Studies on games, play and ludic activities in foreign language classroom

Games, play and ludic activities are used in school contexts to entertain, motivate and promote learning. They also contribute to learner's personal, social and cultural development, stimulate imagination and logical reasoning, build social relations and knowledge, foster cooperation, respect to rules and mutual understanding, and create empathy, interest and curiosity. In foreign language teaching, games, play and ludic activities can yet favor the learning of linguistic, functional and pragmatic aspects of the language.

The difference between a game and a play activity is not a consensus in the literature due to the difficulty of narrowing down their notions considering the broad dimension of their uses. For Walther [1] (2003, n.p), a game comprises "confined areas that challenge the interpretation and optimizing of rules and tactics", while play and ludic activities are open territories where the make-believe and the construction of reality are crucial factors. Another difference lies in the levels of formal and structural complexity that these activities demand.

Regardless the conceptual delimitation of these terms, experiences with games, play and ludic activities in foreign language classrooms have gained importance and visibility in scientific studies carried out in Brazil and abroad. In Brazil, specifically, there are monographs, dissertations, theses, as well as theoretical reflections made by researchers who seek to discuss the use of games, gamification and ludicization in the classroom context. They are disperse work that could, together, contribute to better understanding of the use of these pedagogical resources in foreign language classrooms and their implications to language learning.

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[1] WALTHER, B. K. Playing and gaming - Reflections and classifications. The International Journal of Computer Game Research. v. 3, n. 1, s/p, 2003. Disponível em http://www.gamestudies.org/0301/walther/.

The aim of this thematic issue is to assemble some theoretical and empirical studies on the use of games, play and ludic activities in the foreign language classroom. The seven articles that make it up were written by Brazilian and foreign researchers who have approached the theme based on different theoretical and methodological underpinnings, in diverse teaching contexts having English, Italian, Spanish, French and German as foreign languages. The participants of these studies also vary, and include basic school students, university students and language center students. Despite their idiosyncrasies, the studies that are here assembled share the same common denominator: the need for reflection upon pedagogical practices mediated by games, play and ludic activities. The findings of these studies may help us in this task.

In the first article, entitled **From ivory tokens to artificial intelligence: a historical overview of the evolution of game and play as a tool for language teaching**, Silva historicizes the notions of game and play showing how different currents of thought have related these tools to education and language teaching. On this path, for Silva, games have presently experienced an opening to other paradigms due to the growing importance given to the 21st century skills that seek to adapt education to fit into a more and more plural and less stable context.

The second article is writen by Ferraz & Sant'Anna and it is entitled **Digital games and language education: we need to talk more about this encounter**. The article discusses the role of digital games in English language teaching and highlights their importance in promoting students' critical reflective thinking. Based on the New Literacies perspective, the authors report a classroom study in which they used the game *Sim City* to promote students' reflection on citizenship.

In the third article, **Gaming alone or together? L2 beginner-level gaming practices**, González-Lloret & Díez-Ortega analyze the effects of playing a simulation game individually and in dyads on learning and motivation. The participants were beginner-level learners of Spanish who played the game *Practice Spanish: Study Abroad*, designed to be played individually. The authors depart from theoretical concepts about language negotiation and game-based learning in order to relate game, learning and motivation.

In the following article, entitled **Language games and movement games: ludic motion in Italian language classes**, Bunn discusses two proposals of non-digital games: "Treasure hunt" and "The stone in the swamp", characterized as a movement game and a linguistic game, respectively. These games were adapted to the teaching of Italian following the premises of Gianni Rodari's *The Grammar of Fantasy*. According to the author, the game dynamics allow students to displace the meaning of words (as in the language game) and to move themselves physically (as in the movement game) favoring the use of spoken language, vocabulary learning and student engagement.

In the fifth article, **Gamification in language teaching**, Leffa analyzes university students' perceptions on the use of gamified and non-gamified EFL activities and their level of engagement in both types of activities. The gamified task incorporated specific attributes of games, such as points, badges and leaderboards (PBL). The study is based on the perspective of both Digital Literacy, as a broader theoretical framework, and Flow Theory, as a methodological basis. The author proposes going beyond PBLs to include other elements that can favor foreign language learning.

In the sixth article, entitled **Fair play in building a curriculum for English learning?**, Souza narrates her teaching experiences with the use of gamified activities to interpret her own narratives and to understand how students deal with these activities. Based on narrative inquiry, the author departs from the premise that teacher's practice is influenced by the experiences s/he lives inside and outside the school, which are naturalized in her/his actions. Due to that, Souza suggests that the teacher should interpret game-based activities not as a simple form of entertainment and ludicization, but as a means of stimulating students' protagonism.

The last article puts Special Education at the center of discussions, particularly the issue about the use of flexible activities for students with special needs. The article entitled **Curricular flexibilities in foreign languages: educational experiences with students with special needs**, written by Camargo & Silva, discusses the implementation of three different activities, each one for a foreign language: French, English and German. The purpose of these activities was to promote educational inclusion of three teenage students: one with Cerebral

Palsy and two with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The activities involved ludicization and the use of a pedagogic game. Based on the notion of Educational Accessibility, the authors highlight the importance of shared planning and pedagogical enactment between foreign language teachers and special education teachers.

We believe that this collection of articles will incite reflection, inspiration, changes, resistance and, mainly, the pleasure in all this.

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