

# GAMIFICATION AND LANGUAGE TEACHING



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## Introduction

This document has been produced for the TESOL Electronic Village Online (EVO) 2012 session 'Teaching and Learning Languages through Gamification' (<http://tllg.wikispaces.com>),

The contents are based on material in the book *Digital Play* (Delta Publishing) and the blog of the same name (<http://www.digitalplay.info/blog>). If you want to know more about the book, you can [read an interview with the authors of Digital Play in 'It's for Teachers'](#).

## TLLG overview

*"Games are a more natural way to learn than traditional classrooms. Not only have humans been learning by playing games since the beginning of our species, but intelligent animals have as well."* (Clark Aldrich, *Learning Online with Games, Simulations and Virtual Worlds*, 2009)

Teaching and Language Learning through Gamification (TLLG) aims to give educators the opportunity to investigate the potential of gamification of language learning and teacher development. Gamification is the application of gaming concepts to non-game experiences.

We will be covering:

- looking at specific examples and contexts where gamification has been or can be used;
- using games inside and outside of the language classroom;
- engaging in professional development through play.

We also hope the session will lead to the forming of a community of educators interested in language learning and gaming to share experiences and ideas for continued development.



## Gamification

*Gamification is the use of game design techniques to solve problems and engage audiences. (Wikipedia).* In other words, this buzz word refers to adding a game layer to the real world, and it is becoming an attractive idea for many educators. The basic premise is to make something we do or want to do more engaging by turning it into a game. If you have ever observed anyone playing a game and being so absorbed in it they lose all track of time, then you'll see the attraction of doing this. Is it possible to motivate our learners to be as engaged in learning a language? We shall look at some possibilities here.

## Incentive games

Two examples of incentive games are **Chorewars** (<http://www.chorewars.com>) and **Epic Win** (see <http://www.rexbox.co.uk/epicwin>) The latter is mobile-based; the former accessed by a website. Rather than games, they are both fun reward systems. They both are designed to turn the chores of our daily life (housework, for example) into an adventure game. They do this by giving experience points and adding monsters and turning the chores into quests. Although not designed for education, Chorewars can be [easily adapted for the classroom](#), and is particularly suitable for young teenagers (see <http://www.digitalplay.info/blog/2011/03/28/gamify-your-classroom-with-chore-wars>)

## Alternate Reality Games

The *Alternate Reality Game* (usually referred to as an ARG), is an 'interactive narrative that uses the real world as a platform' ([Wikipedia](#)). An ARG can take many different forms. In ARGs such as [World without Oil](#), participants imagined a future where there was a severe energy crisis and where they had to live their lives without oil. Those taking part spent much of their time imagining what their lives would be like, and wrote blog posts and posted videos as if they were living through this. This game was the brainchild of Jane McGonigal, the leading light when it comes to ARGs. In her new book '[Reality is Broken](#)', she proposes integrating games more closely into our everyday lives in order to make routine or boring work more fun, and to harness their power in order to instigate real societal change worldwide. So far, there hasn't been a lot of ARGs for language learning, but a European union project called [ARGuing](#) successfully piloted a game called *Tower of Babel*. The learners were involved in 15 quests, which required them to 'search the Internet for information, view videos, create their own content, add posts in forums' and most of these were collaborative tasks.

## Mobile gamification

The mobile apps such as [Foursquare](#), [Gowalla](#) and [SCVNGR](#) are social networks for mobiles that are based on location, and which have elements of games embedded. People using these apps *check into* a place to gain points, collect badges or (in the case of Foursquare) compete to become the *mayor* of a particular place. They also share tips and recommendations about the places, which mean they are very interesting for tourists. It's still unclear how these apps can be used for language learning, although people are now writing comments and recommendations in English using them.

Seth Priebatsch, the CEO of [SCVNGR](#), one of these new mobile apps, recently gave his take on the future of *gamification* and how it could be used to improve our educational system. In [his keynote presentation to the SXSW \(South by Southwest\) festival of film, music and technology in the US](#), he said that our education system was 'a badly designed game' in which students competed for grades and which results in many students being demotivated if they are told they have failed a test. In contrast to this, a good game never makes you feel like you've failed – you just make progress more slowly. His idea was to start students with zero points and have them build a high score as they move through a subject.

