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Master's Thesis

***Papers, Please* and Critical Literacy Skills**

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(English)**

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Abstract

This thesis is a theoretical review of how the video game *Papers, Please* can be employed in education to develop critical literacy skills. This is done through a cultural analysis of the video game *Papers, Please* in relation to the Norwegian curriculum (LK20). The video game was viewed as a text, based on the definition of text in LK20. The conclusion shows that there are several factors that needed to be in place for the pupils to develop critical literacy skill in relation to video games. They need language/terminology and tools to analyse the video game, and previous knowledge about the historical context and ideology that relate to the video game. The pupil's identity is also important to acknowledge when working with the video game, because of how others around them and society can influence the choices the pupils make throughout the game. Constructivism was chosen as a learning theory, because it suits well in a classroom where the discussion realies on the factors of people getting different endings in the game and have different lived experiences. The game itself is well suited to develop critical literacy because of the relevant ideological theme, the several endings in the game they can have as consequence of the choices they make, and the different dilemmas the pupils will meet throughout the game.

Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven er en teoretisk gjennomgang av hvordan dataspillet *Papers, Please* kan brukes i undervisning for å utvikle critica literacy ferdigheter. Dette gjøres gjennom en kulturll analyse av dataspillet *Papers, Please* satt i sammenheng med den norske lærerplanen (LK20). Spillet ble toket som en tekst, basert på definisjonen i LK20. I konklusjonen er det beskrevet flere faktorer som må på plass for at elevene skal utvikle critical literacy ferdigheter ved å bruke dataspill. De trenger språk/terminologi og flere verktøy for å analysere dataspillet, og forhånds kunnskap om den historiske konteksten og ideologien som relaterer til spillet. Det er viktig å anerkjenne elevenes identitet når man jobber med dataspillet, fordi andre mennesker og samfunnet kan innvirke på hvilke valg elevene tar når de spiller spillet. Konstruktivisme er valgt som læringsteori fordi den passer godt i et klasserom der diskusjonen er knyttet opp til faktorer som at elevene har fått forskjellige endinger på spillet og at elever har ulike livserfaringer. Dataspillet i seg selv er godt egnet til å utvikle critical literacy på grunn av de relevante ideologiske temaene, på grunn av at det har ulike endinger avhengig av hvilke valg man gjør underveis, og elevene støter på mange ulike dilemmaer gjennom hele spillet.

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1. Introduction

In the last decade, video games have become more accessible because of international gaming platforms like Steam. People associate video games mainly with entertainment, however video games can be used for educational purposes as well. Video games can also be used as an interactive field trip, with the opportunity to visit any time period, fictional- or historical events, and for language learning. They allow pupils to explore different situations and outcomes of their decisions, which gives pupils a new experience that can be valuable in meetings with other people. These experiences are not as good or valuable as real-life experiences, but they may work well as an alternative experience for educational purposes. A lot of children and adolescents play video games and are active participants in discourse communities, however, they might not be skilled in evaluating them critically. The value of using video games in education has been acknowledged in the new curriculum (LK20) for the Norwegian school. In the English subject curriculum for vg 1) general studies it is stated that pupils shall “discuss and reflect on form, content and language features and literary devices in cultural forms of expression in English from different media in the English-speaking world, including music, film and gaming” (The Norwegian Directory of Education and Training, 2020, p.11).

In LK20, the term text has been defined as: “... texts can be spoken and written, printed and digital, graphic and artistic, formal and informal, fictional and factual, contemporary and historical” (The Norwegian Directory of Education and Training, 2020, p.3). This is a wide definition of the term text, which opens up for several other types of text, not just the traditional book, but includes film and video games as well. In LK20, video games are specially mentioned as a part of the new subject curriculum in English. When pupils are working with a text in the English subject, they are supposed to be able to interpret and critically assess different types of text (The Norwegian Directory of Education and Training, 2020, p.3). This means that the pupils need a vocabulary to interpret and analyse different types of texts. They will need tools to be able to assess what they have read critically and be able to understand meaning-making on a semiotic basis. This goes beyond being able to extract information from an English text, pupils need to understand the sociocultural factors that produced those texts and the complexity of producing meaning. The English subject curriculum for general studies states that pupils should be able to reflect on and discuss the content, language features and literary devices in video games from English-speaking countries. Further, critical thinking is

one of the goals in the core curriculum of LK20. Critical thinking and in-depth learning are seen as a part of being competent, which is outlined in the core curriculum section called *Critical Thinking and Ethical Awareness*. Pupils need to think critically to be able to ask logical questions and to be able to reflect on new information. Pupils in a classroom have new information and inputs available at all times because of new technologies like smartphones and the internet. These inputs need to be approached with a critical mindset because anybody can write on the internet, with different motivations and agendas. The agenda of some of these publishers (people, organisations and states) can be against the democratic values outlined in the Norwegian Core Curriculum, so pupils need to recognize fake news/ alternative facts (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.9).

Video games are newly defined as text in LK20, which opens a need for new ways of analysing these types of text. Video games are an interactive text where the narrative develops through actions and choices made by the reader (player). It gives the player the opportunity to take on someone else's identity, explore their life and make decisions on their behalf. This differs from reading books, where the reader passively reads about someone else's life. In the game *Papers, please* the individual players get to make decisions based on their own identity and the identity of the immigration officer they are in the game.

Video games as texts do not have the same status as written texts in the school and home environment. Some parents are concerned that video games have a negative impact on their children. These concerns are about games engendering violent behaviours and attitudes, social isolation, distraction from reading, and provoking addiction (Sanford & Madill, 2007, p.285). However, the American researcher James Paul Gee highlighted that no research indicated that video games lead to real-life violence (Gee, 2007b, p.11). He further argued that if it was confirmed that violence in games lead to real-life violence, we should see an increase in violent crimes. On the contrary, he argued that boys mainly use violent video games to manage angry feelings or when they feel a lack of control (Gee, 2007b, p.13). These factors to video games could be important to keep in mind when video games are used in the classroom. Playing video games is something that most pupils are familiar with in the sense that it is an activity they do out of school, which may give some pupils a sense of control and coping.

Another concern about using games in the classroom is the effect on gender equality. The Norwegian Media Authority (Medietilsynet) has reported that several girls have quit playing video games the past year because of harassment and use of bad language (Rodem, 2022). Gee

argued that we should be worried about these tendencies because gaming is a way to get into information technology skills and careers (Gee, 2007b, p.13). Using video games in school can help to create an inclusive gaming environment, because everyone has a chance at doing well, and they get the same terminology from the game, which makes it possible for everyone to discuss the game.

Spillpedagogene, a Norwegian interest group for teachers who want inspiration on how video games can be used in the classroom, argued that, although video games have become a part of the curriculum in Norwegian schools, teachers struggle to use them effectively. In 2022 the Norwegian government asked Spillpedagogene to give an input on a new strategy for playing video games in the Norwegian school. Spillpedagogene gave two main reasons why teachers find it difficult to use video games in the classroom. The first reason was availability (Husøy et al., 2022). Today there is no national agreement that gives teachers licenses for different video games. The video games that are accessible are, therefore, limited to websites and free to use. The second reason was that teachers may lack competence in video game pedagogy (Husøy et al., 2022). Video game pedagogy is defined as a conscious use of a video game in a teaching situation and with the goal of conveying a clear teaching aim (Nøsen, 2021). LK20 stated that video games are text, and in the English subject curriculum, it is stated that teachers shall use them as a resource when teaching (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020, pp. 3 and 12). This is problematic because many teachers may not have the competence to do so. The newly educated teachers have grown up with video games being accessible, and most of them have played video games previously. However, many of them may still not know how to use a video game in the classroom sufficiently. They may not be able to use video games consciously with a clear teaching aim in mind. We know that many pupils in Norwegian schools are exposed to English through video games, and based on Lisbeth Breivik's research, that playing video games possibly can benefit their reading skills in English, therefore there is a strong case for greater integration of video games in the English as a second language (ESL) classroom (Breivik, 2016, p.56).

For this thesis I have used the game *Papers, Please* and have theorised on how to use it to teach critical literacy for pupils in upper secondary level. Critical literacy is a perspective of literacy that goes beyond just reading and writing. It is the ability to understand, analyse and critique, written, visual or multimodal texts, where the focuses are on ideology, power and social relations (Luke, 2012, p.7 and 9). There is no correct universal model for how to conduct critical literacy. "How educators shape and deploy the tools, attitudes, and philosophies of

critical literacy is utterly contingent: It depends upon students' and teachers' everyday relations of power, their lived problems and struggle" (Luke, 2012, p.9).

In today's society there is an increasing flow of information, which has made it difficult to distinguish between the truth and lies, science and conspiracy theories. Video games can, as with traditional narrative texts, be used to inculcate literacy in pupils. People have easy access to information, through Google searches and social media, where anybody can write with any agenda. Their agenda can for example be to create fear based on false allegations, resulting in polarisation and chaos. Critical literacy has become an important skill in everyday life. It allows people to actively engage with, and analyse, the consumed source material. It goes beyond accepting information at face value as truth and encourages people to question and challenge the narrative and power structures. Information has become more accessible to people because of technologies like smartphones and tablets. This increased access makes it crucial to be able to analyse and evaluate source material. Critical literacy skills help people to recognize biases, prejudices and underlying messages in the source material, which empowers people to make an informed decision and take action toward social justice and equality. In addition, critical literacy may foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse perspectives of cultural contexts, prompting empathy and tolerance towards others.

1.1 Aims and Research Question

This thesis demonstrates how the video game *Papers, Please* can be used to help develop the skill of critical literacy for pupils in upper secondary school. The reasons why the video game *Papers, Please* was chosen was threefold. Firstly, the game is placed in a totalitarian society, which is different from the social democracy pupils are familiar with in Norway. It would be valuable for pupils to have an experience with a society like the one in *Papers, Please* because of the decline of democracies in recent time, especially in Eastern- European countries¹. Secondly, the dilemmas in the game deal with ideology and morality, which makes it suitable for developing critical literacy. Thirdly, the player needs to consider multiple perspectives and source material before making a decision in the game. These dilemmas provide good materials

¹ For example, Members of the European Parliament stated that Hungary was no longer a 'full democracy'. This decision was based on the "fears about academic and religious freedoms, as well as with the rights of vulnerable groups, including "ethnic minorities, LGBTIQ people, human rights defenders, refugees and migrants"" (Siad et al., 2022).

for classroom discussion as they can be related to current topics, like ideology, gender, terror, refugees, fake news and so on.

The thesis statement for this thesis is that *Papers, Please* can be employed to help pupils develop critical literacy skills. Through an examination of the dilemmas provided in the game, I have analysed ways in which cultural signifiers create meaning and influence individual decisions. Additionally, I have demonstrated ways the game can be used to teach about current affairs, including discussions of topics such as ‘fake news’ and social consciousness regarding gender and identity. The game has several themes and current topics that can be useful to discuss in the English subject, where the main topic is ideology.

The main argument of this thesis is that playing a video game can be a beneficial tool for developing critical literacy because it familiarises the reader (player) with multimodal semiotic domains and creates actively-engaged participants in knowledge-acquisition. This thesis will demonstrate that playing a video game can help develop critical literacy skills, put critical literacy in the context of the English subject, and explore the ideology in a fictive state in *Papers, Please*. There is also a cultural analysis and discussion of the game *Papers, Please*, focusing on ideology and current topics that can be related to democracy and critical thinking.

Video games are a new part of the curriculum, and some teachers might need more confidence about how to use them and what to consider when choosing a video game. Misty Sailors has described in the book *Theoretical Model and Processes of Literacy* that some teachers struggle to imagine how to be more innovative in their teaching (Sailors, 2019, p.430). This thesis provides concrete ways in which critical literacy can be modelled through playing video game and demonstrates the benefits of innovative approaches to literacy in the English classroom.

1.2 Thesis Outline

James Paul Gee’s definition of literacy has been used in this thesis to explain how literacy can be used with different types of texts. He proposes that literacy emerges in specific contexts in relation to the practise of a social group. Literacy also depends on type of text. Allen Luke’s definition of critical literacy has been useful for this thesis, as his definition puts critical literacy in the context of the current technological society. Luke has related phenomenon like ‘fake news’ to the importance of critical literacy skills. Catherine Beavis’ model of critical game literacy has been described because it gives an insight on how teachers can review a

video game based on criteria to develop critical literacy skills. The model has four focus points, the player itself, knowledge about the game, outer and inner concepts and situations that can influence the player and the game, and what the game could teach you based on teaching aims. Further, the learning theory of constructivism has been used, because it relies on two factors that are important when working with critical literacy, which are social contexts and that there are no over- all truth.

This thesis is theoretical, and has not been tested in a classroom. It builds on previous research to make a case for using the game *Papers, Please* to teach critical literacy in the English classroom in Norway. In the chapter *Video Game Literacy in Practice* of this thesis there are two research projects presented. The first project is from Australia by Alexander Bacalja. In his research, he explored how to use critical literacy when working with the video game *Bully* in the classroom. This is a practical example of how a video game can be used in the classroom. This supports the idea that video games can be used develop critical literacy.

The chapter also presents Lisbeth Brevik's research of Norwegian national tests in vocational studies, where she noticed that a significant number of boys were better at reading their second language (L2, English) than their first language (L1, Norwegian). Some of these boys were interviewed and asked why they thought they were better at reading in their L2. They answered that they used several hours of playing video games as an out-side of school activity (Brevik, 2016, p.52). The boy's answer opens the argument that playing video games can benefit pupils English reading ability, which could indicate that it is a resource worth spending time on in the classroom. These two research projects show that video games, like *Papers, Please*, has a good potential to be used as a tool when teaching English and critical literacy.

2. Theory

This chapter presents theory on literacy and critical literacy in the context of video games and LK20. Further this chapter presents a model by Catherine Beavis on the application of critical game literacy. The last section of this chapter presents a learning theory of constructivism which is based on the sociological theory of social constructivism. This learning theory is well suited to use for teaching about critical literacy, using video games, because this theory says that learners construct knowledge in discourse communities, rather than just passively take in information.

