The World of Dungeons & Dragons in the EFL Classroom
A literary study on worldbuilding, mental imagery, immersion and applications of Dungeons & Dragons in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract
In a world where gamification is increasingly prevalent, *Dungeons & Dragons* is a vast, seemingly untapped arena into which students in an EFL classroom could potentially venture. By exploring the various applications of the hugely popular tabletop role-playing game, there are several aspects in which students and teachers can explore in order to find practical as well as theoretical uses for a role-playing game of this size and scope. This study has discussed and analyzed the benefits and drawbacks of implementing *Dungeons & Dragons* in the EFL classroom through mental imagery and immersion as an effective teaching tool. The implementation of *D&D* in an EFL classroom is achievable through scaffolding and preparation. This study has also discussed the gamification aspects of the EFL classroom and the game specific areas of game-based pedagogy.

Key words
*Dungeons & Dragons*, EFL Classroom, Upper Secondary School, World-building, Mental Imagery, Immersion, Visualization
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1 Introduction

The “Sub-Creation” or “Secondary World” is the constructed reality in which fictional characters exist (Wolf 226). They love, they laugh, they hurt, and they hate, but most importantly, they live. Creating a fictional world is not easy and requires an exorbitant amount of imagination. Or does it? The aim of this study is to analyze world-building as a useful tool through mental imagery and immersion, as well as analyze the application of world-building in the EFL classroom. The main source that will be used to accomplish this is the Dungeon Master’s Guide by Jeremy Crawford. The Dungeon Master’s Guide (henceforth DMG) is one of the core rule books belonging to the fifth edition of Dungeons & Dragons. The specific rule book details the overarching information a Dungeon Master will need in order to run a campaign with a group of players. Dungeons & Dragons (henceforth D&D), is a tabletop role-playing game that was first released in 1974 and published as short compendiums by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. This study will focus primarily on the most recent edition, the fifth edition which was released in 2014. In this source, every piece of information relevant to creating and running a game is present (4). The book guides the reader through an expansive world which comes to life through interactivity. Everything from creating imaginary landscapes to monsters and non-player characters is detailed (9).

The title of the Dungeon Master’s Guide refers to the Dungeon Master, the person in charge of “running” the game, effectively acting as the omniscient and omnipresent narrator of the constructed world in which the adventure takes place. The players themselves are then painted a picture by the DM to, with their minds, see what the DM wants them to see. There are several visual aids that can be used throughout the game in order to guide the players, miniatures, game maps etc. but in the confines of this study we will forego these aids as the study’s aim is the discussion of mental imagery and immersion. Therefore, the implementation of visual aids is superfluous to the discussion other than pointing out that they are available. Dungeons & Dragons is set (usually) in a high fantasy setting, which the title alludes to. There are variations as to how the game is played, with varying rule sets to facilitate an easier learning curve, which is part of the
discussion this study will conduct. This is especially important regarding the practical applications in the classroom.

Constructing a fictional world comes with its challenges. The key aspect to world-building is originality, as many fictional works are derived from someone else's, making is difficult to achieve originality. One such example is the works of J.R.R Tolkien. Often considered the father of modern fantasy, Tolkien is credited with creating one of the most expansive worlds, teeming with life in all various shapes and forms. *Dungeons & Dragons*, as well as hundreds, if not thousands, of other published or unpublished works, draw inspiration from Tolkien's works, albeit Tolkien himself drew inspiration from numerous mythological sources, especially Norse mythology. Tolkien is also credited with coining the term “Sub-creation. Tolkien had a way of inserting himself into his works making himself canon to the story he himself is telling, “Carrying the conceit about as far as it will go, Tolkien inserted his own name into the header and footer on the titlepage of The Lord of The Rings (and thus into the history of the “book”), not as the author of the book, but as its final transmitter/redactor”. By this Mark J.P Wolf indicates that Tolkien himself inserted himself into his writing in the form of translator and redactor instead of author (232). Exploring different works like the writings of Tolkien, will provide insight into varying genres as well as environmental and temporal factors to the world-building concept. Tolkien is credited with creating the archetypical fantasy races that are popularly still in use within world-building in the fantasy genre today. Elves, dwarves, and orcs, to name a few. These are, within the realm of *D&D*, playable races that the player can choose from when creating their characters (Tresca 23). In *Building Imaginary Worlds*, Wolf discusses at length the influence Tolkien has had on the concept of world-building. Tolkien spent most of his life “living” in his sub-creation, adding to it, perfecting it (Wolf 6). His dedication to the world of Arda set the bar for fantasy writers to come. It is through Tolkien’s extensive imagination and dedication that many mainstays in the fantasy genre are prevalent to this day almost a century later.

The main elements that will be discussed in this study are the concept of world-building and its relationship with mental imagery. The study will focus, to a large extent, on the application of world-building and role-playing gamification in the classroom. Tuula Nousiainen discusses various areas regarding
game-based pedagogy, specifically the challenges and requirements for teachers. Game-based pedagogy as a teaching method is highly relevant regarding the derivation of the growing popularity in this form of entertainment as well as the potential of the tabletop role-playing experience in the classroom. This thesis will discuss the link between the reader and author, more specifically the concept of mental imagery and visualization to understand and relate one’s own experience and imagination from the written word into the images one creates in one’s own mind when reading. Visualization is the reader’s subjective experience and is therefore difficult to quantify and generalize (Brosch 136).

This study will, in part, discuss and provide theoretical as well as practical possibilities as to how the format of world-building derived from D&amp;D could work in a classroom, as well as provide clarity and insight into how fictional worlds are constructed. This study will also discuss the relationship between author and reader, and how it all relates to an EFL classroom. This will be done by examining the rulebooks of D&amp;D fifth edition, specifically the Dungeon Master’s Guide and the Player’s Handbook, as well as using the curricular documents as support and comparing them to relevant texts in order to reach a conclusion that hopefully will be beneficial (Natl. Ag. f. Ed.). Depending on how the DM chooses to run the game, the applications can prove to have interesting results depending on the subject. As the Dungeon Master’s Guide, which is the primary source for this text, gives the DM the task to create a game of their own, this thesis will discuss the variables that go into creating a campaign and then apply those variables to a classroom setting to discern its practicality. In the main section of this text, these variables will be discussed as to how they can be adjusted and adapted to fit a campaign depending on the aim of the game inside of the classroom. The ethics of bringing a game known for a somewhat violent story structure will be discussed further into the thesis (Peterson 84).

By analyzing the core rulebooks of the fifth edition of D&amp;D, this study discusses the practical applications of D&amp;D in the EFL classroom using mental imagery and immersion through the lens of world-building. Using D&amp;D as a teaching tool can according to this study, be implemented provided certain conditions are met. The hypothesis of this study is that students in an EFL classroom can gain insight into language learning through the perspective of mental imagery and immersion.
2 The Creation of a Storyworld

This study will explore the relationship between reader and author through world-building. And specifically, the differences between what the author is trying to convey within the world they have constructed and what the reader is seeing through mental imagery. This will be achieved using *Dungeons & Dragons* as a medium, as it opens avenues of dialogue between author and reader in an interesting way.

The freedom of *Dungeons & Dragons* is immense and will therefore be discussed through different perspectives withing this text. When it comes to the subject of mental imagery and visualization *Dungeons & Dragons* offer an excellent medial highway onto which players can enjoy a variety of scenarios using only their minds, through usage of the primary texts, *The Dungeon Master’s Guide* and *The Player’s Handbook*.

Storyworlds exist a plenty, but few have the adaptability like a table-top role-playing game such as *Dungeons & Dragons*. Therefore, discussing the relationship between writer and reader as it relates to a fictional world created for the specific purpose of relaying hypothetical, safe, scenarios dealing with any manner of issues could prove very beneficial. Research conducted toward using *D&D* in the classroom has been done before, strictly as a teaching method. This study intents to focus on bridging the gap between mental imagery and immersion through the use of *D&D* in an EFL classroom.

