of a lifetime, a dream, perhaps they would want to fulfill at one point in time. For a Middle-Easterner, wandering through the *Assassin's Creed* game world might be purely driven by nostalgia, in the hope of identifying with the elements of the past. I was in it to explore a heritage many, like me, have deemed lost." ─ Maha Al-Saati, of Middle-Eastern origin (El-Nasr, Al-Saati, Niedenthal, & Milam, 2008, p. 1)

According to the four authors, experiences in playing video games are culturally mediated and shaped through the player's prior cultural knowledge, beliefs and experiences. The above mentioned quote depicts the experiences in playing *Assassin's Creed* (2007) from the perspective of a middle-eastern man, who felt the experience as comforting and nostalgic due to his personal relationship with the area and buildings. One of the other authors, with a western background, had a different experience, and found himself focusing on the game's narrative and architectural patterns, also in relation to game play mechanics and function. His experience had to do with the game itself and how he could use the setting he was in to better win the game. Because this player did not share the same background as the previous player, he did not share the same feelings and perceptions (El-Nasr, Al-Saati, Niedenthal, & Milam, 2008). This was also described by historian James Clifford (2003, as cited in El-Nasr, Al-Saati, Niedenthal, & Milam, 2008), who argues for a transactional reading and suggests that the ability to understand text depends more on the reader's point of view than the intention of the author.

Furthermore, the franchise has also been successful in portraying a variety of people with different cultural backgrounds, genders, and ethnicities, and managed to attract a wide range of audience. To be able to relate to the characters in the narratives one encounters has become much more important and relevant in contemporary global society. Pupils we meet in the classroom are no longer a homogenous group, making multimodal texts and text in general,

---

[7] Call for prayer

that portray the diversity more appealing for this generation's pupils as well as contributing the engagement of pupils from these backgrounds themselves. Professor James Paul Gee (2007) notes this as one of the video game medium's stronger points. The ability to create worlds where players may take on various identities, and either choose an identity related to themselves, one that reinforces their presupposed perspectives and values, or choose to put themselves in another's shoes and experience things from another's perspectives and values. One of the most obvious ways video games usually does this is through making distinct protagonists and antagonists in their narratives (Gee, 2007). As seen in the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, nearly all but one of the installments made the *Assassins* the protagonist serving as the "heroes" of the games, with the *Templars* as the obvious "enemy". Although, the eighth major installment *Assassin's Creed: Rogue* (2014), took an interesting twist, depicting an *Assassin* turned *Templar*, the series had prior to this depicted the *Templars* as the real enemies. *Assassin's Creed: Rogue* (2014), therefore challenged this belief of one "true" hero versus an enemy. Through the character Shay Cormac, Ubisoft portrayed how someone's beliefs and values were confronted, where Shay initially was part of the *Assassins* but throughout the game became a *Templar* and was still the "hero" of the game (Ubisoft, 2014).

The English subject curriculum states in its purpose, that the subject is also to contribute to providing insight into how people of different cultures live, more specifically where English is either the primary or official language. Furthermore, the subject is supposed to, according to the curriculum, allow the learners insight into how the language is used as means of communication in international settings, learn about the English-speaking world and the increase of English in international contexts. This is argued as a means to promote greater interaction, understanding and respect, particularly between people of different cultural backgrounds (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). As mentioned above, the franchise has throughout its installments portrayed characters of different backgrounds and provided for experiences that allow for understanding and providing the player with new perspectives. Thereby, it promotes understanding and respect, as the curriculum states, "between people of different cultural backgrounds" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d).

Looking at the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series, and how this particular video game series reconstructs historical events in an open-world setting were the player gets to re-enact these events as well as encounter historical figures, it can therefore be argued that it is "providing insight into the way people live and different cultures where English is the primary or the official language" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). According to historian Dawn Spring,

the *Assassin's Creed* franchise's game world "present a model for developing any historical environment" (Spring, 2015, p. 212). This because the games exhibit historical details, according to Kapell and Elliot (2013, as cited in Spring, 2015) on a scholarly level. This in not just the locations, architecture and scenery themselves, but also in minor details such as art, accessories, jewelry, furniture, utensils, and even indoor lightning. It simulates an almost real life experience to the time and countries featured in each installment. The first installment *Assassin's Creed* (2007) reconstructs the historic Jerusalem, Masyaf, Acre and Damascus (Spring, 2015). As quoted by the previously mentioned authors reviewing the game, there are also details in the sounds and the speech of NPC met in the game, such as the chanting of monks, sound of church bells, call for prayer, etc. (El-Nasr, Al-Saati, Niedenthal, & Milam, 2008).

One of the competence aims in the English subject curriculum, expects the pupils to "discuss and elaborate on the way people live and how they socialize in Great Britain, USA and other English-speaking countries (…)", another one expects the pupils to be able to "explain features of history and geography in Great Britain and the USA" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). The latest installment of the series, *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (2015), set in London during the Victorian Era, as well as the *Assassin's Creed III* (2012) set in Boston and New York City, depicts both historical events and geography in Great Britain and the USA. Portraying major events in history in both countries, such as the revolutions themselves (the American and the Industrial), the 1832 Reform Act, and the Boston Tea Party. Additionally, the geography of both the Great Britain and the USA, are depicted in detail, as well as significant land marks and buildings, such as the River Thames, Big Ben, the Boston Common (as it was during the Revolutionary War), and the Old North Church in Boston.

Figure 5. Map of Westminster, displaying Big Ben and other details of the city of London.
Source: *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (2015) ©Ubisoft

As mentioned previously, pupils are to "discuss and elaborate on how people live and socialize" in English-speaking countries. As demonstrated, the games in the series are highly detailed, depicting historical details about the culture of the time, their economy, how the society functioned, what type of clothing people wore, and even what type of accent they had. The infrastructure, architecture and how people interacted in public spaces are also very well presented. For instance, in *Assassin's Creed Unity* (2014), the player will encounter violent revolutionary mobs that are roaming the streets of Paris, shouting slogans asking for freedom. The player may also visit local inns, taverns, hotels, churches, mosques, temples, and public spaces alike, where they will experience the rich details not only aesthetically but also in how the environment interacts with the player. The details on minor levels, such as furniture, utensils, design, entertainment and even monetary transactions, can be viewed when roaming through the different times and cities (Spring, 2015). Additionally, the player will through loading screens and throughout the games receive historical 'tidbits' containing information of how people lived, minor events that occurred, major headlines of the times and more. Through this, the player will have 'encountered' and 'experienced' a re-enactment of the history, geography and the way of life of people both in Great Britain and the US, as well as the previously mentioned countries. If these experiences are then later brought into the classroom, meaningful learning may be derived when put into an educational context, adding more value to the experience. In addition, the experiences may be used as a pretext for further

65

analysis and important discussion, as seen with Trépanier (2014) who argued that history is the result of research, source criticism and debates. Moreover, the curriculum itself puts emphasis on the use of various sources critically, as well as the pupils having to "show how incidents can be presented in different matters (…)" and "create stories about people from different societies in the past (…) and show how their living conditions and values influenced their thoughts and actions" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d).