2.1 Literacy

Literacy has been defined in various ways. Jeroen Bourgonjon pointed out that many of these definitions offer the impression that the conception and expectation of literacy often relate to what it means to read and write. However, “literacy introduces an ideological binary between literate and illiterate people, and that traditional approaches ignore the inequalities people experience when trying to become literate” (Bourgonjon, 2014, p.2). These types of definition are difficult to connect to ‘modern’ types of literacy, for example, video game literacy. Teaching literacy has commonly been by using traditional printed texts like novels, which is viewing literacy education as a one-size fits all (Bourgonjon, 2014, p.2). Literacy on itself is a skill that can be applied in depending on the context of the text. Breivik’s research showed that traditional L1 struggles with literacy seem unconnected with L2 levels of video game literacy. Gee has argued that literacy is not solely a cognitive process. He stated that literacy also is something that emerges in specific contexts that are related to practices of social groups (Gee, 2007b, p.5). He further pointed out that we should also think about semiotic domains when thinking about literacy. Semiotic domains are language codes, terminology and language patterns, belonging to a discourse community (Gee, 2007b, p.19 and Skulstad,2021, p.106). People can only be literate in specific semiotic domains (Gee, 2007b, p.19). For example, a video game can be a semiotic domain, and the video game community related to that specific game is the discourse community. Semiotic domains are also connected to the individual identity, because we feel connected to the different communities. Pupils that are literate in semiotics may have an advantage when they are identifying the meaning of symbols within a video game and use this meaning in decisions made in the game. The semiotic field of the game *Papers, Please* is based on knowledge of The Soviet Union (officially known as the

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), and the pupils have to learn to ‘read’ the codes of an unfamiliar, non-democratic society. In addition, literacy can also be understood as a social construct that determines the use of language and what is considered as important and valuable (Bourgonjon, 2014, p.3).

Semiotic domains also relates to critical learning. According to Gee critical learning "involves learning to think of semiotic domain as design space that manipulate[s] (...) us in certain ways and that we can manipulate in certain ways"(Gee, 2007b, p.36). Semiotic domains are both human culture and a historical creation, designed to engage/manipulate people to a certain degree. For example, when playing a video game, different semiotic domains influence a player. In games where problem-solving is the goal of the game, the player can be manipulated by the design to make certain decisions. As I demonstrate in the *Analysis and Discussion* chapter, *Papers, Please* uses the social codes of a totalitarian society as a way of manipulating the player away from their dominant social codes, and towards making decisions that undermine their own society’s sense of moral.

Literacy is a relevant skill that can be used for different text types. Gee argued that video gaming is a new ‘literacy’. He has defined literacy as “any technology that allows people to decode meaning and produce meanings by using symbols” (Gee, 2007a, p.135). Video games are one of these technologies. Game design involves codes (semiotics), which are multimodal and are made by action, text, images and sound. The player understands this code as something that carries meaning. Gee has explained that traditional literacy involves a relationship between consumption(reading) and production (writing) (Gee, 2007a, p.135). As a player, you decode and comprehend game design when reacting effectively to that specific design. However, ‘reading’ a game is an interactive process: a game design does not exist on its own before a player has made a decision and acted in the game. Unlike the reader of the ‘traditional’ text as the site of meaning making, the player-as-reader changes the ending of the game, so it is a more active way of meaning making. The game analysed for this thesis, *Papers, Please*, is an open-ended game, which means that the game's ending changes when the player makes different choices and actions. The players design the game in a sense with the designer. The productive aspect of playing video games is that the player needs to think about the design choices. They can ask questions like: ‘why has the designer made the virtual world look like this?’ These reflections can be seen in relation to critical literacy, by knowing what to ask for in order to find the answer.

Pupils may not be familiar with discussing game design in the same way they are used to discussing text 'design'. Gee explains that "learning about and coming to appreciate design and design principles is core to the learning experience" (Gee, 2007b, p.41). The pupils should be aware of the design of a game. They need to be aware of the discourse and the way text creates meaning. The design choices in a game are usually made with a purpose, which needs to be recognized by pupils when they work with video games. This further relates to the skill of critical literacy.

Gee makes a division between printed literacy and gaming literacy. In this thesis, Gee's definitions to distinguish the two literacies will be used. Printed literacy is text that is printed on paper, which could be a mathematics book, novel, newspaper and other similar types of text. Whereas gaming literacy is to view video games as text. Printed literacy has a complex definition. There are different ways to read and write. Each 'type' of printed text has different rules and requirements. For example, legal literacy is needed for reading a law book (Gee, 2007b, p.18). According to Gee literacy is additionally about what is beyond the printed text.

A part of being video game literate is for the player to be familiar with a range of game related texts. Gee has an intertextual principle. If a player has dealt with different types or genres of video games and texts that are associated with them, the player can begin to see how the text relates to each other or as Gee explained, it is 'like a family'. These texts can, for example, be a gaming manual that came with the game or gaming forums related to the game where players exchange experience. The player is then able to see connections between the texts they have read while playing different games (Gee, 2007b, p.106). The goal of this principle in a classroom would be for the learners to understand a text in relation to other texts after having achieved embodied understanding of different texts (Gee, 2007b, p.110). Intertextual understanding helps pupils recognise patterns of communication, and therefore builds on other literacy skills. It teaches them genre and how to gain information from different text types.

2.2 Critical Literacy

The core values of Norwegian education supports the concept of critical literacy, because of the significance of democracy (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.16). Allen Luke claimed that, in a global view, freedom of speech is being challenged and that freedom of access to information is a democratic right (Luke, 2012, p.4). Luke referred to critical literacy as a "use of technologies of print and other media of communication to analyse, critique, and

transform the norm, rule systems, and practices governing the social fields of everyday life” (Luke, 2012, p.5). Critical literacy is thus an everyday skill, and not exclusively for printed text. Luke explained that critical literacy is a political aspect of teaching (Luke, 2012, p.5). The goal of critical literacy is to open up some essential questions in the modern forum of public discourse “What is “truth”? How is it presented and represented, by whom, and in whose interests? Who should have access to which images and words, texts, and discourses? For what purposes?” (Luke, 2012, p.4). One example is media conveying fake news/alternative facts² and arguing that it is freedom of speech and that they can post whatever they want as facts, even when they know it is not. For example, Sky News Australia was fined for presenting a climate change conspiracy as if it was valid, and then they claimed the fine was ‘challenging free speech’ (Meade, 2023). This example shows how journalist can ‘spin’ facts and create fake news. Luke uses a Marxist definition of ideology, which also will be used in this thesis. Ideology is “A systematic scheme of ideas, usually relating to politics, economics, or society and forming the basis of action or policy; a set of beliefs governing conduct. Also: the forming or holding of such a scheme of ideas” (OED, n.d b). Ideology has been used to describe the way in which language and images are expressions of culture.

Critical literacy has become a skill needed in everyday life. Dr Jesse Gainer, a professor at Texas State University, pointed out that critical literacy should be the goal in the 21st-century classroom because pupils need a tool that can help them figure out what to consider as essential information, and what to trust. Gainer further pointed out that the literacy landscape is changing because of new modes of communication and new tools for communication (Gainer, 2013, p.16). These tools are, for example, smartphones and computers where information is easily accessed. Educators today know that pupils have information easily accessible because of the internet and the available technology (for example mobile phones). This makes it challenging to navigate what to consider as essential information. Gainer noted that educators dedicated to critical literacy often asked their pupils to focus on issues such as how texts position readers’ identity markers such as skin colour, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation and linguistic background (Gainer, 2013, p.16). This can be connected to reading as a basic skill because Gainer connected critical literacy to how globalisation affects methods of finding information in the 21st century and a part of reading as a basic skill is to critically

² for some people the fake news is their ‘fact’

assess different types of text (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020, p.4).

There are many challenges when researching critical literacy in the context of English as an additional language (EAL). Jennifer Alford has reviewed several studies on teaching critical literacy in high schools where they use EAL. She pointed out that there are several issues concerning researching critical literacy. One of the challenges was assessing critical literacy because some teachers found it difficult to teach and spend time assessing this (Alford, 2021, p.70). Further, Alford addressed a range of contemporary phenomena that will impact research in the field of critical approaches to learning language and literacy. These phenomena are ‘fake news³’, which needs to be challenged against other sources; advertising algorithms connected to social media feeds commonly used for commercial gain; and the rising interest in topics related to critical literacy. These topics include the challenge of multilingualism, translanguaging, and diverse sexualities and gender identities (Alford, 2021, p.70-71). Playing video games relates to these phenomena by being a medium that people use for entertainment, and which has the possibility to give people a simulated experience that could be helpful in real life, when discussed critically. It additionally helps people to recognise the signifying process of discourse communities in real life.

Research has demonstrated that traditional measures of literacy were improved by playing video games. Lisbeth Brevik mentions in her research the boys that were better at reading in their L2 than in their L1 thought that they were better in their L2 because of playing video games that were in English. However, one could argue that the boys could acquire the skill of critical literacy simply by playing video games, as video game literacy is also literacy. Gunther Kress noted that:

Young people, who may be spending long periods with electronic games, developing high levels of visual analytic skills and muscular coordination quite unlike those of writing, are not going to leave these at the school gate and then turn back into the kinds of human subjects which we may want them to be: formed around the logics and rationalities of writing (Kress, 1996, p.193).

³ “news that conveys or incorporates false, fabricated, or deliberately misleading information, or that is characterized as or accused of doing so” (OED, n.d a).

Video game literacy deserves attention because it provides insight into the pupils' frames of reference. Pupils that play video games are not necessarily well-equipped to approach video games critically simply by playing video games by themselves. In José Zagal book *Ludoliteracy (Defining, Understanding and Supporting Games Education)* he argued that many video game players have a naïve understanding of video games. To 'beat' a game does not lead to a critical evaluation of the game. This can be seen when a player only describes the video game using formal arguments, reasoning their decisions solely on obvious features, like sound or graphics (Zagal, 2010, p.57). The same naïve understanding can be seen in players who generalise their own playing experience by not acknowledging other players' experiences (Zagal, 2010, p.57). Correcting this issue could result in pupils engaging in video games as "cultural artifacts with embedded meaning and ideas" (Zagal, 2010, p.68).

2.2.1 Critical Literacy Connected to Playing Video Games

One of the core values in LK20 is termed *critical thinking and ethical awareness* (The Norwegian Directory of Education and Training, 2020, p.6). One of the prompts states that pupils "must also be able to understand that their own experiences, points of view and convictions may be incomplete or erroneous" (The Norwegian Directory of Education and Training, 2020, p.6). This section refers to personal experiences, ideas and previous knowledge, which echoes what Gainer says about how accessible information has become because of globalisation. Alford's concern with fake news and algorithms can also be connected to this prompt. These factors can all influence what is believed to be "true" and the change in understanding how freedom of speech should be viewed. Furthermore, in the interdisciplinary topic *Health and life skills* it is stated that pupils should be able to "...express their feelings, thoughts, experiences and opinions and [...] provide new perspectives on different ways of thinking and communication patterns, as well as on the pupils' own way of life and that of others" (The Norwegian Directory of Education and Training, 2020, p.3). As I demonstrate in the Analysis chapter, pupils could provide different perspective of the game *Papers, Please*, depending on feelings, thoughts, experiences and opinions. Pupils should be able to reflect on the different perspectives they have when making decisions in the game, this is a part of critical literacy.

Critical literacy skills are vital for video game players, considering the importance of situated context and the opportunity to be in the avatar's mindset while gaming. The empathetic connection to the avatar is a skill pupils can find helpful in their everyday life. Pupils get the

opportunity to play in an unfamiliar environment with unfamiliar challenges and might experience situations that are very different from their own life. These experiences could help pupils understand people with different life experience than themselves. In the core curriculum, the section social learning and development states that “the ability to understand what others think, feel and experience is the basis for empathy and friendship between pupils” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.11). By literally taking the perspective of another as they play through an in-game character as an intradiegetic figure, playing a video game could help pupils understand how others think, feel and experience. This virtual experience is not the same as a lived experience, but an experience from a simulated variation of the lived experience.

Video games give us the opportunity to show how reading works when we actually understand what we have read (Gee, 2007b, p.96). Gee has 36 different learning principles. One of them is the text principle, which explains that a text is not understood purely verbally but is understood by their embodied experiences. Nevertheless, the verbal understanding of a text becomes clear when the learner has enough embodied experience in a domain and similar experience with similar texts (Gee, 2007b, p.106). Gee claimed that “situated meanings lead to understanding and the ability to apply what one knows in action” (Gee, 2007b, p.104) and that verbal meaning only leads to the ability to pass paper and pencil tests.

2.3 The Beavis Model of Critical Game Literacy

Catherine Beavis, a professor at Deakin University in Australia, explained that games might be text, but that they depend on knowledge beyond what is thought of as literacy. She further explained that games are about both action and reading (Beavis, 2014, p.435). In other words, the meaning of a game relies on the game itself in combination with the player participating in the game. A game both tells a story and presents challenges, and the player has an active role in bringing those stories into existence.

Beavis has outlined a model for critical game literacy. This model was intended for teachers to use for curriculum planning and assessment. The model has two layers—the *Games as action* and *Games as text* (Beavis, 2014, p.436). The first layer, *Games as action*, addresses the experience of gameplay by examining the dynamic between the game and player, and the virtual world of a game (Apperley & Beavis, 2013, p.2). The second layer, *Game as text*,

examines the connection between the video game and the ‘real’ world of the player (Apperley & Beavis, 2014, p.2). For this thesis, the layer about *Game as text* will be in focus.

Beavis claimed that game literacy does not have one effect but rather raises different skills, values and attitudes in different contexts (Apperley & Beavis, 2014, p.5). These contexts can, for example, be the classroom, students’ out-of-school experiences, and world events. Beavis explained that this layer, *Games as text*, will give a spectrum of literacies and learning outcomes related to the context (Apperley & Beavis, 2014, p.5). In Beavis’ model the *Games as text* layer is divided into four sections (see figure 2.1).

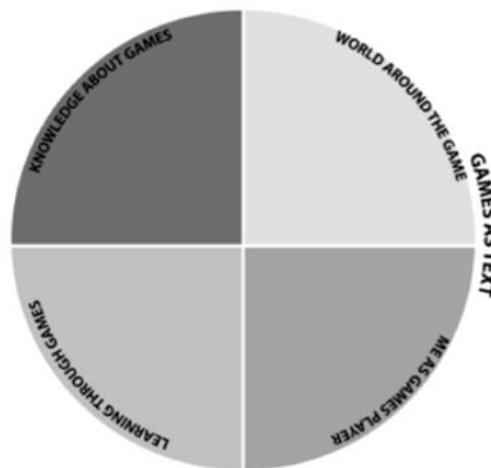


Figure 2.1 Games as text (Apperley & Beavis, 2014, p.8)

The first section is *knowledge about games*, which focuses on the possibility of video games being a cultural artefact, and at the same time awareness of the aesthetic and technological forms. This includes knowledge about the genre (Apperley & Beavis, 2013, p.6). This can, for example, be novels adapted to film, and then the film is adapted into a video game. The focus in the classroom could be on the video game narrative structure and features that could be compared to the narrative in other ‘texts’. For example, the narrative in Harry Potter books could be compared to the narrative in the video game adaptations.

