

Language Teaching and Educational Research

Volume 5, Issue 2 | 2022

Book Review: New Ways in Teaching with Games

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To cite this article:

Okyar, H. (2022). Book review: New ways in teaching with games. *Language Teaching and Educational Research (LATER)*, 5(2), 166-169. <https://doi.org/10.35207/later.1214099>

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Book review: New ways in teaching with games

Reviewed by Hatice Okyar

New Ways in Teaching with Games (2020)

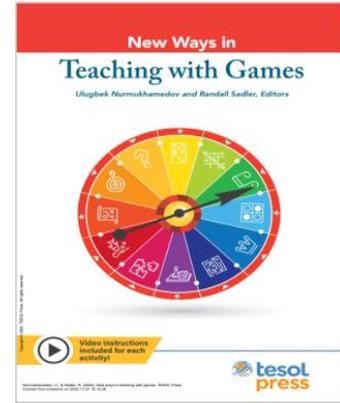
Ulugbek Nurmukhamedov & Randall Sadler (Eds.)

TESOL Press

Pages: ix+256

ISBN: 9781945351747 (paper)

Cost: \$ 51.95 U.S.



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Received

03 December 2022

Accepted

18 December 2022

Suggested APA citation: Okyar, H. (2022). Book review: New ways in teaching with games. *Language Teaching and Educational Research (LATER)*, 5(2), 166-169. <https://doi.org/10.35207/later.1214099>

Suggested APA citation for the book reviewed: Nurmukhamedov, U., & Sadler, R. (Eds.). (2020). *New ways in teaching with games*. TESOL Press.

Author(s)' statements on ethics and conflict of interest

Ethics statement: I hereby declare that research/publication ethics and citing principles have been considered in this review. I take full responsibility for the content of the review in case of dispute.

Statement of interest: I have no conflict of interest to declare.

Funding: None

Acknowledgements: None

The book *New ways in teaching with games* edited by Nurmukhamedov and Sadler (2020) aims to contribute to effective language teaching through games in both English as a second and foreign language (ESL/EFL) learning contexts. This book, prepared with the contributions of many educators, introduces 94 games in various categories (e.g. online games, board games) in detail to improve the language skills of students of different levels and groups (e.g. beginner level young learners) in a fun, engaging, and interactive way. The target audience of the book especially comprises ESL and EFL educators. The book consists of an introduction part and six chapters illustrating the following game types: a) traditional pencil and paper games, b) dice games, c) board games, d) card games, e) technology-mediated games, and f) miscellaneous games.

In the introduction part, the editors clearly explain the content of the book, its purpose, target audience, brief history of the games, and valid reasons and opportunities regarding the use of games in ESL/EFL classes. In each chapter, the following information is provided in a table for each of the games: a) levels of students, b) aims of the game, c) class time required for the game, d) preparation time for the game, e) resources required for the game, e) cost of the game, if any. This short and informative table is followed by a detailed and comprehensive procedure part, which includes pre-, while-, and post-game explanations, in other words, lesson instructions. In the third step, caveats and options section related to the games is presented. After that, the appendix part is also given for some games. In each chapter of the book, language instructors can find a variety of games for students, from beginner to advanced levels. The cost range, depending on the features of the games, varies from free to over 20 U.S. dollars. Most of these games are interactive, involving pair, group and team work, and they primarily aim to improve language-related skills such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Additionally, most of them bring together both collaborative and competitive spirit in the learning environment. As there are many games in each part of the book and it is difficult to mention all of them here one by one, this book review will focus only on a few game examples.

Part 1 of the book is comprised of a total of 21 traditional pencil and paper games. Examples of resources used by some games in this group are charts, handouts, cards, dictionaries, etc. Out of 21 games, 20 of them are free of cost and one has both free and paid options. An example game in this category is Margherita Berti's game "Lost on a Deserted Island", which is intended to improve learners' speaking and writing skills in a meaningful context. This game is free to use and is for intermediate to advanced level learners. The class time required for the game is 15 min or more, and the preparation time is 3 min. In this game, student groups are asked to imagine that they are lost on a deserted island and they need to select 3 items (e.g. a small torch) from the list provided to them to survive in the island, and each group writes their sentences in 5 min, and explains the reasons behind their choice to the class. This game also encourages students to think creatively and fosters their argumentative skills.