Figure 6. Historical 'tidbit' during loading screen. **Text:** '*On 10 January 1863, the world's first underground railway opened, running from Paddington to Farringdon Street. 50,000 people tried to travel that day, but only half managed to do so.*' **Source:** *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (2015) ©Ubisoft

Additionally, the competence aim, under 'Culture, Society and Literature', states that the pupils are to "describe and reflect on the situation of indigenous peoples in English-speaking countries" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). In the fifth installment of the series, *Assassin's Creed III* (2012), the main character Ratonhnhaké:ton is of both British and Kanien'kehá:kan decent. The Kanien'kehá:ka, also known as the Mohawk which is a part of the Native American Iroquois Confederacy, were caught up in the American Revolutionary War, as many of the battles were fought in the Mohawk Valley Region. The region became a French and Indian war zone during the colonial period (Mohawk Valley History, n.d). The consequences for the Kanien'kehá:kan people, which were division, slaughter, destruction of

property, and persecution, are depicted in the game. Ratonhnhaké:ton's background story is witnessing the death of his own mother due to the attacks unleashed by the British, in an event historically known as the "Burning of the Valleys". His story continues in his fight against the oppressors to regain his land and restore peace for his own people and villagers (Ubisoft, 2012). Although Ratonhnhaké:ton is a fictional character, the story of him portrays the situation of the indigenous people, Kanien'kehá:ka, as well as the Kanien'kehá:ka culture and life style being represented in the game. Thus providing insight into the situation of an indigenous people.

4.5 Advantages and Limitations

The aforementioned discussion has attempted to display what the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series has to offer in terms of being a tool in the English subject classroom. The example of how the series deals with a complex interface, having a HUD, demanding more of the player and thereby challenging them on a much greater level. This in how the series follows a rather complex narrative, following two story-lines on a parallel level. Furthermore, the franchise deals with the presentation of history and how it can be used as a tool when critically analyzing history and historical sources. Moreover, that the franchise has its own "community", with wikis, comic books, animated series, adapted novels, merchandise, and even a live-action movie, expands the experience and creates forums in which learning is differentiated and variated. On these forums and platforms, the player may find peers, or someone on a lower or higher level than themselves, thereby finding themselves in a position of either receiving help and tips, or giving it and as a result contribute to a differentiated learning environment.

Researchers Constance Steinkuehler and Sean Duncan wanted to know more about the phenomena of video game forums and discussion sites, and conducted an analysis in 2008 of *World of Warcraft* (2004) (abbreviated as *WoW*) discussion forums. Their research consisted of examining players' habits and dispositions when participating in online discussion forums. Contrary to popular belief, the researchers discovered that 86 % of the forum discussions were not mere social chatter, but rather actual social knowledge construction. The majority of players took a serious stance to the topics presented and used logic and reasoning when arguing and solving puzzles. This was regardless of the player's level and/or experience (Steinkuehler & Duncan, 2008). Educators Jorun Buli-Holmberg and Torill R. Ekeberg,

recognized the need for an overview of differentiated teaching and learning through their work with student-teachers and special educators. In their book "Likeverdig og tilpasset opplæring i en skole for alle" (2011), they list a set of requirements that needs to be in place when choosing suitable learning aids for one's classroom. Firstly, the tools and aids are to be based on the individual pupils' preconditions and learning needs. Furthermore, the tools are to make differentiation possible, and contribute to autonomy within the learner, as well as to make collaboration manageable. Moreover, the teaching tools and aids are also to contribute to motivation, make the learning more comprehensible, enable progression, and last but not least, include each individual (Buli-Holmberg & Ekeberg, 2011, p. 156). This as it is described in the Core Curriculum of LK06, that "Education shall meet children, adolescents and adults on their own terms and so lead them to the borderland where they can encounter the new by opening their minds and testing their skills" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2011, p. 11). This set of requirements, according to both Gee (2007) and Steinkuehler and Duncan (2008), are met through using video games and their forums, especially in educational settings, and are therefore advantageous to use as tools and learning aids when differentiating the teaching.

Although the preceding examples have demonstrated how digital popular media may be used as a tool in language learning, there are limitations in using commercial video games and the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series in the classroom. Firstly, these types of video games are designed with the primary intent of being entertaining and not necessarily educational or fitted for young learners. Nowhere will this thesis suggest that video games, and ones such as this particular series, are to replace texts books and traditional teaching. The video game series is not made with the intent to teach or be a teaching tool, but rather the suggestion is to implement or incorporate parts of the games in class as a means of bridging the gap between pupils' spare-time and school. Also as mentioned, another intent is to allow pupils to discuss the experiences they have outside of class with a teacher, in an attempt to derive whatever learning they have gained outside and use it to their advantage.

The first limitation in using this series in the classroom would be the age rating this series have, making it according to most age rating organizations not suitable for children and young teens. The Pan-European Game Information (PEGI), that works towards making parents and guardians aware of the content of video games, have rated the main *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series as adult orientated and given it the age rating 18. This means that that they do not recommend anyone under the age of 18 to play the games. Approximately 30 European countries have joined PEGI, including Scandinavia, Spain, France, the United Kingdom, and

Italy among others. PEGI's intent is to help inform buyers as to what is suitable at what ages, and is according to themselves there to protect children (PEGI, n.d). Still, PEGI's ratings are done in accordance to what they deem to be appropriate, in other countries and continents, such as Australia and the US the series are rated differently. In the US the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), that shares the same goals as PEGI, gives the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series the label "Teen to Mature" with further explanation as to what that entails and a 17+ age rating, although the "Teen" rating itself is suggested to be suitable for 13+ (ESRB, n.d). Australia on the other hand, rates the series as "Mature Audiences" with the age rating of 15+, but with the exception that if someone below that age is accompanied with an adult (Australian Government: Department of Communication and the Arts, 2011-2015). The first installments in the series was also on their initial release given the age rating 15+ by the United Kingdom. The issue of age ratings and censorship is very much subjective and according to the cultural norms and laws of the country. More on censorship and on issues concerning this will be dealt with in the next chapter.

5. Video Game Censorship and Ethics

"Why don't we stop worrying about the media the child is consuming and do something about the many risk factors first?"

– Greg Toppo, 2015, p. 202

Even though the ratings mentioned in the previous chapter do exist and are there as PEGI themselves state "to protect children" (PEGI, n.d), a lot of children under the recommended age limit do play video games that are not recommended for them. Some do this without their parents' consent, some do it without their parents knowing at all, and others do this with the permission of their parents. As stated initially in the anecdote beginning this thesis, the pupils that I encountered during my practice period were playing video games rated above their age limit without their parents' consent or knowledge. They also admitted to knowing of peers doing the same thing, and how it has become normal in their generation. Yet, because of the age ratings, as an adult one is responsible not to further incite these types of acts. This makes it difficult to properly address and deal with what happens inside and outside of the classroom without simply dismissing or labeling the act as simply harmful and time-consuming. This is further reinforced when stereotypes about people who play video games, so called "gamers", are applied, deeming the act as useless and a waste of time. Nevertheless, educators such as Tobias Staaby and Magnus Sandberg, have managed not only to successfully address commercial video games with learners and colleagues, but have also incorporated them in their teaching (Ulfsnes, 2011; Wawro, 2014).

Similarly, James Paul Gee (2005, 2007), argues that there are major benefits in playing video games and not just the video games in them of themselves, but also in the way they are designed and how they teach and encourage development. According to Gee (2007), video games situate meaning through a multimodal medium that emphasizes experienced learning, problem solving and reflection, whereas the schools mainly focus on standardized test results. In other words, video games encourage meaningful active learning whereas the schools encourage mere repetition of memorized information. Having this as the set baselines, it is "(…) no wonder [why] it is hard for today's schools to compete" (Gee, 2007, p. 41). Society keeps on updating and developing itself whereas schools struggle to keep up. Having this gap between everyday life and the institutions that are supposedly preparing one for their everyday life becomes problematic (Gee, 2007; McGonigal, 2011; Steinkuehler, Squire, & Barab, 2012).

