

This paper examines how a shared metalanguage of digital play can empower every learner's voice by making literacy practices visible, discussable, and socially meaningful. Drawing on Toh and Lim's (2021) Metalanguage Framework, the study analyses adolescents' participation in a multi-phase Minecraft program to explore how learners use language, multimodal design, and social interaction to express identity, think critically, and build literacy-rich communities.

Using qualitative data from gameplay recordings, reflective walkthroughs, interviews, and student artefacts, the analysis focuses on how learners engage in meaning-making through representation, organisation, and engagement. Findings show that students' literacy practices extend well beyond print, encompassing spatial design, visual symbolism, embodied action, technical explanation, and collaborative dialogue. Through personalised builds and environmental storytelling, learners articulated autobiographical identities and cultural values, positioning themselves as authors, designers, and narrators. Organisational talk around rules, systems, and strategies revealed sophisticated disciplinary literacies, including systems thinking, procedural reasoning, and metalinguistic awareness.

Crucially, learner voice emerged most strongly through negotiation and dialogue. During collaborative gameplay, students used language to propose ideas, justify decisions, challenge interpretations, and coordinate collective action. These interactions enabled learners to be heard, recognised, and valued within the community, particularly those whose strengths were multimodal, technical, or relational rather than traditionally text-based. Emotional engagement and perspective-taking further amplified voice, as learners evaluated actions, expressed affect, and reflected on shared experiences.

The paper argues that metalanguage plays a critical role in empowering learner voice by providing a common vocabulary for naming literacy practices that often remain invisible in classrooms. By legitimising multimodal, social, and embodied forms of meaning-making, the framework supports inclusive literacy pedagogy that values diverse ways of communicating and knowing. In doing so, it "lights the way" for literacy education that amplifies student voice, fosters critical awareness, and builds strong learning communities through shared language and collaborative play.