Creating playgrounds in online teaching spaces:
Kanami and Nene's "hero journeys"

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🔖 Item Details

🔑 Key points

- **What is this?** A case study of two students' journeys over the span of one year in my English class.
- **Why did you make it?**
  - to highlight just how transformative LLP can be for certain students
  - to understand WHY these students excelled
- **Who is it for?**
  - Myself: to iterate and improve my teaching
  - Other teachers: to show how to set up an environment in which learners can exceed your expectations

Tweet synopsis

Teaching in 2020 was radically different.
@ddd__yama and Nene's learning journeys were just plain radical.
In this playground, I interview them to find out what conditions led to their radical transformation from zero to hero (level of interest in English).

#RadicalTransformation #HerosJourney #ConnectedLearning #FF14

View at the LLP Playground: https://www.llpjournal.org/2021/05/14/j-york-creating-playgrounds-hero-journeys.html

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Introduction

This playground is a **video** submission first, and **text** second. The video is an interview with two students that completed a year of English classes with me. I am interviewing these students to understand how they interpreted my methods, materials and mediation over the full year. The video was taken in late December 2020. I translated their speech and added subtitles with Aegisub.[1] I edited the video together with Final Cut Pro.

The videos are available [here](#) (Part 1) and [here](#) (Part 2).

The curriculum

More details are provided at the start of each video reflection below, however, at this junction, I will provide an overview of the year (Table 1). Due to lockdown restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic, the class was conducted entirely online, in an emergency remote teaching context. As such, all communication was computer-mediated. The main software used for communication was Discord[2], a popular chat app that combines text, voice, and video modes of communication in a permanent, private space. The online context inspired me to iterate my "Kotoba Rollers" curriculum to include gameplay with English speakers as part of the class (See Table 1). This had a profound impact on the interviewees.

Table 1 Curriculum overview

First semester	The curriculum was based on "Bridging Activities" (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008): ● **Collect** texts from internet communities ● **Analyze** texts with teacher support ● **Participate** in the communities with your own text ● Students considered their interests, made groups, and joined communities of the popular social news website: Reddit[3]. These communities are known as "subreddits." ● After **collecting** and **analyzing** several existing posts, groups **created** and **posted** in their chosen subreddit. ● Groups **reflected** on the comments they received and **replied** where appropriate. ● Groups **created** two reflective presentations to **explain** what they had learned through their analysis and participation.
Second semester	The curriculum is based on my "Kotoba Rollers" framework (York, 2019). Additions were 1) playing the game with English speakers during class time and 2) creating a video portfolio (known as a "best play montage here) for assessment purposes. ● **Choose** a game to play ● **Learn** how to play it ● **Play**, record and transcribe the gameplay audio ● **Analyze** the gameplay audio with teacher support ● **Replay**, record and transcribe ● [NEW] **Play** the game with English speakers in class ● [NEW] **Create** a "best play" montage for assessment

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[1] https://github.com/Aegisub/Aegisub. I learnt about this software through the [Aonahara](#) Discord server, a group of fansubbers for VTuber videos.
[2] https://discord.com/
[3] https://www.reddit.com/

Interviewees

The two students featured in this playground are first-year students studying in the "Department of Information and Communication Engineering[4]." Both are female, which, it should be mentioned, is rare for this university and department. Of the 95 students I taught this year, only 9 were female (9%). More details are provided in the Demographics section of the interview.

Why did I choose these students?

Quite simply, they seemed to "get" the concept behind my lessons and ran with it, exceeding my expectations regarding their overall participation and general quality of assessed work. I wanted to know WHY they performed so well, and HOW we, as teachers or, more specifically: **as LLP practitioners**, can increase our chances of producing shining examples like these students in the future. Figure 1 and Figure 2 are diagrams that the two students created as reflection pieces at the end of the fall semester 2020.
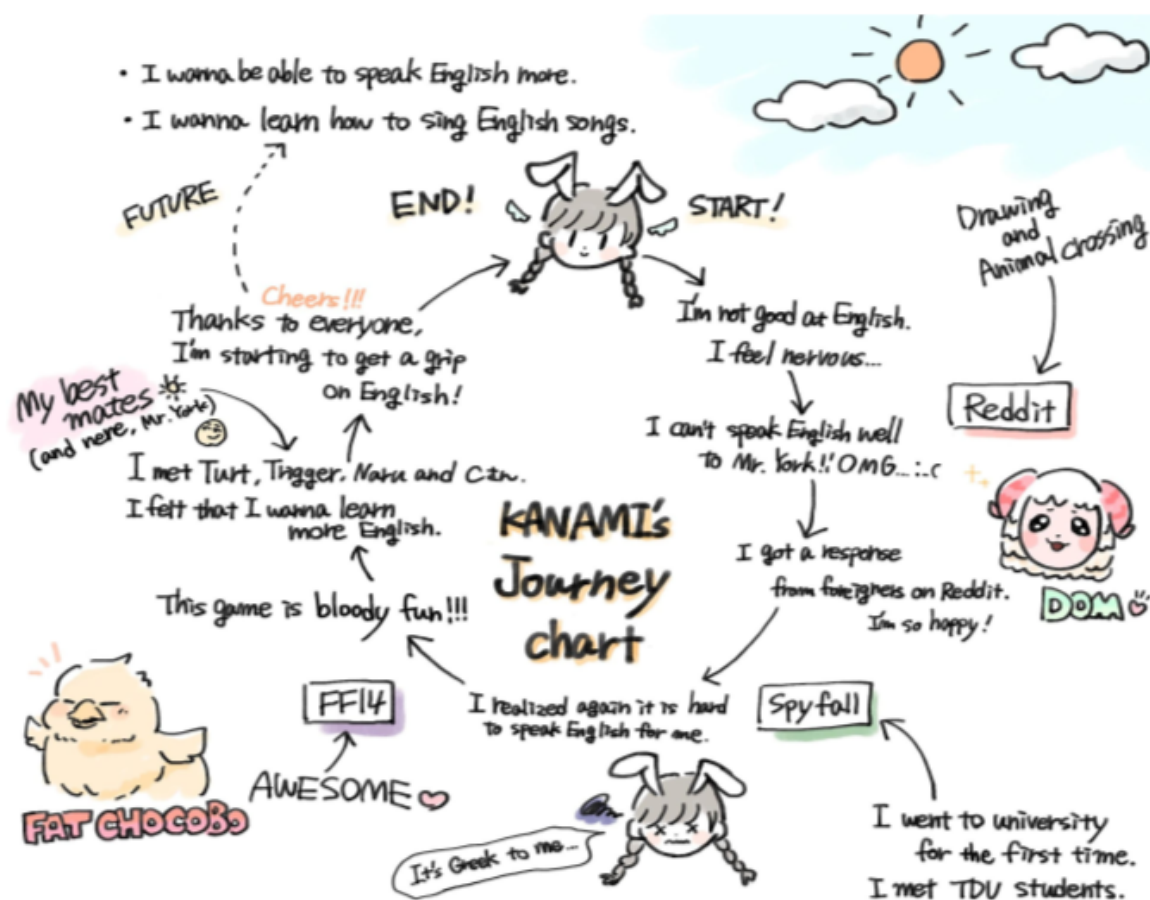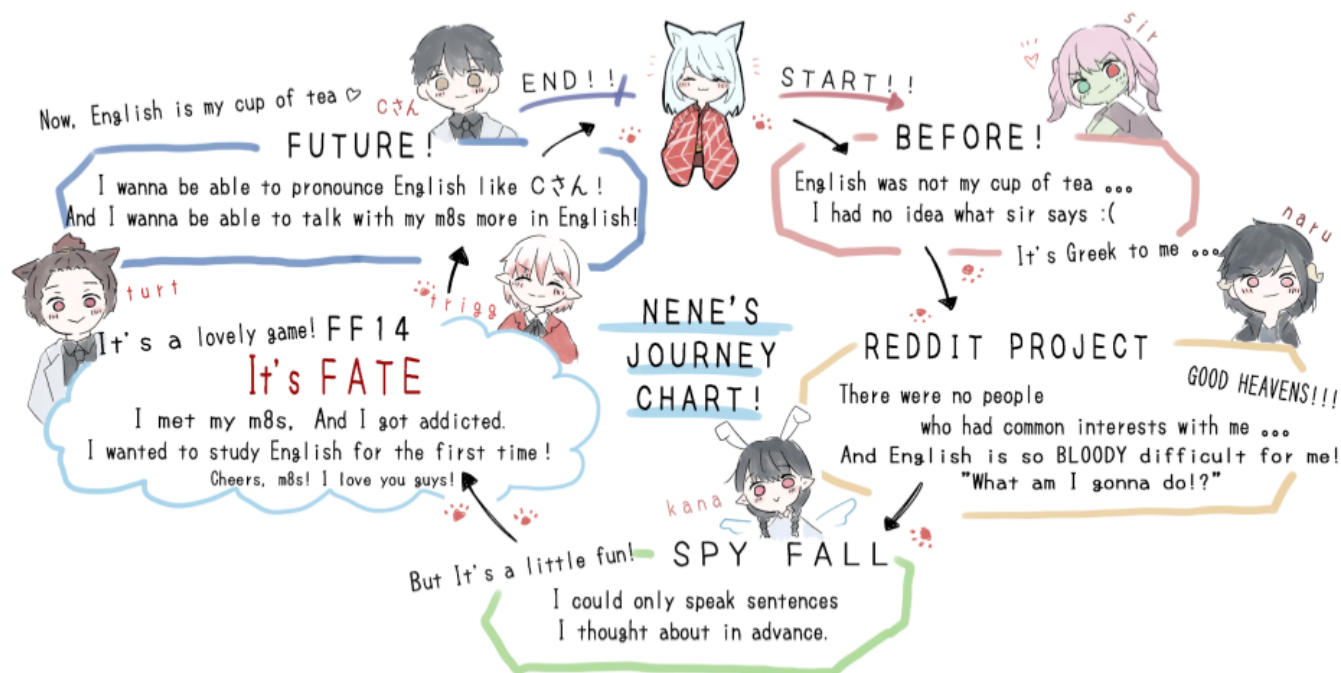

