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Wonder Flower: Planting Seeds of Life and Language in a Pixelated City

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Article Details

Keywords:

Wonder Flower
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Growth
Storytelling

Key points

- **Name of ludic object:** Wonder Flower
 - **Type/genre/theme:** Pixelated storytelling game/ interactive narrative/ quest-based adventure
 - **Intended audience age** 🧑: School-aged learners and beyond
 - **Intended audience proficiency** 🗣️: A1 to B2
 - **Typical time to play** ⌚: 20-40 minutes per game (easily paused/resumed)
 - **Number of players** 👤: 1-2 players, or small groups
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Tweet synopsis

Wonder Flower transforms language learning into a pixelated adventure. Players grow vocabulary, storytelling, and collaboration skills while helping Sherbert heal a gray city through kindness and quests. #ludiclanguagepedagogy #WonderFlower

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Introduction

When we first encountered the online browser-based video game called *Wonder Flower*, we were struck not only by its mechanics but by its spirit. This small, pixelated world invited us to slow down and notice. It felt less like a traditional game and more like an interactive story, reminiscent of the quiet, exploratory charm of early classics such as *The Legend of Zelda* released in 1986 for the Nintendo Entertainment System. We believe that *Wonder Flower* is a game worth loving, not only for its artistry and charm but also for its power as a teaching tool.

In this article, we, the authors, share artifacts in the form of videos and pictures that document our work with *WonderMDXR LAB* members connected to the project. *Flower* in the Meaningful Digital Experiences Research Lab (MDXR LAB) at Monmouth University (United States). The first author is an associate professor in the Department of Speech-Language Pathology, and the second and third authors are graduate students in the same program. Together, we collaborate in the MDXR LAB, which is dedicated to exploring how digital technologies can be used thoughtfully in speech-language therapy and education. Through research and innovative projects, the lab examines when digital tools can meaningfully support communication and learning, and when other approaches might be more appropriate. This shared perspective grounds our work and informs the ways we explore games such as *Wonder Flower*. Figure 1 shows members of the MDXR LAB connected to the *Wonder Flower* project.

Figure 1



Game Overview

Wonder Flower is a freely available game uploaded to itch.io (<https://squiqgythings.itch.io/wonderflower>). Created by Elias Ananiadis (<https://eliasananiadis.com/>), it follows Sherbet, a caring resident of a pixelated city where all plant life has died. Alongside their friend Gelato, Sherbet learns about a magical seed that could grow into the legendary Wonder Flower, a blossom that never wilts. To make the Wonder Flower possible, Sherbet sets out to find a bucket, fertilizer, and a watering can. Along the way, Sherbet helps townspeople with their problems, forming connections and receiving tools and rewards. At its heart, the story is about restoring life and hope through kindness and small acts of service. Figure 2 shows the game's pixelated visual style and cast of engaging characters.

Figure 2

Visual style and characters of *Wonder Flower*.



The game is played through simple, accessible computer keyboard controls that allow players to move through the environment, interact with characters, and manage their progress. Players navigate Sherbet through the world using directional keys (or WASD), with the ability to climb or break glass floors once specific items are obtained. Interaction is central to gameplay; pressing the down directional key (or S) allows players to talk with characters, receive quests, and advance the story. Additional controls support selecting options, and managing in-game text, while an inventory and map system can be opened at any time to track collected

items and objectives. A pause feature (pressing the P key) allows players to stop and resume gameplay as needed. Together, these mechanics create a low-barrier entry point, allowing players to focus on exploration, interaction, and collaboration rather than complex control demands.

Growing Language

Wonder Flower offers a rich landscape for language growth. Every moment presents opportunities to name, categorize, and describe. Learners can sort vocabulary into groups such as characters, animals, objects, or places, building connections between words and concepts. The unfolding story encourages descriptive language, pushing players to say not only what they see but what is happening. Importantly, these language opportunities are most fully realized when the game is paired with intentional pedagogical framing and collaborative play. With support from a clinician, teacher, or peer, players can be guided to generate utterances such as, “Sherbet is looking for the bucket” or “The snail is blocking the path.” These moments naturally expand into longer sentences that strengthen syntax and clarity. The game also supports “wh” questions such as what, who, where, and when, because quests require recalling details and anticipating next steps.

