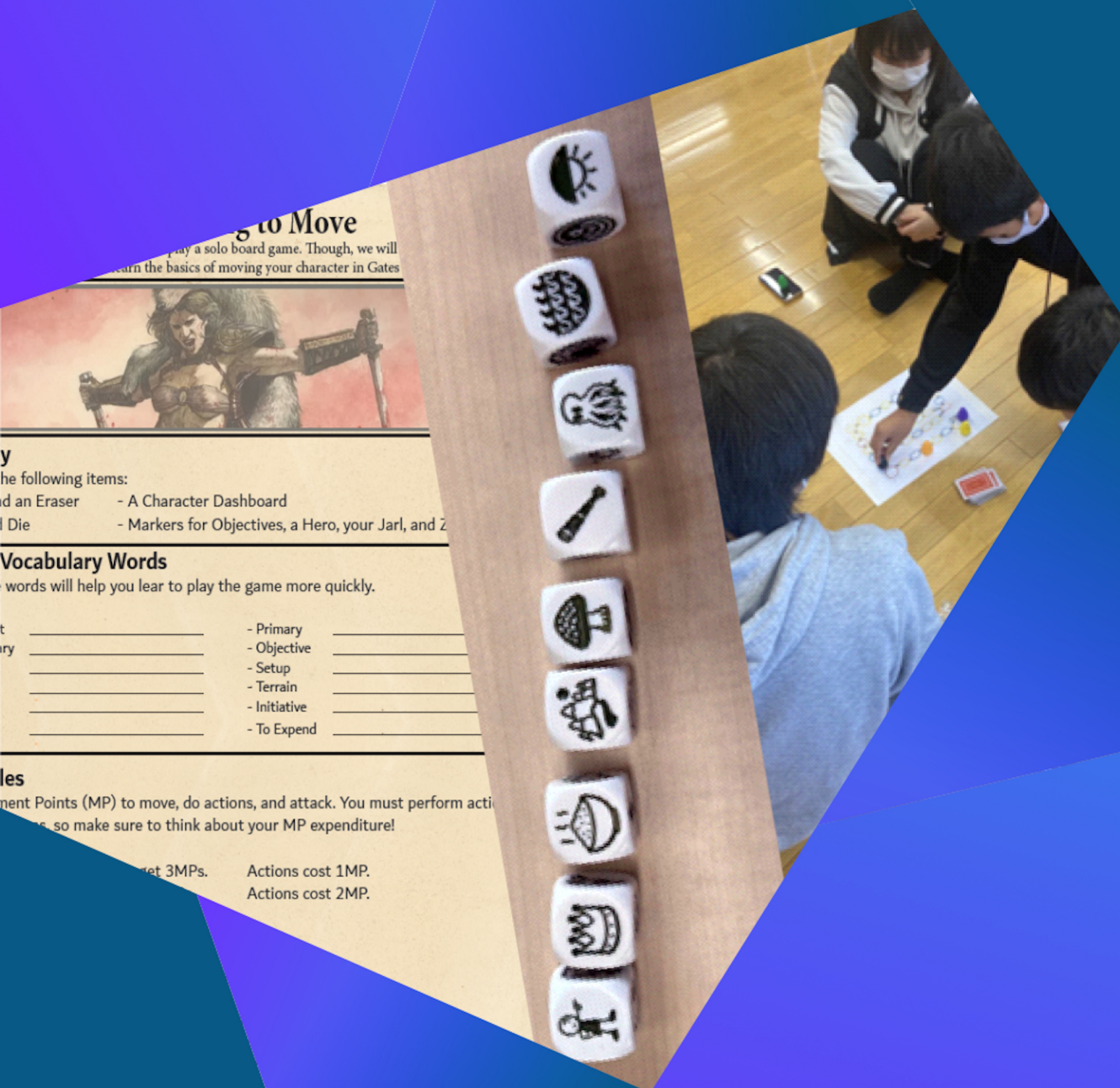




Ludic Language Pedagogy

LLPx 2025 Symposium



Post-Conference
Publication



Introduction

We are excited to present the first ever LLPx Symposium Post-Conference Publication, a collection of papers presented by academics and educators worldwide at LLPx. LLPx is the annual conference for the Ludic Language Pedagogy non-profit, where we bring people together to focus on the intersection of games and language education. At LLP, we encourage using games and play in language education, and collectively look for solutions to those challenges which teachers regularly encounter when teaching language.

We believe that games can provide different and meaningful interactions during education, and encourage their use in classroom settings. LLPers from all around the world have come together to identify ways to overcome resource constraints and effectively deploy game-based learning in their process.

This year's conference theme was 'Playgrounds and Play'. Playgrounds are created spaces in which many different types of play and learning can happen, and we took this conference as an opportunity to imagine classroom environments as playgrounds themselves. From concept to execution, bringing game-based learning to the classroom is both a challenging and impactful objective, one in which the LLP community has succeeded greatly.

The papers in this publication focus on a variety of game types, from using video games and modern consoles to traditional board games, all in order to provide new contexts and situations for language students to experiment in, learn from, and have fun with.

We hope you'll enjoy reading these publications as much as we have enjoyed working with their authors, and hearing about their different experiences in using games as a vehicle for education. It is clear that the initial successes detailed in these papers are just that, initial, and there is much more success to be had.

We couldn't be more excited for the future of game-based language education.

Melinda Máthé
Jonathan deHaan
James York
Randall Waltz-Wills

LLPx Chairs and Organizers



Program

1000	Welcome James York, Meiji University
1010	Keynote Supporting Teachers on Their Ludic Journey Melinda Máthé, University of Stockholm
1030	Playground Presentation Ludic by Design: Integrating Digital Games into an ESL Curriculum to Foster Engagement and Joy Carlos Henrique Rodrigues Valadares, PhD Student at Federal University of Minas Gerais; Temporary Lecturer at Federal University of Viçosa
1100	Playground Presentation Reviewing critical frameworks for a critically oriented digital game education Alex Bacalja, The University of Melbourne
1130	Game/play show and play Emoji Story Prompts Mark L. W. Johnson, Kochi University
1200	10 minute break
1210	Playground Presentation Reviewing a one-year deployment of a Nintendo Switch in a Self-Access Learning Center Derrick Wong, Reitaku University
1240	Game/play show and play Playing Jackbox Party Packs to Practice Authentic English in the Classroom Jermaine Mizusawa, Ryutsu Keizai University
1310	LUNCH BREAK
1400	Playground Presentation *Fitting the pieces together: People, stories, and games Mark L.W. Johnson, Kochi University
1430	Game/play show and play Medical English Escape Room Martin Sedaghat, Niigata University of Health and Welfare
1500	15 minute break
1515	Playground Presentation Running a seminar class as a game design studio James York, Meiji University



1545	Game of the Year awards
1605	Playground Presentation Game-based Learning and Vocabulary Acquisition through In-class RPG Activities and Printouts James Dunn, School of Law, Meiji University
1635	Playground Presentation Reimagining Tombola: A Cross-Cultural Experience for Italian Teaching Petra Khalil, Alumna of Università Roma Tre
1715	Reflection
1800	Closing message James York and Melinda Máthé



Call for Papers

Ludic Language Pedagogy Annual Symposium 2025

Where

Ludic Language Pedagogy Discord <https://discord.gg/je9QZsnntf>

How to participate (presenters, audience) on the day:

In the LLP Discord video channel [here](#).

When

Saturday, March 15, 2025
10:00am to 6:00pm (Japan time)
See the [schedule](#) below

Who

Anyone. We invite anyone to play with us at the symposium.

How to submit a proposal

Edit [this google document](#) by January 29, 2025

Overview:

We welcome submissions to the annual symposium of teaching, learning, research, design, theory, musings and more of **Ludic Language Pedagogy**. The mission of Ludic Language Pedagogy is to promote open, scholarly and practical conversations around purposeful and progressive uses of games and play in language teaching and learning.

Ludic	Keywords such as but not limited to: play, technologies, genres, simulation, roleplay, design, game cultures and communities, etc.
Language	Keywords such as but not limited to: first languages (L1s), second and foreign languages (L2s), literacy, multimodality, literature, discourse, etc. and
Pedagogy	Keywords such as but not limited to: curriculum, goals, student needs and differences, teacher roles, activities and materials, debriefing, assessment, extracurricular learning, educational philosophies, etc.

<https://llpjjournal.org/>

The 2025 Annual Symposium's theme is "Playgrounds and Play."

Playgrounds are created spaces in which many different types of play and learning can happen. In order to encourage different and meaningful learning to happen more in education, the Symposium will explore the idea of classrooms and learning environments as playgrounds in which teachers need to give their students SPACE (Safe, Participation, Agency, Critical, Experiences) to play. But teachers also operate within limitations and constraints, such as policies, money, knowledge, time, culture, technologies and more. How do you take or make SPACE for your students in the constraints that you teach in? How do you use [delicious](#) (MMM, get it?) [methods, materials and mediation](#) (see [York and deHaan, 2021](#) for more information) to make SPACE and play? That's what we want to know! See [submission type 1 below!](#) ([link](#))

In addition to presentations on different ways of playing with delicious pedagogical ingredients within constraints in education, we also welcome presentations of ludic objects (games, forms of play, art and other things) and the ludic in you (your activities and attitudes and actions with objects and ideas). **Submission type 2** ([link](#)) asks you to share ludic things and actions, to explain why these things are important for play and also for pedagogy, and then to help us experience them and level up our ludic literacy, too!

Cost:

Free!

😊 because play should have as few barriers as possible!
Thanks for making the time to play and talk with us!



Participants

Melinda Máthé, Ph.D. student and teaching
assistant, Stockholm University, JSPS Fellow
at University of Shizuoka Game Lab

LLPx Chair

Jonathan deHaan, Associate Professor,
University of Shizuoka

LLPx Chair

Alex Bacalja, The University of Melbourne

Presenter, Peer Reviewer

James Dunn, School of Law, Meiji University

Presenter, Peer Reviewer

Mark Johnson, Kochi University

Presenter, Peer Reviewer

Petra Khalil, Alumna of Università Roma Tre

Presenter, Peer Reviewer

Jermaine Mizusawa, Ryutsu Keizai University

Presenter, Peer Reviewer

Martin Sedaghat, Niigata University of Health
and Welfare

Presenter, Peer Reviewer

Carlos Valadares, PhD Student at Federal
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Lecturer at Federal University of Viçosa

Presenter, Peer Reviewer

Derrick Wong, Reitaku University

Presenter, Peer Reviewer

James York, Meiji University

Presenter, Peer Reviewer



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Keynote: Supporting Teachers on Their Ludic Journey

Melinda Máthé

University of Stockholm

DOI: https://doi.org/10.55853/CP1_1

Much has been written in research about digital games as powerful learning tools (Gee, 2003; Bogost, 2007; Shaffer, 2006; Kafai & Burke, 2015), but far less attention has been given to the people who make those learning experiences possible: the teachers. In the Digital Games-based Learning (DGBL) literature, teachers and their 'practice-based use of digital games have been underrepresented. Inspired by Hattie's (2003) meta-analysis, which found that teacher effectiveness has a far greater impact on learning than games, in my previous research, I focused on how teachers engage with, resist, or adopt digital games in their practice. My research began with a simple question: If teachers are central to student learning, why are they so often peripheral in DGBL research?

Sweden, where my research is based, offers a relevant context: while the national curriculum prescribes broad learning goals, teachers and schools have substantial autonomy in choosing materials and pedagogical approaches. In this environment, however, digital tools have often been introduced through a "push-driven" logic (Player-Koro, 2012), where external visions of innovation have been promoted without always aligning with teachers' needs or realities. Such discourse fails to acknowledge the struggles of technology use in schools, with a common conclusion that schools do not live up to expectations because teachers lack interest or skills. In DGBL, this discourse is described as the teacher deficit model, which claims that teachers have problematic attitudes and thus do not implement games in effective ways (Linderöth & Sjöblom, 2019). To better understand the landscape, I used Activity Theory (AT) (Engeström & Sannino, 2021) to analyze how teachers engage with DGBL. AT is a systems-oriented framework that helps to explore how tools, rules, community, and division of labor shape an activity. It is particularly suited to examining the tensions that arise when innovative tools meet established routines.

In my talk, I draw on results from previous studies described in "Mapping the Landscape of Digital Games-Based Learning in Swedish Compulsory and Upper Secondary Schools (Mathe M., 2020). The studies investigate how teachers across subject areas approach teaching with games based on interviews and a survey of 181 teachers in Sweden. Today, I would like to present three illustrative cases grounded in patterns from that dataset that reflect distinct trajectories of teachers engaging with games.



The first case is that of Astrid, an experienced teacher interested in digital games. She sees pedagogical potential, particularly in games that deal with social issues, but has not yet used them in her teaching. Her reasons are not about lack of will or negative attitudes; she is eager to learn more. But she expressed a need for more practical knowledge, clearer pedagogical approaches, and opportunities to exchange ideas with colleagues. If teaching with games were a game itself, Astrid would be at the starting line, interested and attentive, but still holding back from pressing “start.” Astrid’s position, thus, can be described not as resistance but as a cautious standpoint. Her case reflects the cluster described in the study as “non-game-using teachers”—those who have not implemented games in their practice, but express openness toward future use. These teachers are interested and see the potential of games for learning, yet may lack the personal experience, confidence, tools, or structural support. In AT terms, this reflects tension between the object (pedagogical innovation) and the available mediating tools, and community structures.

Johanna’s case reflects the “skeptics” cluster identified in the study; teachers who have experimented with digital games but discontinued their use after encountering limitations or questioning their pedagogical value. Johanna teaches in a secondary school, where she introduced her class to a series of short educational digital games tied to curriculum content. The games have been delivered via a platform incorporating leaderboards and tracking students’ play progress. Her initial motivation was to boost student engagement with the subject matter and encourage practice through digital games. While the games seemed promising initially, she noticed a gradual decline in student interest. Assigning games as homework did not yield the outcomes she hoped for, and eventually, she phased the games out of her teaching. If we continue the game metaphor, Johanna played a few levels of a bad game, which she then quit due to a lack of perceived payoff. From an AT perspective, her experience points to a breakdown between the object of pedagogical innovation and the effectiveness of the mediating artifact—the games themselves.

Jonas represents the “advanced adopters” cluster from the study: teachers who have integrated games but face barriers in sustaining or scaling these efforts. Jonas, an English teacher, brought a commercially available narrative game into his classroom for English literacy development. Collaborating with colleagues in Norway and Canada, he ran a five-week project where students analyzed the game alongside other texts, explored and analyzed thematic strands (like music, character, and setting), worked in international project groups, and interviewed the game developers. His project was ambitious, well-received, and pedagogically rich. But it came at a cost. Jonas coordinated the licensing, purchasing, and lesson design, which often required him to



use his time and resources. While the project succeeded on pedagogical terms, he expressed hesitation about repeating it in the same form, due to the high level of preparation and resources it required. AT helps make sense of these tensions: in his case, the object of pedagogical innovation clashed with a lack of community structures and resources.

Across these three cases, and in the broader survey data, a key theme emerges: teachers are not passive adopters or resisters of technology. They are thoughtful practitioners navigating complex educational systems. Their use of games in teaching is shaped not only by personal beliefs but by the institutional structures, resources, and discourses that surround them. Activity Theory allows us to move beyond simple explanations like "teacher resistance" or "innovation gaps." Instead, it invites us to examine the misalignments between different components of the games-based learning activity system: the goals teachers have, the rules they must follow, the communities they belong to, and the tools and resources they can access.

While these cases are not subject-specific, the tensions they reveal are relevant across disciplines. Language educators may recognize similar tensions in navigating institutional constraints while striving to create playful, meaningful learning experiences. These insights offer a broader understanding of how teacher agency and systemic support shape the viability of game-based teaching in varied educational contexts.

The cases highlight that teachers interact with games along multiple trajectories: some are cautiously interested, some may turn skeptical, and some are highly invested but constrained. Teachers' trajectories are shaped by more than their individual preferences; they reflect systemic conditions. Activity Theory can help analyze and make sense of the systemic tensions. Rather than focusing on attitudes or competencies alone, it helps to shift attention to the structural alignments that make playful pedagogy possible. Finally, it reminds us that in any discussion about games in education, we must include the voices of teachers not just as implementers, but as co-designers, critics, and agents of change.

As researchers, we must ask, how can we better meet teachers where they are, providing support that acknowledges their unique challenges? And while much of the current research focuses on digital games, what might we gain by broadening our perspective to include the full spectrum of ludic learning.



Ludic by Design: Integrating Digital Games into an ESL Curriculum to Foster Engagement and Joy

Carlos Valadares

PhD Student at Federal University of Minas Gerais; Temporary Lecturer at Federal University of Viçosa

DOI: https://doi.org/10.55853/CP1_2

Short Summary:

This paper reflects on my year-long praxis as a temporary lecturer in an ESL course for the Language Teaching program at the Federal University of Viçosa. To enhance the curricular requirements, I integrated a “Ludic topic” with digital games, designing activities that engaged students both within and around games (York et al, 2021). A post-term questionnaire revealed students’ perceptions: enhanced speaking confidence, collaborative learning, and joyful engagement emerged as key benefits, with many noting how games contextualized language practice. Challenges included passive participation in group settings and occasional misalignment between game mechanics and linguistic goals. Students suggested diversifying game types, pre-class surveys to align with interests, and extending gameplay across multiple sessions to deepen language exploration. Their feedback underscores the potential of LLP to balance curricular rigor with affective, meaningful, student-centered learning.

Constraints plus the who and what of the teaching context

Context (Where do you work? What kind of institution? What is your role? etc.)	Languages Department at a Federal University - Public institution. Entirely free, but there's higher expectations on learning outcomes and excellency. I'm a temp lecturer of English as Second Language (L2) - with an elective on “language teaching and technology”.
Students (goals, wants, needs, knowledge, skills, hobbies, hates, worries)	Mostly young adults (see data below), teachers-to-be, intermediate-advanced language learners. Instead of pen and paper, they mostly use tablets, phones and pdfs. They all have their own styles and backgrounds. Their lingering question is “What will become of me after graduating?”
How much freedom do you have? (What can you do? What can't you do? Why? Who do you need to ask? What will they say?)	A lot. Curriculum? Besides a recommended textbook and topics to be discussed, I can change the way that I teach something based on whatever works best for the class. No need to talk with the administrative body. Tests? I write my own, and I choose to select interesting and contextualized themes for it. - This doesn't mean it's free for all. Students can escalate any issues to the department head or student-driven organizations. - And, as a temporary lecturer, I cannot participate on committees or ask for



	grants, or any other teaching body decisions. It's mostly a teaching position.
Language (goals) (the goals of your course or curriculum, what you must teach, what you want to teach, what students need to know, etc.)	The classes shown here were from a course of “English Language IV” and “English Language V”. Topics range from “the present perfect tense” passing through the “passive voice” and “relative clauses”. (A2 - B2 IELTS). I wanted to add a more meaningful experience (as in, a new view into the ways that language teaching is deeply related to teacher and learners' own context) to the classes, so I added a “ludic topic” to the classes schedule. At the end (or beginning) of each textbook unit, I would dedicate a class to play/do something with a (digital) game. There were smiles and intrigued faces whenever I walked through the corridors with a game controller in hand.

There were smiles and intrigued faces
whenever I walked through the corridors
with a game controller in hand.

How do you create SPACE in the methods, materials and mediation of your teaching and learning playground?