2.1 World-Building in Fiction and Games

Wolf details in his text *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* how it is more common to examine the stories and events that take place within the worlds rather than the world itself (2). He further discusses that the world within a story mainly functions as a background to the story that it contains. The method of comparing what author versus reader sees will be done by examining various works and their adaptations from both a creator's perspective as well as a reader’s. Marta Boni echoes the need for a narrative structure that Wolf discusses, and she also provides insight into the increasingly important concept of a “world” to the story (10).
The relationship between the real world and the imaginary world will be explored throughout the study to extrapolate parallels between them. The reasoning for the importance of drawing parallels between the primary world (the real world) and the secondary world (the imaginary world) is the need for the reader to be able to relate to the characters and the world described within (Wolf 153). On the other side of the spectrum, the reader tries to relate to what the author is trying to convey through their own experiences. A major aspect of sustaining not only the readers’ but also the author’s interest in creating imaginary worlds is storytelling. Storytelling can be considered the alpha and omega when it comes to creating stories as the world probably would not exist without stories to illustrate how the world itself functions. Creating a world with nothing in it is not a world, it needs environments, characters and stories that live and breathe to make the world feel real to the players. *Dungeons & Dragons* offer up a readymade world with existing places and characters that can be modified at will, which is the allure of the game. Marie-Laure Ryan discusses in her chapter of “World Building Transmedia, Fans, Industries” that, “Multiple stories are told about the same world, so the passing from one story to another does not require ontological relocation.” (Ryan 34). When speaking about narrative proliferation, *D&D* provides a world in which to hold many separate adventures, yet in familiar territory. Exporting one’s character from adventure to adventure does not require a complete overhaul on the characters abilities, skills or even personality. The character van just be transferred without change. This means that a character can be places in a variety of settings, changing genres and time periods with ease.

2.2 World-Building through Mental Imagery

Mental imagery can be described as recalling or creating sensory experiences without any aid from external sources or stimulus. Using one’s imagination in order to create mental images that represent experiences one may have felt across all the five senses. Defining mental imagery can be done by exemplifying. In reading a book, the human essentially only registers black marks on a page. But the brain interprets these markings as letters, which form words and sentences that produce meaning (Brosch 135). The meaning is created using the experience, knowledge and impressions the reader has accumulated during
a lifetime. This means that the mental imagery that an individual produce in their heads is vastly different than other individuals.

Mental imagery relies heavily on interpretation because everyone interprets what they read in a novel differently. Emily T. Troscianko writes in her text that “the suggestion that there’s plenty of detail in our mental images but the details fade quickly as we interrogate them is simply a misunderstanding of the indeterminacy thesis, which doesn’t state that what we imagine can never be detailed, but simply that it needn’t always be: indeterminacy is a capacity, not a constraint” (187). This regards the debate about mental imagery that has been studied previously. The descriptions provided by the author and the interpretation of the reader need to find a middle ground for the reader to grasp and produce a mental image that resembles what the author had in mind. The reader has an active role in interpreting what the author is trying to convey in the text. Visual adaptations, as in movies or games, remove the individual’s capacity for visualization as the story is showed in someone else’s understanding of the material, meaning your brain will not have the opportunity to create images to match the words on the page.

When reading *The Hobbit* by Tolkien (1937) for example, one can conjure up images of short, stout halflings and tall proud elves, cruel, evil orcs, and goblins as well as powerful and wise wizards. The subject of interpretation as to what the author is describing is very important to gauge what the author means without necessarily explicitly saying it. One person's mental image of a Hobbit could vastly differ from that of another. Adaptations of literary works, in a way, fill the void of interpretation as the images are constructed as mentioned earlier. What is required for the brain to register and produce images from words in a text? Renate Brosch discusses the problems of visualization as the difference between seeing and thinking (136). The mind needs to actively register and consider the words that mental imagery is created from instead of relying on passive reception.

The individual's mental image of a character, creature, or environment could easily be replaced within one's own mind by the one they have been shown in the adaptation. What the author has envisioned when creating the story and what is shown in the adaptation, is equally different from what the reader has
envisioned. This in turn provides the reader or viewer the opportunity to explore a world as well as help build it by making it interactive using social media (Boni 10). Forums, blogs, Facebook and Twitter etc. help the viewer interact with the medium as well as other viewers in together creating a collective image that corresponds with more and more individuals’ own mental imagery. The players assistance in helping the Dm build the world their playing in through exploration means that the world is different every time the game is played, even if it is the same adventure. Players will undoubtedly make different choices, with different characters with different personal goals, thus creating a unique world every single time.

When the DM describes a character, creature or environment to the player, the description might be completely different from what the player is expecting. The characterization process regarding the character sheets filled in by the players before playing contains different qualities that can be filled in using the numbers the players get from rolling dice, or in congruence with the DM, depending on what the player and DM find to be interesting. The numbers on the character sheets are the determinators that the players role dice against in order to accomplish tasks within the game, and these numbers can be altered on the DM’s behest when they feel it is necessary. There needs to be understanding between DM and player for the game to function. By using a critical lens, the player, can extrapolate meaning from the author or DM, words that they may not necessarily be saying. Thus, they try to figure out what the DM means instead of focusing on what they are saying (McLaughlin and DeVoogd 587). The relationship between DM and player can be summed up in that the DM starts describing the area the players are located in. What do the players see, hear, smell etc. The players in turn tell the DM what they wish to do in that area. If the players leave that area, it is the DM’s responsibility to describe the journey as it unfolds.

2.3 The World of Dungeons & Dragons

*The Dungeon Master’s Guide*, which is the primary source this study will be using, is a creation tool for the hugely popular tabletop role-playing game that requires several players to be played properly. All participants, save one, will assume the role of players. The last participant will act as the “Dungeon Master”
or DM for short. The DM acts as the author whereas the players act as the readers. The DM starts the game and acts as narrator; thus it is the DMs responsibility to “set the scene” for the players. The *Dungeon Master’s Guide* is the main instrument used by the DM, whereas the source the players will need is the *Player’s Handbook*. This book details the character creation aspect of the game, as it gives the player all the tools, they need to create the character that they would like to play. Everything from class, race, gender, and background is detailed in the book in a streamlined way that gives the player all the information they need to play it. Now, it is not completely necessary for the players to use the *Player’s Handbook*, especially in a classroom setting. This study will exemplify how to play the game in various ways that could be viable in a classroom, without the use of the *Player’s Handbook*.

Much of the 1980s regarding the “Satanic panic” stems from, as mentioned previously, out of fear of the unknown. The groups responsible for stigmatizing *D&D*, as well as other forms of entertainment deemed “Satanic” by said groups tried to stifle these works through censorship by completely removing them. This course of action can of course (and in this case, did) have an adverse effect, making the “forbidden” forms of entertainment more enticing, especially for younger people. Using *D&D* as an example regarding the discussion of censorship can be very beneficial when it comes to discussing formal/informal language as well as enforcing the moral values that are prevalent in the cultural community. The National Agency for Education emphasizes the importance of language and learning in the freedom of conversation, meaning the opportunity to speak relatively freely through “the ability to express oneself and communicate in English in speech and writing” (Syllabus).

*Dungeons & Dragons* started a unique trend in tabletop storytelling as there were no visual elements as was prevalent in regular board games, which meant that the only visual stimuli, excluding the people one played with, were the ones you created yourself. *Dungeons & Dragons* itself has helped as well as inspired several adaptations and spawned numerous spinoffs that more concretely depict the events, environments and characters portrayed within the game, thus further solidifying its canonical place within modern fiction and fantasy. *Dungeons & Dragons* functions in that the DM is trying to create a world in which every player can see, hear and taste the same thing, which is by itself impossible as according to the reader response
theory, everyone interprets sensory input in different ways. The difference is that in D&D it is entirely set within the participants’ minds (unless using miniatures, game boards, maps etc.), as the players cannot really experience those things, save mentally. Every participant needs to work together in trying to make the world as real as possible with what they are given. D&D is not a game one “wins” as an individual, it is an adventure that depends on teamwork (Peterson 204).

This study will discuss the creative writing aspect of world-building as it is its largest cornerstone in D&D. The creation of an imaginary world that relies on the imagination of author and reader alike is alluring and when done right can be vital for students. This is because it functions as a sort of escapism that draws you in and in many cases provides you with necessary philosophical or practical tools that may help you in the real world. This contrasts with the standard competitive gameplay where there is a clear goal and way to win (Peterson 168-69). The goal of Dungeons & Dragons is to play the game, which sets it apart from regular games. Many players may play to level up their characters and become more powerful, but you can still play as that same character even after you have reached the maximum level available.

