

*'Playing Games in the School Library* provides an accessible and practical approach to exploring game-based learning and gamification in a library environment. Clearly written with the reader in mind, this book provides a great insight into both pedagogy and practical application. It illustrates the way that playing games can enhance the library offer and proposes a variety of tools and techniques that will encourage readers to start engaging in this approach. The 'real-world' examples from practitioners from across the globe really bring this to life and give readers the confidence of the rationale for including games in their own workplace.'

Rosie Jones, *Director of Student and Library Services, Teesside University and Co-Chair, Playful Learning Conference*

'Sarah gives a real tour de force of the why and how games can and should become integral to all school libraries. It is all too easy to sacrifice books and libraries at the altar of EdTech. Sarah demonstrates what a disservice this would be to both learners and learning. Packed with practical instruction on all manner of games this is a must read for all librarians and teachers. Sarah combines expert knowledge of information literacy with detailed understanding of pedagogy to bring game-based learning to life. I particularly liked the care of placing everything with evidence-based research alongside more personal insights from users and players from all over the world. Better still it is filled with hundreds of games and games sources to suit all types of library and classroom-based learning.'

Stephen Cox, *CEO, Osiris Educational*

'Sarah Pavey's book offers school library professionals engaging insights into how to use games to promote student learning. She explores how game-based learning can help create dynamic and fun learning spaces while fostering a wide range of valuable transferrable skills in our students and meeting their diverse needs. Research-informed recommendations are provided alongside rich examples from real-world contexts, and this book will hold wide appeal for both current and future school library professionals.'

Dr Margaret Merga, *Senior Research Consultant at Merga Consulting and honorary adjunct at the University of Newcastle, Australia*

‘The pandemic has introduced millions to learning online in a crisis situation. To move beyond emergency provision, we need to become more creative, engaging learners and supporting staff. This book provides much needed inspiration and practical help to take a more playful approach to learning online in the library and beyond. Recommended reading for all interested in playful learning.’

Dr Maren Deepwell, *CEO, Association for Learning Technology*

‘Sarah has long been a champion of playful approaches to school librarianship and this book takes full advantage of that experience and enthusiasm. Rather than presenting game ideas in great detail for us to follow slavishly, it uses theory to illustrate aspects and usefulness of many examples, helping the reader not just with game ideas, but how and why they may effectively use them in their own settings. Case studies of games from across the world complement Sarah’s own examples.’

Andrew Walsh, *National Teaching Fellow & Play-Brarian, University of Huddersfield*

‘This book fills a much-needed gap for school librarians. Many of us use games in the school library but Sarah introduces us to the theory and pedagogy to underpin our practice. Sarah not only gives us many examples of the types of games we can use in our libraries, but she also shows us the effects these have on students with different emotional and social skills. With so many practical examples, this book is an important addition to your professional library.’

Caroline Roche, *Chair, CILIP’s School Libraries Group*

# **Playing Games in the School Library**

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information professionals.

# **Playing Games in the School Library**

**Developing Game-Based Lessons  
and Using Gamification Concepts**

Sarah Pavey

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Finally, my thanks to Richard Gerver for his insightful foreword, which is so in keeping with the ethos of this book.



# Abbreviations

ARCS	attention, relevance, confidence, satisfaction
CILIP	Chartered Institute of Librarians and Information Professionals (UK)
CLA	The Copyright Licensing Agency
IBSCA	International Baccalaureate Schools and Colleges Association of the UK and Ireland
IFLA	The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
LARP	live action role play
LMS	library management system
OPAC	online public access catalogue
QR code	quick response code
SAMR	substitution, augmentation, modification, redefinition
SLA	School Library Association



## Foreword

I am a lousy cook and, as a result, when our children still lived at home my main job was to call them downstairs, from their rooms, for the evening meal. I was an expert at this; a big booming voice and a former headteacher's natural authority. I had a system and it worked seamlessly. Like the von Trapp children in that scene for *The Sound of Music*, my two kids would bound down the stairs, sit at the table, assume the ready position and chow down. That was, until my son was given his first pair of noise cancelling headphones on his 16th birthday. My honed method was shattered. From that moment, I had to physically climb the stairs and knock on his door. I hate technology!