If you think this is unrealistic, you may be interested in knowing that this the idea of [making school curriculum more like a game has already been adopted by one school in New York](#). The students of *Quest to Learn* obtain *experience points* and *level up* instead of passing exams. And there are special 'easter eggs' hidden extra tasks that have to be discovered and done at home – rather than making this homework a chore, it turns it into a prize for those students who find it, and they earn extra experience points when they do.

## Augmented Reality

Our last element of *gamification* is another type of software found on handheld devices. *Augmented reality* (AR) works by adding a layer of 'computer generated sensory input to the real world' ([Wikipedia](#)), which means you can receive extra

information about a particular place. AR is also being used to turn the ordinary world into a game, as in the picture below.



*Augmented Reality by Turkletom*

Gamification of education, therefore, has at its root the idea that learning needs to be made fun again, and that students will perform better if they are encouraged to 'play' rather than to 'work'. It's a revolutionary idea that could benefit many of our schools and learners if adopted, but for many of us this currently seems as unlikely as the dragon in the picture above. However, this could well change in the near future...

## **What do you think?**

- ▲ Do you think language learning classroom would benefit from a little 'gamification' ?
- ▲ Should we change our assessment of students from 'pass' and 'fail' to a system where students gain experience points?
- ▲ Are any of your students using any of the apps (*Foursquare, Gowalla, SCVNGR*) mentioned above? Do you have any ideas how they could be used for language learning?

## **Gamification and language teaching**

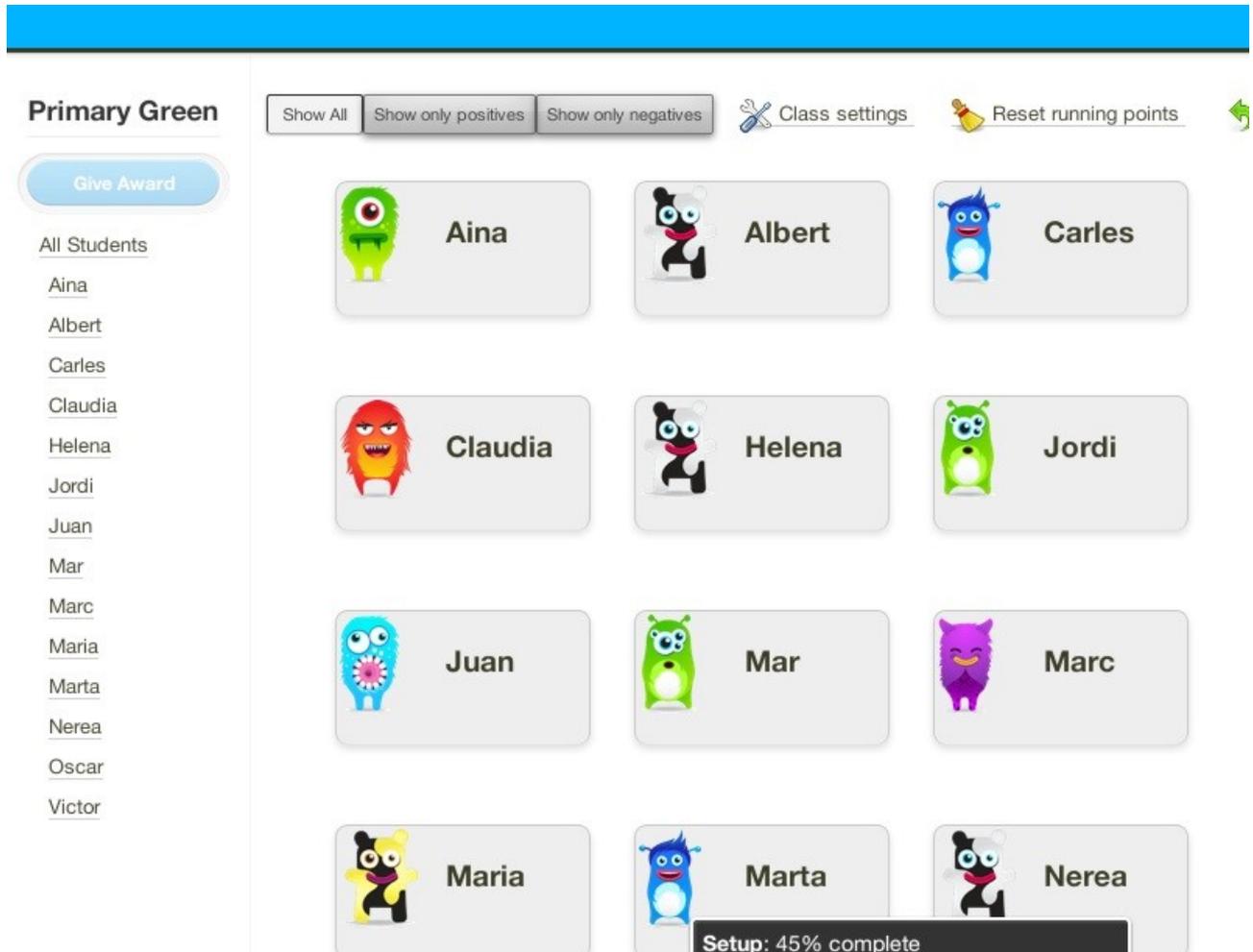
Gamification in language teaching can involve many things, but usually involve the introduction of a points and rewards system into the language learning context to motivate learners.