The second section is called ‘*me*’ as *game player*, which reflects several aspects of the player. This includes issues of value, ideology and identity. Additionally, it considers how players are positioned by the game. One of the goals is for the reader to explore their own involvement as a player, creator and reader. A second goal is to critically reflect on a player's practices (Apperley & Beavis, 2013, p.6). Learners should actively participate in their learning to be

literate and not passively receive instructions on how to read what is on a page (Alford, 2021, p. 98). Gaming is a great way to actively participate in literacy learning because gaming requires the participant to actively make different choices and activities. They are exploring a game by themselves, with others or with instructions given in the game. The reader/players need to actively engage with the game. For example, in the classroom pupils could discuss what they experienced in the position they were sat in, in the game, with the focus on value, ideology and identity. In games like *The Sims* and *World of Warcraft*, the player decides what the avatar looks like. In a classroom these games could be discussed in regard to what the pupils have based their avatar design on.

The third section is the *world around the game*. This section focuses on both the global and the local context of “where game play take place, and how the world around the game influences play” (Apperley & Beavis, 2013, p.7). These contexts include physical and virtual space, if you are gaming online or alone and whether you and the other players are in the same time zone. It focuses on whether the players played the game differently when they are alone or when they are online. For example, in the classroom there could be different learning outcomes depending on pupils playing a game alone, or with someone physically in the same room or online, or if they played the game at home, at school, in- or out of class.

The last section is called *learning through games*. This section focuses on the purpose of a game. A game can be made explicitly for educational purposes or entertainment. The focus is on the current curriculum and the players’ awareness of meta-cognitive strategies and processes connected to the video game. Furthermore, it concerns the development of critical perspectives on games and social issues (Apperley & Beavis, 2013, p.7).

One topic that is closely connected to Beavis’s model is ‘situated meaning’ or ‘situatedness’. Beavis’ use of situatedness is based on Gee’s idea of the situated meaning in video games. Gee explained that situated meaning is both based on context and is domain specific (Gee, 2007b, p.26). In a video game, events, objects, artefacts, conversations, and so on could be meaningful for the story to develop. However, you do not necessarily know what it means until you can give it a specific meaning based on the world you are moving through as a character or through the action, you carry out in that world. This can, for example, be that you find a piece of paper with random numbers on in a video game. At that moment in the game, these numbers carry no meaning, they are just numbers, but then you find a locked door that needs the random numbers on the paper to open it. The numbers carry a new meaning, it is a

code. Further, Gee explains that situated meaning would mean that things that carry meaning can change based on the world or/and the choices the player takes (Gee, 2007b, p.82).

2.3.1 LK 20 and The Beavis Model

The four sections in Beavis' model gives teachers insight to distinguish unofficial knowledge from out-of-school literacy practices and the demands of the literacy curriculum (Apperley & Beavis, 2013, pp. 5-6). The model was created to help teachers guide students on how to critically assess video games and to help teacher understand the benefits video games as a text have to offer pupils both inside and out of school. Beavis' model focuses on how teachers can work with critical literacy when working with video games, which supports the section in the English subject curriculum that describes that by pupils "reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing different types of texts in English, the pupils shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society" (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020, p.3). The goal of this is for the pupils to build a foundation for their own identity and to view others' identities in a multilingual and multicultural context. Video games are defined as a text in the curriculum, and pupils are supposed to be able to critically assess them (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020, p. 4). Beavis model it can help teachers connect the aim from the curriculum to the game they want to use in the classroom.

2.4 Constructivism and Video Games

Pupils need to become aware of how ideology forms one's view of the world, and therefore knowledge is not objective, but socially constructed. Constructivism is a learning theory that can be used in the classroom when using video games to develop critical literacy, because "constructivism posits that learning is a process of building and reining knowledge structures" (Zagal, 2010, p.61). Constructivism is a learning theory which explains how people might acquire knowledge and learn. It is often discussed in relation to theories about what knowledge is and how learning happens. It emphasizes the construction of knowledge by the pupils. Learning is an active process, which builds on pupils new knowledge and meaning based on their own experiences, rather than passively resaving new information/knowledge. Learners are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with knowledge, which means that they bring their own knowledge, experiences and beliefs to the learning process (Imsen, 2005, p.146). In other words, pupil construct their own understanding of the world, based on their own prior

knowledge and experiences. Characteristics with constructivism are that it distances itself from a positivistic view of knowledge and experience (Imsen, 2005, p.145). Positivists believe that there is one objective truth which is created through our sensory experience, and knowledge changes through these impressions (Imsen, 2005, p. 145). Constructivists believe that knowledge is not something that exists on its own, but it is a human construct based on the effort of trying to understand and attempt to understand the world around oneself (Imsen, 2005, p. 145).

Constructivism also emphasizes the importance of social interactions in learning and the importance of dialogue (Imsen, 2005, pp.146, 167 and 178). Pupils should be an active participant in social contexts, where they can engage with dialog and negotiation with others. Through dialog and learning, new ideas can be created (Imsen, 2005, p.174).

The psychiatrist and philosopher Jean Piaget used constructivism when he explained his theory of the 4 stages of children's cognitive development. Only stage 4 in Piaget's development theory is used for this thesis. Stage 4 is called *the formal operational stage* and it concerns pupils from the age of 11 and up. Pupils on this stage should be able to have abstract thoughts unrelated to their own view of what is considered their own truth (Imsen, 2005, p.161). This understanding of truth makes it possible for pupils to understand that their thoughts and feelings are subjective and not necessarily the same as others. In other words, they are able to understand that others think, feel and have experiences that are different from their own. The proposed classroom discussions of the different endings of *Papers, Please* demonstrates how different thought processes of each individual pupil is related to their subjective life experiences. The pupils might have different endings, which are based on each person's unique thoughts and feelings.

2.4.1 Social Constructivism

Social constructionism argues that people develop knowledge in social contexts and that there is no over-arching truth that is more legitimate than any other (Burr, 2000, pp. 3 and 86). In other words, people construct their own knowledge through hands-on experiences and reflection. Kenneth Gergen is a social psychologist and professor at Swarthmore college. He has used social constructionism to explain that objective truth does not exist. He believes that knowledge is approved by researchers and scholars or in communities' own discourses. Knowledge is something that we agree on but does not exist by itself (Imsen, 2005, p.146).

This idea is supported by the core curriculum in LK20, under the section called *Social learning and development* where it is stated that “pupil's identity and self-image, opinions and attitudes grow in interaction with others” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.11). This can be interpreted as pupils develop knowledge about themselves in social contexts. LK20 also states that in an inclusive learning environment pupils should assume co-responsibility in the learning environment (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.18). This environment is created by the pupils in collaboration with the teacher every day. “Pupils think, experience and learn in interaction with others through learning processes, communication and collaboration” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.18). In addition, this can be connected to critical thinking because pupil should also express good judgment when they interact with others. Pupils playing video games uses their perception of truth while playing alone, which has been influenced by their own self-image, opinions and attitudes, however, this perception can be changed by influences of other's experiences, and thoughts.

Education is designed to impact the ‘best’ knowledge that society can offer, and schooling should make pupils able to act effectively in the world with the goal of being self-sufficient and contributing to society (Gergen, 2015, p.146). Gergen has pointed out some problems relating to these views on education. One problem is that pupils do not have a voice in the matter of what is counted as truth and what is counted as valuable knowledge (Gergen, 2015, p.146). This problem is recognised in the Norwegian classroom which is why it is specified in LK20 that pupils have some degree of participation on what is set on the agenda (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.9). The reason why it is important to let pupils participate on what is set on the agenda is to give pupils democratic values and to let them feel how it is to be part of a democracy. Another problem pointed out by Gergen, is that knowledge is frequently assessed, where the individual pupil is measured, which often gives the pupils a feeling of just repeating what the teacher has said (Gergen, 2015, p. 147). However, in Norway, as mentioned, the curriculum focuses on critical thinking and in-depth learning (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.13). The overall problem is that pupils do everything alone. They take notes, read, and get tested alone. Gergen finds this ironic because he believes that knowledge is created in a relational process. Further, he points out that in business and in government, people are dependent on collaboration, which would make it beneficial for pupils to have practiced this in school (Gergen, 2015, p. 147). The pupils would make decisions by themselves while playing *Papers, Please*. However, they would discuss

their decisions with other pupils, and get help if needed from the teacher or by finding solutions on the internet.

Pupils are using language to share ideas and discuss what they believe to be true, which can be reflected when they are discussing the different dilemmas in *Papers, Please*. Social constructivists believe that language is a cultural phenomenon. Language shapes how we understand the world, making language central to social construction (Imsen, 2005, p.46). Language also makes a framework for knowledge. Language is central in the classroom by being used in books, writing and to communicate.

One approach that could be tested in the classroom when working with video games and critical literacy is Gergen's concept of dialogic classroom, which is a democratic way of exchanging ideas, without the teacher having the dominant status (Gergen, 2015, p.151). This approach tries to give the pupils the full opportunity to participate and allows them to use their personal expressions, opinions and so on. In this way the pupils get to use their own ideology in a positive way, to fully be in contact with each other. The teacher will try to prevent only opinionated pupils from taking control over the direction of the conversation. Gergen believes this concept will result in a higher degree of involvement, mutual appreciation, and better learning experiences for the pupils (Gergen, 2015, p.152).

In the classroom, it is important for pupils to feel that they also are a part of the democracy and to be aware of the democracy. The awareness is important because it is easy to take it for granted. The author of this thesis used a social constructivism approach because it sees everyone's experience, ideas and thoughts as equally valuable. Everyone can learn from each other's experiences. The game *Papers, Please* has several endings, which means that different pupils can get different endings based on their own moral and what they see as logical choices. Social constructivism opens the opportunity for pupils to discuss these endings equally. By using Gergen's dialogical classroom, the teacher becomes a supervisor, helping everyone to be heard equally.

The critic to the dialogic classroom is that the teaching aims becomes less targeted because the pupils become the ones that lead the conversation/discussion in class and the teacher is just there to oversee that everyone participate. The lesson also becomes completely unpredictable.

3. Video Game Literacy in Practice

Two previous research projects will be presented in this chapter. The first project is by Alexander Bacalja from the university of Melbourne. He has researched the use of a video game in an Australian classroom with the focus on critical literacy. The second project is from Lisbeth Brevik from the university of Oslo. She looked at the results from national tests and noticed that boys in vocational studies were better at reading in their L2 then in their L1. The boys believed that the reason for this was that they spend time on playing video games out of school.

3.1 Critical Literacy and *Bully*

Bacalja has researched the pedagogical issues associated with working with video games in subject English classrooms. He argued that critical literacy is one approach to support pupils in understanding their cultural world, and using critical literacy is an ideal pedagogical approach to help students engage with and understand different texts (Bacalja, 2018, p.156). He used the video game *Bully* as a text in class with two different activities connected to the video game. For the first activity, the pupils were shown a short clip of the gameplay and then got the opportunity to play the game. Additionally, they discussed the genre of the game (Bacalja, 2018, p.158). This can be reflected in Beavis's model, the section *knowledge about games*, because it can help pupils to relate the game to something that they have some knowledge about from before, for example book genre.

The second activity was aimed to develop pupils' understanding of how video games create an ideologically informed representation of the world. The pupils read a British newspaper article responding to the game *Bully*. The pupils then got two prompts to discuss: "what does this article tell us about video games? And what does the article tell us about power?" (Bacalja, 2018, p. 161). After the discussions, the pupils wrote an article about how the game *Bully* explores power. The primary tool the teacher used for the second activity was critical questioning. Bacalja explained in his results that this tool encouraged students to look beyond video games' engagement and entertainment aspects. The pupils began to 'read' the video game with a critical view, and they participated in critical discourse in the English subject (Bacalja, 2018, p.162). Bacalja concluded that studying video games in literacy-focused classrooms helped expand young people's understanding of everyday life, because of the

“reformulating meanings derived from these texts, and everything they have to say about gender, family, work, race, etc” (Bacalja, 2018, p. 163). He added that video games are texts that are consumed by young people every day which makes these texts a part of everyday life (Bacalja, 2018, p. 164).

Bacalja’s research can be seen in connection with Beavis’s model for critical game literacy. The activities gave the students the opportunity to explore the game and discuss different views people had about the game. The activities connected previous knowledge with new knowledge, which as mentioned, relates to the section about *knowledge about games*. The pupils got to critically assess the game *Bully*, which gave the pupils an opportunity to work with games as a text in relation to ideology and power. This can also be seen in context with how Luke viewed critical literacy in today’s society. Reading the article about the video game gave the pupils a new perspective of the game. This perspective could depend on culture and ideology.

3.2 Boys L2 Reading Skills and Playing Video Games

In 2016, Lisbeth Brevik looked at why a group of boys in vocational studies were better at reading in their L2 (English) than in L1 (Norwegian). She focused on boys because they were outstanding after the national test for being better at L2 compared to the girls in vocational studies. These boys were identified among a national sample of 10,331 Norwegian upper secondary school students who had participated in two national reading tests. They were tested on reading in L1 and L2. Out of 10,331, 463 were better at reading in their L2 than in L1 (Brevik, 2016, pp.40-41). Brevik carried out interviews with five of those 463 students. The boys interviewed were all interested in gaming as an out-of-school activity, which the boys mentioned as the main reason they were better in L2 than L1 (Brevik, 2016, p.56). This research demonstrated that gaming was a significant interest for adolescents, especially boys, in Norway and it is worth considering using this in the English subject in order to develop traditional literacy as well as gaming literacy.

4. Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents the cultural analysis of the computer game *Papers, Please*. The focus is on the representation of ideology in a fictional totalitarian society and explore how the game can be used to implement these specific areas of the core curriculum. These areas are *democracy and citizenship*, and *critical thinking and ethical awareness*. Ideology is explored in relation to totalitarianism, gender, the media, terrorism, corruption, penalty and immigration. In the following chapter, several examples of dilemmas from the game will be presented. These dilemmas can be used in classroom discussions where the aim is for the pupils to improve their critical literacy. The learning theory constructivism is well suited for using video games for teaching critical literacy. It will let the pupils lead the discussions, with the teacher as a guidance. In addition, the time spent on this game could be similar to the time spent on a novel. Begin to work with it in the classroom to make sure that everyone knows how to play the game. Have prepared some questions related to critical literacy and the dilemmas in the game. Ask the pupils to take notes and play the game at home. Use the time at school for discussions and to work on the dilemmas in game.

4.1 Summary of *Papers, Please*

The video game *Papers, Please* was created by indie game developer Lucas Pope, through his company 3909 LLC. It is a single player document-based puzzle game, which was released on August 8, 2013. The game has won several awards, including British Academy Game Awards in 2014 (Papers, Please, n.d.). The game is a narrative adventure game with two game modes. The first is a story mode, and the second is an endless mode. This thesis will focus on the story mode because it has a narrative with themes, compared to the endless mode where the only goal is to go allow or deny people entrance to a fictive country. The player has to make judgments within different cultural settings, employ moral relativity and assess sources, concerning the different dilemmas in the video game. These themes make this game well suited to teach critical literacy, because the context is important for making meaning, and the player needs to be aware of the social construction of these concepts. In addition, the narrative component is an important factor for why this video game was chosen for this thesis, because the game can be analysed as a 'text'. The narrative component of the video game can be recognised by pupils as a component they know from traditional texts, like in novels.

The gameplay of *Papers, Please*, focuses on the working life of a border-crossing immigration officer in the fictional, totalitarian state of Arstotzka. The game is set in 1982. Arstotzka has recently ended a six-year war with their neighbouring county, Kolechia. However, there is still political tension between the two countries and the other nearby countries. The game takes place at a border checkpoint in the city of East Grestin. This is where the gameplay takes place. The city of Grestin is divided with a wall between the Arstotzkan side (East Grestin) and the Kolechian side (West Grestin). This is an obvious reference to Berlin during the Cold War and the Berlin wall to. The arrivals at the border crossing and the Arstotzkan citizens complain about poor living conditions and how difficult their lives have become. As the game progresses, there are several terrorist attacks and a mysterious organisation called EZIC that are trying to overthrow the government of Arstotzka.

As an immigration officer, the player will review the arrivals' documents and use different tools and investigation methods to determine if the papers are in order or not. The purpose of this is to arrest individuals that could be terrorists, wanted criminals, smugglers or have forged or stolen documents, and to deny arrivals that have missing required paperwork entry to the country. The people that have the correct paperwork, and are not any of the mentioned individuals, are allowed to cross the border. For each level (a day at work), the player is given specific rules on which documents are required and what conditions allow or deny entry. This task becomes increasingly complex as the days pass. The player has a guidebook in the booth containing information about the regulations, and these regulations change daily. In addition, the guidebook contains information on how the documents are supposed to look and a map with information about regions in both Arstotzka and the neighbouring countries. There is also an additional tool to help the player in the game. This is a bulletin that contains a summary of changes, the reason for these changes and additional information from the newspaper (the newspaper is shown at the beginning of each day) that could be important for the game. When a discrepancy is discovered in an arrival's paperwork, the player may interrogate the applicant and then demand missing documents, take the applicant's fingerprints (simultaneously, ordering a copy of the applicant's identity record to compare the prints), order a full body scan, or find enough incriminating evidence to lead to the arrest of the entrant. At times, there will be attempts from arrivals to bribe the immigration officer. The Arstotzkan government is monitoring the player's decisions. If the player (the immigration officer) has violated the laws of Arstotzka, a citation will be issued to the player. The player can make two violations without a penalty. Subsequent violations will result in a fine or 'game over'.

The goal is to process as many immigrants as possible while earning enough money to provide for your family. At the end of each day, the player earns money based on how many people have been processed, and the bribes collected. The income can also be lowered if there are any fines that day. The player has to decide on a budget to spend that money on food, heat and other necessities in a low-class housing. The player must additionally be aware of not earning too much money in illegitimate ways. This could result in the family being reported, and all the money accumulated so far being confiscated by the government. After a few levels, the player will experience that expenses are higher than the legitimate income, which forces the player to strategically break the law. This provides an example of context-dependent values, helping to develop critical thinking in the pupils playing the video game.

In the story mode of *Papers, Please*, there are 31 levels or 31 ‘days at work’ for the immigration officer. There are 20 possible endings in the video game, where 12 are ‘game over’, and the other 8 endings are considered as completing the game in different ways. ‘Game over’ just means that it ended a bit too early to be considered completion. It takes about 4 hours to achieve each ending. The fact that pupils get different endings should make the discussions about the themes and dilemmas in the game more interesting. The game places the player in several situations and dilemmas that can be used in teaching critical literacy.

4.2 Text Knowledge About *Papers, Please*

In Beavis’ model of critical games literacy, she described, in a section called *Games-as-text*, that when one considers using a game in the classroom it could be important to focus on *knowledge about the game*. She points out that it could be important to consider the game as an artefact and consider the aesthetic and technological form that emerges. For *Papers, Please* this would be to connect previous knowledge and new knowledge to the game. In the classroom one could for example focus on the narrative structure, and different features that can be connected to related texts.

Game genre is another focus point, according to Beavis. Before playing *Papers, Please*, the teachers should give some information on background information about the game. This will make it easier for the pupils to understand why they are playing this game, what to expect from this game and to retrieve previous knowledge that can be connected to the dilemmas they will meet throughout the game. Giving the pupils this kind of information will help them understand the narrative of the game, and how important the narrative is in the game. First,

pupils should be introduced to the gaming genre this game belongs to, which is narrative adventure games. A narrative adventure game is a game that allows the player to make decisions as the story progresses, which gives different outcomes depending on which decisions each player makes. In connection with *Papers, Please*, it would be ideal to mention that there are 20 different endings and that 12 of these endings are 'game over'. However, the ending 'game over' does not exclude pupils from being able to participate in discussions about the themes and dilemmas in the game. On the contrary, the ending 'game over' has its reasons that can be part of these discussions. In addition, the gamer has the opportunity at any time in the game to go back and replay the levels they have played to change the narrative's conclusion. The pupils would find this knowledge helpful because they know from the beginning that their choices have consequences for the development of the game's narrative. They will also find this knowledge helpful in connection to morality and ideology, by knowing some contexts of the game.

Knowledge about the game's genre, which in this case is a narrative adventure game, would additionally help them understand the narrative if they get one of the 'game over' endings. Ideally, the player would reflect on which decisions he/she has made and can backtrack to where their 'mistake' was made. For example, on day 26, the player could get an instant 'game over', not knowing why this happened. The solution here could be to do a google search to see if others had the same problem on the same day. In this case, a website with the solution is a fandom page listing the reasons for every ending. The reason for this 'game over' was that on day 20, a supervisor gave instructions to let Shae Piersovask through. She appeared on day 25, when there are a lot of other situations in the game that can distract the player from remembering this mission. If Shae is denied entrance, there will be an instant 'game over' on day 26. This way of solving a problem can be connected to Gee's principle of intertextuality, which is when the pupil can see relations to other texts. In this case the fandom page is an intertext, because it relates to the game. This intertext can be used as a game manual that is based on the semiotic domains of the gaming community (discourse community). For pupils this principle is important for developing the full understanding of the game. On this fandom page people can share experiences and seek help when they are stuck. This way of solving a problem can also be linked to social constructivism, by people gaining knowledge in a social context. In this case the social context is over the internet through an the fandom page.

The problem-solving aspect of the problem mentioned above is a skill relates to several parts of the core curriculum because problem-solving is connected to recall of knowledge that in

the game has been learnt through reading. Problem solving drawing on previous knowledge is a competence element of the core curriculum (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.13). In addition, it is a part of ‘creative abilities’ in the core curriculum. The curriculum states that “[p]upils who learn about and through creative activities develop the ability to express themselves in different ways and to solve problems and ask new questions” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.8).

4.2.1 Text types in *Papers, Please*

Papers, Please relies heavily on written text. This makes it easier to analyse the game as text. The pupils must be able to comprehend different types of text to play the game⁴, and they need pre-knowledge of genre to be able to understand ways of reading those types of texts. These texts can for example be, documents or the subtitles in the conversations. The game has a lot of written text. The spoken communication in the game is gibberish, and therefore subtitles are used to communicate what people are saying. This is important because you need to know if the people stopping by are asking you to do something for them, or if what they say is in accordance with the information in their documents. In addition, these subtitles are written in a vernacular form with several grammatical errors, which might affect how the player views the people in the game. An example is a journalist saying, “I cover big story” (Pope, 2013). The grammatical errors mimic common errors in English when spoken by Eastern Europeans. The grammatical errors could make it difficult for pupils to understand what is said. The subtitle gives the pupil an opportunity to read the conversation over again which could help them understand the conversation better, and they can pick up on what the arrival has said, which is important when the player is determining whether what is said believable or not.

Written text and pictures are used in *Papers, Please* to explain the beginning and the different endings of the game. Text in these parts of the game is used to explain the storyline. For example, in the beginning of the game, a written text with a supporting picture explains that your character got a new job as an immigration officer from the labour lottery. You and your family are placed in a 7-class apartment (the higher class of an apartment the lower the expenses are, the standards of these classes is otherwise unknown). There is also a newspaper,

⁴ “The development of reading skills in English progresses from experimenting with phonemes and speech sounds, spelling patterns and syllables to reading varied and complex texts with fluency and comprehension and being increasingly able to critically reflect on and assess different types of texts” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020, p.4).

where the different headlines set the mood, give you information that help you make decisions, and in which you see reports of the results of your actions and decisions.

The colour use in a video game could influence the mood and attitude of the player, which could have an unconscious influence on the players when they make decisions. The colours used in *Papers, Please* are mainly grey, black and red. The grey and black makes nothing stick out, while the red is used in important symbols, for example, for the logo of the labour lottery. Pupils should be conscious about the effect this use of colours has on their mood and attitude to the society the game is set in, as a part of a critical assessment of the video game. The graphic in the game is quite pixelated and makes the game look older than it is. This may be to set the player's mind in the correct historical period. The historical period could be the Cold War, and the coarse pixelation could suggest that totalitarian societies behind the iron curtain got left behind in terms of global development and infrastructure. The player could analyse if this suggestion is true or not.

There are, additionally, two in-game books that are useful in the game. One is the guidebook that contains information about how to play the game, how to evaluate the documents collected from arrivals, a map of all the countries and regions, and the rules that can change daily. The second book is the bulletin, which is issued to the immigration officer daily. It is constantly updated with information and should be read through before the first entrant of the day is called into the booth. The bulletin has several pages with information. It contains notes from the management, an update on regulations and procedures, a list of wanted criminals, and a newspaper clipping attached to the back of the bulletin.

There is a lot of text in the documents given by the people entering the booth. The documents in this group are a passports, identity cards, diplomatic authorisations, entry/access permits, work passes, grant of asylum papers, identity supplements and certificates of vaccination. These documents are the main source of information about the people who wants to enter Arstotzka. The player has to study these documents and consider whether the person's document is within the requirements of the current laws and regulations.

4.3 Historical Context and Current Affairs

Papers, Please, used to teach critical literacy suits a class in upper secondary school. It is advantageous to have previous knowledge from the subjects of social studies and history, for

example about the Cold War and totalitarianism. This would help the pupils have the terminology needed to understand the game. Lev Vygotsky wrote that language is a social phenomenon, because you need language to be able to communicate your thoughts (Imsen, 2005, p.46). The terminology needed to discuss this video game would be about ideology, for example gender and social power. The terminology would also be used when they later discuss different concepts and dilemmas in the game.

4.3.1 Historical Context and Totalitarianism

When working with video games in the classroom it is important to have a focus on the world around the game. Beavis explained that the world in the game and the world outside the game has an influence on the game player (Apperley & Beavis, 2013, p.7). One example of the outside world influencing the game is the Cold War. *Papers, Please* is relevant because of its portrayal of the situation in Berlin during the Cold War. Many of the pupils growing up today do not know how the Cold War affected the whole world. They may know the historical events, but they do not have any experiences related to this time period. The Cold War has become relevant in today's society because once again people are concerned about the threat of nuclear war in relation to the current war between Russia and Ukraine. *Papers, Please* has many obvious references to Eastern Europe during the Cold War. The game gives pupils an experience with the functions and ideological systems of totalitarianism. It is important for pupils to understand what leads people to believe what the state tells them, unquestioningly. The theme of totalitarianism and the understanding of believing the 'truth' of a state are often taught through reading novels such as George Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm*, which is a passive demonstration of totalitarianism. However, by playing *Papers, Please* the player gets a first-hand experience of having to make immoral choices due to circumstances in the game play that can lead to a deeper level of understanding these mechanisms. This is an insight that is useful for comprehending the current conflict in Ukraine, and the reactions of the surrounding countries. It is important that pupils have an idea of how totalitarianism influences various aspects of people's lives. The fall of the Berlin wall can be seen as a symbol of the fall of the Soviet Union, and knowledge about this part of European history is important to understand the conflict in Ukraine.

In order for the pupils to be able to reflect on situations and references in *Papers, Please*, it is essential to have the historical context of the Cold War, Berlin and the Soviet Union. This context is also a situated meaning in the game. The pupils need to realise that notions of

'morality' are culturally and circumstantially dependent. It is important for them to see the connection between the wall in the game and the Berlin Wall during the Cold War, to understand the impact of The Soviet Union in Eastern Europe during the Cold War, and connect these to the events in the game. This could help pupils understand the setting of the game and the lived experiences, decisions or actions of the characters met in the game (Endacott & Brooks, 2013, p.41). Further, this could make the pupils empathise with the different characters coming to the booth. Every single character in the game is a result of the totalitarian society they are a part of.

While playing *Papers, Please*, the player becomes aware of their position as an immigration officer in a totalitarian society. On the one hand, you constantly fear doing the wrong thing, resulting in going to prison or not getting paid enough, which leads to not having money for food, heat or medicine. On the other hand, you know you have the power to determine people's destinies by your choices. One example is on day 16 when a woman comes to the booth with the wrong paperwork and explains that she needs medical help and that she does not trust the doctors in her country. She gives the player ten credits (the monetary value in *Papers, Please*). The dilemma would be whether to allow the woman to enter or not. This differs from printed literacy where the reader is passive and you can distance yourself from the character you are reading about. In a novel, the reader is not making decisions, the character is the one making decisions. When you are playing *Papers, Please* you are actively participating in the decision-making. When players make different decisions, they are influenced by the video game's rules and what needs to be done to survive in that virtual world.

