



# 10 Reasons to *Use Video/Online Games* *in the Classroom*

Video/Online games can be used either in class -if you have the technology available -or at home, if the students have a computer and internet access, but why would you want to this? Below are ten reasons why you might consider incorporating the use of video/online games in the primary EFL classroom.

## **1. Children feel CONNECTED**

Most children play video/online games with other kids. They interact with their friends to strategize, decide who does what and what the best way to win the game is. Such games are a great way for children to interact with other children, near or far, possibly from a variety of educational or social environments or even from geographically distant places. When one or more players speak different languages, the lingua franca of choice is usually English. It is not unduly optimistic to imagine how much spontaneous interaction in English can be fostered if children get a chance to interact with each other and/or with characters as they play a given (educational) video/online game.

## **2. Children feel COOL**

We cannot underestimate the positive effect of feeling 'cool' or up-to-date that children derive from playing video/online games. In the past, children gathered around the popular game board of the day, they proudly collected their marbles, dolls or model cars and played the open-air games that their generation cherished. Likewise, while playing video/online games children of today construct a personal and collective identity as they develop their individual traits and personality.

### **3. Children feel a sense of COMMUNITY**

Undoubtedly, video/online games are an important part of the popular culture of our time and children not only enjoy playing them but also experience a sense of belonging to their particular socio-cultural group. It would seem natural, then, for teachers of English to exploit this powerful sense of community by either developing a set of tasks around any of the existing, most popular games or to use textbooks that incorporate online worlds for use inside and/or outside the classroom. Chattfield, T. (2010) shares a good example of the former. It is the work of the "Consolarium", a team led by Derek Robertson, National Advisor for Emerging Technologies and Learning to the Ministry of Education in Scotland. This team has shown how to develop a full curriculum around commercial video/online games, (see link below). A good example of the latter is the Online World component of *Our Discovery Island*, Pearson's latest series for teaching English to children (see link below). Children can access the online world of *Our Discovery Island* either in school or at home to play a variety of interactive games that reinforce what has been taught in class.

### **4. Children feel in CONTROL**

The structure of video/online games is such that it allows children to make choices, starting with the very important choice of the level of difficulty at which they want to play a given game. This makes games a very 'forgiving' environment for play. From there on, there are unlimited opportunities for gamers to make informed (or even random) choices. By comparison, a traditional classroom provides far fewer opportunities for choice. No matter how learner/learning centered a given classroom, the teacher is normally in control. For that reason, children can sometimes miss the freedoms afforded by online worlds when they are in a traditional classroom.

### **5. Children feel CAPABLE**

Contrary to popular belief, most of the video/online games

children play require them to cope with enormous complexity. Researchers theorise that children learn many useful so-called 21<sup>st</sup> century skills while playing video/online games. Jenkins, H. et al, (2006), for example, have identified at least 12 such skills. Four of the more evidently relevant are: *Play*: i.e. “the ability to experiment with one’s surroundings as a form of problem-solving”, *Performance*: i.e. “the ability to adopt alternative identities for the purpose of improvisation and discovery”, *Multitasking*: i.e. “the ability to scan one’s environment and shift focus as needed to salient details”, *Collective Intelligence*: i.e. “the ability to pool knowledge and compare notes with others toward a common goal”. This alone, should be enough to persuade us of the benefit of play in online worlds.

## 6. Children feel **COMPETENT**

Video/online games give children a sense of achievement and ongoing success. Shaffer, D.W (2006) and his team, for example, have developed “Epistemic”, brain or knowledge games. These give players a great feeling of competence because they invite them to solve real problems the way real people do. For example, they may require the players to place themselves in the shoes of an urban planner or engineer to build an ideal town or to solve a number of problems in relation to their own city. The feeling of accomplishment that comes with accepting such realistic challenges, the constant feedback as to how they are doing coupled with the possibility of trying again and again until they get it right make such online worlds very engaging and gratifying environments. Why not replicate this in language learning online worlds?

## 7. Children feel **CREATIVE**

Video/online games can be very complex and intellectually challenging. For example, they may require players to create an avatar and endow it with specific skills that will ensure it stands better chances of winning the game for them. They may also involve some degree of problem solving, which requires the players to work as a team to come up with creative solutions. Thirdly, many games require players to interpret clues in order to solve mysteries or complete quests by themselves or with

others. All the above requires children to think fast, “laterally” to borrow Edward De Bono’s term, or creatively in order to win.

## **8. Children feel CONFIDENT**

As we mentioned above, video/online games can be a very “forgiving” environment for children to play and learn in. For this reason, they feel totally confident in it. Most importantly because they themselves can usually choose the level of difficulty at which they want to play, and they can adjust this at any given time to suit their particular ability. As a result, most players are not deterred or disappointed as they can be in a classroom situation where they are face to face with a teacher and peers, and the consequent risk of embarrassment is higher. Failure is often taken gracefully in an online world and players are usually very forgiving with one another, occasionally telling each other off in a friendly and humorous manner.

## **9. Children feel COMFORTABLE**

The influence of affective factors on learning remains important, particularly in an age when tremendous demands are placed on everyone from a very early age. Finding the right balance between challenge and support is every teacher’s most demanding job. It would seem a pity for foreign language teachers, not to make use of video/online games, in some way, to ensure the children get lots of language practice that is not boring. If children feel completely at ease playing and learning in challenging online worlds, why not give them the best of both worlds?

## **10. Children feel COMMITTED**

It is hardly surprising that children who feel connected, in control, capable, creative and confident, should also feel completely committed. This commitment to a task is precisely what teachers battle hard to achieve in classrooms worldwide. In view of the above, it would seem that blending best practice in

learner/learning centered classrooms with non-violent, commercial or epistemic, language learning games in online worlds can enhance the levels of commitment to language learning on the part of the learners and thus dramatically improve their chances of success.

## References

Chatfield, T.,2010. *Fun Inc. Why Games are the 21st Century's Most Serious Business*. Virgin Books, London.

Shaffer, D.W.,2006. *How Computer Games Help Children Learn*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

## Links

Jenkins Henry, et al, 2006. *Confronting the challenges of participatory culture: Media Education in the XXIst Century*:

[http://digitalllearning.macfound.org/atf/cf/%7B7E45C7E0-A3E0-4B89-AC9C-E807E1B0AE4E%7D/JENKINS\\_WHITE\\_PAPER.PDF](http://digitalllearning.macfound.org/atf/cf/%7B7E45C7E0-A3E0-4B89-AC9C-E807E1B0AE4E%7D/JENKINS_WHITE_PAPER.PDF)

Overview of the Epistemic Games Group:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2VBsHkFfI>

Robertson, D. LTS Game Based Learning 2010

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RULkrxpaync>

Our Discovery Island:

[www.pearsonelt.com/ourdiscoveryisland](http://www.pearsonelt.com/ourdiscoveryisland)