Ludic Language Pedagogy Playground
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It's your mooooove: Why teaching with games should be like v a p o r w a v e (and not like nightcore)[1]

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📍 Item Details

🔑 Key points

👤 **What is this?** A playful conceptualization of teaching with games as v a p o r w a v e .

▓▓ **Why did you make it?** During a recent conversation, I came upon the concept of teaching with games as v a p o r w a v e . This document is an exploration of the concept in more detail and as a place for others to discuss and comment on.

🌺 **Who is it for?** Teachers who are unsure where games fit into their curriculum, how often to use them, how long they should be used, what to do before or after games, etc.

🌴 **What is v a p o r w a v e ?** Essentially, slowed down 80s pop music, which gives it a modern, hybrid a e s t h e t i c .

Tweet synopsis

👤 There's no need to rush gameplay in a classroom.

▓▓ 20 minutes at the end of the week? Too short.

🌺 Take your time. Give students time. Slow it down.[2]

🌴 Good Ludic Language Pedagogy is like v a p o r w a v e ; not nightcore.

🌊 #LudicLanguagePedagogy #vaporwave

View at the LLP Playground:
llpjournal.org/2020/06/24/york-teaching-with-games-vaporwave.html

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[1] **Marc Jones: This is playful, and I love that, but it is potentially an accessibility nightmare. It took me a lot of effort to get through the black on pastels and some of the formatting is hard to focus on. Is there a way to tone it down a bit while remaining playful?**
James: Yes, please check THIS VERSION.
[2] Jonathan deHaan: Love this line. I keep coming back to it. It's such a compact, fitting, mantra.

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🌸 What is ｖａｐｏｒｗａｖｅ?[3]

ｖａｐｏｒｗａｖｅ is a style of music that started appearing in the 2010s. It fundamentally slowed down pop music from the 70s and 80s and takes inspiration from the art of that generation also (see Figure 1). Scholars have postulated that the genre is a form of punk rebellion or a "critique and parody [of] consumerism" (McLeod, 2018, p. 123). That is, the music is far from original: it does not use samples in a clever or innovative way, it just rips the original music and slows it down. That's it. For an example of some "good"[4] ｖａｐｏｒｗａ ｖｅ music, please listen to the following "remix" of Diana Ross's song "It's Your Move" (1984) by Macintosh Plus (2011) in Table 1. As can be seen from the track title, the use of Japanese characters appears throughout the genre. One reason for this is that 80s *Japanese pop* songs are often the base of ｖａｐ ｏｒｗａｖｅ tracks. The visual aesthetics of the genre mash Roman busts, checkerboard patterns, pastel colours (predominantly pink) and simple, geometric patterns (○, 〜, ▲, etc.).

Figure 1 *An example of the 80s pop aesthetic that vaporwave musicians take inspiration.*

Table 1 *An example of the ｖａｐｏｒｗａｖｅ genre.*

Version	Artwork	Details	
Original[5]		Artist: Album: Track: On YouTube:	Diana Ross Swept Away It's Your Move DIANA ROSS it's your move[6]
🏙️ ｖａｐｏｒ ｗａｖｅ🏞️		Artist: Album: Track: On YouTube:	Macintosh Plus Floral Shoppe リサフランク420 / 現代のコンピュー (in English: Lisa Frank 420 Modern Computing) https://youtu.be/cCq0P509UL4?t=207

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[3] This paper was written listening to this ｖａｐｏｒｗａｖｅ playlist on Spotify. It is recommended that readers put this on as background music whilst reading.

[4] Obviously, ｖａｐｏｒｗａｖｅ, like any art form, is incredibly subjective. This album is however recognised as one of the most typical examples of the genre.

[5] **Jonathan**: The connection/embedding of the music with the teaching ideas REALLY works for me.

[6] As pointed out by DM Jones -- the title of this song aligns perfectly with the concept of the paper: teaching with games where it's now YOUR turn to make a move.

🗿 How on earth does this connect to language teaching?