Early on in this 'brave' new world, I knocked on the door, to no response, so I held my breath, he was a teenage boy, and walked into his den. There in front of me was what looked like a villain from a Bond film, sat, back to me, facing a bank of screens, engrossed in what looked like a battle for world domination. So engrossed was my own baby Blofeld that he wasn't aware that I had invaded his space. Luckily for me, he finished his game and span around on his chair to face me, he removed his headphones and smiled. I was half expecting him to be stroking a cat and for him to pull a lever that would drop me into a tank of sharks.

He could see the look of astonishment on my face and immediately and eloquently inquired about the reason, 'What?'

Now to clarify at this point, I wasn't amazed or surprised by what I'd seen or even by the smell, what had shocked me was what he had been saying, while gaming, to whoever was on the other end of his audio feed.

My son had been speaking in Russian!

I needed to understand how and why; had he been recruited by the Russian state or was he a child genius?

The answer was neither. He had been playing online with a lad from just outside Moscow who, it turns out, he had met during an online tournament about a year earlier. They had become friends and had been playing games

together ever since. In that year, my son had taught his Russian comrade some English and vice versa.

In that moment I was genuinely speechless, in awe. My teenage son, an academically 'average' student, had learnt conversational Russian, within a year, while gaming. In that moment, my world changed.

I realised immediately that similar things were going on in the teenage bedrooms of those lucky to have such virtual access and technology, all over the world. Our children are learning at an accelerated rate, things that matter to them, with incredible success, without us.

I had known for years that gaming, despite some of the misinformation and scaremongering, could have a really positive impact on our children, from their resilience to their literacy skills. In 2020 The National Literacy Trust published a report (Picton, Clark and Judge, 2020) based on surveying nearly 5,000 young people aged 11–16 in the UK. Nearly four-fifths (79%) of the children who took part in the survey said that gaming motivated them to read content about video games, including in books, reviews and blogs.

The research showed that gaming can make kids more creative: 63% of respondents said they write video-game-related content, including scripts, top tips for other players and reviews; 58% said they'd be up for writing or designing their very own video games; and a third said they wanted more opportunities to read and write about video games at school.

The study also found that playing video games can help young people relate to others better, with 65% saying that gaming helped them imagine being someone else.

Importantly, and especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its lockdowns, many young people said that gaming had helped them manage their mental health better through assisting them deal with stressful situations and negative emotions.

What the experience with my own, linguistic genius, superspy of a son taught me was the value and power of actual gamification to learning. Especially for our older students.

As a teacher and then as a headteacher, I always believed in the power of making learning richly experiential and contextual, and the importance of play. You only have to observe the accelerated learning among young children in a well-run and brilliantly managed early years environment.

Game-based learning and gamification codifies and encourages the natural learning reflexes we have, from an incredibly young age, and uses them to enhance education for all of us, especially for our kids. Five of the clearest benefits of game-based learning are that it:

- makes learning fun and interactive
- creates a purpose and desire to learn
- gives learners the opportunity to see real-world context and application
- offers immediate and tangible feedback
- enhances the whole learning experience.

For too long, we have focused too rigidly on how we make education work more efficiently, while often worrying about the cultural influences on our young people and the negative impacts that those influences can have on their lives, rather than exploring the potential to use those influences as levers for change and meaningful evolution in our system. Sarah's book excites me so much because she uses her experience, knowledge and practical understanding to help guide us to find ways to use the power of gaming, of gamification, to catalyse real and impactful change for our education system and, ultimately, for our children.

The wisdom of seeing our librarians as key players in that evolution is so vitally important too. They have always brought a three-dimensional, wider view to the pressured environments that so many of our teachers and students experience. They can act as early adopters, guides and coaches as we look to ensure that although not all children may be able to converse with Vladimir Putin, they are all certainly better placed to thrive in our ever changing, global community.

