



CALL RESEARCH BRIEF

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Title: Summary of Gaming alone or collaboratively? L2 beginner-level gaming practices
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Original Text: González-Lloret, M., Diez Ortega, M., & Payne, S. (2020). Gaming alone or together? L2 beginner-level gaming practices. <i>Perspectiva</i> , 38(2), 1–21.
Rationale/Overview of the study This study compares whether playing an educational game is effective for Spanish learning at the beginner level and whether it is more effective to play alone or in pairs. The game that was researched was <i>Practice Spanish: Study Abroad</i>, McGraw-Hill Connect, as part of the textbook that these students were using for their first-year Spanish classes. In this immersive environment/game, the students (through an avatar) had to complete a series of tasks as a study abroad student in Colombia. The students met at a computer lab once a week for three weeks to play the game as part of their language curriculum. The control group also went to the computer lab once a week, but they engaged in other activities from the online platform, either individually or in pairs.
Research methods Participants: 156 beginner learners of Spanish in a US university participated divided in two experimental groups: individual playing and collaborative playing, and a control group who engaged in other online activities comparable in vocabulary, structures and level to the game (all from the same textbook online materials). Data collection tools and analysis: Screen recordings of the two groups playing game and audio of the collaborative play were analyzed qualitatively. First, sequences were identified including Language Related Episodes (LREs) “any part of a dialogue where students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or other- or self-correct their language production, [which] entail[s] discussion of meaning and form”. Swain, 2000, 286-7). These were transcribed and analyzed. At the end of the three weeks (the end of the semester also) learners’ performance on the grammar, vocabulary and reading sections of their final exam was compared. A standardized test (WebCAPE) was also used as pre and post measure of language gain. In addition, all students completed a survey about their experience and engagement with the tools at the end of the three weeks.
Results – In non-technical terms, what does the study show/suggest? How sure can we be? - Although the gaming groups scored higher than the control, there was no significant different in the WebCAPE test between them. - The group that played collaboratively outperformed the individual group in all measures. The difference was statistically significant for their final exam grade, grammar test, and the use of ser/estar. - Lots of L1 use while playing collaboratively but learners used the L2 for reading, translating, repeating

out loud, and engaging in metalinguistic explanation.

- Most LREs focused on vocabulary and word meaning followed by morphological issues and the verb *ser* (which was the grammatical topic of the chapters and appeared often).
- The qualitative data showed many instances of the type of negotiation of meaning that we know promotes language learning
- While learners in dyads enjoyed playing the game, the learners playing individually lost interest and did not enjoy playing.

Practical Implications – *What are the implications for learning and teaching? What pedagogical suggestions are there that apply the results?*

- This game was a valuable tool for learners but only when played collaboratively, not individually (which is how the game is designed to be played). Game designers may benefit from this type of research before they commercialize their materials. It was the language generated by the game (not the game itself) that promoted the learning.
- Three weeks is too short to see any real benefits from this tool
- Computer labs, although may seem a thing of the past, are useful spaces for this type of collaborative play.

References:

Swain, M. (2000). "The output hypothesis and beyond: Mediating acquisition through collaborative dialogue". In Lantolf, J. (ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*, 97-114. Oxford: Oxford University Press

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