Immersion in a story means to be “sucked” into the story, not just seeing what happens in a text, not just projecting their minds into the story world, but feeling it, living it (Brosch 139). Fantasy and science-fiction always strive to push the boundaries of what is real and what is not. Fantasy as a genre is particularly broad, as it stems from the imagination. There it can contain virtually anything. Science-fiction on the other hand tends to have a closer gap between it and the real world. Wolf details three types of immersion in his text, the first being the physical immersion of self, such as riding an attraction in a theme park. The second being sensual immersion, meaning that one is immersed by virtual reality, a headset of some kind that provides the data necessary directly. This type of immersion relates directly to the novel Ready Player One by Ernest Cline (2011) which deals with exactly that, a headset that lets the user enter a different, albeit virtual world. The third type deals with conceptual immersion which relies on imagination (Wolf 48). What is necessary to achieve conceptual immersion regards to the level of detail and interesting plot points that engages the consumer of the medium. The importance of a story to follow sets a fictional world apart from other forms of media, for instance newspapers. Gannon Youakim discusses in his text the concept of
controlling the narrative, “[t]hrough agency, immersion, and interaction, they better understand the narrative of the session – and narratives as a whole” (34). Through control of the narrative, one better understands the narrative, which creates immersion of the story itself, which in turn facilitates creativity.

2.4 World-Building in the EFL Classroom

This study will, as mentioned, cover the various applications for world-building and role-playing games in the classroom as a means of cognitive learning. A role-playing game can easily be modified to cover a variety of subjects. The trick, to make it viable, is to create what is known as a “homebrew” adventure. This concept deviates from the premade adventures available for purchase in that it relies on the DM to create the adventure themselves. Depending on the subject it could be important to tweak certain aspects of the rules of the gameplay of that game in order to add realism. Playing a role-playing game in a classroom setting could be beneficial for the students in several ways, not just language acquisition, social skills, and teamwork. The curricular documents Swedish upper-secondary school presents the need for contextual meaning, “[s]tudents should be given the opportunity, through the use of language in functional and meaningful contexts, to develop all-round communicative skills. These skills cover both reception, which means understanding spoken language and texts, and production and interaction, which means expressing oneself and interacting with others in speech and writing, as well as adapting their language to different situations and recipients” (Natl. Ag. f. Ed.). The meaningful contexts described can be included within a role-playing setting, as the all-round production or language can aid students in familiarizing themselves with the target language on a higher level. Every skill mentioned in the aforementioned quote is used and trained through constant usage within a role-playing game. But it can also act as a catalyst for the acquisition of factual knowledge as well, historical, religious, mathematical etc. The religious aspect of *Dungeons & Dragons* has long been discussed as it, after its initial inception in the 1970s, created a moral panic, which has been discussed previously (Laycock 49).
The importance of visualization shines through as the importance of the game diminishes if the players are unable to visualize and immerse themselves in the game to gain the most out of it. Therefore, if the DM decides to create a “Homebrew” adventure in a realistic world that draws parallels to our own, it is very important that the DM takes their time to really build up a credible world that the students, or players, can follow along in. This to ensure that the players’ interests do not wane throughout. The problem of maintaining the players’ interests and motivation for the game will be discussed in detail later in the study. Using storytelling as a collaborative tool in an EFL classroom can be beneficial (Hergenrader 18). It is also here that the teacher can create a multimodal experience for the students by making it a collaborative effort in creating an adventure or setting within the game together. The process can include various technological efforts from the class that bring it all together, including map creation, character creation and cosplay (dressing up as characters), to name a few, to engage every student as much as possible (Broche 588).

Joseph Laycock discusses in his book about the moral panic that D&D inspired during the early stages of the history of the game. There was a large outcry among religious groups considering the apparent idolatry and Satan-worship included in the game (10). Introducing the discussion in an EFL classroom as to why religious groups had such a negative reaction to a fantasy game all relates to the moral panic that was starting to gain traction in the world. This discussion can prove beneficial in an EFL classroom through different perspectives. One perspective is through censorship. The language itself is centered around a set number of words and letters that when used improperly can offend people or groups of people. Through the understanding of the history of uses, especially when it relates to religion, which has always been a sensitive subject for some, it can prove beneficial in teaching students not to use certain words or phrases in order to help them navigate the language more efficiently. Another perspective in why the discussion could be beneficial is through the understanding of history. Especially when it comes to civil rights movements as well as religion. Nowhere was this moral panic more prevalent than in the United States as that is where the game was first introduced in the 1970s, but also because of the growing alternative scene in music, film, and games in general. Concerned parents would use the game as a catalyst for their agenda in banning everything and anything that deviated from their own Christian values (11). Some people may want to
engage in an activity known as “LARP,” meaning live-action role-playing. This activity consists of people dressing up as their characters and pretending to be them and conducting adventures and/or battles (Tresca 182). LARP can be done in different settings, the least not being the world of Tolkien. This shows not only the immense popularity of the fantasy genre, but also the desire for people to actively engage in and to as great an extent as possible, become characters from their favorite stories. Michael J. Tresca continues to discuss how LARPs have always been a part of our lives, as people throughout history have found entertainment in pretending to be someone else. Drawing inspiration from someone else’s world is essentially acting in a play without rehearsed lines. Therefore, there is a freedom to how one plays one’s character. This sparks the imagination and provides visual assistance in envisioning how the world looks around you, if everyone around you is actively participating in a shared mental imagery of sorts. This ties into the concept of shared world-building as every participant engages in actively trying to create and maintain a world together.

The fictional world might work as a place where you can pick up relevant social skills as well as factual knowledge that can aid you in your daily life. Learning through fiction can absolutely be done when applied correctly in a classroom, as many students will gravitate to this form of learning. Using the game to increase social skills, means it is imperative to actively participate and get to know your character, as it is necessary to understand your character in order to play (Nousiainen 87).

Role-playing games tend to lean on a narrative structure, which is why they should be applicable to an EFL classroom (Youakim 21). Depending on the focus of the game session, a party of players can accomplish any number of things, especially regarding the English classroom, as the themes and topics of the game being played can be about virtually anything. Therefore, the game can be a gateway into discussing important topics which is required by the syllabus (Natl. Ag. f. Ed.). The concept of immersion presents itself differently for different people.

One of the more successful tropes to accomplish this is the monomyth, or the hero’s journey, in which a protagonist character overcomes obstacles throughout a story to save the day (Campbell). The
hero’s journey as a literary storytelling convention has come under increasing scrutiny as of late, as most of these stories have pertained to a male, and often Caucasian heroic figure. This can be considered problematic in that people that do not fit into these categories do not feel represented. As the social roles in society are ever evolving, it makes sense that these tropes need to be re-evaluated and change as well (Gallagher 4). Fictional writing containing more diversity and more modern ideas of sexuality are expanding rapidly, therefore bridging the gap between genders and races at an exponential rate. Regarding these ideas and concepts, Dungeons & Dragons has helped pave the way, notably through the option of playing as any gender or race one wants. In the Player’s Handbook there is a detailed description of the races and classes one can choose from when creating a character. Throughout the history and various editions of the game, there has never been any differences made between genders, as the power level of a character is determined by the level of the chosen class (Player’s Handbook 45). The races detailed in the book are fantastical creatures and serve to help determine the background and personality of the character.

The game was first introduced for a younger audience, as children and teenagers were the first to gravitate toward it. Mainly boys were attracted to the game at the time. The interesting part of the game considering gender, is that many boys tend to play female characters. This raises an interesting notion as to why so many boys chose to play as female characters instead of male, when the dominant culture during the time of the game’s inception was so against it. Modern adaptations are trying to combat the lack of diversity in film by switching genders and ethnicities on selected characters within visual media. The importance being, as mentioned above, that everyone should have a chance to feel represented and included (Natl. Ag. f. Ed.).

