

From the authors

In 1983, my parents bought me a Sinclair ZX Spectrum and some games for my birthday. This began a phase that lasted nearly five years. Little did I know that nearly two decades later my interest in video games would return – but this time professionally, in my role as a teacher of English as a foreign language.

For 20 years or so, my relationship with video gaming and play would be a casual one. I occasionally played the popular PC games *Lemmings* or *Mine Sweeper*, and played *Mario Bros* with friends, nieces and nephews when the opportunity arose. However, I very much thought my gaming days were over. I did, however, return to playing video games briefly at the beginning of my teaching career. As an end-of-the-week activity, I would walk down to an internet café with several colleagues, connect to the same online ‘first person shooter’ game and spend happy hours blasting away at my fellow teachers. Then each of us moved on from that language school, I stopped playing and, for five years, gaming was gone.

It all changed one day in a computer room while teaching a secondary-level English class. We were in the middle of project work using Microsoft PowerPoint when a pair of fast finishers asked if they could play an online game. My interest was piqued: ‘You can play the game if you tell me about it.’ I can’t remember much about the game itself but, listening to the two learners, I was surprised by their enthusiasm and fluency when talking about it. I began to see that there was something here for English language teaching.

That evening at home, I played a few other online games and, before long, a whole new world was opening up before my eyes. By playing online games and wearing my (virtual) teacher’s hat, I began to see the language potential. At first it was simply describing instructions, but that soon moved on to describing the story, as I found games that were more narratively complex. Soon I turned to forums and fansites to help me complete the games.

Research had never been such fun!

Since then, I have started a wiki, archiving the best games, and co-run the *Digital Play* blog with Graham, posting lesson plans, activities and ideas for language teachers. I have also run numerous in-house training sessions, presented at conferences and written online articles, all concerned with using video games as language learning tools.

Computer gaming has always been a very social activity for me. As a teenager, I remember playing games such as *Space Invaders*, *Galaxia*, *Defender* and *Jump Bug* with friends in arcades, and at home playing with my brother on his Sinclair Spectrum. When the first ‘text adventure’ games started to appear, playing was always a collaborative effort with friends, helping each other solve the puzzles together.

After university, I remember playing computer games at lunchtimes with work colleagues. At one architectural practice I worked at, everyone would jump into a plane at the end of the day for a team game of *Flight Simulator*, and instructions for team members would echo around the two floors of the building.

Then, about 15 years ago, just after I’d started teaching, one of the other teachers at a summer school brought in a games console and set it up in our staffroom. As we played, some of the kids started hanging out on the balcony that overlooked the staffroom and shouted instructions to us on how to play the original *Tomb Raider* game. It was my first experience of games being used to generate language. I have since dabbled in using games with learners ever since, occasionally bringing my own PlayStation 3 into class for fun end-of-term karaoke and quiz-game sessions.

The Eureka! moment came for me one day in our computer room after playing part of an online game with my young learners. I had been reading out help from a ‘walkthrough’ (the written instructions on how to complete the game) and at the end of the class the learners asked me for a copy of the 12-page document. This was so they could carry on playing the game at home and finish it. This they did – without even realising they were enjoying English reading practice.

I realised there and then that games could be a powerful teaching and learning tool.

Finding out that Kyle had a similar interest was like finding a brother-in-arms. Soon we were brainstorming and sharing ideas of how best to use games with our learners, and then we worked together in the virtual world Second Life creating our own language learning quest games.

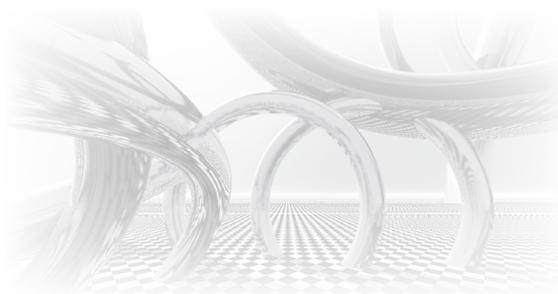
During this time, we had the idea of putting all we had discovered in a blog (*Digital Play*) and took the logical step of writing a book for teachers. I’m very happy to say, here it is!

Kyle

Graham

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