**Paper on the project: Computer games and bullying among children**

Background

Today, almost all children have access to the Internet, computer and various game consoles either at home, on the net point, at school or with friends and in recent years the public, politicians and researchers attention to children playing computer games has increased. This project concerns computer games, and how these provide children with images, metaphors, norms etc. that they can use as cultural tools when they interpret and act in the social reality – also the one outside the world of games. For many boys and girls, bullying and conflictual relation patterns are part of their everyday experiences in school. One of my questions will be how virtual and non-virtual worlds of experience interact in these contexts and among children who live with bullying practices in their school environment. The *eXbus* (*Exploring Bullying in Schools*) project is based on the understanding that practices of bullying occur in the encounter between individual subjects and all the meaning-creating and sustaining forces that children bring with them from the different contexts (real and virtual) they engage in, and create understandings of themselves and others through (Kofoed & Søndergaard, 2009; Søndergaard, 2009; Hansen, 2009). One of the focus points in the project is the media products that children get inspiration, norms and interpretation frames from and how these become part of how inclusion and exclusion are executed among the children. My project will more specifically have its focus on how computer games as a media and as a technology become part of the contextual framework that contributes to delimit and mobilize children as subjects in bullying contexts.

Focus in the research project

The relationship between virtual and non-virtual experience is characterized by neither absolute demarcation nor direct transfer. Rather – as recent research shows (Sundén; 2003, 2007, in press; Hine, 2000; Kendall, 2008) – it is characterized by complex interacting processes, which can result in various forms of transformations and movements across virtual and real life. Some of the offers in the game universe deal with gendered identities, practices and artefacts. They also include practices of relations, conflict management strategies, hero and villain figures etc. When many girls and some boys aged 10-14 build imaginary realities in SIMS within special repertoires of figures, houses and forms of relations or when many boys and some girls enter Counter Strike and virtually assume heavy uniformed men’s bodies to fight ‘terrorists’ or ‘antiterrorists’ – what body images, practices of relations, norms etc. are they offered and how are they used? How do these images, practices and norms interact with other images, practices and norms through which children develop and relate in contexts characterized by conflicts and bullying practices? Are these virtual practices taken up as inspiration, as objects of irony, as play with aesthetics and transformations or what kind of relevance do they make to the children who engage with them? I will try to answer these questions through interviews with children and participant observation. My focus will be on games, where children can have interactions both *in* and *around* the game like multiplayer online games.

State of the art

Several studies are concerned with how children use and relate to media and technologies (Sørensen & Jessen, 1999; Sørensen & Olesen, 2000; Drotner, 2001; Stald, 2004, 2009; Jerselv, 2004, 2009; Buckingham, 2006; Linderoth & Bennerstedt, 2007; Sørensen, 2007; Livingstone & Haddon, 2009). There are also several studies concerning cyberculture and cybersubjectivity (Turkle, 1995; Sørensen, 2001; Kroløkke, 2002; Bryld & Markussen, 2003) and studies about cyberbullying, where technologies like cellphones, chatrooms and social utilities like Facebook or MySpace are used in online bullying (Shariff, 2008; Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kofoed, 2009). But only a few studies describe the relationship between children and computer games and how this can connect with bullying. However, several studies concerning children, media and technology present inspiring perspectives and considerations. Recent research indicates that media products and technologies have great social value for children and play a part in their processes of becoming, their identity formation and peer relationships (Jenson & de Castell, 2002; Valentine & Holloway, 2002; Nyboe, 2003; Consalvo, 2003; Kelly, Pomerantz & Currie, 2006; Carr, 2006; Højgaard Cawood, 2007; boyd, 2007; Sundén, 2007; Walkerdine, 2007; Ito et al., 2008). Several of these studies are critical towards the distinction between technology and ‘the real’ social world. Also, they don’t see technologies as something dangerous or threatening in children’s lives but rather as an important part of their everyday lives and future that we should try to learn more about. These as well as the research and the new theoretical framework developed from the *eXbus* project will be my primary source of inspiration ([www.exbus.dk](http://www.exbus.dk), Kofoed & Søndergaard, 2009).

Theoretical framework

In my theoretical framework I will draw on the post-structural and discursive psychology research tradition where philosophical underpinnings such as Michel Foucault’s discourse and power understandings and Judith Butler’s theories on gender, sexuality and power forms a fundament for more subject focused investigations of the becoming of subjectivities in lived experiences (Foucault, 1976; Butler, 1990, 1993; Søndergaard, 1996; Davies, 2003), socialcultural theory (Bruner, 1986; Hasse, 2003; Gulbrandsen, 2006) and new materialism - Actor Network Theory and Science & Technology Studies (Haraway, 1991; Mol, 2002; Thompson, 2005; Barad, 2007). The structures and processes of the social world as well as our materiel surroundings are in these theories recognized as having a material force, a capacity to constrain, to shape, to coerce, as well as to potentiate individual action. A theoretical framework like this will enable me to think about subjects, objects and interaction as a part of a complex whole (Højgaard Cawood & Juelskjær, 2005; Adrian, 2006; Juelskjær, 2009; Højgaard & Søndergaard, 2010). I need to be able to do this when the children step into the games, ‘become’ their characters, experience the game world ‘as’ their character and at the same time does something with that world – while the bodies on the other side of the screen are jumping up and down in excitement, pain, fear etc. Furthermore, I will draw on theories about research with children and children’s perspectives (Thorne, 1993; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998, Alderson, 2000; Kampmann, 2000; Davies, 2003; Staunæs, 2004; Kofoed, 2005).

Research design

The project is primarily empirical and my research design will be based on participant observations in school classes and qualitative interviews with pupils.

My ideas for a research design are as follows;

* Pilot study of three days participant observation (Marcus, 1998; Hasse, 2000; Kampmann, 2000; Staunæs, 2004) in two to three different school classes where bullying is a problem. In this short study I want to get to know the children (and the other way around) and get an insight in their every day school live, their relations and their interests in playing computer games.
* Selection of children who will be a part of my further research. For this selection I will draw on theories about research with children and children’s perspectives (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Alderson, 2000; Kampmann, 2000; Kofoed, 2005).
* In line with previous work from *eXbus* I will examine the social processes where they unfold. I will do participant observations with the children playing computer games – on the net point, at home etc. Some of my observations will – inspired by Walkerdine (2007) – be recorded on a video camera. The purpose of this will be to combine the recordings with my observation notes and furthermore the recorded situations will be useful in my further analysis. The recordings will not take place without the proper permissions from teachers, parents and children involved in my project.
* Analysis of the research material so far to qualify and focus further interviews with some of the children.
* Qualitative interviews with some of the children based on the observations (Kampmann, 2000; Kofoed, 2005). Possibly with the inclusion of some of my video recorded material.
* At the same time I intend – inspired by Hine (2000), Nyboe (2003 and Sundén (2003) – to do virtual ethnography in order to get to know the games the children are playing and which they and I will be analyzing.

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