

Let the games begin!



We know that effectively learning includes an element of enjoyment as well as challenge and competition. The use of games for learning both in and out of the classroom has a long history.

The division between ‘play’ and ‘work’ is a spurious one, implying greater value of the latter. But this denies our own heritage of learning.

Understanding of the complexities of learning in oral cultures with is growing as extensive research. For an introduction, see the [Indigenous Memory Code ABC RN](#), and the [research undertaken by Dr Diana James](#) at the Australian National University.

One area where games have great effect is in social and interaction skills. This is particularly evident in games where players are required to sit together and interact with each other as play progresses.

There is still a place for these games in our high-tech classrooms with the vast range of digital learning capabilities.

Games

We know about the importance of games in developing motor skills, and incorporate these into our PD/H/PE program. Games help coordinate the body with the brain and experiment with how the two entities cooperate. In the classroom, the physical interaction involved in such games as Twister® and Jenga® can encourage manual dexterity and strengthen balance. Advanced video- and electronic-game systems also have the advantage of improving hand-eye coordination and visual focus.

There is growing evidence of the benefits of electronic games, though direct links between such benefits as boosting memory, increasing coordination, overall cognitive function, reducing stress and sharpening decision-making skills is still debatable.

When we are looking at board and card games, there is similar hesitation in stating emphatically that playing 'A' produces 'B' outcome, when 'B' refers to improved social skills, developing conflict resolution skills, lengthen attention span and improve concentration, improving self-esteem and so on.

Our concern in the classroom is delivering the curriculum so that our students achieve the outcomes for their stage of learning. It is here we can itemise and account for the skills involved in playing games.

Actions and activities that playing board and card games require include:

- Negotiating rules
- Following a system of directions
- Turn-taking and cooperating
- Recognising intrinsic rewards
- Advancement and rewards gained from prolonged play, and learning to lose
- Memorisation and repetition
- Creativity
- Recognising skills and talents of others
- Incorporating reading, writing, speaking and listening.



Links to the Australian Curriculum

These sit firmly within the Australian Curriculum, in the Literacy Strand.

Examples from Years 4, 5 and 6.

From Year 4 Content Descriptions

- *Interacting with others: Interpret ideas and information in spoken texts and listen for key points in order to carry out tasks and use information to share and extend ideas and information ([ACELY1687](#))*
- *Use interaction skills such as acknowledging another's point of view and linking students' response to the topic, using familiar and new vocabulary ([ACELY1688](#))*
- *Read different types of texts by combining contextual, semantic, grammatical and phonic knowledge using text processing strategies for example monitoring meaning, cross checking and reviewing ([ACELY1691](#))*

- *Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning to expand content knowledge, integrating and linking ideas and analysing and evaluating texts (ACELY1692) –*

Elaborations:

- making connections between the text and students' own experience and other texts
- making connections between information in print and images
- building and using prior knowledge and vocabulary
- finding specific literal information
- asking and answering questions
- creating mental images
- bringing subject and technical vocabulary and concept knowledge to new reading tasks

from **Year 5 Content Descriptions**

- *Interacting with others: Clarify understanding of content as it unfolds in formal and informal situations, connecting ideas to students' own experiences and present and justify a point of view (ACELY1699) –*

Elaborations:

- asking specific questions to clarify a speaker's meaning, making constructive comments that keep conversation moving, reviewing ideas expressed and conveying tentative conclusions
- *Use interaction skills, for example paraphrasing, questioning and interpreting non-verbal cues and choose vocabulary and vocal effects appropriate for different audiences and purposes (ACELY1796) –*

Elaborations:

- participating in pair, group, class and school speaking and listening situations, including informal conversations, discussions and presentations
- using effective strategies for dialogue and discussion including speaking clearly and to the point, pausing in appropriate places for others to respond, asking pertinent questions and linking students' own responses to the contributions of others

From **Year 6 Content Descriptions**

While the primary purpose of text in Year 6 is aesthetic, there is room for crafting strategy and sophisticated engagement in games with other students.

