



CERCLL Games To Teach Project Working Paper
Conceptualizing digital game-mediated L2 learning and pedagogy: game-enhanced and game-based research and practice
Reinhardt, J. & Sykes, J.

Our working paper series is comprised of pre-publication drafts of academic-level work, for the purpose of dissemination of ideas, review, and general feedback. Working papers should not be cited without author permission. If you have feedback for this paper, please contact Jonathon Reinhardt at jonrein@email.arizona.edu and Julie Sykes at jsykes@unm.edu.

Abstract:

As digital gaming becomes a mainstream, global cultural force, researchers have begun imagining and developing digital games and simulation environments for educational purposes (e.g. de Freitas, 2006; Gee, 2007), as well as critically examining the adaptation of existing commercial games for learning purposes (e.g. Lee and Hoadley, 2007; Nardi, Ly, and Harris, 2007; Steinkeuhler, 2008). While researchers have noted potential applications of various digital games in second and foreign learning and pedagogy (L2LP) (e.g. Purushotma, 2005; Sykes, Oskoz, and Thorne, 2008; Sykes, Reinhardt, & Thorne, 2010; Thorne, 2008; Thorne, Black, and Sykes, 2009), applied linguists have also begun empirical investigation of game-mediated L2LP practices using a variety of heuristics, for example, conversation analysis (Piirainen-Marsh & Taino, 2009), L2 pragmatics (Sykes, 2008, 2009), ecological psychology (Zheng *et al.*, 2009), learner behavior patterns (Sykes, 2010), place-based learning (Holden & Sykes, forthcoming), language socialization (Thorne, 2008), and cognitive load theory (deHaan *et al.*, 2010). The current chapter adds to this body of work by surveying game-mediated L2LP research and proposing a taxonomy grounded on their *game-enhanced* or *game-based* nature, and their focus on L2 learning or pedagogy. By exploring the synergetic potentials of these perspectives, we hope to offer both researchers and practitioners a framework for conceptualizing their own work in this emerging, interdisciplinary field.

1. Introduction

With millions of players worldwide, digital games have grown in ubiquity, diversity, and accessibility over the last decade across the globe, and are now played in most of the world's major languages. Once confined to the physical boundaries of an arcade, single PC, or television console, games have boomed with the expansion of broadband Internet, in the form of Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOGs) and, most recently, casual social networking games (SNGs). In combination with a growing variety of platforms and player configurations, new narrative forms and distinct game genres have emerged, merged, and re-emerged as new forms.

Faced with these developments, applied linguists and language educators have begun to pay closer attention. Some have begun looking at the L2 learning, intentional or not, that goes on in what we term 'vernacular' games--commercially available, popular games not designed purposefully for L2 learning purposes. Others have started designing, and researching L2 learning in, educational games specifically purposed for second/foreign

language learning and pedagogy (L2LP). Many researchers find useful insights in the research from games studies (e.g. Arnseth, 2006; Judd, 2005) and educational gaming (e.g. deFreitas, 2006; Gee, 2007), which have developed and adapted a variety of frameworks to research digital gaming, both in- and outside of educational contexts. Their work on L2 learning and teaching with digital games is laying the groundwork for the newly emerging field of *game-mediated second/foreign language learning and pedagogy*.

In this chapter, we propose a taxonomy to frame the research and practice of game-mediated L2LP by surveying this work. In new, trans-disciplinary fields, new knowledge can emerge by exploring possible epistemologies, or how that knowledge might be potentially organized. Exploration of this nature leads to new understandings because of the affordances and limitations engendered by conceptual metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Sfard, 1998). This work is important because the terminology used to frame discussions of new phenomena influences how they are conceptualized and their potentials are imagined. In proposing this taxonomy, we hope to offer researchers and practitioners a framework for orienting their work, as well as suggestions for future research and practice in this emerging, interdisciplinary field.

Our framework begins with the distinction among *game-enhanced* and *game-based*, and between L2 learning and pedagogy. Using this dual lens results in four broad perspectives that offer guiding questions for research and practice (see Table 1). We believe research from all four perspectives is necessary, as each perspective informs the other. Research on game-enhanced L2LP using vernacular games, even if it just involves the researcher playing games individually to understand them, necessarily informs the design of game-based L2LP environments. Yet game-based pedagogy is not necessarily the end goal, since there are many reasons for considering the use of vernacular games in the L2 classroom. Moreover, we acknowledge that research on L2 learning and pedagogical practice are intertwined, and that many studies incorporate both perspectives. Research on L2 learning informs pedagogical practice, and research on L2 pedagogy necessarily entails theories of L2 learning, whether game-mediated or not.

Table 1. Guiding questions for game-mediated L2LP research and practice

	L2 learning focus	L2 pedagogy focus
Game-enhanced: working with vernacular games	How does game-mediated L2 learning occur “in the wild”?	How can vernacular games be pedagogically mediated for L2 learning and teaching?
Game-based: working with educational and L2 learning purposed games (i.e., synthetic immersive environments)	How do specific game designs afford particular L2 learner behaviors?	How can game-based environments be designed to incorporate and/or complement L2 pedagogical uses?

As recipient of a US Government grant, CERCLL is required to record all outreach activities, including dissemination of working papers. If you would like a free copy of this entire paper, please send a note to Dr. Jonathon Reinhardt at jonrein@email.arizona.edu, so that we can keep a record of interest.