Figure 1 Kanami's journey. Larger version here

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[4] https://www.dendai.ac.jp/en/undergraduate/engineering.html

Figure 2 Nene's journey. Larger version here

In the interview, I only talk about the diagrams in passing, not giving them the attention they deserve. Please take a few minutes to read the text on them. I'll be here when you get back.

☐ *tick...* ☐ *tock...* ☐

Intrigued? So was I. OK. Let's talk about these incredible diagrams.

The journey diagrams were created at the *very end* of the course as a final, reflective activity. A google slides template was created[5] which asked students to reflect on:

- Unique elements of the games they chose to play,
- The games good and bad points for learning English,
- Any new words or grammar they learnt through gameplay,
- Their learning "journeys" in 2020.

Regarding the last point, I provided students with some templates to use to express themselves. This was inspired by deHaan's work (see Furusawa & Yoshida, 2021), where he prompted students to reflect on their learning in various forms[6], including the creation of a diagram (Figure 3). I created my own, digital template (Figure 4) and also introduced the narrative concept of a "hero's journey" (Figure 5).

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[5] Reflection Google Slides template
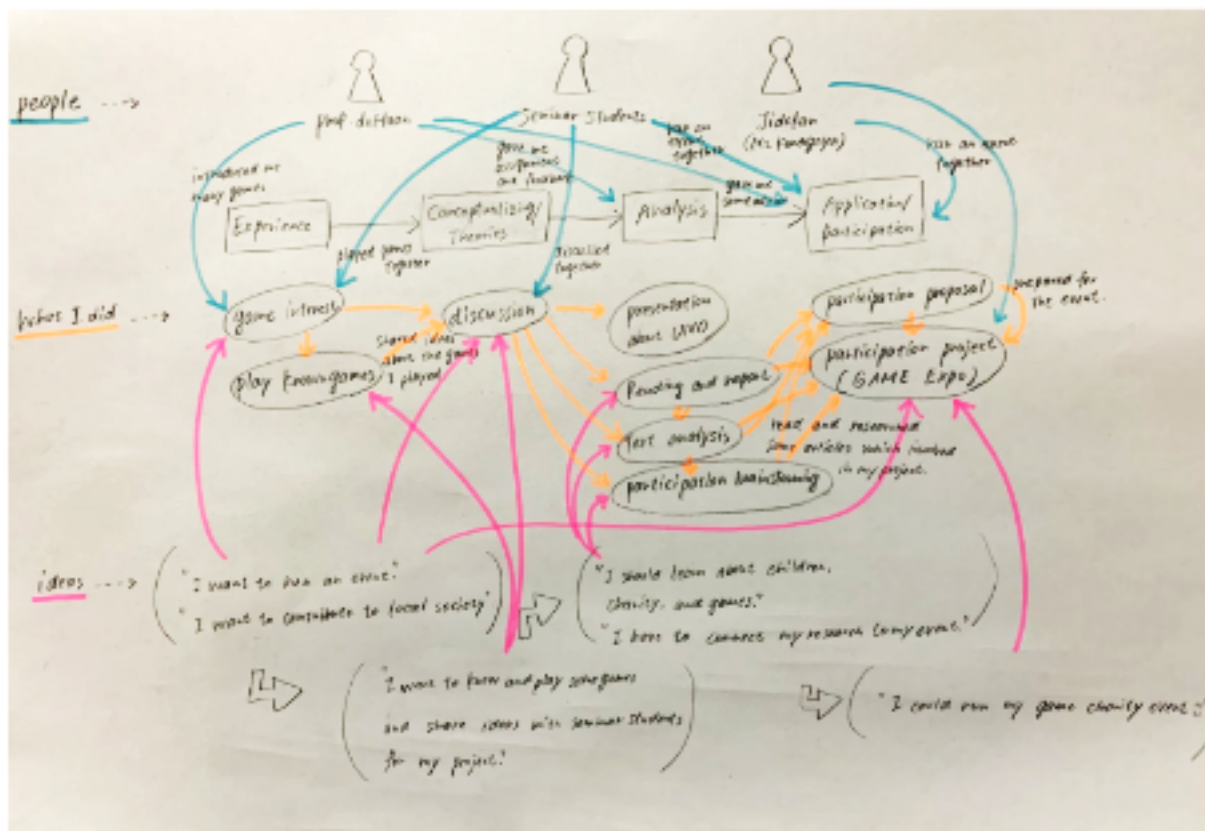[6] See page 4 of deHaan's reflection worksheet here.