Papers, Please does not just passively present the difficulties of living in a totalitarian state: Arstotzka's regime influences how you, as a player, think, and you are faced with the moral question of whether you allow individuals in need to cross the border without proper documentation, or be faithful to Arstotzka's laws. This demonstrates for the player the different ways a culture's ideology dictates one's own actions, and the difficulty of the individual to act outside of society's structures.

Papers, Please uses the multimodal function of propaganda. Arstotzka's power is based on visual symbols as well as written text, which are a part of the semiotic decoding that the player has to do. The game has several references to Communist symbols. The player needs to be able to recognise the meaning of these symbols to understand the in-game ideology.

One example of these symbols is the hammer used as a symbol of the labour lottery (see figure 4.1). The hammer represents workers and can be associated with the hammer and sickle, which has been used on the flag of the Soviet Union and as a symbol for the Vietnamese communist party. Other examples are the names of the entrants and the countries that sound Slavic, and the only activities of the immigration officer is his repetitive work and taking care of his family. The government in Arstotzka is an all-power government dictating rules and uses bureaucracy as a tool to establish authority. Furthermore, governmental agents show up randomly to observe if the immigration officer is doing his job. This enhances the stress and makes the player feel threatened because you feel like you are constantly being watched, and you have to be careful if you consider doing something that can be seen as a threat to the state of Arstotzka. This mirrors the experience of being controlled by the state power of surveillance and observation.



Figure 4.1 Labour Lottery (Pope, 2013)

When the pupils are playing *Papers, Please*, they are set in an unfamiliar situation by being an immigration officer in a society that is unfamiliar to them. They have to use their English skills and critical reading of the information given in the game and previous knowledge about totalitarian societies to make decisions in the different situations they are set in. The curriculum defines ‘competence in the subject’ as, “...the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills to master challenges and solve tasks in familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations. Competence includes understanding and the ability to reflect and think critically” (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.12). This is related to in-depth learning, which should prepare pupils to use and expand on their competence (Lenz, 2020, p.10).

It is important for pupils to understand what corruption does to a society, when playing *Papers, Please*. Norwegian pupils have grown up in a society with barely any corruption compared to other countries (FN-sambandet, 2020a), which could make it difficult for pupils to relate to how it affects societies comparable to Arstotzka. The pupils might not understand why individuals participate in corruption in the real world. In Arstotzka, corruption is widespread. In order to get things done, the citizens of Arstotzka need to pay bribes and do each other favours. While playing *Papers, Please*, the player will come to expect bribery, and to give unauthorised entrance to arrivals when this happens. There will be days when just the salary from the job is not enough, and you would not afford your rent, which will result in a ‘game over’. The pupils should be aware that one of the effects of corruption is that it destroys democracies and create distrust in the political regime in a country.

Further, pupils need to understand corruption in order to understand people from countries where, for example, bribery, black markets and money laundering are common. The arrivals coming to the booth know that the immigration officers are corrupt, which creates an assumption from both the arrivals coming to the booth and the player that everything will work smoothly with a little bit of bribery. Because of this assumption you cannot condemn the people in this society. This topic can be seen in connection with the chapter in to the core curriculum about, *Democracy and Citizenship*. Pupils should try to understand the view of others (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.9). In *Papers, Please* the player is forced to actively take part in corruption by accepting bribery and doing favours, which will give the experience of how it is to take part in this society and what it does to you in the moment of decision making.

4.3.2 Democracy and Current Affairs

Russia’s current war in Ukraine has shown how important it is to understand the differences between democracies and a totalitarian state. The democratic elected Ukraine government wants to turn to the European Union, and protect and further develop their democracy (Bennis, 2022). Russia on the other hand want to dictate Ukraine to be closer to them politically and economically (Kirby, 2023).

The Finnish newspaper *Antero Mukka* has tried to “breach the restrictions and decided to hide articles about Russia's war in Ukraine in Russian in the shooter game Counter-Strike” (Kauranen, 2023). The game Counter-Strike is very popular worldwide and among young

Russians. The editor of *Antero Mukka* decided to do this in response to the banning of free reporting in Russia. Russian journalists have to describe the Russian invasion of Ukraine as ‘a special military operation’ (Kauranen, 2023). When one side of a conflict can use video games to inform and influence the players, the other side can as well, and it is important for the players to be aware of this and recognise it. This example shows how important critical literacy skills has become in everyday life, also when playing a video game for entertainment.

This thesis has used Robert A. Dahl’s definition of what a democracy is. He defines democracy as effective participation, voting equality, enlightened understanding, control of the agenda and inclusion of adults (Dahl, 2000, p. 37-38). The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institutes has a project called the V- Dem Project where they annually rate democratises. The V-Dem Project is an approach to conceptualize and measure democracies. In this approach Dahl’s definition of democracy is used. In their report they have rated countries on a liberal democracy index in 2012 and in 2022, rating every country from 0 to 1. In 2022 Norway was ranked at number three with a score of 0,86, which indicates that Norway is a very democratic country compared to the 202 countries rated (Papada et al., 2023: 44). According to the V-Dem rating, the USA has become more autocratic the past ten years. They got a score of 0,85 in 2012 but had a score of 0,75 in 2022 (Papada et al., 2023: 44). USA has historically been seen as an ideal democratic country. There are different reasons for why this change is happening, one of which is the declining trust in political institutions. For example, the previous US president Donald Trump tweeted statements that question ideas and structures which are considered as fact. For example, he stated after losing the 2020 election that “I WON THIS ELECTION, BY A LOT!” (@realDonaldTrump, 2020, November 7). He tried to create a distrust in the vote count for the 2020 election. It all resulted in the attack on the US congress on January 6th 2021. This was an effort to undermine the public trust in the government and change people’s relationship with previously trusted news sources (Fried & Harris, 2020, p.532).

Moreover, in Europe there are the notable changes in multiple countries, including Poland. They got a score of 0.65 in 2012, but they were at 0,43 in 2022 (Papada et al., 2023: 23 and 44). This indicates that democracy is being challenged in Poland. Poland was once considered as the regional leader in the process of democracy in post-communist Europe. The backsliding in Poland is seen in context with the weakening of democratic norms and institutions. This was most notable after the 2015 election, when the right-wing party *Law and Justice* was elected (FN- sambandet, 2022b). They have weakened press freedom, by using the public

media as an instrument of propaganda. Journalists report that they are verbally attacked, and that conservative politicians attempt to discourage journalists from covering topics that are gender-related and/or LGBT+ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, the + symbol is used to include people who do not fit typical binary notion of male and female) issues (Reporters without Borders, 2023).

The trends in both Poland and USA are trends that are unwanted in Norway. This is why *Democracy and citizenship* is one of the interdisciplinary topics of LK20. The goal for the interdisciplinary topics is to create a basis for the connection between teaching and the school's learning environment in order to strengthen the 'danning', or building of character. 'Danning' is to develop as an individual, future employee and as a citizen (Lenz, 2020, p.10). The International Civic and Citizenship Education study by Oslo and Akershus University College (now OsloMet) from 2016, showed that out of pupils from 24 countries, Norwegian pupils scored highest concerning participation in the democratic processes, which can be interpreted as a sign of the democratic feeling being strong in Norwegian schools (Dyb, 2017). However, the pupils are also supposed to be understanding of others, even when they disagree (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.16). This is why it could be important for pupils to experience how it is to be part of a society that is not democratic, and how it influences the individuals. They need to understand how someone could make decisions within an authoritarian state that would appear extremely immoral in a democracy. Thus, understanding that the ideology of the society you live in dictates views and actions a lot more than they might be aware of. It could be difficult for pupils to get this understanding just by reading about it. *Papers, Please* can offer pupils the experience of being a part of a totalitarian society, which can help them understand people with backgrounds from societies different from their own.

The core curriculum explains that a democratic society is based on the idea that everyone has equal rights and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.10). The citizens in Arstotzka do not participate in decision-making processes. One example of this lack of self-definition is that they do not decide where to live and/or work. The pupils playing the game should notice this while playing the game and make this connection to why and how Arstotzka is not democratic.

One of the interdisciplinary topics of LK20 is *Democracy and citizenship*. This topic can be taught through the game *Papers, Please*, because it gives the player an experience of a society

that is not a democracy. The pupil "... shall develop an understanding of the relationship between individual rights and obligations" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.16). Individual rights means that the individual has the right to participate in political activities. A society depends on citizens exercising their rights to further maintain and develop a civil society, which should be balanced by responsibility (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.16). In countries that do not allow its citizens these individual rights, people are more likely to avoid responsibilities.

This interdisciplinary topic in LK20, *Democracy and Citizenship*, further adds that the school should "promote democratic values and attitudes that can counteract prejudice and discrimination" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.9) with the goal of the pupils being respectful of people's differences. *Papers, Please*, simulates an experience of a society that does not have the same rights and values as Norwegian society. This could make it clear to pupils why democracy is important and why it is important to be actively involved in politics. The game has an immersive moral and cultural experience that leads the player to make unethical decisions based on the game's structural requirements rather than their own moral compass. The game implicitly assumes the player's moral compass does not match with the game, and that part of the 'difficulty' of completing the game is that the financial circumstances (costs are greater than legitimate earnings) forces the player to deny these implied moral codes. The game is more difficult to complete if the player plays with a high moral standard.

One effect of playing and reflecting on the video game *Papers, Please* can be related to being socially conscious, which is commonly known as being woke⁵. To be 'woke' has become a popular way of speaking up on current topics. To be woke is to be well informed about an issue and to speak out about it. It is also to publicly 'call out' another person or organization for being offensive towards minorities. This part of wokeness is closely connected to cancel culture⁶, which is a more extreme version of a call-out. 'Cancelling' occurs when someone or an organization makes a statement or behaves in a way that is considered offensive and are

⁵ Woke: first associated with racial awareness. Originally used to raise awareness of racial injustices among Black youth. To be woke is a self-promotive way for people to articulate their social consciousness (Coppola, 2021, p.24).

⁶ "Cancelling' occurs when a person (or organization) makes a statement or behaves in such a way that is considered so offensive that the only constructive solution is to shun or boycott them" (Coppola, 2021, p.25).

seen as the 'only' solution is to shun or boycott them (Coppola, 2021, p.25). 'Cancelling' has made people scared of speaking out if their opinion does not match the majority opinion. William Coppola has connected Freire's critical pedagogy to the development of wokeness in social media. Coppola believed that Freire would have viewed the adaptation of wokeness as a "well-intentioned but disingenuous attempt to proclaim their solidarity, simply because naming one's oppression can only be done by the marginalized, never for the marginalized" (Coppola, 2021, p. 28). According to Coppola, call-out culture would be viewed by Freire as a way to engage with a dialogue, because it is a way for marginalized communities to call out injustice. Freire expressed that humility makes us seem sure and that nobody is superior to anybody else (Coppola, 2021, p.36). The cancel culture among people of privilege is to refuse a dialogue. Woke-, cancel- and call-out culture are all relevant today because this has become the common 'rules' for any discussion online. Pupils need the skills of thinking critically and to see others' point of view to be able to stay socially conscious and call-out injustice, especially for marginalised groups, without 'cancelling' the opponent. The critical perspective is supported by the core values in LK20.

Woke (social consciousness) and cancel culture can be seen from a constructivism point of view. People develop knowledge of the world in a social context, which means multiple views exist across communities. A socially conscious person calling out another for not being as socially conscious as them can be a case of believing in different knowledges or 'truths'. However, it is better to discuss disagreements rather than fully cancelling the one with a different opinion. If we fully cancel someone, it would be to refuse dialog, and not try to find a common 'truth'.

The video game *Papers, Please* demonstrates the influence of cultural context on behaviour, and the video game may lead to an increased understanding of how different opinions develop. The ability to deal with conflict and disagreement will be challenged and developed while playing *Papers, Please*, because of the moral dilemmas that appear throughout the game. *Critical thinking and ethical awareness* are core values in LK20. This requires pupils "to learn in different contexts and will therefore help the pupils to develop good judgment" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.7). This skill and awareness intersect with the interdisciplinary topics of *Democracy and citizenship*, through the skill critical thinking. The pupils should be able to deal with conflict of opinion and respond to disagreement (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.16). This should be done in a respectful way, by not using slurs or 'cancelling' the other.

In *Papers, Please* one of the subtopics that should be discussed concerns social justice. There are big differences between a democracy and a totalitarian society when it comes to social justice. Luke wrote that an educational philosophy concerning critical literacy education is “premised on an ethical imperative for freedom of dialogue and the need to critique all texts, discourses, and ideologies as a means for equity and social justice” (Luke, 2018, p.358). Education about social justice should be fair and have powerful engagement with ‘others’ who have been economically and socially marginalised.

4.4 The Player

The players moral, identity and ideology are important to acknowledge when using *Papers, Please* in education. It highly impacts the decisions made in the game. These factors are influenced by the game itself, but also the world outside the game. These factors are mentioned in Beavis’ model on critical game literacy, in the section called ‘*me’ as game player*, and the section called the *world around the game*.

4.4.1 Moral and Identity

Francesco Crocco explained that critical gaming pedagogy promotes critical thinking about hegemonic ideas and institutions, instead of propagating them. He believed that there are two practices that are used in critical gaming pedagogy. The first method is used for games that are specially designed for a primary purpose rather than pure entertainment (Crocco, 2011, p.29). This would seek to simulate the point of view of marginalized subjects, to “generate empathy to provoke critical thinking about hegemonic notions” (Crocco, 2011, p.30). In the second method Crocco used a technique called codification, which is defined as the exploration of a theme through its representation in media (for example video games) (Crocco, 2011, p.30). The goal of this technique is to develop a sense of criticism, so pupils react passively. “One begins with the preparatory discussion of a theme, followed by the examination of a media sample that codifies that theme, and concluded by a dialog where students critically analyze the theme and contingent media” (Crocco, 2011, p30). When a video game is used for codification, it is not treated as a simulation of the real world. The video game should be treated as an artifact to be critically examined as a reference to hegemonic ideology. Codification is a method used to resist empathy and passive-identification with game content.