- *Interacting with others: Participate in and contribute to discussions, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing and supporting arguments, sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions (ACELY1709)*

Elaborations:

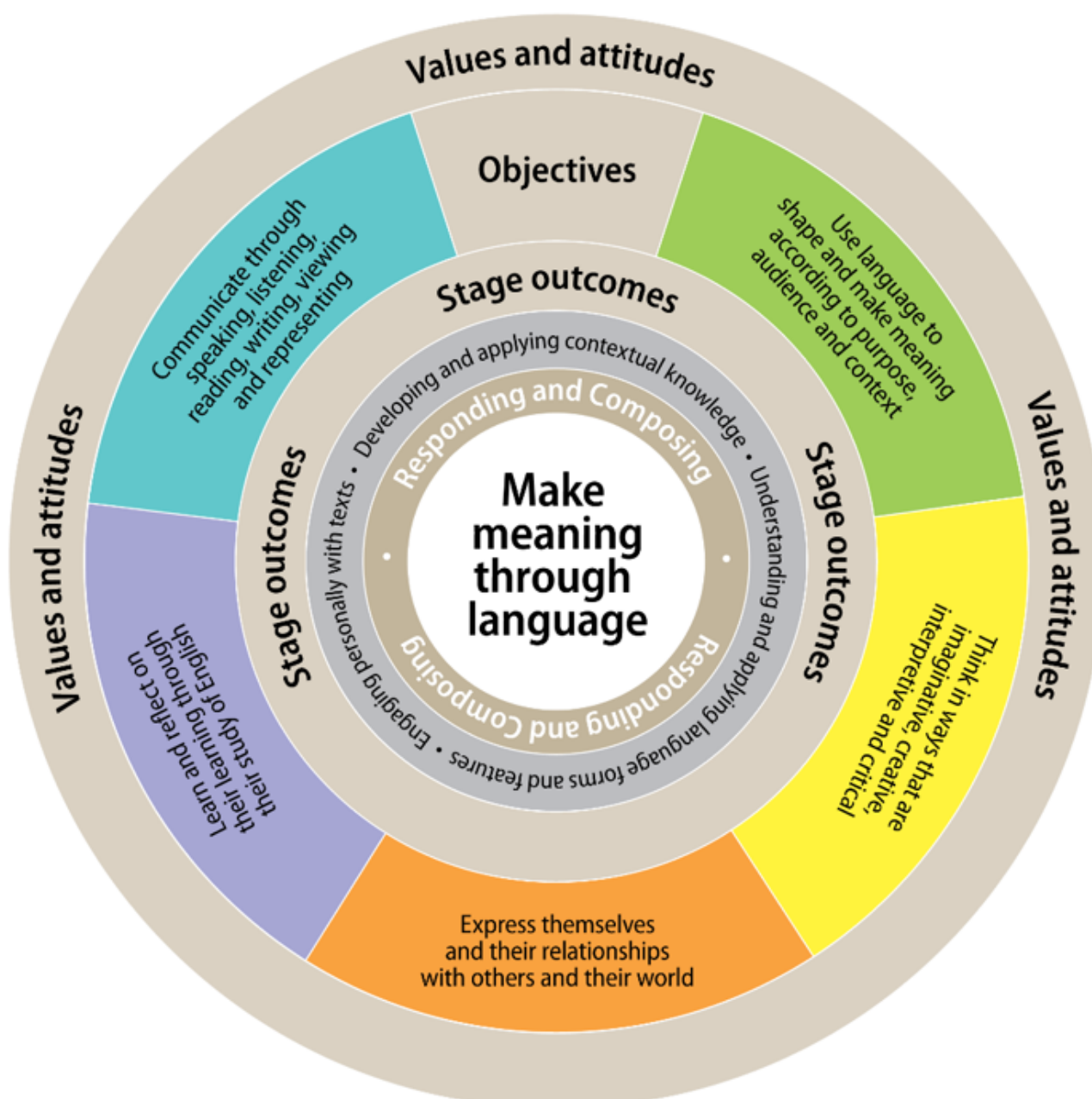
- using strategies, for example pausing, questioning, rephrasing, repeating, summarising, reviewing and asking clarifying questions
- *Use interaction skills, varying conventions of spoken interactions such as voice volume, tone, pitch and pace, according to group size, formality of interaction and needs and expertise of the audience (ACELY1816)*

Elaborations:

- participating in pair, group, class, school and community speaking and listening situations, including informal conversations, discussions, debates and presentations



In the [NSW English syllabus K-10](#), the organisation of content clearly demonstrates a place for the interactions and use of English in a wide range of settings. In games, students need to engage purposefully with texts, and apply contextual knowledge. It is in the social skills that the values and attitudes that underpin our classrooms and our society can be developed.