The second part of the book consists of seven dice games in total. All of the dice games have a free version, but there are also paid versions. Some examples of materials used in this category are dice, coins, story cubes, game boards, etc. As well as contributing to learners' language skills, some game-related activities also stimulate learners' creativity. For instance, in Randall Sadler and Ulugbek Nurmukhamedov's game called "Storytelling, Coherence, and Transition Devices", learners create and tell a story about the pictures on each dice. This game also helps learners' storytelling skills improve. As for Christine Haverington's game "Let's! Read,

Do, and Go Game”, it includes rolling the dice to move forward on the game board, reading instructions, and performing role-plays for different scenarios. This game contributes to the learners’ vocabulary, pronunciation and reading comprehension.

In part 3, nine board games are introduced to the readers. For example, the game “Bingo Listening Activity With Lyrics” by Paula Rolim and Abdulsamad Humaidan is a kind of board game that mainly aims to improve the listening skills of learners. This game is free of charge. The class time and preparation time for this game are at least 10 and 15 min, respectively. It is for intermediate to advanced level learners. In this game, students draw a bingo grid on a paper and choose 9 words out of 15 randomly and write them on their bingo grids. While listening to the song, they cross out the words they hear. This game fosters learners’ listening for detail or listening for specific information skills. In addition to developing learners’ language skills, some games in this category raise learners’ cultural and pragmatic competence as well.

As for the part 4 of the book, it presents 22 card games to the readers. For instance, in the game “Crazy Conjunction Combinations” provided by Christina Abella for intermediate and above levels, students are encouraged to use different types of conjunctions to join clauses. In this game, there are two sets of cards: one set is for conjunctions, the other set is for clauses. The card set for the clauses also has four blank cards to encourage students to create their own clauses in addition to the given ones. In this game, students work in pairs or groups of four. While each group reads their sentences that they formed, the rest of the students in the class evaluate whether they are grammatically correct or not, and each correct sentence is awarded 1 point. This game aims to improve learners’ speaking and writing skills as they bring clauses together in a meaningful context.

Part 5 provides readers with 18 technology-mediated games. Most of the games in this part are free of cost. The games in this category require Internet access and digital devices such as computers, tablets, smartphones, projectors, cameras and so on. To give an example of a game in this category, Arthur Wendorf and Jeffrey Maloney’s “Guess Who?: Movie Characters” game for beginner-level students uses a website in which pictures of famous people and other characters are presented. The teacher secretly picks one of the characters shown on the website and students ask questions related to the physical appearance, such as “Is the person young?” to find out the person selected by the teacher. With this game, students improve their oral skills in language and they learn how to form questions.

The final part of the book covers 17 miscellaneous games. For example, Gabriela dos Santos Garcia gives information about the game “Hot Potato” as one of the miscellaneous games. This game is for all levels and it requires 10 min or more of class and preparation time. In this game, students stand or sit in a circle. The teacher starts the music, and while the music is playing, learners pass the bag containing the written papers with phrases (e.g. play the piano) to the next one in the circle. When the teacher stops the music, the student with the bag chooses one paper and makes a sentence about himself/herself based on the written paper and grammar topics they learned before. The game continues until all the written papers are used. This game helps develop learners’ speaking and sentence formation skills.

One of the most important features and strengths of the book is that TESOL press, as the publisher of the book, offers game videos that were prepared by the creators of the games at www.tesol.org/teachingwithgames website. Since the videos show and exemplify how to play these games in practice, this will greatly facilitate the work of teachers. Another particular

strength of the book is that the caveats and options part offers extra suggestions for smooth implementation of the games, and alternative ways to use the games more productively. Teachers can use the games both as presented in the book or by adapting them to the needs of their student groups. Another advantage of this book is that readers have the opportunity to find game examples for all levels of ESL/EFL learners in a single book. Undoubtedly, these various game resources will greatly enrich the language learning environment.

Despite its many strengths, the book also has some minor shortcomings and areas that need improvement. For example, the game chapters in the book directly provide examples of games before defining the game type in general. Instead, it would be better to give a brief definition and general features of the games types (e.g. dice games refer to.../ board games are defined as...) in each chapter introduction just before presenting the game examples. This could help readers gain more insights about each game type. It would also be useful to provide a more detailed explanation or a mini glossary with examples for some specific terms mentioned in some game activities such as *persuasive rhetoric*, *circumlocution*, and *speech act*. I believe that this would make the book more reader-friendly. I also think that it would be better if brief information about each of the authors who contributed to the book was given at the end of the book. Finally, although it is stated in the book that appendices are provided as a supplementary material on the TESOL press website, they do not seem available on the website anymore. As mentioned earlier, these are very minor limitations of the book. However, the elimination of them in future editions can make the book much more useful and rich in content. All in all, generally speaking, this book is definitely a valuable and comprehensive resource for both ESL and EFL teachers with a rich variety of games, lesson instructions, and practice-oriented videos it offers.