In Staaby's case, he uses commercial video games strategically and according to what goal he wants his learners to achieve. Although Staaby primarily uses games with a rating of 18+ with pupils fitting that age group, he has also used games with a rating of 18+ with classes of lower age. Furthermore, Staaby has received much praise both by his pupils and other educators for successfully integrating the video game *Walking Dead* (2012) in his Religion and Ethics classes, as well as encouraged and guided other teachers to do the same. This proves the many benefits and positive effects integrating commercial video games in class provides (Hauso, 2014; Wawro, 2014). Assistant Professor Sandberg, who previously worked as a high school teacher, received an award in 2010 for his successful use of *Assassin's Creed II* (2009) in his history classes at Stovner Videregående Skole, displaying the easiness of incorporating commercial media in contemporary class. This he did in addition to debunking the myth of this type of media being a waste of time (Ulfsnes, 2011), which will be further developed later on. It is important to notice that the purpose of this thesis is not to encourage nor advocate for a full integration of commercial media in contemporary classrooms, rather to understand the preconditions of contemporary pupils and use it advantageously. The main focus is to look at how one may bridge the gap between pupils' school and everyday lives, as it has become increasingly widened making it difficult for pupils to relate or apply theory into practice. This chapter will therefore focus on censorship, its intended purpose and why it seems to have failed. We will look at the ethical responsibility of the teacher, as well as the responsibility of being aware of the pupils' preconditions. The chapter will end by looking at how this applies to the video games series *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015).

5.1 Censorship – What is it and what is its purpose?

Because of the concerns previously mentioned there have been attempts at preventing or restricting young people in particular from accessing media that portray and allegedly encourage illicit acts. Despite these efforts of constraint and with good intentions, youth still access these types of media. Similarly, the constraints receive criticism from the public. Games that are deemed inappropriate not only for youth but for the public in general are justified by being product of free speech. An example of this is the relatively new video game *Hatred* (2015) made by a rather unknown studio, Destructive Creations. This game has upon and even before its release caused a huge stir (Stuart, 2015). Although this is certainly not the first video game to promote violence, or in other words, reward its player for kills (such as

first-person shooter games[8]), this game is certainly one of the first to do so in a rather unorthodox way. What makes *Hatred* (2015) different is how it portrays murder and thereby rewards the player each time the player kills someone. In usual violent video games, the player is in a certain context, such as in the context of war where the player is a soldier fighting against the enemies of the nation. In *Hatred* (2015) however, the player is nameless but referred to as "The Antagonist" who only wishes to kill people for the fun of it. The player must shoot him- or herself through the levels by hurting as many men, women, children, officers, animals, whatever that is living, as possible. Even when the player him- or herself is hurt, the only way of healing is through executing a victim as painfully as possible. If the player chooses not to kill, The Antagonist will still be feared by the NPCs and the end result of the game will still be the same. That is when the police will arrive and kill The Antagonist even if he is not resisting arrest. Now, despite being developed by a rather small company and in addition to the public criticism of the game, *Hatred* (2015) became one of the top-selling games on the gaming platform Steam (Suellentrop, 2015). The question arises as to why such a game would even be "green lighted" (in other words, approved for sale), and how and why people would actually buy and play it.

Upon its release I myself found this game rather disturbing and could not comprehend how this game could be sold or even be made, not necessarily because of the violence to which the player is subjected, but how the violence is portrayed. *Hatred* (2015) encourages the player to feel good about killing one's victims; the more they suffer the higher the score and not in a context of being a "war hero" or achieving a greater goal. One year later, working with this thesis and throughout the data and information gathered, my opinion on this subject has changed. Not to advocate for violence nor encourage it and media like it in any shape or form, however, looking at the contemporary global situation, one has to see how violence and criminal acts have not only been increasingly visible and almost unavoidable in media, as well as a rise in violent crimes in general. Simply banning whatever deviates from the cultural norms and laws seems rather futile. The current situation is at a level that, regardless of a ban, encountering and dealing with violence is inevitable. The proposition is to tackle the matter differently, because contemporary methods are not achieving the desired results. There is also the question of how to use a medium like *Hatred* (2015). The fact that it is repelling and difficult both to watch and play makes it an even better tool in addressing such matters. For instance, this game could have been used as a demonstration of why violence is indeed

---

[8] e.g. franchises such as *Call of Duty (2003-2015), Battlefield (2002-2016),* and *Far Cry (2004-2016).*

harmful and disturbing. As the game manages to portray pain inflicted upon the victims in inhuman ways making one question why anyone would ever want to hurt anyone in such a manner or hurt anyone at all. This makes it excellent in discouraging people, particularly younger people, to inflict pain on others.

Nevertheless, the purpose of ratings and censorship of commercial media, video games in particular, is as the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) states, "to help parents make informed choices" (ESRB, n.d), and to protect minors from harm and encourage illicit acts (National Coalition Against Censorship, 2016). Furthermore, the discussion of censorship and restricting content was stirred after the 1999 Columbine High School shootings. This was due to the victims' families suing several video game developers claiming first-person shooter (FPS) games encouraged the shootings. Although the lawsuits were dismissed, they managed to push the video game industry to provide for rating systems that would categorize the games and give them appropriate age labeling (Toppo, 2015, p. 198).

5.2 Why Censorship is 'Broken'

Where the restrictions and ratings were meant to help and guide the consumer, the outcome has not quite been as expected. As many youths manage to get a hold of, and consume, media that are restricted for their age group, the preventions against this consumption are not taken seriously enough. There are also the misconceptions about video games in particular, of how they only encourage illicit acts, are addictive, a waste of time and generally a bad influence on those who play. Additionally, one of the biggest concerns non-gamers have with regards to playing video games is the fear of having the line between reality and the virtual world blurred. The assumption is that youth in particular struggle with defining this line and therefore are at a greater risk of falling from society, and should therefore be protected from over use of the medium (Gee, 2007; Parkin, 2015; Toppo, 2015). As mentioned in the anecdote, one of the pupils I met during my practice stay claimed that age ratings of video games only belittled the youth. This because, according to this pupil, adults believe that children and youth will reenact whatever they see on a screen. Reporter Greg Toppo agrees, and points out that the worry that violent games makes violent people, only proves that the one worrying him or herself fails to grasp the difference between reality and play (2015, p. 204).

Scholar Gee (2007) categorizes video games themselves as neither good nor bad, and explains that it all depends on how they are used. If they are played in moderation and with guidance from peers and/or adults, Gee argues that they provide beneficial and lasting cognitive and social effects. However, if combined with a violent environment and used with no limit, the playing will of course cause more damage. Gee was also asked what the statistics suggested in terms of whether or not people have ever been killed due to video games, in which he replied that it was uncertain. In other words, death caused by video games as the sole reason, is not that knowable. While statistics as to how many have been killed because of what is in books suggest billions, books are not deemed as harmful and encouraging illicit acts. Nevertheless, history does show the same level of skepticism as well as censorship towards books, especially those of a certain genre. Because of this, restricting entireties of games may not be the solution, as the youth will still manage to get a hold of the games and do it behind the backs of adults (Gee, 2007, p. 159; Toppo, 2015, p. 202).

5.2.1 Fleeing to Virtual Reality

While the rise of gaming culture and development of technology has brought forth benefits, addiction as well as escapism have also been a consequence. Incidents have been reported of players signing in to play but never signing out again, due to their addiction to the medium. Journalist Simon Parkin (2015) tells the tales of video game addicts in his book "Death by Video Game", where he explores the reasons as to why some people fail to return to the real world again. Where others flee reality in order to find solace and comfort in video games so that they may heal and finally move on, a select few flee for good. These gamers do not want to take part in reality, escape it for good, and enter the virtual world where they do not have to face depression, death and pain. If one's virtual character dies in a video game, one will usually be allowed to "respawn", e.g. come back to life. For these gamers, there is no point in living in the real world; this virtual world may fulfill all their needs. Although these incidents are few and far between, and there have been incidents of people dying at the "hands" of their video game for other reasons, there has been an increased concern of what harms video games may cause. A study conducted in 2011, researched the possibility of a correlation between youth suicide and the excessive use of video games and internet. Although the study found little evidence suggesting that video games and excessive internet use were the cause itself, it did suggest that further research was needed to determine just how the media could affect already depressed or mentally ill people (Messias, Castro, Saini, Usman, & Peeples, 2011).

