BOOK REVIEW OF
DIGITAL GAMES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING
BY HAYO REINDERS (2012)

RESENHA DO LIVRO
DIGITAL GAMES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING
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Digital games can be used for educational purposes since they may increase motivation, communication and interaction among players. Furthermore, they can also be used for teaching and learning a second language (L2). Many authors have been writing on the topic, such as Chik (2011), Gee & Hayes (2011), Prensky (2001), Squire (2006) and Sykes & Reinhardt (2013). One important book published was *Digital Games In Language Learning and Teaching*, a book edited by Hayo Reinders, with a foreword by Paul James Gee, published in 2012 by Palgrave MacMillan (United Kingdom).

Following the introduction, the book, a collection of articles written by several authors, is divided in two parts: I) From Theory to Practice, with four chapters; and II) From Practice to Theory, with six chapters. In Part I, the relationship between second language acquisition and games studies is explored; while in Part II, the studies focus on the use of games in different settings and principles and teaching practices. The articles from both parts share a variety of topics related with videogames, as well as an ostensibly examination of a medley of issues related to the topic.

In the Introduction, Reinders mentions that this book is the first collection of articles and research regarding digital game-based language learning, stating

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important characteristics that digital games offer to players. Although the articles in the present book bring different themes, Reinders puts them together perfectly, worried about the future of language learning studies. Reinders mentions that "games are only one element in a much longer ecology of learning and teaching, and they need to be understood and developed as such" (p. 7), and with the growth of knowledge about them and their limitations and affordances, findings need to be brought back to the major knowledge about language learning and teaching.

To start Part I, the first chapter is written by Michael Thomas "*Conceptualizing Digital Game-Based Language Learning: Transformational Paradigm Shift or Business as Usual?*". This article begins discussing about the existent dichotomy concerning digital games, mainly the ones that fluctuate between entertainment *versus* education. The author then brings some arguments to reflect whether digital education may not represent commercial and marketing interests, without reaching to a conclusion. Regarding digital games education, Thomas mentions that gaming is a prime example of learning through social and collaborative learning, where learners engage in knowledge construction. As a researcher on the educational field, he appreciates good learning in context. About digital game-base language learning, games appear as "relevant communication and relationship building" (p. 21), providing linguistic exposure, awareness and feedback. Although the author talks about several researchers of the field of games and provides theoretical background, a definition of digital games and digital game-based learning went by taken for granted.

In the second chapter, Reinhardt & Sykes argue about "*Conceptualizing Digital Game-Mediated L2 Learning and Pedagogy: Game-Enhanced and Game-Based Research and Practice*" and propose themselves to come up with resemblance and dissemblance among game-enhanced and game-based, and learning and pedagogy. It is fairly a challenge that the authors consider important, since many times terminology ends up by influencing how discussions happen or are conceptualized. Several studies confirm that language learning happens while game playing, especially those games where players interact among other cultures and identities. While players usually do not pay attention to the language of a game, since the focus is on game rules, playing games leads to a game-mediated pedagogy

regarding language learning, usually incidental. As a conclusion, distinctions are made between game-enhanced L2 learning and game-enhanced pedagogy, and between game-based L2 learning and game-based pedagogy. Although the article is written in a reader-friendly manner and brings examples to illustrate their ideas, terminologies per se end up by being its central idea. It is an article intentionally structured to make this point.

The third chapter, "*Behaviorism, Constructivism, and Communities of Practice: How Pedagogic Theories Help Us Understand Game-Based Language Learning*", written by Filsecker & Bündgens-Kosten, starts with a review of learning theories, giving focus to the relation between learning theories and instructional design, since their focus is on games designed for learning. For each learning theory revised by the authors, situated examples of serious games are presented. For behaviorism, the term *Edutainment* is introduced, meaning that games are simply played for drills repetition, without teacher engagement. For the constructivist perspective, there are three distinct learning environments that incorporates speaking and listening modes, which involves more authentic environments and consequently, demands from players skills in context. For the third approach, situated perspective, the games include avatars, which encourages missions or goals for the player to complete, thus turning communication the key-element. After exemplifying each perspective with real games, the authors point second language learning advantages brought by each theory analyzed in the article. Although the perspectives are all explained separately, the authors could have triangulated their data analysis and conclusions uniting the behaviorist, constructivist and situated perspectives, thus including ideas of how teachers, educators and students in learning milieus can implement them in the classroom.

Chapter four is written by Peterson and entitled "*Language Learner Interaction in a Massive MultiPlayer Online Role-Playing Game*". In a very well organized fashion, the author a) presents important features of massive multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG); b) reviews current research; and c) makes analysis of findings from a study where Japanese learning English interacted through game playing. The participants of the study were intermediate-level students of English and, though facing difficulties in communication, with proper orientation and

supportive environment, they assumed an active role and interacted successfully in the target language online. Conclusions found that interaction among players was motivating, fetching and gratifying, nonetheless challenging. The present chapter was the most appealing and compelling that I read on the subject so far, conveying concepts in a reasonable order, presenting examples of data analysis, and research analysis in an efficient mode.

Part I of the book culminates with lots of research regarding theories and language learning. It was a quite in-depth reading, since its focus was on theoretical background. Its target audience is compelled by either academics or interested enthusiasts, not by the general public. Part II is estimated to bring concepts that are more pragmatic.