Papers, Please signifies the game world as a totalitarian state using signifiers of The Soviet Union. Morality is a big part of the game. The player must make choices based on their own moral feeling in the moment of the decision making. This morality can in some dilemmas be based on empathy which could provoke the critical thinking aspect of the dilemma. Codification can also be related to decision making. The places and the situations in the game has never existed in real life. The game can codify the theme of ideology connected to a virtual identity (in this case in a totalitarian society) and a real-world identity. However, for most players it is impossible to resist empathy in the game, because the player is dealing with dilemmas that can be related to real life situations.

Papers, Please shows that people who live in totalitarian states are victims of their circumstances, but also that the 'morally good choices' students might think they make are also actually supported by the environment they live in. Vygotsky is known for his sociocultural theory, and stated that language and culture play a big role in people's lives. Culture can be seen in someone's language, thinking and awareness (Imsen, 2005, p.46). Knowledge is a part of culture as well. The society someone grows up in shapes them into who they are and what values they have. A culture in a society influences and shape the beliefs and behaviour in that society. "The values inherent in national cultural systems can influence beliefs and perceptions and provide guidelines as to what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and practice" (Tata & Prasad, 2015, p.283). In Arstotzka everyone is corrupt, it is expected and accepted. Compared to the totalitarian society of Arstotzka, Norway is a social democracy. In a social democracy there are more equal opportunities.

When the moral code in the video game (implied and enforced) go against the player's own moral codes it might lead pupils to examine their self-image and understand others' choices more empathetically. Gee believed that the virtual identity is something the teacher should consider as important when working with video games (Gee, 2007b, pp.48-49). The virtual identity of the player in *Papers, Please* is when the player is placed as the immigration officer, and this is influenced by the virtual world of Arstotzka. The virtual identity is partly fixed by the game design, for example the work placement and who is part of the players virtual family. Another element that influences the virtual identity of the player is the (ideological) semiotic domain by having to make different choices based on the fixed ideology of the society of Arstotzka. When pupils in a classroom have a collective semiotic domain, they are able to collaborate with each other and discuss different scenarios throughout the game, even if they

have made different choices in the game. In this context semiotic domain is shared terminology and experiences of the game. It is also important to consider their real-world identity. Pupils have multiple real-world identities, that need to be considered by both pupils and the teacher when playing the game. The players are not adapting their real-world identity to the virtual identity. The virtual identity gives the player experiences from a point of view that is different from the real-world identity. The effect of this virtual identity makes an impression on the real-world identity, which can be useful in meeting with others. When the pupil has played the game, they should reflect on these two different identities.

The virtual identity in *Papers, Please* reflects some of the values of the real-world identity of the player. Combining real-world identity and the virtual world is called projective identity (Gee, 2007b, p.50). This would be to project one's own values and desires to the virtual character, in this case to the immigration officer. The immigration officer has some limitations which are fixed with in the game. This is regardless of the player's choices. The rules and regulations in the video game are fixed by the game designer. In *Papers, Please* the player has some freedom to choose what path (ending) the character takes. In the players projective identity, they may worry about if they should obey the rules of the totalitarian society of Arstotzka or not, and if the immigration officer has enough money to keep him and his family alive. The player could try to play the game based purely on their own values. However, the player will not get that far in the game, and end the level with 'game over'. In that case they most likely will not be corrupt and will not accept the norms of a totalitarian society, which are necessary to get a proper ending in the game. The player could then try again, and this time use what they learned from the first time and adapt to what the game expects of the player by following the norms of the society within the game.

Papers, Please could be seen in relation to critical pedagogy, because it raises a practical pedagogical and curriculum question of the connection between representation and truth, objectivity, reality, facticity and lived experience (Luke, 2018, p.355). In the curriculum for the English subject, in the section about text in the English subject, it is stated that “[t]hey shall build the foundation for seeing their own identity and others’ identities in a multilingual and multicultural context” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020, p. 3). This part of the curriculum states that the multicultural context is an important part of one’s identity. The game could help pupil to be aware of their own identity and how it can be influenced by society and culture.

4.4.2 Ideology

In this thesis these everyday ideological constructs will be connected to different dilemmas in the video game *Papers, Please* and further how they can be used in a classroom discussion. Luke explains that in a critical analysis the pupils need language to name and problematise the world. These analyses would be to take every-day ideological constructions of class, ethnicity, gender, conflict and so forth, to make the pupil problematise them through dialogic exchange (Luke, 2018, p.355).

Before playing *Papers, Please*, it is useful for the pupils to know about the type of society in which the game is set. As mentioned in the plot summary, the game is placed in the fictional totalitarian society in the country Arstotzka. The pupils should know what a totalitarian society is to understand the story. At the beginning of the game, you get told that you got a job through the labour lottery and that you and your family are placed in an apartment where you have to pay rent. You did not choose this job or the apartment; the government of Arstotzka made these decisions for you. These are indicators of a totalitarian society. If the pupil already has this context of the game being placed in a totalitarian society, they are mentally prepared that this game will give them an experience of a society that is different from a democratic one. The immersive experience of the game's decision-making can give a deeper understanding of the effects of such a society on the individuals who live there.

In *Papers, Please*, it becomes clear throughout the game that ideology has an impact on the player from the player's out-of-school and in-school experiences and their experience of the totalitarian ideology in the game. Vivien Burr looked at ideology from a social constructivist point of view. Ideology is a lived experience. It is "what we think about, what we feel, how we behave, and the pattern of all our social relationships" (Burr, 2000, p.83). The ideological impact on the player influences the choices made by the player in the different dilemmas, which leads to the players having different outcomes the first time they play the game. This impact can, for example, be seen in people getting different endings. In addition, Burr pointed out that it is possible to discuss ideology without getting embedded into the issue of truth, because in social constructivism there are no absolute truths (Burr, 2000, p.86).

The concept of ideology is the foundation of approaches to both critical pedagogy and critical literacy. Luke explained that there is an ongoing "conflict over what might count as science, and whether and how science and ideology... stand in relation to 'truth' arguably constitutes

a threat to the social contract of liberal democracy” (Luke, 2018, p.359). The consideration of what is seen as ‘truth’ and ideology are two main topics throughout the game.

In Beavis’ model about critical games literacy there is a section about ‘*me*’ as *game player*. This section focuses on the reflection about oneself as a game player, which includes attention to the issues like value, ideology and identity. These three issues are in focus when analysing and discussing the different dilemmas in *Papers, Please*. To put this in perspective, Allan Luke draw the connection between Paulo Freire’s critical perspective and Karl Marx’s idea of ideology in connection to critical pedagogy. Freire’s work was influenced by key concepts from Marx’s definition of ruling-class ideology when he defined school knowledge and ideology (Luke, 2018, p.354). “By this view, conventional and uncritical approaches to literacy are expressions of dominant, ruling-class ideology that succeed in creating a receptive literacy, involving passive reproduction of systematically distorted views of the world” (Luke, 2018, p.354). In a Norwegian context, there is not a clear ruling-class ideology, as seen in the some other countries. However, there are marginalised groups that experience racism⁷ and exclusion based on gender, religion or ethnicity. In that sense, we can relate ruling-class ideology to a Norwegian context. Norway also has capitalism, and capitalism was a concern of Marx.

Pupils should be conscious readers/players, when they play *Papers, Please*. They should be conscious about the current discourses concerning topics like ideology and culture context within the game, which would help pupils make connections between the discourse in *Papers, Please* and real life. An example of this discourse could be gender dilemma in the video game. One of the rules the immigration officer is supposed to work by is that all information in the documents provided by the entrant must be correct in order to be allowed to cross the border. The gender dilemma comes when a person looks like a woman and has a female-sounding name, but in their passport, they are gendered as a man. For days 1-3, you cannot find out if this is correct. You can decide to let them cross the border, but you will get a penalty, which usually is a fine of five credits. You can choose to decline them, but that can feel wrong for the player because you do not know if the papers were wrong or not. However, for levels 4-31, you can use a full body scan if you need to check their sex. The use of a body scanner

⁷ There are laws in place to protect these groups, but it is difficult to prove in some cases, for example when you do not get the job because your name is not ‘typical’ Norwegian (Nematpoor & Khorami, 2022).

could also be discussed because it is quite intrusive as this only focuses on the sex they were born as and not the gender they identify as. In *Papers, Please*, when this dilemma comes, the entrant has facial features that look like it could suit the name. They could potentially be transgender. The body scanner and facial features can be used in a discussion on the topic of gender expression.

The pupils should be aware of their own cultural competence. Cultural competence is “[t]he ability to relate to people who may be of different cultures to oneself, including all aspects of cultures such as race, gender and sexuality” (Russel, 2020, p.35). This includes a deeper understanding of who we are, which includes not only understanding what our worldview is, but how it is formed. This includes for example clarity about how we are socialised, what our biases are and where they come from. In *Papers, Please*, the player could experience being uncomfortable on making judgements about someone’s gender based only on documents and eventually pictures. This can be based on their own cultural competence, and their structural conspectus about gender.

It is important for pupils to understand gender within an ideological classification. In a classroom there might be people struggling with their gender identity, or people who are not aware of the role gender plays in the society they are in. According to social-constructionist feminism, gender is created by ideology. Simone de Beauvoir’s main thesis is an epochal work called *The Second Sex*. She believed that “throughout history, women have been reduced to objects of men” (Moi, 1988, p.92). Women have been constructed to be the man’s ‘other’, rejected her own subjectivity and the responsibility of her own actions. The patriarchal ideology presents women as immanence and men as transcendence. These fundamental assumptions dominate all aspects of social, political and cultural life. De Beauvoir believed that “one is not born a woman; one becomes one” (Moi, 1988, p.92). In other words, de Beauvoir believed that it is not the sex you are born that defines the gender you are, it is the things you do in life (performative) that defines it. By discussing gender as something you can become helps pupils see that their actions and opinion can even shape their idea of their own gender, which for some people becomes important for who they are. It can additionally help pupils see how their society is shaped, by factors like gender roles and expectations to gender. When pupils are aware of the gender structure in their society, and are introduced to different views on gender, they should be able to discuss gender in a respectful way. This also goes for the gender dilemma in *Papers, Please*. Pupils need to be socially conscious when discussing

this dilemma, which in this context means to have some ideas about the ideological classification of gender.

There is an ongoing debate about gender identity, and transpeople's rights. High-profile celebrities and other public figures have joined in on the debate in mainstream media including Twitter. One example is J.K. Rowling, who in 2020 tweeted about being gender critical⁸. This led to people arguing for cancellation of her as the author of the popular books about *Harry Potter* (Velasco, 2020, p.4). More seriously, this year in Kentucky they passed a new law, which included a ban on transgender medical treatment for those under 18. The republicans who wanted this law, said that the law was meant to protect minors from doing something they might regret as adults (Drenon, 2023). This will force people under the age of 18 that already has started their transitioned to detransition (Drenon, 2023). This law also restricts discussions of sexual orientation and gender identity in schools. Since new year nine states has made similar changes to their laws. The pupils in the Norwegian classroom could be aware of these issues but do not have an opinion on it or find it difficult to discuss these issues. Playing the game and discussing the dilemma in the video game about gender, might increase the pupils socially consciousness on this issue and make them more able to discuss the topic of gender identity and transpeople's rights.

4.5 Critical perspectives of *Papers, Please*

When using a video game in the classroom it is important to think about what the learning outcomes are. Beavis's model for critical literacy has, as mentioned in the theory chapter, a section about *learning through games*. The game *Papers, Please* was not designed with the intention of using it in the classroom. However, it has several topics and themes that can be explored and discussed in the classroom that works well with the intention of connected to the core curriculum of LK20 and the real world, which makes the game suitable in as a tool in the classroom for working with critical literacy skills.

⁸ "Term often used by campaigners focussing particularly on the exclusion of trans women in some or all women-only spaces" (Mackay, 2021, p.1)

4.5.1 Critical Assessment of Sources

As mentioned in the theory chapter, the goal of critical literacy is to discuss questions in the modern forum of public discourse. It is to ask questions like “What is “truth”? How is it presented and represented, by whom, and in whose interests? Who should have access to which images and words, texts, and discourses? For what purposes?” (Luke, 2012, p.4). The newspaper in the game *Papers, Please* makes the player directly face these questions throughout the game. Full media control is an important way for totalitarian states to control information. The Arstotzkan government can presumably corrupt or pressure the journalist, and control the content of the newspaper. The newspaper in Arstotzka is called *The Truth of Arstotzka*. It is the only newspaper presented in the game. The front page features domestic and international news, weather, entertainment, sports and politics. The text beyond headlines and other subheadings is not legible for the player. By only reading headlines, you only get a summary of the content of the newspaper. It is not too detailed, making the reader quickly skim through the information. The name of the newspaper sounds ironic. To name the newspaper, ‘the truth’ can make the player question if the newspaper is telling the truth. It sounds like you should not question the information this newspaper gives you because this is the only truth allowed in that society. The newspaper presents an subjective truth, at least from a constructivist view (Imsen, 2005, p. 145). This opens a discussion about the media and what to consider to be the ‘truth’. This discussion can be connected to the topic of fake news and alternative ‘truths’. Current topics that can be discussed here are for example the broad casting of the election in the USA in 2021 and the following attack on the US congress. It is important to discuss events that have happened in real life to show that fictional situations could happen, which is a part of being a concise player and a part of the critical literacy skill. This would also open the discussion of editorialising, where the newspapers take different political positions.

One of the dilemmas that you meet in the game is a question about the press representation of the society. A man comes to the booth with his passport and an ID card identifying him as a journalist. He gives the immigration officer the additional information that he wants to write an article about Arstotzka’s government. However, he does not have the proper paperwork for workers, nor an entry permit, which the rules require him to have. The player needs to decide if the journalist should be allowed to enter or not. One of the arguments that could be in favour of allowing the journalist to enter is that he might write an article that will show the readers

how the Arstotzkan government treats its citizens, which could result in the player trusting that the journalist would write it from a perspective that the player believes to be true. That would mean that the journalist writes about, for example, corruption and bad living conditions. This would be to undermine the totalitarian government. Further, it could have been difficult for a journalist to get the correct documents, as part of the government controlling media and information about political issues. In the game, there is never a law explicitly saying that journalists or people working in the media should be denied entrance to Arstotzka. The argument against the journalist being allowed entrance would be that he does not have the correct paperwork. The papers he does have could be forged or stolen. The immigration officer will get a citation if he allows the journalist to enter, due to the missing permit and ID supplement. In addition, it would show loyalty to Arstotzka to abide by the laws. The journalist in the game is not polite, and the player probably has no sympathy for him. He is abrupt in his answers when interrogated and he thinks the immigration officer is slow to approve his entrance. The journalist did not conform to the norms of the totalitarian society. The norm is to bribe when you do not have the correct paperwork. At the moment of the decision, the player does not know that the journalist works for *The Truth of Arstotzka*. If the player had known from the beginning it could have been a different discussion, because the player has read the newspaper for every single level and already has an opinion about the newspaper. The newspaper is not a trustworthy source, it has clear elements of propaganda and is obviously used as a mouthpiece of the government.

