



Ludic Language Pedagogy Playground

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Deciding who's a n00b: Developing multimodal and gaming literacy skills with Towerfall Ascension

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Key points

- **What is this?** An example of informal LLP between a teacher (or, possibly, a parent with a high level of gaming literacy and interest in their child) and their son.
 - **Why did you make it?** To showcase an example of the rich literacy skills that may emerge when players take time to engage with and consider a game.
 - **Who is it for?** Mothers, fathers, game players, games-in-education advocates, skeptics, and the curious.
 - **★ BONUS:** A lesson plan is provided in the Appendix which may be utilized in L1 and L2 teaching contexts for young learners, teens, and beyond. The lesson is designed to show how this interaction between teacher-parent and son may be implemented in the classroom.
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Tweet synopsis

There's more to video games than just playing.
This paper outlines how a father and son engaged in multimodal and gaming literacy practices with the couch co-op game: Towerfall.
#n00b #gamingliteracy #LLPFatherAndSon #TierMaker #Towerfall

View at the LLP Playground: <https://llpjurnal.org/2022/07/20/york-towerfall.html>

Outline to this playground

The TL;DR of this playground is that through playing, reading, talking, and writing about the game *Towerfall Ascension* (Thorson, 2013) my son and I engaged in several multimodal and gaming literacy practices.

This is LLP in the wild[†] in an informal, instructed language and literacy context. There was no classroom, and no “traditional” students, just me and my son engaging in ludic activities. I hope to show in this playground what can be achieved through deliberate **reading** and **writing** activities connected to playing games.

The structure of the paper is as follows:

1. Explanation of our project.
2. Questions for the readers.
3. An introduction to multimodal literacy and gaming literacy skills.
4. Appendix with a lesson plan I created based on the content of this paper for L1 and L2 teaching contexts.

Terms introduced

| | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Achievements and trophies | Rewards for completing difficult challenges in video games. |
| Couch co-op | Refers to cooperative video games that are played locally (while sitting on the same couch!) and do not require an internet connection (i.e., not online). |
| Deathmatch | A game play mode where the last person remaining is the winner. |
| Leetspeak | “Elite speak,” a form of digital writing practice which replaces letters with similar looking symbols. |
| Mob | An enemy in a game. |
| N00b, newbie | A word referring to a beginner/low proficiency player. |
| Power up | Something which increases the power/strength of a player’s character. |

[†] Jonathan deHaan, quite rightly redacted this. This is not “in the digital wilds” as written about in papers such as Sauro & Zourou (2019) as I am involved: a **teacher** who knows pedagogy, with high game literacy, and “a knowledgeable other who interacts to lead development”. My son did NOT do this on his own. Thus, this is, instead, an example of informal, or one-to-one ludic language pedagogy practice.

1 How trying to decide who is a “n00b” led us on such a multimodal journey

Introducing Towerfall

Since December 2021, my son and I have been working through the content of the couch co-op, action game “Towerfall Ascension” (Thorson, 2013, Figure 1)². Couch co-op or local co-op refers to a game that does not have an online multiplayer component, only local. Meaning: you have to be sitting on the same couch to play this game with friends.



Figure 1: An example of the fast-paced action in Towerfall deathmatch mode.

As a brief introduction to how the game plays, please consider watching some of the many videos on YouTube, such as the one by me and my son: York (2022)³. Without watching a video, however, Figure 2 introduces the main elements of the game.

1. Me, getting ready to shoot at the ghost which spawned from a portal (see 3). Notice the different color arrows that are available to me (shown above my head).
2. My son with the wings powerup and four regular arrows.
3. A dark portal (this is where the mobs come from) A fiery ghost has just spawned from the portal. This mob is simple to defeat.
4. Another mob (which is very hard to deal with, remember this for later).



Figure 2: The game screen of Towerfall, with main elements marked in red.

² Thank you to Noah Yoshimura for lending my family the PS4 which introduced us to Towerfall Ascension.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FWZhM2YbqdA>

Having now introduced the game screen and how players interact with it, I will briefly mention how “reading” and understanding games may help develop our “multimodal literacy” skills (I will take a deeper dive on this topic in Part 3 below).

Consider the following: In the modern, technology-mediated society, we don’t just read text on a screen. We consume and produce various multimedia all of the time. Games themselves are multimedia heavy: sounds, moving images, music, text, as well as the controller itself. All of these items need to be understood (or “read”) in order to play effectively.

Let’s take the player character for example. The character moves according to various button presses on the controller, which must be learnt through interaction with the game. *How do I jump? What happens if I bump into one of the mobs from the bottom, side, or top? How do I shoot?* There are also advanced movement techniques which are completely opaque upon first playing the game. However, having *played* the game and then *watched* others play (on YouTube for example), we might notice differences in levels of ability and skill which we can then investigate through watching or reading advanced movement technique tutorials.