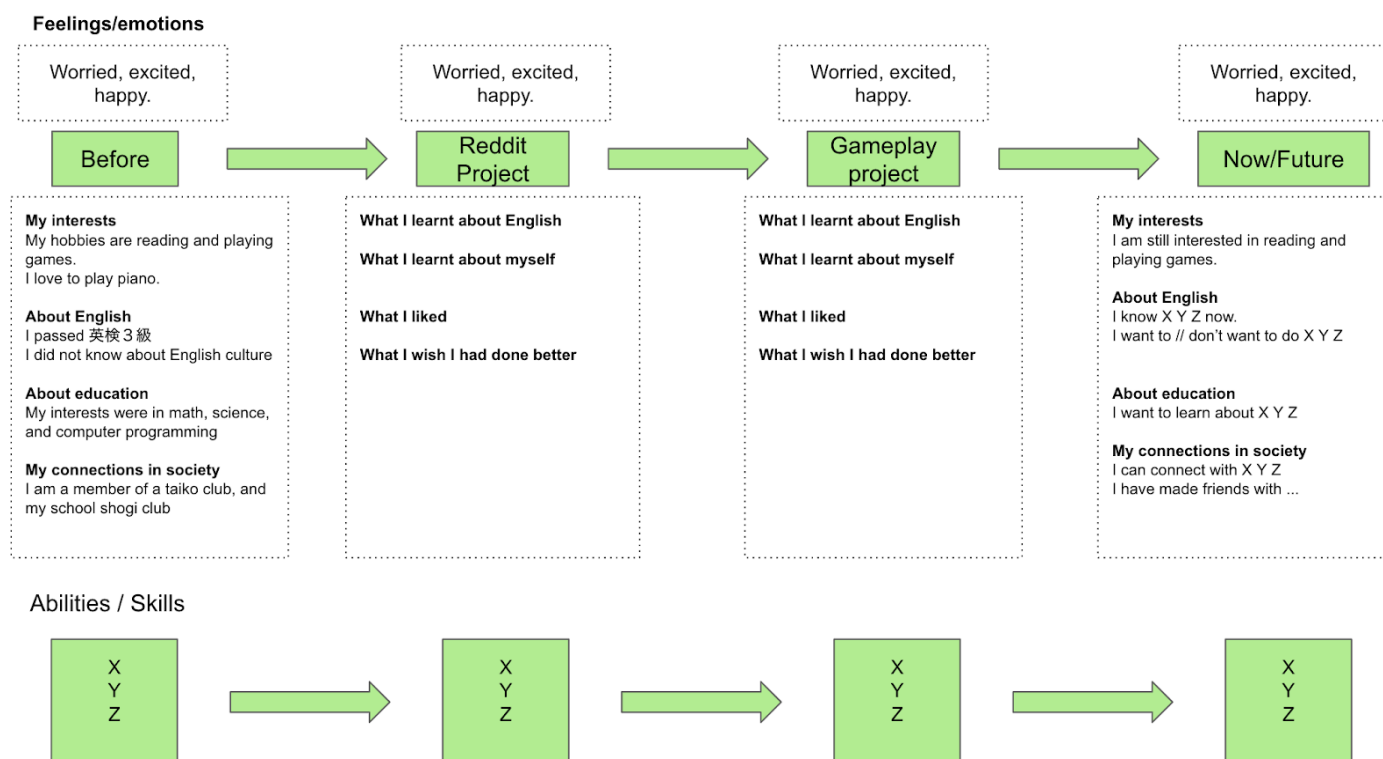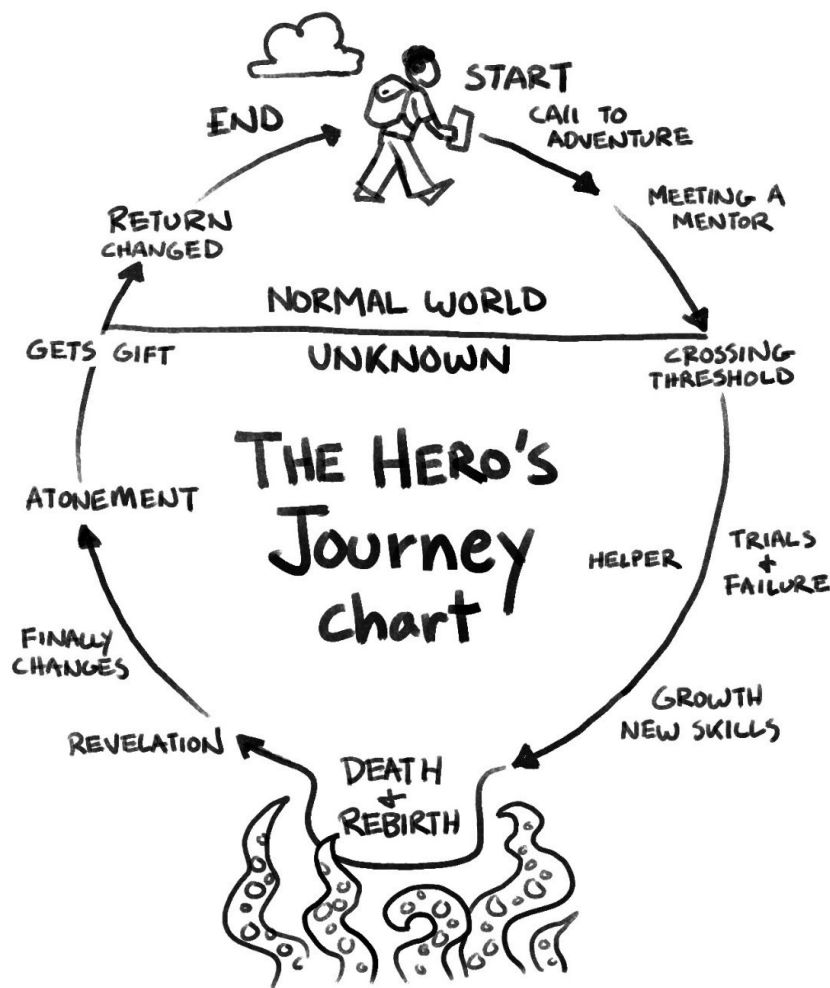**Figure 3** An example "journey" from one of deHaan's students

Figure 4 A template to reflect on a year in my class

Figure 5 The archetypal "hero's journey" narrative arch[7]

The hero's journey concept resonated with these two students, resulting in their diagrams above. They have appropriated the concept to show their growth as English learners over the course of a year. Both students started as nervous and unmotivated learners:

- Nene: "English was not my cup of tea"
- Kanami: "I'm not good at English"

Kanami shows enjoyment of having contact and communication with English speakers through the first semester Reddit project: "I got a response from foreigners on Reddit. I'm so happy!" but Nene shows that she was not satisfied with her group choice. It seems that she had to compromise and join a group that was not aligned with her interests (this is examined further in the interview). After the first semester Reddit project, Kanami shows frustration or at least self-reflection that English is still difficult "I realised again it is hard to speak English for me." As proposed by reviewer Marc Jones, this may relate to a shift in Kanami's identity from someone that had only studied English as a subject, and now trying to be a member of a community of practice in an online space.

The students start to express confidence and enjoyment during the second semester's classes. "It's FATE," Nene says. "It's bloody fun," Kanami adds. It's important to note, again, that with the 2020 version of Kotoba Rollers (in an online context) I added a stage for students to play with English speakers **as part of the class (**again, more details below). The interviewees made friends with the

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English speakers, and continued playing together. Perhaps this is where they picked up all the slang expressions featured in the diagrams? Watch the interview videos and read on to find out.