According to game theorist Jane McGonigal (2011), there is a mass exodus to the virtual world and it is occurring because of the real world's institutions and communities are unable to facilitate the achievement of meaningful goals. Reality has become a burden, something difficult to participate in, challenging and lacking ways to motivate its inhabitants, whereas video games are almost the complete opposite. Having challenges that are manageable, that facilitate motivation, and that give the doer a sense of meaning, they, the video games, outperform the challenges faced in the real world. This is even more the case when one is suffering or facing hardships and challenges outside of the ordinary. No wonder people then flee to this medium when reality is too unbearable to face; video games provide a sense of solace and comfort. As the upcoming stories that will be presented are only a few of many, ranging from people suffering with mental health issues, to young people facing parents with abusive behavior, to a student that failed his or her final exams, video games become a refuge. Video games become the place where one may experience a new reality that is both logical and just, where the player is in control, and the rules are never broken, where one will find predictability and actually be able to succeed. In Parkin's words: "video games offer a compelling and comforting refuge from life's trials" (Parkin, 2015, p. 235). In addition to this, they may also offer a way to process grief as in the case below of Chris Ferguson, and to be able to heal.

Parkin relates the story of a couple of people that found solace in video gaming in his book. Chris Ferguson was one of these people that, when reality was far too difficult to bear, found comfort in video games. When his wife had to undergo surgery to remove an ectopic pregnancy threatening her life, both Ferguson and his wife struggled to face reality. While Ferguson's wife was being treated, the hospital sent Ferguson home. Due to his emotional suffering, Ferguson struggled with coping, completing simple tasks and even sleeping, as there was nothing he could do for his wife's recovery. In the search for something that could get his mind off the heaviness of the feelings he was carrying, the only familiar and bearable action for him was to play video games. Parkin explains why he thinks Ferguson found solace in playing video games during Ferguson's difficult time: "it gave him something to do, a series of easily digestible tasks which he could complete (…) a sense of progress and movement when the rest of his life's plans had been obliterated" (Parkin, 2015, p. 176). Parkin further explains how the video games are designed with routines and directions making a framework easy to bear when one's life seems to be falling apart. Where literature, music and movies only remove one out reality, video games enable the player to control and

provides options and challenges that are obtainable (Parkin, 2015 p. 169-176). This was exactly what Ferguson needed at the time, something he could control, options that he himself had a say in, and progress in a story. This compared favorably to his reality, where all he could do was watch as things fell apart, then wait for a solution.

Parkin later cites a similar story, that of Yousif Mohammed, a 19-year-old who was forced to flee his hometown Baghdad in fear of being kidnapped in the aftermath of the second Gulf War. During this difficult time Mohammed found solace and company in video gaming, and managed to even earn one of the top scores in the game. Although his parents, as many parents often are, were worried that his gaming was a bit too much and that it would encourage violent acts, they soon realized that Mohammed's hobby was actually the opposite. It was an activity that kept him inside and safe, as the country remained volatile, as well as providing him with the company of peers as they could log on and play online with people from all over the world (Parkin, 2015, p. 181). Another example is that of Mohannad Abdulla, today a network administrator for one of Baghdad's main internet service providers, who spoke to Parkin about his experiences in growing up in Iraq in the aftermath of the war. Abdulla explained that during his youth whatever leisure activity available would be too dangerous due to terrorists, which would give him little to no options. Video games would at times be the only option as: "games are the only way to have some fun with friends and stay safe at home, where there is no risk of being killed by a suicide bomber" (Parkin, 2015, p. 181), Abdulla explained. In other words, for youth like Mohammed and Abdulla, their only way of recreation and play was to do activities that did not force them to go outside; video games provided fun activity as well as the opportunity to connect with people like themselves online. Abdulla further explained that video games have been the only escape this youth has from the troubles and pain they face every day (Parkin, 2015, p. 181-182). Mohammed's parents too explained the benefits they found in having their children play video games, despite their initial reluctance. Mohammed's mother, Amna, explains how video games contributed to broaden her son's friendships and bonds, and how happy she was to hear that he was making friends from all over the world that cared about him and that he himself cared about (Parkin, 2015 p. 184). Because of video games, these youths have been able to experience some of what many would label as a "normal childhood" despite their difficult circumstances. Because of video games, these youths may too experience bonds of friendship in a safe environment, despite the heinous and terrorist acts that are happening around them.

5.2.2 Actual "Death by Video Game"

One of the long-running debates concerning video games has been how they contribute to or increase violent behavior in the people playing them. One of the many arguments against the medium is that it encourages violence and hateful acts. Where some may argue that there is little evidence proving there to be direct causational link between the medium and the behavior, others will point to incidents linking crimes with people playing violent games (Parkin, 2015, p. 128). Research has also shown that young people playing violent video games or are exposed to them over time react more aggressively compared to those who do not play (Koplewicz, 2014). However, the American Psychological Association, as well as other researchers, argues that these studies only show a correlation between aggression and violent games, but not any evidence that video gaming directly causes actual criminal violence. In other words, there is no specific evidence that suggest a direct causal relationship between playing violent video games and actually committing violent crimes. Still, APA recognizes that violent video games can be one of several risk factors and therefore suggest increased parental control and guidance in order to decrease the exposure of young people to violence (Anderson & Dill, 2000). In addition to this, APA encourages that further research into how the combination of violent video games with other factors such as mental instability may increase risks of violent acts. In other words, violent video games themselves are not the cause of violent acts, rather combined with other factors, violent video games may encourage violent thoughts and tendencies (von Radowitz, 2015).

Parkin counters the notion of blaming the video games themselves, claiming that whatever act is done excessively has a negative effect regardless of what the act itself is: "You could also die while sprawled out on the sofa, chain-watching the latest television serial. You might also perish after a four-hundred-page Tolstoy binge, or while you endure Abel Gane's nine-hour-long film 'Napoléon'" (Parkin, 2015, p. 18). In other words, according to Parkin, it is not the act of playing video games that causes the death of its overly excited players, rather the excessive engagement in an activity which compels and individual to sit still for an extended period of time (Parkin, 2015, p. 18-26). This is not to imply that video games do not encourage the player to actually dedicate their time and energy to the game, which is exactly one of the reasons many are against the medium. Books and movies may demand the fullest attention of the one reading or watching, what the video game medium demands is even more. Not only is it enough that the player is giving their undivided attention to the game, but they are also required to use their body both physically and mentally. Of course dependent on what

type of game is being played, most games do require the player to give more of themselves than just their attention, as the player is the main character in the story and has to play their role. To complete the act of playing a game, one is compelled to give it one's all, which is precisely what makes the medium risky. However, some video game producers have included warnings in their video games and some even a built-in timer that automatically pauses the game and encourages the player to get outside for a break. Others have taken it further and developed extensions, consoles and games that require one to use their entire body (such as Sony's *EyeToy,* Microsoft's *Kinect* and Nintentdo's *Wii*) making the games into healthy exercise. Despite these attempts there is still a minority that allow its addiction to consume them, and extreme cases of people that die of over play of video games, due to high blood pressure, lack of nutrition and rest (McGonigal, 2011; Parkin, 2015).