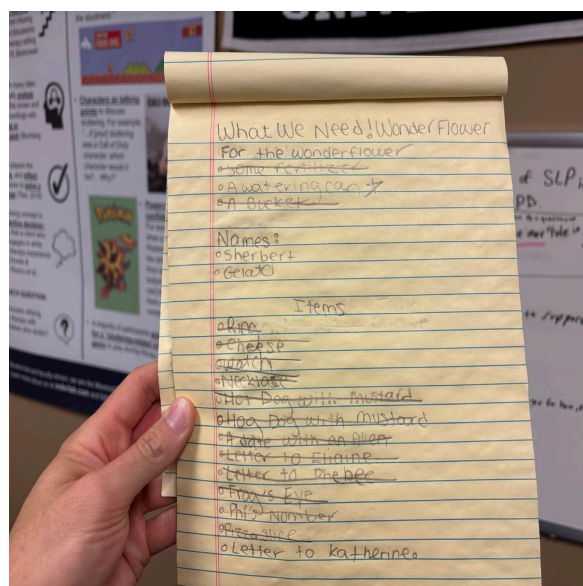
Our first video clip (<https://tinyurl.com/WF-Clip-1>) illustrates these opportunities. As Sherbet received a new item, the children read the dialogue aloud, experimented with describing what it could do, and quickly shifted into giving one another directions. Phrases such as “go left” and “press the down arrow” highlight how naturally sequencing and imperative forms surfaced. Laughter and overlapping talk showed collaborative communication, with learners predicting outcomes, negotiating turns, and clarifying instructions.

Our second video clip (<https://tinyurl.com/WF-Clip-2>) shows how the group used notetaking to extend practice beyond the screen. We jotted down what had happened in the game so far: which items had been collected and which still needed to be found. This transformed gameplay into a shared storytelling activity where children recalled events, organized information, and anticipated what might come next. This supports deHaan’s (2019) point that much of the meaningful language work with games happens before and after play, as learners retell and create around their experiences. Similarly, Al-Khanfar (2023) demonstrated how playing *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* in Spanish became a foundation for collaborative translation and vocabulary growth, showing how games can serve as authentic contexts for language development.

We often rotate the role of “note taker,” giving each child the chance to document the journey. As shown in Figure 3, children documented gameplay events and tracked important items during collaborative play. During breaks, the group reviews the notes together, retelling events and checking progress against the larger quest. This encourages summarizing, sequencing, and collaborative problem-solving. It also allows for playful correction and elaboration, as children build on one another’s ideas. This approach is supported by research demonstrating that note taking functions as a generative learning strategy, helping learners organize information, make connections across ideas, and strengthen comprehension (Chang & Ku, 2015). In this way, the act of documenting and revisiting gameplay becomes not just a record of events, but a meaningful process of constructing understanding.

As clinicians and teachers, we step in only to model language when needed or to prompt expansion. Within this shared activity, note-taking shifts from an individual task to an interactive scaffold that supports expressive communication in real time. It becomes a tool for

Figure 3
Collaborative gameplay notes..



reinforcing vocabulary and story structure, and a way of giving each learner a voice in shaping the shared adventure. This mirrors York's (2023) emphasis on creating SPACE in classrooms, where play provides opportunities for safe participation, agency, and meaningful experiences, and echoes deHaan's (2019) call for educators to frame games as part of broader pedagogical sequences linking play with reflection.

Extending the Dialogue

After playing together, the children drew thank-you pictures for the game's creator. These drawings, filled with game characters and bright colors, capture the joy and gratitude the game inspired. We then scanned and emailed the pictures to Elias Ananiadis himself, allowing the children to share their appreciation directly with the creator. In doing so, they extended the dialogue of the game beyond the screen, using art and language to say "thank you" for an experience that made them feel connected and capable. Figures 4 and 5 highlight children sharing thank-you artwork inspired by their *Wonder Flower* experiences.

Figure 4

Child sharing thank-you drawing.

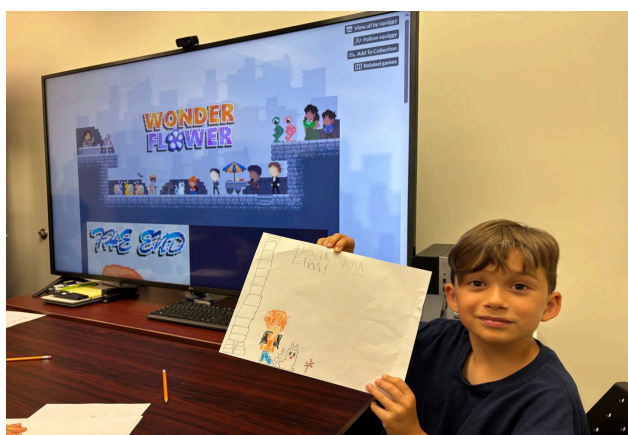


Figure 5

Children sharing thank-you drawings.



These visuals remind us of what makes *Wonder Flower* so special. It is not just a game about planting a flower. It is a shared space where players can explore words, tell stories, support one another, and feel part of something hopeful. That, to us, is the true magic of this game. We are deeply grateful to Elias Ananiadis for creating *Wonder Flower* and for giving all of us a beautiful space to learn, connect, and imagine together.

References

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