In this playground item, I want to put forth the idea that language teachers should <u>slow down,</u> and take more time on activities in their classrooms. In the world of modern foreign language teaching (if not education in general), the increase in adoption of educational technologies and the ease of collecting quantitative data has ramped up an emphasis on results and grades or what has been called the datafication of education. Datafication is not only limited to grades, but may also include a surveillance-like monitoring of students' discipline (Manolev, Sullivan & Slee, 2019). With grades easier to quantify, tests can be made more difficult, and courses more "efficient" (to borrow a term from the "kaizen" movement) (Masaaki, 1986). For teachers and students then, "time is money" after all.

As a result, teachers may be most concerned with getting students to complete course materials as quickly as possible, and are judged on how well their students do at standardized tests. We have institutional goals, national and global standards and a limited amount of time to teach content before students take term final exams. Given all these pressures, it's easy to think that there is no time to "slow down" and "take things easy" in one's classroom. But this paper argues that slowing things down is precisely what we need. Not just because it's aesthetically pleasing, but also because there are solid cognitive and affective benefits associated with slowing down our teaching practices. Vaporwave's ironic parody of 1980's consumer aesthetics serves as a useful foil for rethinking what Darvasi has called "McEducation" (2016, p.71), one-size-fits-all, fast-food like approaches to teaching and learning[7]. In language teaching, as with other subjects, teachers could learn a thing or two from ｖａｐｏｒｗａｖｅ.

> In language teaching, as with other subjects, teachers could learn a thing or two from ｖａｐｏｒｗａｖｅ.

🎲 What does this mean for teaching languages with games?

Similar to how ｖａｐｏｒｗａｖｅ artists like to use the Japanese language to give their creations a sheen of "hipness" and "cool", I will also use a Japanese word to describe a common way in which teachers employ games in their classrooms:

The word is pronounced *tsukaisute*, and means "single-use," "disposable," or "throwaway." I argue that teachers' use of games is often considered the same: a "fun" activity, "bit of fluff" or "treat." A dopamine hit that *tricks* uninterested students to practice the L2. Of course, that is, or at least I hope it is, a gross overstatement and hyperbole. The "tricking" here is rather a deep seated belief in games being useful for promoting engagement as learners are motivated to complete the "fun" activity. Teachers have promoted game use for their cognitive and, more commonly, *affective* benefits in language teaching for the last five decades (Palmer and Rodgers, 1983; Dorry, 1966; Poll, 1973; Davis & Hallowell, 1977). However, I am concerned that the typical usage of games as found in current volumes are somewhat 表面的[8].

As a concrete example, the first "game" in the new TESOL Press book on "new ways" of using games in teaching is a common ice-breaking activity: Two Truths and a Lie (Nurmukhamedov & Sadler, 2020). Students get points for guessing which of three sentences a partner shares is a lie. After the game,

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[7] Thanks to Peter Hourdequin for the rewrite of this sentence.
[8] ひょうめんてき (HYOUMENTEKI), superficial

students reveal what information they found about their partner. The game is an ice-breaker and is fulfilling its role. "It has served its purpose," you might say. But then what of other games in the book? Maybe they have more depth, more rigorous pedagogical underpinnings? Loftier goals attached to them?

Another example (chosen randomly) is "Catchphrase for EFL" (Kiser, 2020, p.136) which sees students practice circumlocution skills (describing a word using other words). Students take it in turn to draw a card from a predefined deck, and describe the word without saying it. Once a student guesses the word being described, it is the next student's turn and the game continues until there are no cards left. After the game the author posits that "you may wish to explain the purpose of the game" (ibid. p.137), which is to utilize the skills trained here when encountering an unknown vocabulary word in conversation outside the class. A specific game for a specific skill or purpose then. OK. I see a pattern emerging.

After analyzing the book's chapter keywords, the most common are "practice" (n = 35) and "vocabulary" (n = 33) followed by the skills "listening" and "speaking" (both n = 13). Picking a random chapter, then, one generally finds "listening skills" or "practice using grammar and vocabulary" as the aim for using a game in class.

