BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Gameful second and foreign language teaching and learning: Theory, research, and practice*

James York, Tokyo Denki University

Gameful second and foreign language teaching and learning: Theory, research, and practice
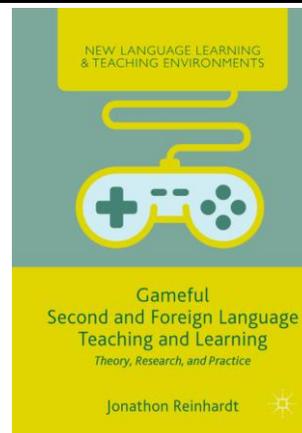
Jonathon Reinhardt

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Although the use of games in language learning and teaching is not a new phenomenon, the educational value of games and gaming practices is currently receiving considerable attention from teachers, researchers and materials developers. In the opening paragraphs of the book, the author states that he receives a large volume of email from language teachers asking how they can incorporate games into their own contexts. According to the author, then, the impetus for writing the current volume was to provide a single, comprehensive resource for language teachers and students on the topic of digital games in language learning and teaching contexts. The volume is a timely snapshot of the digital game-based language learning (DGBLL) field. The term *gameful* is borrowed from McGonigal (2015) and adopted as a specific "disposition or attitude toward language learning" (viii). The neologism *learnful* is also proposed to describe a disposition toward learning whilst doing activities that are not typically academic or related to learning, such as when playing games.

The book is written from the perspective of praxis, such that theory and practice should mutually inform each other. This is a close metaphor to game development which is a practice-based, dialogic process between developer and players. Translated to the language classroom, this suggests a dialogue between teacher and students, or the teacher's iteration of their practice based on *playtests* in the classroom. The metaphor is also applied to founding and iterating a research agenda later in the book.

Each chapter opens with specific framing questions which prompt readers to consider their own teaching and gaming practices. Chapters are well-referenced and academic yet provide scaffolding tools to aid the reader such as breakout boxes with further theory and explanation, additional questions, and footnotes with further reading suggestions. Similarly, at the conclusion of each chapter are Project Ideas which act as inspiration for further reading or to generate action based on the chapter's topic. These reader-centric elements are one of the strongest reasons to recommend this book to researchers or teachers interested in the DGBLL field.

If the book is used in an applied linguistics or TESOL class, the opening and closing questions could also be used to generate discussion between students. Personally, these elements seem to reflect how the author

developed the book as a supplementary or guiding text for their own teaching context. That is, chapters outline the author's considerable knowledge on the subject, interspersed with personal anecdotes and thoughts, almost as if to say "refer to my book" in the event that he is asked a question about games and language teaching. This is not a critique, but rather a reason for recommending the book to teachers of applied linguistics, TESOL, or SLA.

The chapters of the book are arranged to systematically unpack the various ways in which games may be used in language learning and teaching contexts. After an introduction (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 provides information on the dizzying demographics around gameplay habits worldwide, which leads to the questions: Who plays games and What are people learning from games? The chapter introduces the results of a survey given to language-learning gamers to understand what can be learnt from informal, autonomous gameplay. The themes of autonomy and the potential learning affordances of games appear as prominent features throughout the rest of the book.

Chapters 3 and 4 cover the philosophical definitions for play and game. These chapters are not only richly detailed with historical considerations of game and play, but the author also deftly connects philosophical conceptualizations to language learning and teaching practices. Of note is the concept of *language play* which is introduced as a means of language development that exists in contrast to communicative language teaching's (CLT) clinical and repetitious nature. This critique of CLT could be thought-provoking for language teaching students, prompting them to explore multiliteracies or other pedagogical approaches outside of the mainstream.

Chapter 5 progresses to consider what can be learnt through gameplay practices based on the intrinsic design properties of games. The chapter therefore offers a broad and detailed description of the affordances of games and gameplay for language learning with links to structural-behaviourist, cognitive and socially-informed approaches. The chapter is reminiscent of Filsecker and Bündgens-Kosten (2012), which outlines the pedagogical affordances of games based on associativist/behaviouristic, constructivist, or socially-informed approaches. Here then, the author is meticulous in his consideration of game affordances for language learning and provides links to relevant research findings throughout the chapter. Without being limited to gameplay itself, the chapter also introduces the multiple and diverse ways in which game players may communicate and participate in online affinity spaces that form around specific game titles. This is an important addition to the chapter as it demonstrates that there is more to learning with games than merely playing.

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 introduce three specific approaches to using digital games in teaching contexts based on the author's previous work with Julie Sykes (Sykes & Reinhardt, 2012). Game use is categorized into game-enhanced, game-based, and game-informed teaching practices, and each of these approaches are explored in turn. Finally, the book ends with a chapter (Chapter 9) outlining how one may conduct research related to games and language teaching, including the various unique features and challenges that such researchers may face. Ending the book (rather than opening the book) with this chapter on potential research avenues is a subtle indication that the author considers teachers to be the primary audience, a point which is most welcome in this area of research.

