

# Children Learning English as a Foreign Language

## Gaming and Learning — Face the Connection

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**A lot has recently been said about what is referred to** as “game theory literature.” Theorists, scientists, and even video game designers have been assigned a mission: How to place what is behind the context of games into an educative framework or, rather, how to tackle education within the context of games? This article aims to pinpoint a few features of effective gamers that can be optimized when applied to the appropriate learning environment.

It is not possible to talk about this subject without establishing a direct relationship between the application of a certain strategy, observation, adjustment and therefore better performance of that strategy. However, how do we identify a good gamer in class and then consider him/her a good/effective learner?

The backbone of this relationship lies in mastering strategy learning: Players gradually figure out what strategy produces the highest payoffs in a specific game (Weber and Rick, 2008). For instance, if you have played auction — a classic game where groups decide whether or not a sentence deserves to be purchased — the teacher soon realizes that the tokens used as money can become more valuable than simply trying to work out the sentences. And the group will start developing strategies to finish the game with some “money” left. In that case, more importantly will be to pay more attention to *meaningful* learning. In this case, the role of the teacher should be to transfer concepts once learned in new contexts (Stahl 2000,a,b; Rankin et al., 2000).

Having said that, let us now identify the five characteristics effective gamers have in common that can be observed in the classroom, so the teacher can apply them to meaningful learning.

### 1. A blend of mixed feelings.

Effective gamers are used to dealing with a sense of urgency, fear, and optimism because they have a deep sense of focus. If the teacher is able to put together a task in which these feelings are likely to occur, she/he should expect these mixed feelings to appear, showing that students are deeply engaged.

### 2. Collaborative environments

The video game industry soon realized that games would be more involved if more and more players became engaged in epic assignments. There is nothing more convenient than simply inviting people to join you in these missions. These invitations saw no geographical borders, and now larger and larger online communities get together either to accomplish or to dispute a certain accomplishment. The positive side effect of this is that it takes a lot of trust to play with someone. We develop rapport with people with whom we play, even if we are on opposite sides. So, games that are strongly based on group work are very welcome. Indeed, it is important to assign members different tasks, especially if noticed which particular contributions can be provided by the students' specific “gift.”

### 3. Optimistic Drive

One characteristic that is inherent in effective gamers is that they are extremely optimistic! "Failure is not an option!" is their motto. With this natural drive, effective gamers decide to act as soon as possible in order to overcome obstacles with an ultimate belief of success. The challenge for the educator is to provide a learning environment in which the rewards are truly meaningful and motivating, while the learning acquisition elements outnumber those rewards.

### 4. The right level of challenge

It is been largely preached that three factors are vital in a learning environment: the feeling of growth, an element of fun, and the right level of challenge. Out of these three, the last one is the first piece in the game designer's drawing board. Targeted gamers are never given a challenge they cannot achieve. If the challenge is below their abilities, they will lose interest; if the challenge is above their talents, it becomes overwhelming and therefore demotivating.

### 5. Gamers become super heroes.

Games are environments in which self esteem is key. Effective gamers become highly empowered individuals moved by a cause. The problem is that video games became popular as a way to evade the real world. The educator's role is to bring the real world into gaming. Effective gamers are extremely productive because they are willing to work hard if given the right work. As parents or as educators, we are often surprised by gamers level of accomplishments. So, why not involve them in a super project equivalent to an "epic battle" meaningful for their context, society or the planet? In the words of Jane McGonigal, "games are powerful platforms for change."

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Holding a degree in Letras, a Specialization Course in Materials Design by the University of Chichester — UK. **Jorge Teixeira** has more than 20 years of experience in ELT, as an English teacher, coordinator, and teacher trainer. Throughout his career, he has gathered valuable insight mostly from teenagers and adults. He has also held significant positions in the Braz-Tesol-Goiania Regional Chapter. He is currently an ELT consultant for Pearson.