Moreland University

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Language Game – Reflection

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I reflect here on what I learnt from the creation of our game and how I would use or modify it for my students. My students are in China, learning English as a second language, soon to start the kindergarten, aged 5 – 6, age grade.

The first big learning and reflection point for me from creating this game was that of just how much you can do with technology. We designed the game in Canva. Previously I had only used Canva for presentations with text and a small number of graphics. Taking the time to further explore features of the program for this game, I was able to see how a bigger range of graphics and photos, and video and sound effects could bring the game to life, for example, through the video of the cave, celebration fireworks and visuals for Nezha walking up the mountain. It also made me realize that this was only a beginning. By working further with Canva and other technologies, including AI video creators, this could be taken further.

I am excited to use the game with my students in the coming semester and in doing so will look to enhance it further to add more of a visual and story element, for example, video clips of moving up a mountain, rather than simply an adjusted picture, as well as of real challenges that might be come across along the way, for example a waterfall, or other difficult terrain. These could be added at different points throughout the game. They would make it more engaging for students, turning it into a more in-depth story. This would be enriching for students due to a exposure to more language and sophistication in storytelling, which would support their increased language development. It would also offer the opportunity for further language practice, for example, with students describing or answering questions about what is happening.

The technology could also be used to make the challenges more part of the virtual environment of the story in the game rather than it simply be the case that we say there is the next challenge, and this is shown on a separate screen. For example, Nezha could find meet a guard who says he needs to complete the challenge, and we see this guard holding the challenge on the screen. This would make it closer to a real movie or video game. It is inspiring thing that this is more manageable for us to create on our own now.

I would be excited to use the game both in the virtual learning environment and in the physical classroom. The enhancements with technology would support the experience in an online class. Even offline, in the classroom, the virtual game could be used on the screen, with the classroom space used for the implementation of the language challenges.

Creating this game made me realize the potential of a story for a learning context. These are loved by so many and especially young children. I want to make them a bigger part of the learning experiences I create for my students going forward. I will use the game created with technology, as it is, first, so that my students can experience this. However, I would then want to keep the story element and adapt it to a fully physical game for variety. This can include use of props, with areas of the classroom representing different places in the story. Role play can be incorporated for increased skill development, including movement and drama.

I can continue to adapt to further games with the story style, for example changing the story that forms the basis and changing the challenges. Using the classroom for the game offers many exciting possibilities for students to practice further 21st century skills, including collaboration and creativity. These include creating

physical props and environments that could be used in playing the game, creating language challenges themselves, and even creating the story that could be used as the basis for the game. Technology literacy and information literacy could be practiced if students also use Canva or similar platforms later to find images that could be used in a digital version of the game, as we created for this assignment. As students become used to the style of game, I would like to make it as student cantered as possible by involving them in the game creation.

With regards to the creation of their own language challenges, this could include making questions that their classmates need to answer to practice speaking, thinking of their own words, phrases or short sentences to write with the teacher's assistance as necessary for their classmates to practice reading, making their own short paragraph for their classmates to listen to, to practice listening to, and thinking of words their classmates need to practice writing.

For the game as it was, Icha and I had decided to focus on kindergarten. Hence it was created with my own students in mind. The story of Nezha, from their cultural background was appropriate. So too was the level of the challenges.

I was led to realize however the attention that needs to be taken to ensure the needs of all students are being met.

For the discrete skilled speaking challenge, we decided that giving students choice over either saying a sentence of the form, "I like to _____ because _____.", saying one of the form, "I don't like _____ because _____.", or saying both would give students ample choice. Seeing how it might work out in reality as we played, I noted that it is a form of student-led differentiation, with students saying as much as it is important for them to express personally, more in line with how speaking is used authentically. The minimum requirement still ensured they practiced the skill, and there was also the opportunity for them to stretch themselves by saying more should they wish. This made it natural. I would hence want to keep this format.

For the discrete reading challenge however, stronger students had the opportunity to be stretched, reading the sentence independently and later having the opportunity to read a longer string of three sentences. All students tried to read the sentence, "The cat is black" without scaffolded support given initially. While this did mean that all students were stretched to try first, and there was still a focus on growth mindset and trying, it did mean there was less direct catering to individual needs. Students who did find the sentence difficult to read, could be left outside their zone of proximal development initially. Similarly for writing, there was the opportunity in the writing the names challenge for students to write their classmates names. However, I saw in the playing of the game, that in reality, there may have been little time for this. In other writing challenges, there was little direction for students who might have been able to write more than the words required, to do so. More direct catering to individual needs could hence be incorporated for both reading and writing.

For the reading and writing integrated challenge – the gap fill – we had originally planned that students would do this individually and could ask for help if needed. However, in our final discussion before playing the game we realized that the challenge could be difficult for many, making it more difficult for everyone to be supported. Hence, we made the last-minute decision to make it a challenge that would be done in groups, with individuals supporting each other. Seeing how this could work out in reality as we played, we noted it to be much more effective.

Modifying the game for use in my own class therefore, I would ensure a variety of challenge types, so that students could gain different benefits and have their individual needs catered to. I would have challenges in which students work individually to practice independence and building skills based on their own needs. I

would also include group work, so that students could benefit from the collaboration, social skills and communication here. In some cases, students might need to be working together and supporting each other. In others, more able students, practicing leadership, may be supporting students who have less experience with a skill, for the benefit of both. Speaking challenges can involve practicing particular sentence structures or aspects of speaking, while giving choice to make it natural and authentic. For reading and writing, the challenges that individual students have could vary on their level. The students' current goals, for example either reading or writing individual words, or alternatively sentences, could be discussed with them first in the preparation for the game. This will mean individual students will also know what they will be focusing on within these challenges. As above, eventually some student created challenges could be included also.

A final learning point that came from the creation and playing of the game was the clarity needed on exactly how the students are being stretched within each challenge, that is, where the focus is, as well as where supports should and shouldn't be provided. For example, in the first discrete reading challenge, it needed to be ensured initially that no aspect of the sentence was looked at together with students, because students were being stretched to try to read the whole sentence on their own. The question – "What color is the cat?" – was asked to them out loud, however. Reading this question sentence would likely have been challenging but comprehending it when listening would have caused little difficulty at the students' level. This helped balance the cognitive load and keep the focus on the reading and comprehending of the statement. In the integrated reading and writing gap fill, I first discussed the picture with the students. This helped activate thinking and set context as a support, important because the sentences were more challenging. However, I ensured not to provide any initial support on the deciphering of the sentence itself, so a focus was kept on doing this independently.

With the listening challenge on Nezha eating the bananas, I realized in the moment, while playing as the teacher, that perhaps I was providing too much initial support and context for Icha by discussing what energy means and what things Nezha might need to do to get energy. I hence ensured that we did not discuss in too much depth here. Nonetheless, too much support may have been provided when the goal was to focus to comprehend the sentence, "Nezha needs to eat four bananas to have the energy to climb the mountain." independently.

When playing the game with my students, I would take the time in advance to clarify exactly what the focus of each challenge is and the specific level of support and context that is needed. This would help ensure I am ready to implement in the playing of the game.