During the interview, both students mentioned that learning slang and memes was one of the biggest takeaways of the class, in true meme format then, one could consider the class in terms of the "now kiss" meme (Figure 6). I provided an environment for students to grow as competent English speakers through gameplay and then introduced them to English speakers in class, allowing them (or, forcing[8] them) to play together. For these two students, this experience appeared to be the start of their *current journey* -- playing Final Fantasy 14 with English speakers regularly and learning to *enjoy English*. But why did they continue to play? Was it the game? The support? The English speakers? The interview and reflections below provide answers to these questions in detail.
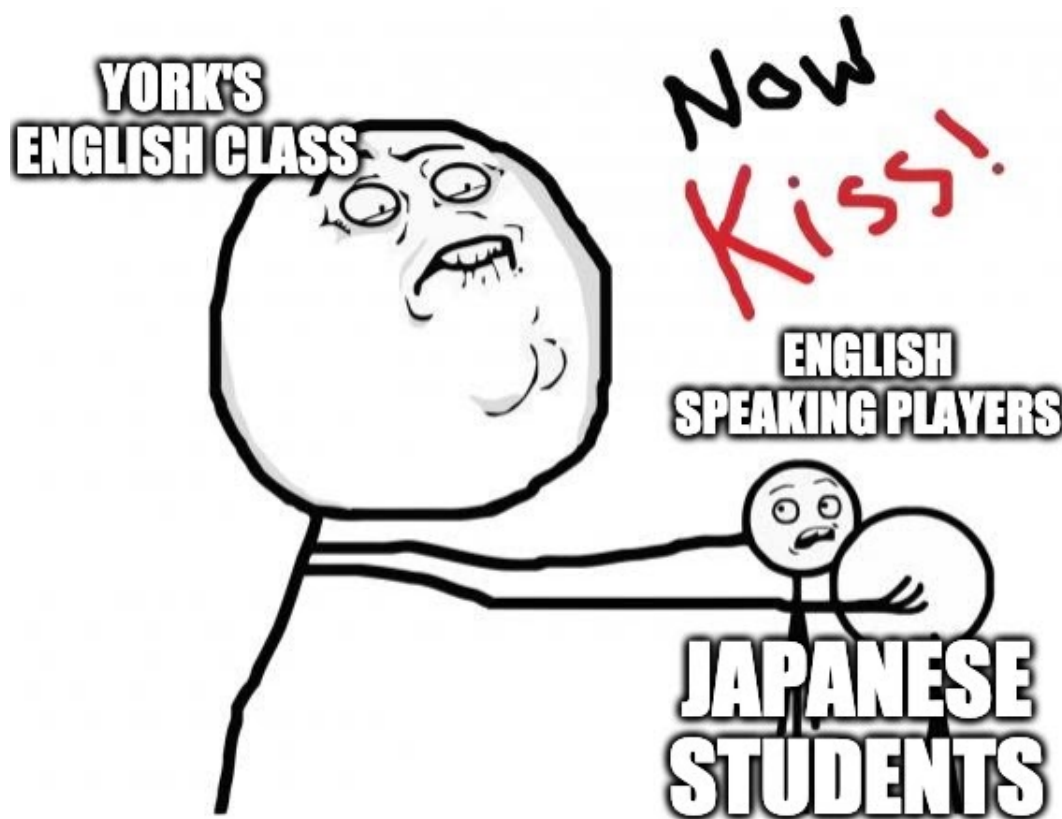
Figure 6 A meme representation of how this class allowed (forced) Japanese students to interact with English speakers during gameplay activities as an exit task

> For these two students, this experience appeared to be the start of their current journey -- playing Final Fantasy 14 with English speakers regularly and learning to enjoy English.

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[8] **Reviewer comments:**
Marc: Interesting choice of words. Do you really see it as forcing, and if so what are the potential negatives of this. I know you are focusing on why Kanami and Nene became your successes, but it might be worthwhile to mention any recollections you have about any asides students made about being forced to play with English speakers.
Fabio: I remember we talked about this on the Among Us playground too. I think the word "forcing" works well in contrast with "allowing". We (teachers/ gamers) might think that the opportunity to play games in a class is, for most students, like holy water from heaven. But for who doesn't like games maybe forcing works better (because they have no choice).

Reflection PT1: Reddit project

Overview of the project

The project was created for several reasons.

1. A need for a syllabus that would be practical to implement during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As mentioned in the introduction, the second intervention focused on here was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, in April 2020 (the time when we normally start the academic year in Japan), teachers at my university were told that we would be teaching remotely from May. Therefore, we had one month to prepare for remote teaching. Fortunately for me, I had already conducted this course in a face-to-face context the previous year and immediately saw that it would be an appropriate curriculum to apply to a remote teaching context. This is because the course is centred around collecting and analyzing texts on the internet. Thus, even in a face-to-face setting, students are searching on the internet, using online grammar guides, watching videos, and posting to Reddit. The primary use of the classroom space is to gather as groups and work on their projects and for me to monitor their work, helping as needed.

2. I wanted to reconsider what communicative competence means in my context.

I was personally dissatisfied with the lack of "meaningful" or "authentic" language use that was occurring within my classroom. The phrase "empty babble of the communicative language class" (Pennycook, 1994, p.311) is constantly on my mind when thinking of the goal and purpose of language teaching in my context. In other words, if the end goal of language learning is to use the language with an authentic audience, wouldn't it be more productive to get students to communicate (via text and other non-verbal media) with online English speaking communities instead of practising language forms with their monolingual peers?

> Wouldn't it be more productive to get students to communicate (via text and other non-verbal media) with online English speaking communities instead of practising language forms with their monolingual peers?

As argued above, although CLT was originally conceived as a method for engaging with members of a community or social group (Canale & Swain, 1980), it is now "associated primarily with interactive, transactional oral language use" (Byrnes, 2006, p. 244). "Interactive" here is language use between people (spoken or written), and "transactional" relates to the exchange of information for a specific reason, such as when ordering food at a restaurant or giving directions. In other words, the language of a clinical nature, stripped of context and content. As a result, a student may know *how* to order a coffee, but not what it *means* to order a coffee in that particular culture.

Other criticisms of the approach appear succinctly in Paesani, Allen, and Dupuy (2016):

- It typically has a heavy focus on oral and functional language use,
- There is a superficial treatment of texts and cultural content,
- The primary skill focused on is recalling information, rather than to interpret and analyze content,
- Principles are adopted in a piecemeal way.

The current project therefore attempted to address these issues by putting literacy practices at the core of the curriculum. Students analyze authentic, multimodal texts found on the Internet. Additionally, whilst there is still a speaking component in the curriculum, the main skills focused on are reading and writing, as students not only analyze texts but create texts of their own.

3. I wanted to experiment with pedagogy in my classroom.

Inspired by progressive approaches to education, especially the *Connected Learning manifesto* (Ito et al., 2013) and Thorne and Reinhardt's (2008) Bridging Activities (henceforth: BA) model, I wanted to see how these models could be adapted to an EFL context where learners are low-proficiency. That is, Thorne and Reinhardt's initial consideration for BA is for advanced level learners, but no aspect of the model prescribes a level of proficiency (2008, p.559), and, in addition, there are few papers on the integration of the model in teaching contexts (see McNeil, 2020 for an exception). I, therefore, took it upon myself to chart the territory.