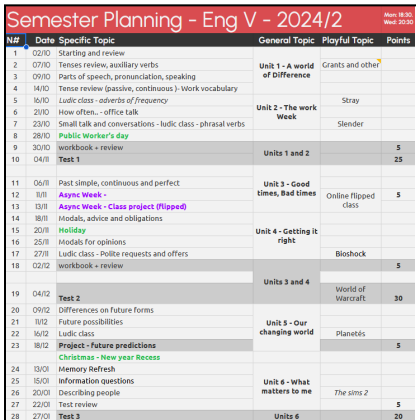
	Methods	Materials	Mediation
Safe: learning from failure, inclusive, competence, supportive	A topic review class prior to any test. Give voice to students' worries and needs (be it about the classes or not). Show the humane in “humanities”.	A teacher that recognizes how challenging academia – and language learning – can be. Classes plan as shared document that students could check prior to each class or test	I listened to their needs and the things that happened to them. Class planning could be changed per request of all students. Made a secure environment to allow themselves to express their feelings.
Participation: society, community, choice, self-direction, culture	- Group work in-class. - In-person participation was not connected to grading. - No prizes, whatsoever. I want to foster golden teaching moments (Lunenberg et al, 2007).	Community-building efforts: Group photos, “party” classes, class-suggested themes to study.	
Agency: autonomy, freedom, dialogue, interaction	● Online (async) deliveries of homework and projects via a moodle platform ● All materials for the classes are available beforehand, along with each class theme and topic. ● Slides are made available after each class.		



	• Late deliveries had softer grading penalties. • Seek a common goal in the chosen games; Avoid using competitive games (or at least using the ones with group cooperation);	
Critical: challenge, reflective, interdisciplinary, purposeful	On every class: Why are we learning this? Is it useful to you? Is it useful to society? Why do you want to become a teacher? What is our fight? How do we win against prejudice and inequality?	PedML practices (New London Group, 1966; Cope, Kalantzis, 2015), along with Freire's ideas on Epistemological Curiosity (Freire, 2011). Critical thinking materials: world news, tweets, things that happened in the city; games as a reflex (or contrast) of society.
Experiences: relatedness, identity, relevant, meaningful	I give examples on my own learning process and my own life as an undergrad at the university, along with the experiences that made me be where I am now. I foster the understanding that not all teaching is perfect, and that even with good MMM, things might not work as planned.	

On every class:
Why are we learning this? Is it useful to you? Is it useful to society?

The teaching and learning

What we do (teaching and learning)	What is the result (learning/outcomes/actions)
The classes` plan (with a ludic topic) 	• Students are eager to try new things (and they explicitly ask about it!). • Help students organize their own lives around what they need to be prepared for. • Compels me (the teacher) to actually work and research ways to integrate those games. • Sometimes, even students that were not enrolled in the classes would come to watch and play.
My goals for integrating games on my classes: • Testing new ways to teach with different game genres • Adapting, overcoming, not accepting the norm as the way that things should only be done (Is there really only one way for teaching this? How could I improve? Will my students like it?) • Creating a new generation of critical-thinking, creative, inventive teachers.	



The actual classes and activities

The following is a brief explanation of the methods and procedures of each class, followed by links to the classes  or to the websites and games  used. A rough estimate of the time spent on planning and gameplay is included.

English IV (2024-1):

- Class 5 - [Akinator](#) 

Planning time - less than 10m. Play time - 10- 15m (a game for warming-up the class)

- Just play
- Point out insights on the vocabulary and grammatical structure used during/after gameplay.

- Class 6 - [Papers, Please](#) 

Planning time - 30m to 1 hour. Explaining rules, game origin, etc: 10-20m. Play time: 30 - 50m (lots of replayability and debriefing)

- Adaptation of the game into a physical setting
- Imagination play: Students were given fake “passports” and had to enter the “country” (classroom) by being asked specific questions about their identity (random students were assigned as inspectors).
- Analysis of language usage on each game turn + overall conceptions at the end.

- Class 12 - [Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes](#) 

Planning time - 30m to 1 hour. Explaining rules, presenting vocabulary, etc: 20m - 30m.

Play time: 45m (or as long as they want!)

- Overt game instruction before playing
- Play the game: Class is divided into groups of 5; one student goes to the computer, while the others look for clues in the printed manual.
- Monitor L2 speaking output during each turn.
 - It was common to see students relying on the first language in the beginning, but on a second run, they got confident in using L2 communication.

- Class 15 - [Fallout Series](#)  + [Two rooms and a boom](#) 

Planning time - 1h to 1h:30 (Lots of research for this one). Explaining game rules, 10m.

Play time: 30m (Keep in mind that the class itself is 1h:40m long! 30m is for the game itself.)

- Social, historical and critical analysis of the 50's America and its portrayal in the Fallout game series;
- Students worked with textual materials around the game – wikis, screenshots, the TV show.
- “Two rooms and a boom” was played to foster spontaneous communication, while keeping in the same context of the class.

- Class 19 - [Gartic Phone](#) 

Planning time - 5m (Just choose a theme). Explaining game rules, 5m (not much to do here). Play time: 20m(On bigger classrooms – more than 10 students – consider customizing the game for only 4 or 6 turns, otherwise it takes too long to end).



- This was a class focused on vocabulary learning. The post-game overview allows for a moment of reflection and feedback on their writing/sentence structuring.

English V (2024-2)

- Class 5 - [Stray](#)  (Gameplay video [Here](#) )

Planning time - 1h:30 (Besides downloading, adjusting settings and controllers). Explaining game rules, 5m. Play time: around 15m (The game itself is not the focus, only the discussion that can happen about it.)

- One of my “Halloween month” classes
- Pre-game communicative topics
- During-game grammatical/comprehension activity sheet based on the character’s actions and game environment.

- Class 7 - [Slenderman](#)  (Game [here](#) )

Planning time - 1h:30 (Download game assets, spread around the building, designing activities, running the game...). Explaining game rules, 5m. Play time: 10m for the game itself; 20m for hunting pages around.

- Discussion on “creepypastas” and the “slender man” myth
- Grammar activities between discussions and gameplay
- The original game was played as a way to experience the new before transferring it to a physical setting.
- The actual paper sheets of the game (along with a sequence of sentences related to the class) was printed and hidden in the corridors of the language department building (the classes were at night, so it became extra scary)
- Students needed to find all the pages before running out of time.

- Class 10 - [Bioshock](#) 

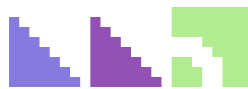
Planning time - 2h (Watching the first level of the game, taking screenshots, creating alternative endings...) Play time: whole class (We used the game’s plot to create activities and explain language around it.)

- Created a “choose your own adventure” type of class. Students read the story and tried to find the correct directions to progress. Each slide allowed for a moment of discussion on which direction was the right one.
 - Listening, writing and grammar activities were integrated with the other parts of the gameplay, culminating in the “would you kindly” dialogue of the game.

- Class 13 - [Planetés](#) 

- Printed the worksheets and followed the game instructions:
- Planning time - 15m (The flyer says “it’s intended to be played without any prior preparation”. Now I think it just meant no extra materials to print or use).
- Explained game rules as instructed by the flyer (on each turn).
- Play time: whole class (Had to finish it early because there was no time to replay certain parts.)

- Class 16 - [The Sims 2](#)  (Character Creation)



Planning time - 1h (Playing the game to get some screenshots, planning the activities around it) Play time: 20m (Just enough to create a character with students.)

- Small activity of playing with “descriptions” and physical / emotional characteristics.

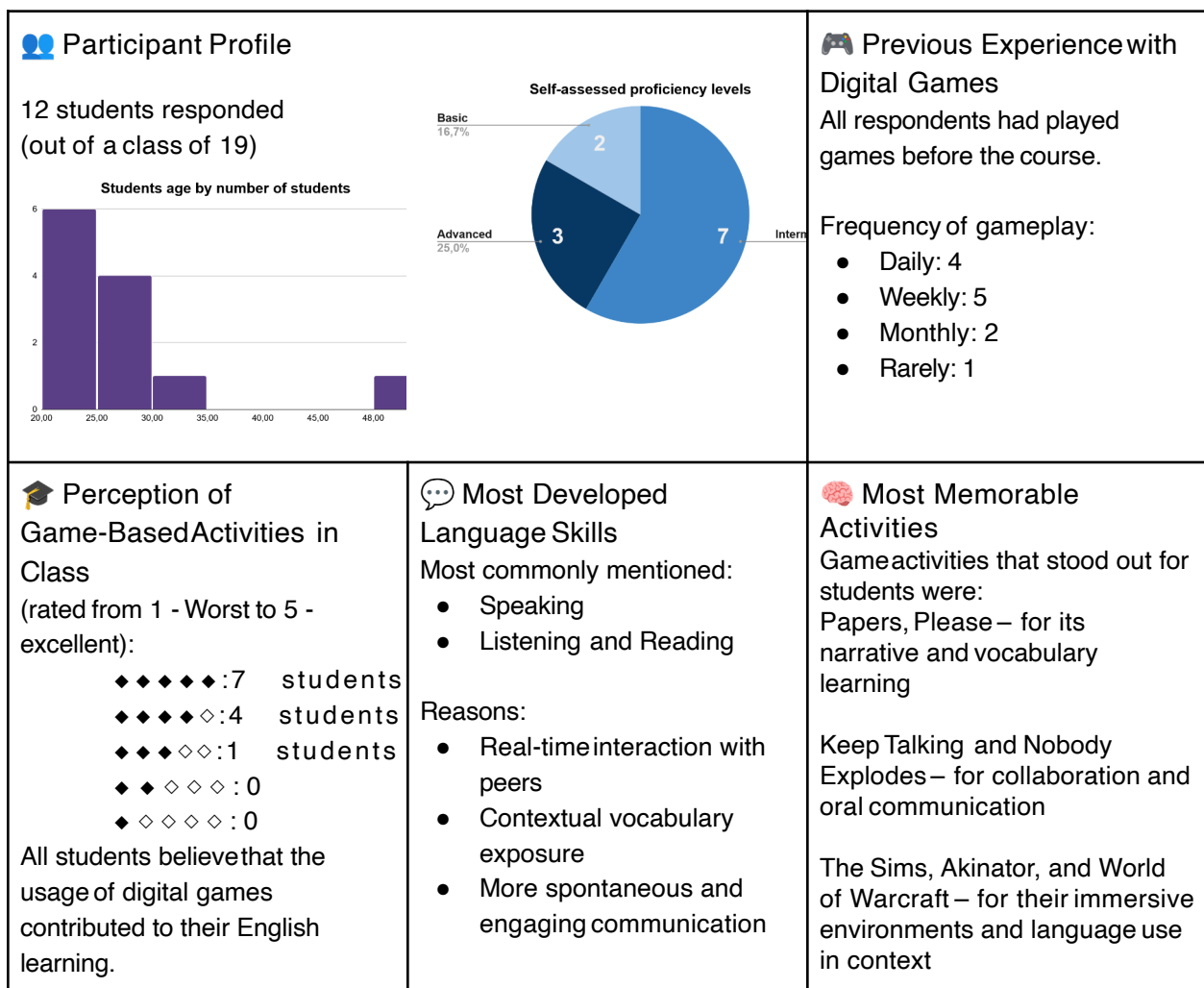
- Test using [World of Warcraft and "The remarkable life of Ibelin" movie](#). 📖

Planning time - 3h (This is on me, though – I took too long planning the activities to put on the test)

- The test consisted of comprehension, grammatical, writing and listening questions.
- All questions were related to the movie “The remarkable life of Ibelin” or the game World of Warcraft.

📊 Student data analysis

Student feedback on the game activities was collected through a brief questionnaire administered after the term. The most relevant results are summarized below.





✓ Highlighted Positive Aspects	⚠ Reported Challenges	💡 Student Suggestions
Students noted: • Increased motivation and active participation • Stronger peer interaction and teamwork • Learning through play felt more natural and less pressured • Interdisciplinary learning opportunities	• Difficulty connecting game content directly to language goals • Potential for distraction due to gameplay focus • Limited time to fully explore game content • Some wanted more collaborative or competitive game modes	• Use selected games in multiple lessons for deeper exploration • Prioritize group or multiplayer formats • Clarify how game content links to language objectives • Allow more time for immersion and post-game reflection

📄 Key takeaways for other teachers.

Takeaway		Details
1	Don't stop creating	As a teacher, I challenge myself to always add as many new and unique activities as I can.
2	Share your plans with your students	This is a key point in the participative process of teaching. Students want to learn. They want to try new things to help them learn and to tell you if it was a good or a bad experience. And you (should) want all of that too.
3	What students shared with me	• Impact of Digital Games on Learning: Students highlighted improved speaking confidence, group collaboration, and contextualized learning, with games making lessons interactive and engaging. • Positive Aspects: Key benefits included enhanced engagement, interdisciplinary vocabulary enrichment, teamwork, and natural learning through enjoyment. • Challenges: Issues included passive student participation (on single-player games or gameplay videos, to some students), occasional difficulty connecting games to linguistic goals, and complex instructions needing clarification. • Suggestions for Improvement: Recommendations included diversifying game types, aligning games with lesson content, pre-class surveys for student preferences, and extending gameplay to explore multiple language aspects.

📄 My key takeaways

Teaching with games in this context felt exceptional – a real privilege, thanks to the unique setting that allowed me plenty of technological resources, and students that were genuinely eager to explore new methods. I'd gladly do it again, incorporating more genres, new game-based approaches, and even student suggestions (like their last-minute request for Resident Evil). That enthusiasm highlights the potential in LLP.



There is still some room for improvement, such as fostering a more participative class for all, weaving games more deeply into the curriculum, and moving beyond single-session gameplay, creating more interesting combinations with the classes.

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Reviewing Critical Frameworks for a Critically Oriented Digital Game Education

Alex Bacalja

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DOI:https://doi.org/10.55853/CP1_3

Short summary:

This paper examines three frameworks that investigate how educators engage with digital and non-digital media. The aim is to explore the possibilities and limitations of each framework as schemata for supporting learners to engage more critically with digital games. While digital games are increasingly deployed in formal learning contexts to support teaching and learning, their critical study with students has attracted less attention. This paper explores three frameworks that explore how educators engage with digital and non-digital media. The aim is to demonstrate/explore the possibilities and limitations of each framework as schemata for supporting learners to engage more critically with digital games. These three frameworks were selected because of their integration of literacy and criticality, recognising however, that there are many such frameworks that are also useful for educators (for example, see Apperley and Beavis, 2013). In the following sections, I offer some brief context about each framework and its key features.

Context: I work in the Faculty of Education of Education, at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Most of my teaching focuses on is in English and literacy teacher education.

Students: My students are predominantly those studying to become secondary school teachers, however the audience of my research is high school students. I am interested in how we develop the knowledge and dispositions that support young people to be critical users of digital games and other digital technologies.

Goals: I want high school students to be able to study digital games, for aesthetic, literary, textual and critical objectives.

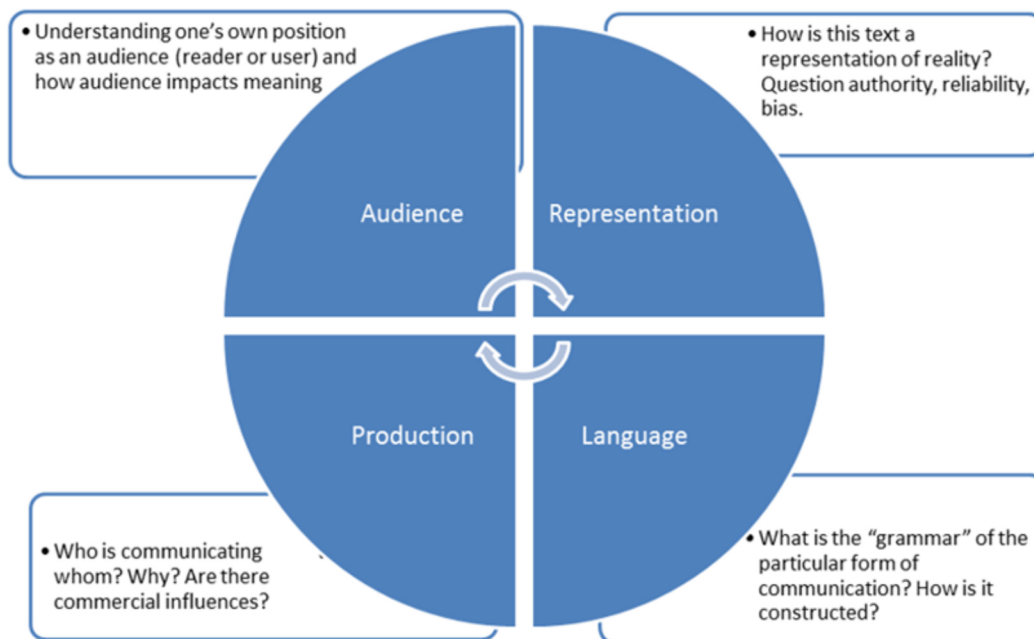
I want high school students to be able to study digital games, for aesthetic, literary, textual and critical objectives.



The Media Literacy Model

David Buckingham's Media Literacy model (2006) is a comprehensive framework for understanding and analyzing media in the digital age. Buckingham, a British scholar and educator, was interested in what children need to learn at school. He wanted an approach to media education that was much more than simply functional literacy. He developed this model to help people critically engage with various forms of media.

His approach emphasizes the importance of developing critical thinking skills and understanding the complex relationships between media producers, texts, and audiences. His work on digital media and digital literacy pushes us to think beyond the functional, the operational aspects of 'how things work', and conceptualises digital literacy education to include a focus on the socio-political aspects of how texts work. While his model is centered within discourses of media education in Anglophone countries, it has a lot to offer those interested in critical digital game literacies education.



The Media Literacy model (Buckingham, 2006)

What I find useful about this model is its multidimensionality. While some limit notions of gaming literacy to operational aspects of game-playing (see Prensky and McGonigal), Buckingham's model goes further. It is not limited to just one aspect of what many have



termed ‘gaming literacies’. It does not ignore the operational, focussing on this in the “Language’ quadrant of the framework, which can include aspects of how we ‘play the game’, but encourages teaching which looks behind the surface, including the political economy of these digital texts, with allusions to the impact of commercial influences on game design and questions about game production.

What is missing from this framework are specifics. This is understandable given the model is intended as a frame to understand a wide range of media texts. Nonetheless, this will be a limitation for those seeking to use the framework to engage in curriculum development that is specific to digital games. The model doesn’t really identify what knowledge is needed to deconstruct a game, hoping that the questions alone will get us there. It also lacks a focus on the interactive nature of our engagement with digital texts.

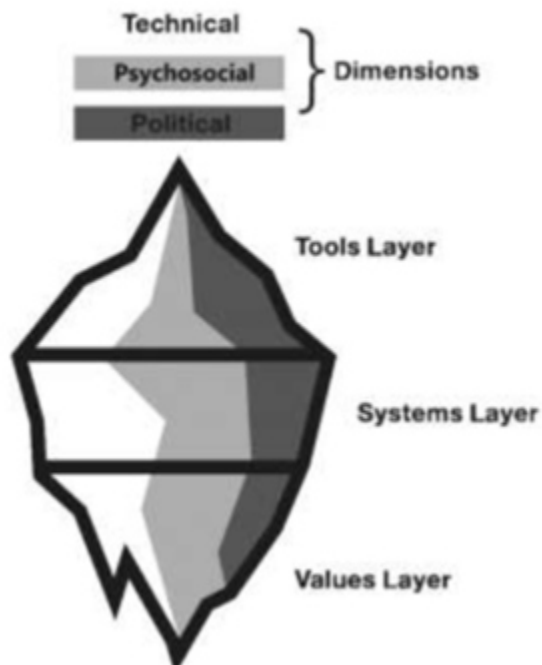
The Technoskepticism Iceberg Framework

The authors of the Technoskepticism Iceberg (Pleasants, Krutka and Nichols, 2023) are generally critical of the current approach to technology education. They argue that “Our schools generally prepare students to be consumers and users of technology more than thoughtful and empowered participants in public debates and decisions.” (p.487). They advocate for Technology education which does more than provide students with technical skills: “it should prepare them to critique the technical psychosocial, and political dimensions of technology”. This reminds me of the problems with DGBL, but that is a discussion for another time. Pleasants et al (2023/2006) propose a vision for Technology Education which is captured by the Icebergs overlapping layers and dimensions. Regarding layers, they identify:

Tools: created for well-defined purposes that bring about intended outcomes.