We can use games to assist our students to achieve syllabus outcomes.

Games of Strategy:

- Cluedo – Can be played by children and adults. There are variations on the classic game, including other games and books. A film and a musical have been released as part of the Cluedo franchise if you want to analyse and compare the multimodal texts in detail.
- Monopoly® - The original game has evolved into various forms. Issues with the original include the space required to set up, and the extensive time required to play. These two have been solved with the variation called ‘Monopoly Deal’. This takes little space, requires no special equipment other than the deck of cards, and takes a much shorter time to play. The game requires some addition skills, various interactive skills, and strategic thinking. Excellent for Year 5 and 6 students. There is a video game adaptation, but the social interaction is lost.
- UNO™ – there are several versions of this game. All require strategic thinking.



Figure 1: Cluedo - literacy at work in play

Photo A.Gray

Games to encourage creativity:

- Pictionary® - a supporting team with younger students is helpful. Widely available.
- Celebrity Heads – you don’t need to purchase anything special for this game. All instructions can be found [here](#).

Word games:

- Bananagrams® - This word game can be played anywhere, by anyone developing or consolidating their vocabulary and spelling skills. Available in 15 languages, with ‘starter’ and large letter formats, and you can even get the packs customized for your class. Click [here](#) for information.

- Scrabble® - The classic game of vocabulary, spelling and strategy that can be played with up to four players. Adults can get extremely serious about Scrabble. The current official dictionary for Scrabble is Merriam-Webster's *Official Scrabble Players Dictionary, Fifth Edition*, published August 6, 2014. This dictionary is also referred to as OSPD5. (See <https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/official-scrabble-dictionary-410936>). There are 30 versions in languages other than English. A 'cheat' site for English language players is at <https://wordfind.com/>. Scrabble is on Facebook. There are online versions, such as at <https://poki.com/en/scrabble> but this does not provide important face-to-face interaction and communication. Words with Friends is an online game similar to Scrabble.
- Upwords - Players build words using letter tiles on a board. The letters can be stacked on top of other letters already on the board to create new words. The higher the stack of letters, the more points are scored. Information on how to play can be found [here](#).
- Scattergories®/Scattergories® online version - <https://scattergoriesonline.net/> in English and other languages – great for vocabulary consolidation. Originally known as Categories and played with paper and pens, with the categories, target letter and duration determined by agreement among the players.

Card games (52 card deck):

The standard deck of 52 cards is a handy pack of potential complex skills for all children.

Handling the cards is a challenge - the manipulation required to hold the cards so the opponent can't see them, shuffling without dumping them all on the floor, and dealing, all require considerable skill, developed through considerable practice.

Card games require organisation of the cards according to rank and suit. Each player applies the rules of the game – simple or complex – to their own cards, and in reference to the other players in the game. Players need to see patterns, plan and strategise in order to achieve their best result. Playing cards are useful for numerous maths activities, so familiarity and skill with handling the cards is useful.

Playing cards with consolidates the social skills of turn-taking, following and sticking to the rules of the game, and provides opportunity for winning and losing.

- Go Fish is an excellent 'first' game for younger students. A great way to learn about numbers and patterns. And an opportunity for young players to win.
- This website <https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/things-kids-can-do-with-playing-cards-3542633> has ideas, and provides links to some activities like building card houses.

Commercial games for physical activity and precision:

- *Twister*® - K-Mart, Target, Big W etc. (pub. Milton Bradley) considered the first popular American game to use human bodies as playing pieces
- *Jenga*® – see the full range of Jenga® products at <http://jenga.com/> (and as above)
- The NSW Department of Education provides a comprehensive range of physical literacy skills [here](#).



Resources

<https://ourpastimes.com/214084-the-advantages-of-learning-games-for-kids.html>

ACARA (2012) Australian Curriculum, English, at <https://australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/> accessed 15/02/2019

NESA (2012) NSW Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum – English K-10 at <http://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/english-year-10/english-k-10/organisation-of-content> accessed 16/02/2019

- For a link to some of the research on the value of video games for educational purposes see: <https://www.aare.edu.au/blog/?p=1802> accessed 18/02/2019

<https://journalistsresource.org/studies/society/education/outcomes-of-game-based-learning-research-roundup/> accessed 18/02/2019