3 Analyzing the World of Dungeons & Dragons

The wizard prepares his spells, the bard sings an inspirational song, the cleric prays, and the barbarian starts to rage. A party consists of several players that together combine various abilities and skills
in order to complete the missions they are tasked with within the world. Be it to climb a mountain in order to slay a dragon terrorizing the lands or delve into the deepest dungeons in order to retrieve lost riches, the world and its possibilities are seemingly endless. The party travels the land, fighting monsters and gaining fame until the final monster appears to give the party one final challenge.

*Dungeons & Dragons* is famous for containing a fantasy setting where players and non-player characters alike wield magic in various shapes and forms (Crawford 9). If the subject at hand is for instance history, and the DM wants the students to be engaged in an actual historical event, some things will have to be changed. The magical aspects will have to be removed, depending on how the DM wants to run the game. There are variations to this as well. The point is that the DM has control over the setting of the game to such a degree that they can create a world that is historically correct but insert the player characters into it wielding abilities and magic without removing all too much of the realism of the story. This alludes to the older concept of *Wargaming* that has been prevalent throughout history as a means of escapism and entertainment in general, which entails simulating battles and campaigns in history in a gaming setting (Laycock 54).

3.1 Storytelling in Creating a *Dungeons & Dragons* World

This analysis will delve into the depths of *D&D* and role-playing in general as a medium of mental imagery and its possible usage in an EFL classroom. As with most media, role-playing games usually strictly adhere to narrative structure (Wolf 2). From a transmedial perspective *D&D* have led a rich explosion of varying narratives, from books to movies and animated series. Henry Jenkins mentions in his article that “[a] good ‘world’ can sustain multiple characters (and their stories) and thus successfully launch a transmedia franchise” (Jenkins). This is especially evident regarding the recent film adaptation along with famous actors and content creators’ interest in the franchise. There are of course exceptions to the rule as a role-playing game can be altered in a variety of ways to tailor it to the group’s needs and wants. One can remove the narrative structure completely and just have the environment and objects in place for the players to interact with. A game played in that way presents some challenges as the world will lack a certain living
element. If the only other characters the players can converse with are lifeless “duds,” it would be difficult to progress as finding information on what they are supposed to do would be harder to find.

*The Dungeon Master’s Guide* provides, in detail, all the tools that the DM needs to create a world containing everything necessary for the game to function. The world of *Dungeons & Dragons* is vast; therefore, it is not difficult to use the rules and tools afforded within to create your own adventure. The book offers insight into the various deities, monsters and people that dwell within. However, choosing to use any of these is completely optional for any burgeoning DM as they are mainly guidelines and nothing one strictly must adhere to. The book stresses the importance of making the world “one’s own” in the opening pages as it is the DM’s responsibility to make sure everything fits and makes sense to the players (*DMG* 9). Interestingly, the next few pages of the book discuss the various pantheons and divine structures present in the game. Through the perspective of world-building, the various pantheons, religions and faiths all come together to create a system that is in constant flux, as many of these are in open rebellion against each other. Depending on the class that the player chooses they must adhere to a specific religious structure. This reveals another set of rules the player follows regarding how to conduct themselves within the world. There are always variables, but the idea of choosing to play for instance, druid, brings with it spiritualism and nature-based magic (Tresca 87). Thus making it easier for a player to create a character that is more attuned with nature if that is what the player wants.

Gods Inhabit the Land or Are Entirely Absent.

What if the gods regularly walk the earth? What if the characters can challenge them and seize their power? Or what if the gods are remote, and even angels never make contact with mortals? In the Dark Sun setting, the gods are extremely distant – perhaps nonexistent – and clerics rely instead on elemental power for their magic. – (*DMG* 10)

This offers interesting insight into how to create a game from a top-down perspective as it makes sense to start from the divine aspect, meaning creation mythos (*DMG* 10). Who created the world, and why? World-building in this way, considering the creation of the world, may simplify the process. For instance, in
Tolkien’s works, the world was sung into existence by the dominant gods, the Ainur, before being shaped by the lesser gods, the Valar. There are a variety of creation myths present in our own reality that could very easily serve as inspirational basis for creation myths within fictional worlds, which has been exemplified in numerous works by many authors. With the divine structure in place, it becomes easier to create the creatures inhabiting the world, as there often needs to be some relation between the creatures of the world and the gods. If the DM chooses to use the Greek pantheon as basis for the adventure, the creatures logically should reflect the mythos regarding that structure. Centaurs, harpies and hydars could be used as adversaries in this example.

When examining the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* in tandem with the *Player’s Handbook* there is an emphasis in alignment and religion. The chart for alignment dictates the personality traits of the character. For example, if a player chooses to create a character that is lawful good, the character needs to exhibit the traits that best exemplify that alignment. The same goes for chaotic and evil on the chart, which is included in Appendix A. The subject of religion and morality is an aspect that can be thoroughly examined when it comes to *D&D* as it is a very important part of the game. Certain classes within the game rely heavily on divine intervention and assistance in general. For instance, the Cleric draws most of their power from divine grace, which includes aiding their fellow players (PH 56-63).

For beginning DMs, using a premade adventure module as in *Curse of Stradh* relieves the DM of the pressure of creating a whole world from scratch (Perkins). Further down the line the DM can adjust the module at will or create a homebrew adventure for their players. In using a premade adventure module for a beginning DM it serves as a sort of “trial by fire,” in that the burgeoning DM learns while doing. In doing it this way it is easier for a DM to develop their own style of storytelling while not focusing on creation. There are several ways for a DM to gain proficiency in being a DM. The standardized version of learning to be a DM is through the way described earlier, but there are ways around it. Most DMs learn by themselves, but in an EFL classroom setting, the teacher could act as a sort of “Arch-DM,” using already learnt skills to further teach the students how to be DMs themselves.
Curse of Stradh as an example of a premade module of *D&D* is mainly focused on horror as the main villain is a vampire, whose aim is to entice the players into venturing deeper into the fictional nation of Barovia in order to corrupt them. Using a horror themed adventure module as the basis for example in this study arrives from the fact that the adventure itself is not exclusively horror themed. Meaning that the concept may appear to be strictly horror, but the elements that are drawn from that genre are very easily modified to lessen the fact. The characters and environments can be described by the *DM* in a way that removes the more frightening aspects of the module by for instance using funny voices or sound effects to lessen the effects. The *DM* can also forego or change specific elements that are especially horrific. But if the *DM* decides to use *Curse of Stradh* in its entirety, there are aspects that can prove valuable. The genre of horror is very common in that fear is an emotion most people can relate to, and using horror as the genre of choice may resonate with upper secondary school students on a broader note than if the adventure was a module consisting of mainly political intrigue instead of an exciting story regarding monsters. The players must resist the beckoning of Stradh in order to best him and successfully save Barovia from Stradh’s dark influence. In order to successfully play *Curse of Stradh* in an EFL classroom, the *DM* must acknowledge the themes of the game which leans toward the darker style in order to run an accessible game that every student can be a part of. This means the themes and overarching tones of the game should be considered, examined, explained and discussed with the students in order to run it. Storytelling is crucial within *D&D*, which means the teacher or student acting as *DM* has a responsibility towards the players in divulging any problematic themes and events that may unfold within the game.

3.2 Mental Imagery in the Service of World-building in *Dungeons & Dragons*

*Dungeons & Dragons* is a storytelling medium in the form of a cooperative role-playing game, and every person involved in the campaign must add some form of dedication in order to keep the game functioning. Everyone has their role to play. Players working within the framework presented to them by the *DM* are presented a world in which they must make choices. These choices merge with a storyline either created by or co-opted by the *DM* in order to present not only a world by itself, but a living world with a multitude of NPCs or Non-Player Characters for the players to interact with in any shape or form.
The concept of mental imagery, which has been defined and discussed earlier in this text, is a large point of inquiry of this text. It is also the main concept a player (and DM) in a game of D&D must understand and fulfill in order to play the game. A game of D&D is created, not only by the DM but to a large extent, the players. The DM’s role is of course to paint a picture, but it is the players who live in it. Therefore, it can be discussed who is running the game. The players make choices that guide the game forward, and it is the DM’s job to make that picture come to life through descriptions. These descriptions include terrain, characters, ambiance, sound etc. It can be described as the players and DM trying to connect their personal mental images to each other in order to reach a common consensus that works for everyone in the game.