Systems: Our interactions with these tools are multiple technical, political, social, cultural, and economic systems, which shape how technologies can and will be used.

Values: these include how technologies are designed and used.



The Technoskepticism Iceberg Framework (Pleasants, Krutka and Nichols, 2023)

Furthermore, they argue that there are 3 dimensions that are evident with each of the layers of the iceberg. These dimensions are:

- **Technical:** Focus on the ways that technologies are structured in material terms and how they function. **Psychosocial:** Focus on the ways that technologies affect and are affected by how people think, act, and relate to one another. **Political:** Focus on who makes decisions about how technologies are designed and deployed and how those decisions are made.

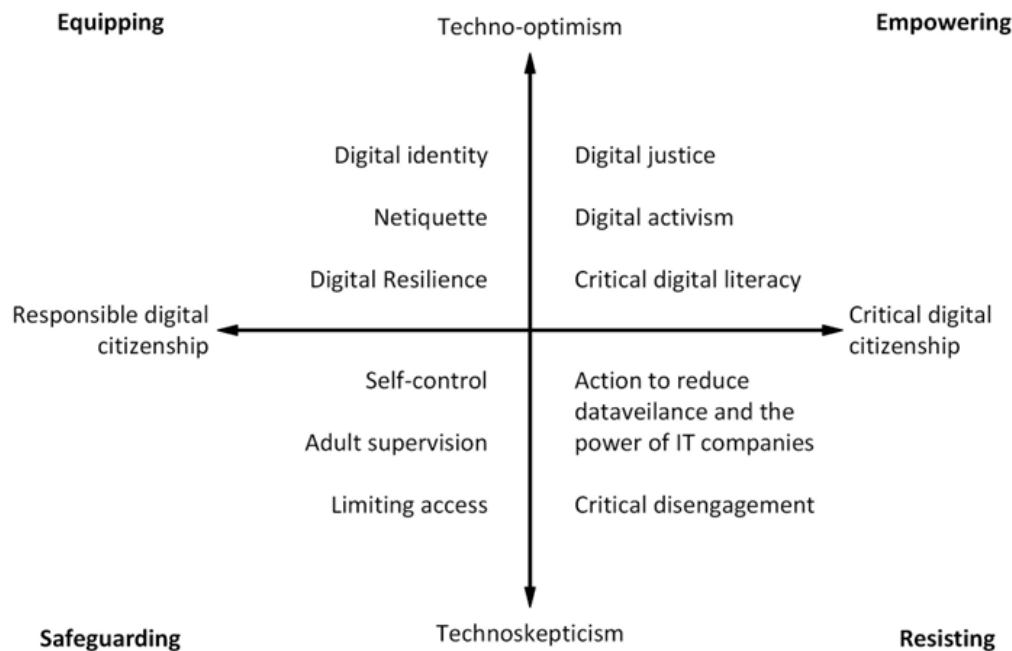
What I find useful about this model is that it captures the complexity of digital technologies. It also recognises our entanglement with these educational technologies by going beyond design and drawing attention to how they are used, and the values that mediate their use. I also like the way it considers systems outside of digital technologies that interact with them. This model encourages looking below the surface (hence the iceberg), in terms of both design but also questions about the political-economy of digital technologies like digital games.

What is missing are questions about knowledge. What technical knowledge do we need to know about technology to start thinking in terms of layers and dimensions? How does knowledge, or its absence, inform practice? I also wonder about where we start when we seek to employ a model like this. With interweaving dimensions and layers, and areas of focus above and below the surface of the iceberg, it might be challenging for educators to find an entry point.



The Online Safety Education Model

This model comes from two New Zealand researchers interested in online safety education. They inquire into the approaches offered for preparing young people for a digital world that is full of risks. Their paper is a synthesis of different approaches, and they offer an “analytical model based on prevalent conceptions of digital citizenship and narratives of technologies to identify four different approaches to online safety education in the academic literature (p.2)”.



Online Safety Education Model (Estelles and Doyle, 2025)

The four approaches explored are:

Safeguarding: this subscribes to the ‘control paradigm’ and is driven by fears of online risks and (arguably, paternalistic) child protection desires. It uses a security rhetoric that focuses on designing policies and practices aimed at restricting and/or regulating young peoples’ behaviours. In terms of digital games – this would involve banning games, and the platforms on which they are played, such as Steam, and limiting access to devices.

Equipping: this approach seeks to instill in students the knowledge and skills to navigate, and benefit from, our increasingly digitised society in a ‘safe’ manner. This approach acknowledges both the potentiality and ubiquity of digital technology. In digital games terms, this aligns with a lot of tech-optimism, which leverages techno-determinism, usually associated with DGBL, and also rhetoric around creativity –



e.g. Leggo or Minecraft.

Empowering: this approach focuses on empowering individuals to fight against social injustice. It conceives of digital technologies in terms of their potentiality for social action (think Paulo Freire and Critical Pedagogy). It explores using digital technology to both question established, oppressive norms and to engage in consciousness raising dialogues and collective actions. In terms of digital games, what knowledge do we need to play critically? What knowledge will help us use games for social justice goals? How will we design curricula that move from games for entertainment to critical perspectives? In summary, this approach would still involve playing games, but differently (for example, Flanagan's *Critical Play* (2009)).

Resisting: this approach strongly questions the belief that digital technology can offer a path towards more democratic societies. It argues that digital technologies are the product of and cannot operate outside of capitalism. In digital gaming games terms, it would encourage the development of knowledge that would lead young people to self-discipline themselves away from games.

What I find useful about this model are the many ways it addresses and questions how educational technology deals with the more problematic aspects of living and being in a digital world, as well as the complexity of responses possible for educators to adopt. I also like the way it situates different approaches to technology education within other educational paradigms or philosophies, demonstrating the interrelationship between them.

What is missing is that it implies that an educator can only be within a single quadrant. It leads the reader to simplify (or delimit the possibilities). Can an approach be both equipping and resisting? Can a technoskeptic also believe in an empowering approach?

Questions and next steps

The paper is largely speculative, offering far more questions than it seeks to answer. Models for critical digital game literacies both open and close opportunities for critical literacy lit. Educators can work with existing frameworks, however, these will also need to be tweaked to be specific to the textual/practice demands of digital games. A focus on practices AND objects, offers a productive way of planning for critical digital game education. The project of developing critically-oriented youth will require engaging with questions about what knowledge and experiences are necessary for such goals, and how existing frameworks might support this work.

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knowledge and experiences are necessary for such goals, and how existing frameworks might support this work.

These questions include:

- Which model is best-suited to supporting a critical digital game literacies education?
- Which model is complete enough that teachers can pick it up and ‘run with it’ without extensive further reading?
- Which model addresses the ‘knowledge question’ best? (I.e. what knowledge is needed to develop a critical perspective towards digital games?)

The next step is to work with educators to test the usefulness of these models as tools that support pedagogy. Codesigning curricula with educators and learners, and then inquiring into the effects of such design, will assist in determining which models are most effective and where more work is needed.

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Reviewing a One-year Deployment of a Nintendo Switch in a Self-Access Learning Center

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Short summary:

In the past academic year (from April 2024 to January 2025), a Nintendo Switch has been parked in the iFloor, a Self-Access Learning Center (SALC) in Reitaku University. Our goal for using the console is to attract students into the SALC to participate in communicative practice with or without the use of the game console. This presentation is a simple overview of what was done, what affected the implementation of the Switch, feedback from the iFloor staff, and things to change for the following academic year.

Your constraints plus the who and what of your teaching context

Context (Where do you work? What kind of institution? What is your role? etc.)	I work in Reitaku University, a private tertiary education establishment in Kashiwa, Chiba, Japan. My role is a lecturer in the Center of English Communication, with a secondary role as an iFloor/Writing Center developer.
Students (goals, wants, needs, knowledge, skills, hobbies, hates, worries)	The iFloor, as a SALC, provides all students in the university with a space to practice English communication. However, data indicates that a majority of our visiting students come from the Faculty of Foreign Studies. Therefore, while some of them may be motivated to practice English, observations and visitation statistics indicate that a majority of students only attend due to assignment requirements or do not visit at all. Context: Students enrolled in the English for Communication courses in year 1 and year 2 are assigned a set number of required visits to the iFloor each semester, typically 5-6. Year 3-4 students, therefore, come to the iFloor of their own volition. Student proficiency is diverse, with TOEIC scores ranging from 200s-high 700s.
How much freedom do you have? (What can you do? What can't you do? Why? Who do you need to ask? What will they say?)	Main limitations are as follows: 1. Budget: limited budget restricts the games we may procure for the Nintendo Switch. 2. Space: the iFloor consists of an entire floor of a building (pictures and floor plans available on the iFloor website)



	(https://www.reitaku-u.ac.jp/global/ifloor/), however, the main communicative area where students visit and hangout is a small subsection known as the iLounge. The iLounge is where we have the necessary television, power outlets, seats, and shelves to use a Switch properly.
Language (goals) (the goals of your course or curriculum, what you must teach, what you want to teach, what students need to know, etc.)	My preliminary goal is less linguistic and more motivational in nature. Between discussions with the iFloor lead developer, we think that a game console on the iFloor provides several potential benefits: 1. Alternative communicative medium parallel to our board games and card games. While some students tend to use our board games and card games rather than engage in direct conversations, video games might help attract students who are not interested in either. 2. A display that attracts onlookers: In previous semesters, through observations by teachers and iFloor staff, we have noticed a number of students who linger around or outside the iLounge furtively. Through student surveys we realized some of these students hesitate coming into the iLounge as they were intimidated by pure conversation groups. Through games, we hope to pull some of these students in. 3. Discovering scenarios or requirements in which productive communication may occur through co-op gameplay in a SALC. While game choices may impact the communicative experience of SALC users, how the games are presented, assistance by SALC staff, and the environment in which the games are played might contribute to the experience as well. 4. Identifying effective games that suit our context of cooperative play and local player communication. Game choices were based on games that encouraged or required teamwork and communication. Without cooperating and communicating with each other, students would not be able to progress the puzzles or scenarios presented by such games. (see Trial Implementation in the breakdown table)

Evaluating the choice of using a Nintendo Switch using the Bates (2019)

SECTIONModel:

The decision to use the SECTIONModel for evaluating the suitability of a gaming console in our SALC must be credited to a prior research conducted in Sojo University's SILC (Sojo International Learning Center) on an attempt at using Minecraft in their SALC (Remmerswaal, 2022). SECTION stands for Students, Ease of use, Cost, Teaching functions, Interaction, Organizational Issues, Networking, and Security and privacy. SECTION is a framework designed to help researchers effectively choose media for use in teaching and learning (Bates, 2019). Due to logistical and technological challenges, while I initially planned on testing out a similar setup on the iFloor, I was unable to visualize successfully deploying a service of that magnitude and I had to give



up on implementing a Minecraft-based project before financial investments were devoted to it. However, Remmerswaal's decision to use Bates's SECTIONSmofor evaluating media use informed my decision to do so similarly and pointed us towards a great direction.

The following table represents an evaluation of the Switch based on the SECTIONSmofor model and the reasons why the Switch was ultimately implemented on the iFloor based on the criteria listed in the SECTIONSmofor model.

An Evaluation of a Gaming Console (Switch) on the iFloor	
Students (student demographics, access to technology, learning differences)	• iFloor welcomes students from all undergraduateschool years • A gaming console on the iFloor means students do not need to own a gaming device of their own to participate in a co-operative gaming session, hence lowering the barrier for entry. • Discussion questions, board games, card games in use on the iFloor; caters to students that prefer video games
Ease of Use (simplicity, tech literacy, reliability)	• Students fairly tech literate; most aren't gamers but are fascinated by them • Games chosen have simple controls with tutorials • One gaming console means easier monitoring for iFloor staff to provide guidance
Cost (production, delivery, maintenance, overheads, time invested)	• High initial cost (main weakness of the implementation) • Minimal maintenance cost (apart from potential equipment damage, replacement, and electricity) • Additional costs are new games acquisitions
Teaching Functions (media usage in teaching design, media selection)	• Providing students with an additional form of media over which to communicate with other students • A scenario in which students may infer and organically foster language used in a teamwork context; taking up leadership roles; peer learning occurs frequently, usually for imparting game knowledge
Interaction (student to student/teacher interaction; inherent, designed, user-generated interaction)	• Student to student interaction is the priority of the implementation • As mentioned above in Teaching Functions, students were observed during our trial period (breakdown and explanation available after the next section) to voluntarily teach other students and some adopt leadership roles • The games chosen also require communication with each other to plan strategies, otherwise the players cannot progress in the games (inherent interactivity).
Organizational Issues (support for media and technology use,	• Limited by space and availability of power outlets and television screens; power outlet restriction was an unforeseen and very real



organisational challenges)	problem and it was an extremely difficult problem to solve and limits our placement of the gaming console University also pushes back on the spending of research funds on gaming consoles and games; understandable due to the nature and reputation of games in conventional education establishments
Networking (networking beyond the material or media use, integrating social media)	- Firstly, due to internal school policy and infrastructure we restrict internet communications for the console. This results in an inability to play online and interact with the outside world - Secondly, we do not yet encourage users to bring their own games to the iFloor. Students are, however, welcome to use any of the curated games available on the iFloor for English practice. However, some students do come to use the console as part of their English Communication class assignment - No supplemental social media component
Security and Privacy	- No online access whatsoever - No chance of online toxicity and interaction with potentially unsavory players or gameplay

 How do you create SPACE in the methods, materials and mediation of your teaching and learning playground?

	Methods	Materials	Mediation
Safe: learning from failure, inclusive, competence, supportive	Students state what skills or language they would try to use before gaming. Student staff available to play with them and facilitate/jumpstart communication.	Pre-game journal and post-game journal. Pre-game journals ask students what they would practice. Post-game journals ask if they achieved their goals and their thoughts about the session.	iFloor staff would assist and monitor the pre-game journal entries to the best of their abilities.
Participation: society, community, choice, self-direction, culture	All Reitaku students are welcome to use the Nintendo Switch and to select the games they want. However, we require students to play in groups and never alone.	Co-op Switch games	Student staff would join students who wanted to play if they came alone or with odd numbers. We also encourage students to invite other students to join them on the couch to play and to watch.
Agency: autonomy, freedom, dialogue, interaction	SALC context, therefore students are completely free to	Rules are posted right in front of their seats as a reminder.	iFloor staff monitors the game session and keeps track of language



	decide if they want to play, how long they want to play, and if they would be willing to participate in a post-game discussion. Students also come with their own friends or get matched with a student staff or other iLounge visitors. Language use is moderated, mostly for English use.		use to ensure students remain in English.
Critical: challenge, reflective, interdisciplinary, purposeful	Students are encouraged to move beyond just producing reactive sounds and instead engage in conversations between players as the games are cooperative in nature and require teamwork. Post-game journals also elicit some reflection on their gaming session and students check themselves for language or skills practiced.	Post-game journal. If students are willing, a post-game discussion to break down the session will be held with a student staff.	Student staff are usually available to lead or initiate conversations. Such conversations typically consist of teaching game controls, teaching of game mechanics, and post-game discussions, should the students wish to do so.
Experiences: relatedness, identity, relevant, meaningful	Some students, especially the Faculty of Engineering students, resonate with the Switch and we do notice an increase in the usage of the iLounge due to the Switch from the Engineering students. Students generally do try their best to keep to English, but struggle to produce meaningful conversations in some games, which caused the removal of those games.	We focus more on cooperative games and games that seem to produce much more meaningful conversations. Games like Overcooked 2, Nintendo Sports, and Mario Party were extremely successful in that regard.	



Other? If you've found other ways to play in your context, explain them here: 	Limited events (during pre-holidays or last week of the semesters) seem to work well and get returning students. Events were promoted using posters and organized and facilitated by teachers who volunteered.	Super Smash Bros. Christmas Brawl.	
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The study will be broken down in a chronological order and present implementations, thoughts, and findings for each stage.

What we do (teaching and learning)	What is the result (learning/outcomes/actions)
Trial Implementation (December 2023) The Switch was deployed for 4 weeks in December. The goal of this implementation was to 'test the waters' and gauge student interest and usage frequency within the span of a single month. Additionally, this was a period in which we tested the full array of games we acquired and saw how the students responded to each game. Objectives: 1. Gauge student interest 2. Determine the number of uses within a month 3. Evaluate the suitability of each game 4. Find out if there are any adverse effects that radiate outward from the play area that may negatively affect other users? Implementation: 1. Barebones. Rules were not introduced yet. 2. Switch, 7 games, and 8 pairs of Joycons: a. Super Smash Bros. b. Mario Party c. Mario Kart d. Kirby and the Magic Mirror e. Overcooked 2 f. Monopoly g. Nintendo Switch Sports	Learning: We registered 250+ users (not unique) in a month. Students were generally very interested in the Switch but we quickly noticed an issue: quite a number of students are game illiterate. This meant that some students, while interested, do not actually know how to use the Joycons nor how basic in-game controls worked. Additionally, staff required time to get used to a new form of media on the iLounge, and as such, I am required to be present quite often to fix issues with Joycon connections and to remind student staff to store the console and games away at the end of each operation day. Speaking to student staff, I realize that they too require quite some time to figure out how things worked, as not all of them have experience with a Switch. We had one incident of theft of a single Joycon controller but it was promptly returned to us, with the student citing a mistake. One incident of student staff forgetting to keep the Switch away for the night (that was quite a moment). Some students got too immersed into the gaming and were very loud. Staff of course were present to control that but these outbursts still happen occasionally. Some games like Super Smash Bros. and Mario Kart produced undesirable play scenarios where students were either not speaking or were completely silent. We realized that competitive games, despite their popularity, may not be appropriate to our context as a SALC.



Outcomes:

Despite that, students responded quite positively. Through observations and through conversations with the students after game sessions, we discovered that a majority of students enjoyed the games and thought they were useful communicative tools. However, some students did mention it was challenging to talk while playing. Some playgroups were formed and they came back as repeat users. Some students that are more familiar with gaming or are avid players of a specific game would take it upon themselves to teach other students. These groups were the most productive groups communicative-wise and tend to produce more returning students.

Actions:

After discussion with other iFloor developers, we thought about doing game rotations for the following semester, but decided to just curate and narrow the list of games instead. Super Smash Bros. and Mario Kart were removed immediately.

We determined that the Switch should only be used when the full-time iFloor staff is on duty. Therefore, the Switch is operational only on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays between 10.40am and 5.30pm.

Some form of self-reflection is needed for students who used the Switch, and so we created a very simple post-game reflection questionnaire. As a SALC, we are technically not supposed to force students to do something, but we highly encourage them to fill in the post-game journal as data that would help us determine if the Switch was well-received or not.

Name:	Student ID:	Date:	Time:
What game did you play? _____		1: Not at all	5: Very
How much did you enjoy playing the game?		1 ☐	2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐
How much English did you use?		1 ☐	2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐
Did the game help you practice English communication?		1 ☐	2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐
What new words or language did you notice or use in the game today? Write up to 5.			
What are you going to do or practice the next time you play this game?			