What’s so important about being able to control a game character, though?

The “knowledge of how to control characters in games” is a narrow conceptualization of various, related multimodal literacy skills which present themselves to our children and students. Controlling a character may be extrapolated to controlling cursors on a screen, Desktop GUIs, interacting with touchscreens, navigating a mobile phone menu, and so on. Thus, the argument is that being literate at playing digital video games (or “gaming literacy,” which I also talk about more later in the paper) is one avenue of improving digital and multimodal literacy skills.

Defining n00b and other “leetspeak” terms

According to Wiktionary, **n00b** (yes, that is an N, two zeros, and a B) is the “leetspeak” rendering of **noob** or **newbie**.

That’s a lot of stuff to unpack already, so let’s back up...

Gamers are well known for their propensity for competition and rivalry. This is not just true of video games but is also seen in sports, puzzles⁴, and, well, capitalist societies in general. “Newbie” is a term that is used as a derogatory term for new players, coming from “newcomer.” The word has been remixed many times, and one such way is through the “elite speech style of hackers” known as leetspeak. Below are examples of the evolution of words into their leetspeak equivalents:

Newcomer → newbie → newb → noob → n00b

Elite speak → eleetspeak → leetspeak → 133tsp34k → 13375P34K

⁴ I’m being bombarded by friends’ Wordle scores on Twitter for example

It should be noted that “n00b,” as an insult is very tame, and can be used as a self-deprecating term also. In the case of me and my son, we used the term to refer to ourselves or the other player:

- ↳ “That was n00b.”
- ↳ “Dad, you’re a n00b.”
- ↳ “Did you die to a slime boy? You’re a n00b.”
- ↳ “Whoops! N00b mistake...!”
- ↳ “That mob is a n00bie.”

It should be noted that my son did not know this term when I started using it. I had to explain the term much as I have done above. And I started using it naturally as either my son or I lost a life to an easy-to-beat character in the game (see next section on “mobs”). The reason for this is that we have a limited number of lives to complete levels, and so losing a life to an easy character meant that we did not have that life available later in the level when they were more difficult characters to beat. Thus, I would either use the term to lightly admonish my son for losing his life or apologize for being a n00b myself.

It should be noted that my son did not know this term when I started using it. I had to explain the term much as I have done above.

Introducing “mobs”

Now I have introduced the game, and the term n00b, I’ll introduce our problem with defining when the term was suitable as an insult.

The key takeaway from Figure 2 (gameplay screen) is that there are different enemies otherwise known as “mobs” that need to be killed to clear each level. There are 23 different mobs in this game. Mobs feature different movement and attack mechanics which make them more or less difficult to deal with. Table 1 introduces some of the mobs in Towerfall⁵. Note: all of the difficulty rankings come from my son and I (as shall be revealed more later). The green slime ranked D is one of the easiest mobs to avoid, whereas the “Green Bolt Crystal” in A is much harder to deal with.

⁵ Details can be found on the Towerfall wiki: <http://towerfall.wikidot.com/enemies>. All images are from this site.

Table 1: Examples of mobs in Towerfall

| Difficulty | Image | Description |
|------------|---|--|
| A |  | Green Bolt Crystal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moves slowly. • Shoots a bolt arrow at the player. • Shoots another bolt arrow at the player upon death. |
| B |  | Red Fire Elemental <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moves quickly. • Chases the player. • Shoots no projectiles. • Touching the mob burns the players "wings." |
| C |  | EyeBat <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moves slowly. • Chases the player when within proximity. |
| D |  | Slime <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moves slowly. • Jumps at the player within short proximity. |

The idea of “n00b” for us relates to getting hit/killed by a mob which we both consider to be easy to beat. Thus, in Table 1, if I was to get hit by the slime, I would be a n00b, whereas if it was the Green Bolt Crystal that got me, I would *not* be a n00b, this mob is difficult to deal with for even expert players. However, because there are so many different mobs with different attack powers and dangers, there was a “gray zone” regarding when someone deserved to be called a n00b or not. In other words, we fought about whether we were a n00b or not, based on the mob we died to. Essentially: not wanting to concede that we had played sub-optimally, and that the mob itself was a tricky mob to deal with. Consider the following conversation:

Son: You're a n00b.
Me: It's not my fault, the fire ghosts are tricky!
Son: No they're not. You're a n00b.
Me: [cries inside]

With such exchanges being common, and during down time in the game (or at breakfast, dinner, etc.) we also talked explicitly about our personal rankings of the mobs. Which ones did we think were hard? Which was the hardest? Which was easy? Why? Some of the arguments during the game would also get quite heated, with neither person wanting to admit being a n00b. So, we (or should I say, I) decided that we should create a shared understanding of mob difficulties, ranking them from least to highest difficulty. This would (perhaps) stop (some of) the (heated) arguments about our performances.