> There are few papers on the integration of [Bridging Activities] in teaching contexts. I, therefore, took it upon myself to chart the territory.

The BA cycle underpins the pedagogical practices of the current study. It is a 3-phase cycle of activities which is presented graphically in Figure 7. These stages are: 1) observe and collect, 2) guided exploration and analysis, and 3) creation and participation.
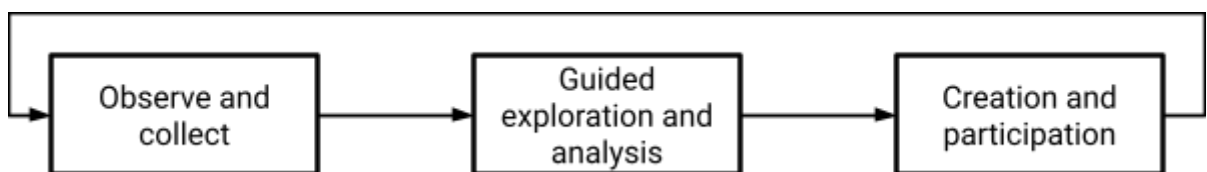
Figure 7 *A graphical representation of the phases in the Bridging Activities framework*

The model reflects the stages of a multiliteracies approach as outlined by the New London Group (1996). Learners engage with four major activities:

- Situated practice -- coincides with "observing and collecting"
- Critical framing -- coincides with "guided exploration"
- Overt instruction -- coincides with "analysis"
- Transformed practise -- coincides with "creation and participation"

It is, however, worth mentioning that at the time BA was devised (2008), the pedagogical model outlining how to put multiliteracies education into practice was not as pronounced as it is now (see Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). Since the conceptualization of BA, there has been considerable progress made in terms of the pedagogical practices of multiliteracies, also known as Learning by Design. And, perhaps, unfortunately, as the curriculum and pedagogical practices of this paper were informed by BA and *not* the pedagogy of multiliteracies directly, there are significant differences between the activities completed here and a "modern" take on the pedagogy of multiliteracies. Concretely, there is no reference to the four key practices of the Learning by Design: experiencing, conceptualizing, analyzing and applying (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015). For a more rigorous (or, indeed pedagogically sound?) ML teaching model, which aligns closer to the Learning by Design principles of ML, see deHaan (2019). deHaan documents not only a model for conducting the pedagogy of multiliteracies with games (p. 8) but also outlines teacher roles (p. 9), and details student development at each stage of the intervention (see also deHaan, 2020 for another, shorter introduction to the framework).

It should be noted that BA also aligns closely with Connected Learning (Ito et al., 2013, 2020), an approach to teaching and learning which leverages student interests towards participation in various communities and where connections formed through participation in these communities feed back into academic achievement. In sum then, both BA and CL share common roots in a multiliteracies approach to teaching, though neither strictly mandates the application of the pedagogical practices of multiliteracies, also known as "learning by design."

Doing BA

I conceptualize the BA framework in terms of verbs. Those in bold are the six aspects of learning in Bloom's taxonomy of learning (1956):

- **Observation and collection** (verbs: **understanding**, observing, collecting, scanning, browsing, searching, hashtagging, commenting, participating)

Students select texts relevant to their interests and subjective language needs and goals. The texts are therefore considered "them-relevant" internet-mediated texts (p. 563).

- **Guided exploration and analysis** (verbs: **understanding**, **analysing**, **evaluating**, thinking, discussing, translating, looking up, comparing, contrasting)

Students conduct analysis and teachers aid where necessary. During this stage, it is important to raise learner awareness of the grammatical and lexical choices in texts. One advanced activity proposed during the exploration and analysis phase is to consider how linguistic choices combine to realize different textual, interpersonal, and ideational meanings (p.563).

- **Creation and participation** (verbs: **applying**, **creating**, transforming, remixing, joining, doing, participating)

Students use the knowledge they gained during the exploration and analysis phase to participate in their chosen community. From a sociocultural perspective to language teaching then, this can be considered the act of *imitation*, as the basis of a zone of proximal development (see Lantolf & Poehner, 2014, p.50). Or, from a multiliteracies approach, students remix or transform their found items, which become *redesigned*.

Each group of students worked on a Google Docs worksheet. They copied it and completed the activities collaboratively over the length of the intervention. The worksheet can be accessed here.

Interview video link

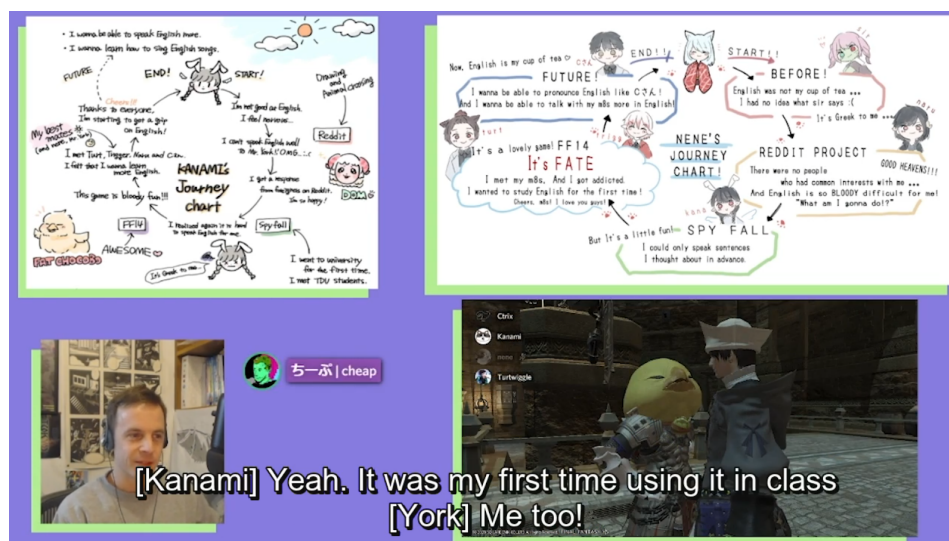A video of the first interview can be found here. A screenshot is presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8 A screenshot of the interview video (Part 1)

📺📺📺 I recommend watching the video before reading my reflections.

Demographic questions

1. Tell me about your experience with English before becoming a university student.
2. Regarding remote classes:
   a. Did you have suitable technical skills? What about the tools used in class: Google Docs, Reddit, Discord, etc.?
   b. Did you have a suitable environment for joining remote classes (i.e. a decent PC, etc.)?
3. Would you consider gaming one of your hobbies?

Both students mentioned that they had fairly negative thoughts towards English before starting university. Low grades, low motivation, and generally uninterested in English. Kanami mentioned that as long as she didn't leave Japan, she thought it would be fine to not understand English.

They both had suitable environments for conducting remote lessons and considered gaming one of their hobbies.

Only Kanami mentioned that she had used Discord before and was fairly proficient with technology; mostly due to her work in high school creating a video documentary.

Bridging Activities Reddit project: Questions and answers

1. Do you remember the participation cycle?
2. Do you think you achieved the class objective of participating in English communities?
3. Which communities did you participate in?
4. What kind of reaction did you expect to get?
5. Was the reaction you received different to your expectations?
6. What was the atmosphere like in the two groups you joined?
7. What skills did you gain from this project?