Subsequently, and importantly, the types of games featured in the TESOL volume are extremely low-tech. This is not a criticism. Of 94 chapters, only 18 are written about the use of digital tools (not all of them games in my opinion). Therefore, it seems that DGBLL (digital game based language learning) exists as a theoretical, researched topic rather than something that is commonly practiced in classrooms. If this is the case, why are we so transfixed on the digital? Why do *digital* games appear in the research literature but "Traditional Pencil and Paper Games," "Dice Games" and "Board Games" as seen in the TESOL volume do not? Is research on games *使い捨て*, too? That is, are these studies carried out merely to fulfill a research agenda rather than to filter down into actual, practical implementation?

> Is research on games *使い捨て*, too?

Finally, the average length of time for in-class game use prescribed by each of the 94 chapters is just 20.6 minutes (SD = 25.1). It took me longer to get that data point than most teachers in the book spend using a game in their classes. What can be achieved in just 20 minutes of game use? The answer appears to be "vocabulary practice" and "listening" or "speaking" skills as those are the most common keywords in chapter aims (see "Quizlet Charades" from the same volume as a typical example). These one-time, one-skill game uses provide fun or interesting experiences where students can use language, however, they strike me as *使い捨て* examples[9].

> What can be achieved in just 20 minutes of game use?

In sum then, and in stark opposition to the research literature on the affordances of games for language learning (see Reinhardt, 2019 for a review), language teachers appear to be using analog over digital games for the purpose of practicing language forms for an average of 20 minutes per game.

Taking inspiration from v a p o r w a v e then, by spending more time on game play and game-related activities rather than just throwing them out once played, we get closer to something

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[9] **James:** Thanks to DM Jones for helping me to write this section.

that resembles Ludic Language Pedagogy: an approach to using games that specifically includes the teacher and their pedagogical interventions and mediation. LLP then, has the following parallels to v a p o r w a v e (Table 2).

Table 2 *A comparison of LLP and v a p o r w a v e*

LLP	🔮v a p o r w a v e✨
(1) Increases time dedicated to gameplay and game-related activities (slows down teaching).	Slows down existing music.
(2) Is not new. Language teaching methodology is not new. We don't need to reinvent the wheel to be innovative.	Is not new.
(3) Is an approach where teachers **craft and modify games for instructional ends**.[10]	Is a type of DIY musical bricolage, crafting music out of existing materials.
(4) Is a forceful **rejection of the "McEducation"** trend.	Is a forceful rejection of consumerism.

As a concrete example of how one may do more with a game than practice vocabulary, see any of the articles or walkthroughs in Ludic Language Pedagogy journal (Table 3). For example, I (York, 2019) outlined how I deliberately rejected the assigned textbook (**4: reject McEducation**), and created a curriculum around board games play (**3: craft and modify**). The pedagogical approach was informed by a task-based language teaching approach (**2: is not new**). Finally, after a stint of playing a new game each week with a huge number of extracurricular activities I slowed down my teaching to include gameplay to only two of a 7-week class cycle (see also Staats, 2019) (**1: increase time dedicated to gameplay and related activities**).

Table 3 *Examples of LLP as v a p o r w a v e in the Ludic Language Pedagogy journal.*

Author	Ludic	Language	Pedagogy
deHaan (2019)	Railways of the World	English as a foreign language	Multiliteracies
York (2019)	Various games	English communication	TBLT
Jones (2020)	Various games	Any modern foreign language	Various
deHaan (2020a)	Jenga	English communication	Sociocultural Theory

🌓 Some considerations for slowing down game use in your class

This section lists some simple suggestions and considerations for activities other than merely playing games to practice vocabulary or grammar points (see also deHaan, 2020b). Concrete examples from my own experiments in an *interactive design* approach to curriculum development are provided.

