

# ELT



## Ireland bulletin

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[info.eltireland@gmail.com](mailto:info.eltireland@gmail.com) @ELTIreland

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# How Teachers Can Leverage the Power of Gaming.

by Sean Laurence

Have you ever played a video game with friends? Please allow me to paint a picture. You're in your living room. You're sitting on the couch in front of a big TV with some friends. Everyone has a game controller in their hand. You're playing Nintendo's Wii Tennis. Your friend just hit a supersonic serve and you missed the return. Someone cracks a joke. Or maybe you are in mortal combat with your best friend on the PlayStation. Everyone is cheering you on as you battle your friend. Everyone is laughing, making comments and doing their best to win. What would happen if your new friend came over? Your friend recently moved from another country. He's learning English and only understands some of what people are saying. He doesn't understand everything but he does understand the shouts of excitement when someone wins and the loud groans when someone loses. Some say that music is a universal language, I would like to propose that gaming is a universal language too.

This article will help you tap into the power of gaming. Reading a book can be very enjoyable because it can transport you anywhere, but reading might be a chore and something language learners want to avoid. Gaming is a visual medium. It helps language learners understand what is happening.

**“ Games can reach out and touch you with their stories. They are a form of interactive entertainment that goes beyond watching a movie or reading a book.”**

Games can be enjoyed in many ways (alone or with friends). You can take on the role of an archaeologist seeking buried treasure or a space marine vanquishing demons on Mars. Games can reach out and touch you with their stories. They are a form of interactive entertainment that goes beyond watching a movie or reading a book. Games allow language learners to explore the English language in a completely new way. It is appealing and they want to come back for more.

Teachers might encounter parents who are against gaming. It can be detrimental to a students' academic performance. Only if there isn't a balance between studying and gaming. Teachers can help parents understand that gaming can be an opportunity for learning, growth and connection. They can suggest a simple contract between parents and children - "If you finish your homework, you get three hours of gaming time". Parents should embrace gaming. They shouldn't cut the cord to completely prevent any sort of gaming.

Teachers can get their students excited with Minecraft homework. Students usually don't associate the adjective "exciting" with homework. Many of your students think Minecraft is exciting though. Cambridge English thinks so, too. They made a Minecraft level which helps your students get better at English while playing the game. Minecraft is a massively popular game which is easy to play. What Cambridge English made will excite and engage your students.

English Adventures from Cambridge English is a Minecraft world. You can get it after you install the Minecraft Education Edition. When you start English Adventures for the first time, there are simple quests. To solve the library gate quest, you must unlock the padlock with a four letter word. The immersive reader feature in Minecraft is helpful for students. They can see parts of speech, slow the voice speed for any character and translate.

My students had a lot of fun completing the Minecraft homework I had assigned to them. Before playing the first time, they were given questions. The answers were waiting for them to discover in the game. Some students explored the level even further. They learned gaming can be for education in addition to entertainment. Students had to write the answers as complete sentences in their notebooks. I gave my students a surprise quiz on the day the homework was due. The questions in the quiz were the same as when I assigned the Minecraft homework. If they already answered my homework questions, the quiz was a breeze for them.

Other teachers around the world have used Minecraft innovatively. They have used it to educate their students about sustainable cities, computer programming and understanding volcanoes. Anyone can create anything in Minecraft. Teachers can even ask their students to create their own Minecraft level around a topic. The Minecraft website has many resources for teachers such as training, lesson plans and community forums.

Students are part of the gaming universe in many ways. Teachers can educate students how gaming can be woven into their education. Students like watching other people play games. Live Streamers speaking in English on Twitch and YouTube are funny and entertaining. Play Together is an app which lets students talk in English with other players. Quiz your English is an app which tests your English grammar skills with players around the world. Teachers can open the door for their students if they educate themselves about the ways in which gaming can be educational (and fun) for their students.

I want to give some more advice to teachers. They can share it with their students.

- Gaming should be inclusive. It's for everyone. Try to get all of your students to play. Even the non-gamers.
- Students can tap into a worldwide community. They can make new friends, share experiences together and get exposure to different cultures.
- Encourage students to change the language of the game to English. They should keep a notebook where they can write new vocabulary or grammar.
- Students can voice chat (within the game or with Discord) with other players to improve their English listening and speaking skills. Search YouTube for Real English for Gamers. It's an excellent resource for students to get started.
- Start an after-school gaming club. Students can meet online to improve their English skills while playing together. Think of it like Zoom with games.
- Create an online community for you and your students. Discord is free, fun and easy to use.

I started Language Legends. We meet online every week and play games like Uno. In the future, I want to play more complex games with my members. I'd like to try Garctic Phone, Codename and an MMORPG. Search Facebook for Language Legends <sup>(5)</sup> and you'll find my group.

Teachers can use the power of gaming to engage, excite and educate their students. Students can think of gaming as not only a form of entertainment but also as a form of education. Putting entertainment and education together is a winning combination.



seanlaurence.com/minecraft

Pic by Author

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#### About the Author:

Sean Laurence calls Vietnam his second home (his first is America). He has been educating students in the English language for nine years. He makes English part of their lives through gaming, soft-skills and 21<sup>st</sup> century projects. He can be reached at [seanlaurence.com/contact](mailto:seanlaurence.com/contact).