We (or should I say, I) decided that we should create a shared understanding of mob difficulties, ranking them from least to highest difficulty

Introducing TierMaker

In order to rank the mobs together, I knew of a website called “TierMaker”⁶ which allows people to rank almost anything. The homepage features tier lists for sports, tv programs, movies, video games, video game characters, and even fast food menus. The reason I knew of the site was due to my fandom of the professional Smash Bros. tournaments on YouTube. Simply: top players of the Smash Bros. game often use TierMaker to rank how good they think different characters are. Therefore, I wanted to emulate this activity for our own purposes.

With knowledge of TierMaker, I thought we would be able to rank mobs as a collaborative activity, and in doing so have a concrete guide available for when a player was a “n00b” or not (based on which mob they are killed by). However, upon searching the site for a premade Towerfall mobs ranking tier list, we found that there wasn’t one, so we had to make our own. I created an account with TierMaker, headed to the Towerfall wiki page⁷ for images, and uploaded them to create a custom TierMaker page⁸. We then proceeded to rank the mobs by discussing which mobs were difficult and why. As an example, we initially placed all three ghosts in the same tier (C), but through discussion (and reference to the Towerfall Wiki, again) we were reminded that the red ghost burns off the players wings, which is both different to the other two, stronger, and more detrimental to the players’ progression, so we placed that ghost into the higher B-tier.

We dragged the images into the slots (S = hard, D = easy)⁹. The results are available in Figure 3. Two mobs were considered S-rank difficult, four in A-rank, and so on. We decided between us that if you die to a C-rank or lower, you are officially a n00b.

Upon searching the site for a premade Towerfall mobs ranking tier list, we found that there wasn’t one, so we had to make our own.

⁶ <https://tiermaker.com/>

⁷ <http://towerfall.wikidot.com/>

⁸ Can be found here: <https://tiermaker.com/create/towerfall-ascensions-monsters-1507483>

⁹ As an additional skill learnt here, I taught my son how to drag and drop with a laptop trackpad as part of this process.

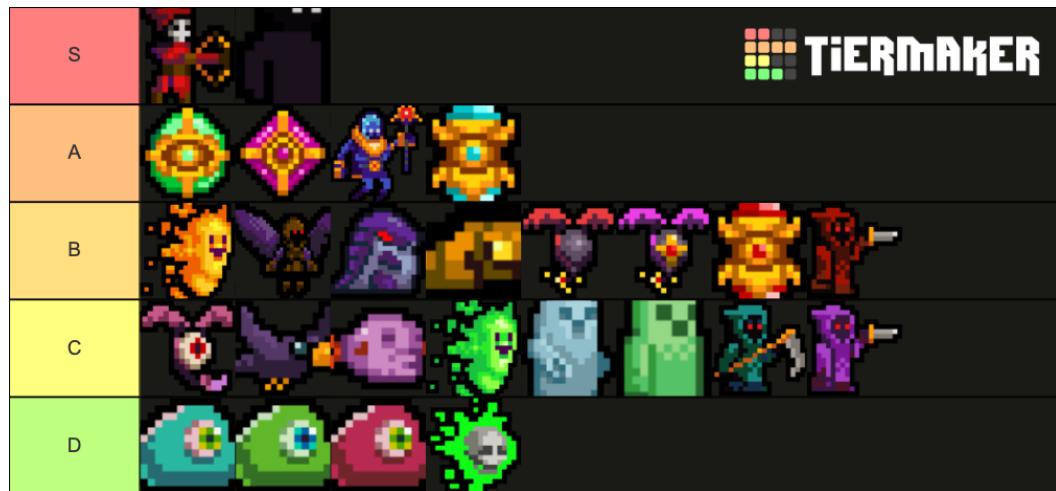


Figure 3: All of the different mobs in Towerfall ranked by my son and I.

We decided between us that if you die to a C-rank or lower, you are officially a n00b.

As a final participatory and multimodal activity, I shared the details of our learning as a tweet (Figure 4). The tweet¹⁰ features text, hashtags, a URL, and an image.

 ち一♂ | James York
 @cheapshot 

 I'm very deep into #Towerfall recently. I play with my son and we call each other a n00b when we die to certain mobs. But some mobs are harder than others. So who's a n00b and when? We made a #TierMaker to rank mobs. If you die to C and below, you = n00b.

[tiermaker.com/list/video-game-mobs...](https://tiermaker.com/list/video-game-mobs)



 09:54 · Feb 1, 2022 · Made with Kizie.co

Figure 4: A multimodal tweet regarding the whole project.