Mental imagery and visualization all work in the service of immersion. A hallmark of good writing is the ability to make readers feel immersed into the world that is presented to them. By crafting a world rich in detail an author has the ability to captivate and exhilarate the reader to venture forth into that world. The created world must be produced with care, the readers may lose interest in the world (Wolf 204). As a collaborative storytelling game there are several ways that Dungeons & Dragons through mental imagery works in the service of World-building.

Player imagination contributes to the world-building process through imagining their characters, how they interact with the world described to them by the DM. This runs deep as the players’ imagination does not just stop at the characters’ overall appearance, but their mannerisms and motivations as well. Through visualizing the game world, players can form emotional connections with NPCs and the world in general through these interactions within the game, thus making it possible for players to use the game in a sort of therapeutic means (Bean 8). Consistency and continuity along with descriptive narration and setting creation is discussed further along within this text, as they require separate, more fleshed out sections. Through mental imagery the players’ creative thinking is stimulated which will help them, not only within the world, but outside of it as well. It helps the players to be able to visualize the world they are in order to solve puzzles and navigate challenges, which can inspire them to create truly innovative solutions to hard problems. This all relates to immersion which is highly prioritized when running a campaign in any
table-top role-playing game, especially one as large as *Dungeons & Dragons*. *D&D* is a shared experience which, through mental imagery can form a foundation for memorable moments and stories as well as serving the ongoing narrative of the game. The ongoing narrative is especially important to foster as a campaign of *Dungeons & Dragons* can take a very long time to complete. Thus fostering an environment that the players wish to return to is paramount. The world must lend itself to continuation, by facilitating a fun and interesting environment (Collins 363).

3.3 Game-specific Aspects of World-Building in *Dungeons & Dragons*

As discussed in previous sections, *Dungeons & Dragons* is very much a social game. To accomplish anything in the game, the players must interact with both each other and the world itself. Through world-building, the players and DM in congruence create the world together, but to gain the most out of the experience there is required a bit of self-reflection. This means that when creating your character for the game, the player is completely free in creating whatever character they want and then immersing themselves within it (PH 11). Again, the players are free to create a character in any way they see fit, provided they do so within the ruleset of the game. Therefore, the DM must approve of the choices and the step-by-step character creation guide in the rule books. Learning about socially constructed issues could be accomplished within the world in a way that separates the players from the issues themselves but at the same time experiencing them firsthand. Mental imagery lets the player live as someone separate from themselves, dealing with challenges and social issues through the eyes of a constructed character.

There are several game specific aspects of world-building in *D&D* which all play an important role in creating a campaign within the world to a certain extent. The subjects of gods and pantheons as well as alignment have been discussed previously therefore will be omitted from the following section. These sections of the text will give the reader of this text an overview of several of the important sections detailed in the game that all have their individual contributions to an EFL classroom, what students may gain from appreciating them. Many people struggle with social anxiety and *D&D* can be considered an outlet, where
one can go on adventures and experience social interaction through the guise of a wizard or barbarian warrior which separates the player from themselves. In the same way as acting can separate the person from a character and create space for them to be able to fully function as a social human being without the pressures of society. In this regard D&D is the ultimate escapism as the game provides the tools to create a whole fantasy world that one can live and navigate in. When Dungeons & Dragons was first released it was considered “uncool” and exclusively for unpopular kids on the lower end of the social echelon. The game was therefore very often played in secret and very exclusive for likeminded “nerds” if you will. Society has changed quite a bit over the last fifty years with the internet and social media taking over the world. Fantasy film adaptations have helped immensely in bringing the fantasy genre to the forefront of popular culture. Dungeons & Dragons has attracted a massive surge in popularity over the last ten years with its own film adaptations and spinoffs (Leitch 1). D&D acts differently regarding immersion than regular literature in that the player/reader is actively taking part in the story, inserting a character of their own creation.

The game features polyhedral dice which is a set of seven dice that the players will have to cast to determine success in their actions in game. This system can be tricky and hard to learn as there are many rules that govern the world. These dice include a four-sided, six-sided die, eight-sided die, ten-sided, twelve-sided, twenty-sided and one hundred-sided die. These have their own functions with the twenty-sided die acting as the primary. There are several more systems that can be adapted into role-playing games. Everything from using a couple of six-sided die all the way up to using a Jenga-tower as a system is possible. The most important of all the die is the abstract “I’m the Dungeon Master, and I said so.” The DM can use this “die” at will to retain complete control over the party and the game itself. This is a limiting factor but does not have to be as the customization options for the game allows for specialized gameplay. Meaning that technically there can be more than one DM or no DM at all, depending on how the teacher wishes to structure the project.

3.3.1 Magic and Supernatural Elements
Through the perspective of world-building, D&D is (usually) set in a high fantasy setting. Depending on whether the DM wants the magical system to operate as it is written within the guidebooks, magic is extremely prevalent. When creating a campaign setting for the players to work within, the rules and mechanics of magic must be established. Games other than D&D have different systems that govern how magic functions, and the DM must be aware of its functionality (DMG 24). There are differences between a high fantasy world and a low fantasy world. A high fantasy world takes place in an entirely original world, no matter the level of magic that is present. Lord of the Rings world of Arda is entirely original, therefore high fantasy. The same concept goes for the works of George R.R. Martin and A Song of Ice and Fire. On the other side of the spectrum, you can find the wizarding world of Harry Potter by J.K. Rowling. The story revolving Harry Potter takes place in our world where the author has added fantastical elements and magic to our already established world. The difference between high and low fantasy is up for debate, but this text operates under the previously states difference between the two (Simmonds). The other side of the debate argues for the difference between high and low fantasy to be between the usage of magic, therefore calling Harry Potter high fantasy whereas Lord of the Rings would be considered low fantasy as the level of magical elements between the two is highly skewed in Harry Potter’s favor.

The importance of the inclusion of magic in some shape has been well established throughout the years (Peterson 12). Nonetheless, magic does not have to be present at all for a work of fiction to be considered fantasy. The idea of creating things out of thin air, casting spells, or transforming objects adds a fantastical element that aids in the escapism that these works of fiction are relating to its readers. The concept of magic is fluid and works differently from author to author as well as reader to reader. In the world of D&D proper, the spell system is straight forward. There are hundreds of spells that characters can learn and use, some of which at a cost. There are generally three different components that are necessary to facilitate the casting of a spell, verbal, somatic and material. For instance, the spell Flame Strike, requires all three whereas the spell Destructive Wave only requires verbal. This all falls under the interest of the need for understanding from both player and DM as it can break the game quickly and make it difficult for the DM to control the game if the players can cast anything however they like. A modicum of study to grasp the
characters limitations and abilities is required. The success rate of casting spells, as with most everything related to the game is somewhat dependent on dice rolls. But taking under consideration that the modifiers on the players character sheets in congruence with the DMs all powerful will, the outcome of the dice rolls might fail or succeed regardless of how well the player rolls.

3.3.2 Monsters and Creatures

Monsters and creatures are an important part of the gaming experience in *D&D*, but again, it does not have to be. The foes the player party faces could be entirely human if the DM chooses, but if the DM uses a premade adventuring module the enemies in the game will to a large extent be non-human. The core rulebook *Monster Manual* that adheres to the various creatures and monsters and their “stat-blocks” can be modified at will and serve the DM however they like (4). A DM can choose to create their own bestiary, completely unique to their specific world. Using *Monster Manual* would make that process simpler as the DM can use preexisting stat-blocks to use for their unique creatures. Each monster or creature should have their own distinct traits and behaviors and should interact with the environment in varying ways. The game will lose its immersive appeal if every encounter is the same as the previous one. Therefore, making every encounter unique furthers the need for stimulation of mental imagery, as the descriptions will change every time.

A player might require support because of having a high level of social anxiety, the relaying of those emotions to their character may then be easier than uttering their concerns themselves. Anthony Bean argues that the players that are role-playing as heroes might feel more capable, stronger, and more resilient, making it easier for them to confront and deal with challenges (8). Thus, separating themselves from themselves and donning the guise of someone else in order to help themselves.

