

Play is an important part of a child's early development and education. I have taught up to class VIII where I have seen and worked on many possibilities and realised the benefits of play and education. The day I do not include any activity in my class I feel that I am missing out on something. If there is no possibility of play or activity in a certain concept, I start the class with a general warm-up activity or game that helps students to listen, speak, read, write, reason out or guess.

Preparing cards

There were twenty-four new students in class I who were not familiar with speaking, reading or writing English letters or words or pictures based on the words. The baskets of word picture cards were available in the school/classroom. I used these cards every day to familiarise them with reading and speaking. I told children to read and understand these picture cards in their free time and play with them. But I did not see them doing this on their own and I had to get involved. I soon realised that children played 'photo win' and 'card game' secretly and would stop playing or hide the cards as soon as I or any other teacher came by.

I decided to play these games with pictures, picture-letter, letter, picture-word cards in English so that they would learn while playing.

The main stages of preparation for this game were as follows:

1. Creating a theme-wise list of all the keywords for class II.
2. Creating word-picture cards for each keyword.
3. Creating word-picture and letter-picture posters of selected words.
4. Selecting four words from each letter of the keywords. Then preparing rectangular picture cards of size 5 X 10 cm (draw or paste the pictures). Total number of cards $4 \times 4 \times 26 = 416$ cards
5. Preparing rectangular letter-picture cards of size 5 X 10 cm, drawing or pasting pictures and writing letters on them. Total number of cards $4 \times 4 \times 26 = 416$ cards.
6. Preparing rectangular word-picture cards of size 5 X 10 cm, drawing or pasting pictures and writing words on them. Total number of cards $4 \times 4 \times 26 = 416$ cards
7. Preparing rectangular word-cards of size 5 X 10 cm, writing words on them. (Total number of cards $4 \times 4 \times 26 = 416$ cards)
8. Preparing rectangular letter-sound cards of size 5 X 10 cm. Total number of cards $4 \times 4 \times 26 = 416$ cards.

The complete set of the letter A is shown in the table below:

Types of cards	1	2	3	4	Total number of cards
Picture card					$1 \times 4 \times 4 = 16$
Picture+letter card	A  a	A  a	A  a	A  a	$1 \times 4 \times 4 = 16$
Word+picture card	 apple	 axe	 ant	 aeroplane	$1 \times 4 \times 4 = 16$
Word card	Apple	Axe	ant	aeroplane	$1 \times 4 \times 4 = 16$
Letter card with sound	A a ऐ	A a ऐ	A a ऐ	A a ऐ	$1 \times 4 \times 4 = 16$

So, there would be 20 cards for a letter. There were a total number of 80 cards in four sets. (26 X 80 = 2080 cards for 26 letters). All the cards were used in two games. That is, a total of 10 sets of pictures, letter picture, word picture, word and letter sound cards were made. In this set, each word, letter and picture was coloured with four different colours (black, red, blue, green). The blank sides of the cards in each set were also coloured with a different colour crayon.

Sound-letter games

Day 1: To familiarise the children with the cards, they were shown the letter-sound video of *Sampark Foundation* on the first day. The video introduced six letters by discussing the pictures and taught the children to ask, 'What is this?' This was done as a group and pair activity in the classroom. Children coloured twelve pictures of three letters in the class to learn letter writing and recognition. They were asked to colour the remaining twelve pictures of three letters at home.

Day 2: The next day, they listened to the sound of the letters on audio and did the same exercises for the remaining six letters as on the first day.

Day 3: The children were asked to recite the letter-sound poem on m, n, o, p, q, r, s without listening to it. After that, 'Snatch a Card' was to be played.

But before that, we had this dialogue:

'Do you want to play?' I asked.

The children said, 'Yes... Yes... Yes.'

I asked again, 'What happens in a game?'

The children answered, 'It is fun, we run, hide, and catch.'

I asked, 'Why do you have fun?'

'Because we win.'

I said, 'It means someone loses and someone wins.'

How does the loser feel?'

One child said, 'Feels bad.'

I asked the other children, 'And how do you all feel?' One child replied, 'No, teacher, I will win the next time.'

I continued the conversation and said, 'It means that sometimes you win; sometimes somebody else wins. If we practice regularly and put in sincere efforts, we win. Those who win should feel happy. But those who lose should be ready to play better the next time. And the ones who win should be congratulated.'

'But some children tease the loser,' some children said.

'Why?' I asked.

All were quiet. I said, 'Okay! Let the winners think about it! If the losers do not play again, then with whom will the winners play?'

'They will not be able to play with anyone,' the children replied.

'How will he feel then?' I asked.

'He will not like it,' said the children.

'So, tell me, is it okay to tease?' I asked again.

'No.' they said.

I continued my conversation addressing all the children, 'So we will play the game keeping in mind that we will not tease anyone for losing. Now tell me, whether to play or not?'