Project summary

As a summary of this project, the couch co-op video game “Towerfall Ascension” acted as a springboard for a variety of multimodal literacy skills development. How do I know this? I

¹⁰ <https://twitter.com/cheapshot/status/1488314737079115779>

interviewed my son three months after writing the initial draft of this paper, where I both discussed various topics, and interviewed him to see what he learnt (or forgot, as you will see).¹¹

- He remembered the word “n00b” and what it meant, though he could not tell me the origin of the word.
- He remembered that we fought about whether a mob was considered a n00b or not.
- He forgot how we made the TierMaker. I had to remind him of going to the Towerfall wiki to collect pictures.
- He remembered how to drag and drop the character portraits.
- He learnt that in a ranking system S is high and D is low.
- He agreed that the tier list clarified which mobs were easy and difficult.
- One interesting insights was that he verbalized how gameplay was a necessary prerequisite to create the tier list:

Me: How does the tier list help us? (I think he misinterpreted the question as “how do we make a tier list?”)
Son: To know? Who's an easy guy?
Me: Is that right?
Son: By playing.
Me: By playing? Not by making the tier maker.
Son: You play and then know.
Me: You needed to know how the mobs work, right? To make the tier list.
Son: Yeah.

The project progressed thusly:

1. We played a couch co-op game together, becoming increasingly proficient at playing the game through many (many) attempts.

Our interactions when playing the game were varied and it is hard to sum up in a paragraph. We were often very serious about our progress through the levels towards the last boss. However, our focus would often wane and we would lose countless lives and see the Game Over screen repeatedly over the first few levels (until we pushed ourselves to focus again). So there was definitely an oscillation between seriousness and frivolity. Regardless of whether it was in jest or in anger however, the game and our interaction led to...

2. ... my son and I laughing or shouting at each other for poor gameplay¹².
3. I called my son as a n00b when he died to a simple mob. I taught him this word in context.
4. We had disputes regarding when the term n00b was appropriate or not.
5. This led to the creation of a TierMaker so that we could jointly rank mobs in terms of difficulty based on their specific game mechanics.
6. There was no pre-made TierMaker for our purposes, so we made our own.
7. After discussing the ranking of the mobs, we decided which ones were “easy” and which were more “difficult,” and thus the accurate use of “n00b” became apparent.

¹¹ Available here: https://otter.ai/u/LnM2rSokdQ4p-Z_mGAj3N6A5NhY

¹² Remember, this is a brutally difficult game.

8. I tweeted about the whole project.
9. We are still playing and using the term n00b affectionately (and sometimes spitefully).



2 Questions for the reader

I end the paper with some questions for the reader:

- 🤔 What do we mean by **multimodal** literacy?
 - 🤔 What do we mean by **gaming** literacy?
 - 🤔 Reading the above project, what **multimodal** and **gaming literacy skills** do you think we engaged in?
 - 🤔 How could what we did be emulated/remixed for **classroom** practice?
- 🧭 Additionally, I have provided a lesson plan template in the [Appendix](#) as a way to show how this project could be implemented in an LLP classroom.
- 🌐 I taught a Japanese class with this lesson plan, and have provided both the completed Japanese language worksheet as well as a video of the lesson in action!
- 👀 Go check it out for your own context!!

HOWEVER, If you are interested in reading more about multimodal literacies or gaming literacy, please continue and read Part 3 below

3 Understanding various literacy skills

What are multimodal literacy practices?

Walsh, (2010) considered how classroom pedagogical practices are gradually changing to incorporate multimodal literacy. But what are these literacy skills? And how do they differ from traditional literacy skills? First, traditional literacy may be considered the reading and writing of paper-based texts. Simple! However, contemporary communication is far richer in terms of multimedia usage than just the written word. Images, videos, gifs, voice recordings, digital texts, videos, etc., we are awash in multimedia. There is therefore an impetus for us to update our definition of literacy from reading and writing text to include other media.

For example, in this paper, my son and I played a **game**, which is a treasure trove of multimedia to be *read* which leads to multimodal literacy practices. Table 2 outlines various multimedia in games that are “waiting to be *read*.” In other words, the table outlines how the media exists as something to be consumed/understood/read by the player.