🌊 Play games more than once

Is it really that revolutionary? Games take time to learn and become proficient at, especially complex games like board or video games. Task repetition has been shown to help increase learner output in terms of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (see Bygate, 2001; Fukuta, 2015). A concrete example from my own teaching can be seen in York (2019) where learners played a board game, analyzed their interactions and corrected errors post-play, and then replayed the same board game with an increased knowledge of both the rules, and language requirements.

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[10] Thanks to Paul Darvarsi for this conceptual link between LLP and vaporwave.

🌊 Be (pedagogically) playful/creative

Vaporwave forces us to reconsider the music of the 80s or, at least, forces us to see it in a new way. It is a creative(?) reuse of the old, transforming it into something new. In a similar fashion, as teachers we have the opportunity to create a learning context for our students. For example, even if you are enslaved to the use of an institution-wide textbook, the textbook itself does not predefine a teaching strategy, only the content of instruction. It is the pre-existing 80s music (keeping with the ｖ ａ ｐ ｏ ｒ ｗ ａ ｖ ｅ metaphor) with which we can manipulate and remix to our students' benefit.

Concretely then, with games, consider adding in pre- and post-gameplay activities. The more the merrier! Identify issues or instances where students are struggling and create activities (on the spot if necessary) to circumvent them or to aid students' understanding. Put theory into practice. Borrow ideas from friends, colleagues, or people you follow on Twitter..! But make sure they fit your context and are chosen for a specific purpose, not just because they sound cool.

Iterate your creation process. Just as I advocate playing the same game multiple times as a way to build confidence and language comprehension, don't give up on a pedagogical intervention after the first "playtest." Good games were not made in one sitting and neither will your curriculum. It needs to be playtested and iterated a number of times to really shine.

> Don't give up on a pedagogical intervention after the first "playtest." Good games were not made in one sitting and neither will your curriculum.

In terms of **pre-play activities,** of course, teaching students how to play a game is a necessary pre-game task, but it need not be teacher-fronted. Students could select a game and learn it on their own. They could be instructed to watch a YouTube "how to play" video or they might brainstorm words and phrases that they think they will need. Gameplay is cognitively demanding. So much so that your students may struggle to use the second or foreign language during gameplay. Play in the mother tongue first if you need, to get a feel for the game, to start students' minds roiling with the possibility of emergent gameplay or strategies they may want to employ and then consider the vocabulary or grammar they will require to pull off such a feat…. **Post-gameplay** debriefing or reflection sessions can help students make sense of what happened, what language they used, what language they wanted to use but couldn't and what language they *will use* in any subsequent play sessions (because you're going to play the same game more than once, right?).

> ⧄⧄⊡ **TEACHING TIP**
> "Slowing things down and making sure that students are taking their time and reflecting on the language they are using." (York, on Staats, 2019)

🌊 Using the mother tongue to lead to target language development

Speaking the target language during gameplay is a valuable activity to increase proficiency in that language. However, mother tongue use *during* or *outside of* gameplay can also be a useful tool to help scaffold proficiency. [Trans]languaging[11] is the concept of using your mother tongue (and other semiotic resources) for meaning-making purposes in the target language (Swain, 2006). It is a powerful tool for checking understanding, making oneself understood, and scaffolding proficiency.

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[11] Again, not a new concept. Let's use what already exists, and remix it for our own contexts.

The point I mean to drive here is this: <u>do not punish mother tongue use</u>. Instead, use it as a scaffolding tool for improved language proficiency.

