
Games and Activities in Teaching a Foreign Language

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Abstract: This article is devoted to the using of games in English classes. Games can improve the learners' verbal communication and motivate them to learn a foreign language.

Keywords: game, learner, motivation, communication, process, effort, knowledge, phrase, memory.

The use of games in the learning process stimulates verbal communication, promotes the formation of motivation and interest in learning a foreign language. Also, a game is one of the most effective methods of implementing the principle of communicative language teaching. An important factor for a game is to take into consideration the age of students and their social experience.

Lee defines: "Games in the strict sense, which have a definite beginning and end, are governed by rules..." Similarly, Hadfield defines games as "an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun." Games are not carried in chaos. Games have the rules, and for it is necessary players to digest these rules before the start so that they can play the games smoothly without committing them.

Games provide a constructivist classroom environment where students and their learning are central. "Learning through performance requires active discovery, analysis, interpretation, problem-solving, memory, and physical activity and extensive cognitive processing" (Foreman 2003: 16). Students draw their own meaning from these experiences while learning from their mistakes and also from each other. The students also build upon their previous knowledge and use their new knowledge in a situation separate from the activity in which they learned it.

Telephone Conversation. For telephone conversations, ensure students are taught the necessary phrases in initiating a phone call before you assemble students together in telephone role-play— phrases such as "Could you repeat that please?", "Can I put you on hold?", "I'm sorry, John isn't here, would you like to leave a message?". The dynamics of a telephone call should be divided into 3 parts: the introduction, the purpose, and the closing. The teacher should introduce the instructions of each part to the students.

Language management techniques such as asking a person to repeat information, or spelling words on the phone should be taught to students as well. It's a good idea to introduce a special phonetic alphabet (unlike the pronunciation phonetic alphabet) for spelling words on the phone. Since the pronunciation of some letters such as "P" and "B" or "T" and "D" sound similar when spoken on the phone, a phonetic referencing system had to be developed. When word had to be spelled over the airwaves, phonetic alphabet users replaced letters with words that contained the required letters needed in the spelling.

For example, instead of saying, "Apple is spelled A-P-P-L-E" you would say, "Apple is

spelled ‘A’ as in alpha, ‘P’ as in papa, ‘P’ as in papa, ‘L’ as in Lima, and ‘E’ as in echo.”

Role-Plays. Integrating role-playing in your lessons will enliven any classroom atmosphere. Without role-plays, students would not have a chance to put their knowledge to practical oral use. Role-plays can range from doing simple telephone conversations; dialogues focusing on functional English; and acting out a small drama. The more props that you have for role-plays or skits, the more “real” it becomes and students tend to be more involved in playing their roles.

Making skits are wonderful improvisations in student-centered activities. Provided the students have been presented appropriate words related to the topics of the skits, teachers can assign small groups with a skit-card. A skit-card would contain brief information on the situation that they would have to role-play and the necessary characters involved. At the conclusion of their skits, students would have to provide a solution to any predicament involved in their situation.

Situation. Student has made an appointment to a loans officer at a bank to discuss the possibility of borrowing some money. The loans officer has to be careful not to lend money to careless business people. The officer has to ask many questions to the applicants to scrutinize their business before deciding to lend out any money. The officer has an assistant to help him/her.

The conversation must end with the loans officer and the assistant making a decision whether or not to lend the business partners any money.

Characters: 2 business partners, 1 loans officer at a bank, 1 loans officer assistant at a bank, The skit card assumes that students are familiar with the phrases of making requests, answering wh-questions, yes/no questions, modals and some aspects of business etiquette. Ensure skit card language is accessible to students.

Another great small-group activity that students have fun with is playing card Games. The following is a list of some card game activities:

Scrambled sentences can be put together in the correct order by assembling together single-worded cards. Excess words should be created so students can spot any unnecessary words. Another version is teachers can create sentence strips that describe a short story and students would have to arrange the sentence strips in correct sequential order.

E.S.L. Fish. Picture cards can be played in the same fashion as the traditional “Fish” game with an E.S.L. twist. The goal of “Fish” is to accumulate as many matched pairs of cards as possible. Ensure students know the specific language needed to play the game. In groups of three to five students, each group has a small deck of cards (for example with pictures). Each player is dealt five cards facedown. The remaining cards are placed at the center of the table. Each player takes his cards and privately looks for matching pairs. Matching pairs are then placed on the

Table for all to see but the remaining cards are not to be exposed to other students. The person on the right of the dealer begins the game by asking a target language question from the cards in his hand.

Pronunciation categories. When testing students’ knowledge of the phonetic alphabet such as vowel sounds, diphthongs, consonants and consonant clusters, and so forth, teachers can make cards with different words containing particular phonological features. Students would then have to read the words, pronounce them, and sort them under the appropriate phoneme.

Adjective opposite. Teachers can test a student’s knowledge of opposites involving

adjectives. Cards with adjectives can be created for students to match them with their corresponding opposite.

Phrasal verb matching. Teachers can test a student's knowledge of phrasal verbs by making cards with phrasal verb on each. Corresponding cards with synonymous verbs to the phrasal verbs can be made for students to match together.

Vocabulary grouping. Teachers can test a student's knowledge on logical vocabulary grouping. The categorical groupings are not given so students would need to determine what they are. Words that correspond to certain groupings can be made on cards and students would need to determine what certain words have in common and figure out what the name of the category is. For example, you can create cards with the words, water, cup, towel, toothbrush, toilet and the category students would have to come up with to assemble them under would be "Things found in a bathroom." This game can be reversed by distributing a card with the category written on it already, "Things found in a bathroom" and having a student provide clues that would prompt the other group members to guess what the category is.

Concentration is competitive and tests the memory of your students.

There will be motivated to learn new vocabulary and a competitive spirit to use memory skills to win the game. This game can be played individually or in pairs or small teams. And you will be sneaking in a lesson on spelling and vocabulary for your students. This game is quick to play and can be adapted to suit a small class as well as a big class. Another advantage is that you can control how long you want to play the game for a few minutes or a few rounds. It can be adapted from vocabulary to phrases, idioms, or grammar practice. This game has a wide audience from high school students to advanced learners. The teacher writes 15-20 words on the blackboard. And ask learners to memorize the words within a set amount of time. Then teacher covers the board and asks the students to write down as many words as they can remember. This game will be suitable for a single or team game.

Charades is a guessing game in which players give clues with actions and gestures. This game helps students to improve the vocabulary and it can be used for all level students. The game can be designed to practice particular types of vocabulary, e.g., sports and hobbies, emotions and feelings, health problems, etc. In Charades, one student stands up and acts in front of the class and enacts the word or phrase. The class is divided into two or four teams, which might be fine with students, and each team sends different representatives in each turn. There will be a time limit set for the answer. The team that guesses maximum correct in minimum team wins based on points assigned.

To sum up, using of games in teaching English promotes a community of learners. Games stimulate interactivity and improve students' creative thinking.

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