All the children shouted in unison, 'We want to play...we want to play!'

I felt that almost all the children had understood the spirit of the game.

I said, 'Okay, let us start today's game.'

Snatch a Card

In this game, seven picture cards are placed at a distance of two feet each. Children stand facing each card. The card has to be touched as soon as the name of the picture is called out. Whoever touches it first, gets the assigned points. The points are shown on the board like this: (p = person)

P-1		P-3		P-5			P-7		P-9		P-11		P-13
Mango		Nest		Orange			Parrot		Queen		Rat		Sun
P-2		P-4		P-6			P-8		P-10		P-12		P-14

After playing the game, the children completed 14 pictures by joining the dots and coloured them in the class. The remaining 14 pictures were to be done at home. Finally, the remaining seven-letter pictures were completed in the same way.

Day 4: After the listening-comprehension process was completed, I wanted to confirm whether the children knew the names of the pictures in English properly or not so on the fourth day, all the cards were mixed and the children were asked to pick up any 14 cards from the pack. Then, they were divided into groups of five.

I gave them instructions on how to play. Everyone had to hide their photo card. Then, by turns, each child would take a photo, read out the name written on it in English and place it in the centre. If the photo matched the previous photo placed in the centre, the child would win all the photos placed in the centre. When someone had no photos left, they could still play by borrowing photos from the winner, to be returned later. The children said that this is also how they played 'Photo win' and that they were excited to play. The game started and the children had fun. After the game, I told them that we could play it whenever they wanted in their free time.

Day 5: We did the activity of reading and saying the alphabet aloud from the chart and a set was prepared based on the colour on the blank side of the cards. Children were also taught a new game, the popular 'matching pair' game which is played with playing cards.

Some children were eager to play. One child remarked that playing cards was not a good thing: that the police would catch those who play cards. I told them that we are not playing with money. We are just playing the game to learn to read. Our picture cards are learning tools and not regular playing cards. Then, the children agreed to play.

Day 6: The children had to recite the poem - a b c d e f g... and play 'innings win' with letter-picture cards. This game is played in groups of six with teams of three members. The members from both the teams come one by one, tell the name of the card and keep it in the centre. As soon as identical cards are paired, the team that has matched them becomes the 'innings winner'. In this way, the game continues. In the end, the team that has won more times is the winner.

The children said, the game was similar to the 'photo' game and that they had a lot of fun and

would like to play in their free time as well. As a teacher, I wanted the children to say that they want to play. And it was very fulfilling to know that children were motivated to play these games on their own. This was an achievement!

This was followed by reading names on a chart paper, pairing words with pictures, completing incomplete words, reading word names with the help of pictures and colouring the words, reading the letters appearing in the words one by one and playing 'photo win' and 'innings win' with word picture cards both as classwork and homework for the next four days.

Word games

In the next stage, children practised reading, recognising and writing words. After reciting a poem in chorus, the game, 'Who am I' was played. In this game, a word card is pinned on a child's back with a safety pin. This child can neither see the card on his/her back nor is he/she told about it. The rest of the children read the word card. If a child has difficulty in reading, a member of the group tells him/her softly so that the cardholder cannot hear. Next, the cardholder child has to figure out the word. He/she asks some yes or no questions to the rest of the children. He/she wins the game after guessing the word correctly through these questions and answers. Initially, there may be a little difficulty in guessing the word but after some practice, the children understand the process/pattern.

While practising reading and writing words, children became familiar with the form or structure of the words. They started reading and writing many words. The children then did the following activities - listening to stories and poems, writing down certain important words that appeared in them, reading the words, reading the letters in words one by one, drawing a picture by reading the word name, writing word names for pictures, etc.

The next step was to understand the letter and its sound, for which they were shown the video of Sampark Foundation. The children repeated the sound poem after seeing the video, sang it and had discussions to understand how A B C or any other letter would sound in a word. For example, A = ऐ, B = ब, C = क and स. Finally, they reached the basic stage of reading and writing by playing the game using the letter-card set, joining the letter-cards and reading, listening and writing and reading and writing rhyming words.

Conclusion

This is the story of my thirty to thirty-five hours of direct-indirect work and practice. Now the children keep playing games of cards in their free time. They are using their time meaningfully and learning. This also means that in their initial school days children should not feel bored with the direct teaching of reading and writing. Instead, if some games are introduced, then learning becomes enjoyable and many children learn. Games contribute in a way that has directly helped me in my teaching-learning process.

My takeaway from this experience is:

- It is necessary to discuss the rules of the games,

social experiences and beliefs related to the game, otherwise, it will be impossible to connect all the children with the games.

- There should also be innovations in games. I tried to innovate through new cards or a new game.
- We should not be strict with the idea that children must learn, otherwise, the games also become boring. For example, if the children could not name the card, I would tell them as many times as they wanted and ask them to try again. I also believe that children will learn from each other while playing together.



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