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for Moroccan Teacher Trainers*

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Topic: Games as Tension-Free Activities

Target audience: inspectors

Objectives: designing games as major teaching activities whose objectives are:

- i . to lower students' inhibition, stress and anxiety
- ii . to promote students' language proficiency
- iii . to provide opportunities for real communication

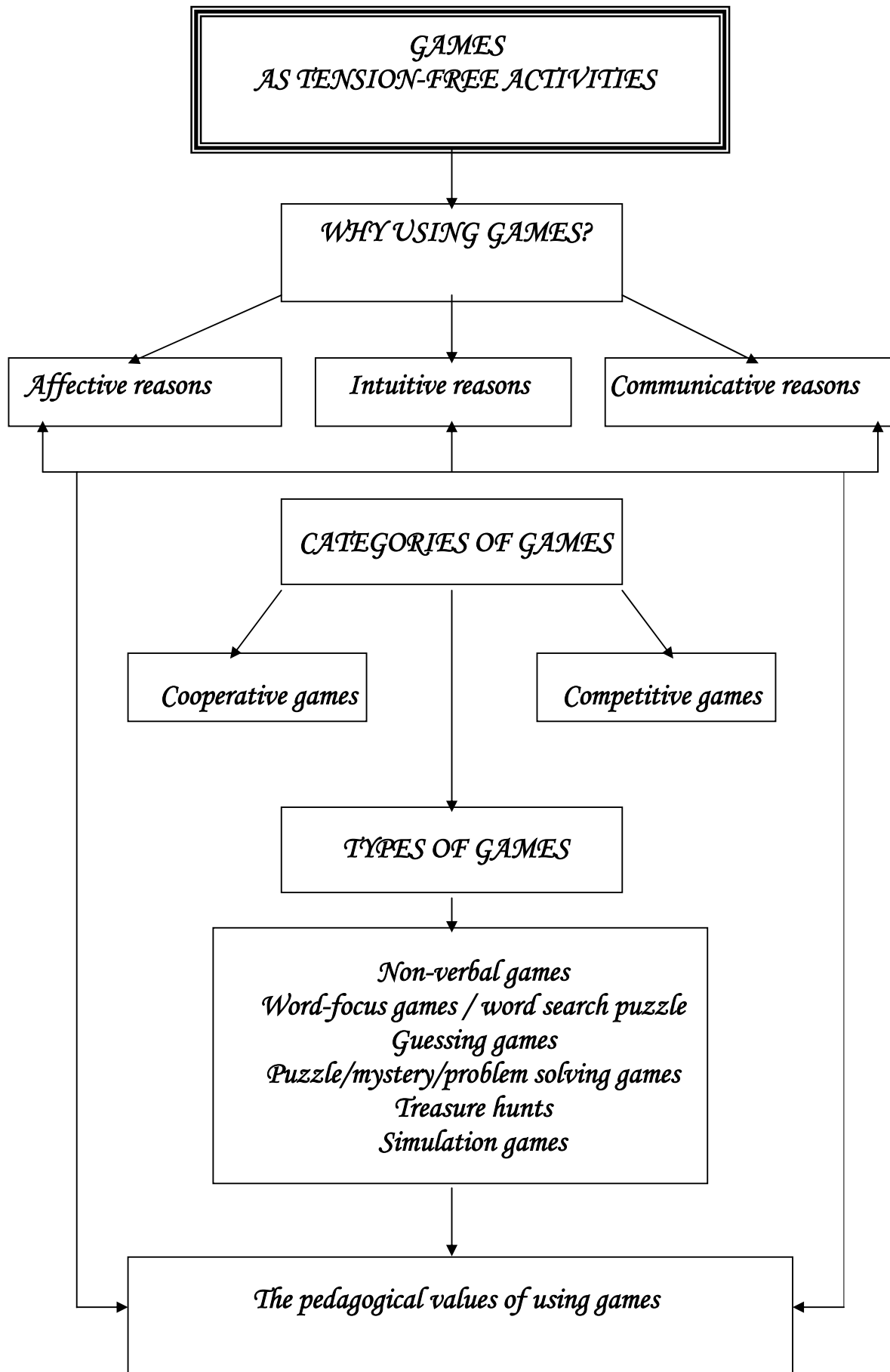
Materials from Books in the Box:

- i . Shenanigames
- ii . The Great Big Bingo Book

Curriculum goals: games should be at the heart of teaching English as a foreign language in Moroccan middle schools

Outline:

- i . Brainstorming
- ii . Theoretical background including:
 - o rationale behind using games
 - o types and functions of games
- iii . games teaching techniques
- vi . using competitive and cooperative games for audience practice and application
- v . discussion and feedback



GAMES AS TENSION-FREE ACTIVITIES

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE WORKSHOP:

- to raise Moroccan EFL practitioners' awareness towards some misconceptions that regard serious and formal classroom environment as pre-requisite to effective learning and consider games as recreational classroom activities
- to reflect together on games as relaxing and enjoyable activities and how they can promote effective learning in Moroccan middle schools

I . THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The recent introduction of English as a foreign language at the middle school level in Morocco is an optimum opportunity for us, middle school teachers, supervisors and CPR trainers to update our teaching / training techniques and strategies so as to be more effective in developing young learners' language proficiency. Therefore, one of our priorities should be raising awareness of EFL practitioners towards some misconceptions that regard serious and formal classroom environment as pre-requisite to effective learning and consider games as recreational classroom activities. In this respect, we've got to foster an approach to learning and teaching based on interplay, which is defined by Pro Lingua Associates publishers as *'The interaction of language learners and teachers with their materials, with the language and culture, and with each other in active, creative and productive play.'*

Unlike adults, young learners are not self-motivated as they do not have immediate needs to learn English. They are not extrinsically motivated and are not concerned with jobs, diplomas and so on. Adults may generally have a clear purpose in learning (work, degrees, travel etc.) and are likely to feel more motivated and committed. Young learners, on the other hand, don't feel any immediate need for language learning. Hence, language games can be used as a means to arouse learners motivation and create a tension-free, cheerful and relaxing classroom atmosphere, where learners can acquire language most effectively. They shouldn't be dealt with as activities that aim mainly to break the ice between students and teachers or to add diversion to routine classroom activities.

II . WHY USING GAMES?

Games should be used for three main reasons: affective, intuitive and communicative.

A . Affective reasons:

H. Douglas Brown states: *'if we were to devise theories of language acquisition or teaching methods which were based only on cognitive considerations, we would be omitting the most fundamental side of human behavior.'*

Brown's assumptions are supported by Krashen's Affective Filter hypothesis, which consists of some affective variables namely anxiety, stress, inhibition, motivation and personality factors. Krashen's theory accounts for how the affective filter can be a crucial element in language learning. These variables can either enhance learning or hinder it depending whether they are positive or negative. According to Krashen, optimum learning occurs when the affective filter is low. The lower it is, the better students' performance can be. A weak affective filter means:

- Relaxing and tension-free classroom atmosphere;
- Less inhibition and anxiety;

➤ Positive attitude towards the target language;
Games are among the basic instructional activities that enhance students' emotional well-being and consequently make input acquisition more likely.

B . Intuitive as opposed to Cognitive reasons:

Cognitive factors ironically may prevent adults from achieving language proficiency successfully. Using cognitive abilities in language learning may result in difficulties as learners tend to process the comprehensible input rather than internalise it spontaneously . However, young learners' language acquisition seems to be less demanding as they are generally believed to accept rather than analyse, making use of their intuitive abilities.

While playing games, students become so involved in the activities that they may repeat the same questions over and over again until they find the right person, place, object or information they are seeking. This way, repetition and drilling are made more meaningful and communicative. Games are believed to help learners develop spontaneous and intuitive automaticity, which is, in fact, a crucial element in fostering better communicative competence and developing efficient strategic interaction in the target language.

C . Communicative reasons:

Games provide an opportunity for learners to use the language communicatively even in an artificially structured environment; that is the classroom. Games can provide more than fun insofar as they stimulate conversation and promote students language proficiency. Learners can practise and internalise vocabulary, structures and grammar most effectively because while playing games learners' attention is focused on the message rather than on the language patterns. W.R. Lee says that *'most of language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms.'*

III . CATEGORIES OF GAMES

Jill Hadfield divides games into two categories:

- **Cooperative games:** these are games in which learners as individuals or teams collaborate together, collecting and sharing the information to reach a common goal.
- **Competitive games:** these are games in which learners as individuals or teams compete to be the first to reach the goal.

IV . TYPES OF GAMES

Patricia A. Richard-Amato divides games into different types:

- **Non-verbal games** (e.g. matching pieces of a puzzle, scrabble etc.)
- **Word-focus games / word search puzzle** (e.g. a letter grid, crossword puzzle etc.)
- **Guessing games** (e.g. guess who I am / what I have / what I'm doing etc.)
- **Puzzle-solving games** (solving a problem, a mystery etc.)
- **Treasure hunts** (finding out a hidden object etc.)
- **Simulation games** (turning the classroom into a market, hotel, streets etc.)

VI . THE PEDAGOGICAL VALUES OF USING GAMES:

- to bring variety and fun to learning
- to provide a cheerful classroom atmosphere
- to facilitate memorization of collocations
- to enhance students' positive attitudes towards the target language
- to arouse students' intrinsic motivation
- to develop students' communicative competence
- to create a meaningful context for language use

- to raise students' awareness towards competitive and cooperative values

The following books included in the 'Books in a Box' can be considered as a precious supplementary material resource for both Moroccan CPR trainers and middle school teachers:

- Thematic Word Search
- The Great Big Book Of Cross words
- The Great Big Bingo Book
- Shenanigames
- Do As I say
- Match It
- The Interactive Tutorial
- Index Card games
- Grammar Practice Activities

Bibliography:

- *Patricia A. Richard-Amato, (1988) 'Making it Happen' Longman Inc. White Plain N.Y.*
- *Jill Hadfield, (1985) 'Elementary Communication Games'. Nelson House, Edinburgh*
- *James Kealey and Donna Inness, (1997) 'Shenanigames'. Pro Lingua Associates Publishers*
- *Nina Ito and Ann Berry, (2001) 'The Great Big Bingo Book'. Pro Lingua Associates Publishers*