In 2013, 20-year-old Adam Lanza showed up armed at Sandy Hook Elementary School where he killed 26 people. In the media Lanza was portrayed as an aggressive video game player, that was obsessed with violence, guns, murder and mayhem. He was also recorded to have owned FPS titles such as *Call of Duty* (2003-), as well as violent action games such as *Grand Theft Auto* (2001-) and *Dead or Alive* (1996-2008). Yet, the video game that Lanza obsessed about the most, the game which had him frequently show up at public arcades for, the game which earned him his biggest reputation and the nickname DDR Guy, was the video game *Dance Dance Revolution* (2009-)[9] (Toppo, 2015, p. 192-194). Still, Lanza's terrorist acts contributed to increase the fuel in the heated debate about the negative influence by video games on youth and people in general.

In "Free to Learn", Peter Gray (2013, p. 169-170) relates how violent and warlike play to some is a way of confronting reality. By playing games that portray violent acts, the player enables him or herself to bring reality into a fictional context. In this way they may encounter and experience incidents in a safe environment, as well as practice how to deal with such matters. This is according to Gray, not harmful for youth and children, but rather educational and should not be shunned. Furthermore, by allowing youth to play at violence is a good way to prepare them both emotionally and intellectually for reality of the violence they may face. The fear expressed by many is that the exposure to violence will eventually lead to an encouragement of violent acts. What Gray suggests, is that the play is done with guidance, but not with control and censorship. He continues to suggest that the youth, in order to adapt and

---

[9] A physical rhythm and dance game that requires the player to stand on a platform and step on the correct arrows according to the rhythm.

survive the real world, must be allowed to prepare themselves for reality, instead of being spared from it (Gray, 2013, p. 179-180).

Professor Harold Schechter in his book "Savage Pastimes" (2005) relates how the Baby Boomer generation were exposed to a significantly large amount of violence as children, especially through television, and that as a consequence if looking at today's accusations against violent media, one would expect the entire generation to all be murderers. While conducting his research and gathering information for his book, Schechter discovered that the majority of shows on prime-time television, were that of the violent sort, this also applied to the shows that aired for children. Schechter further relates of how contemporary critics would have deemed the media consumption of his time to be unsafe and guaranteed to encourage raise a generation of hate and mayhem, but "instead, we grew up to be the generation that preached peace, love and flower power, and believed we could end the Vietnam War by surrounding the Pentagon and chanting 'Om'" (Schechter, 2005, p. 23).

5.3 Ethical Responsibilities

Violence is a part of human experience, unfortunately it is unavoidable. Although one is usually affected by what one consumes, once something becomes normalized it does not seem that create the same effect it once did. Initially, the video game medium did not cause a lot of commotion and stir, and there were little to no assumption about whether or not it could cause harm to its consumers. It was not until certain video games and genres were introduced, and that consumers and/or general public reacted, asking for the games to be censored, that the notion of harmful video games was considered to be a reality. And it was not until the first lawsuit against the video game medium in 1997, by anti-video game activist and attorney Jack Thompson, that the general public began questioning the correlation between video games and violent actions (National Coalition Against Censorship, 2016). Additionally, the medium has been deemed a time waster, and claimed to provide little to no cognitive and social effects by critics. This has been argued against by scholars and educators such as the previously mentioned Gee, Staaby and Sandberg. They also made the point of how certain games, as with every other media or idea, will at certain times affect certain people under certain circumstances. To claim that the medium itself is entirely at fault, is according to these and other scholars, an irrational claim (Cook, 2014; Gee, 2007; Hauso, 2014; Toppo, 2015).

It is also worth noting how video games have not been the only ones to be criticized or blamed in the beginning of its release. Previously, music, films, the radio, books and comic books, were given the same treatment. Then when the medium became a bit more familiar, only certain genres were criticized, such as rock music, violent films, what was deemed inappropriate books and violent comic books. The media were also regarded as time wasting and having a bad influence on youth, with the claim that they would corrupt the youth and only result in a dysfunctional society. Obviously these were assumptions based on fear and ignorance at the given time periods. In the documentary, *Pixel Poetry* (2014), that deals with the debates and criticism that the video game medium has encountered, video game journalist Adam Sessler explains this as follows, "It's like language discourse; to the one outside it creates social anxiety because the outsiders are fearful of something strange to them and they're afraid to lose power" (Cook, 2014). In other words, whenever something new is introduced to a community, the ones who fail to understand what it entails, will usually be fearful, either due to a precautionary nature or due to the fear of losing authority. This is of course only natural, as we humans are prone to wanting to protect ourselves from harm and wish to maintain that which already is well functional.

A parent worrying that their child spends almost the entirety of a day playing video games, is without a doubt expected. Worrying that one's child may become addicted to certain acts, substances or socially deviant, are all part of raising a child and setting necessary boundaries. The question of to what extent a child should be limited play, is well debated, especially since video games are by design made to keep the player interacted and without stop. Video games are also to some extent addicting, according to Associate Professor Natasha Schüll, who studies addiction and technology. Schüll claims that video games, and especially contemporary games, incorporate this "ludic loop", where the point of the game is not to experience a plot or follow a development, but just keep on playing. "Kill the monster; kill the monster again; kill the monster again. You never know when you're going to get the reward [or] how much the reward will be. It's these little ludic loops", Schüll states, and further explains how games with this kind of design can be as addictive as gambling (Schüll, 2014). The point of "ludic loop" based games, is to create a never-ending procession of play, where the player keeps on returning to the game (Schüll, 2014; Toppo, 2015). Yet, there is the difference between these kinds of games made with the purpose to keep the player going, and games designed differently with other purposes, such as multiplayer games (e.g. *World of Warcraft* [2004]*)*, games that require one to use one's body actively (e.g. *Dance Dance*

Revolution [2009-]), and games that thrive on story and character development (e.g. *Assassin's Creed* [2007-2015]).

Reporter Greg Toppo, researching his book "The Game Believes in You", consulted game scholars, critics, psychologists, educators, parents and children, discovered that the general public's stance on violence and violent media is justifiable, but also double-standard. While worrying that violent media will create violent citizens, Toppo discoverd that we are simultaneously clouding children's minds and fantasies with unrealistic expectations about money, love, adventure, and self-fulfillment. While worrying about violent video games, there is little to no worry about media that encourages greed and selfishness, and there is little to no worry of whether or not love songs incite unhealthy relationships (Toppo, 2015, p. 207). Psychologist Eric Schleifer, who specializes in treating young teenagers, reveals that contemporary youth have psychological issues, such as severe anxiety, that earlier generations did not deal with on the same level. Because of the world news and information being easily accessible, the contemporary generation is exposed to almost every little detail of what is happening around the world. Where approximately just a hundred years ago, the only information available, especially for youth, was that of local news, more specifically what was happening in the neighborhood they lived in. According to Schleifer, this amount of information sharing causes a great deal of stress to contemporary youth (Schleifer, 2014, as cited in Toppo, 2015, p. 207-210).

Furthermore, Schleifer (2014, as cited in Toppo, 2015) as well as researcher Nick Yee (2014, as cited in Toppo, 2015), suggests that because of today's society seeming to be more uncontrollable and difficult to deal with, children are in need of feeling strong and powerful. This is in order to properly face the world without difficulties when they themselves become adults. They therefore suggest that children are allowed to play through whatever troubles them, to try and fail, while being guided, until it feels safer, and until they themselves can handle the issue at hand. Furthermore, if there are any underlying psychological problems, removing technology alone will not solve the problem. The suggestion is therefore to sit down with one's child and guide them through their media consumption. Be it watching the news together, watching commercial movies together, playing video games or analyzing popular song lyrics, as long as there is a dialogue before, during or after the experience. Moreover, children's media advocates discovered this, and in their research found that parents who watch television with their children allow for their children to gain cognitive and educational benefits, in comparison to children who watched television alone (Takeuchi & Stevens, 2011

as cited in, Toppo, 2015). Contemporary children's media advocates now call for "joint media engagement", involving all types of media contemporary youth consume, be it playing commercial video games with one's child, reading comic books, or going to the movies together (Takeuchi & Stevens, 2011 as cited in, Toppo, 2015). They emphasize there to be active conversation about what is happening on screen, for instance with video games, that the adult discusses with the child the experience they are going through, what they understand and how they intend to solve the puzzles. The media advocates also emphasize the role of the adult when engaging with the youth, and questions how the adult is involved. This is because children study the behavior of adults and thereby copy it. So the adult must also be aware of their own behavior, how they solve the game at hand, and how they react to certain parts of the game. As with all media exposure, a child is in need of proper guidance and context, as well as being heard when they want to express their experience and thoughts (Toppo, 2015, p. 207-213).

