



TEACHING GRAMMAR THROUGH GAMES

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ABSTRACT

Grammar points can be contextualized with games that are absorbing and just plain fun if they are selected with the interest of the class in mind. According to Haldfield (1999:102-104): "A game is an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun... Games should be regarded as an integral part of the language syllabus, not as an amusing activity for Friday afternoon or for the end of the term." This definition highly evaluates the importance of games in teaching. It adds to teachers' techniques in teaching that games serve not only as an 'amusing activity', but as a technique to carry out tasks to learners amusingly as well.

Key words: Teaching grammar, Games in teaching, Tips for using grammar games.

INTRODUCTION

The collection of word games is a valuable resource for the teacher of young through adult learners of English as a second or foreign language. Focusing primarily on language development through the use of high frequency vocabulary and structures, they reinforce classroom lessons and provide additional spelling, conversation, listening and speaking practice.

The most instructive language learning games are those that emphasize specific structures. They do not only practice the basic pattern but also do so in a pleasant, easy way that allows the students to forget they are drilling grammar and concentrate on having fun. The following games are concerned with Yes/No questions, Wh-questions, tag questions, comparative and superlative, adverbs, modals, demonstratives, etc.

Grammar is perhaps so serious and central in learning another language that all ways should be searched for which will focus student energy on the task of mastering and internalizing it. One way of focusing this energy is through the release offered by games. Teenagers are delighted to be asked to do something that feels like an out-class activity and in which they

control what is going on in the classroom – they become the subjects, while for a lot of the 15,000 hours they spend in schools they are the objects of teaching. The point is that fun generates energy for the achievement of the serious goal.

Games are a lively way of maintaining students' interest in the language, they are fun but also part of the learning process, and students should be encouraged to take them seriously. They should also know how much time they have to play a game. It's not useful to start a game five minutes before the end of the lesson. Students are usually given a 'five-minute warning' before the time is over so they can work towards the end.

Games motivate learners

Harmer (1998: 3) asserts that:

“Motivation is some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action....The motivation students bring to class is the biggest factor affecting their success.”

Finding an effective way to motivate learners is always the interest of teachers, researchers and linguists.

As Hansen (1994: 118) states,

“Games are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy learners more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings.”

Games are highly motivating since they are amusing, interesting and at the same time challenging. The activities in a game get all the students to move around, activate their mental capacities and stimulate neural networks, thus motivating learners in learning and retention. At that time, students who are shy also attend the activities with fun, forgetting their shyness and feeling of fear.

Games promote learners' interaction

Interaction comprises the nature of classroom pedagogy and classroom behaviour. Pair or group work is one of the main ways to promote interaction. Many games can be played in pairs or in small groups, thereby providing a venue for students to develop their skills in working with others such as the skill of disagreeing politely and the skill of asking for help.

Games improve learners' language acquisition



Games can stimulate and encourage students to participate in the activity since naturally they want to beat the other teams... Apart from having fun, students learn at the same time. They acquire new language. Students begin to realize that they have to use the language if they want others to understand what they are saying (Schultz & Fisher, 1988).

Therefore, games comprise many factors such as rules, competition, relaxation, and learning. The main focus of using game in class is not only to help students to learn more effectively but also to have fun. However, to use games in classrooms, it is equally important that before playing, the rules of the games are clearly explained and well understood by the students.

Tips for Using Grammar Games in Class Successfully

Organization:

The first thing we should do when start teaching a preschool or elementary school ESL class is to figure out how to organize our class. For the younger students we shall want to change our activities every five to ten minutes because they have shorter attention spans. If we don't change our activities, they'll soon start losing interest. As we get towards the higher elementary grades, we can expand the time we spend per activity. The best way to gauge this is to pay attention to our class for the first few days to see what length of time works the best for them. Additionally, try to have everything ready to go before the students enter the classroom. That way we can go from activity to activity with minimal downtime. This is essential as we can lose control of the class if we do not keep them occupied.

Expectations:

If we notice that our class is getting noisy or rambunctious, it's time to change activities. Kids of this age like to be active; in order to balance out the energy levels in the classroom, alternate between active activities and quiet activities.

We should careful how we use activities that require fine motor skills - or more importantly pay attention to our expectations for activities that require fine motor skills. Children in preschool and early elementary are just learning to write in their own languages. This is not the best time to expect them to write in a foreign language as well. As they progress through elementary school, however, you can begin using games and activities that require them to write small amounts.

Variation:

We want to make sure our activities appeal to all sorts learning styles, so even when you are using games to teach grammar we shall want to vary the types of things we expect our



students to do. For preschool and early elementary grades, stick to games that use talking, listening, looking and moving. For middle and high elementary, we can continue to use games that use talking, listening, looking and moving and add in some games that use writing and reading.

Going along with this same idea, think about what children learn from the easiest. Television commercials are short and catchy and the most memorable are the ones that are repeated often. Keep these characteristics in mind when we are teaching grammar to our students- incorporate these characteristics into your daily activities.

Respect:

To make games work for us and our class, be sure to operate our class with the utmost respect - both to and from students. This includes teaching our students from the very start that we expect respect at all times. This includes giving encouragement and following the rules unconsciously.

That said we shall need to make sure the rules for all of the games are clear and manageable. When possible, explain the rules in the students' native tongue so that they all know what is expected of them. When there is an environment of respect in the classroom, the students will feel safe enough to participate in the games so that they can get the most educational value out of them.

Towards the end of elementary school, we can start introducing competitive games, but only if the class is respectful and it shouldn't be the main focus of the game.

Routine:

Even if we only have our students for a short time every week, establishing a routine will help the class go smoothly. Children of this age (preschool through elementary school) thrive on routine and if they know what to expect next, they will be more able to participate in what's going on now. Set up a schedule for the type of activities we shall be doing at any given time throughout the class whether it is a game, story or song or whatever we want to do. Then, when we are planning our class, plug in the appropriate activities to each section of time. We should also leave a little time at the end of the class period to allow the students to clean up and gather their things as well as time for us to recap the class praise the students and tell them good-bye.

We can also designate a "sign" to use to signal to the students when it is time to change activities such as clapping or signing a specific song so that they know it's time to return to the circle, table or desks.

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Nurture:

Perhaps the most important thing we can do with our students is to nurture them every day. For each child in our class, find something we like about him or her and be sure to tell him or her. Be encouraging, patient and kind while playing games and participating in activities and they'll like us as a teacher and a person which will in turn help them get excited about our class and what we have for them to do every day.

CONCLUSION:

As a result of rapid changes taking place in the world due to globalization and privatization, the need to acquire proficiency in English has been felt more than ever before. Communication – written as well as oral has become very necessary for the learners of English as a second language. To encourage communicative activities in the class room and to integrate grammatical rules with their uses, it becomes necessary for pedagogues to create some interesting situations in the class room to facilitate the learners to use the grammatical items in them. One should use grammar games before presenting a given structure area to find out how much knowledge of the area is already they have known. A lot of activities can be adapted to different classes with different grammar components. Using games as a central part of the students' learning process would be a better idea. Thus, each game is proposed for a given level ranging from beginner to advance. This refers simply to the grammar content of that particular game.

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