

Using Games in Teaching Vocabulary

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Introduction:

Bearing in mind that communication is the ultimate goal of learning a language, then acquiring, remembering, and meaningfully using newly learnt words is an essential part of learning a foreign language. Students learning a foreign language –most of the time- tend to forget or misuse new words. This (forgetting and misusing) is due to many factors the most important of which are:

- *words are not properly stored in students' minds.
- *they are not practiced enough.
- *they are not related to students own experiences and interests.

Among the many ways of making learning more effective, I strongly suggest GAMES.

Advantages of games:

Language learning is a hard task which can sometimes be frustrating. Constant effort is required to understand, produce, and manipulate the target language. Games have proven to have advantages and effectiveness in learning vocabulary in various ways:

- *Games bring in relaxation and fun for students, thus help them learn and retain new words more easily.
- *Games usually involve friendly competition and they keep learners interested.
- *Vocabulary games bring real world context into the classroom and enhance students' use of English in a flexible, communicative way.
- *Games are highly motivating and they give students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings.
- *Games add diversion to the regular classroom activities, " break the ice", but they are also used to introduce new ideas.

Aims of using games in teaching vocabulary:

Games are like any other activity and when planning for them the teacher needs to consider what his/her objectives are. Some examples of aims and objectives when using games in teaching vocabulary are:

- Present new vocabulary items.
- Review vocabulary from previous lessons.
- Check what students know before teaching new vocabulary items.
- Practice new vocabulary items that have just been presented.
- As a warmer at the beginning of the lesson.
- As a filler at the end the lesson.

Thus we can see that GAMES are at the heart of teaching vocabulary and not just an activity to fill the odd moments when the teacher and students have nothing better to do.

How to choose a game?

The role of games in teaching and learning vocabulary cannot be denied. However in order to achieve the most from vocabulary games, it is important that suitable games are chosen. Whenever a game is to be conducted, the number of students, proficiency level, cultural context, timing, learning topic, and classroom settings are factors that should be taken into account.

Conclusion:

Learning vocabulary through games is one effective and interesting way that can be applied in any classroom. In this paper I suggest that games are used not only for mere fun, but more importantly, for the useful presenting, practice and review of vocabulary to improve the learners' communicative competence.

Suggested games:

Ambiguous picture: draw a small part of a picture. Ask the students what it is going to be. Encourage different opinions. Do not confirm or reject their ideas. Add a little more to the drawing and ask the question again. Build your picture in about four stages.

Association: start by suggesting an evocative word: "storm", for example. A student says what the word suggests to him or her-it might be "dark", and so on round the class. You might start with any other word or use an item of vocabulary the class has recently learnt.

Crosswords: ask a student to write a word of not more than five letters in the middle of the board, for example, "melon". The letters should be written clearly and separately. Now think of a word which shares one letter with the word on board. Give students a clue to your word. For example, "I like reading them". If somebody guesses: "books" he or she writes the word so it crosses the first word and shares a letter. The students now take over.

Favorite words: write on the board one of your favorite words. Tell the class it is one of your favorite words and explain why. Tell students to write down some of their favorite words and then give their reasons for choosing them to their neighbor.

Feel the object: collect various objects from the students and from around the room. Put the objects in a bag. Hold the bag and then ask students to feel the objects and try to identify them.

How many things can you think of that....? In groups, students try to think of and note down as many things as they can that fit a given definition and that they know in English. For example, you might tell them to think of as many items as they can that work on electricity. After two or three minutes have a competition to see which group can think of the most items.

Invisible elephant: tell the students that you are going to draw a picture for them. Draw the outline of an elephant, a car, a man, a bird... in the air with your finger. Ask them what you have drawn. Encourage different interpretations.

Jumbled words: write on the board words the students have recently learnt, with the letters in jumbled order. It is best to have the words all associated with one given theme; otherwise the task of working them out can be too difficult and time-consuming. For example, you can give an elementary class a set of words like:

(gdo, sumoe, owc, knymoe, tac, tnhpeal, ibdr). Tell them these words are all animals.

Match the adjectives: write three adjectives on the board. For example: important, dangerous, heavy. Ask students to suggest things which can be described by all three adjectives.

Match the people: write a list of about ten jobs on the board. Each student writes down a list of ten ideas, feelings, memories, etc. he or she associates with one of the jobs listed. The students then work in pairs, and each student studies his or her neighbors' list and tries to guess which job the list refers to. The students then confirm or reject the guess and explain why he or she put each word in the list.

Recalling words: write on board between 15 and 20 words the students have recently learnt, or that you think they know. Make sure all the words are understood. Give a minute for everyone to look at them, then erase conceal them. Individually, or in pairs or groups, the students try to recall as many as they can and write them down.

Vocabulary steps: draw a series of steps on the board. Take any set of concepts which can be graded objectively. For example, metals can be graded according to value. Animals can be graded to how dangerous they are.

Five minutes activities. Penny Ur and Andrew Wright.

www.tefelgames.com

Games for language learning. Andrew Wright, David Betteridge and Michael Buckley.

Six games for the EFL/ESL classroom. Aydan Ersoz

The use of games for vocabulary presentation and revision. Agnieszka Uberman

Learning vocabulary through games. Nguyen Thi Thanh and Khuat Thi Thu Nga