In my own v a p o r w a v e -like context, students play the same board game twice. Both sessions are recorded and transcribed for further post-play analysis. During the first play session, students are told (as is class mantra) to use *English first*, but that they are free to use their mother tongue for anything they cannot portray in English. Why? Because the mother tongue utterances are an extremely valuable source of data for analysis and language growth. This is because those mother tongue utterances, if transcribed or analysed in post-play activities can be used to facilitate learning of equivalent phrases in the second or foreign language. See Figures 2 and 3 below for a comparison of first and second gameplay sessions for one particular group that transcribed and analysed their language use as part of my classroom practice.
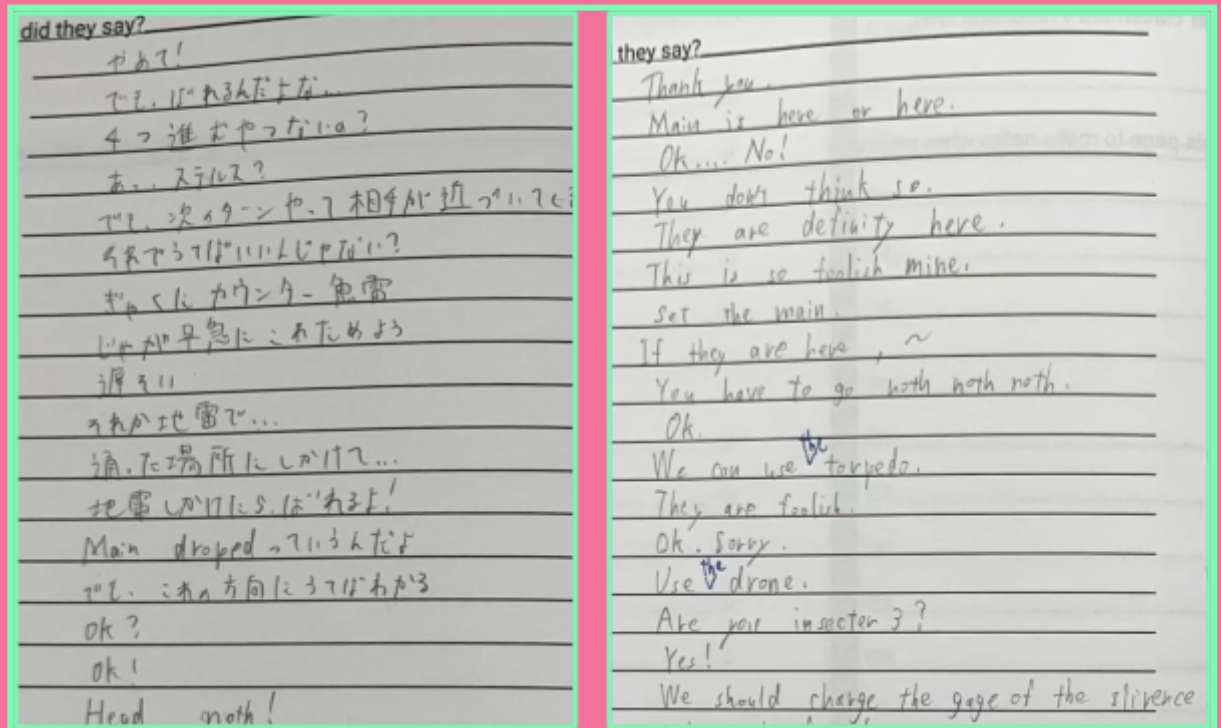
Figure 2 *A comparison of post-play gameplay transcriptions highlighting improved target language use. (First on the left, second on the right).*

🌊 Don't relegate cognitively demanding tasks to homework

Be wary of how much learning is happening outside of the classroom with a flipped learning approach. Homework activities may be better carried out in the classroom. Mechanical activities may be successfully prescribed for homework such as transcription in the case above. Cognitively demanding tasks, on the other hand, are better in the classroom where students have their peers and the teacher to work with and check their comprehension. Again, from my own experience, I would assign both 1) learning rules and 2) correcting any vocabulary and grammatical mistakes as a solo homework activity so that class time could be dedicated to outputting the target language. A big mistake. Half of the students would not complete the homework due to more pressing assignments from their major fields of study, the other had nobody to check their corrections and so were unsure whether what they wrote was correct or not. Now, students spend a full 100-minute class on learning how to play (see Table 4).