A gaming meetup was scheduled and conducted before the following semester amongst the student staff. This one day 3 hour event was created to allow the student staff to familiarize



	themselves with the games console. During the event, they were asked to playtest all of the games we had. Simple rules were created and posted right in front of the play area so that students would be aware. <u>RULES FOR USING THE NINTENDO SWITCH</u> 1. Fill in the Sign-in Sheet. 2. Fill in the Pre-game Journal. 3. Play with other people. 4. SPEAK IN ENGLISH. 5. Practice Number 1, Play Number 2. Focus on communication. 6. Sign-out and fill in the journal when you are finished. Most importantly, have fun while practicing English!
First Semester Implementation (April 2024 - August 2024) The Nintendo Switch was deployed for 14 academic weeks. No meaningful changes were made during the semester in order to fully test our measures taken following the previous trial implementation. The first semester implementation is important because while the trial implementation was done in the later parts of the second semester of the previous academic year, this would be done in the first semester from Week 1, with newly enrolled students. Game list has been narrowed down to: 1. Mario Party 2. Kirby and the Magic Mirror 3. Overcooked 2 4. Monopoly 5. Nintendo Switch Sports	Learning: I felt as if student feedback and reflection collected from the journals was inadequate due to the extremely simplistic post-game journal we had. We originally made it simple because we were concerned that students might not stick around long enough to fill it in if it's too long as it's an optional thing. Jonathan deHaan provided me with some sample questionnaires and reflective questions during LLPx02 which proved useful. Additionally, some materials, particularly the post-game discussion sheets and grading rubrics in his earlier work provided me with a lot of inspiration and some starting points, especially when it comes to the type of questions we should ask and list of skills to focus on in the pre-game journal (deHaan, 2019; 2020). While we still want to keep the length of the post-game journal short, the samples provided along with some feedback from other iFloor developers gave us an indication of how we would take it further. An updated sample of the post-game journal will be displayed at the end of this section below.



	Student response remained warm and supportive. We realized Overcooked 2 was a massive success. It was very popular and based on feedback from the iFloor staff (who sits next to the Switch everyday), students produced the most productive conversations and peer learning compared to other games. Nintendo Switch Sports was surprisingly successful but it produced a different type of conversation and timing of conversation. While Overcooked 2 produced conversations and communications during the rounds, Switch Sports produced post-game commentary and gameplay evaluation between players and onlookers, similar to conventional sports. Kirby was not popular. I hypothesized that story-based games would be difficult for students to start and pick up where they left off even though it is a co-op game. We steered clear of that game since. Outcomes: Students responded positively in the likert scales, but did not demonstrate willingness to respond to longer form questions. Student staff members were far more capable in supporting the students compared to the trial implementation. Actions: I wanted to get more games like Overcooked 2. Doing some research, I had my eyes on Human Fall Flat, Pico Park, and Moving Out. However, the administration does not seem too happy with the purchases made previously despite 3 long-form written explanations. After further discussions with the iFloor developers and observations from the iFloor staff, we decided to implement a Pre-game journal and a Post-game journal. Pre-game journal will require the students to think about the skills and language they would like to practice during the gaming sessions. We made them 'promise' to do so.
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	Those students usually would not have used the iFloor otherwise, as the Faculty of Engineering has another SALC in the engineering department building. 2. The staff stated that the Switch attracted different students compared to the board games and card games, and neither are particularly more effective than the other, as even students who play board games and card games could be silent students as well. 3. Roughly one-third of student conversations during game sessions were beyond silence or simple remarks. Most game sessions did not produce meaningful conversations or peer guidance. However, the staff remarked that the groups that did speak performed very well and were quite excited during the game sessions. 4. The staff stated that the most productive groups were the ones which had a figurehead. That is, a student which is either highly proficient in English or in gaming. These students lead or initiate conversations without the help of student staff. 5. Student staff were excited and willing to conduct post-game discussions, but most students were not willing to do so. 6. As a final remark, the staff said that the Switch was a positive implementation. Outcomes: I think a different format could be tested for the following semester based on the feedback provided this academic year. While students responded well, the nature of a SALC made monitoring the use of the Switch difficult, especially when student staff or teachers are occupied with other student groups wanting to practice English discussions. Actions: 1. Buy more games. (Human Fall Flat, Pico Park, Moving Out) 2. Include a Japanese translation for the game journals if we retain that format. 3. We are thinking about either changing or offering a new format for the use of the Switch. This is a format we are thinking
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	about implementing for other forms of media like music, movies, etc., named (tentatively) 'Mini Clubs'. - A Student staff will be in charge of each Mini Club, which specializes in one form of media. - Each Mini Club will convene either once a week or once every two weeks to do activities related to their form of media. - The Gaming Mini Club could conduct student staff-led game sessions with worksheets and post-game feedback and discussion sessions. - This could be a more structured form of play compared to the free open-use that we have done over the past year. - Details will be hashed out before the following semester, but we are considering adding this format on or completely replacing the old freeplay format. To be determined.
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5 key takeaways for other teachers. Share tips, materials, etc that others can use immediately.

Takeaway		Details
1	Feedback is key in a SALC.	Ask the students, ask the staff, ask the teachers, ask anyone. You need to know how the program works in the field, especially since as teachers we are not able to spend as much time as we would like to in a SALC.
2	You always need staff on duty, always.	Without a full-time staff, this project would not have been possible. A full-time staff on a SALC ensures that forms are filled, etiquette is observed, and THEFT is prevented.
3	Be prepared to be a tech support.	Game literacy and tech literacy is not universal. Some students are more familiar with games and tech while others aren't. Be on call to solve tech problems regarding cables, Joycon connections and game patches.
4	Briefings, lots of briefings.	Keep the student staff in the loop. Communicate often regarding changes or days when the Switch should not be used. Make sure each student staff remembers and stays aware of the rules and things to encourage the students to do.
5	Learning first, playing second.	Students should be made aware of this fact. Student staff should be made aware of this fact.



Implications and Future Plans

While this study does not present an immediate solution or conclusion towards the question of the suitability of free-use video game consoles in a self-access learning center, we can draw some meaningful lessons with which to better equip ourselves to tackle future, similar endeavors. Observations of play sessions and data from staff members indicated a close and mutually supportive relationship between game choice and delivery method. Both factors present specific challenges when aimed to be implemented as effectively as possible.

Game choice when done from scratch can be challenging as games have to either be purchased or borrowed from someone in order to be tested in a specific setting. Therefore, the stress and financial loss taken upon realizing a game that was purchased was not suitable for use in the target context and student demographic can be emotionally and financially draining. Additionally, replicating this study with minimal or no game knowledge or game playing habits could present a challenge when it comes to identifying which games might be or might not be suitable. Granted, based on the study, even possessing a certain level of game knowledge might not provide the researcher with a completely accurate opinion on which games may be effective. Students are different, contexts are different, and the restrictions we teachers face are different from institution to institution. Therefore, hopefully, this study would provide fellow teachers with a simple glimpse into what is and what isn't suitable based on a specific context so that teachers may draw a better, more educated conclusion than what we started with at the beginning of this study.

Students are different, contexts are different, and the restrictions we teachers face are different from institution to institution.

How we deliver or present the games to our students could also be a variable as major as game choice. At the end of the year-long study, the inclination towards assuming this stance looms ever closer and ever larger. While the study was done and continues to be done in a self-access learning center context, that is to allow students as much freedom as possible in deciding when and what to play amongst our list of games, continual work has to be done on the teacher and the staff members' part to ensure that students not only enjoy themselves in the SALC, but also to produce meaningful conversations and practise discussions amongst their peers. How can we encourage students to step



away from simple complements and verbal acknowledgements? How can we scaffold students towards more strategic discussions and planning in puzzle games? How can we introduce sentence structures and encourage asking questions and offering guidance? These are questions and objectives we are constantly striving and struggling towards. Further research and adjustments will be made to improve upon these points and answer these questions.

Conclusion

Parking video game consoles in self-access learning centers is far from being a smoking gun, it is barely a whisper in the wind. However, working towards diversifying the types of media and communicative mediums used in self-access learning centers could help cater to and appeal to more students with different interests and preferred methods of interaction. Hopefully, this study could provide likeminded teachers with a place to start and know what mistakes to avoid. Cost will be a huge factor owing to the inherent price of games and gaming consoles. Scaffolding and providing guidance are also challenges to overcome as student support staff, as helpful as they are, can only help so much. They are students themselves, and as such, like everyone else, may have different preferences and interests. It is, admittedly, an expensive, time-consuming, staff-dependent tool in a SALC context, and I loved every second of it.

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Fitting the Pieces together : People, Stories, and Games

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Short summary: This is a reflective snapshot, or a cross-sectional view, of one of my courses. I will discuss how I am moving towards incorporating meaningful and relevant ludic practices into my curriculum, fitting together learners' interests, needs, and my own passion for stories into the context of my institutional requirements.

Slides:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1LkpaTXJMbrY7XRHmwn9qtXlnS85GgsE5ZpcswUtrVyo/edit?usp=sharing>

Your constraints plus the who and what of your teaching context

Context (Where do you work? What kind of institution? What is your role? etc.)	I teach mandatory first year English conversation courses. I have four sections of the course, that is four different groups of students meeting at different times but following the same curriculum. It is a national university and I am a part-time lecturer.
Students (goals, wants, needs, knowledge, skills, hobbies, hates, worries)	Students differ tremendously, mostly based on department, but are mostly similar in terms of demographic: 18-19 year old Japanese students matriculating through Japanese education. Their levels are not assessed before the course, but based on personal observation they run the gamut from false-beginners (those who have studied for a considerable length of time but display beginner level proficiency) to near native speakers of English, from hating English and everything surrounding it to being deeply engaged in English personally, academically, and prospectively for their careers.
How much freedom do you have? (What can you do? What can't you do? Why? Who do you need to ask? What will they say?)	I have great freedom in terms of curriculum, methods, and materials. I will be reprimanded if I am too lenient in grading, and I am required to use an in-house small-group conversation grading rubric for the final exam.
Language (goals) (the goals of your course or curriculum, what you must teach, what you want to teach, what students need to know, etc.)	I try to align the goals with the grading rubric (see Table 1) so as to give the students as much opportunity to score highly as possible on its extremely strict absolute scale. I want to teach how to use English to express themselves and their experiences and to connect with society both locally and globally. • Develop communication skills and confidence • Develop autonomous and collaborative language learning skills • Connect with their classmates



	• Connect with other English users by sharing their interests through English on the internet
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Table 1 Grading Rubric (originally adapted from Nunn, 2000)

Scoring Area	Score	Descriptors
Keep Going	0-1	Not classifiable.
	2-3	Has (almost) no ability to keep a conversation going. Without constant help, the conversation is always likely to break down.
	4-5	Rarely self selects, but responds minimally to other speakers and sometimes supports their contributions. Negotiates rarely and/or only with a very limited repertoire. Communication sometimes breaks down without support.
	6-7	Responds fully when nominated, supports other speakers and sometimes self-selects. Has an adequate repertoire for negotiation. Communication almost never breaks down.
	8-9	Is able to take initiatives, self-selecting and negotiating whenever necessary drawing on a wide repertoire of expressions and techniques. Helps other participants to join in and interrupts politely when appropriate.
	10	Native speaker (or near native speaker) ability to manage a conversation in English.
Content	0-1	Not classifiable.
	2-3	Has almost no ability to communicate even basic information such as age, price, etc.
	4-5	Can only communicate the most basic information, and cannot really express ideas or feelings on anything but the most basic everyday topics.
	6-7	Can communicate information on a reasonable range of topics and can express opinions, feelings and ideas to a certain degree on a more limited range of topics.
	8-9	Has a sound ability to communicate information, and express feelings, opinions, and ideas on a variety of topics.
	10	Native speaker (or near native speaker) ability to contribute ideas, opinions and information in English.
Intelligibility: Pronunciation	0-1	Not classifiable.
	2-3	The speaker is almost impossible to understand.
	4-5	Inadequate use of prominence and poor pronunciation of individual sounds makes the speaker very difficult to follow without compensation.
	6-7	A reasonable pronunciation of individual sounds; some attempt is made to make important syllables prominent. The message is intelligible, although there are occasional lapses.
	8-9	Good use of prominence and accurate pronunciation of individual sounds makes the speaker easy to follow. Intelligibility is almost never impeded by wrong sounds, insufficient or misplaced prominence.



	10	Native speaker (or near native speaker) proficiency in English pronunciation.
Intelligibility: Grammar and Vocabulary	0-1	Not classifiable.
	2-3	Poor structure and/or inadequate and inappropriate use of vocabulary make it (almost) impossible to understand.
	4-5	Barely adequate use of structure and limited vocabulary make it difficult to follow without compensation.
	6-7	Vocabulary and structure are normally adequate for the task. Fairly frequent errors do not seriously impede comprehension.
	8-9	Good use of structure and vocabulary make the speaker easy to understand. Only a few errors which do not impede comprehension at all.
	10	Native speaker (or near native speaker) command of English grammar and vocabulary.

How do you create SPACE in the methods, materials and mediation of your teaching and learning playground?

	Methods  Assessment,  Curriculum,  Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)	Materials  Digital shared docs,  Learner-made,  Learner-chosen	Mediation  Flexible language,  Self-assessment,  Peer-feedback,
Safe: learning from failure, inclusive, competence, supportive	◎ Positive assessment No 減点 (deducted points) only 加點 (added points) ◎ Cyclical syllabus The same process repeated 3 times, gradually introducing scoring areas of the grading rubric used in the final exam (Table 1).	○ Free, digital learning materials Accessibility options like high contrast, magnification, and screen-reading	◎ Flexible language policy My department pushes an all English approach, but I adopt a flexible approach based on the needs and abilities of each cohort.
Participation: society, community, choice, self-direction, culture	◎ Participation-based assessment Coming, talking, and listening counts for their grade.	○ Shared docs For brainstorming & reporting ○ Anonymous peer feedback through Google forms	◎ Peer interaction and feedback Starting with an awareness survey and an intervention following Sato (2013)



Agency: autonomy, freedom, dialogue, interaction	○ Free(ish) conversation At the start of most lessons: general guiding topic, followed by reflection	◎ Learner-made materials Planetes (Caviglia and Zamboni, 2024): maps, culture, personas	and Sato and Ballinger (2012) ◎ Self assessment Based on the same scoring criteria I use for summative assessment (Table 1)
Critical: challenge, reflective, interdisciplinary, purposeful	◎ TBLTinspired Task sequence includes pre-task planning, text mining, and post-task reflection	◎ Audio recordings Reflect on own unscripted, improvised speaking	◎ Attention and awareness raising Teacher feedback followed by group feedback discussion/consultations
Experiences: relatedness, identity, relevant, meaningful	○ Autobiographical curriculum content Sharing own experiences, Discussing own interests, Planning own future	○ Youtube, etc. as input Bringing student interests into discussion through student choice of Youtube video as homework.	○ Role model I share my own language learning experience (En->Jp)
Key: ◎ Major factor in SPACEfor play in learning and teaching ○ Minor factor in SPACEfor play in learning and teaching			



The teaching and learning, as high definition as you can share:

Figure 1 Primary Task Cycle (adapted from Johnson, 2025)

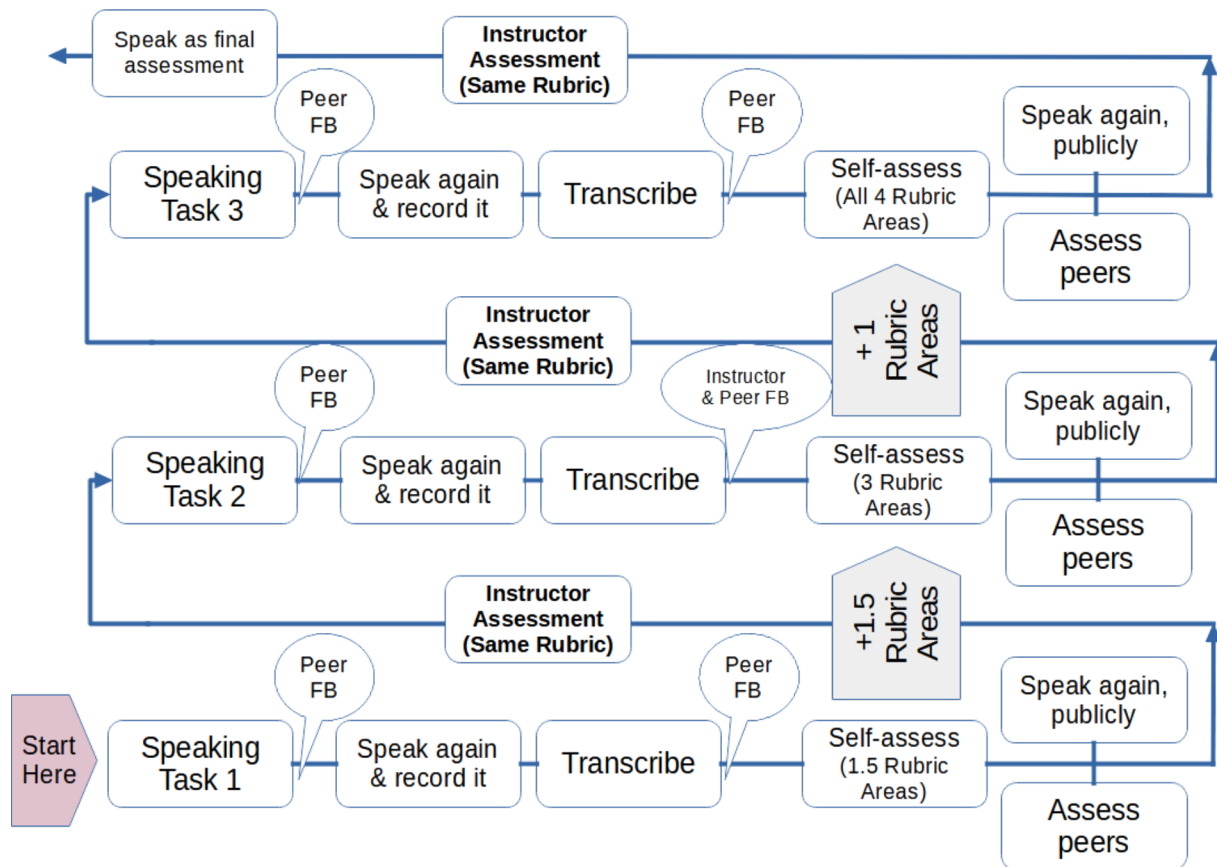


Table 2 English Conversation II Course Outline

Course Sections	English Conversation II - Post Elementary (3 sections)	English Conversation II - Lower Intermediate (1 Section)
Unit 1	Talking about people and places around you	
Lesson 1	Orientation	
Lesson 2	Self-introductions and peer feedback	
Lesson 3	Spyfall	
Lesson 4	Now and then & Self-assessment	
Lesson 5	Self-introduction Performance Graded using the Intelligibility: Grammar and Vocabulary and the information component of the Content area (see Table 1).	



Unit 2	Talking about the past, experiences, and stories	
Lesson 6	Travel Stories	
Lesson 7	Have you ever & Story Structure	
Lesson 8	Collaborative Storytelling with Rory's Story Cubes and similar games	Collaborative Storytelling with Planetes
Lesson 9	Storywork and Retelling	Planetes Phase 2 and 3
Lesson 10	Storytelling Performance Graded using the Intelligibility: Grammar and Vocabulary, Intelligibility: Pronunciation, and Content areas.	
Unit 3	Talking about the future, plans, and hopes	
Lesson 11	Plan a vacation	
Lesson 12	Ideal life in 15 years	
Lesson 13	Talk show Performance Graded using all four areas of the grading rubric.	
Lesson 14	Final Exam preparation Graded using all four areas of the grading rubric.	
Final Exam Week 1		
Final Exam Week 2		

What we do (teaching and learning)

I. Course Content / Tasks

The general course outline is given above in Table 2 showing similarities and differences between the different sections of the course. In terms of language content, the three unit-initial speaking tasks represent the topical focus well:

Speaking Task 1 was to introduce oneself.

Speaking Task 2 was to share a personal experience.