5.3.1 *Assassin's Creed* and Censorship

As previously mentioned, despite video games being rated and restricted for youth, a lot of the youth do still have access and play these games regardless. As seen in my experience in practice, the pupils encountered during this time considered their acts not to be of concern, but were still reluctant to admit what they have done, lest they be scolded for their mischievousness. This indicates the general stance on video games and censorship, where most adults deem video games to be far more harmful than the children themselves do. High school teacher Tobias Staaby, as previously mentioned, successfully incorporated commercial video games in his classrooms, including titles with a rating of 18+ in classes of pupils. The way Staaby solved the issue of rating, was firstly by consulting his supervisor who told him that he should treat video games in the classroom in the same matter he should treat any other medium in class. That is, as long as an adult is participating and supervising while the content is being displayed, there are no worries in using a medium rated 18+ with younger pupils (Staaby, 2016).

Furthermore, associate professor Magnus Sandberg, as introduced, successfully incorporated *Assassin's Creed II* (2009) in his teachings and even won a prize for it (Ulfsnes, 2011). This he did with both pupils in the second and third year of upper secondary, in both ancient and modern history. The way Sandberg initially solved the issue of rating, was to primarily discuss it with his supervisor, before informing the pupils' parents by mail. He later on

continued using rated video games in his classes without informing the parents, as no one complained and informing them required a lot of effort. Prior to the actual use of the medium in class, Sandberg discussed the ratings and violent media with his classes. Additionally, he made sure that the pupils, prior to playing *Assassin's Creed*, adjusted the display settings to "turn off blood", this way the combat sequences seem less violent and not as realistic. Sandberg also justified the use of this kind of media, by emphasizing that the PEGI-ratings function as guiding labels, and are not enforced by law. Furthermore, there is an actual cognitive benefit by using the medium in an educational setting, rather than when the children play themselves, in particular media with this sort of content. He also used *Grand Theft Auto V* (2013) in his social studies class with pupils in the second year of upper secondary. This Sandberg did with the same justification as when he used *Assassin's Creed II* (2009), in order to properly discuss violence and play with his pupils as well as receiving an educational benefit from the game, as most of his pupils already played the game during their free-time. This was also the pupils' first time playing this game, that has received its share of criticism due to its violent nature and depiction of women,[10] with an adult present (Sandberg, 2016).

Moreover, the way Sandberg implemented commercial video games in his teaching, was by dedicating an entire day to learn about the renaissance in Firenze, through *Assassin's Creed II* (2009), which revolves around this specific time period. Sandberg divided his class into groups each consisting of three pupils. Then two by two groups were formed to create a "wiki-team", that were to make a wikispace together. When looking at the actual playing of the game, Sandberg divided the tasks like this: one pupil had the controller and played the game, another pupil wrote down notes and gathered information for the wiki, and the last pupil took pictures and recorded both events in game as well as the group's progress. This they did on gaming consoles that the pupils' themselves brought from home (Sandberg, n.d). This was done in contrast to Staaby, who projected the game on screen from his own computer, and made sure that the pupils took turns in using the controller. Feedback was then provided by the pupils anonymously through the application "Kahoot!" (Hauso, 2014). These roles that the pupils were assigned rotated so that each pupil was allowed to play the game, as well as take notes and pictures. Afterwards, the pupils were to create the wikispace, where they chose a subject to further investigate and thereby present it in the wiki. How to do this and looking at what was relevant, was already discussed in class previously, so the pupils

---

[10] There among a torture sequence as well as the treatment of women both in the game's story and when free-roaming stirred concern and public outcry, causing one retailer to ban its sales (Makuch, 2014).

followed the "SPØK"-form, which divides a society into four aspects: the social aspect (Sosiale forhold), the political aspect (Politiske forhold), the economical aspect (Økonomiske forhold) and the cultural aspect (Kulturelle forhold). After this, the pupils were to present their wikispaces, as well as to make a documentary on their process (Sandberg, n.d).

In order for children and youth to be properly prepared for life, adulthood and what that entails, it is vital that they receive proper guidance and feedback throughout their lives. The argument is not necessarily to encourage for more gaming or use of commercial media in the classroom, nor is it to encourage the play or consumption of restricted and rated media. Rather the argument is to better understand and use the fact that players already exist and that youth do have access to various media despite restrictions. The point of this is how to use this fact to the advantage of the teacher and educator, rather than having it be an obstacle when dealing with children and youth. Looking at ways to bridge the gap between contemporary education and youth's everyday life, instead of widening it, has been the intent of this thesis.

6. Conclusion

"In a world without gold, we might have been heroes!"

– Edward Thatch, *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (2012)

This thesis has made an attempt to investigate how video games, mainly commercial games such as the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series, can engage, motivate and enhance learning. As the gap between teachers and pupils has widened, the focus has been on how to bridge this gap by extracting and using parts of pupils' everyday lives and interests as a gateway to motivation for learning. As presented, quite a few contemporary pupils struggle with maintaining motivation in class, such as in the example of the pupils met during practice. For them, the need for engagement and continuous feedback was apparent. There has also been the issue of mislabeling pupils that has led to undermining their potential and strengths that may not be apparent in a specific educational setting. This contributes both to weakening the relationship between educator and learner, as well as it decreasing the motivation for learning. As previously presented, this was seen with the pupil that was labeled a "trouble-maker" and a "slow learner". This pupil was deemed unable to participate in a regular classroom setting and acquire the same level of proficiency in the subjects as his peers, by some of his teachers. The label that was put on this pupil, contributed to constrain his relationship with both peers and teachers, and made it difficult for others and himself to realize his actual potential. As already argued, despite these labels, this pupil managed to play through the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series, as well as see the connections between what he had learned in class and what was presented in the series. In addition, he was following the story in the game in a language that was not his first language, at the very young age of 10 years. This was something that neither his parents or teachers were aware that he was capable of doing.

As professor Gee suggested, when trying to understand individuals, their behavior, and their motivation, we as educators need to look at the four roles or identities (nature, institution, discourse and affinity). This will in turn provide a far broader understanding of the individual as a whole. In terms of contemporary youth, Gee argued that the identity of affinity, also understood as identity of interest, have come to be dominant in youths' lives and even in conflict with their institutional identity or role (Gee, 2000-2001). This makes it difficult not only for pupils themselves when they are in the classroom, but also for their teachers and educators. It has therefore been argued here that by understanding the pupils and their identity of interest, educators, teachers, and politicians may use this to increase the motivational drives

within the pupils as well as create a better learning environment for them. In terms of how to actually increase pupils' motivational drives through their interest, this thesis has tried to exemplify this through popular media, such as the *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) series. The video game series was therefore analyzed using the English subject curriculum as a tool, and it was considered whether or not the series contributed to a greater learning outcome.