Table 2: *The multimedia of gameplay*

| Multimedia | Specific examples | Description |
|--|--|--|
| Moving images | Mobs, characters, projectiles, the map, platforms, etc. | All of these elements interact with each other in various ways which need to be read or decoded, analyzed, negotiated and interpreted in order for the player to succeed in navigating the game space. |
| Sounds | Player sounds, enemy sounds, ¹³ menu sounds, voice acting, Background music | <p>Sounds must be understood to know if you have hit an enemy, collected power up, if your partner has been hit, if a particular mob is spawning, etc. Audio cues can also be given to lead a player in a particular area. Finally, sounds, and music are used throughout games to bring the game world to life, and embody the player in the experience.</p> <p>Music can be used to change the emotional state of the player or cue the player towards changes in the story. For example, quiet relaxing music, scary and creepy music, and fun, frantic music all go with different game genres or specific moments within games.</p> |
| Text | During game dialogues Rule books In menus | <p>Text appears more or less in games depending on the genre. A simple puzzle game may only feature minimal text however, an RPG which is a narrative-driven game genre is filled with rich text both explaining the game world but also as dialogue between characters. Depending on the location of the game, players may learn about various literary genres. Most notably fantasy¹⁴, but also military¹⁵, and other specific, real-world genres.¹⁶</p> |
| The physical controller for inputting commands | Buttons, joysticks, analogue sticks, the “d-pad,” shoulder buttons, etc. | <p>Understanding which physical button produces each action of the player is essential in becoming proficient at any game. Additionally, how actions can be strung together into combos or produce more advanced movements are an essential part of getting better at games, particularly fighting and dexterity-based games like Towerfall.</p> |

At first a player may not understand what each element of a game does, but through interaction (i.e., multiple “readings”), the player’s skill increases and more complex actions become available. In the case of our Towerfall gameplay, mobs (designed, moving images) had various abilities that needed to be “read” and understood by us in order to deal with them effectively. This was achieved through interacting with them (playing the game) via the use of game controllers.

However, what the table does not elucidate is what happens when players interact with each other **during gameplay** and in **beyond-game** avenues of interaction between players. As shown in Ryu (2013), players could make use of specific resources to learn how to play also: forums, videos, tweets, and so on. In our case, verbalizing our understanding of mob movement, and their underlying, programmed mechanisms allowed my son and I to improve

¹³ Provide an audio cue which can be referenced to play a game blindfolded

<https://uppercutfcrit.com/the-art-of-the-blindfolded-speedrun/>

¹⁴ For example, the Final Fantasy series

¹⁵ For example, the Metal Gear Solid series

¹⁶ Some examples: Kerbal Space Program for science and astrophysics, Euro Truck Simulator for geography and mechanical language, and the Assassin’s Creed games for historical events.

as game players. This also led to extending our multimodal literacy practices outside of the game to create the tier list.

The above example is not only true for games, but can be extrapolated to learning around *all* multimedia. The structure and content of a tweet differs from a news article. A Reddit post differs from an academic paper. A podcast is different from a live stream on twitch.tv. As these examples hint at, then: genre, platforms, and multimedia combine in various ways. Thus, not only us, but our students need to understand how to *critically* “read” and “write” media in order to participate in various communities of our modern, multimedia-rich world. Indeed, many students may already be aware of different media and platforms for participation in out-of-school contexts (Jewett, 2008), which, as written above, provides impetus for curricula to introduce students to critical analysis of media in their classrooms. With a focus on digital games in particular, Apperley and Beavis write that, “Understanding the literacy practices involved in playing digital games and reconceptualising curricula to support the learning affordances offered by digital games have great potential to build strong bridges between students’ out-of-school life-worlds and twenty-first-century curricula (2013, p. 1-2).”

Our students need to understand how to critically “read” and “write” media in order to participate in various communities of our modern, multimedia-rich world.

As extended conceptualizations of “reading” and “writing”, Table 3 is an inexhaustive list of **multimodal literacy practices** that we, humans, engage in, and thus may be considered for inclusion as skills to be taught in schools.

Table 3: *Multimodal literacy practices* (Walsh, 2010).

| Reading and viewing | Talking and listening | Writing |
|---|--|---|
| Decoding Responding Interpreting (i.e., to textboxes, icons, images, and prompts on screens and devices) Analyzing Browsing Searching Navigating Hyperlinking | Collaborating Investigating Negotiating Enacting Interacting Connecting Networking | Planning Composing Evaluating Creating Designing Producing Transforming |

❓ Which of these practices do you see in our gameplay and extension activities?

Here are some examples:

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Decoding: | We had to decode how each mob moves in order to both avoid their attacks as well as know how to attack them. |
| Negotiating: | We negotiated in terms of whether a mob was considered easy or not. |
| Creating: | We created the tier list. |

Further reading on multimodal literacies

Open access LLP journal articles are marked with a .