3.3.3 Adventuring Locations

If a DM chooses to create their own world, designing varying locations is important. Bustling cities, living forests, dark caves and dungeons, all serve to create an immersive experience (*DMG 99*). When the
DM describes these locals to the players, the key word is “detail.” DMs may want to focus on the visual, but including the other senses is equally important. Smell and sound in particular play a major role within the game. The players may hear sounds in the distance indicating an impending attack or smell a noxious gas that may end their lives if they do not flee. Each location should (if possible) have its own history and challenges and rewards to entice the players to move forward. The description of the locals through the DM to the players, aids the DM in creatively using the English language in order to find the words that best describes the area.

These aspects of the adventuring locations could inspire creativity in and of its own. Many people do not have the means to travel, and this could prove some sort of substitute. To experience the variety of locals through the eyes of a fictional characters, using mental imagery, the player could experience a whole new world, which could make the player could feel as if they are there. The description of adventuring locations is highly important when considering the importance of immersion as the locations the characters visit add to the overall “realism” of the game. The details of the DMs descriptions of a location invite players to immerse themselves and “forget” the material aspect of the game, i.e., that the players are currently sitting in a room talking (Boni 14).

3.3.4 Economy and Trade

Adventuring in the world of D&D is not exclusive to wandering around and clearing out dungeons. The freedom within the game is paramount in that players very well could choose to deviate completely from the adventure presented to them and for example, set up shop in a small village and sell general goods. The system of economics within the game is fairly fleshed-out with different currencies and exchange rates present (PH 143). Resources and currency are important to equip a character with the things they need in order to survive in the harsh world presented to them. There are poor regions and rich regions within the world of D&D, and the player can have a massive impact on the monetary aspect of the world by trading. Building empires if they will. That is the extent of the freedom within the game.
Mathematical principals could be made a focus of a campaign in that the players could assume roles of traders within the world. It could easily be made into a contest as to which player can become wealthiest within the game depending on what the aim of the game is. The DM could set up several trade routes and encourage the players to became active tradesmen, thus requiring the players to actively test their mathematical skill. The role of the dice could be exchanged with sound reasoning and thought, by explaining their aims within the game in the service of being savvy businessmen. By haggling and bartering through business dealings lets the students use the English language to express themselves toward gaining what they want. If the student were to start a business in order to deal with trade, in the same way as regular adventuring, through mental imagery they would gain understanding of the economic world of the game and pay thereafter.

3.3.5 Character Creation and Races

There is a variety of races and classes to choose from when creating a character. It is important to consider the race you choose, not only for the benefits that come with it, but also how races place within the world. If a player chooses the race Tiefling for instance, the player should be prepared to be disliked (PH 42). The Tiefling stems from demon kind and has a bad reputation. Therefore, it is important to understand how the race you choose will be interacted with within the world. The importance of knowledge of the game should reside within the teacher’s prevue. The concept of teaching students the entire rulebooks is not practical and would require too much time. That is why this study regards scaffolding and minimalism to be preferable.

The creation of a player character should be done carefully and considered on a deeper level. Mark Gallagher argues that the proto-typical ideals of masculinity have evolved over time and changed into a large series of templates, regarding the characters relationships with others as to what their societal role is (4). How far does the player want to stray from their own appearance and personality? What traits do they want to have, desirable or undesirable? Several aspects must be considered. The class they choose to accompany their race should reflect their character’s general personality and behavior. Archetypes exist for
this exact purpose. The elven ranger, the half-orc barbarian, the Tiefling warlock, all these archetypes are created because these races and classes go very well together when one considers the aspects of each category.

The most common archetypal roles are Tank, Healer and Damage Dealer. The Tank’s role is to draw enemy fire. The Healer’s role is to make sure that the other members do not die. Lastly, the Damage Dealer’s role is to output as much damage as possible onto enemy combatants. There are variations toward the roles of a party. These three main roles are considered the “Holy Trinity” of group compositions within role-playing games. This section is very important, especially when it relates to bringing D&D into a classroom setting in any form. According to the Curriculum, the work to prevent bullying is to be incorporated into the entire school system (Natl. Ag. f. Ed.). A large section of the subject of bullying relates to racism and sexism. Placing students into hypothetical situations (within the game) that deals with these subjects can help students relate. Within the Syllabus for English, it clearly states that the content of the course should relate to social, cultural, living conditions as well as varying thoughts, issues, events etc. Using these as markers for what the students should learn in the classroom, a DM could model the gaming experience after what is necessary. The various races that are prevalent in D&D make the world a multicultural melting pot that provides inclusion for everyone regardless of ethnicity, gender, background etc. This means that D&D is from a cultural standpoint highly accessible for anyone.

3.3.6 Character Backgrounds and Quest Hooks

In the background section of the Player’s Handbook, the player can choose and customize their character’s background. In doing this before the adventure the character’s background can be weaved into the overarching story presented by the DM. If a player for instance, chooses the background Urchin, meaning they spent their childhood on the streets of some city, the player has an avenue in which they have learned certain skills, lockpicking, pickpocketing etc. These skills could (with the DM’s permission) increase the overall skill score the character has. The background embedded within the story offers a connection between the player and their character and the world. It offers role-playing opportunities that
increases immersion and creates an interest for the player to become more invested within the world (PH 125). When analyzing the background section of the *Player’s Handbook*, this offers the player understanding of their characters personality and previous skills, and guides the players toward playability, meaning a way to actually play the character in a unique, entertaining and valuable way. Not necessarily as a useful member of the adventuring party, but perhaps comic relief or “dead-weight”.

### 3.3.7 Time and Calendar

There are systems in place that governs time and dates within the game (PH 181). The DM can choose to alter these systems at will. This could be a massively interesting storytelling tool, as the players could by some happenstances find themselves in an alternate dimension for a few minutes and when they return centuries could have passed. The implications of how this could be used to tell a story and to world-building in general are immense and requires consideration. Perhaps annual or recurring events or festivals could be presented to add shape and flavor to the narrative. The narrative structure regarding time helps the characters through what is called “down time.” During “down time,” players can learn new skills and procure new equipment over a period that does not take up an inordinate amount of actual gameplay time, thus furthering the adventure along.

### 3.3.8 Geography and Landscapes

Mapping the wilderness in a campaign requires understanding of world-building as the DM needs to make the world come alive through description (DMG 106). Adventuring as mentioned previously should be done in fleshed-out locals, but that should be true for larger landscapes as well. Terrain should shift from grassy planes to rocky cliffsides in order to keep the players on their toes. Mountain ranges, vast oceans, arid deserts (DMG 99), all of which and many more could in some shape or form be implemented in order to create a globetrotting adventure for the players. These vastly different regions should be described with their own flora and fauna (or lack thereof) in order to give shape to the world, again, depending on which level the DM wants the players to be aware of.
Considering the scope of the game, as the campaign can take place in everything from small villages all the way to massive forests, the object of the game is (again) to reflect on the details, especially from the DM’s point of view.

### 3.3.9 History and Lore

Developing a vast and rich lore will make the process of creating a world for the players to explore more interesting. Past conflicts and battles, ancient civilizations and other epic events that have taken place can provide insight into the current state of the world (DMG 9). Stories of legendary heroes or villains that are told within the world can inspire hope or fear within the players and give them reasons for acting the way they do. Lost knowledge can be found in deep dark caves that present the characters with opportunities or quests to undertake in order to gain more understanding.

The factors detailed above along with factors mentioned previously in the text, together form a collective source of information for the DM to choose from in order to help build their world. The rules and information present within the rulebooks of D&D are daunting, but because the DM has complete freedom to bypass or completely ignore the rules or core mechanics at will, creates a freedom of creation in a set fantasy world that is unique for this tabletop role-playing game. A DM has total control over the game world and could easily create a world that fits their needs, no matter what it pertains to. Considering the limited amount of time available for upper-secondary school classed regarding EFL learning, the DMs of each group’s role has to be limited, therefore it’s the teacher’s role to make sure the material is doable in a way that will not overwhelm the students.

