

Learning through Games

By: Imane KARAMAN
(*wissalimade@hotmail.com*)

Introduction.

Some teachers think that games are a waste of time and prefer not to use them in classroom. Others use them just as time-filling activities. Using games in the classroom is not just a way to keep students awake or to have fun. They can be an important component of education. In fact, they have a great pedagogical value.

I- What are games?

The word game means different things to different people. A game is an activity usually undertaken for enjoyment, but one must not lose sight of the pedagogical and psychological values that game have. Language games are activities mainly aimed to get the learner to use the language in the course of the game, develop practical skills, review language lessons, or serve as a form of exercise. You can teach everything you want with games and thus lead toward the goal of improving learners' communicative competence.

II- Reasons for using games.

- Games are an important component of education. They promote students' communicative competence, generate fluency and keep them all involved. It is also believed that if students are having fun, they will find learning English interesting and want to learn more. They entertain and teach at the same time.
- Games can lower students' anxiety. While playing, learners have fun, relax, and learn at the same time According to Krashen, optimum learning occurs when the affective filter is low. The lower it is, the better students' performance can be. Moreover, in a relaxed atmosphere, students absorb and remember faster and better. They practise and internalise language most effectively
- Games are highly motivating and entertaining. They can transform a boring class into a challenging one and passive learners into active ones. They encourage students to interact and communicate naturally. While playing games learners try hard to win. They do not worry about making mistakes because they focus on the use of language rather than on the language itself. W.R. Lee says that 'most of language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms.'
- Games bring variety, fun and flexibility to teaching. They are used in the classroom to introduce new ideas, to reinforce concepts and to provide language practice in the various skills- speaking, writing, listening and reading. Therefore, the role of games in teaching cannot be denied.

VI - Types of games.

- 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 ...)
- *Treasure hunts* (finding out a hidden object...)
- *Simulation games* (turning the classroom into a market, hotel, streets etc.)

Game activities

Alphabet identification.

◆This game should move rapidly around the classroom. ◆Each student, in turn, gives imaginary information about himself following this format: My name is ..., my wife's name is ... And we live in ... (city or country). ◆The first student must fill in the blanks by providing words which begin with the letter A. the second student uses the letter B. The third student with the letter C, and so on around the room. Letters Q, X and Z may be eliminated from the game. My name's Amina. My husband's name is Anass. And we live in Agadir. My name's Bill. My wife's name is Barbara. And we live in Boston. My name is Carol. My husband's name is Carl. And we live in Casablanca. The game goes on like that through the alphabet.

Piling up stores.

◆You start off with a sentence such as: "In my kitchen store I have a carrot". ◆The first student continues: "In my kitchen store I have a carrot and some sugar". The second student: "In my kitchen store I have a carrot some sugar and some eggs". And so on. Each student adding another item until the sentence becomes impossible to remember, or until the class has had enough. ◆Immediately you have finished, ask students to see if they can recall, in writing, all the items mentioned. ◆One can pile up classroom equipment, furniture, clothing or any miscellaneous collection of items.

I Love My Neighbours

◆A student stands in the middle of the classroom. ◆The person in the middle says, "I Love my neighbours because they are playing football" Or anything they want. ◆Then everybody in the classroom should perform the action. ◆The person who does not perform the action correctly becomes the next caller. ◆This game is used to practice the present continuous.

Passing on.

◆Every one stands in a line. Pass on a command that others have to carry out (touch your nose! Touch your trousers!). ◆Encourage students to be quick. ◆Get everyone's attention. Explain that the basic idea will now be to say something different from what you have touched. You will touch your head but say foot. Then the person next to you has to do the opposite very quickly such as touch his/her foot and say head, they say a different opposite command to his/her neighbour, who does its opposite and so on.

Game activities

Word Snakes

A popular spelling game involves two teams who start off with the same word. Each team has half the board. They have to fill up their side with as many words as possible, but each new word has to start with the last letter of the word before. Here are a few examples.

Food: Spinach – ham – melon – nuts – sausage – egg – garlic – cheese.....

Animals: Giraffe – elephant – tiger – rhinoceros – spider – rat – turtle

At the end of a given period of time the team with the biggest number of correct words is the winner. You can adapt this game to any topic you're doing or one you want to revise.

Question and Answer Game Activity

◆Usually students answer comprehension questions after a reading. Why not have students create their own comprehension questions? ◆Have students in small groups work together to write questions which can be answered by the text only. ◆After groups finish writing their questions; they ask their questions to another group which must answer within a specified amount of time. If the answer is correct and given within the time period, the answering team receives a point. Each group takes turns asking and answering questions.

Running dictation.

◆To review capitalisation .Students sit in three rows: readers at one end of the class; runners in the middle; writers at the other end. ◆Runners get up and approach the readers, who have the text. The readers read one sentence to the runners. ◆The runners run to the writers and dictate the sentence they have heard. And, as quickly as possible, return to the readers for the next sentence. ◆Continue until one group is finished with the whole passage. ◆See if that group has a correctly spelled version. Then, declare them winners. ◆Let the whole class check the original text to see how closely they followed it. ◆To make the game more interesting, occasionally during the process of dictation shout “switch” and let students exchange roles; readers become runners, runners become writers.

References.

- Bruce Marsland. 1988. *Lessons from Nothing: Activities for language teaching with limited time and resources.* Cambridge University Press.
- James Kealey and Donna Inness, (1997) ‘Shenanigames’. Pro Lingua Associates Publishers
- Natalie Hess. 2001. *Teaching Large Multilevel Classes.* Cambridge University Press.
- Patricia A. Richard-Amato. (1988). *Making It Happen: Interaction in the Second Language classroom, from Theory to practice.* Longman Inc. White Plain N.Y.
- Penny UR. 1988. *Grammar Practice Activities: A Practical guide for teachers.* Cambridge University Press.
- Seth Lindstromberg. 2004. *Language Activities for Teenagers.* Cambridge University Press.
- <http://iteslj.org/games/>