

ESRC Festival of Social Science University of Sheffield

School of Education

Event 4. Young children's literacy practices in virtual worlds

Speaker: Professor Jackie Marsh

Wednesday 11th March 2009 – 5.00pm to 6.30pm
University of Sheffield, School of Education, 388 Glossop Road, Sheffield, S10 2JA

In this talk, I will outline findings from a study in which young children's engagement with virtual worlds was examined. Commercially-produced virtual worlds have become increasingly popular with children aged from 4-11, but there has, as yet, been little consideration of the ways in which children are using the worlds and the educational implications of this. In the study outlined in this talk, a survey of 175 children aged 5-11 was undertaken in which their use of virtual worlds was explored. This was followed by a series of interviews with groups of children and observations of three children using the worlds in their homes. Findings indicate that use of virtual worlds is extensive by this age group and that there are numerous opportunities for literacy practices to be undertaken. In addition, issues of identity, gender and commercialism are paramount. The implications of these findings for early years and primary educators are considered.