

THE ROLE OF GAMES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

INTRODUCTION

Learning foreign languages has always been viewed as useful and important. In order to provide good language training for their children, people use to enroll them in kindergartens or schools where a foreign language is taught. This way the language is acquired naturally, with good pronunciation and good linguistic habits are formed. The new role of foreign languages in human society (sitting for a scholarship or applying for a job, in tourism etc) has made educators devise new ways of teaching them. That's why I have chosen this theme, teaching English to young learners through games. Games can be used almost any time. One important factor is the mood of the class: if they are especially restless for any reason, e.g. on windy or rainy days, they may be more interested in games than in the books.

Games can also be used to break up periods of work with books. Many teachers will be using a course book to present new language, and then using a workbook to practice it. In this case, the obvious order is course book - workbook - game, with games used to break up the workbook activities.

Some teachers like to end a lesson with a game, if there is time. This seems to work well: the lesson gets more interesting at a point where the class is getting tired and losing concentration.

Other reasons for including games in the language class are:

1. They focus student attention on specific structures, grammatical patterns and vocabulary items.
2. They can function as reinforcement, review and enrichment.
3. They involve equal participation from both slow and fast learners.
4. They can be adjusted to suit the individual ages and language levels of the students in the class.
5. They contribute to an atmosphere of healthy competition providing an outlet for the creative use of natural language in a non-stressful situation.
6. They can be used in any language teaching situation and with any skill area whether reading, writing, speaking or listening.
7. They provide immediate feedback for the teacher.
8. They ensure maximum student participation for a minimum of teacher preparation.

Language learning is hard work (Andrew Wright, David Betteridge and Michael Buckby, p. 1). One must make an effort to understand, to repeat accurately, to manipulate newly understood language in conversation or written composition. Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work.

Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part and in order to do so must understand what others are saying or have written, and they must speak or write in order to express their own point of view or give information.

Children play and they want to play. Children learn through playing. Playing together, they interact and interacting they develop language skills. Games provide contexts, reasons and routines for playing.

This work explores the basis of these assertions in order to argue the importance of giving games a place among activities used in teaching English to young children.

1. Definition of game

In her article, Julia Khan (Christopher B. Jayne M. and Ray T., p. 142) says that "games are activities governed by rules, which set up clearly defined goals. The achievement of these goals signals the end of the game. Games involve a contest either between players or between the players and the goal, and game should lead to having fun. Games are for playing, and this element of play is crucial".

The rules of the games must be set for how games are played. The authority behind the rules and the contest lays in the game itself rather than with the player or teacher and the authority must be acknowledged if the game is to be played fairly. Children are very

concerned with fairness and with preventing others from breaking the rules.

Julia Khan also writes¹⁹ that games are activities that children naturally and universally engage in. There is certain timelessness in the pleasure children find in the games and how the nature of the games they play changes as they develop, ranging through fantasy, ritual competition and luck.

Games may be seen as a route by which children come to term with their social environment, presenting as they do a social situation which is firmly governed by rules but whose outcome is unknown.

Piaget saw children's games as, ‘the most admirable social institutions. The game of marbles for instance ...contains an extremely complex system of rules.’

2. Why use games?

Generations of children rediscover the same games and delight in playing them.

Games are enjoyable. The essence of many games lies in outstripping, in friendly fashion, someone else's performance, or in bettering one's own, as in the world of sport.²¹ Enjoyable also is the active co-operation with one's fellows. In group or team activity, rivalry and co-operation go hand in hand. There are the other groups or teams to surpass and friends to help surpass them. In spite of all the effort and sometimes, when attention is sharply focused and the learner's energies