Let's look now in more detail at one of these systems aimed at young learners:

- **Class Dojo**

## Reward and Punishment for Young Learners & Teenagers

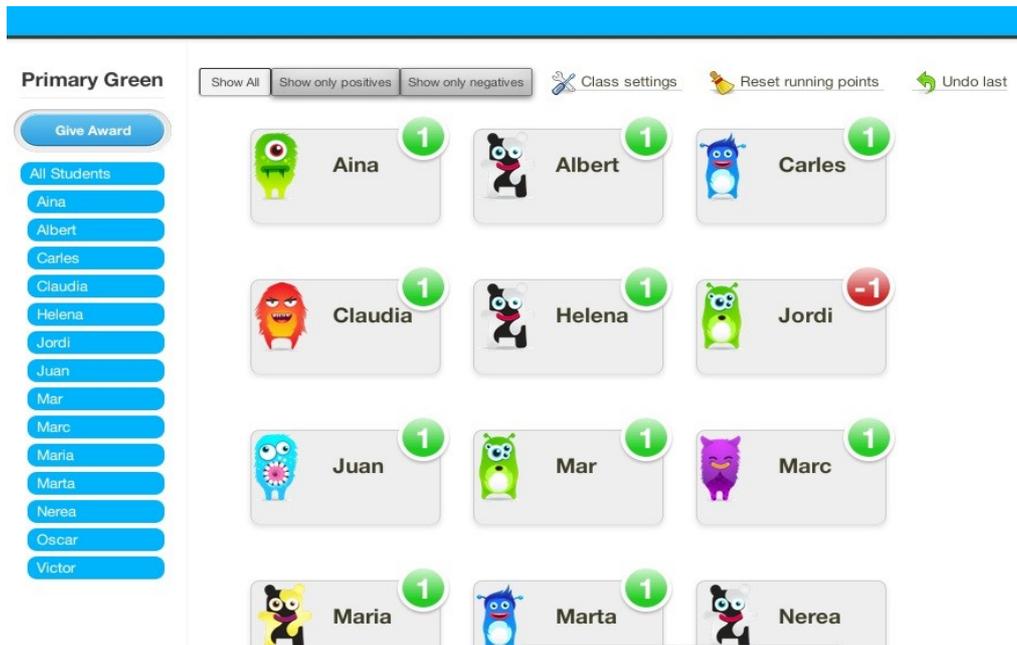
**Class Dojo** (<http://www.classdojo.com>) is a realtime behaviour management system for teachers who have an internet-enabled computer and a projector (*connected classroom*) or IWB. You start by creating an account and setting up a class by typing in the names of your students. Avatars for each student are automatically generated during this process.



In class, you select a student and award a positive point for behaviour such as creativity, hard work, presentation, etc. You can also award negative points for bad behaviour, when a student doesn't bring homework or if he/she arrives late.