Both students understood the aim of this intervention and expressed that they thought they achieved the aims with their groups. Their experiences differed slightly in terms of group dynamics. Kanami mentions that the two groups she was a part of, "Drawing" and "Animal Crossing," both had positive atmospheres whereas Nene mentioned that her first group "Game Programming" was rather quiet and inactive. Kanami also mentioned that her group mates would meet outside of class to chat, do homework, or play games together. Several reasons for the difference in group dynamics were proposed:

- The presence or absence of a talkative person or leader figure (Kanami)
- Technical skills of group members (York)
  - Ability to create docs and help other students (Kanami)
  - However, technical skills are not considered a linchpin to successful group dynamics (Kanami).
  - Conversely, Nene's group members all had strong technical skills but the group was still quiet, thus pointing to the fact that it is individual group members characteristics that are more influential.
- Communication skills of group members (Nene)
- Expertise in the group's chosen topic of investigation (York)
  - Nene agreed to this point.
  - Kanami also agreed. She stated that all members of both of her groups were very interested in the topic and so could share information in lively conversation. This aligns with my thoughts and is the reason there is a two to three week onboarding period where

students are *forced* to consider who they are, what they are interested in and what connections they have in society.

- ○ During the interview, I mentioned that I consider it important that students do not compromise or pick a group at random. Kanami agreed.

> There is a two to three week onboarding period where students are *forced* to consider who they are, what they are interested in and what connections they have in society.

In terms of skills gained, both mentioned that the project exposed them to net slang, where Kanami was surprised so much existed. They also learned how to use Discord and Google Docs.

Reflection PT2: Kotoba Rollers online

Overview of the project

I have written extensively about the Kotoba Rollers project. The easiest way to read about it is with the two LLP papers I have written. York (2019) is an overview of what, how, and why I taught with board games. York (2020) is a deep dive into the effect of post-play activities and task repetition on learners' task performance, focusing on output accuracy. However, for the 2020 online version, I have only produced a video describing the changes.[9] The major changes can be seen in Table 2, and are:

1. The **type of game** used (analog → digital),
2. The **tools** used for communication (face to face → computer-mediated with Discord)
3. Student **assessment** (me listening to students speak during gameplay for 10 minutes → students submitting a "best play" montage video of their speaking ability with a reflection sheet).

Table 2 An overview of the changes between KR in 2019 (face to face) and 2020 (online, remote)

| Kotoba Rollers 2019 (with board games, face-to-face)	Kotoba Rollers 2020 (with digital games, remote)
Games - Board and card games **Classroom** - Teacher instructions - Discussing games. - Playing games. - Group work activities. - Presentations. **Student smartphones** - Search for game rules in Japanese. - Search for game rules in English. - Use online dictionaries. - Watch online game reviews and rule explanation videos. - Record gameplay audio. - Use the recording to generate a transcription of play. - Complete a final online report. **Printed worksheets** - For all stages of the class, completed individually.	**Games** - Video games or *digital* board and card games **Discord** - Teacher instructions. - Group discussions. - Sharing links and recordings. - Chatting during gameplay. **Google Docs worksheets** - For all stages of the class, **completed as a group.** - Collaborative editing. - Share multimedia. **OneDrive** - As a place to store gameplay recordings and montage videos. **Video editing software** (OBS, ATIUTL, Adobe Premier, etc.) - Creating their "best play montages."

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[9] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZm14ii8gII

The concept of making a best play montage was based on the unfairness of the previous evaluation method. During the first two game cycles, I would spend approximately 10 minutes with each group listening silently as they played their game. The major problem with this method is that I only have this 10-minute snapshot of students' performances. For instance, a student could have played a fantastic round of One Night Ultimate Werewolf just before I arrive, speaking fluently, accurately and cooperating as an active member, yet when I arrive, their character role does not let them participate to the same degree, meaning that ultimately I can only give them a low score.

Inspired by the concept of game montage videos and college football recruiting tapes.[10] I wanted to give students the responsibility and opportunity to show me what they were able to achieve over the 6 to 7-week cycle of playing, analysing and replaying their chosen game. So instead of a 10 minute window to show me their best performance, they could use footage from any of their gameplay sessions, and, if they *still* didn't have anything to show from their in-class play sessions, they could get together outside of class, play, and use that footage, too. Several groups cooperated in this way to gather footage for students that seemed to lack "best plays."

> I wanted to give students the responsibility and opportunity to show me what they were able to achieve

A worksheet was created to show students how to simply edit a video[11] as well the basic structure of their montage (see Figure 9). It also introduced how to write up their reflections, including the use of hashtags.
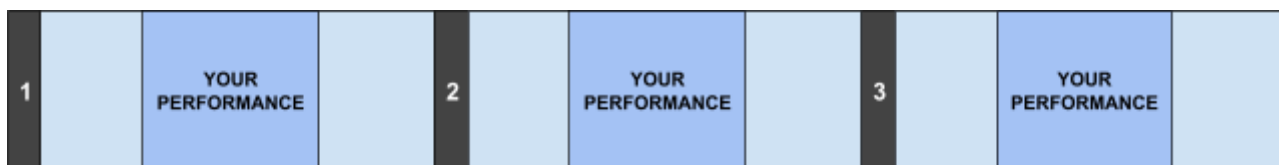
Figure 9 A graphical representation of how students should structure their montage videos

An example of the written reflection from Nene can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3 The text data for one of Nene's best play clips

What happened	I really wanted to take the aggro, but I didn't	
Transcription of speech	Kanami	Please take the aggro.
	Nene	OK.OK. **I'll take the aggro.**
		A! No! I'm NINJA. Sorry!
	Nao	No! No!
	Nene	OMG! Wait! Wait!
	Sir	Is this the FATE quest?
	Nene	yeah
	Kanami	Yes
	Sir	Oh I see.OK!
	Nao	Change class!

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[10] https://www.ncsasports.org/football/recruiting-video
[11] Worksheet available here:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1WVCGViWaI4l7NHFCAurrDWH-P38pKXoaN2fNowgFs_8/edit?usp=sharing

	Nene	OK!
	Sir	Change class lol
	Nene	yeah, I'm knigh….
	Nao	Oh Thank you.
	Nene	a Paladin yeah.
	Sir	you should be a blue mage
	Nana	Nene introduce paladin
	Nene	yeah lol
Your reflection	I was able to use game words. I was able to speak English fluently.	
Tags	#fluency #accuracy #gamewords #cooperation	

Both of the students interviewed here produced remarkable montage videos. Remarkable in terms of volume and quality. One simple reason for this is that they played their chosen game outside of class with English speakers (specifically, English speakers from Ireland, Portugal, and Japan), meaning that they had a large volume of recordings from which to select their best plays. Therefore, whereas some students had to scramble to collect three best play clips (the minimum required for evaluation purposes), Kanami and Nene submitted 5 clips, with an average video length of 7.5 minutes each.

In other words: putting the responsibility on students to produce an individual portfolio of their performance over the semester (the montage in my case) means that they *have the opportunity to create* their best work. Unlike a one-time test, students could do the following to gather material for their portfolio, cumulatively:

- Students can play in class, but the time for playing in this model is limited. So...
- Students can play among themselves outside of the class to gather extra material. And...
- Students can make use of the English speakers invited to the server to play and record in their free time.
- Students could even write a script and act it out as a "model" play session.