- Apperley, T., & Beavis, C. (2013). A Model for Critical Games Literacy. *E-Learning and Digital Media*, 10(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.2304/elea.2013.10.1.1>
-  deHaan, J. (2019). Teaching language and literacy with games: What? How? Why? *Ludic Language Pedagogy*, 1, 1-57. <https://llpjourn.al.org/2019/09/18/dehaan-what-how-why.html>
-  deHaan, J. (2020). Language and literacy teaching with games: the “who” and transformative actions. *Ludic Language Pedagogy* (2), p.162-186. <https://llpjourn.al.org/2020/04/17/dehaan-gt-class1-walkthrough.html>
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.). (2015). *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies*. Palgrave Macmillan UK. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137539724>
- Cooper, N., Lockyer, L., & Brown, I. (2013). Developing multiliteracies in a technology-mediated environment. *Educational Media International*, 50(2), 93–107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523987.2013.795350>
- Walsh, M. (2010). Multimodal literacy: what does it mean for classroom practice? *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 33(3), 211-239.

What are gaming literacies?

Based on Gee's (2004) concept of literacy, Zagal (2008, p. 34) proposes three levels of game literacy. They are the ability to:

1. **Play** games.
2. **Understand** meanings with respect to games.
3. **Make** games.

This concept is a logical one in that in general we may expect an individual to develop the mechanical skills to play games before they understand them, and understand them before they are able to make them.

In the example provided in this paper, my son verbalized that gameplay was a prerequisite for extension activities such as our discussion and tier list creation. Thus, higher level game literacy skills may emerge from the initial stage of playing and interacting and debriefing post-gameplay.

The ability to **understand** games can be unpacked in various ways. In terms of human culture, in relation to other games, as a medium that is limited or made possible by certain technologies, and finally in understanding the mechanics that make up games. Focusing on a

human cultural lens of “reading” games, we may consider how a game is an artefact borne of specific cultures and represents those cultures. Thus, as Zagal writes, “understanding its relationship, and the role it plays, within culture in general” (p. 34).

Building on the concept of an individual’s cultural, economic, and social capital (Bourdieu, 1984), Walsh and Appleby (2009, p.7-8) created a list of questions to guide teachers in understanding the level of their students’ gaming literacy as a form of “gaming capital.” Gaming capital here then refers to how students’ knowledge, understanding and critical awareness of games as well as their ability to play games may be a source of capital. An abridged set of questions appear below. Notice that any of these questions could be utilized in a language classroom as the prompt for a speaking test, discussion, debate and other project-based work.

Cultural Capital

- Do you know how to find information or finish playing without asking anyone?
- Do you ever contribute or add to FAQs or walkthroughs?
- Do you know people who are really good at video games?
- Can they make money from their knowledge?

Economic Capital

- What game are you the best at?
- Would you consider yourself to be an expert on any game? Why?
- Are there games you want to play that you can’t?
- How do you know these better games exist?
- Would you like it if there were more people you could play games with? What games?

Social Capital

- Do you think particular games are designed for girls and boys? (Example/explain)
- What do your friends think about your gaming?
- What do your parents think about your gaming?
- Do you ever play games online with people from other countries? If so, where are they from? Are they better than you? If not, why not?
- Do you play games with an adult rating?

Symbolic Capital

- How would you describe people who are really good at computer games?
- From your experience, what kind of person is a good gamer?
- Do you think people who are good gamers get good jobs when they leave school?

Bacalja (2021, p. 199) also considered several important questions that a teacher might ask of their students in helping to promote critical literacy skills from gameplay, as a way to consider how games may represent certain cultural worldviews and how games may differ from other media.

- “What kinds of characters are missing from the game you play?
- What are the main themes of the games you know?

- How are these themes similar or different to themes in other media you engage with?
- What themes are missing?"

Additionally, games may be considered a language learning tool on multiple levels (Figure 5). The language that appears **in** the game itself, the language produced as players **interact with** the game at the pre- during- and post-play levels, and finally in terms of how language is used **around** the game in society (York, et al. 2021)

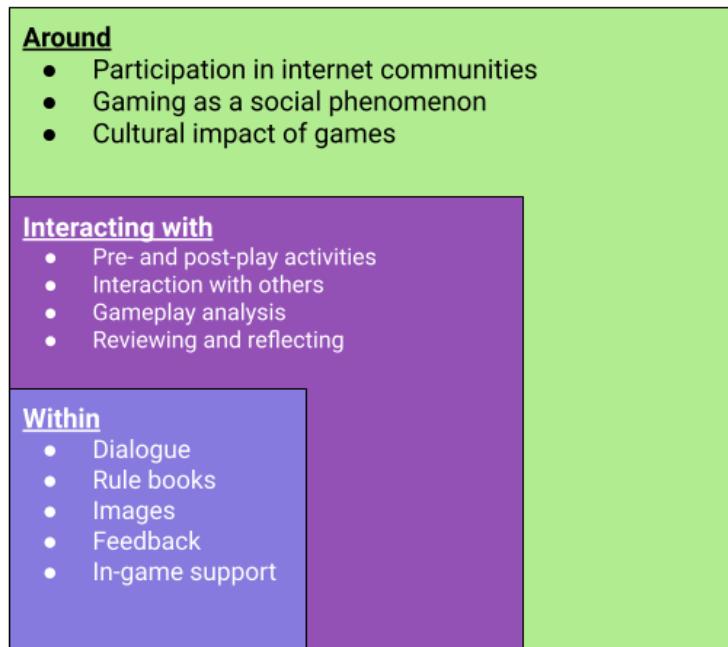


Figure 5: *An example of how a game may interface with language learning goals and wider participation in society.*