Table 4 *An example of a flipped classroom compared to a ｖａｐｏｒｗａｖｅ classroom*

Version	Details
Flipped classroom approach	- Learn rules for homework - Transcribe and error-correct as homework by themselves.
`～ｖａｐｏｒ　ｗａｖｅ～` **approach**	- Spend a full class on learning game rules, using the rulebook, peers, the teacher, YouTube videos, etc. - Transcribe at home by themselves. - Spend a full class on error correction with peers, the teacher, YouTube videos, online grammar guides

> ◺◿▤ **TEACHING TIP**
> Be wary of how much learning is happening outside of the classroom with a flipped learning approach

🧩 Summary

The table overleaf (Table 5) is a compilation of the above points. But I ask before I end this paper: Is this really anything to do with 「ｖａｐｏｒｗａｖｅ」 or is it just 「ｇｏｏｄ☆ｔｅａｃｈｉｎｇ」? That is, what constitutes "good teaching" in your mind? Is it one or more of these adjectives: creative, conscious, considered, fun, and engaging?

Is 「ｇｏｏｄ☆ｔｅａｃｈｉｎｇ」 _with games_ the use of a game at the end of a unit to treat students for doing the "hard work" of slogging through the textbook, or can the game be used in place of the textbook entirely? Is learning with games limited to specific skills acquired through gameplay or can you drop the BPM, and spread that gameplay out to act as the springboard for acquiring a variety of other skills?

Of course, your institutional regulations or limitations may prevent you from using games at all, and if so, you should perhaps consider a follow up to this paper as "Teaching languages with games as 70s punk!" I can't wait to read it.

Table 5 *An example of teaching with games as v a p o r w a v e in comparison to non- v a p o r w a v e game use.*

Version	Details
Original	- You are teaching a specific grammar point and have selected a complex, emergent board game for students to play in class because you heard that students can practice speaking with it. - In class, you: **Present** the grammar. **Practice** the grammar before playing. - Introduce the rules to students. - Play the game where students try to **produce** the target grammar in the game. - You notice that students mostly spoke their mother tongue during play. - You decide that the game was "too difficult" and go back to the conversations in the textbook.
▬ v a p o r w a v e▬	**As above:** - You are teaching a specific grammar point, have selected a game to practice it. - In class you: **Present** the grammar. **Practice** the grammar before playing. Introduce the rules to students. Play the game where students try to **produce** the target grammar in the game. - You also notice that students mostly spoke their mother tongue during play. **New:** - During play, students were recording audio of themselves playing. - They listen to it together and: - Laugh at the progression of the game[12] - Discuss, in their mother tongue, the problems they had, 1) speaking the target language, 2) following the game rules. - Write out common mistakes, and check the rules again. - Watch youtube videos of native speakers playing the same game to mine vocabulary or interesting phrases. - You listen as well and - Instruct them again on the grammar point which was the target of the class - Provide help regarding the rules - Ask questions regarding their performance - Finally: students (and you?!) play the game again several times until they become confident enough to play using (mostly) the target language.

[12] **Evan:** Just clicked to me that listening to yourself in a recording provides a nice distance from yourself, and laughing together as a group can be a great way to humble students into being more motivated to work on their literacy.

DM: It can also be used as a tangible artifact of progression over time in a portfolio. This is particularly powerful if the learner is engaged in identifying and noticing the progression, learning, and challenges.

🎮 BONUS thought: Teaching languages with games as "nightcore"

Additionally, I am including a "nightcore" version of the same track. What is nightcore? It's the opposite of ｖａｐｏｒｗａｖｅ: speeded up 80s pop with anime graphics as the main aesthetic. If careful, considered game use is ｖａｐｏｒｗａｖｅ, the disposable, throwaway usage could be considered nightcore, and nobody likes that now, do they?[13]

Table 4: *Nightcore version of Diana Ross's original track, "It's Your Move."*

Artwork	Details
	Nightcore version **Artist**: Unknown **Album**: Unknown **Track**: Nightcore - It's Your Move https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SceFx1vNCro

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