From a language learning perspective also, increasing the amount of time that students use the L2, in various contexts, may lead to enhanced acquisition or the automatization of language forms.
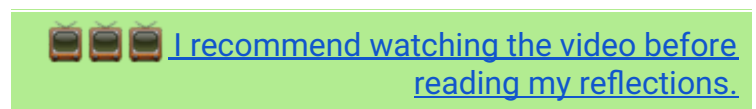
Interview video link

The video for the second part of the interview can be viewed here, a screenshot is provided in (Figure 10).

Figure 10 A screenshot from the interview (Part 2)

Kotoba Rollers online: Questions and answers

1. Do you remember the gameplay progression cycle?
2. Can you remember how I evaluated your ability for the first two cycles?
3. Did you know what a "montage video" was before making one in class?
4. How did you feel about making a montage as evidence of your work?
5. Why did you choose FF14?
6. How did you feel about playing with English speakers during class?
7. What was your experience of speaking with English speakers before joining this class?
8. Tell me about the English speakers you played with during class.
9. How did you start playing FF14 with English speakers outside of class?
10. Did you learn slang from playing FF14 with English speakers?
11. Do you feel like you did better than other students in this class?
12. Why do you think you two achieved much more than other students?
13. Do you think there is a good balance between teacher-fronted and student-centred activities?
14. What role did I (the teacher) have in your development?
15. Have your feelings towards English changed over the course of this year?
16. Do you think you'll feel the same about English in a year?

Whilst the majority of the students' answers are explored in more detail below, some are not, as the answers they provided in the video did not seem to require further explanation.

1. Do you remember the specific stages of the curriculum?
The students remembered Kotoba Rollers TBLT cycle well. Learn, play, analyze, replay, reanalyze, though Nene did not mention the report stage:

Nene: *"At first we researched the game we chose."* (**learn**)
Nene: *"Then we made a small community."*
Nene: *"And in that group we researched words that we would use during gameplay."* (**learn**)
Nene: *"Then we played in Japanese first."* (**learn**)
Nene: *"And then we thought more about useful words and expressions for the game."* (**learn**)
Nene: *"Then we played in English."* (**play**)
Nene: *"And then we transcribed our gameplay audio."* (**analyze**)

York: "*I just heard a very important word then..!*"
Nene: "*Made a transcription and checked our mistakes and the words that we couldn't say in English.*" (**analyze**)
Nene: "*Then we played again.*" (**replay**)
Nene: "*I think that's the cycle…*" (1.14.32 to 2:10.02, video 2)

Nene used the word "community" to describe how students made groups around different games. For instance, she played FF14 with a small group of students who were separated from each other in Discord via voice and text channels. An example of our in-class conversion can be seen in Figure 11. The choice of the word "community" is very interesting to me. It implies that for Nene, the class was not a single body, but consisted of smaller communities, working together on their individual game projects.

Figure 11 An example conversation in a group's Discord channel

2. Can you remember how I evaluated your ability for the first two cycles?

Kanami: "*I think the group was evaluated as a whole?*" (2:22.41, video 2)

Judging from Kanami's reaction, I was not clear regarding the evaluation criteria for stages before they created their montage videos in the final cycle. Kanami thought that I evaluated groups as a whole, rather than on an individual level which was incorrect.

4. How did you feel about making a montage as evidence of your work?

Judging by the work these students produced, it was evident that they enjoyed making their montage videos before asking this question. Each had gone the extra mile to include colour-coded subtitles for their video (see Figure 12). You can see Kanami's video here. And Nene's video here.

Figure 12 An example of colour-coded subtitles from Kanami's montage video

They also confirmed that the montage-creation process fulfilled my original intention: allowing students to self-select their best English speaking moments instead of having me visit their group for a limited time.

Kanami: *"We could show you the times that we really spoke well. When you weren't in the room. And we could show you things that we wanted to, like funny play sessions and stuff. I think that was another good point."* (04:18.58 to 04:46.16)

Naturally, not all students found the video editing process easy and fun, as responses to a post-experiment questionnaire revealed. In response to the question "What was the most difficult part of this class," several responses mentioned that video editing was indeed the most difficult part of the class (n = 5, 5%). However, the biggest issues for students in this class were related to communication and expressing themselves in English:

1. Playing in English (n = 26, 27%)
2. Expressing themselves in English (n = 25, 26%)
3. Speaking to English speakers during the exit task (n = 14, 15%)

6. How did you feel about playing with English speakers during class?

Their experience of being nervous when playing with English speakers is something that I expected, and, to be honest, wanted students to experience. Of course, I didn't want students to feel uncomfortable, but they had completed several gameplay sessions up until that point, which may be considered "pedagogic tasks," and playing with English speakers may be considered the "exit task"

(Long, 2014, p. 226). This was a *test* atmosphere, where students were required to show that they could play with English speakers through their continued effort to learn English through gameplay. Playing the game became the test.

It was through this important experience that these two students met their "m8s[12]" (as Kanami mentions in her diagram): Turtwiggle, Trigger and C-san.

9. How did you start playing FF14 with English speakers outside of class?

Nene: "*I didn't have a class after your lesson, and so I hung around in the game. Turtwiggle also stayed behind. I told him that I wasn't good at English, but he said that he'd show me around. And so we started playing together.*" (0,0:08:45.20 to 0:09:07.92, video 2)

Nene mentions that she played FF14 with Turtwiggle after class because she was free and Turtwiggle offered to show her around: a clear example of situated learning where a more experienced peer (or mentor) offers their expertise to onboard a less experienced member of the community.

10. Did you learn slang from playing FF14 with English speakers?

Kanami replies that she did indeed learn slang from the English speakers, but more importantly, she mentions that learning slang with English speakers acted as a catalyst for them to start researching words themselves. Informally, they introduced me to a private Discord server that they created specifically to study English (Figure 13).

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[12] Slang for "mates."

Figure 13 Kanami and Nene's Discord server for learning English

General questions regarding the class

11. Do you feel like you did better than other students in this class?

Both students were aware that their performance was of particularly high quality.

### 12. Why do you think you two achieved much more than other students?

In the case of Kanami and Nene, allowing them to connect with members of a community that they were interested in (English speakers as part of FF14 play) *as part of class* promoted further participation *outside of class*. However, the same cannot be said for other students in my class. One hint as to why this is the case may be due to the unique, underlying characteristics and motivations of Kanami and Nene. As Nene mentions here, she had an underlying interest in learning English, yet she did not have the right environment to pursue it before joining my class. She was also highly motivated to play FF14, which itself offers a rich ecology for intercultural communication (but only if one seeks it!). Without trying to put words in Nene's mouth, I can say that her motivations mirror those of my own somewhat. Around 2006 I really wanted to play World of Warcraft (WoW), but I was also just starting to learn Japanese, so, as a compromise, I told my friend that I would only play WoW with him if we could join a Japanese guild. This "two birds with one stone" approach allowed me to play WoW without feeling guilty because I had compartmentalized the play session as "play *plus* study."

> [Nene] had an underlying interest in learning English, yet she did not have the right environment to pursue it before joining my class.