The English subject curriculum in its purpose states that the subject is to be a means of cultivating the pupils, as well as be a tool for further education. Additionally, the English subject is to provide the pupils with insight of how others live, as well as experience the variety of cultures within the English-speaking world. This is to be done, according to the curriculum, through a variety of media, seeing as multimodal texts and interaction may inspire creativity within the pupils (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). Some of the competence aims that have been considered in this analysis have been the ability to "listen to and understand variations of English from different authentic situations, express oneself fluently and coherently, suited to the purpose and situation" and "promote understanding and respect between people of different cultural backgrounds" (Utdanningsdirektoratet, n.d). This was seen in the series where each of the franchise's installments, the setting, characters and language used, were different variations of English in authentic situations. As with *Assassin's Creed III* (2012), set in 18th century in Boston and New York City, players could listen to authentic Boston and New York City accents. Additionally, the video game series has throughout its installments portrayed characters of different backgrounds and different time eras (e.g. the Crusades, the Italian Renaissance, the Civil War, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution), as well as provided for experiences that allow for understanding of other people and provided the player with new perspectives. How *Assassin's Creed* (2007-2015) may actually be used as a tool in the classroom have been seen through the examples of Tobias Staaby and Magnus Sandberg. As presented, Staaby chose to play *Walking Dead* (2012) in plenary and make an intensive approach, whereas Sandberg chose to make an extensive approach, using *Assassin's Creed II* (2009).

In terms of ethical responsibilities and age ratings, both teachers made sure to first clarify with their supervisors. In Staaby's case, he chose to be present with his pupils while the medium was being displayed. Sandberg, on the other hand, allowed his pupils to play the game without him being present, but made sure to discuss the content with his pupils prior to the project. He also made sure that his pupils adjusted the display settings by turning off blood, making combat sequences less violent. Sandberg also justified this by emphasizing the

fact that the PEGI-ratings function as guiding labels, and are not enforced by law. Consciously preparing how to present the media, and in which manner to discuss it with the pupils, greatly takes the pupils own experiences with the game play into consideration. The pupils, as we have previously presented in my opening anecdote, are aware of the ratings, but feel that they to a certain extent can be condescending in how they are presented. They express that even though the media shows certain explicit content, they will not be inclined to re-enact it, and are fully capable of distinguishing the difference between reality and fiction.

The purpose of this thesis has been to understand contemporary pupils' preconditions and use it advantageously in educational settings. The main focus has been to look at how to bridge the gap between pupils' everyday lives and what they face in school, as a lot of pupils find it difficult to relate to or apply theory into practice. Through their interest, the intent has been to strengthen the relationship between educators and learners, especially when living in a technology-based society. Although it would have been interesting to delve further into the concept of motivation in school in general as well as to look at all of the subjects, and not only video games, this study has, because of limits in time and scope, mainly focused on the English subject and video games.

References

Ajayi, L. (2009, April). English as a Second Language Learners' Exploration of Multimodal Texts in a Junior High School. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, pp. 585-595.

Ames, A. C. (1990). Motivation: What Teachers Need to Know. *Teachers College Record*(91), p. 13.

Anderson, C. A., & Dill, K. E. (2000). Video Games and Aggressive Thoughts, Feelings, and Behavior in the Laboratory and in Life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*(78), pp. 772-790.

Australian Government: Department of Communication and the Arts. (2011-2015). *AustralianClassification*. Retrieved from How it all works: http://www.classification.gov.au/Information/Pages/Home.aspx

Barab, S. (2012). 17 Introduction to Section III. In C. Steinkuehler, K. Squire, & S. Barab, *Games, Learning, and Society* (pp. 271-278). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bartol, V. (2011). *Alamut.* (M. Biggins, Trans.) California: North Atlantic Books.

Beavis, C. (2012, February). Video Games in the Classroom: Developing Digital Literacies. *Practically Primary*, pp. 17-20.

Blizzard Entertainment. (2004). World of Warcraft. Blizzard Entertainment.[Video Game].

Bowden, O. (2009-2015). *Assassin's Creed.* London: Penguin Books.

Buli-Holmberg, J., & Ekeberg, T. R. (2011). *Likeverdig og tilpasset opplæring i en skole for alle.* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Cook, R. (Director). (2014). *Pixel Poetry: A Film About Games, Art, Society, and Culture* [Motion Picture].

Destructive Creations. (2015). Hatred. Destructive Creations. [Video Game]

Drew, I., & Sørheim, B. (2009). *English Teaching Strategies.* Oslo: Samlaget.

El-Nasr, M. S., Al-Saati, M., Niedenthal, S., & Milam, D. (2008). *Assassin's Creed: a Multi-Cultural Read.* Burnaby: Simon Fraser University.

ESRB. (n.d). *ESRB*. Retrieved from ABOUT ESRB: http://www.esrb.org/

Extra Credits. (2012, May 13). Extra Credits: Gamifying Education. [Video Clip]

Forsyth, E. (2010, June 11). From Assassin's Creed 2 to the Five Greatest Warriors: Games and Reading. *Australia and New Zealand Conference*, pp. 12-24.

Gee, J. P. (2000-2001). Identity as an Analytic Lens for Research in Education. *Review of Research in Education*, pp. 99-125.

Gee, J. P. (2005). *Why Video Games are Good for Your Soul.* Australia: Common Ground.

Gee, J. P. (2007). *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy.* New York, Palgrave: Macmillan.

Gray, P. (2013). *Free to Learn.* New York: Basic Books.

Gregg, K. R. (1989). Second language acquisition theory. In M. S. Gass, & J. Schachter, *Linguistic Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 15-40). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Halverson, R. (2005, July 31). What Can K-12 School Leaders Learn from Video Games and Gaming? *Innovative Online*, p. 8.

Hamilton, K. (2012, August 8). *Kotaku.* Retrieved from How Has Assassin's Creed III Disappointed Me? Let Me Count The Ways: http://kotaku.com/5958941/how-has-assassins-creed-iii-disappointed-me-let-me-count-the-ways

Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English Language Teaching.* Essex: Pearson.

Hauso, T. (2014, January 16). *NRK.* Retrieved from Brukar zombiar for å lære elevane etikk: https://www.nrk.no/hordaland/tar-zombiar-med-inn-i-klasserommet-1.11473634

Hornby, N. (2005). *A Long Way Down.* London: Penguin Group.

Imsen, G. (2006). *Elevenes verden.* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Infinity Ward. (2003-). Call of Duty. Activision. [Video Game]

Ingebrigtsen, T. B. (2016, January 29). *NRK.* Retrieved from Dataspilling gjør unge bedre i engelsk: https://www.nrk.no/norge/_-dataspilling-gjor-unge-bedre-i-engelsk-1.12771444

Judge, M. (2014, July 17). *Load the Game.* Retrieved from Assassin's Creed Unity aims to be historically accurate according to Ubisoft: http://www.loadthegame.com/2014/07/17/assassins-creed-unity-aims-historically-accurate-according-ubisoft/

Konami. (2009-). Dance Dance Revolution. Konami. [Video Game]

Koplewicz, H. (2014, March 25). Video game violence linked to bad behavior, study says. *CBS This Morning.* (CBS, Interviewer)

Løvlie, L. (2003). Teknokulturell danning. In R. Slagstad, O. Korsgaard, & L. Løvlie, *Dannelsens forvandlinger* (pp. 347-371). Oslo: Pax Forlag A/S.

Maehr, L. M., & Meyer, A. H. (1997). Understanding Motivation and Schooling. *Educational Psychology Review*(9), p. 39.

Makuch, E. (2014, December 3). *Yahoo! News.* Retrieved from GTA 5 "Violence Against Women" Criticisms Spurs Ban by Australian Retailer: https://www.yahoo.com/news/gta-5-violence-against-women-132100049.html?ref=gs

McGonigal, J. (2011). *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World.* London: Jonathan Cape.

