

Using Video games to help language development

Like it or not, video games are here to stay. You only have to see the success of the Spielberg movie *“Ready Player One”* and look at the multi-billion dollar international video game industry. There is an entire culture of “gaming” now and whole new global communities have formed through interactive gaming. And as most parents know, a love of video games starts young.

However, parents worry about video games. They are often told to worry by the “experts.” We have all heard about limiting “screen time”? There does need to be a healthy balance for children when it comes to non-screen activities such as playing outside and reading books. But do video games deserve the bad reputation they have been given? Instead we could use video game time to get beside our children and maximise the benefits of their time on the screen. Use the time as a positive time to engage and facilitate language development.

Research has found that video games can help development. They can teach problem-solving skills and creativity, inspire an interest in history and culture, even help them to make friends. They can even be a source of education for supporting language. Here is how you can help children maximise the educational opportunities in games.

Just like books can be a source of language enrichment, look at electronic and video games as a chance to build and develop communication and language skills.

We know that conversation with adults help support children academically. You could use the video game your child enjoys as a topic of conversation with your child, to get on their level and understand their special interests.

- Can they tell you what they like about it?
- Ask them to describe to you how to play it?
- Can they teach you how to play the game?
- Who else do they know who plays the game?

While they are playing try to engage with them about what is happening as they play. Ask questions about the game and the choices they are making, just like you might during a book reading together. In fact why not join in the game and have “real” conversations where you can share your own dilemmas and problem solving strategies with your child. Maybe there are some new concepts or words that you can help your child better understand. Get your own avatar and have some interactive fun with your child.

Use the video game as an opportunity to get closer to your child, to help understand their interests and to then use the conversations as a chance to build on their language and give them a chance to ask you questions or (more likely!) teach you something new. Ask questions that require sentence response answers. Encourage more complex responses including words and phrases like because, even though.

Refs:

1. 8 Reasons Video Games Can Improve Your Child: Parent-approved video games that are played in moderation can help young kids develop in educational, social, and physical ways, C. Olson, Sc.D. accessed 2/3/2018 <https://www.parents.com/kids/development/benefits-of-video-games/>
2. Talk in activity during young children’s use of digital technologies at home , (2013), Danby, Davidson, Theobald, Scriven, Cobb-Moore, Houen, Grant,. Given, & Thorpe.