For specific critiques of the book, I will start by referring to the title keyword: Gameful. Personally, the use of terms *game-enhanced*, *game-informed*, and *game-based* to refer to game usage in teaching practices is not intuitive. Adding *gameful* as an umbrella term for these practices may beckon further misconceptions from teachers. Subsequently, *game-informed* is further distinguished from the term *gamification*, introducing additional terminology. One suggestion, then, is that it may have been easier to conceptualize game use around the terms of *informal* versus *formal* and *incidental* versus *explicit*, as outlined in the introduction to the book (p.31). *Game-based language learning* (informal, autonomous game use) or *game-based language teaching* (formal, teacher-led game use) could be employed as more straightforward alternatives, whilst at the same time emphasising teaching as opposed to learning (see deHaan, 2019).

As the main premise of the book is to provide practising teacher-researchers with practical information on

how to integrate games into their own classrooms, the reader would expect Chapters 6 to 8 to contain concrete, empirical examples of game-based teaching frameworks and approaches. Unfortunately, although the author has developed frameworks around game use with Thorne (Thone & Reinhardt, 2008)—*bridging activities*—and Sykes (Reinhardt & Skyes, 2011)—*explore, examine, extend*—neither of these models features prominently in the book, which would have been welcome. Perhaps this is because there are no empirical examples of these frameworks in action (see Pearson, 2015; Kim, 2016 for hypothetical examples). This is not a critique of the book, but of the field of language teaching with games. A disconnect between theory and practice means that the author must refer to hypothetical examples or preliminary, experimental studies of how teachers potentially could teach with games rather than how they have taught with games (particularly Massive Multiplayer Online games). The author could have addressed the difficulty teachers face in implementing games in their contexts, including cost and privacy issues as well as institutional resistance.

In conclusion, then, this volume is currently the most comprehensive introduction and guide on the topic of games and language learning and teaching. The structure of the book moves systematically from the theoretical to the practical, with strong connections between chapters. There is content for both the beginner (or in gamer parlance, should I say *newb*?) applied linguistics student, teacher, and researcher, as well as those who may be more established practitioners who want to dive deep into the literature on games and language learning. The author has not only presented the underpinning theory, philosophy and research findings related to games in language learning and teaching contexts but has carefully considered how to prompt the reader to learn more about the presented material, and consider their own teaching context, and game-playing habits, preferences, and proficiencies. The book may also be appropriated as a textbook in undergraduate or graduate TESOL and applied linguistics courses that focus on CALL or technology-enhanced language learning, adding to its value and use potential. The DGBLL literature is presented in great detail but lacks in critique from the author, which, granted is not the aim of the book but would have been most welcome.

As a teacher-researcher who is deeply involved in the area of games and language teaching, I recommend this book as a detailed description of the current state of the DGBLL field.

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About the Author

James conducts research on the application of games in language teaching. He is currently exploring the use of tabletop games in a TBLT context. James also edits *Ludic Language Pedagogy*, an open-access journal which publishes research on the integration of games and play into language teaching practices.

E-mail: york@mail.dendai.ac.jp

This book examines the theory, research, and practice of the use of digital games in second and foreign language teaching and learning (L2TL), to show how to harness the enthusiasm, engagement, and motivation that digital gaming can inspire by adopting a gameful L2TL approach. Demonstrates how research into autonomous, informal learning in voluntary, self-directed contexts can inform gameful learning in formal ones. Combines theory, research, and practice, to provide a framework for exploring the practice of gaming; the theories of play, games, and learning; and the implications of research on gameful L2TL. The language of publication is English. The journal is devoted to reporting previously unpublished highest quality theoretical and empirical research on learning and teaching second and foreign languages. It deals with the learning and teaching of any language, not only English, and focuses on a variety of topics ranging from the processes underlying second language acquisition, various aspects of language learning in instructed and non-instructed settings, as well as different facets of the teaching process, including syllabus choice, materials design, classroom practices and evaluation. Review of Engaging language learners in contemporary classrooms; Authors His adventures through play, games, learning, and research will, undoubtedly, inspire the gameful nature in all of us for years to come.†(Julie M. Sykes, Associate Professor, University of Oregon, USA). "Reinhardt has written what will surely be a seminal book on the role of digital games in second language learning. This book offers a comprehensive examination of the theory, research, and practice of the use of digital games in second and foreign language teaching and learning (L2TL). It explores how to harness the enthusiasm, engagement, and motivation that digital gaming can inspire by adopting a gameful L2TL approach that encompasses game-enhanced, game-informed, and game-based practice. The method of teaching foreign languages is a system of knowledge about the laws of the process of teaching a non-native language and about ways to influence this process in order to optimize it. The method of teaching a foreign language discovers and substantiates the patterns of learning a foreign language. As experience and practice shows, the teacher needs to develop and implement such techniques, methods and forms of training that have contributed to the rapid mastery of students in the relevant specific phenomena in a particular foreign language. Thus, a private method explores the study of language and speech phenomena that are specific to the particular foreign language being studied. General and private methods are interrelated.