Richard Gerver

*President of the School Library Association*



# Introduction

We all enjoy playing games whether alone or in a social setting. If we apply this premise to education, then even the most dreary of topics can be made palatable through engaging in playful learning. The dull procession through a set of prescribed rules to reach a solution can be replaced with something that is more fun. But games still have rules, so why is this approach so much more acceptable and exciting? Why when playing a game do we often reach a 'state of flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) where we can experience total immersion? Time seems distorted, our concentration is intense, and we feel in total command of our actions. Within a game, rules are purposefully placed to enhance enjoyment – imagine playing Monopoly if there were no rules to regulate what you could and could not do. It would hold little pleasure if one player just raided the bank and commandeered all the property – game over! If we can tap into this energising formula of a structured game and understand what makes it successful, then as librarians we could provide wonderful experiences for our students that support their classroom learning and give them the opportunity to practise life skills.

This book explores the use of games-based learning and gamification by school library staff. It illustrates how game play can be developed through blended theory and practice, exemplified by case studies taken from a variety of international contexts. There are many publications that consider classroom games, both theoretical and practical, but games in classrooms are often just used as a reward for hard work at the end of a course rather than as part of the education process. Yet we know that much exploration, learning and understanding happens through play, as can be observed in young children. As librarians we bridge the gap between formal lessons and leisure time activities and perhaps have more opportunity to explore the worlds of game-based learning and gamification as we have more autonomy over our work schedules and content. This book considers practical ideas in context, underpinned by learning theories. To complement this publication, an online course by the author is available from the School Library Association (SLA)

([www.sla.org.uk/course/game-based-learning](http://www.sla.org.uk/course/game-based-learning)), which allows participants to experience the practical aspects of the game design discussed here.

In the following chapters, we consider how pedagogical theory confers structure and purpose on a game-based approach to learning. We understand the effect that game play has on motivation and engagement for positive learning outcomes and question how individual students might respond to the process. Taking a journey of discovery through different types of game, both commercial and our own creations, we learn how to use them effectively within our own environments. We also consider how we can use game play to enhance awareness and recognition of our library services and how we can collaborate with others in our school community for the design and execution of these activities.

But why should we invest time in games? Is game play or gamification just a lever to raise levels of engagement? Is it just a gimmick with a limited life span that eats into our busy schedule? The answer is no – provided we heed the rules of effective design and purpose. A game-based approach to learning or a gamification incentive scheme can be beneficial to students in many ways, both in leisure time and during formal library lessons.

A game can be offered to students in the library during breaktimes simply as a form of refreshment, in the same way that we might use fiction books or magazines. However, we know that reading fiction does more than provide escapism, subliminally the practice also helps with literacy learned in the classroom by giving an informal method of using the learned skills. Similarly, game play encouraged by the library leisure environment allows students to hone lifelong learning skills that perhaps are not even addressed by formal teaching, as Richard Gerver illustrates in his Foreword. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to questions being asked about the approach to education and there will no doubt be more emphasis placed on self-directed learning in future. This independent learning approach is favoured both by practitioners in higher education and employers because it develops skills in non-routine cognitive problem solving and enhances social skills through team learning. In an age when information is literally at our fingertips, it makes sense that the future skills for life depends far more on the interpretation of what we find and synthesis of new information. Games have been used for thousands of years as a means of practising skills in a safe environment and learning through failure to develop resilience and perseverance. Research tells us that the more you practise a skill the better you become at executing it and applying it to the given situation, as exemplified by the old adage ‘practice makes perfect’. We are living in a time when resilience and self-reliance becomes key and when adaptability, creativity and social interactions have global relevance. Playful learning can help develop competencies in all these areas.

Within our formal library lessons, we can use the advantages that game play and gamification have to offer too. The raised levels of motivation and engagement games confer might help us to boost the self-confidence of a reluctant reader or we might be able to create a slightly more effective and interesting method of explaining the Dewey Decimal Classification system. We can mimic real-life situations to highlight the importance of practising research skills, cognitive thought processes and perseverance within a safe environment.

This book has drawn on the practice of game-based learning and gamification from around the world. Case studies were collected through school library organisations, mailing lists and social media where respondents were asked to complete a template. The participating schools have only been identified by country and type of education and the students only by age group. Where adults are quoted within case studies, their job title is used to show context. A list of the librarians who contributed and who were willing to be named is given in the Acknowledgements. This structure was adopted as it gave understanding to how and why the game-based learning or gamification approach was used. The curriculum our schools follow may set some ground rules for design, however for the most part these case studies can be adapted for our own libraries wherever they might be, and for students of all ages. Read on, be inspired and unleash your creativity.