Speaking Task 3 was to discuss future plans.

The speaking tasks were initially framed as the topic of a ten minute group conversation at the beginning of the first class of each unit, to elicit the students ability to speak on these topics as is, following a TBLT approach. They were prefaced by an attendance question used to simultaneously check attendance and prime students' thinking toward the following speaking task. For example, the attendance question for the first lesson of Unit 2 was, "Where did you go for your school trips?". Immediately following this, the students were directed to begin Speaking Task 2, as described in the lesson materials extract below:



Materials Extract 1 Speaking Task 1 Written Instructions

10 minute chat 🗨️
Make groups with new friends 👥
Theme: Talk about your school trips.
Try to keep talking for ten minutes 🕒
Remember to:

- 🗨️ Ask follow-up questions.
- 🤔 Ask for clarification, if you don't understand.

A major part of the course design was also on developing positive attitudes and behaviors conducive to constructive peer interaction and feedback. This was introduced beginning from the first orientation lesson using a survey adapted from Brown's (2007) learning styles checklist, followed by class discussion about the results and then through instruction and reflection throughout the course.

II. Games Used

Three analog games were incorporated across the four sections of the course, the latter two were differentiated by language level: Spyfall (Ushan, 2015), Planètes (Caviglia and Zamboni, 2024) with lower-intermediate section, and Rory's Story Cubes (O'Connor, 2005) with post-elementary sections.

a. Spyfall (See representative learner reflections [below](#))

Spyfall was integrated into the task cycle following Speaking Task 1 and filled [one 90 minute lesson](#) (Lesson 3 in Table 2 above). The game encouraged the use of various question forms useful for asking follow-up questions or requesting clarification. The game participants used English to play the game and experience the usefulness of different questions, but they also partnered with a classmate who took an observational role. By pairing players with these peer monitors who focused entirely on their partner's language use, collaborative peer-feedback behaviors were also encouraged in the relatively non-threatening context of a game. The directions given to the players in both roles are shown in Materials Extract 2 below. The seating arrangement of the activity was very similar to a closed fishbowl discussion format (for more in depth exploration of this format in EFL see Tsai, 2025), where the primary participants are seated facing each other in the center and each peer monitor is seated behind their partner, both facing inwards.

Materials Extract 2 Spyfall Learning Activity Instructions

Play and Learn
Playing a game in English can be hard! 😊
So, we will work in pairs 👥
One person is the player 🎮
The other is the observer 👁️

The player will

- 🎮 play the game
- 📖 use as much English as they can



The observer will:

- 🎧 Listen to their partner's English.
- 🎧 Listen to how the other players react to their partner's English
- 📝 Write down what their partner said.
- 📝 Write notes, thoughts, and feedback on their partner's English vocabulary and expressions.

Transcription (My partner said ~)	Notes, thoughts, feedback
(empty rows redacted)	

After the round you will give feedback to your partner and your group 🙄

After the first round, the player and observer switch roles 🗨️🗨️

Then play again 🔄

b. Storytelling games

My driving interest in language and linguistics is oral narrative. I have incorporated interventions for eliciting and scaffolding students' sharing of their personal experiences (discussed in some detail in Johnson, 2025), but I have also been exploring the usefulness and ways of implementing creative oral storytelling in the language classroom. Storytelling games provide structure, inspiration, and constraints for such tasks, however many storytelling games are much too difficult (e.g. Once Upon a Time), complicated (e.g. Dungeons and Dragons and similar roleplaying games), or time-consuming (see previous example) to incorporate within a 14 week university language course. Rory's Story Cubes is simple enough that it can be implemented with little modification and Planètes was developed specifically with this context in mind.

III. Playing in my space

The exploration of the games in this presentation is a manifestation of my own play as a researcher-practitioner using the SPACEI have in my teaching context to play and explore. Since I have very few constraints (just the grading rubric, potential for grading review, and the desire to do a decent job) my teaching is very exploratory. Furthermore, since I teach four sections of the same course I also have many opportunities to tweak things in a small way and try again. I feel rewarded when my students give me explicit positive feedback, but also when I see learning happening and students making connections, both with each other and the content of the course.

I have only recently, since beginning my own graduate studies in TESOL in 2023, taken the research side of things seriously. Realizing that games provide a fertile ground for research has encouraged me to use them in a more calculated way that can be accounted for, as I have tried to do here. This perspective has thus given me more tools to play with in my context.



The results documented here are from my first experimentation with using each of these games. I will thus share my critical reflections and considerations for future iterations.

What is the result (learning/outcomes/actions)

The following data was gathered from the transcriptions, self-assessments in Figure 1 above as well as student reflections on their learning following particular activities and at the end of each the three units (more or less corresponding to each speaking task and what followed it on each row of Figure 1). This study was done during a larger and broader research project in which I used reflexive thematic analysis to investigate numerous aspects of my course. As an inductive study, the following data were not found to be relevant to the broader study, and the resultant themes from the reflexive thematic analysis are not relevant to the current paper. This research context was provided at the request of the reviewers, but will not be discussed in greater detail.

Ila. Spyfall Worksheets - Reflection Questions

Below I have attempted to illustrate the learning situation around the game with students' answers to the reflection questions. The answers are single data points but illustrate common or salient strands identified in the data and labeled with analytic codes, representing the data at an intermediate level of abstraction. The codes are playfully rendered below as hashtags, as one might see in microblogging.

1 How do you feel about your teamwork with your partner and your group?

"We built a good relationship. I was able to remember the name." #RelationshipFocus

"Our team was cooperative, but we were defeated by the spy." #GameOrientation

"I think good teamwork, because when I can't come up with ideas, she teaches me something." #CooperationOrientation

"I can remember what I said in the game by seeing sentences written by my partner." #EnablingReflection

"It is difficult for me to communicate with my group. I had difficulty hearing the English my partner was speaking." #CommunicationDifficulty

How do you feel about your teamwork with your partner and your group?

"I can remember what I said in the game by seeing sentences written by my partner." #EnablingReflection

2 Did your partner notice some mistakes in your English that you didn't?

"No" #No but also "Yes" #YES!

"Yes, and he was pointed out that I couldn't speak English the way I wanted. Also, he kindly pointed out the mistake." #KindFeedback



“Yes. I answered ‘I want to dancing’, but my partner told me You should better use ‘dance’”
#SpecificCorrectiveFeedback

“I didn’t make any mistakes.” #RemarkableConfidence

“I didn’t notice. I can’t keep up with the English” #MaybeDidNotUnderstandTheQuestion

3 Did you learn any useful or interesting English words or expressions? If so, please share.

“No” #No but also “Yes” #YES!

“If the question is a “yes” or “No” answer, we won’t know you’re a spy. My partner asked everyone What questions and they found out I was a spy. These are useful only in this game.”
#GameStrategyXLanguageFocus

“Submarine means ‘sennsuikann’.” #Lexis

“Yes, I did. I learned phrase ‘I go there opening time’.” #Woops

“To paraphrasedifficult wards to easy wards.” #CommunicationStrategy

“Yes, I did. I learned ‘Maybe yes’. This word can hide my true thinking.”
#OMGWhatHaveITaughtThem

IIb. Storytelling Game Outcomes

Planètes ([Day 1 Worksheet](#), [Day 2 Worksheet](#))

In summary of learners’ reflections gathered at the end of the 2nd unit (the row beginning with speaking task 2 in Figure 1), it afforded them:

1. A pleasurable creative outlet combining art and language,
2. Pride in their collective creations,
3. Simulated (inter)cultural exchange,
4. Opportunity to express their opinions

Critical reflections on playing with Planètes

Major hurdles were

1. Explaining the game rules succinctly and effectively (See my DeepL translation dump in Day 1?).
2. The game was intended to fit within a 60 minute lesson, but required two 90 minute lessons to complete.
3. 1 and 2 were largely a result of insufficient instructor preparation!

Next iteration will:

1. Use graphic visualizers (as I did with adapting [James York’s Spyfall instructions](#)) for teaching the rules (also see Day 2 worksheet, where I was more prepared).
2. Create more opportunities for repetition and focus on form through re-telling the tales of travel and development (i.e. expanding Phase 3 of the game).



Rory's Story Cubes ([Lesson Worksheet](#))

Example with Rory's Story Cubes Voyages and transcripts of oral telling



Collaboratively Created Story (11:28) Once upon a time there was a boy who was brave. (@0:33) He wanted to be a king. (@10:10) He ate rice to get power. (@2:11) First he climbed a dangerous mountain and he found a power up mushroom. (@7:03) He ate a power up mushroom and got a scoop. (@7:20) He found the King Octopath. (@4:48) The king octopus's weak point is light. (@8:20) He shines a light on the king octopus. (@8:52) The king octopus died. (@8:58) He became a king. (@9:00) Happily ever after. (@9:10)	Member A's Retelling (?) Once upon a time, there was a boy who was brave. So he wanted to be a king. So he ate rice to get a power. He climbed the dangerous mountain. In there, he found a power up mushroom and ate it. So he get a scoop. So he found king octopath in the dangerous sea. So king octopath's weak point is light. So boy shine a light to king octopath. King octopath died. Happily ever after.	Member B's Retelling (1:31) Once upon a time there was a boy who was brave. He wanted to be a king. He ate rice to get power. First he climbed a dangerous mountain and he found power up mushroom. He ate power up mushroom and got a scoop. He found the king octopath in the dangerous sea. King octopath dislike light. Brave boy shine light. So king octopath is died. He became king.
Member C's Retelling (1:42) Once upon a time there was a brave boy. He want to be a king. He ate rice to get power. First he climbed a dangerous mountain and he found a power up mushroom.	Member D's Retelling (1:22) Once upon a time, there was a boy who was a brave. He wanted to be a king. So he ate a rice to got power. First, he climbed a dangerous mountain and he found a power	Notes - The dice are both inspiration and constraint. They both encourage and slow down the crafting of the story. The "power up mushroom" was a boost for them, but the sunrise (finally "light") was a big



He ate a power up mushroom and got a scoop. He found the King Octpath. It live in the sea. <u>King</u> octpath's weak point is a light. so he shine a light. <u>Octpath</u> died. He became a king. _____	up mushroom. He ate a power up mushroom and he got a scoop. He found the king octopus in the dangerous sea. The king octopus's week point is a light. So, he shiny a light to the king octopus. The king octopus died. He became a king! Happily ever after.	challenge. They took my idea for flexible interpretation of the images. - Decided to take a more translational/translanguaging approach around 3:30 - Retellings are remarkably similar, despite not writing the story down. Differences shown in bold and <u>underline</u>.
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Critical reflections on playing with Rory's Story Cubes

Challenges to overcome

1. The creative process was hard to document with the recording set-up used (student smartphones in a noisy class).
2. Language errors in the group product were almost systematically reproduced in individual retellings.

Next iteration will:

1. Use multi-device synchronous recording via Teams video chat to produce a single recording with mics (embedded in smartphones or PCs) local to each group member.
2. Ensure a language focus or focus on form step between group product and individual retelling (This was planned but cut due to time constraints). The activity was primarily meaning focused with momentary switches of attention to language form during the collaborative co-construction of the story. After the groups put the narrative together they then went immediately to retelling what they made instead of analyzing it and considering improvements or revisions. Including such an intermediary analytical or revision stage aligns more closely with TBLT and might better support students' language development.

Course-end Survey Comments => Feeds into next iteration

☀ What were the best parts of this course? (respondents n=93, some responses included > 1 code)

Lower level code: 🟡 Storytelling n=16, 🟡 Variety of conversants n=13, 🟡 Future plans: 8

Higher level codes: 🟡 Socializing n=36, 🟡 Topics n=27, 🟡 Way of learning n=22, 🟡 Improvement n=16

5 key takeaways for other teachers. Share tips, materials, etc that others can use immediately.

Takeaway	Details
1	Don't hate, iterate!
2	Use peer monitors for communicative games

Exploratory Practice and Reflective Teaching open windows and doors to new and interesting pedagogical options.
Using Spyfall with peer monitors helped to cement the peer-interaction attitudes I aimed to foster. It let the players focus on communicative tasks and then created opportunities for reflective focus on form for one partner while priming the other for their turn to play.



Takeaway		Details
1	Don't hate, iterate!	Exploratory Practice and Reflective Teaching open windows and doors to new and interesting pedagogical options.
3	Retelling vs. Creative telling	Retelling one's own experiences or read/heard experiences or stories allows students to engage strong narrative memory. Creatively telling a story is much more cognitively demanding, especially when doing so in real time, without planning.
4	Game choice matters - Choose well	Not all games are created equal - fitting games to players and context requires critical ludic literacy.
5	Join LLP's Discord server	Communities of practice can provide curatorial support, suggestions for games and other materials, methods for using them in the classroom, and best practices for mediation of learning.

Using Spyfall with peer monitors helped to cement the peer-interaction attitudes I aimed to foster. It let the players focus on communicative tasks and then created opportunities for reflective focus on form for one partner while priming the other for their turn to play.

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Running a Seminar Class as a Game Design Studio

James York

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DOI:https://doi.org/10.55853/CP1_6

Short summary: In this short talk, I introduce the overarching structure to my seminar class which is framed as a game design studio.

Slides: [Available here](#).

Your constraints plus the who and what of your teaching context

Context (Where do you work? What kind of institution? What is your role? etc.)	Meiji University, a private university in the centre of Tokyo. I belong to the School of Political Science and Economics (SPSE). The department is made up of various smaller departments: Political Science, Economics, Policy, and the Humanities and Languages (of which I belong). My role is thus as a language/culture expert. I teach three English language classes but more classes that align with the “culture” part of my role: - The History of Video Games (where we held this end-of-semester event), - Game Design 101 (analog and digital) - My seminar class (which is the feature of this talk).
Students (goals, wants, needs, knowledge, skills, hobbies, hates, worries)	It’s an interesting thing to think about. I initially worried that my seminar class would not garner any interest. “Games and education...?In this school? Who’s going to be interested??!” However, students often choose the university name over the department they get accepted to¹. The prestige of the university taking preference over their desired area of study (See Lopuski, 2024). Thus, we have a number of students within the SPSE that have joined because of the name of the university rather than the course that they have been accepted onto. So, as a result, there are a number of students within the school who are NOT interested in political science or economics, but other topics instead. I have actually been told by students, “Thank goodness you’re here². I wouldn’t know which seminar to apply to if you weren’t here.” What are their goals though? Another good question. And not one that I can answer in the singular. I have 18 students in the seminar class, and although it is not quite to the level of inquiry seen in deHaan’s work (2023), I do ask them about their goals--I do this as a formal lesson at the start of the year, where we spend a full class learning about each other. I created a worksheet where students have to answer various questions about themselves, which they share with me. - Some are here because they want to work for a games company (One is currently interning for Sega as a game planner).

¹ Please let me know if this is true in other countries.

² Great game btw: <https://thankgoodness.game/>



	- Some are here because they don't want to join a seminar that is connected to their "major." - Some are here because they think it will be fun. - Some are here because they think it will be easier than other seminars, and so they can focus their efforts on getting external qualifications. - Some, I really do not know why. I advertise the seminar as a place where students will: 1. Create educational games, 2. Have the (external) target audience play the game 3. Write their thesis based on the results of the experiment 4. Possibly crowdfund or create the game to sell at a game convention So, with these things in mind, I think a lot of students are drawn to the creative and practical aspect of the seminar. They can make something, and possibly sell it. That will look great on their resume.
How much freedom do you have?	I have full freedom to play. There is no external pressure to do anything in particular, the seminar class is where I choose goals. This is where I have SPACE to play (York, 2023).
Language (goals) (the goals of your course or curriculum, what you must teach, what you want to teach, what students need to know, etc.)	I teach students about various learning theories, game design techniques, the concept of gamification and game-based learning, and about research methods. Thus, this class is NOT an "English as a foreign/second language" class. The medium of instruction is Japanese, though I have some strong English speakers in the class, so sometimes I group them together and we conduct activities in English. I also bring in English-speaking guests. The "language" that students learn in the class relates to its theme: - Game literacy: Game genres, mechanics, components, etc. Keeping Zagal's (2010) definition of game literacy in mind, students learn how to play games, talk about them, and make them. - Academic literacy: Students have to submit a thesis at the end of the class, so they learn about ... Related to education and learning theory, as well as how to conduct an experiment, research design, statistical tests, citing, formatting a research paper, etc.

How do you create SPACE in the methods, materials and mediation of your teaching and learning playground?

	Methods	Materials	Mediation
Safe: learning from failure, inclusive, competence, supportive	Group work. Lots of feedback, from both me and other students Mini-presentation sessions (low-stakes)	Weekly diary entries, which I read and comment on.	I talk to students one-on-one throughout the year to check on their school work, job-hunting, and other topics.



Participation: society, community, choice, self-direction, culture	Participation is built into the curriculum. Students must make a game for a specific target audience. That audience must play the game.	Not a material in the “traditional” sense perhaps, but I have guest speakers join the class at a rate of about 4 guests per semester, connecting the students with game designers, publishers, teachers, developers, etc.	I provide feedback on students’ diaries to help them see how their activities in class relate to their personal and private lives.
Agency: autonomy, freedom, dialogue, interaction	After a lecture, students make games based on the teachings. They are free to create whatever they like based on the concepts covered in the lecture.	Diaries have multiple sections which the students can write about topics of their choosing. Game review worksheets are designed as a framework for having students think critically about games. Students have agency over the content.	If students are unsure of which path they should take when trying to decide on a project, I’m happy to step in and give them my own opinion, or talk through their options with them.
Critical: challenge, reflective, interdisciplinary, purposeful	The class is designed so that students can build a game for any discipline. Some stick to my own area of expertise -- language, but others are working with companies outside the university to build a game, thus requiring them to learn new skills.	Their diaries are based on the pedagogy of multiliteracies four strands (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015), one of which is critical analysis.	Student creations are reviewed by me, each other, and external sources (other game designers, companies that they are developing the game for, and the target audience in general).
Experiences: relatedness, identity, relevant, meaningful	Most of my teaching is based on the creation of a framework/playground within which students can play (see York, 2020; deHaan & York, 2025). Students choose HOW they play. In this case, students choose their groups, the games they play, the games they make, how they run an experiment, and so on. I do this so that the project is meaningful to the students.	The games they design provide students with meaningful experiences.	During the first class, I tell students that one of the goals of the seminar is for them to use it as a stepping stone to the career of their choosing. They are free to do something that is relevant to them.