The headline in *The Truth of Arstotzka* the next day depends on whether the player let the journalist into the country or not. If the player lets the journalist enter the headline will be, “Arstotzka’s Frail Border. United Fed Reporter Exposes Lax Protocols” (Pope, 2013) (see figure 4.2). If the journalist was denied entrance, the headline would say, “Arstotzka’s Iron Border. Int. Media Reveals Entry Visa Bias” (Pope, 2013) (see figure 2.3). Both headlines carry the same meaning, but the wording is different because of the decision taken by the player. The headlines show how a journalist can twist the content to fit their political agenda. In the classroom discussion concerning this dilemma, it should be mentioned that the journalist is biased when he writes his article. The journalist did not ask the immigration officer about how it is to work as an immigration officer, which would seem natural when you write about passing across the border. On the other hand, if the journalist was denied entrance, he would argue that it violated his rights. The rights he is arguing about here are the freedom of the press and the freedom of speech. The journalists that produces fake news/alternative facts argue that

it is freedom of speech by often spreading political opinions based on vague data, that are populist or the journalist is paid to write an article in favour of a political agenda.

A report from Mediatilsynet showed that in Norway, TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube have become common platforms for people in the age group 9-18 to find news (Medietilsynet, 2022). These platforms do not have an editor that is in charge to fact-check what is posted, and to be responsible for the posts. This allows people to tell alternative facts, or fake news. The argument used on these platforms is that they can do this because of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Pupils in the classroom need to be able to reflect on what the arguments around freedom of speech really mean in today's society, because the argument is used by some media houses to protect them from being sued when they mention alternative truths in their news. Comparing the two newspaper headlines in the game and using them to discuss editorialising the class can open up a discussion about source reliability and journalistic integrity. In *Papers, Please* there is no law that stops journalists from crossing the border. However, they do need the correct paperwork. We do not know if getting the correct paperwork to enter Arstotzka as a journalist is difficult. In real life states can decide if outside journalists get to enter the country. For example, in Iran barely any journalist from western countries have been allowed to enter to cover ongoing protests against the ruling regime (Simonsen, 2023). However, it is common for a totalitarian society to try to control what information the media can write about, such as China trying to crack down on the multiplicity of the internet in the age beyond 'mass media' (Choudhury, 2017). A part of the discussion could be if pupil's choices would have changed if they knew that the journalist was writing for *The Truth of Arstotzka*. Then make the pupil highlight the fact that undermining mass media in a totalitarian state can destabilise the spread of misinformation which is used to control the masses. This could help pupils assess sources critically outside of the game as well as in the game.



Figure 4.2 The Truth of Arstotzka “Arstotzka’s Frail Border. United Fed Reporter Exposes Lax Protocols” (Pope, 2013)



Figure 4.3 The Truth of Arstotzka “Arstotzka’s Iron Border. Int. Media Reveals Entry Visa Bias” (Pope, 2013)

The reliability of media in a repressive state is also represented in the way the newspapers present people who are wanted for crimes. The media in repressive states can accuse people of a crime they might not have done. An example from *Papers, Please* is the dilemma connected to the newspaper where a track star is wanted for murder. On day five, the headline is “Republian Track Star Wanted for Murder! Vince Lestrades Whereabouts Unknown – Has Likely Fled Repbulia” (Pope, 2013). Vince Lestrades enters the booth on the same day, and you can detain him or let him enter. At the time in the game there are no written rules about letting criminals enter Arstotzka, meaning there will be no penalty for the immigration officer allowing them to enter, if they have the correct paperwork. Vince claims that it is a set-up and that Repbulia⁹ is lying. This dilemma can be used as practice in perspective-taking, a skill connected to critical thinking. As mentioned in the theory chapter, Jean Piaget points out that when pupils attend the formal operational stage (from the age of 11), they are able to understand that their thoughts and feelings are unique and not necessarily the same as others. They should also be able to put them self in the position of others. Perspective-taking entails

⁹ Fictional neighbour country of Arstotzka

both aspects of cognitive and emotional empathy (McNaughton, 2019, p.121). To take perspective requires the pupil to be open-minded and to carefully consider the views of others. The empathic side of perspective taking is both a deep awareness of others' feelings, thoughts and experiences, and empathy requires respect of the 'other' (McTighe & Harvey, 2020, p.101). The pupils should be able to see others' perspectives even when they disagree. When pupils can see others perspective they can "...assume a critical distance from the habitual beliefs and ... reactions that characterize less careful and circumspect thinkers" (McTighe & Harvey, 2020, p.100). Moreover, this dilemma can lead to a discussion about the newspaper's credibility. You have no way of knowing for sure if Vince is telling the truth. It might be too early in the game for the player to start questioning the newspaper's credibility. However, the player should recognise that it is a totalitarian society, which, as mentioned earlier, could indicate that the government has full control over the media. We do not know what type of society Republia is, but we can assume from the name that it is a republic or that it wants the world to think they are a republic (this can be associated with for example The Republic of Congo and Peoples Republic of China, both with low rating by V-Dem (Papada et al., 2023: 43)). This might change how we view Vince's statement about Republia's false accusation against him.

The game *Papers, Please*, can be used to exercise critical assessment of sources through requiring players to use judgment over who and what to trust. Multiple times in the game, the immigrant officer is approached by members of a mysterious organisation called the order of the EZIC star (EZIC). The organisation claims its main cause is to free Arstotzka from its greedy and corrupt leaders. However, their political ideology is not specified in the game. You can decide to do what they ask or ignore them. If you decide to ignore them, it can lead to game-ending number 20. This ending requires that you, in addition to ignoring them, decide to stay in Arstotzka on day 31. This will unlock an endless mode of the game. However, if you complete at least four of EZIC's missions, you most likely will end up with ending 19. To get to this ending the player has to allow Mikhail Saratov (EZIC agent) into the country on day 11, to allow Stepheni Graire (EZIC agent) to enter on day 14, to allow Marie Escalli (EZIC agent) to enter on day 17, to poison Khaled Istom (EZIC claims that he wants to ruin their plans) on day 20 and to confiscate the Koelchian diplomat Korfon Kallo's passport, to let him enter the country and give the passport to an EZIC agent on day 27. In ending 19 the immigration officer will get a message from EZIC on day 31, which will tell the immigration officer to hold his fire. EZIC attackers will blow up the border wall, and EZIC will gain power.

It is unclear if it is a good thing to join EZIC, because it is not clear if EZIC is a freedom-fighting organization or a terrorist organisation with other agendas.

The dilemma of whether you should help EZIC has several options and endings, but not all of them will be described here because of space limitations. This dilemma could be discussed in the classroom on the background of the lack of information about EZIC, and in questioning who gives us the information about them. The theme of this discussion would be how to assess sources critically. This theme is related to digital skills, which is one of the basic skills in the English curriculum (The Norwegian Directory of Education and Training, 2020, p.4). Digital skills requires pupils to “critically assessing information from different English-language sources”(The Norwegian Directory of Education and Training, 2020, p.4). In other words, pupils should not trust everything they read online. There are two sources that give us information about the organisation EZIC, themselves and the Arstotzkan government. As mentioned, EZIC claims that their main cause is to free Arstotzka from their greedy and corrupt leaders, and they claim not to be behind the terrorist attacks that sometimes cut the day short. In the game, the Arstotzkan government do not directly refer to EZIC as a terror organisation. However, it is implied that the Arstotzkan government believes that they are terrorists. If the government had said that EZIC was a terror organisation, the player might choose not to help them because the word terror has negative connotations associated with it. It would have the opposite effect if EZIC explicitly said they were freedom fighters because freedom fighters have a positive connotation associated with them. The game highlights how language and representation affect our judgment, which makes the player decide for themselves what seems a correct course of action, both morally and ethically.

In addition to EZIC’s unclear ideology, the player could reflect on the moral question of what EZIC have asked the immigration officer to do because there is a big difference between giving entrance to agents and killing people. EZIC asked the immigration officer twice to kill someone. The first time by poisoning someone and the second by shooting the man in red. If on day 17, the player gave entrance to the EZIC agent Marie Escalli, she will say that the ‘man in red’ is not a threat, which can make you second guess if you should do the mission on day 23. On day 23, the player was asked to kill the man in red (he is in the line to enter the country, coloured in red, and the others are black (see, figure 4.4)) because he presented a threat to EZIC. He does not actively present a threat when he is standing in line. The question the player should ask themselves is whether this is a morally good deed, that could lead to a free Arstotzka. If the player decides to kill the man in red, he will get an instant ‘game over’ (ending

number 9). This is not one of the proper endings, which can be interpreted that the player made a wrong choice. If the decision is not to kill the man in red, the game will continue. This dilemma could lead to a further discussion on whether EZIC is a reliable source or not. The player could decide not to shoot the 'man in red'. This will lead to the immigration officer getting a letter on day 24. The letter explained that the 'man in red' was targeting EZIC agents in Kolechia. This can be seen in connection with the EZIC agent Marie Escalli's comment. She said that the 'man in red' is not a threat, which could imply that not everyone in EZIC agrees on the decisions made in EZIC. She could be an infiltrator, trying to create a distrust to EZIC. EZIC could be lying about the man in red and lying about EZIC agents being targeted. This dilemma shows that EZIC is willing to go to extreme measures to get what they want, which might indicate that they are behind the terror attacks against the booth. As mentioned, on day 31 EZIC decides to attack the border-crossing. EZIC sends the immigration officer a warning at the beginning of this day. The attack aims to take power in Arstotzka and demolish the wall dividing West- (part of Kolechia) and East Grestin (part of Arstotzka). The man who started shooting looks similar to the one who attacked the booth earlier, which can make the player think that EZIC might not have been telling the truth, about not being the ones behind the terrorist attacks. Through these moral dilemmas the pupils get to reflect on morality, and the reliability of EZIC. Both morality and reliability are topics that can be important when assessing a source, and when the player reflects on what kind of organisation EZIC is.



Figure 4.4 Man in Red (Pope, 2013)

In a classroom, the pupils most likely would end up with several different endings. For example, some pupils might do the EZIC tasks, while others decide to stay true to Arstotzka. A discussion could be about why they did, or did not, do the EZIC tasks. Some pupils might find EZIC extreme by using violence as a solution. This discussion could be about how to trust

an organisation in a totalitarian society and how a totalitarian society influences how the individual acts. *Papers, Please* offers an opportunity to participate in a fictional totalitarian society. The player gets to make choices in several different dilemmas before meeting EZIC, which can influence how the player thinks when they decide whether they should help EZIC or not. The game itself does not tell the player what is the correct choice. The correct answer is what the player considers to be true.

In the end screen, most of the endings state “Glory to Arstotzka” (Pope, 2013); however, the end screen on ending 19 says “Glory to the New Arstotzka” (Pope, 2013) because EZIC has gained power in Arstotzka. We do not know what happens after this statement because the game is finished, but this is a bittersweet ending. The word ‘new’ can be seen as no change because they just added the word ‘new’ to the country’s name. It also depends on how the player views EZIC. If the player viewed them as a terrorist organisation, the player can assume that the changes are minimal. If the player viewed them as a freedom fighting organisation, at least they are free from corrupt and totalitarian regime. However, we do know that EZIC has used corruption as a tool to get what they wanted. EZIC and the immigration officer are both taking part in the corruption that happens in the country. As mentioned, EZIC gave the immigration officer money after the first mission. At that time this came as a surprise, because it happens early in the game, at the players are not used to the bribery perspective of the game. It seems that EZIC believes they have to play along with some of the norms in the totalitarian society to get things done. In addition, to get through every level in the game, you must be corrupt because you need the additional money to survive.

4.5.2 Recognising Rhetorical Forms

The rhetorical devices logos, ethos and pathos are devices used in several other types of texts, and is something pupils should have worked on previous to working with *Papers, Please*. This previous knowledge could help pupils begin to reflect on the game instead of having a naïve understanding of video games.

Pupils should be aware of the appeal forms logos, ethos and pathos because they can be used to manipulate the reader to believe in or trust people with specific agendas. In one of the dilemmas in *Papers, Please*, the player must decide whether to help an arrival called Jorji to smuggle drugs across the border or not. In the game the player might have an unconscious bias against the character called Jorji. When the player first meets Jorji he portrays a homeless

person. He seems to not know the laws and regulations connected to get permission to cross the border. Jorji plays on the emotions of the player. He uses pathos. The player does not know that he is smuggling drugs before day 11. The player first gets introduced to Jorji on day three, when he has no passport. He appears several times with the wrong paperwork, but has a positive attitude even when he is denied entrance or is detained. He even sympathises with the difficult job the immigration officer has. He is using the appeal form pathos when he appeals to the player's feelings, which can be seen as a way of manipulating the player to feel sympathetic to Jorji. He further uses logos when the players find out that he is trying to smuggle drugs. Jorji appears again on days 19 and 22, and his body weight did not is not compliance with the weight mentioned in his documents, which leads to the need to take a full body scan. The scan reveals that he was trying to smuggle drugs across the border. Jorji says, "I have a little side business here. You let me through, and I give you something something" (Pope, 2013). He bribes the officer with ten credits, which allows him to enter the county. The logos part of this argument is when he builds his credibility by saying that he has a business, and because of that, he can give me something (assuming credits) if the officer lets him enter. Jorji uses ethos when he gets detained, which can be seen on day 24, when he appears once again. He has the correct papers, but now he was on the wanted list. Upon interrogation, Jorji says he bribes the police officers not to put him on the wanted list. If he gets detained, he explains that it is not a problem because he knows the police officer already and says, "I have little talk with them again. Anyways, you have tough job. I rather sell drugs" (Pope, 2013). Ethos is used as what he says seems credible, due to his relationship to the police. He says he will talk to the police again, which points back to the interrogation when he explained that he bribed the police. In addition, he uses pathos here because he is sympathetic to the immigration officer and recognises that he is only doing his job. The detaining of Jorji does not hold him back for long because he is back on day 29, which confirms that he bribed the police.

