

Review of *New ways in teaching with games*

Casey Nedry, Ritsumeikan Moriyama High School

New ways in teaching with games

Ulugbek Nurmukhamedov and Randall Sadler, Editors

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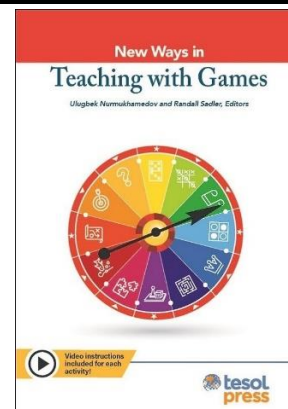
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Using games as a component in learning has been a staple of educators for some time, but the past two decades have seen game use in the classroom become increasingly popular. Research into games and implementing games into language teaching is a relatively young branch of the language instruction field, but it offers “rich affordances and motivational potential” (Jones, 2020, p. 4) from traditional card games such as Bingo to apps and modern board games. Enter *New Ways in Teaching with Games* edited by Ulugbek Nurmukhamedov and Randall Sadler as a guide to the ludic available for use in classrooms.

The editors compiled 94 different games, submitted by numerous contributors, across six categories that comprise the parts of the book: traditional pencil and paper, dice, board, card, technology-mediated, and miscellaneous games. Each game entry includes an at-a-glance summary of aims, cost, language level, preparation and class time, and the resources needed. There is also a key to indicate the cost of items such as dice, the board game, or online accounts. Detailed written instructions are given for pre-, in-, and post-game processes. Caveats and options are also included. Additionally, the publisher, TESOL Press, hosts informative contributor-made videos at www.tesol.org/teachingwithgames. When reviewing this book, I have opted to closely examine three to five games per category, across a range of language levels, and briefly discuss a few favorites from each of the six parts of the book.

Part 1 consists of 21 traditional pencil and paper games. A few games in this part require the students to write something and all games require printing out lists and tables. The vast majority of these games are free and include examples such as info-gaps, pair work drills, and group work games. Christopher Stillwell’s “Conversation Killers: Identifying Behaviors That Help or Harm Discussion,” for instance, is a highly interactive game that helps raise awareness about the roles people take on during a conversation. It creates many opportunities for students to converse with each other while helping them understand the behaviors that emerge out of a discussion. This game would fit into any communicative language class and offer students the chance to learn about group dynamics.

Part 2 is composed of seven dice games. In these games, dice are rolled and the result determines actions the students need to take or language students are required to use. The games in this section have a small cost associated with them, require the use of a die or dice, and have a more playful feel to them compared

to the games in Part 1. Evrim Dervis's "Dicing Lightning" uses dice to help students learn about the concept of *word knowledge* – acting out the meaning, definition, use in a sentence, collocations, synonym(s), and antonym(s) – of new vocabulary. Working in pairs, the students discuss knowledge of the assigned vocabulary. The die roll determines which feature of the word knowledge the student needs to produce, for example, 1 = give a definition, 2 = use the word in a sentence, 3 = make a collocation, and so on. This appears to be an engaging way to reinforce new vocabulary and provide an opportunity for the students to support each other's language learning. Randall Sadler and Ulugbeck Nurmukhamedov's "Storytelling, Coherence, & Transition Devices" and "Story Cube Corner" by Jessica Piggot and Clarissa Codrington both utilize Rory's Story Cubes to create tales. These cubes (i.e., dice) have pictures on them to prompt students into using their imagination to compose a story. As presented in the book, the former game focuses on speaking, while the latter focuses on both speaking and writing, although both games could easily be adapted to a variety of aims.

Part 3 covers nine board games, such as print-and-play board games (i.e., games that require players to print the board and pieces), traditional board games such as Snakes and Ladders, and modern board games such as Tsuro. The cost depends on the game and ranges from free to more than 20 U.S. dollars. Being very popular and widely available for purchase at retailers, modern board games can be referred to as analog games, in contrast to digital games. Jonathan deHaan's "Snakes and Ladders: Analyze and Remix a Classic" provides a good lesson plan for getting learners to discuss the cultural aspects of a game, game design, and game rules. The focus shifts away from language used during the game and towards language about the game. It is suggested that this game can increase students' gaming literacy as well as weave together their interests and schoolwork, which would create a robust pool of language to use and draw from.

Part 4 includes 22 card games. A staple in many classes, cards are ubiquitous and take on a variety of forms: bingo, index, flash, playing, and cards manufactured for board games. As such, the cost per game ranges from free to over 20 U.S. dollars. Fumie Togano's "Guess What Comes Next" is a spirited way to practice prediction and listening. Using incomplete sentences as prompts, students select teacher-made word cards to fill in the missing part of a sentence. The student with the most cards "wins," but the game itself is a fun way to practice predicting what vocabulary is needed. The written instructions use single vocabulary items as an example, but that could easily be changed to multi-word phrases. The instructions also suggest including some cards as distractors to make the game more challenging. Robb McCollum's "Something in Common," for instance, uses cards from the board game Dixit. In this game, students interview each other by asking questions about their cards in an attempt to find similarities. The cards have attractive and evocative art that can stimulate students' imagination, which should lead them to posing more compelling questions. A variant in the caveat section suggests using only the cards that display a particular theme (for example, food or plants) to focus on a specific group of words.

