Chapter 17

The Creation of a Rubric for the Evaluation of Language Teaching and Learning Videogames

Douglas A. Agar
Macquarie University, Australia

Philip J. Chappell
Macquarie University, Australia

ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on the creation and evaluation of the Language Education Videogame Evaluation Rubric (LEVER) which, it is hoped, will be of benefit to those involved in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Based upon a sociocultural model of language development, this research is unique in the manner in which it draws on up-to-date best practice in the domains of both language pedagogy and videogame design. This chapter will then report on the application of the LEVER to two titles which have been created to teach a foreign language, in order to both to test the games for quality and the rubric itself for rigour and ease-of-use.

INTRODUCTION

Videogames, once seen as the preserve of adolescent boys, are now part of mainstream culture. The Digital Australia 2014 report by Australian Policy Online (apo.org.au), as conducted by Bond University, shows the development of this gaming culture since 2005, concluding that computer games have become a normal part of household activity across all age groups. Sixty-five per cent of Australians play videogames, 76 per cent of gamers are over the age of 18, and the average age of gamers is 32. Forty-seven per cent of gamers are female, 19 per cent of Australian gamers are aged over 51. Perhaps most relevant for educators is the finding that 98 per cent of homes with children have computer games, and that 81 per cent of mothers and 83 per cent of fathers play videogames. It must be noted, of course, there are now many more means to play videogames than

previously, with many older members of society only beginning to play in the last few years. Nonetheless, it is clear that videogames are virtually omnipresent in Australian homes, and are a valued medium of entertainment for those of school-going age. In this chapter, it is acknowledged that these significant trends are not taken advantage of in our educational settings. While schools are adopting technology in a number of ways, Anderson's (2012, p. 1) poignant description of the status of computer games in schools is our call to action.

Teachers are increasingly enthusiastic and confident about using ICT in teaching and schools are increasingly supportive; but there is this 'naughty child' sat in the corner and that's computer games.

We begin with an overview of the theoretical framework for the remainder of the chapter. This framework deals with views of language and language learning that are social and cultural in their origins, reflecting the fundamental belief that people's minds and their social lives reflect their culture and histories (Bruner, 1990). Indeed, we propose a powerful argument for adopting a view of language and learning that has at its heart acts of meaning, or semiosis. For foreign language classrooms, language is at the same time the content of lessons, the main mode of communicating that content, and the main mode of supporting the learning of that content. That is, language is both the object of learning and teaching activity as well as the medium through which it is enacted.

Introducing videogames into the range of foreign language curriculum materials adds another complexity to classroom learning and teaching, requiring the defining and delimiting of videogames in this context. This is a crucial issue for teachers, with the literature demonstrating they are not at all clear about what constitutes a worthy game and, if they can locate one, how it can be integrated into their curriculum activities. Thus, there is an early focus in this chapter not only on

the application of videogames to language teaching, but also on their contribution to education in general. As far as this chapter is concerned, the term videogame will be used as a catch-all term to refer to games played on a number of different media. These include personal computers or laptops running Windows, Macintosh OS or Linux, tablet computers running iOS or Android and modern mobile phone technology, as well as dedicated gaming consoles such as SONY's PlayStation series, Microsoft's Xbox machines or Nintendo's Wii consoles, as well as their handheld iterations. At the time of writing, these three latter companies have recently released newer, more powerful versions of their popular home consoles. These machines, especially SONY and Microsoft's offerings, are extremely powerful machines which have the potential to offer unprecedented levels of immersion, depth and scale of gameplay. The term videogame will also be taken as being synonymous with the term computer game. As time has passed, the once clear distinction between these and other similar terms has blurred, and the perpetuation of such distinction is outdated and of little use within the parameters of this chapter.

A main part of this chapter is outlining a recent research project in which a rubric (*The Language Education Videogame Evaluation Rubric*, henceforth LEVER) for evaluating the worthiness of videogames was constructed and then used to evaluate a number of games. The rubric is based on the theoretical framework mentioned above and discussed in more detail below. It integrates best practices in education, language education and language pedagogy, and is notable for its approach, rather than past approaches that have focused more on practical considerations. The rubric is applied to two videogames in order to demonstrate the extremes of educational worthiness for the foreign language curriculum, and to provide a model for teachers and educators to follow when evaluating games for their own language learning and teaching contexts. It is only when our field has access to more of these evaluations, together

Related Content

Narrative and Conceptual Expertise in Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games
Javier Alejandro Corredorand Leonardo Rojas Benavides (2016). *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations (pp. 44-67).*
www.irma-international.org/article/narrative-and-conceptual-expertise-in-massively-multiplayer-online-role-playing-games/144280

Engaging the Un-Engageable
John Carrand Peter Blanchfield (2011). *Handbook of Research on Improving Learning and Motivation through Educational Games: Multidisciplinary Approaches (pp. 633-657).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/engaging-engageable/52516

Experiencing Presence in a Gaming Activity Improves Mood After a Negative Mood Induction
Stefan Weber, Fred W. Mastand David Weibel (2020). *International Journal of Gaming and Computer-Mediated Simulations (pp. 1-22).*
www.irma-international.org/article/experiencing-presence-in-a-gaming-activity-improves-mood-after-a-negative-mood-induction/268880

Crowdfunding Serious Games: Towards a Framework
Christopher Buckinghamand Vanissa Wanick (2023). *Research Anthology on Game Design, Development, Usage, and Social Impact (pp. 198-211).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/crowdfunding-serious-games/315488

Book Review: This Is Esports (And How to Spell It): An Insider's Guide to the World of Pro Gaming
Susmit S. Gulavani (2021). *International Journal of eSports Research (pp. 1-6).*
www.irma-international.org/article/book-review/276937