Essay writing is an essential skill in many different content areas. Familiarizing students with the different parts of an essay is necessary at the secondary level, as students must learn to communicate effectively, organize ideas, and use evidence to support their arguments. Our board game, “Quest to the Teacher’s Desk,” is an interactive method of active engagement in the classroom which can be used at different skill levels, with different textual materials, to teach or review the different parts of an essay. It is a multimodal tool that fosters classroom collaboration and can be adjusted to support differentiated educational strategies.

The New London Group’s (1996) pedagogy of multiliteracies provides the foundation for our rationale for this board game. Since the NLG found that “there was not a singular, canonical English that could or should be taught anymore” (p. 63), educators need ensure students are learning actively in this new educational context. Our board game is a perfect method because games foster collaboration and healthy competition (in our case, the emphasis is not as much on “winning” as it is on having a completed essay by the end of the game). We were also inspired by the Think Literacy document “Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7-12 - English” (2005) which describes a strategy for the essay writing process. Our game fits with the suggestion to “provide students with a template to scaffold their understanding of a specific form of writing and help them organize information before writing a rough draft” (p. 42). In “Quest to the Teacher’s Desk”, students learn the components of an essay. With this knowledge, students can begin to create their own brought drafts. Think Literacy says that through these activities, students can learn to formulate and organize ideas clearly, build evidence, and connect texts to issues beyond personal experience (p. 42).

Our game can easily be adapted by teachers for different needs. The chosen passages and topics can come from a single text or from a number of sources familiar or new to the students. Our game can be used as a review and study guide as well as a low-stakes opportunity to ‘test out’ essay ideas. Teachers may use the students’ progress in the game as diagnostic or formative assessment to evaluate their current understanding of the essay writing process. As a follow-up activity, a teacher may lead a class discussion about how the students learned from the game, and may use samples of draft work to help polish key parts of an essay.

This game is a beneficial way to help students learn or review essay writing, a topic which some students may hesitate to embrace. Students are actively involved in kinaesthetic learning and collaborating with a small amount of competition. Students can play independently or in teams, but either way they must collaborate with a larger group. This game has been created with adolescents in mind as an activity to increase motivation and lead to further class discussion about what a great essay looks like and why they are so significant to student success.

References

The New London Group. (1996, April). A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 60-93.

Think Literacy. (2005). English, Grades 10-12. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/studentsuccess/thinkliteracy/files/ThinkLitEnglish10-12.pdf