*D&D* generally tends to focus on smaller parties of players traversing the environment on epic quests, but that does not limit the overall scope of the possibilities of the game. With some modifications on behalf of the DM, epic battles between massive armies can be fought, mountains can crumble, and the skies can fall. The possibilities are seemingly endless.
4 Implementing *Dungeons & Dragons* in the EFL Classroom

*Dungeons & Dragons* is a game that is played for the most part inside the participants’ minds. The DM has either created a world on paper or is using a premade adventure published by the creators of the game. The only thing the players are required to have is their character sheet, which mainly consists of one or a few pieces of paper containing the information about the character they are playing. The DM spends the entirety of the game relaying information to the players about what they see when they enter a new space and what happens in a combat setting etc. The players will encounter countless foes in varying shapes and sizes and gain experience points that allows them to level up and grow stronger to take on more powerful foes and so on.

Considering the tools needed, i.e., pen, paper and die, this removes the need for digital competences that game-related pedagogy usually requires. The material required can be acquired through school sanctions of personal acquisition, depending on what deals have been struck, if any. Most games used for learning, especially when it pertains to older students, usually require digital tools. *D&D* only requires the physical tools to function. In that case the teacher does not have to worry about issues regarding digital tools that is a major problem when discussing digital based learning in general, and game-based learning (Nousiainen 91). *D&D* was originally meant to be played with only analogue tools but can be converted into digital as well, this because when the game was first released, the analogue option was the only option. But over the years since the original release, digital aids have slowly been implemented. There are several digital aids that can be used. The website *D&D Beyond* for example, is a highly detailed platform that allows the participants of a game to play online or using various tools within that system depending on the need. Keeping your character sheet online, not being forced to keep track of several pieces of paper, access to books without having to carry everything with you. By making use of the digital platforms available, the players can actively discuss and reflect on everything from the comfort of their own home, albeit the game functions more cohesively by gathering in the same place, therefore the game works better when played in person.
In the theory-section of this text, religion as a point of contention was discussed briefly, including the concept of the “satanic panic” that was prevalent in the 1980s. The important thing to remember is that D&D is a game. A game that is fictional and is not meant to “corrupt” the youth of the world. The game works as a simulation or escapism. Children engage in simulations on a regular basis, in that they are playing games (Laycock 16). The Swedish equivalent regarding the “satanic panic” was expressed in much the same way as in the US, but to a lesser degree. The main focus was regarding evil music, such as heavy metal“ music, that was deemed evil and corruptive.

There are several gaming systems, spanning several different worlds that would take up far too much space within this study to cover. The discussion regarding the pedagogical applications of tabletop role-playing will therefore focus on the system in D&D. The game system used for Dungeons & Dragons is intricate with many fine-tuned rules that would take up an inordinate amount of time to explain to the students to play. Therefore, this study argues that to play a tabletop role-playing game with a full class, D&D needs to undergo changes to function in a classroom setting. There are a multitude of ways a DM can tweak the rules to make it more accessible. Only using one type of dice or changing the character sheets to make it more streamlined and accessible to the students may be a good idea. As the game utilizes several varying dice, removing the need to learn how they all function might become necessary, this because of the time constraints that limit the time available to learn the rules. Removing some of the dice is just one example of how to tweak the game in order of streamlining. Another viable option would be to split the class up into smaller groups and assigning premade roles and characters to them to grasp the game more comprehensively. Playing a full-sized D&D game in a full classroom would be next to impossible with the time allotted for lessons as every character needs to be able to play the game, which translates into a long period of time for most students to just sit and wait, which is not ideal.

The narrative structure of Dungeons & Dragons is very important to consider, especially if the game is to be implemented in any shape or form in a classroom setting. Along with the rule system, narrative must be taken into consideration when constructing the infrastructure of the world the players will inhabit (Wolf
Dungeons & Dragons is constructed in a way that let’s all the participants create the world together through a collaborative effort, as explained through the Dungeon Master. Every participant has their own responsibilities as they navigate the world in front of them. Variations exist where there is no need for the Player’s Handbook, especially when considering the quantity of players included within an EFL classroom. One idea could be to simply forgo the book and create characters for the students instead of having to go through the rigorous process of detailing the rules to them as that may take up an inordinate amount of time. Therefore, a prudent thing to start the exercise is to divide the class up into smaller groups, and in the process, scaffold the coming project by detailing how it is going to work. Provide detailed instructions for the individual DMs of the class, along with separate details for the players in what the goal of the game is, as well as what every individual role is. Thus, creating a simplified version of the game that the students have a chance to engage in. The teacher can hand out premade characters or guide them in making simplified characters themselves.

When explaining the rules to the students, it is imperative that everyone understands the rules to an extent that they can independently run the game without too much supervision. It may also be a good idea to have the groups document the progress of the groups. The teacher could at this point present the modified rule set to the students, that should be significantly slimmed down. If the teacher has decided to create their own adventure, the DM of each group must be informed separately to best be able to guide the players through the game, depending on the structure. Accomplishing this could be tricky, and the role of DM for each group must be considered and defined very acutely. This is because the DM effectively is “God” within the game world, and it could lead to conflict if the DM conducts themselves in a way that is not preferred by the rest of the group. The DM still needs to treat the players with respect and understanding. The challenge here being how the teacher deals with this type of power dynamic in the classroom.

The game promotes cooperation to a great extent, and it is very important as well as valuable to be able to communicate with everyone in the groups in order to run the game to as great an extent as possible. To accomplish this, it is imperative that everyone is on board with the concept. Starting with a lesson
detailing how the game is going to be played, and thoroughly explaining how the rules work along with how information on the world is imperative. Including a project of this magnitude in an EFL classroom would require a large amount of preparation and dedication to be able to pull it off. An English 6 or 7 classroom would be the most likely candidate for a successful run as that is at the very end of the students’ upper-secondary education, and therefore stands to reason that the level of proficiency is at its highest. As D&D is a group activity, the Syllabus for English 6 in an EFL classroom details that the students should come out from the activity having expanded their oral and written proficiency. The Syllabus contains all the knowledge requirements that the students need to pass the course, which include specific areas that could be implemented with D&D. Gannon Youakim discusses, “[t]he inclusion of RPGs into a curriculum might offer students who learn differently a chance to succeed while still teaching them the same values of a traditional classroom” (14). As students learn differently, role-playing games grants them an opportunity to learn on their own terms while retaining the required sections from the curriculum. Playing a role-playing game of this sort helps guide the player to use their language skills in a different way, meaning that the players need to communicate in a varied way to detail what their character is doing in the game, if the students do not engage with the game, the activity might fail.

There are several components within the game world that can be applied to the EFL classroom, as the game promotes not only the means to expand one’s vocabulary through cooperation and teamwork, but also the implications of real-world issues that can be explored. The teacher may want to discuss hot button topics that are relevant in the real world, such as race, gender, politics etc. Including those aspects in the game is doable as there for example could be tensions between races within the game world, or perhaps a non-player character is being discriminated against because of their gender.

Incorporating necessary devices to fit the game in general toward an EFL classroom can be done in several ways. The game itself is as mentioned before, a social activity, which requires speaking. This in tandem with creating vocabulary exercises in congruence with actual gameplay can increase the vocabulary skills of the students. Holding reflective discussions regarding the game in the target language encourages
and reinforces learning in that the students must actively reflect on what has happened throughout the session and evaluate. Writing activities can easily be implemented as well. Students can be encouraged to keep a journal, detailing what they have accomplished progressively, through which critical reading of the game provides the students with a forum for reflection and analysis (McLaughlin and DeVoogd 587). Problem-solving and critical thinking are generally seen as highly important in a role-playing game as there no doubt will be difficult puzzles and hindrances throughout the adventure. The game encourages teamwork, which is extremely important. By actively discussing possibilities and courses of action within the game, players can foster a camaraderie with their classmates to move forward. The gamification aspect of D&D brought into the classroom can prove very fun (Youakim 35).

This adventure module has seen some revisions over the years, as the first incarnation of the adventure was entitled Ravenloft was released in 1983. Curse of Stradh in its current incarnation is tweaked to fit into the updated rules of the fifth edition of Dungeons & Dragons. The adventure is set in a dark and gloomy land known as Barovia. An immortal vampire that is created in the likeness of Bram Stoker’s Dracula, the dreaded vampire lord of Transylvania. The adventurers must band together to defeat Stradh, who taunts them along the way. This adventure is considered one of the best written modules, which explains its enormous popularity (Thompson). The players must traverse Barovia in search of the tolls they will need to defeat Stradh, which means fighting foes and creating alliances, which could be challenging.

