

Chapter 5.3

Amusing Minds for Joyful Learning through E-Gaming

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the present use of e-gaming in language acquisition along with its potential and challenges. We review the use of traditional, non-electronic games for language acquisition, provide a brief introduction of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), and examine the use of electronic games in language learning. Although there is limited research on the use of electronic games in language acquisition, potential exists for the integration of electronic games in language classrooms. In addition, more in-depth research is still needed in this field. For classroom practice, we provide a resource of online e-games for practitioners.

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INTRODUCTION

It is increasingly common to see young people spending time playing video games. Several researchers (Funk, Hagen, & Schimming, 1999; Squire, 2006; Williams, 2003) have noted that many youth today spend more time playing video games than reading, or watching TV or films. Thibodeaux's study in 2001 showed that nearly 84% of children between the ages of 12 to 17 had a video game console, and 38% of them played video games for at least an hour every week (as cited in Jenkins, 2005, p. 48). The Kaiser Family Foundation reported in 2003 that 50% of U.S. children have played computer games by the time they are six years old (as cited in Jenkins, 2005, p. 48). Similar findings were reported in Jones's

survey of students at more than 20 U.S. colleges and universities in 2003, which indicated that all students had played a video, computer, or online game (collectively, electronic games) and that 65% of the students identified themselves as “regular or occasional” game players (as cited in Jenkins, 2005, p. 48). Facing students’ strong interests in and even addiction to these electronic games, many educators seek to understand games’ attractiveness. Many wonder if there are attributes of games that are beneficial to learning and consider ways in which games could be used for learning. Some scholars have challenged the traditional view that “games, as opposed to work, are unproductive and non-utilitarian” (Ang & Zaphiris, 2007, p. 448) and have attempted to explore the potential of games in education. For example, Gee (2005) maintains that good games incorporate learning principles supported by current research in cognitive science.

With the rising interest in using electronic games in education, electronic games may also have potential to impact the field of second language acquisition. In this chapter, we first elaborate on research using traditional (non-electronic) games in language acquisition. Next, we identify key findings from existing research in the intersection of electronic gaming and language acquisition. Finally, we explore implications for future research, policy, and practice.

BACKGROUND

Traditional (Non-Electronic) Games in Language Learning

Reviewing non-electronic game use in language classrooms sheds light on further exploration of e-gaming (electronic gaming) in language teaching.¹ The use of simulations and games in language acquisition has been valued by many practitioners and researchers (García-Carbonell, Rising, &

Montero, 2001; Gaudart, 1999; Halleck, 2002; Hill, 2002; Kovalik & Kovalik, 2002; Macedonia, 2005; Jung & Levitin, 2002; Saliés, 2002). Language classrooms often integrate role-playing simulations or card and board games for language instruction. Cekaite and Aronsson (2005) studied the role of play in children’s second language acquisition and emphasized the need to incorporate language play into learning. According to Crookall and Oxford (1990), gaming techniques are very powerful means of helping people to acquire certain foreign or second language skills. Previous research on the use of simulations and games in language classrooms has illustrated the impact of their use to teach speaking (Macedonia, 2005), writing (Kovalik & Kovalik, 2002; Saliés, 2002; Spelman, 2002), and enhance cross-cultural understanding (Jung & Levitin, 2002) and communicative competence (García-Carbonell et al., 2001). Based on the previous research, two significant strengths of using simulations and games in language learning are presented below.

Motivation and Traditional Games

Using simulations in language classrooms promotes positive affective factors such as increased motivation and engagement. Reflecting on using simulations and games in an English for Academic Purpose (EAP) class, Saliés (2002) maintains that students were highly motivated when involved in simulations and games, and had positive attitudes towards learning. Furthermore, simulations involve students, even those who are normally quiet, in active participation (Saliés, 2002). Macedonia (2005) states that language games are used to practice or strengthen declarative knowledge with entertainment as a positive side effect based on her experience with using wooden blocks, cards, and finger games in teaching Italian as a foreign language to German-speaking learners. She emphasizes that language games provide opportunities of “redundant oral repetition of grammar

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