In sum, the ingredients for Nene becoming an active English learner seem to be:

- **Interest** (in English and in FF14)
- **Community** (locally and online)
- **Opportunity** (provided by the KR online class)

Readers may be aware that these three elements align with the three keywords of the Connected Learning manifesto (Ito et al., 2020). Students participate in offline and online communities based on their **interests**. The **relationships** forged as part of these communities are then leveraged towards further civic, academic, or career **opportunities**. These three keywords make up the core of a connected learning approach to education (see Figure 14).
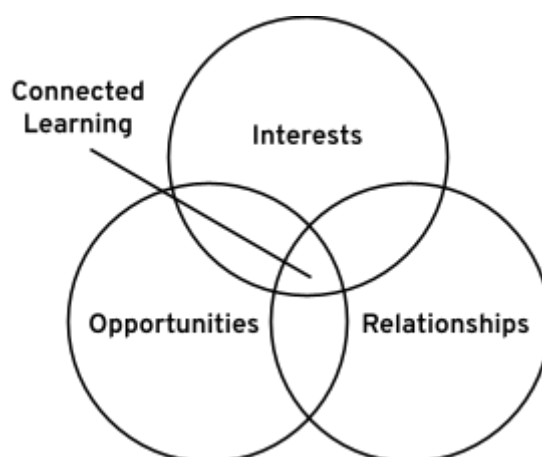
Figure 14 A graphical representation of the three core elements of Connected Learning

Based on Nene's response then, she was interested in FF14 and used it as an opportunity to improve her English with local (her and Kanami) and online (the FF14 community including a multinational group of English speakers) communities.

13. Do you think there is a good balance between teacher-fronted and student-centred activities?
14. What role did I (the teacher) have in your development?

Kanami: *"I think we learnt things that we couldn't do by ourselves. I think making a class with this structure is a really awesome thing."* (13:30.18 to 13:36.17, video 2)

Based on their responses, my main role as teacher was in creating an environment that allowed students to play. I do not mean this lightly. Play is a deep-rooted, fundamental part of my teaching. Not merely playing games themselves but in terms of the whole curriculum.

Salen and Zimmerman (2004, p.304) regard play as "free movement within a more rigid structure." This definition of play resonates well with my philosophy towards teaching. I create the "more rigid structure" in which students can "play." Taking the metaphor further: The classroom is the **playground**. A playground is designed according to an aesthetic aim, artistic statement, the lay of the land (size, elevation, amount of sun, etc.), and of course adheres to health and safety rules and regulations. In terms of the classroom then, the playground is formed based on the artist's (teacher's) concept and pedagogical approach, the unique character of the students (age, social, cultural and historical background), whilst adhering to various curricular and stockholder rules and regulations. Once the playground is made, it houses various playground **equipment**. These are the materials used in class. Materials such as worksheets are the **sandpit** or **jungle gym** where rough affordances for action and interaction are presented, but numerous activities may be explored based on temperament,

imagination, chosen game, group dynamics, and so on. The teacher exists as a **parent** or **guardian** or **park warden** to oversee students playing: helping students cross the monkey bars (scaffolding), showing how to build a sandcastle (instructing), catching them when they fall or graze a knee (supporting). My goal is to *be* the MONSTRUM[13] of ludic language pedagogy. To create the best playgrounds within which students can play and grow as they wish.

> My goal is to be the MONSTRUM of ludic language pedagogy.

15. Have your feelings towards English changed over the course of this year?
16. Do you think you'll feel the same about English in a year?

The two students' responses revealed that the English classes that they took with me were the most significant classes they took in their first year of university. I cannot claim all responsibility for their positive experience. 2020 was an incredibly difficult year for teachers and their students across the globe due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, based on the interview responses, the opportunity to utilize existing interests for academic opportunities (both on Reddit and through gameplay) motivated both Kanami and Nene to become interested in the English language and pursue opportunities to study it further. Compared to their prior experiences, the class was their first experience of using English for authentic, communicative purposes with a "real" audience (both on Reddit and with English speakers in the KR online class). Creating the opportunity[14] for communication with online peer groups may be considered an important step towards facilitating willingness to communicate and further interaction.

> The class was their first experience of using English for authentic, communicative purposes with a "real" audience.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Take student heads out of the textbook, out of the classroom, and into the "digital wilds..!" What's the worst that can happen?!*

* I appreciate that there are many terrible things that can happen when students contact strangers in public, digital spaces. It is our job as teachers to make sure we provide students with a safe space for exploring their hobbies online. Anonymity is the first major step to ensure their safety. In this study, students were told to create a Reddit account and Discord username which did not reveal their full name, and not to provide any sensitive personal information in public posts. I checked all posts before being posted to Reddit and monitored student groups throughout the intervention, checking for appropriateness of topic (some students wanted to explore adult themes) and checking comments on posts. Finally, all English speakers invited to the class Discord server were screened before they were allowed to join during the gameplay sessions.

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[13] One of the most innovative playground design companies in the world. For instance: https://monstrum.dk/en/playground/historical-playground
[14] (whether prompted, suggested, nudged, or forced)

Final comments from Kanami and Nene

Kanami

Thanks to Mr.York, I learned how interesting learning English is. Furthermore, I met my wonderful mates! They teach me English. Thanks to them, I can communicate and discover new things. I really appreciate everything they have done. My English is still not so good, but I'm starting to get a grip on it. I'm proud of that and I'll do my best in the future too :-)

Nene

Through my English class, English has changed from "STUDIES I have to do" to "HOBBIES I want to do" for me. English is still difficult for me, so sometimes my heart is going to break off. But my mates teach me kindly, so I can keep learning! I'm deepest grateful to my mates and Mr.York for telling me the joy of learning English to me. I'll continue learning hard to enjoy communicating with them in English from now on, too.

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Appendix 1: Japanese version of questions asked

1. 大学生になる前に、英語に対する教育経験や思いについて教えて下さい。
2. 大学の授業をリモートで受けるのに、
   a. テクノロジーに関して、どれくらい技術はありましたか。
      i. Google DocsやRedditやDiscordなど、この授業でよく使ったツールに関しては？
   b. テクノロジーの使い方のチュートリアルはありましたか？
   c. 家で問題なく授業を受ける環境はありましたか。
   d. ゲームは趣味の一つとしてありましたか。他の趣味は？
3. 他のクラスでは、
   a. 交流するチャンスはありましたか。
   b. 教員の技術的ノウハウを感じた。
4. 前期（Reddit）の授業について
   a. 前期の授業の流れは覚えていますか。
   b. 海外のコミュニティに参加する目的だったけど、このプロジェクトの目的は果たせた。
   c. どのコミュニティに参加しましたか。
   d. 参加して、どんな反応が来ると思っていましたか。
   e. 思っていた反応と実際に来た反応は違いましたか。
   f. 自分たちの努力と返事の割合について、努力するほど反応がいいと思いますか。
   g. ２回グループ替えした。自分たちが所属していたグループ内の雰囲気はどんな感じでしたか。
      i. 私達が使っていたテクノロジーはグループワークが捗るように影響はあったか。
   h. このプロジェクトを通して、身についた技術はありましたか。
5. 後期の授業について
   a. 後期の授業のサイクルは覚えていますか。
   b. 授業の目的は何だったと思いますか。
   c. なぜFFXIVを選んだか
   d. 評価についてどう思いますか。
6. 私の授業を受けた後、今になって
   a. 私が作ったカリキュラムは、自分たちに「意味」や「やりがい」があったと思う？
   b. 教員が「支配している」と「学生が自由にできる」割合はどう思いますか。
   c. 英語に対する教育経験や思いについて教えて下さい。
7. この一年間で何を学びましたか。