The teaching and learning, as high definition as you can share

What we do (teaching and learning)	What is the result (learning/outcomes/actions)
Application process is a job application [Japanese only]	Students know that the seminar is serious, but playful (role-playing as part of the application process) even before joining.
An overview of the seminar as game design	I have only used this for the second semester of the third grade, but it



lab	gives students a clear overview of their potential roles within the team, and what is expected of them. Anecdotal, but compared to last year's seminar which did not use this resource, this year's seminar focus is much sharper, clearer, rigorous (especially the diary work), and concrete. Students understand this; and have been working as hard as I am pushing them.
I give several lectures on learning theories at the start of the first semester to build their knowledge and skills. • Constructivism • Cognitivism • Behaviourism Students make simple games based on the concepts introduced in each lecture. Other students play those games and guess what concepts were referenced in its creation. This teaching method aligns closely with Kafai's work on constructionist learning³ (See also Papert, 1980).	Students check their understanding through material creation. Students get a taste of game design basics. A positive "product-first" atmosphere of "done is better than perfect" is created.
I ask students to write a weekly diary. Topics include: • Media consumption • Personal projects • Group work They link their media consumption and activities to their academic work and beyond.	Students put their thoughts on paper. Perhaps one of the few times when they can freely write what they want as part of a class. I don't grade them on the content, only on having completed it, thus it is a low-stakes activity which should provide them with the safety to write as they wish. Students write about various topics in their diaries. A lot are focused on their group work, but some are on job hunting concerns and internal group issues. I generally know what problems students are facing with their group based on informal observations during class time, and give feedback and advice in the document itself. I do this outside of class, and use their diaries as a source for teaching in the next class. They can use their diaries as part of their thesis writing, of which I give them the choice of two types: • Experiment report (i.e., collect data from subjects who play their game and assess its "effectiveness"). • 🖱️ "Journey" paper (i.e., write about their journey as a game designer, documenting what they did, and how it influenced the final design/project/experiment).
Thesis in pairs as default Thesis based on product creation -- backstory --	Groups police each other to stay on task. Although I haven't specifically prescribed it, students create presentations based on their weekly tasks to tell their teammates

³ Not to be confused with "constructivism"



My own university thesis was a kind of group project. I created an 8-bit granular synthesizer, making the circuit boards and programming the microchips. I was really proud of it, showing it off to the rest of the class at the public open day. I think this has had a profound influence on my teaching. I want students to make something, together, for someone else, to exist in the world. -- end backstory -- I expect groups to: • Design an educational game • Assess its effectiveness (as part of an experiment), and this should be done with non-classmates, in an external environment. Students work in teams of 4 to make their games, and prescribe each other a task each week. This varies from simple things like “print X” to more complex tasks like “read X papers” or “research X”	what they have been working on [Example]. Students can specialize in things that interest them (art, project management, reading research papers, etc.) I think having students make something as part of their thesis project is a good way to inspire an entrepreneurial spirit. Having students work with external institutions is also a good motivator. Some examples: • One group is working with a high school in Tokyo, and invited a teacher to come and playtest their prototype in class. • Another group is working with an elementary school and has created a number of presentations to outline their project plan [link] (JP) • One group that has made a lot of progress on their prototype is considering crowdfunding the game, and invited two representatives of AEON's crowdfunding initiative to tell us about it [source] 
Bottom-up or Top-down game design Students are making games that are to be used in an educational context for a target audience. Now, three of the four teams are creating games which are bottom-up (meaning they are creating a game based on an interest they have, and have to find a place to test it later). But one group is creating a game for a company (which I'm calling top-down). They are struggling because the content of the	Students are assigned homework to come up with a game idea they'd like to create before they form groups. While some students find this challenging, others have clear visions. In the next class, students share their ideas and form groups based on the ideas that resonate with them. This approach creates a safe environment where students can join a group around an idea they find interesting, even if they are not satisfied with their own ideas. This time, one group decided that they'd like to explore the option of creating a game for the supply chain management company. With a strong leader, and equally strong members, they are working hard on their design.



game (supply chain management) is something they are not familiar with, and interfacing with the company can be difficult sometimes, but this is a fantastic opportunity for them and will look fantastic on their CV. The company has even offered to fund some prototype creations.	
Internal playtest sessions Play testing is a core activity to the game design process, and so students play each other's games frequently.	Such sessions help students realise that although they may know how to play their games, external bodies will be clueless → thus the need to create concise, clear rulebooks. One student has purchased a book specifically on how to create rulebooks for board games as a result.

3 key takeaways for other teachers. Share tips, materials, etc that others can use immediately.

Takeaway	Details
1 Fake it til you make it	If students are going to make games, the environment should be like a game design studio! I actually looked into the Valve employee handbook (Valve Corporation, 2012) when planning the class to structure it like a company. As concrete examples: • Students are put into groups and work on projects that they value. It's not something that I have given them, but something that they have chosen to work on. This relates to the Valve handbook on page 4: "This company is yours to steer—toward opportunities and away from risks. You have the power to green-light projects. You have the power to ship products" • 360° peer review: Students evaluate each other (anonymously) as a way to outline strengths and weaknesses and thus create a better group dynamic. This does not relate directly to the Valve handbook. In their, compensation is based on peer evaluations which, in an educational context, would equate to grades. I do not do so for this class, but do in others..!
2 Focus on practical applications and collaboration	Students work in teams to design educational games, with self-assigned weekly tasks. Focusing on creating a tangible product may foster an entrepreneurial spirit. Collaborate with external institutions for real-world impact. (aside: think globally, act locally)



3	Provide a framework (playground) for students to play in.	Simple, clear goals + constant reinforcement = focused students. This works, for me, in general. There are of course still issues with it. For instance, only certain students writing their diaries, only certain students pulling their weight during group work, and so on. But, this is a university seminar class, and the goals are pretty clear (I think), and I can't do the work for them, and they are adults, so they have to do what they think is best and work out any kinks themselves!
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Game-based Learning and Vocabulary Acquisition through In-class RPG Activities and Printouts

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Short summary:

Game-based learning (GBL) is increasingly recognized as an effective tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, fostering engagement, vocabulary acquisition, and other language skills (Davis, 2020). This paper investigates the effects of a cooperative game-based activity on vocabulary retention among Japanese EFL students. A six-week experiment involving pre- and post-tests assessed the efficacy of a custom-designed game adapted from an upcoming solo roleplaying game, Gates of Niflheim, integrating 70 vocabulary selected by me to help with understanding rules and gameplay. Words that were replaced in the original rules were replaced with CEFR A2-B2 level vocabulary words. The findings, supported by statistical analysis of the participants' performances, demonstrate significant improvement in vocabulary acquisition. Drawing upon the theoretical foundations of cognitive load theory and the motivational principles of GBL (Ferdig, H. & Johnson, T. 2009), this study underscores the pedagogical potential of games in language education. A comprehensive review of relevant literature further contextualizes the role of GBL in EFL, contributing to the growing body of research advocating for interactive and innovative teaching methods.

Your constraints plus the who and what of your teaching context

Context (Where do you work? What kind of institution? What is your role? etc.)	I teach at a private university in Tokyo, Japan where students can benefit from strategic thinking, independent thinking, and critical thinking skills. My institution allows great freedom for teachers to do what they feel is best for the students. The activities described in this presentation were designed to help law students improve their vocabulary while developing inquisitiveness and critical/strategic thinking skills that could be useful in their future careers. I am a Senior Assistant Professor and my duties include teaching, entrance exam creation, and various committee responsibilities.
Students (goals, wants, needs, knowledge, skills, hobbies, hates, worries)	My students are, for the most part, interested in becoming lawyers or other types of legal professionals in the future. These students have shown an interest in critical thinking skills and strategic thinking skills to further improve their abilities to work in the legal field in the future. My students' hobbies vary wildly, but they all seem to enjoy the game aspect of the game-based learning activities. They seemed to relax while focusing on working through the quest, spoke more (as needed by the nature of the



	game), and even the less talkative (or withdrawn students in some cases) were coaxed into more speaking and engaging in the class than in other styles of teaching such as lecture or even video/discussion based EFL classes. I have noticed that my students do not like to have their time wasted and focused activities with clear goals (like learning these vocabulary words through playing such and such games) are appreciated.
How much freedom do you have? (What can you do? What can't you do? Why? Who do you need to ask? What will they say?)	I have a lot of freedom. I am lucky that my university allows us to do pretty much anything we want in the classroom when it comes to styles of teaching and even the focus of the classes. I guess the largest constraining factor for me is time. I am the President of the JALT Critical Thinking SIG and I really enjoy making original printouts (which I hope to share during the symposium) but that takes time. I feel that if I had more free time, I could create even more/better printouts for my students (I wish!). That being said, however, the limitation of time and the myriad of obligations pulling at my attention due to both internal (at my school) pressures and external (in textbook creation, volunteering, etc.) make it so I feel rushed when doing one of the favorite parts of my job. I would like to finish by saying that I love the freedom given to me by my school, but this freedom comes with the cost of more time invested in making prints/preparing for classes, both of which I enjoy to the detriment of my other obligations sometimes. Though, I do think it is time well spent.
Language (goals) (the goals of your course or curriculum, what you must teach, what you want to teach, what students need to know, etc.)	The goal of the activity in question was to allow students to gain independent thinking skills through strategic and critical thinking while working with a partner to best complete the missions found in the game-based activities. The secondary (and more measurable) goal was to help students improve their vocabulary knowledge through game-based (practice-based?) activities that integrated the vocabulary in question. A pre- and post-test showed a clear improvement over the six weeks of learning and playing the game-based activity.

How do you create SPACE in the methods, materials and mediation of your teaching and learning playground?

Student Agency x Strategic Thinking x Support from Printouts

Students were told to cover the rules printouts prior to the class they would use them in. The printouts covered basic concepts in the game like the useful vocabulary for that day's activity, how to take turns, how to move, and how to fight in the game. Students were asked to utilize the knowledge from the printouts in the class time to both play the game and support other students in their understanding/playing of the game. Students needed to make their own choices, come up with strategies, decide on movements and the order of play, and work together to complete goals in the game.

Participation x Materials



The game system adapted for this study comes from the single-player game named Gates of Niflheim (GoN). This adventure dice-rolling game integrated quite a few CEFR B1 and below (with also a few very high level/specialized vocabulary) to teach and play the game. I adapted this to help give further context and background information using the vocabulary that was tested on in the pre-test. I created original printouts to help students prepare for the day's activities and presented the most important game-play instructions without much of the verbose instructions found in the rule book of the original game (GoN). I prepared tokens, gameboards, dice, printouts, character sheets, and various other support materials for students to successfully complete the activity. It was a lot of work, but it was a lot of fun.

Agency x Materials

As described in SPACE-based teaching (deHaan & York, 2025), game-based activities can give students a sense of agency and control over their choices during the activities such as the ones described in this presentation. Students also have to “live with” their choices and play out the game to the point where they either lose the mission or complete it.

Students benefit from this freedom of choice and the realization that choices have consequences. While my students also study “traditional” English language skills, I feel it is important that they feel that they have control over their choices in class and learn to live with the results of those choices. The materials provided the students gave them the basics of playing the game, but the success or failure of their mission was ultimately down to their choices. Students also were encouraged to help those playing the game before their turn to play came up. This hopefully encourages students to be more independent thinkers and be more group oriented (even at the same time in some cases) when it comes to working towards a goal.

Students also were encouraged to help those playing the game before their turn to play came up. This hopefully encourages students to be more independent thinkers and be more group oriented (at the same time) when it comes to working towards a goal.

Critical x Mediation

Critical thinking is a large part of any strategic thinking-focused game. The ability to reason out what your best actions should be and the resulting possible ramifications give students a chance to develop strategic and logical thinking skills. Evaluating the



choices afterward gives the students opportunities to think critically about what happened and integrate those lessons into their next play session. Throughout the course of the six weeks for this study, students became more thoughtful in their choices and started discussing strategies more than at the beginning where it felt as though they were not taking into consideration the effect their actions might have on their teammate.

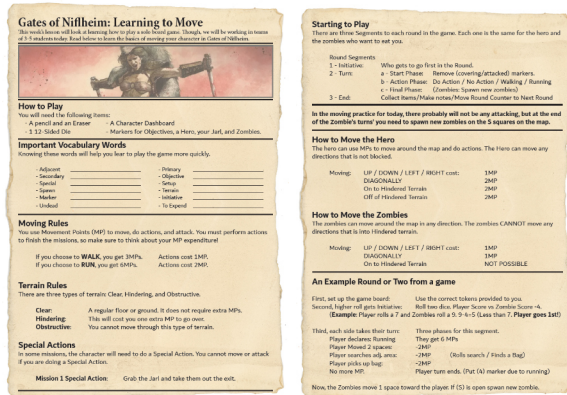
Students were asked to interpret the logical flow of the rules, integrate that understanding into action, and keep others on task to allow the game to continue naturally. These aspects of gameplay, especially with a choice of equipment and actions to use in the game, allows students to develop critical thought on both the rules-side and play-side of the game, but also the aspect of keeping others within the game's rules so everyone can enjoy (and learn!). This should help students to better integrate critical thought into an English language environment.

Experiences x Methods

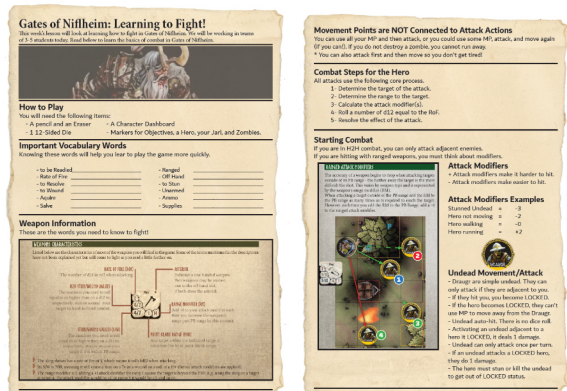
One excellent aspect to game-based learning that is so impressive is the chance for students to create memorable experiences during the class activity. An RPG in particular allows the students' imaginations to fill in the blanks in the game and create their own story. This original story can change every time they play and hopefully can create some memorable moments that will further help cement language learning done through the game play as when motivation is high, so goes learning.

The teaching and learning, a definition and example.

What we do (teaching and learning)	What is the result (learning/outcomes/actions)
We are the Facilitators of Understanding It seems to me that we, as educators, need to give students knowledge that facilitates the understanding of something in order for the students to use and expand upon said knowledge. A game-based activity can help students to do this in a more motivated head-space. To help with this facilitation of understanding, printouts can be used to focus on, and introduce, vocabulary that can be helpful for the game-based activities. From introducing the rules:	The result of the game-based activities are pretty interesting from both a student learning experience perspective and from a vocabulary acquisition perspective. The students who were asked to take a pre- and post-test showed a marked improvement on almost all of the participants in the classes. Among the more than 80 students who participated in these activities, there was a marked improvement in vocabulary scores. Student impressions were measured with an online, anonymous, questionnaire which asked the students to rate their experiences during the six weeks of learning and playing the game-based vocabulary learning activity.



To learning how to fight:



Students can utilize the vocabulary and rules to both play the game and describe it after the experience in a variety of different game environments.



Student impressions were, overall, very positive and reported that the activity was a challenge, but they felt very confident in playing the game in English at the end of the six weeks. Teacher observations as well supported the motivational qualities of the activities as participants all exhibited a willingness to start, and continue with, the ongoing activities during the intervention.

On the front of vocabulary retention and use improvement, the data suggests that participants increased their vocabulary knowledge and recall over the course of the intervention.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the game-based learning intervention on vocabulary acquisition, a paired-samples t-test was conducted on the pre-test and post-test scores of 39 EFL learners. Participants completed a vocabulary test before and after a six-week game-integrated instructional period designed to reinforce 70 target vocabulary items.

Participant scores revealed that the mean score on the pre-test was 49.80 (SD = 8.19), while the mean score on the post-test increased to 55.00 (SD = 6.55). After analysis, improvement in scores were shown to be statistically significant, $t(38) = -6.19, p < .001$, indicating that the vocabulary gains observed were unlikely to have occurred by chance. Furthermore, taking into consideration the effect size, using Cohen's d test with a result of $d = 0.71$, suggests a medium to large impact from the intervention and the game-based activities.



And even start to plan their own original game as a productive activity.

From planning to playing!
Creating an early and original card game

Name: _____ Class: _____ Number: _____

Read the information and instructions below to create your own original game. When you have answered all the questions, make sure your name, class number, and class student number are on the printout and have it in to the teacher before you leave the classroom.

Instructions

Today your task is to make a fun and original card game. It should be simple, easy to understand, and enjoyable to play. Follow these steps:

1. **Think of an Idea**
 - What do you want your game to be about?
 - Will it be a game of numbers, matching, or something else?
2. **Plan the Rules**
 - Decide how many players can play.
 - Write down the rules in simple steps.
 - Think about how a player can win.
3. **Design the Cards**
 - How many cards will you need?
 - What will each card show? (Numbers? Pictures? Text? What information is needed to play?)

Example Card Game: Number Match

In Number Match, the goal is to collect pairs of cards with the same number.

How to Play

1. Each player is dealt 5 cards.
2. Players take turns picking a card from the deck.
3. If the new card matches a card in their hand, they keep the pair.
4. The player with the most pairs wins!

Your Game!

Think of your own theme, cards, and rules. Enjoy creating your own card game!

Write a simple explanation of the rules and a few pictures to help others understand how it is played.

A Short Discussion of the Results

These results are encouraging as they provide further support for the efficacy of the game-based vocabulary instruction in enhancing word retention and recognition among EFL learners. The moderate-to-large effect size further suggests that the approach not only achieved statistically significant, and positive, results but also could have meaningful educational value to students in the EFL context. These findings align with previous research findings suggesting that interactive and motivational learning environments, such as game-based systems, can enhance language acquisition outcomes in foreign language contexts.

The significant improvement in vocabulary test scores following the game-based intervention highlights the pedagogical potential of game mechanics in EFL classrooms. The increase in post-test performance, paired with a medium-to-large effect size, suggests that learners not only retained more vocabulary but were also likely more engaged with the learning process. These findings support the idea that integrating gameplay elements, such as repetition through meaningful use during the game, immediate feedback, and collaborative competition, can promote deeper cognitive processing and retention of target language forms. This is consistent with prior research emphasizing the motivational advantages of game-based learning in second language acquisition (Gee, 2003; Reinhardt & Sykes, 2014).

Adding to this, the interactive nature of the vocabulary games may have encouraged incidental learning and peer-supported scaffolding, both of which are known to enhance vocabulary acquisition. Importantly, the results underscore that well-designed games are not merely supplementary activities but can function as central components of an



effective language curriculum. While the current study was limited to short-term vocabulary gains, future research should examine the long-term retention effects and how different game mechanics impact various learner profiles and language skills. In the future, an original game which better utilizes the target vocabulary, while remaining a simple, easy to pick up game/activity. While I would not use this specific game again, I would certainly consider an alternative RPG to use in class as there are many possible use cases for specific vocabulary acquisition, be it through fantasy themed games or science fiction themed ones.

5 key takeaways for other teachers. Share tips, materials, etc that others can use immediately.

Takeaway		Details
1	Get them thinking	Allowing students to make their own choices in a game-based activity is something that should be encouraged. The highs and lows of playing a game make the information inside of the game more memorable, even without the aid of memorizing a word list. Students can pick up new vocabulary through gameplay if it is focused and pointed out for them.
2	Supplements matter.	If you are going to have students learn and play a game in English, make sure you support that learning by adjusting it to their level. This may require some original prints and the adaptation of the game's original rules to better fit the skill levels of the students. Even with this, it can be a struggle for students to play the game so the clarity of the printouts is incredibly important.
3	Questions matter.	Prior to, during, and after the activities, it is important to query the students and get their impression on how they are understanding and playing the game. Is it fun? Is it too difficult? Is it way past their abilities in English to follow the rules? Encouraging students to ask questions and even following up with the students through questionnaires and other data collection methods can help them to be more independent and ask more questions in the future.
4	Games can help us learn.	As will be explained in this presentation, games are an effective way to help students gain vocabulary knowledge in a fun and motivating way. Learning rules and implementing them in the classroom, combined with the natural motivating force games have, help students to learn more and practice more.
5	Teachers matter.	As the teacher, we are the facilitators of understanding. It is ultimately up to the students to practice and perform, but the teacher's awareness of student understanding and even how they present the information for the students can impact learning outcomes. Easily understandable rules with focused vocabulary usage can be a valuable tool for teachers in getting students to both learn, and use, English more in class.



Easily understandable rules with focused vocabulary usage can be a valuable tool for teachers in getting students to both learn, and use, English more in class.

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Reimagining Tombola: A Cross-Cultural Experience for Italian Teaching

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Short summary:

I have designed a mini-course of Italian as a second/foreign language that I will be holding online in December 2025, based on the Italian game called Tombola⁴.

The goal is to:

- promote Italian language practice by activating multiple competences and activities (Council of Europe, 2020);
- introduce students to a traditional Neapolitan game, Tombola;
 - have them play — knowingly — the variant of Tombola created by tourism and the bourgeoisie, but in the way in which my family and I play it, that is to say without money, but rather by promoting interpersonal and intercultural exchange instead;
- talk about tradition, tourism, play, irony and other topics.

