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EDUCATIONAL GAMES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING

Language learning is hard work ... Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work.

Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part and in order to do so must understand what others are saying or have written, and they must speak or write in order to express their own point of view or give information.

The need for meaningfulness in language learning has been accepted for some years. A useful interpretation of 'meaningfulness' is that the learners respond to the content in a definite way. If they are amused, angered, intrigued or surprised the content is clearly meaningful to them. Thus the meaning of the language they listen to, read, speak and write will be more vividly experienced and, therefore, better remembered.

If it is accepted that games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language, then they must be regarded as central to a teacher's repertoire.

Language learning is a hard task which can sometimes be frustrating. Constant effort is required to understand, produce and manipulate the target language. Well-chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow students to practise language skills. Games are highly motivating since they are amusing and at the same time challenging. Furthermore, they employ meaningful and useful language in real contexts. They also encourage and increase cooperation.

Games are highly motivating because they are amusing and interesting. They can be used to give practice in all language skills and be used to practice many types of communication.

There is a common perception that all learning should be serious and solemn in nature, and that if one is having fun and there is hilarity and laughter, then it is not

really learning. This is a misconception. It is possible to learn a language as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. One of the best ways of doing this is through games.

There are many advantages of using games in the classroom:

1. Games are a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class.
2. They are motivating and challenging.
3. Learning a language requires a great deal of effort. Games help students to make and sustain the effort of learning.
4. Games provide language practice in the various skills- speaking, writing, listening and reading.
5. They encourage students to interact and communicate.
6. They create a meaningful context for language use.

Using Games

Many experienced textbook and methodology manuals writers have argued that games are not just time-filling activities but have a great educational value. W. R. Lee holds that most language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms (1979:2). He also says that games should be treated as central not peripheral to the foreign language teaching programme. A similar opinion is expressed by Richard-Amato, who believes games to be fun but warns against overlooking their pedagogical value, particularly in foreign language teaching. There are many advantages of using games. "Games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely" (Richard-Amato 1988:147). They are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings (Hansen 1994:118). They also enable learners to acquire new experiences within a foreign language which are not always possible during a typical lesson. Furthermore, to quote Richard-Amato, they, "add diversion to the regular classroom activities," break the ice, "[but also] they are used to introduce new ideas" (1988:147). In the easy, relaxed atmosphere which is created by using games, students remember things faster and better (Wierus and Wierus 1994:218). S. M. Silvers says many teachers are enthusiastic about using games as "a teaching device," yet they often perceive games as mere time-fillers, "a break from the

monotony of drilling" or frivolous activities. He also claims that many teachers often overlook the fact that in a relaxed atmosphere, real learning takes place, and students use the language they have been exposed to and have practised earlier (1982:29). Further support comes from Zdybiewska, who believes games to be a good way of practising language, for they provide a model of what learners will use the language for in real life in the future (1994:6).

Games encourage, entertain, teach, and promote fluency. If not for any of these reasons, they should be used just because they help students see beauty in a foreign language and not just problems that at times seem overwhelming.

When to Use Games

Games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of a lesson. Yet, as Lee observes, a game "should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do" (1979:3). Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages. Rixon suggests that games be used at all stages of the lesson, provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen.

Games also lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners recall material in a pleasant, entertaining way. All authors referred to in this article agree that even if games resulted only in noise and entertained students, they are still worth paying attention to and implementing in the classroom since they motivate learners, promote communicative competence, and generate fluency.

Games have been shown to have advantages and effectiveness in learning vocabulary in various ways. First, games bring in relaxation and fun for students, thus help them learn and retain new words more easily. Second, games usually involve friendly competition and they keep learners interested. These create the motivation for learners of English to get involved and participate actively in the learning activities. Third, vocabulary games bring real world context into the classroom, and enhance students' use of English in a flexible, communicative way.

Therefore, the role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be denied. However, in order to achieve the most from vocabulary games, it is essential

that suitable games are chosen. Whenever a game is to be conducted, the number of students, proficiency level, cultural context, timing, learning topic, and the classroom settings are factors that should be taken into account.

In conclusion, learning vocabulary through games is one effective and interesting way that can be applied in any classrooms. The results of this research suggest that games are used not only for mere fun, but more importantly, for the useful practice and review of language lessons, thus leading toward the goal of improving learners' communicative competence.

- * Games are fun and children like to play them. Through games children experiment, discover, and interact with their environment. (Lewis, 1999)

- * Games add variation to a lesson and increase motivation by providing a plausible incentive to use the target language. For many children between four and twelve years old, especially the youngest, language learning will not be the key motivational factor. Games can provide this stimulus. (Lewis, 1999)

- * The game context makes the foreign language immediately useful to the children. It brings the target language to life. (Lewis, 1999)

- * The game makes the reasons for speaking plausible even to reluctant children. (Lewis, 1999)

- * Through playing games, students can learn English the way children learn their mother tongue without being aware they are studying; thus without stress, they can learn a lot.

- * Even shy students can participate positively.

- * A game must be more than just fun.

- * A game should involve "friendly" competition.

- * A game should keep all of the students involved and interested.

- * A game should encourage students to focus on the use of language rather than on the language itself.

- * A game should give students a chance to learn, practice, or review specific language material.

In an effort to supplement lesson plans in the ESL classroom, teachers often turn to games. The justification for using games in the classroom has been well demonstrated as benefiting students in a variety of ways. These benefits range from cognitive aspects of language learning to more co-operative group dynamics.

General Benefits of Games

Affective:

- lowers affective filter;
- encourages creative and spontaneous use of language;

- promotes communicative competence;
- motivates;
- fun

Cognitive:

- reinforces
- reviews and extends
- focuses on grammar communicatively

Class Dynamics:

- student centered
- teacher acts only as facilitator
- builds class cohesion
- fosters whole class participation
- promotes healthy competition

Adaptability:

- easily adjusted for age, level, and interests
- utilizes all four skills
- requires minimum preparation after development

Well-chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow students to practice language skills. This paper provides some sample games that can be used in the language classroom.

Why Use Games

Language learning is a hard task which can sometimes be frustrating. Constant effort is required to understand, produce and manipulate the target language. Well-chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow

students to practice language skills. Games are highly motivating since they are amusing and at the same time challenging. Furthermore, they employ meaningful and useful language in real contexts. They also encourage and increase cooperation.

Some Advice

Games should be regarded as supplementary activities. The whole syllabus should not be based on games only -- even for young learners.

When choosing a game, the teacher should be careful to find an appropriate one for the class in terms of language and type of participation.

Once the game has begun, the teacher should not interrupt to correct mistakes in language use.

The teacher should not compel an individual to participate. Some learners may not want to participate due to personal reasons. Forcing students to participate usually does not have successful results.

A game which looks wonderful on the paper may not work in the actual classroom setting. If it is tiring or boring, it should be stopped.

Give clear instructions. Unless the learners know what he is expected to do and how to do it, the aim cannot be achieved, and the game cannot be played.

Conclusion. Games are highly motivating because they are amusing and interesting. They can be used to give practice in all language skills and be used to practice many types of communication. The aim of this paper was to demonstrate some sample games. Teachers are encouraged to find other games which are suitable for his/her students or develop his/her own.

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