

## Play in the Language Class

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Play is an indispensable part of our physical, mental, and social development. While including play in my teaching, I have found that play enhances the abilities to listen, respect rules decided upon and have control over one's emotions. To make my language class lively, I took the support of language games that can increase the comfort and confidence of learners in the acquisition of the English language and give them ample opportunities to make mistakes, experience, learn and apply when and where needed. The advantage of playing a language game is that learners do not feel disappointed about losing because everyone is in the same phase of learning. Also, as most children cannot help correcting each other, learners get quick peer feedback. As a teacher, it is my responsibility to provide my students with the best possible resources. I am sharing a few of my experiences of using language games in the classroom.

### Games for early grades

In class I, I began a read-aloud session on the story of soap. As per my lesson plan, I used picture flashcards, voice modulation and a little drama. After the session, I asked the students to tell me the words that they remembered from the story. One by one, students started naming the words and I wrote down each word with a serial number on the blackboard. Then I made each student get up serially and call out a number, starting from the number one – this became the number assigned to each. This done, I began calling out one number at a time and the student with that number had to stand up and read out the word with the same serial number on the blackboard. Here, learners who were in the phase of learning letters were asked to point out the letters alone or take the help of a friend.

In continuation, the next language game was the 'Memory game' - a common language game that students really enjoy. In this, students close their eyes, and the teacher rubs off a word from the blackboard, so when they open their eyes, they

have to guess the word that has been erased. It takes five to six attempts by students to guess the correct word because to do this, firstly, the student needs to remember which word has been removed and secondly, he or she needs to be aware of the (approximate) pronunciation or spelling of the word to express it. But as soon as the blackboard is left with fewer words, the excitement of the students is clearly visible on their faces. The answers are prompt, and the number of attempts reduces. Some students have pictorial memory and fit the image of the words on the blackboard in their minds. But they must also know how to articulate it correctly.

'The vast majority of children enter school with vocabularies fully fit for everyday life, with complex grammar and with deep understandings of experiences and stories. It has been decades since anyone believed that poor and minority children entered school with "no language"' (Labov, 1972; Gee, 1996 cited in Gee 2002). So, when learners come to school, they come with a large vocabulary and the role of the school is to make their speech and writing clear and expressive by enriching their vocabulary with meaningful contexts and deeper learning. Naturally, it is not possible to teach all the words of the texts. I think it is also unnecessary. Choosing words wisely from the texts and making students use them in a meaningful manner is more important. The language games I mentioned above are more appropriate in the early grades when we deal with nouns. In second language acquisition, nouns are all equally new words for all learners.

### More complex games

For the students of class IV, I created a game that is inspired by the *Dog and the Bone* game. I divided the students into two groups. The groups stood facing each other and each child was given a number. I wrote down words from their texts on bits of paper and scattered these in a circle between the two groups. I would call out a word two times. Then, I would call out a number. The children with that number from each team would step forward

and search for the word I had called out. Whoever found it first, would pick it up and read it aloud. The child from the other team would try and make a sentence using the word. Two other members from either team would also get a chance to make a sentence using the word.

Each student comes up with a different sentence in a different context. Some use the word in a positive sense, some in the negative. They even try to use the word in a question. For example, using the word 'sound', the children made these sentences: 'The koel has a sweet sound,' 'I can make the sound of a tiger' and 'What sound does the car make?'

'The variety of contexts in which words can appropriately be used is so extensive, and the crucial nuances in meaning so constrained by context, that teaching word meanings in an abstract and decontextualized manner is essentially futile and potentially misleading...' (Situated Language and Learning: A Critique of Traditional Schooling by James Paul Gee).

Learning a word with its one dictionary meaning will not really help in expanding a child's vocabulary as a particular word will have different meanings in different contexts. For example, the word 'star' can have several meanings when used in different contexts: 'Stars are not in my favour,' 'Look at the stars shining so brightly', 'The box is star-shaped', 'She was the star of the class'.

The meaning of a word differs in different contexts, but students usually do not make sentences with a word consciously with this thought. Once we get multiple sentences from the students, their learning and our teaching become easier as they understand how the same word can mean different things. To succeed in this, children need to be provided with ample opportunities to explore words in speech and writing.

### Reflection

During this lockdown period, I read a book, *Situated Language and Learning: A Critique of Traditional Schooling* by James Paul Gee. In the book, the author deals with the issues of language, learning, and literacy. The focus of the book is on how the 21<sup>st</sup>-century video games/ games/ digital world can aid language acquisition for school students.

In a video or digital game, we do not learn all the symbols or signs of the game at one go but gradually start picking the key factors/steps to understand and play better. In the same manner, when we introduce language to students, we need to move from simple to complex, from known to unknown. Therefore, my strategy has been to read a book/ text/story and then conceive and play language games based on it, which helps students to better understand the vocabulary in different contexts. Gee makes a point that while teaching language we start teaching the system of rules and it does not work. Our mind works best by making associations.



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