

TREND 3: DIGITAL GAME BASED LEARNING (DGBL)

Students love to play video games, but many teachers may have doubts about how they can be used for learning. Teachers who do not play video games often see them as a distraction that students spend too much time playing. Taking a closer look at video games shows us that these games are more than entertainment for our students. They are also platforms where students can create and share stories with other fans of these games.

Teachers who do not play video games can still take advantage of these games and their *affinity spaces* in the language classroom. Affinity spaces are both real and Internet-based spaces where people with similar interests can gather together to interact and learn from one another. In the case of video games, these affinity spaces are often English speaking and our students can often be motivated to learn English so they can interact with others who share their love of a particular game.

In this week's Teacher's Corner, we will explore ways we can take advantage of video games for the language classroom even when we do not play video games ourselves.

WHY VIDEOGAMES? WHY NOW?

The use of video games in the classroom, or Digital Game-Based Learning (DGBL), is one of the major trends in education today. The question for many non-video gaming teachers is: why? Here are some of the leading facts for the use of games in the classroom:

Video games are the new media literacy – We are all familiar with the traditional forms of media: music, books, movies, and television. For many of us, these ‘big four’ media have

existed our whole lives. As a result, we understand them and use them frequently for relaxation, entertainment, and learning. Video games are now the fifth major literacy (Squire, 2008). Teachers use each of the other four media in the classroom and now that video games have joined the list of major media literacies, it is time we use them too.

Video games are the first interactive literacy – What makes games a powerful media is their interactivity. Music, books, movies, and television are all ‘one-directional’ literacy; we can consume them but not change them. Our students love video games because unlike traditional literacies, games are interactive. Video games respond to the choices we make as a player, and the story changes as a result of these decisions. This ability to make decisions and see the results is engaging and motivating for our students. When students play games, they have an experience that they can then share and discuss in the language classroom.

Video games are big business – The video game industry is now the largest media industry in the world, making more money each year than either the movie or music industry. For teachers, this is important, as we should recognize that our students may want to work in this industry. The video game business is a global business with games being made in countries around the world by globalized teams. Many of these positions require fluency in English. If you have students who dream of making games in the future, take time to remind them that working in the video game business means knowing and using English.

Video games can take our students to America – The fastest growing area of video games is e-sports. In e-sports, teams of players compete in organized competitions across the world. This year’s [DOTA II International e-sports competition](#) saw teams of players

compete for USD \$20 million in prize money. These teams are international teams that all use English to communicate. Even American universities are developing e-sports teams. This year the Pacific Area Conference (PAC 12) made up of universities in the western part of the United States will begin [hosting and organizing e-sport competitions](#). A student's video game playing could get them a scholarship to the University of California Los Angeles, Arizona State University, Oregon State University, and many other universities.

HOW CAN I USE VIDEOGAMES?

If you do not spend time playing video games it may be hard to know how to use them in class. A great place to start using games in the class is by taking advantage of the affinity spaces around games and incorporating these into the classroom. This helps us in two different ways: students can bring their love of video games into the classroom, and we as teachers can learn about the games our students play through their homework assignments.

Game Reviews – Besides video games as software, there is a large industry around video games. Entire websites are devoted to reviewing games, reporting video game news, and watching e-sports. Students can use these websites for reading practice and learning about genre writing. Students can visit game review websites to learn the structure and organization of game reviews, which provides reading practice within a context. They can also study the structure and organization of the video game review and write their own review as homework. Students can get language practice, and you can learn about their favorite game.

Podcasts – For students in need of listening practice, video game podcasts can be a great resource. Many podcasts such as [Kotaku’s Splitscreen](#) discuss video game news and reviews, while others such as [Designer Notes](#) interview game developers and teach the art of making games. These podcasts can be an effective way for our students to develop their listening skills in context. Even better, encourage your students to make their own video game podcasts to share with you and their fellow students. For more on podcasts, see our American English Webinar Series webinar on [Podcasting for the Classroom](#).

Fanfiction – Fanfiction is the taking of characters from our favorite media and creating new stories that use these characters. For example, students may read or watch *The Hunger Games* and then write their own story using the characters of Katniss and her friends. They can do the same with video games. If students have a game they play often, allow them to use a writing homework assignment to introduce you to their favorite character. Students can describe their adventures in the video game or use their character in a completely new story. Remember, your students may have many things to write or discuss about a video game character, but they will not bring those ideas to class until they have been given a space to do so.

Machinima – Machinima, which is the act of making movies using games, uses video games much like a theater stage, and players use the game as a background to tell their own stories. When making machinima, players write dialogue scripts, plan background sets, and then record their performances. These videos are then edited and posted online for others to share. Making Machinima may seem too complicated for the classroom. However, the students can take care of the technology, so do not worry if you are not familiar with the tools. Instead, focus on providing the students the opportunities to work on such projects

as part of your class homework. The students are and can even teach you how to use them, which is an excellent example of 21st century skills.

When considering how to use video games in the classroom, consider how they are another form of media. We can encourage our students to discuss their favorite music, books, movies, and television shows in the classroom as part of conversation practice. Now it is time to add video games to that list. If students are provided the space and opportunity to bring their knowledge to the classroom about video games, they can be a rich source of communication and a useful tool for learning English.

If you want to bring specific games or game-related activities to your classroom, check out the [September 2015 Teacher's Corner](#) to learn more.

Reference

Squire, K. (2008). Video-game literacy: A literacy of expertise. In D. Leu, J. Coiro, M. Knobel, & C. Lankshear(Eds.), *Handbook of research on new literacies* (635-670). New York, N.Y.: Lawrence.