Messias, E., Castro, J., Saini, A., Usman, M., & Peeples, D. (2011, June). Sadness, Suicide, and Their Association with Video Game and Internet Overuse among Teens. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, pp. 307-315.

MicroProse; Activision. (1991-2016). Civilization. MicroProse; Activision. [Video Game]

Mohawk Valley History. (n.d). *Mohawk Valley History.* Retrieved from Revolutionary War: http://www.mohawkvalleyhistory.com/themes/revolutionary-war#.V97wPpOLRQa

Morieux, Y. (2015). How too many rules at work keep you from getting things done. TED@BCGLondon.

Mosendz, P. (2014, September 18). *Newsweek.* Retrieved from Frances Takes Issue with 'Assassin's Creed': http://europe.newsweek.com/assassins-creed-france-ubisoft-manuel-noriega-call-duty-video-games-285285?rm=eu

Munden, J. (2014). *Engelsk på mellomtrinnet: a teacher's guide.* Oslo: Gyldendal.

National Coalition Against Censorship. (2016). *NCAC.* Retrieved from About Us: http://ncac.org/about-us

Nikolajeva, M., & Scott, C. (2006). Mimesis and Modality. In M. Nikolajeva, & C. Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* (p. 38). New York: Routledge.

O'Driscoll, J. (2009). *Britain: Student's Book: for Learners of English.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Parkin, S. (2015). *Death by Video Game: Tales of Obsession from the Virtual Frontline.* London: Profile Books.

PEGI. (n.d). *PEGI.* Retrieved from Om PEGI: http://www.pegi.info/no/index/id/338

Prensky, M. (2006). *Don't Bother Me Mom--I'm Learning!* St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House.

Ray, N. (1992). *Motivation in Education.* Portales: Eastern New Mexico University.

Rødal, A. (2016, January 29). *UiO: Institutt for lærerutdanning og skoleforskning.* Retrieved from Dataspilling gjør unge bedre i engelsk: http://www.uv.uio.no/ils/forskning/aktuelt/aktuelle-saker/2016/engelsk-og-dataspill.html

Robinson, K. (2006). Do schools kill creativity? TED2006.

Robinson, K. (2010). Changing Education Paradigms. Animate, RSA.

Rockstar North. (2013). Grand Theft Auto V. Rockstar Games. [Video Game]

Rockstar North; Canada; Leeds; Digital Eclipse. (2001-). Grand Theft Auto. Rockstar Games. [Video Game]

San Luis, N. (2015, December 7). *Upworthy.* Retrieved from Why aren't millennials buying houses? They can't afford it.: http://www.upworthy.com/why-arent-millennials-buying-houses-they-cant-afford-it?c=ufb1

Sandberg, M. H. (2016, September 4). Using Video Games in the Classroom. (E-mail correspondance)

Sandberg, M. H. (n.d). *StovnersCreed*. Retrieved from Læring med Assassin's Creed 2: https://stovnerscreed.wikispaces.com/

Schüll, N. D. (2014, June 7). Stuck In The Machine Zone: Your Sweet Tooth For 'Candy Crush'. (A. Rath, Interviewer) NPR.

Schechter, H. (2005). *Savage Pastimes.* New York: St. Martin's Press.

Spring, D. (2015). Gaming history: computer and video games as historical scholarship. *Rethinking History*(19), pp. 207-221.

Staaby, T. (2016, January 5). *Spillpedagogene.* Retrieved from The Last of Us - Spill som skjønnlitteratur: http://spillpedagogene.blogg.no/1452009075_the_last_of_us__spill.html

Staaby, T. (2016, September 1). Using Video Games in the Classroom. (E-mail correspondance)

Steinkuehler, C., & Duncan, S. (2008, September 3). Scientific Habits of Mind in Virtual Worlds. *J Sci Educ Technol*, pp. 530-543.

Steinkuehler, C., Squire, K., & Barab, S. (2012). *Games, Learning, and Society.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Stuart, K. (2015, May 29). *The Guardian.* Retrieved from Hatred: gaming's most contrived controversy: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/may/29/hatred-gaming-controversy

Suellentrop, C. (2015, June 2). *Kotaku.* Retrieved from Hatred: The Kotaku Review: http://kotaku.com/hatred-the-kotaku-review-1708545268

Sundqvist, P., & Wikström, P. (2015, April 7). Out-of-school digital gameplay and in-school L2 English vocabulary outcomes. *Elsevier*, pp. 65-76.

Svartdal, F. (2013, November 25). *Store norske leksikon.* Retrieved from locus of control: https://snl.no/locus_of_control

Team Ninja. (1996-2008). Dead or Alive. Tecmo. [Video Game]

Telltale Games. (2012). The Walking Dead. Telltale Games. [Video Game]

Toppo, G. (2015). *The Game Believes in You.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Trépanier, N. (2014, May). *American Historical Association.* Retrieved from Perspectives on
    History: https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-
    history/may-2014/the-assassins-perspective

Twenge, M. J. (2006). *Generation Me.* New York: Free Press.

Twenge, M. J. (2013). Teaching Generation Me. *Teaching of Psychology*, pp. 66-69.

Ubisoft. (2004-2016). Far Cry. Ubisoft. [Video Game].

Ubisoft. (2007). Assassin's Creed. Ubisoft. [Video Game].

Ubisoft. (2009). Assassin's Creed II. Ubisoft. [Video Game].

Ubisoft. (2010). Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood. Ubisoft. [Video Game].

Ubisoft. (2012). Assassin's Creed III. Ubisoft. [Video Game].

Ubisoft. (2013). Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag. Ubisoft. [Video Game].

Ubisoft. (2014). Assassin's Creed: Rogue. Ubisoft. [Video Game].

Ubisoft. (2014). Assassin's Creed: Unity. Ubisoft. [Video Game].

Ubisoft. (2014). The Crew. Ubisoft. [Video Game].

Ubisoft. (2014). *Ubisoft.* Retrieved from Ubisoft: www.ubisoft.com

Ubisoft. (2015). Assassin's Creed: Syndicate. Ubisoft. [Video Game].

Ulfsnes, K.-A. (2011, December 8). *UiO: Institutt for pedagogikk.* Retrieved from Pris til
    kreativ IKT-pedagogikk: Inspirert av forskningssamarbeid med InterMedia:
    http://www.uv.uio.no/iped/forskning/aktuelt/aktuelle-saker/2011/tweak.html

Urban, T. (n.d). *Wait but Why.* Retrieved from Why Generation Y Yuppies Are Unhappy:
    http://waitbutwhy.com/2013/09/why-generation-y-yuppies-are-unhappy.html

Utdanningsdirektoratet. (2011, June 7). *Udir.* Retrieved from Core Curriculum and the
    Quality Framework: http://www.udir.no/in-english/Core-Curriculum-in-five-
    languages/

Utdanningsdirektoratet. (n.d). *Udir.* Retrieved from English subject curriculum (ENG1-03): http://www.udir.no/kl06/ENG1-03?lplang=eng

Vaage, O. F. (2012, Oktober 9). Barns dagligliv i endring . *Samfunnspeilet*(4), pp. 24-29.

von Radowitz, J. (2015, August 17). *Independent.* Retrieved from Study finds that violent video games may be linked to aggressive behaviour: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/study-finds-that-violent-video-games-may-be-linked-to-aggressive-behaviour-10458614.html

Wawro, A. (2014, January 17). *Gamasutra.* Retrieved from Norwegian school using The Walking Dead to teach ethics: http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/208850/Norwegian_school_using_The_Walking_Dead_to_teach_ethics.php

Wolf, S. A. (2004). Critical Perspectives. In S. A. Wolf, *Intepreting Literature with Children* (pp. 9-43). New York: Routledge.