Your constraints plus the who and what of your teaching context

Context (Where do you work? What kind of institution? What is your role? etc.)	I am a freelance, certified teacher of Italian as a second/foreign language. I run my own individual business and work in various contexts. I work with private students, employees of companies and other entities. My classes are online, mostly one-on-one or even in pairs.
Students (goals, wants, needs, knowledge, skills, hobbies, hates, worries)	My students are of different nationalities and are between 18 and 75 years old. Some live in Italy, some live abroad. They have very different levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 of the CEFR). I can definitely say that there are these advantages: • my students love Italy and the Italian language; • they are motivated and open to different stimuli; and these disadvantages: • they are very busy, they have little free time at their disposal (because of work, family, etc.).
How much freedom do you have? (What can you do? What can't you do? Why? Who do you need to ask? What will they say?)	In my main work context, the one where I am my own boss, from a certain point of view I have enormous freedom because I don't have to ask anyone's permission because I decide what I do. Obviously, however, there are some limitations: • my students obviously have to want to sign up for the activities I offer, they don't have to; • many students live abroad, so, if I want to engage them, my activities must be online.

⁴ For informational purposes, Bingo is a game very similar to Tombola.



	• I have to be able to combine everyone's day and time preferences, and their time zones; • To act in complete fairness, I must keep in mind the limitations imposed by the copyright of the games I plan to use in my courses. While academic discussions and training often overlook copyright in game-based language teaching due to its complexity and legal variations across countries, I believe it is crucial for each teacher to consider their specific work context and determine if and how a particular game can be used in compliance with copyright regulations.
Language (goals) (the goals of your course or curriculum, what you must teach, what you want to teach, what students need to know, etc.)	I, as a teacher, have a lot of flexibility in deciding course content and objectives. All students definitely want to improve language skills, mainly the oral ones. They also wish to learn more about Italian culture and society. To avoid the constant risk of banality and superficiality, my goal is to do a 360-degree work on Italian language, culture, society, and to inspire to embrace the complexity of the world.
Other	I generally don't particularly like games that focus exclusively on randomness, such as Tombola. However, Tombola — like so many other similar games — can be a very thought-provoking game, when placed in an educational framework that keeps in mind the endless possibilities that arise from the language in the game, the language around the game, and the language inspired by the game, as deHaan, Poole and York show and suggest (York et al., 2021; and see also deHaan, 2019) or, said in other words, from the words in the object (the game), the words in classrooms, and the words in the world (deHaan & York, 2025). I also realize that my family plays Tombola in a peculiar way, so it is also about sharing an absolutely personal experience, and in my opinion it is a valuable thing for a teacher to do. In fact, to be more precise, with the students we will play a variation of Tombola — used by my family, in which we don't play for money — which is based on a version of Tombola that I thought was the authentic one and instead I recently found out with great surprise — by reading the studies of Alessandra Broccolini (Broccolini, 2005, 2006) — that it is a sort of “bourgeois touristsfied” version, which is, in turn, based on the original, authentic Neapolitan version. The idea of this mini-course stems from a desire to introduce my students scattered around the world, of different nationalities and levels of Italian, to each other. Every now and then, in Rome, I organize group outings (museum exhibitions, concerts, dinners) and my students really appreciate it. I like the idea of connecting people. I manage to organize two meetings a year, but I would like to do it more often. As for online, however, I have never organized group events. But once one of my students who lives abroad said to me, “Petra, why don't you connect all your students scattered around the world online? It would be great for us!” This has remained a very interesting stimulus for me, which I plan to put into practice with the activity I propose here.

To avoid the constant risk of banality and superficiality, my goal is to do a 360-degree work on Italian language, culture, society, and to inspire to embrace the complexity of the world.



Tombola [...] can be a very thought-provoking game, when placed in an educational framework that keeps in mind the endless possibilities that arise from [...] the words in the object (the game), the words in classrooms, and the words in the world (deHaan & York, 2025)

How do you create SPACE in the methods, materials and mediation of your teaching and learning playground?

👤 feel free to play around with the table format, or write things in paragraphs or media instead

Safe: learning from failure, inclusive, competence, supportive	
Methods 🧱	The design of my mini-course is informed by task-based language teaching (TBLT). The game session will be preceded by various pre-play activities, which are particularly helpful for A1-level students whose mother tongue is very different from Italian. These activities will ensure that students feel confident and relaxed during the game session. Despite the game's simplicity, it requires knowledge of the rules and careful attention to the drawing of numbers, which can be challenging for non-native Italian speakers. Due to students' limited free time and time zone constraints, pre-play activities will be completed asynchronously, with my periodic check-ups and my constant availability to help. There is no assessment or grading phase for this mini-course.
Materials 📝	I created and adapted materials to suit different levels: some activities are more complex for high level students, some others are simpler for beginner level students. Furthermore, when playing Tombola with my family, we traditionally include consolation prizes for participants who do not win. This practice will also be implemented during the Tombola activity with students.
Mediation 👤	To ensure maximum participation, I select a day and time that accommodates all students, taking into careful consideration the diverse geographical locations and varying time zones of learners. I intend to facilitate a multi-layered mediation process: given the probable participation of two A1-level Japanese students, I will invite a former C2-level Japanese student. Her advanced language skills would enable her to mediate complex content, such as the history of Neapolitan Tombola and the symbolism on the game board, for the A1-level students. Although students are adults, they will be provided with advance notice regarding the infrequent sexual content present in the original Neapolitan Tombola, to mitigate any potential cultural discomfort.
Participation: society, community, choice, self-direction, culture	
Methods 🧱	I propose pair activities (described in Agency → Methods and in The teaching and learning, as high definition as you can share) in the pre-play phase to prepare for the game and to allow students to become acquainted with each other before the event.
Materials 📝	In the game session we will play an Italian adaptation of a Neapolitan game, Tombola, and reflect on its transformations over time and space and how it relates to the society in which we



	live.
Mediation 	My goal is to create a small community of students of Italian scattered around the world. Each student will contribute two prizes to a prize pool, and I will encourage the students to create prizes that reflect their own cultures. I plan to invite a Neapolitan friend as a guest because they can share first-hand experiences and provide a local perspective that I cannot.
Agency: autonomy, freedom, dialogue, interaction	
Methods 	I decided that, in addition to doing activities with pragmatic focus based on already constructed sentences, students will be asked to think about any other phrases or expressions they plan to use, taking inspiration from the model proposed by York (2019, 2020). The prize pool for the competition is entirely student-driven. Participants are encouraged to contribute items that are meaningful for them and that they believe would be desirable rewards for their peers. Intermediate and advanced students independently choose, from the list of Smorfia* images, the figures they want to explore and delve into, with the goal of preparing a presentation to be given during the game session, when the number associated with the chosen figure is drawn. *In the Neapolitan Tombola, the 90 numbers are associated with certain figures from the so-called Smorfia. The Smorfia is a large table of symbolic numerological correspondences. It is based on the belief in the symbolic meaning of numbers. For example, number 5 is the hand, number 18 is the blood, 90 is the fear.
Materials 	Each student must provide two prizes to create the prize pool. They can create whatever they want: recipes, tutorials, songs, poems, photographs, stories. They can use their native language, along with Italian. All awards should be able to be sent digitally, to facilitate exchange between countries. So, once again, the prizes, as already pointed out, do not consist of money. As Mark L.W. Johnson said during the symposium, it is a kind of IOU turning into digital multimedia composing.
Mediation 	I support students in the prize creation phase. I add prizes myself, and I invite students to be creative and bring in new ideas, and I accompany them in revising their prize proposal.
Critical: challenge, reflective, interdisciplinary, purposeful	
Methods 	In the post-play phase, after my presentation on the anthropological aspects of Tombola, I facilitate a post-play discussion where I ask questions to the students, taking inspiration from the focus on the importance of asking questions described by Jonathan deHaan (deHaan, 2020). These questions are designed to encourage reflection on cultural, social, and psychological themes.
Materials 	I discovered, much to my surprise, very interesting things that I had previously ignored about the game of Neapolitan Tombola, thanks to two studies (Broccolini, 2005, 2006) and a book (Liccardo, 2019) I found while doing some research. Liccardo's book will be referred to intermediate and advanced students to do their research on the figures of the Smorfia. And to ensure an insightful discussion during the post-play phase, I have created a presentation based on Broccolini's research findings. The presentation provides a framework for focusing on themes like tradition, tourism, play, and irony through structured discussion and exchange of observations.



Mediation 	In the post-play phase, I will foster a critical analysis of Tombola, encouraging participants to delve deeper and uncover the cultural richness and historical significance that lie beneath its seemingly simple exterior. Through guided discussions, we will explore the game's symbolism, its role in social interactions and cultural values.
Experiences: relatedness, identity, relevant, meaningful	
Methods 	Eliminating the prize money fosters a richer environment for interpersonal and intercultural exchange among students. This change encourages participants to engage with each other on a deeper level, sharing perspectives and experiences without the pressure of vying for a monetary reward.
Materials 	The prizes that students bring to the game session are intrinsically linked to their personal lives and cultural backgrounds. This includes sharing their favorite recipes, which can offer a glimpse into their family traditions and cultural heritage. They might also share their favorite songs, which can reveal their personal tastes and interests, as well as aspects of their identity. Additionally, students may share stories that are relevant to them, providing insight into their experiences, values, and beliefs. These shared items and stories foster a sense of community within the classroom, creating a space where students feel comfortable sharing their unique perspectives and learning from one another.
Mediation 	Despite being a Roman, I propose a variation of a Neapolitan game. During the creation of this mini-course, I did some research that revealed a significant divergence between the version I have always played and the original Neapolitan version, a discovery I found rather surprising and interesting. I will introduce my students to the version with which I am familiar, while acknowledging its deviation from the original and sharing the historical context of the latter, including my surprising discoveries. In the post-play phase, we will engage in a reflective discussion about similar games within the students' respective cultures, noting potential similarities and differences.

The teaching and learning, as high definition as you can share

What we do (teaching and learning)	What is the result (learning/outcomes/actions)
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Pre-play in asynchronous mode, with my periodic check-ups and my constant availability to help

I prepared simple flashcards to revise the numbers in Italian and also a listening comprehension activity — more similar to the actual game session — in which I draw out numbers aloud for students to recognize.

I have summarized in written form the rules of the game, with examples accompanied by pictures. I will probably also attach a YouTube video with the explanation made by another person, or I will make a video myself.

I created the cartelle (the cards with the 15 numbers) of the Tombola myself, with a simple layout, using text and emojis.

Cartella n°1							
4 Il maiale O' puorco		22 Il pazzo O' pazzo		42 Il caffè O' caffè	59 I peli è pile		82 La tarola imbandita A tavola mbandita
	11 I topi E' surice		31 Il padrone di casa O' padrone e casa		53 Il vecchio O' vecchio	71 L'uomo di merda L'uomo e merda	88 I ciociaralli E' casacavalle
	18 Il sangue O' sangue	25 Natale Natale		49 Il pezzo di carne O' pezzo e carne		60 Il male Se lamenta	75 Pulcinella Pulcinella

I created some activities to make a pragmatic focus before the game session, taking inspiration from York (2019, 2020). I wrote down some sentences that the students will have to match and group to the function (for example: “È uscito il 23?” → ask for confirmation if a number has already come out; “Mannaggia! Oggi sono proprio sfortunato/a!” → express frustration) and, in addition, the students will be asked to create, write, and add any other phrases that they find useful and would like to use.

Creation of prizes.

Pre-play in asynchronous mode, with my periodic check-ups and my constant availability to help

By knowing the rules and by mastering the numbers in Italian, students will be able to participate to the game session with awareness and enthusiasm.

No copyright issues arise at the time I create my materials.

Ease in communicative participation during the game session. Students will easily express happiness, frustration, requests for clarification and repetition of numbers, etc. They will do things in Italian during the game session.

Students bring digital prizes that reflect their personal lives and cultural backgrounds to the game session. These can include recipes, songs, and stories, in their native language and Italian. They may write, speak and record, draw, photograph and describe, etc. This fosters a sense of



Smorfia image activity for intermediate and advanced students Students choose one or two images from the Smorfia — individually, in pairs, or in groups, as they prefer — they read the explanation of the selected image, they create a summary of its meaning to share during the game session when that number/image comes up.	community and cultural exchange within the classroom. Understanding and sharing of cultural insights regarding Italian and Neapolitan culture.
During Play We play Tombola. We listen to the intermediate and advanced students' presentations. We talk, we explore, we listen, we comment, we exult, we get frustrated.	During Play Experience an Italian game, cross-cultural exchange and cultural insight.
Post-play Prize exchange. My cultural insight presentation on the history and the anthropological traits of Tombola. Debriefing guided by questions I have prepared, inspired by the articles I read. For example: 1. Are there any games similar to Tombola in your country? If yes, do you like to play it? Why? 2. You were able to choose the cartelle you played with. All the cartelle were numbered. Why did you choose those cartelle numbers? Do you believe in luck? What do you associate the numbers you chose with? 3. How does the experience of Tombola, both as a game and as a time of socialization and expression, make you reflect on the role of play in people's lives? What is the role of play in your life? 4. Does the "game within a game" of Tombola, with its obscene interpretations and double entendres, make you reflect on the role of transgression and humor in different cultures? In your country, are there games or traditions that use humor or	Post-play Discussion and awareness of traditions, touristification, play, irony and much more.



transgression to express something? Are there topics that are considered taboo and are not addressed with humor?	
5. How does the Neapolitan Tombola, with its local roots and transformations over time, make you reflect on the traditions of your country? What traditions do you consider most important in your culture and how have they changed over time?	

5 key takeaways for other teachers. Share tips, materials, etc that others can use immediately.

Takeaway		Details
1	Connecting students with each other is a good thing.	While online education has its limitations, it also unlocks possibilities that would otherwise be unattainable, such as connecting with people across vast distances. Although fostering connections through individual classes can be challenging, it is certainly not impossible. Inspired by a student's suggestion to connect all my students worldwide online, this submission was born.
2	The teacher does not know everything and cannot know everything, but can create the conditions to achieve knowledge.	My students are often curious about the culture of other Italian regions and cities. I'm from Rome, not Naples, so I don't pretend to be an expert on Naples. However, I can facilitate our discovery of the city by researching and finding materials, and by connecting students with Neapolitans. This process of discovery is valuable and stimulating for me as well. I can also share how my family and I have adapted and played this game over the years, presenting it as a familiar variation.
3	Sharing with students what we do, how we live our traditions and how we transform them is a valuable thing.	The experience of learning about a tradition from a person is more impactful than simply reading about it online. As educators, we can offer our students a personal connection to tradition, a relatable narrative and perspective that a webpage cannot provide. We can inspire and engage students in ways that go beyond the limitations of digital information.
4	It is interesting to (re)discover the traditional games of one's own country.	The story of the game Tombola reveals something profoundly human, something with which we can likely all connect. Teachers can experience the joy of rediscovering and sharing games that originated in their own country. This is an engaging way to connect students with cultural heritage and traditional games, fostering cultural appreciation and cross-cultural understanding.
5	Removing money sometimes induces creativity.	In Italy, Tombola is traditionally played with money. However, my family and I have reimagined this tradition by eliminating the monetary aspect and replacing it with a prize pool composed of second-hand items and experiences. This shift away from a monetary focus not only fosters creativity but also carries a personal touch and reflects the unique interests and talents of the players. (A difference between how I play with my family and how I plan to play with my students: since the course I created is online, because the students are scattered



		around the world, students cannot exchange items/prizes by hand and shipping things around the world may not be convenient, so this is the reason why the prizes put into the prize pool must be in digital format (PDF, photographs, audio, video, etc. → recipes, poems, songs, stories, lessons, etc.)
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TEACHING TIP

The teacher does not know everything and cannot know everything, but can create the conditions to achieve knowledge.

TEACHING TIP

Removing money sometimes induces creativity.

On doing > on potential

Keeping in mind that “I did X” is a lot better than “X can be done”» (deHaan, 2024), given that the outlined proceedings pertain to a project scheduled for December 2025, I encourage all interested readers to reach out starting January 2026 for inquiries and feedback regarding “what I did” -- the course's actual outcome. My contact information is available on my LLP profile: <https://llpjournal.org/2024/07/01/petra-khalil.html>

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Emoji Story Prompts

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Short summary:

I struggle with designing and implementing interesting and effective classroom activities that are simple enough for my learners to approach and succeed in using their target language, English. As such, I have been exploring the simplest ways to evoke stories in the language classroom. Part of that exploration is described in my recent LLP playground (Johnson, 2025). In the review process I was inspired to create this game software in collaboration with ChatGPT. It is an extremely simple digital tool to prompt people to create stories.

Game information

Title: Emoji Story Prompt Generator

Publisher: I made this with help from ChatGPT. Specifically I prompted it to generate code, then I tested the code and playtested the game, and repeated this process iteratively providing further prompts for ChatGPT to revise the code.

Availability: It is available for free on itch.io and [github](https://github.com). It is also fully open-source and licensed as GPL-3.0

Technology requirements: Modern browser or python.

Cost: Free

Play time: 5 minutes or more

Player count: Solo or more

Other important details for classroom implementation:

This is a tool to aid in facilitating story creation. There are many possible ways in which it could be implemented. It could easily be used in creative writing classes, but I will primarily discuss using it for collaborative oral storytelling. Oral storytelling is a core communicative genre - part of conversation, entertainment, and education. Spoken stories help build connections between people by creating empathy because of how readily we make meaning from narrative. They are subjective and personal, where written forms become more concrete and detached. From a pedagogical point of view of collaborative learning in TESOL, the written mode is often the preferred mode for focus on form work, as evidenced by the tremendous amount of literature on collaborative writing (see for example Storch, 2019). However, I speculate that the oral



mode might allow learners to more readily modify their output as a result of the interaction with their peers due to the more fluctuating and tenuous nature of speech.

TEACHING TIP

It is easy to play remotely through video or even text chat and the resulting emoji can easily be reproduced as they are simply text.

The game is a digital reimplementaion of the mechanics from the commercial off the shelf game, Rory's Story Cubes (O'Connor, 2005). That game can also be used in very similar ways and also includes the physical component of the dice, which provide the inspiration and constraints for storytelling. As a set of nine dice, each with six faces, one set of Rory's Story Cubes has 54 abstract images which provide inspiration and constraint. The digital Emoji Story Prompt Generator uses most of the full set of over 3600 emoji (at the time of this writing), with a few subsets removed or made optional. This measure prevents less familiar images like Japanese Kanji from appearing unless explicitly allowed by the user. It is easy to play remotely through video or even text chat and the resulting emoji can easily be reproduced as they are simply text.

Why is the game important for play (for ludic literacy)?

1	It encourages storytelling. Stories are innately human, but difficult for many people to create. The challenges are numerous, including limited productive knowledge of narrative structure and a high standard many people set for stories, probably influenced by the ubiquitous presence of masterful narratives in literature, the media, film, and television. For learners trying to produce a narrative in their target language, genre specific conventions in terms of vocabulary and grammar also pose a hurdle. These challenges can be addressed with pedagogical interventions modeling and scaffolding narrative elements, structure, as well as the linguistic conventions involved in the genre.
2	It simultaneously provides multimodal creative inspiration and constraints. The sometimes abstract images inspire numerous possible interpretations for narrative elements from the prompted set of emoji (👤❤️🐟📺👱🏻👉👊👋), as seen in the partial transcript below. Parentheticals are researcher notes. Father: Alright, what do we have Son: Ninja! F: Yeah there's a ninja, oh cool a coffin, fish, oh that could be like bacon, and... So... How about... What is this? (indicating 📺) S: Is it a ... bakudan? F: A bomb? could be a bomb, sure S: Or a computer? F: Computer. S: Or tablet? F: Yeah could be any of those, okay. So, I think I've got an idea... Once upon a time there was a Ninja.