In the example of playing Towerfall with my son, there was very little language for us to use **within the game** but our interaction and discussion as we **interacted with the game** led to us my son discovering a new word, and we jointly created a hierarchy of the characters appearing on screen. Finally, we participated in game-related communities (tiermaker.com) as an activity not connected directly with playing the game but **around the game**.

In summary, gaming literacy is the ability to play, understand and make games. In this section, I have focused on the second literacy skill – understanding games. I then introduced a number of analytical framing devices to help teachers think about games as cultural artefacts. This was done with a focus on why and how gaming literacy could be integrated into language classrooms.

Further reading on gaming literacy

● Language teaching focus

★ LLP journal article

- Blume, C. (2018). Playing By Their Rules: Why Issues of Capital (Should) Influence Digital Game-Based Language Learning in Schools. *CALICO Journal*, 36(1), 19–38. <https://doi.org/10.1558/cj.35099>
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Appendices

1. The tier maker

<https://tiermaker.com/create/towerfall-ascensions-monsters-1507483>

2. Our personal ranking of mobs

<https://tiermaker.com/list/video-games/towerfall-ascensions-monsters-1507483/1936955>

Disagree? Create your own ranking and let me know by tagging me on Twitter [@cheapshot](https://twitter.com/cheapshot).

3. Lesson plan for classroom implementation¹⁷

Instructions for use

This paper has introduced how enemies in a game can be ranked in terms of how difficult they are to beat or avoid, or in terms of the danger they pose towards a player. As a result, my son and I engaged in a discussion regarding game mechanics (enemy movement and special skills) and compared enemies using a ranking system. This lesson plan expands on this concept to generate discussion among students regarding the characters they know in games.

⚠ Note: The lesson plan does NOT require students to play games in class.

⚠ Note 2: The lesson plan is NOT only hypothetical. I taught a Japanese class with it recently. Participants also gave me feedback to improve the layout of worksheets.

[Video](#) | [Completed worksheet](#)

Which mob/enemy is the strongest?

Goals:

For the teacher

- To learn about their students' various levels of gaming capital/literacy.
- (Assuming low gaming literacy on the part of the teacher:) To learn about popular video games and the various characters that students know about. Therefore learning more about the gaming zeitgeist of their class/region/country/the world.

For students

- Introduce various game characters using game-related vocabulary. Includes an **analysis of game mechanics** (decoding, analyzing, and reflecting on their game literacy).
- Use **comparatives** and **superlatives** to compare mobs and experiences.
- Engage in a **discussion** with others about games and game characters (mother tongue or foreign language)
- **Extension tasks:**
 - **Digital literacy skills!** Learn how to use a computer to create a TierMaker of their own to rank mobs/characters.
 - **Participation in a social/public/gaming community!** Post completed mob lists publicly (Reddit/Twitter/etc.).

Part 1: Considering game words

As a priming activity, groups of students should think about the words they use when gaming, filling in "Part 1: Game words" on their worksheet. There are three categories of words for the students to consider, helping them to think about objects and actions of games. Second and foreign language teachers may include a space for translation of words into the mother tongue.

Consider having groups share their words with the rest of the class.

¹⁷ Rob Swier: The teaching plan at the end is clearly directed at second language teachers, so perhaps it would be good to say a bit more about who exactly you think could/should do a lesson/project like that.
Response: I have addressed this with extra detail.

Part 2: introducing characters

The teacher prepares the class by showing some famous game characters (it could be the character that the player embodies, or enemies/mobs).