There are several options regarding campaign setting in an EFL classroom, but toward the end of the book it contains a shorter adventure, Death House, that is much more suitable for use in a classroom as it can be played in just a few short sessions. Death House leads the players through a haunted house of sorts and has them solving riddles and searching for clues on what the haunting consists of, as well as how to stop it (COS 211). The module acts as a sort of precursor to the main campaign itself, and lets the players get to know their characters in a controlled setting. The module, much like the entirety of the campaign book, contains maps, environments, and general information of what non player characters know, as well as how they speak and their general mannerisms, this for the DM to be able to role-play these characters without all too much effort. Using Death House in an EFL classroom raises some interesting questions regarding
content warnings as the module deals with death and other taboo topics in various ways, and therefore needs to be discussed with the students in some way beforehand.

To practically apply D&D to an EFL classroom, is to divide the class up into smaller groups and assign them specific roles. To do this as fair as possible, one idea is to draw names and act accordingly. The roles could be ready made characters for a speedier introduction, depending on the level in which the game is going to be played, or perhaps assigning archetypal roles of a role-playing game for each player. Splitting up the class into groups of four and letting them choose the roles for themselves is also an option, as they might feel it grants them more influence into the choice, and not compelled to do it in a certain way. This is not to say that there needs to be a combative element to the game, as it can focus entirely on diplomacy, intrigue and speechcraft. The game is highly customizable and provides detailed instructions on how to create a game based on what the need is.

5 Conclusion

There are several aspects to consider when discussing role-playing games in the classroom, the importance of understanding the relationship between mental imagery and how to bring it all together in an EFL classroom. A successful writer creates a story that figuratively “sucks” the reader in and lets them experience the world before them through projecting their constructed mental images into the world. This study has provided a few examples as to what is required to accomplish this. This study has discussed the applications of D&D in and outside the EFL classroom. To run a campaign with students the DM must be prepared to adapt the game to fit the aims of the class. Several ways to accomplish this can be implemented, as in removing specific systems from the game to facilitate focus on certain subjects and objectives. Changing settings, locations, lore, currency etc. to fit the reasons for the game could prove beneficial in teaching students’ certain subjects through gamification.

Practically implementing D&D into a classroom can prove difficult, but there are several ways to accomplish it. First and foremost, the teacher (or DM) would have to make sure the game is tailored to the
class itself. This means that if the class consists of completely new players, the rules must be explained in detail, meaning the rules must be simplified to shave off the time it would require to accomplish this. If a teacher does take the time to actively create and implement a streamlined version of a role-playing game, no matter which one they choose, as mentioned, there are clear benefits that may make it worth the extra time.

As mentioned in the text, running a full-fledged D&D campaign with a full class is highly difficult. One solution would be to split a class up into smaller groups and assigning each group a DM or have them rotate between sessions. The DM would then be responsible for that session, meaning that they would have a larger amount of control. If the title rotates between sessions, a DM might be less inclined to derail the game with their classmates.

Understanding how mental imagery and visualization work can benefit students in EFL classrooms in more ways than one. Creatively, students can expand their horizons in several avenues, social sciences, economics, history etc. Just by playing the game, students must solve (at times) complex puzzles in order to get ahead, and as mentioned in previous sections, these puzzles can be adapted to fit the criteria of the curriculum for that particular subject. Students can gain and retain a higher level of social skill by playing D&D as the game encourages students to participate in team-oriented activities.

The gamification aspect of D&D in the classroom is sought after by students, therefore the concept of integrating schoolwork into a game setting that can be played in a classroom can be beneficial. Skills in speaking, writing, reasoning, vocabulary as well as a spattering of others, are prevalent within the game, which will give the players incentive to continue playing and exploring the world.

Playing Dungeons & Dragons is very possible in an EFL classroom. Using a premade adventure that has been altered according to what the DM desires to teach in the classroom can be done provided the teacher prepares. A premade adventure would be the most straightforward way to go in order to simplify the process as the adventure is already created, but for the more experienced teacher, a custom game is also possible. Scaffolding the gameplay and engaging with students directly and as intensively as possible will
ensure that the students gain access to the games rules in a way that makes it comprehensive to students of upper secondary school.

Researching how D&D can be utilized in an EFL classroom can be done in the future in several ways. Conducting a study as to the actual results of running a campaign in an EFL classroom would be the obvious way to go, as this study is merely hypothetical. Therefore, if a future study were to practically implement what has been found in this study, the results would be very interesting to review. Another course of research regarding D&D would be in direct comparison with literary work in the fantasy genre specifically, meaning a study comprised of discussing adaptation and inspiration. Another area could be to investigate immersion in a practical sense, outside of the EFL classroom in studying how immersion works through actual gameplay.

This study has discussed the benefits along with drawbacks of using Dungeons & Dragons in an EFL classroom, but are there any significant benefits to using the game in a non-EFL setting? There are several subjects that can be covered. Mathematics is a significant one regarding the use of dice in the game. The roll of the die is integral to playing the game as the rolls you make determine the success or failure of your intended action, therefore being able to swiftly add or subtract numbers to or from your dice rolls helps speed up the game and not grind to a halt.

Principles of probability tends to guide a player’s actions in the game. Adding and subtracting numbers on a die is one thing, but a player’s ability to assess the likelihood of an outcome of said die roll often comes to the forefront. If a player states their intention in completing a task and asks the DM for the difficulty rating, if the DM is forthcoming in giving up said difficulty rating, the player then must gauge the likelihood of success based on their ability scores. This can deter a player from completing or even attempting an action out of fear of failure.

The subject of history can be broached in the same manner as a campaign setting can be set in a historical setting. This again is left to the DM’s discretion as the world can be adjusted and adapted to fit the subject matter. Say for instance that a history teacher wants to discuss medieval Europe using a short
campaign set in Dungeons & Dragons, the necessary changes that would have to be made would revolve
firstly around removing the fantastical elements from the game, mainly magic and non-human characters. To
simulate a real physical location in medieval Europe, the DM could easily swap out names for locations and
NPCs in order to make it fit. The learning curve or the students would in this case be lowered as well
because several systems from the core rule set of the game would be removed. If the teacher aims for the
campaign to be focused on medieval life, the combat system would be removed as well, making the game a
strictly social experiment, thus in a way, guiding the student in focusing solely on interaction, intrigue and
general life and its barebones mechanics remaining within the game. The DM can outside of removing role-
playing elements to fit their aims adapt certain elements within the game instead. The game itself can be
adapted to fit several subjects at the same time. Emily Gaudette details in the article “The Educational Value
of Dungeons & Dragons” that chemistry can become alchemy, world history can become lore, and
mathematics can be applied to the dice-rolls (Gaudette). The game is meant to draw in and encourage
intellectualism.
Works Cited


Brosch, Renate. “What We ‘See’ When We Read: Visualization and Vividness in Reading Fictional Narratives.” *Cortex*, vol. 105, 2018, pp. 135-143.


Appendix A Alignment chart and explanation

The alignment chart serves to help the player guide their character by using a moral archetype. Certain classes one can choose is better matched with certain alignments, but it isn’t required. For instance, the Paladin class is best matched with the Lawful Good alignment as the class is best known as a true law-abiding citizen who seeks nothing but justice and the common good of the people. The rogue class is best served paired with the Neutral alignment because the Rogue is best known as either a thief, assassin or both. The bottom row represents the varying types of “evil” alignments for characters, best used in describing the villains of the campaign the players are playing. These villains are typically NPC’s that the DM controls and serves as one of (if not THE) boss the players have to overcome in order to succeed. The degrees in which a character can be good or evil ranges as follows; a lawful character is straight-forward, seeking the true good outcome of every choice they make. A Neutral alignment does not really care in which way a certain task is done, if it reaches the goal, (The ends justifying the means). The chaotic side of the scale derives from the fact that the character is willing to commit horrible acts in pursuit of their goals. True Neutral (the center option) is the most selfish alignment as the character does not care about anything and only serves themselves.

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