Part 5 consists of 18 technology-mediated games such as apps, software, or websites. Several of the suggested games are free, but most require Internet access and requisite hardware. Yiting Han's "The Detective Story: Solving the Murder" is a first-rate example of technology fused with a detailed lesson plan creating an abundance of language use opportunities. The free app is polished and entertaining, but it is the provided lesson plan that makes this submission exceptional. Every step in the lesson plan engages the students with the app and enables them to naturally communicate and practice all their language skills. The lesson plan is an involved process, which requires the teacher to be committed to learning the game so he or she can be familiar with the game's rules and vocabulary, anticipate students' questions about the game, and use an appropriate amount of class time. These efforts, however, should be justified by the output opportunities available to the students. The lesson plan could be used as a template for use with other games, either analog or digital. For lower-level students, Trisha Dowling's "Vocabulary Photo Scavenger Hunt" would be particularly suitable. In this game, students need to go outside of the class, take pictures of things that start with each letter of the alphabet (although the number of letters can be adjusted), and then create a PowerPoint presentation that should include their word, picture, and a sentence using the word. Points can

be given for each unique word, with matching words earning zero points. This game allows students to engage with vocabulary they are interested in and gives them the chance to use it in a purposeful and contextualized way.

Part 6 is comprised of 17 miscellaneous games. The games in this part vary and include Hot Potato, Jenga, and role-playing. Many of them are free, while some cost 10 U.S. dollars or less. Adriana D'Adamo Guillén's "Saving Lives Using Commands and Transition Devices" combines a bit of role-playing and a communicative activity. In this game, students act as teams of astronauts, with one student pretending to have a hole in his or her mask while keeping the eyes closed. The remaining crew members must talk to the endangered astronaut through assembling a device to fix the mask. Being creative and inspiring, this game focuses on specific grammar points and simulates a scenario where they would naturally be used. The pre-game and post-game segments of the lesson plan also provide numerous opportunities for oral communication. The post-game session could be especially useful for the students to give feedback to each other as well as receive feedback from the teacher.

In the introduction to *New Ways in Teaching with Games*, the editors claim the games within are appropriate for a variety of ages and can be used to practice language rather than learn about it, reinforce the four language skills, encourage culturally and pragmatically appropriate language production, and provide innovative learner-friendly experiences tied to language practice. After reading and watching 26 of the entries in the book, I believe they are mostly successful in providing evidence to support those claims. The book offers teachers an extensive amount of material to work with, which can be used as-is or modified to a teacher's needs. Furthermore, the organization and formatting of the submissions are easy to use and follow, and the videos are useful for seeing how the games actually work. Perhaps most importantly, the lesson plans allow teachers numerous opportunities to improve their students' language abilities.

The book does have some limitations though. First, the appendices, which are reportedly hosted on the TESOL Press website, do not appear to be available there as of July 2020. While the appendices are essential only for two entries (i.e., Paul A. Lyddon's "Routine Questioning" and Elsa Richter's "Comparative Concentration"), they provide useful supplemental materials for 13 other entries. Additionally, the video link for Shane Dunkle's "Using the Board Game Coup to Practice Bluffing Skills" is redirected to a login page rather than to the actual video. While these are not critical errors, they are unfortunate and make the work look incomplete. Another arguably strong pedagogical limitation comes from many games using points as a way to motivate the students. Kludging points and leaderboards onto a game does not necessarily create an effective learning space; instead, a more pedagogically sound approach would be to create pre-, in-, and post-game opportunities that would engage students with the game and encourage them to use and practice the target language. A strong example of this approach is Yiting Han's lesson plan for "The Detective Story: Solving the Murder." Pre-game, students discuss detective fiction as a genre, explore vocabulary associated with detective fiction, and analyze elements of the game's story such as the characters and locations. In-game, students are asked to listen to the characters in order to understand the rules and interact with the game, as well as make a note of new vocabulary they want to learn. Post-game, the students are asked to talk and write about clues they found in the game. The design of this lesson appears more engaging than simply awarding points for using language or answering questions correctly.

In their rationale for game use in the classroom, the editors mention *Gameful Second and Foreign Language Teaching and Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice* by Jonathon Reinhardt (2019) and eight affordances that games can create for language use, such as providing context, time for second language use and learning, and space for languaging and social collaboration. It thus appears that combining the games in Nurmukhamedov and Sadler's *New Ways in Teaching with Games* with such affordances would result in a powerful synergy of pedagogy and games.

References

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Reinhardt, J. (2019). *Gameful second and foreign language teaching and learning: Theory, research, and practice*. Palgrave Macmillan.

About the Author

Casey Nedry teaches at high school in Japan. His gaming heart goes out to crunchy euros and wargames, but he can occasionally be seen playing social deduction games.

E-mail: casey.nedry@gmail.com