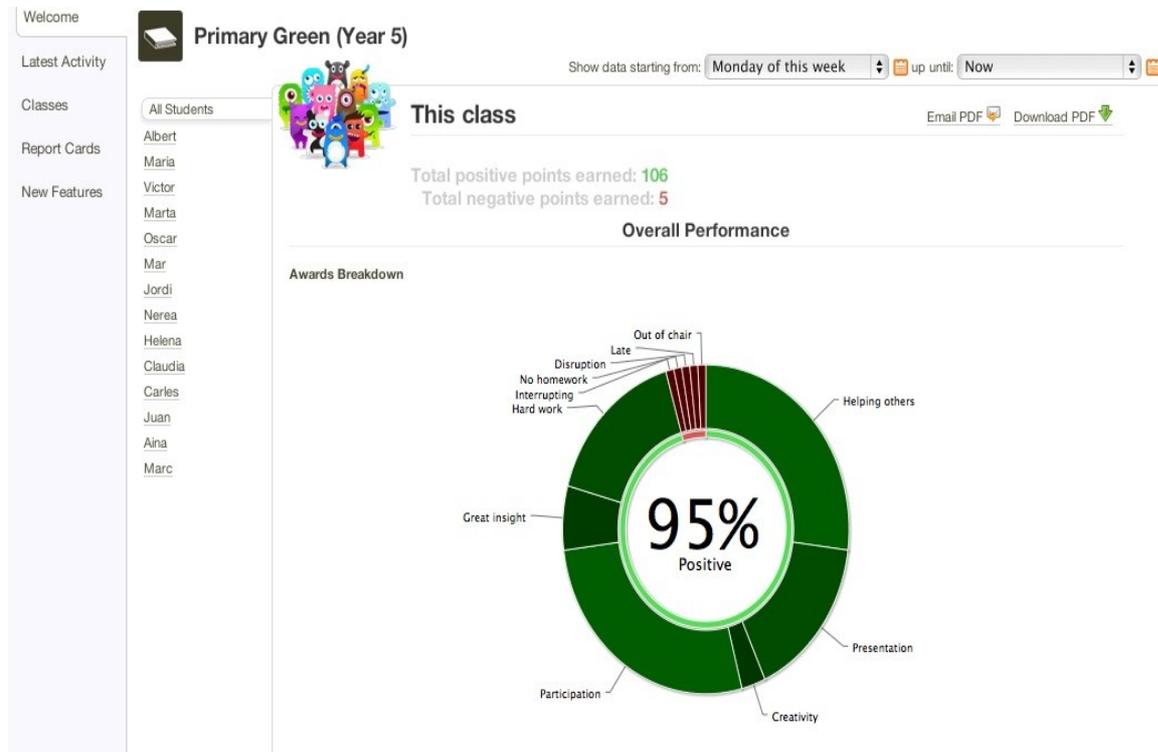


Think of it like a digital star chart with added extras. The points can be awarded individually or, by selecting all students, you can give everyone a point. On the board, you can show only the positive or only the negative points the students get.



You can also undo if you make a mistake or change your mind, and it's possible to reset all points to zero too.

So far so good, but what makes Class Dojo really interesting is that once the class has ended, the programme displays a pie chart with the results of all student behaviour.



If you use Class Dojo every class, then you can select periods of time (days of the week, terms, etc) to display records of. You can also choose individual students and display their progress.



These are report cards that you can print off (on paper or PDF) for your own records or to give to the students or parents. You can also add and change the behaviour categories when you select 'edit class'. This way you can tailor make the programme to suit the behaviour you want to reward or stop in your own class.

Primary Green Year 5 Delete class

1 Students | 2 Behaviours | 3 Rewards (Coming soon)

Type in the boxes below to choose the behaviours you want to award. Finished

Positive Behaviours		Negative Behaviours	
Choose an icon	Choose a name	Choose an icon	Choose a name
	Participation		Disruption
	Helping others		Late
	Creativity		No homework
	Great insight		Disrespect
	Hard work		Interrupting
	Presentation		Out of chair

All in all, Class Dojo looks like it is a great way of *gamifying* the behaviour of your class and could work well for many teachers. A great find!

Class Dojo section Originally published here:  
<http://www.digitalplay.info/blog/2011/11/04/reward-or-punishment-gamification-with-class-doj/>