These appeal forms can be connected to how people in power get their citizens to believe what they are told. This is not necessarily a bad trait, it is just important to be aware of it, for pupils to effectively analyse someone's argument. The appeal forms can be used to discuss current affairs of alternative facts. Logos, ethos and pathos are all used to convince someone that their argument is correct. Jorji used pathos to let him enter Arstotzka. Jorjis pathos additionally influenced his ethos and logos because Jorji seems trustworthy. Jorji can be used as an example of how someone can be convincing in an argument connected to fake news and how some people can believe people even when they obviously are lying.

The player could think that Jorji would give the immigration officer credits, which he does. He gave the immigration officer a bribe when he tried to cross the border, and on day 31, he gave the officer an additional 40 credits to thank him for helping him. The player does not know that Jorji will do this, but he assumes it because it is a norm in Arstotzka to bribe officials. As a part of the critical thinking aspect of this dilemma, it could be important to discuss who earns money from Jorji's drug business. The player could assume that EZIC earns money from Jorji's smuggling. If EZIC is a terror organisation, it is not uncommon for these sorts of organizations to earn money illegally.

One of the dilemmas in *Papers, Please* deals with justice in a totalitarian society. Pupils get the opportunity to discuss what is morally and ethically correct to do, based on the evidence and social norms. On day 29, the newspaper informs the player that a serial child murderer, Simon Wens, has escaped the United Federation¹⁰ prison. On the same day, a man comes by the booth. He explains that Simon Wens murdered his daughter, Julia. He asks if the immigration officer could take Simon's passport and give it to him so he can track down the murderer. The player can assume that the father will revenge his daughter's murder. Wens arrived on day 30. The dilemma here is whether the immigration officer should help the father. This dilemma can be connected to the section about *critical thinking and ethical awareness* in the core curriculum. The goal of this section is to enable pupils to reflect, judge and evaluate in their everyday life (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.7).

One of the main questions is whether the player believes Simon deserves the death penalty and if it is ethically correct to help the father carry this out. This relates to the dilemma of the question of who has the moral responsibility and right to decide someone's fate. In this dilemma, it would help the pupils to try to see the father's, the Arstotzkan government's and Simon's perspective. One of the goals in the core curriculum is social learning and development, which focuses on the ability to understand what others think, feel and experience with a basis of empathy (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.11).

The dilemma of whether the player should help the father can be seen in context to the moral question about what a life is worth and the topic of death penalty, which could be discussed in a classroom. In general, extra judicial punishments are not a good sign for a society. Simon

¹⁰ Fictional neighbour country of Arstotzka

was not sentenced to the death penalty by the United Federation court. However, the father of Julia believes that Simon deserves the death penalty. The father does not trust that the legal state of the United Federation is able to punish Simon as the father sees fit. The father did not say explicitly that he would kill Simon. However, the player could assume that the father will do so. The father's moral code is based on the principle of an eye for an eye. He also believes that the prison punishment did not fit the crime of killing his daughter.

The player could ask themselves if they trust the legal- and court system in a totalitarian society. They could take the father's perspective, who, as mentioned, does not trust the legal system to punish Simon. Simon could be framed for doing something he did not do, which could be why he escaped the prison. This could also be seen as a reason for not trusting the legal system in the United Federation. If the player believes that Simon was framed, they could let him enter Arstotzka without taking the passport from him. This would be to disobey the laws in Arstotzka, because one of the rules at this point in the game is to not let wanted criminals enter the country. The player could decide to trust the verdict and detain Simon. He will be sent back to prison. This decision would be based on loyalty to Arstotzka, and the trust of the legal system in Arstotzka.

The dilemma relies heavily on pathos. It is far more emotional to discuss children in a context like the one in this dilemma, which could make the player base their decision purely on emotions, and the player might choose differently if Simon was charged as a serial killer of adults. This clearly intended to evoke a complete lack of empathy for the criminal from the player. The dilemma is purely one of the role of the state and of individuals in the process of justice. Julia's father could also be driven by a fatherly responsibility, and a feeling that he failed to protect his daughter. The father is feeling helpless and scared. The man who killed his daughter has escaped, and there is nothing stopping Simon from killing again.

This dilemma could be discussed in connection with how the Norwegian legal system handled the terrorist¹¹ after his attack on July 22nd in Oslo and at Utøya. The terrorist did one of the worst things a human can do, to attack and kill children. However, in the trial, he was treated as any other human. He had good legal representation, and the verdict was fair and based on the evidence and Norwegian law. In *Papers, Please*, both the totalitarian society and the moral

¹¹ I chose not to use his name as a political statement and in respect to his victims.

code of the father could make the player question the court's verdict on Simon. In 2022 the Norwegian court administration had a survey asking Norwegians if they trusted the Norwegian courts. 87% of those that answered said that they trust Norwegian courts (Norges Domstoler, 2022). This indicates that we rarely question verdicts in Norwegian courts.

One of the big topics in *Papers, Please* is immigration. Throughout the game, the player gets to meet several people with different backstories on why they left their homeland. The stories are about people being persecuted, having bad living conditions, and not trusting the government. The people telling these stories usually have incomplete or incorrect paperwork. These immigrants are using pathos to get accepted for entrance. In a classroom, this topic can be connected to how rich countries, including Norway, deals with immigration. One of several current discussions is about children that were born in Norway but get sent out of Norway because their parents lied when they came to Norway. Children born to parents that are applying for asylum get citizenship from where the parents are from, which means that if the parents get denied the right to remain in Norway, the whole family are sent back to the country they fled from (Skatteetaten, n.d.). Another discussion is about the time spent on their application, and that people can wait several years to get an answer whether they can stay in Norway, which makes it difficult when their application gets denied because they are now established in Norway. The topic of immigration is difficult because it is a decision that decides people's destinies. The game puts the player in a situation where they decide these destinies.

A topic that could be discussed linked to the topic of immigration is whether the media are politically polarized on this topic and why it is so. This topic could be discussed in the classroom before playing *Papers, Please*, because, in the game, the pupils are the ones deciding if immigrants and refugees are allowed into Arstotzka. After playing the game, they could reflect on their own opinion on immigration and how difficult it can be on an emotional level and legally, which could explain the polarisation in the media. Studying British and US newspapers (tabloid and broadsheet, different political sides etc.) shows how these debates are rooted in language. For example, an article by the Mirror (a left-wing British tabloid) talks about the 'dehumanising' language used by politicians around immigration (Fleet Street Fox, 2023)

Another current topic that could be discussed in relation to the dilemma about immigrants in *Papers, Please* are Donald Trump and Mexican immigrants. In June 2015 Donald Trump

announced his candidacy for the president election in US. In his announcement speech he described immigrants that are crossing the border from Mexico as dangerous (Bump, 2022). He was generalising and exploiting peoples fears, contributing to polarising the debate about Mexican immigrants in the US.

It is important to know the historical context to try to understand what others have experienced. The core curriculum has a section about social learning and development, which explains that the basis for empathy is "...to understand what others think, feel, and experience..." (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017, p.11). This could help pupils to challenge the stereotypes they have created. Stereotypes are formed over time by our culture and are created of pieces of information to 'make sense' of the world by categorising people and situations (Jones & Quach, 2007, p.2). Further, a stereotype can either be positive or negative. In connection to *Papers, Please*, some of the pupils playing, might have created stereotypes about characters similar to the ones in the game. For example, when the player first meets Jorji he look like a poor man who lives on the street. The player could be thinking that he is unfriendly by the look of him, but as mentioned earlier he is quite friendly. The awareness of stereotypes can be connected to current discussions about immigration. The people trying to enter sometimes explain that their living situation in the country they came from was terrible. One example is the dilemma if the player should let a woman with a missing document enter. On day 5, a man comes to the booth, he has the proper paperwork, but he says that his wife, will arrive later and she does not have the correct paperwork. The wife comes to the booth and does not have an entry permit. If she gets asked for her entry permit, she will desperately ask to enter the country because someone from Antegrians¹² (which is where the woman is from) will kill her. She gives no reason for why someone would kill her. The player could let the woman enter based on empathy for her situation, believing that the woman is safe in Arstotzka. However, the player could decide to decline her based on the missing document and assume that her story is a lie.

In a classroom discussion, it could be discussed why the woman would seek refuge in a totalitarian society, which could help the pupils see the women's perspective. The pupil could see that totalitarianism is not all bad, it does have some positive sides (for example, it is effective, when it comes to decision making, because they do not have to listen to everyone's

¹² The People form Antegria (one of the neighbour countries)

opinion). Another argument is that because it is totalitarian state, the woman might feel safe there because the government tries to control everything happening in the country. However, the woman could have said the name of the person that wanted to kill her and if he had followed her to the border, it would be possible to look out for them. This dilemma can additionally be connected to the skill of critically assessing sources. This dilemma can be discussed from the perspective of believing the woman is lying or if she is telling the truth. There is no correct answer because there is no possibility in the game to ask her more questions than what is premeditated in the game.

5. Conclusion and summary

This thesis has demonstrated how the video game: *Papers, Please* can be employed to help develop critical literacy skills in Norwegian upper secondary school. A video game is a part of active learning, where pupils actively need to take part in playing the game, compared to passively reading for example a novel. The video game *Papers, Please* has several themes, dilemmas and several endings making it well suited to develop critical literacy. The game can be linked to several topics that directly are connected to critical literacy, which are ideology, power and social relations. The English subject curriculum for vg1 mentions that teachers need to use video games for teaching critical literacy.

Papers, Please, was chosen for this thesis because the decisions the player has to make and the subsequent consequences they experience, demonstrate the impact of culture and ideology on our behaviours and outlook. These situations are such the player might never experience in real life. The game raises moral questions, and it gives the pupils the opportunity to think critically and explore an unfamiliar society that they may have knowledge about but no previous experience with. The overall teaching perspective of the game is that we are all products of our society (culture and ideology). The game shows that people who live in totalitarian states are victims of their circumstances, and it shows the pupils playing the game that the 'morally good choices' they take throughout the game are also supported by the environment they live in.

The player gets to explore ideology both by participating in the decision making and by discussing dilemmas with others. The topic of ideology can be seen has an impact of the decision making in *Papers, Please*. Ideology is a part pupils out-of-school and in-school experience.

Pupils need to have previous knowledge of the historical context of the game before playing *Papers, Please*. Pupils need to know the references in the video game to the Cold War and knowledge about what a totalitarian society is in order to assess the game critically.

Video games give the pupils a simulated experience which could help them in meeting with others that has a lived experience similar to the one in *Papers, Please*. The players get to explore and experience a society lacking of democratic values and feel how the norms of a society quickly changes the moral compass of the player

The concept of truth becomes vague because of the several endings in the game, seen in relation to the theory of constructivism there is no overall-truth. None of the endings are more valuable than others. The player does not get a special reward for specific endings, which means that all the endings are equally true or correct. The discussions after playing *Papers, Please* would purely be based on the projective identity, and what they morally felt was correct at the time of making the decision in the game. The pupils need to accept each other's choices and endings, and the discussions will help them understand each other's similarities and differences.

The learning theory constructivism could work well when using *Papers, Please* to develop critical literacy skills. The teacher cannot predict what endings the pupils will get, which leads to less predictive discussions. This means that the pupils need to participate in discussion so the teacher can guide them to make connections and reach specific teaching aims. The work on the video game is also time consuming, which gives the teacher the opportunity to adapt if needed to what the pupils need and what they experience.

5.1 Limitations

There are several limitations to the use of *Papers, Please* in the classroom. The limitations should be evaluated by the teacher before deciding to use the video game.

As Spillpedagogene pointed out, there is no common licence to use video games in education in Norway at this time. *Papers, Please* is not free of charge to play. This is a problem with several other games, which is why Spillpedagogene has asked for a national agreement to make it easier to access video games in the same way as teachers can access film, music, and books (Husøy et al., 2022). Further, the teacher should also be aware that pupil's competence in gaming might vary. Some pupils have played a lot of video games, others have not. It could be useful to go through some of the functions of the game before the pupils play it. For example, how to notify when there is false information in documents it is not explicitly explained how that is done in the game.

Papers, Please has an age restriction of 17+. In Norway, there are age-restrictive classifications on video games, but they are only a recommendation (Medietilsynet, 2021). This means that teachers can use it in the classroom for vg1. However, there might be some backlashes from parents/guardians regarding the choice of using this video game.

Papers, Please was released in 2013, that is 10 years ago. The game was quite popular when it was published, winning several awards and getting great reviews. This could indicate that some of the pupils might already have played the game several years ago. This may decrease the motivational value of using this video game for educational purposes. Pupils that have already played the game, can on the other hand be a resource to pupils that are struggling to understand what to do in the game, and they might have played through several endings, which could give a unique reflection on what is the 'correct' thing to do in this game. In addition, just because they have played through the game does not mean that they have critically assessed the game, or knows how to critical asses it.

Another limitation could be that some pupils might be immature and not benefit as wanted from playing *Papers, Please*. This is a judgment the teacher needs to take based on how well the teacher knows the pupils in the class. The teacher could chose a different game, that suits better for the maturity level of the pupils in the class, or only chose specific parts of the game.

5.2 Further reasurch

This thesis is purely theoretical, and the usefulness of the video game *Papers, Please* to teach critical literacy has not been tested in on pupils in a classroom. The video game is some years old, but the games themes are still relevant and the way the game is designed makes it interesting to see if *Papers, Please* could work well in the English subject in vg1 to develop critical literacy. This could provide information about obstacles and other findings by using this game, which was not be foreseen in this thesis. Did the game in fact help pupils develop critical literacy? How do you assess critical literacy in the context of working with video games? Is it possible to assess critical literacy? These are questions that could be further researched.

It could also be interesting to explore how other games worked in the English subject when working with critical literacy. Games like *Detriot: Become Human*, *Heavy Rain* and *Twelve Minutes* all have multiple endings, which could be interesting to research in the English subject to develop critical literacy.

Another possibility could be to explore if *Papers, Please* helped pupil develop other skills. It would be interesting to research if video games actually can help pupils to be better at reading in their L2 as Brevik's research indicates. Is the assumption of the pupils in Brevik's research

correct, were they better at reading in their L2 because of out-of school gaming? There is assumably a great potential of using video games in education, and according to the curriculum teachers shall use video games in the English subject, therefore video games should be further researched as a tool in the English subject in the context of the Norwegian classroom. Overall there would be useful to research the function of using video games in the Norwegian classroom.

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