Starting the Part II of the book, From Practice to Theory, there is chapter five, written by Chik: "*Digital Gameplay for Autonomous Foreign Language Learning: Gamers' and Language Teachers' Perspectives*". This author is one of my personal favorites in the area, since Chik writes in a very pragmatically manner, conjoining previous research, surveys and studies about games, relating them all together. In this article, Chik discusses how Asian gamers assume and manage autonomy in foreign language learning, analyzed through teachers and students' perspectives on pedagogical potential of gaming for language learning. Conclusions point that teachers under traditional classroom settings, have a restricted view that game playing may not be associated with learning a foreign language, even though players engaged themselves and exercised their autonomy in the language use and interaction in the game context, immersing themselves in digital gaming in the target language. Digital games, as can be seen, took language learning beyond traditional classroom. However, the teachers' view described in this article many times reflect the reality of public and private schools, where traditional settings remain. This article can be read as a plea to teachers and educators to include technology in learning environments as far it is possible for them.

Chapter six, written by Jackson, Dempsey and McNamara, deals with "*Game-Based Practice in a Reading Strategy Tutoring System: Showdown in iSTART-ME*", a tutor program online (that stands for interactive Strategy Training for Active Reading and Thinking – Motivationally Enhanced) that provides adolescent learners with

reading strategy trainings about science texts. The chapter begins with an extensive but profitable review about serious games previous research, following by an iSTART-ME explanation. Their objective in this study is to implement game-based principles and features to support language learning according to five categories: feedback, incentives, task difficulty, control and environment. The authors conclude that learning happens better and easier in non-game environments, while engagement is better reached in game-based settings. However, these differences may be due to pedagogical approaches differences, since games benefit from long periods of time playing them. Even though the authors explain and exemplify the platform iSTART-ME, it seems difficult and hardworking to work with it, especially with students that are learning a second language. At the same time, the project ensures benefits, such as a training in reading strategies (that include audio and visual language) that teachers and educators may include in non-game activities, leading students to a multimodal learning.

The seventh chapter, "*Sprites and Rules: What ERPs and Procedural Memory Can Tell Us about Video Games and Language Learning*", by Reichle, is eye-catching from the title to the footnotes. Reichle argue how video games can benefit from procedural memory to maximize language learning. As a start, the author reviews previous research about ERP, that is, event-related potential, stating that computer games have been used to train language learners, and its success was closely tied to the game mechanisms, and that these practices could ascertain profitable language learning in real settings. Then, the author takes real examples of games advertisements to show how game designers take advantage of these practices to enhance gameplay experiences. It is almost a cycling strategy: gameplay experiences depend on design practices, and vice-versa. The question that remains, however, is whether the combination of second language morphosyntax and gameplay experiences can proceduralize grammar while gameplay skills acquisition takes place. As can be seen, although the author offers useful research and examples within gaming activity, there are still research under development and questions to be answered by teacher-researchers to gather data for.

Written by renowned authors in the area, Reinders and Wattana, chapter eight is entitled "*Talk to Me! Games and Students' Willingness to Communicate*" and sets

the informal and reader-friendly tone the article proposes. In this article, the authors analyze a pilot study that investigates the effects of playing an online multiplayer game on both quantity and quality of L2 interaction, and on participants' will to communicate in the target language. The conclusion leads to assertions that computer games can undeniably affect L2 interaction arrays and contribute to second language learning, but this depends, of course, on thoughtful pedagogic planning. Results showed that video and text chat are different, but both portray positive results: regarding quantity, L2 interaction was expressive, and regarding quality, L2 interaction encouraged students to express themselves in a variety of discourse functions. Results also showed that participants were commonly eager to communicate in English, either by speaking or writing, and after a period of time, students felt their skills have improved. These are new areas interestingly framed by the authors, and their compact style here heads for interesting analysis and further research.

In the ninth chapter, Sundqvist and Sylvèn talk about "*World of VoccCraft: Computer Games and Swedish Learners' L2 English Vocabulary*" in an analysis of three studies that conclude that playing computer games facilitate second language acquisition, especially vocabulary pieces, presenting gender, age and type of gaming differences. After presenting a theoretical background about games, the authors move on to three studies investigating the use of computer games and their relation to English vocabulary acquisition by Swedish students. The studies mentioned by Sundqvist and Sylvèn were chronologically ordered and related in details, which facilitated the reading and the understanding of them. Conclusions of the studies show that a) gaming profits acquisition of English as a second language; b) boys outperformed girls by involving themselves more in the game and by selecting games linguistically and cognitively more demanding, thus resulting in higher acquisition of vocabulary; and c) learning outcomes happen more easily in lower-age gamers. These conclusions make an ideal overview to anyone with an interest in using games to teach and learn a second language. Digital games are an easy way to engage the younger generation in language learning, being motivational in themselves, engaging and collaborating to enhance their skills and ideas, regardless of age or outside interests.

The last chapter of the book, chapter ten, titled "*Collocation Games from a Language Corpus*", was written by Wu, Franken & Witten. This article presents a system, FLAX, that supports collocation language games and that can be found online, supported by a contemporary collocations corpus system by Google. After analyzing online games about collocations, the authors felt the need and created their own games sustained by a method that identifies collocations by a) type; b) frequency; and c) pattern. The games analyzed were: collocation dominoes, collocation matching, common alternatives, related words and collocation guessing. After presenting their methodology, the authors concluded that games similar to these can be played also with other human beings, not only computers, and that games motivate learners and elevate their performance. Although the language learning games are portrayed as easy to design and to understand in the present article, I personally feel that they have to be carefully pedagogically planned, regularly pointing towards new levels of learning goals.

The second Part of the book ends in chapter ten, and examines the implementation of videogames in applied research and classroom settings. Accordingly to its title, takes practice beyond theory, being practical, useful and concrete.

The book presents research and studies of why and how games have a place in the future of education. After reading the book, it is clear that there is great potential for gaming in education. Therefore, it is not *what* videogames can do for language learning, but *how*. Thus, the key to the whole book is plain and clear: it is a book interested in research about videogames, but focusing in how this multidisciplinary area shapes the learning milieu. I would guess that anyone who gets this far in the book would be capable of creating a working educational game setting.

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