The requirement for incorporating all of the nine images however constrains the story, as they must somehow be made to connect through the narrative. Later in the same game the following exchange shows how the use of that as a bomb is made to connect with fish, firefighter, and then coffin, and bacon.

S: Oh that's good. And... one person, took the fish,

F: Mhmm

S: So that the ninja put a bomb on the person that took on his house

F: The ninja took the, huh? Are you talking about the firefighter?

S: Yes.

F: So the fire fighter took the ninja's fish.

S: Mmm.

F: And then the ninja put the bomb

S: Yes.

F: On the fish? That's what you mean?

S: No. On the firefighter's home.

F: On the firefighter's house, oh okay. But... he's gonna blow up the fish then.

S: So he made a coffin of the fish.

F: Ok.

S: And he liked the fish so much he... osonae tte nante iu? (How do you say osonae?)

F: Oh he he offered like, he offered something to him

S: The fish always eated bacon

F: The fish always ate bacon.

S: Yes.

F: So he offered bacon to it on its coffin.

The resulting narratives are more often than not absurd and unrealistic in the real world, but humorous due to the constraint of being required to find connections between the images.

Why is the game important as a teaching tool (for pedagogic literacy)?

1	It significantly lowers the hurdle to facilitating story-based activities in the classroom. There is no need to purchase physical games, one prompt can be displayed for use by multiple groups even without individual devices, and the reusability is considerably greater than that of the previously cited games. The game as outlined below is quite simple and encourages collaborative dialogue. In doing so, it decreases the complexity of implementing storytelling play and permits teachers more time to incorporate pedagogical interventions that might support learners' constructive peer interaction and construction of narratives, as mentioned above.
2	The resultant prompts are text which are easily reproducible through copy and paste, facilitating digital manipulation and reproduction. This can be helpful as a support or visual aid if the stories will be used in extension activities like retelling the stories to the same or new audiences. It also provides a useful reference for feedback if audio recordings are made for assessment or evaluation.
3	It is flexible, fast, and free software. That means it's easy to adopt and adapt.

How did you show and play the game on the day at the event?

First I explained the rules and guidelines for playing with the Emoji Prompt Generator, as given below.

The basic rules for creating a story are:

1. Use all 9 emoji to tell a story.



2. They can be used in any way to inspire or cue an element of the story.
3. Use them in any order.
4. Copy and paste them into the order you used them, to document the story.

The basic rules for creating a story together are:

5. The same as above except ...
6. Whoever has an idea starts.
7. Whoever has another idea continues.
8. Use 1 to 3 emoji in a single storytelling turn.
9. Story elements inspired by an emoji can be longer than a single sentence or event.
10. Let everyone participate.
11. Decide the story together.
12. Ask for clarification!
13. Ask for advice and opinions!

First I showed an example of the game being played. The demonstration was a game between myself and my Japanese-dominant bilingual son based on the following nine emoji 🧑❤️🐟🔥👨🚒📺🍷👉. The dialog during play included several episodes which suggest how the quality of interactions emerging in the game might provide learning opportunities, shown in the extracts below. Extract 1 shows cumulative talk (Mercer, 1996) where players build on each other's contributions and me recasting a Japanese word that my son hesitated to produce in English.

(1) Example of a recast within a cumulative talk episode.

F: What is this?

S: Is it a ...bakudan?

F: A bomb? Could be a bomb, sure.

In Extract 2, I was uncertain of my son's intended meaning, and so I asked for clarification.

(2) Example of asking for clarification

F: A ninja took the, huh? Are you talking about the firefighter?

S: Yes.

F: So the firefighter took the ninja's fish?

In Extract 3, my son explicitly asks for a translation of the Japanese word *osonae*. I provide a parenthetical English translation for readers.

(3) Example of a request for help, specifically a translation.

S: *osonae* to *nanteiu*? (How do you say *osonae*?)

F: Oh he offered like, he offered something

Lastly, in Extract 4, my son makes an error with the past tense form of "eat", which I recast in full.

(4) Example of a recast incorporating a full reformulation.

S: The fish always eated bacon

F: The fish always ate bacon

S: Yes.

These interactive patterns show examples of corrective feedback and other learning opportunities within the coconstruction of the narrative. These could be reinforced through a later stage of retelling, providing the opportunity for modified output, that is, the incorporation of recast and translated language items.



Then I facilitated two sessions through the Discord server, one of which is recorded in the livestream recording of the symposium (York, 2025; 01:40:00-01:46:00).

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Playing Jackbox Party Packs to Practice Authentic English in the Classroom

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Short summary:

I am always on the lookout for digital games that support authentic language practice in the classroom. Jackbox Party Packs create a space where students can play with language in a meaningful yet low-stakes manner. These games encourage social and playful engagement, allowing learners to explore timing, humor, and collaboration—essential skills for real-world language use—without the pressure of formal assessment.

Game information

Title: Jackbox Party Pack Series (1-10)

Publisher: [Jackbox Games](#)

Availability: Digital download for Microsoft Windows and macOS (via [Steam](#), [Epic](#), and [Humble Bundle](#)), [Android](#), [iOS](#), [Apple TV](#), Linux, [Nintendo Switch](#), [PlayStation 4](#), and [5](#), and [Xbox 360](#), [One](#), and [Series X/S](#).

Technology requirements: PC or gaming console, internet connection, projector or large screen

Cost: Jackbox Party Packs typically range between \$13.74 to \$29.99 USD for a pack of five games. Prices can drop significantly during frequent sales, where 20% to 50% discounts are common.

Play time: Most games are about 15-20 minutes long.

Player count: Most Jackbox Party Pack games can accommodate 1–10 players. Additionally, each game often includes an audience mode that allows up to 10,000 people to participate—making it a flexible choice for both small and large classes.



Other important details for classroom implementation: Each student (or group of students) needs a smartphone, tablet, or laptop to join the game. If some learners do not have individual devices, they can participate in small groups sharing a single device.



Technology Setup

All you need: one screen + internet + student devices. Flexible for any class size with audience mode up to 10,000.

Why is the game important for play (for ludic literacy)?

1	Students use authentic language for gameplay in real-time in order to practice timing, humor, and reading the room in a safe framework of a game. Instead of rote learning of set phrases, students learn how to speak and engage in lively and organic exchange and banter.
2	Students practice following instructions and directions in the target language which mirror social and cultural rules one must negotiate while communicating by working within the framework of the rules of the game.
3	Gameplay is straight-forward. The audio and video reinforce the ‘magic circle’ (Huizinga, 1938/1955), providing signals and boundaries that, as Salen and Zimmerman (2004) note, help maintain the rules of play. Media cues such as sound and visuals deepen immersion, fostering a shared playful mindset (Goffman, 1961).
4	The games make it easier to encourage students to participate, regardless of language level, so no student is left behind. Inclusive participation is critical to the social dimension of play. Everyone has a role—even if some are more vocal, others can still participate.
5	The humor and ability to vote allows the games to provide a safe space for low-risk, low-stakes experimentation, so they may express themselves creatively without being put into the spotlight. The funny, collective decision-making fosters shared meaning-making, which highlights how playful activities generate a sense of co-creation and communal storytelling.



Why Jackbox in the Classroom?

Students play with language in real time. Humor, timing, and collaboration create authentic practice without exam pressure.



Magic Circle of Play



Audio and video create a shared playful mindset with clear boundaries and signals (Huizinga, 1938/1955).



Inclusive Engagement

Even quieter students join in through voting or teaming up. Every role matters.

Why is the game important as a teaching tool (for pedagogic literacy)?

1	Several games can be used to review classroom material. The immediate feedback given by both the teacher as well as their peers serve as formative assessment. This can inform the teacher of students' strong and weak areas in order to adjust future lessons.
2	By allowing students to make their own questions and answers, the game creates a constructivist learning space (Vygotsky, 1978; King, 1992; Yu, 2009) to use what they have learned in class to think critically and problem-solve for deeper engagement with the language material from the textbook (Gee, 2003; Whitton, 2014). This improves their metacognitive awareness (Flavell, 1979; Tanner, 2012) and encourages them to think about how they could improve their play next time.
3	Games can be chosen or adjusted for various language levels in order to match students' zones of proximal development. Teachers can add their own prompts or answers to balance the playing level of some games.
4	Larger classes can work in teams or participate as "audience members" who create a collaborative learning environment where peer feedback and social dynamics ensure full class engagement. Social-constructivist aspects of learning are demonstrated through the need for students to justify their answers and collaborate on team responses (Vygotsky, 1978).
5	Through post-game discussions or reflections, students engage in self-assessment and peer feedback. This helps them understand how they learn, reinforcing self-regulated learning strategies that are fundamental to strong pedagogic practice.



Pedagogic Power

When students make their own questions, they construct knowledge, develop critical thinking, and build metacognitive awareness.



How did you show and play the game on the day of the event?

For this presentation, I used Drawful Animate from the Jackbox Party Pack 8. I selected this game because it allows for high teacher control and flexibility, making it adaptable to any language level—from beginner to advanced. It is particularly effective for reviewing vocabulary, grammar points, or sentence structures. Its intuitive gameplay, similar to Pictionary, ensures a low learning curve and makes it accessible even to mixed-level classes.

One of the key advantages of Drawful Animate is the “make your own prompts” feature. Teachers can create customized word lists, or in higher-level classes, students can submit their own vocabulary, phrases, or sentences for peer review and collaborative input. This supports flipped classroom methodology and enhances learner engagement as they decide what the prompts the game will include.

For this demonstration, I used a vocabulary review list from my first-year beginner-level English course for Japanese students. The theme focused on the Interests and Activities units from their textbook. Students had previously studied gerund forms (～ing) or 動名詞 (～すること), and had practiced converting these into present continuous verb forms (現在進行形, ～している) by adding the correct be-verb (am/is/are). These structures were also introduced as complements to preference verbs such as like, dislike, enjoy, and hate.

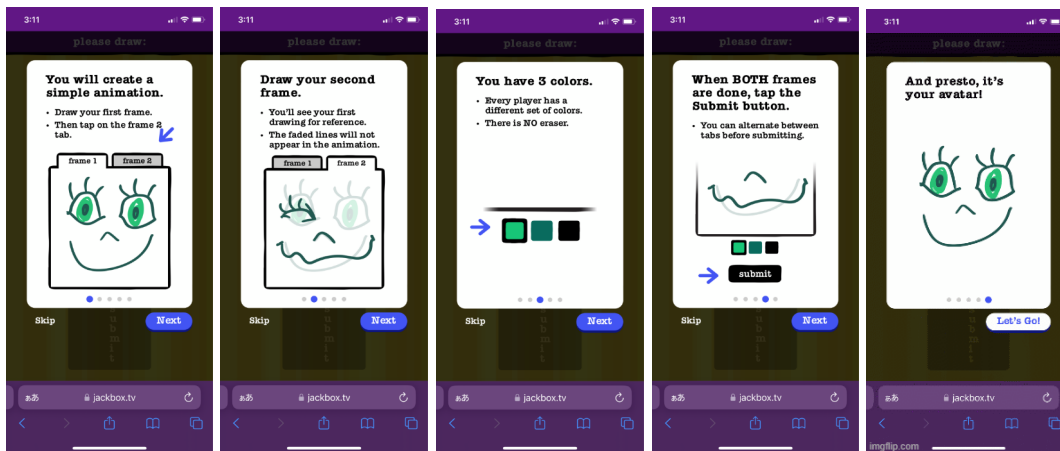
For this presentation, we played with the gerund forms of the activities. Additionally, especially in this particular type of review using action words, the animation theme of the game runs parallel to the material, invoking an image of “action”. For this particular exercise, the participants were shown (or would be instructed to enter) prompts in the format shown in the screenshot below:



The game flow was as follows:

Setup & Mini-Tutorial

- I launched the game and shared the room code.
- students joined via jackbox.tv on their own devices.
- As part of the login process, they created two-frame animated avatars—offering a built-in tutorial on how animation works in the game.



Gameplay:

- Each player receives a prompt from the list (e.g., playing tennis) and draws a two-frame animation:
 - Frame 1: Base drawing
 - Frame 2: a variation to show motion or progression.
- Once all animations are done, each one is shown to the group.
 - All players (save the artist) try to write a fake but convincing answer that others may pick in order to score points.
 - Players then choose from the prompts provided by all the other players and vote for the one they believe to be the actual answer.
- After everyone has voted on what they think the correct prompt was, the game shows list of checkboxes that players
 - ☒ ...to "Like" funny, creative, or clever answers
 - ☒ ...to give recognition to players even if their prompt wasn't picked
 - NOTE: Players are allowed to check more than one answer this time. These likes don't affect the main score, but they do count toward the "Most Liked" award shown at the end. They are a fun, social way for players and audience members to show appreciation for creativity and humor.



- Points awarded for:
 - Guessing the correct prompt
 - Fooling others into picking an erroneous prompt
 - Attracting guesses with the original answer

In typical classroom gameplay, after each round, the teacher or a student models a sentence orally using the correct grammar, depending on the grammar point being practiced from the list, e.g.:



“He is taking a selfie.”
(the underlined portion being the correct prompt)

The student or teacher uses the prompt in a complete sentence, reinforcing the fact that the appropriately conjugated **be-verb**, along with the **-ing** form, now constitutes the present continuous (or present progressive) verb form.

- If the goal is to practice using a preference verb with the gerund, the prompts can be adjusted (taking selfies), and the instructions given to follow the format as follows:

“She **likes** taking selfies.”

“She **enjoys** taking selfies.”

“She **doesn't like** taking selfies.”



“She **hates** taking selfies.”

- If the goal is to practice using preferences with the to-infinitive, the prompts can be adjusted (to take selfies) and the instructions given to follow the format as follows:

“She **likes** to take selfies.”

“She **doesn’t like** to take selfies.”

“She **hates** to take selfies.”

Audience Mode (for groups larger than 10)

- If there are more than ten players, the remaining students are requested to sign in as audience members and:
 - Vote on what they think is the real prompt
 - React to funny or clever answers with “likes” that may show up on screen, increasing the engagement of the class
 - Influence the game by voting for fake answers that earn players bonus points
 - The audience also adds energy to the game by watching, laughing, and interacting live—even if they’re not in the main group of players

The game encourages students to write grammatically correct and believable sentences to score points, reinforcing language learning through creativity and peer interaction.

At the end of the game, the player with the highest score is declared the winner. Additionally, a “Most Liked” award is given to the student whose animations received the most audience approval—offering an alternative form of recognition that values creativity and humor.



Grammar in Action

Prompts become grammar practice when practiced post-round, orally: He is taking a selfie. / She likes taking selfies. / She hates to take selfies.



Alternative Recognition



The Most Liked award values humor and creativity alongside accuracy.

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Medical English Escape Room

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Short summary:

I designed and ran an escape-room style game in which participants must work together to solve a variety of puzzles within a limited time for my medical English students as both a review for the final exam and a fun activity for their final lesson with me. I decided to do this to both end the school year on a memorable high note and to give my students a chance to learn in a novel way to help boost their recall of some of the test content. I will be talking about the process of planning, creating, and running the game, along with some of the challenges that I encountered, as advice for other teachers who may want to do something similar.



Game information

Title: Medical English Escape Room

Publisher: I created this activity myself, but was inspired by Fiona Wall Minami's 2024 LLP talk about escape rooms, as well as escape rooms that I have experienced in the US.



Availability: The activity used common objects and materials that would be available at any dollar/100 yen shop, such as a small cooler box, a bicycle lock, and plastic vials, as well as items that students should have with them such as pencils and smartphones.

Technology requirements: The only technology that was needed for the activity was a smartphone to be able to scan the QRcodes and listen to the audio files that were recorded by me.

Cost: Roughly 1000 yen for materials.

Play time: Students were given 1 hour to complete the puzzles and open the locked box.

Player count: Classes had an average of 20 students, who were asked to make groups of 3-4 people. With a larger space and more copies of the game materials, any number of players would be able to take part. In the case of multiple classes, each room would need a teacher/monitor.

Other important details for classroom implementation: Teachers may want to include a hint system for groups that get stuck on a puzzle, or otherwise monitor groups and see if any are struggling and need help. For example, each group could be given a set number of tickets that could be given to the teacher in exchange for a hint or some kind of assistance. In my case, students did not ask for hints, but I provided some suggestions and ideas for groups that seemed to be struggling or focusing on the wrong details.

For students that have difficulty focusing or staying on task, it may be a good idea to ask groups to decide on roles for each player. These roles might include a leader (keep the team focused and on task), a writer (take notes of important clues and hints, track which puzzles have been completed), timekeeper (manage time and set priorities), and an explorer (search the game environment for hidden clues, look for details that other members might overlook). In my own class, there were some students who seemed less motivated and let the other members of their group do most of the work, so I feel that assigning clear roles would help to balance out the work.

In normal lessons, students mostly interact with their textbook, notebook, and smartphone/laptop screen, so this experience pushed them outside of this



"comfort zone" to engage with novel objects and tasks.

Why is the game important for play (for ludic literacy)?

1	It creates an atmosphere of fun, challenge, and mystery. Most students have heard of or participated in escape rooms before, so they came to class knowing that it would be very different from a normal lesson.
2	This was a largely analog/physical activity. Students needed to move around the room, arrange pieces of paper like a jigsaw puzzle, manipulate small plastic test tubes, and finally open a physical combination lock to open a box. In normal lessons, students mostly interact with their textbook, notebook, and smartphone/laptop screen, so this experience pushed them outside of this "comfort zone" to engage with novel objects and tasks. In a small but still significant way, this helps to mirror the work they may do in the future, which will not always be predictable or based on a textbook.
3	Unlike the tasks and activities that we normally did in class, these puzzles were presented with no instructions, and students had to think, experiment, and collaborate to both find out what each puzzle was asking of them and how to solve it. This required a very different mindset that focused on independence (little or no direction from the teacher) and teamwork (depending on other members to progress). Without direct instruction, teams approached puzzles in different and creative ways, such as moving together to find and memorize information hidden around the room versus splitting up to try and cover the whole room at once. My students seemed excited by this extra layer of puzzle, and most of them worked hard to figure out how to progress.

The creation and planning process was very helpful for forcing me as a teacher to look at the lesson content (vocabulary, prefixes/suffixes, medical questions) in different and interesting ways.

Why is the game important as a teaching tool (for pedagogic literacy)?

1	Some of the puzzles presented the lesson content in unique and memorable ways, such as scanning a QRcode to listen to an audio clip of a patient describing their symptoms, and then having to match that clip to a specific illness or medical condition. This adds an aspect of realism and authenticity to the overall experience.
2	Students were given limitations during the activity, such as a 1 hour time limit and not being allowed to use their textbooks or notes. They needed to work together as a team to complete each puzzle, making this an exercise in collaborative learning and problem solving. At first some students seemed frustrated but quickly they tried to rely on their own knowledge and that of their teammates. Also, without access to notes, I feel that many students were more open to making mistakes.
3	The creation and planning process was very helpful for forcing me as a teacher to look at the lesson content (vocabulary, prefixes/suffixes, medical questions) in different and interesting ways. Though some of the puzzles are straightforward matching or word-jumbles, I wanted to include other aspects such as words hidden around the room, a jigsaw puzzle that required players to tape a paper back together, and QRcodes that linked to audio files.

How will you show/play the game on the day at the event?



I have a document with photos, explanations, and the original puzzles that I will share. I would also like to have participants try some of the puzzles themselves, so I will prepare some of them in a way that works digitally.

Sample puzzle: [Medication Calendar puzzle](#)

Presentation slides: [Medical Escape Room](#)

All puzzles and materials: [Medical English Escape Room](#)