



Practicing English by Playtesting Games

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In this project, 85 university students in Japan, all of whom liked board and card games, were supported for three 90-minute classes through the process of playtesting a card game for an independent designer on the Board Game Designer's Forum (www.bgdf.com). Groups read the game rules and the designer's questions about his game, then prepared the components and played several times. After a short lecture and exercises on giving polite suggestions in English (e.g., "you might not want to..." and "it would be really great if you could..."), students collaboratively wrote feedback and a short message. Their feedback was sent to the designer, who wrote an extensive response to the class expressing his gratefulness for the amount, variety and quality of their feedback. Each student reflected on the tasks and brainstormed how they could use their English skills to communicate and contribute in their personal areas of interest.

Teacher Reflection

Each stage of the project seemed meaningful: the students read carefully in order to play; they had a great time exploring a new game together; and they thought and wrote critically. I think the success of playtesting projects depends on matching students with the right game (length, complexity, language). Students could be asked to use online analysis tools like <http://www.lextutor.ca/vp/eng/> or http://www.lexicool.com/text_analyzer.as to find new and important language. Video game playtesting using sites such as <http://www.betawatcher.com/>, <http://massively.joystiq.com/category/betawatch>, <http://gamingbetas.com/> or <http://www.deathbybeta.com/> might also workwell. I want to do more to help students use their language skills to communicate and collaborate in other (self-chosen) niche Internet communities.

Student Reflection

Some said that the project was "really fun," "a little difficult, but got easier," and "it improved my critical thinking skills." Other said it was "rare and meaningful;" "the years of studying English bear fruit. English enables us to have connection with many people in the world."

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