If the teacher is not familiar with such concepts, consider using the following table as conversation starters. Note, games marked with a * are rated adult, and thus may not be suitable for all contexts. Recommended play ages are shown in parentheses¹⁸.

| <u>Top 10 selling online games (as of 2022)</u> ¹⁹ | | <u>Top 10 console games (2021)</u> ²⁰ |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| 1 | PUBG (13+) | Assassin's Creed Valhalla (16+) |
| 2 | Minecraft (8+) | Minecraft (8+) |
| 3 | Apex Legends (14+) | Monster Hunter Rise (13+) |
| 4 | Fortnite Battle Royale (13+) | Mario Kart 8 (6+) |
| 5 | CS: Global Offensive (16+) | Marvel's Spider-Man - Miles Morales (13+) |
| 6 | HearthStone (10+) | Super Mario 3D World (8+) |
| 7 | League of Legends (14+) | Madden NFL 22 (8+) |
| *8 | Call of Duty Mobile (17+) | *Resident Evil: Village (18+) |
| 9 | Among Us | MLB: The Show 21 (8+) |
| *10 | Call of Duty Warzone (17+) | *Call Of Duty: Black Ops Cold War (18+) |

Note also that some of these games are sports games (MLB and Madden NFL specifically). This means that even if a teacher and their students did not know about game characters, the class could still be completed from the perspective of sports themselves, comparing the skill of players/athletes or teams.

For a specific list of game characters that teachers could use in class, consider the following list of enemies from two iconic games, the Super Mario series and Minecraft. Reviewing and ranking mobs from a single game that all students have played is likely to be easier than comparing across games, as reviewer Rose mentioned:

"I wonder if it is possible to rank mobs from different games. Within a game, we know which mobs are the hardest ones to defeat but across different games I wouldn't know..."

- [Bowser](#) (Mario series)
- [Goomba](#) (Mario series)
- [Boo](#) (Mario series)
- [Bullet Bill](#) (Mario Series)
- [Piranha Plant](#) (Mario Series)

- [Creeper](#) (Minecraft)
- [Zombie](#) (Minecraft)
- [Skeleton](#) (Minecraft)
- [Spider](#) (Minecraft)

¹⁸ Ratings from Common Sense Media: <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/>

¹⁹ Source: <https://sportsbrowser.net/most-popular-online-games/>

²⁰ Source: <https://screenrant.com/best-selling-games-2021-so-far/>

- [Enderman \(Minecraft\)](#)

Students should write sentences to describe each character on their worksheet in "[Part 2: Describing mobs.](#)"

Consider having groups of students share their ideas with the rest of the class.

Part 3: Ranking mobs

Once they have completed Part 2, ask students to write some sentences about their ranking below the table. A format is provided.

E.g.:

Bowser is the most difficult because he is the last boss of Mario.

The Enderman (2) is more difficult than a zombie because he chases you.

Consider having groups of students share their ideas with the rest of the class.

Part 4: Post task

1. Students share their tier list with the rest of the class.
2. Provide corrections and further grammar work as needed.
(If the class uses a textbook, relate the work done in this class with that of the textbook to show the connection)
3. Ask *why* students decided on the ranking they did.
4. Promote discussion regarding each group's ranking (agreements/disagreements) and language work as needed.

OPTIONAL: Extension task

1. **If time and resources allow**, explore the creation of a TierMaker in groups.
2. Students will need to log into the site, so accounts will be required (in advance)
3. Students will also need to find images to create their own TierMaker, so this is a good opportunity to introduce the concept of game wikis, which host creative commons images for use by others.
4. Finally, and again, **if resources and permission allow**, consider posting about the project in a public space where students may get feedback on their work from other game fans.
 - a. **This need not be public as in "on the internet" public, but as posters in the corridor outside of class with coloured stickers for other students to vote on their favorite list:**



The worksheet for students is available on the next page

Part 1: Game words

First, let's think of some words related to games and gaming. Fill the table with as many words as you can think of. Some examples are provided.

| English (Verb) ²¹ | Japanese translation | English (Noun) | Japanese translation | English (Adjective) | Japanese translation |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| attack | 攻撃する | item | アイテム・道具 | amazing | すばらしい |
| escape | 逃げる | armor | 装備・防具 | strong | 強い |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

Part 2: Describing mobs

Using the words that you thought about in part 1 (and more) can you describe some famous game mobs/enemies/characters?

| Drawing/photo and name of mob | Difficulty ☆☆☆☆☆ | Movement/actions (Why is it dangerous or difficult?) |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| | ☆☆☆☆☆ | |
| | ☆☆☆☆☆ | |
| | ☆☆☆☆☆ | |

²¹ For other foreign language teachers, please change the languages (L1, L2) that you are teaching to suit your context. Additionally, if the teacher is not working in a foreign language context, remove the second language columns.

| | | |
|--|-------|--|
| | | |
| | ☆☆☆☆☆ | |
| | ☆☆☆☆☆ | |

Part 3: Our ranking

Now that you have thought about various game mobs and their abilities, as a group, please try to rank them from most difficult to least difficult. Why did you rank them this way? Add a reason.

1. _____ is the most _____ because _____
2. _____ is _____ than _____ because _____
3. _____ is _____ than _____ because _____
4. _____ is _____ than _____ because _____
5. _____ is _____ than _____ because _____