

# HOW CAN WE IMPROVE LANGUAGE LEARNING?

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Language learning is hard work which can sometimes be frustrating. Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. As a teacher of English I have learnt from experience that 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, they 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.

The need for meaningfulness in language learning has been accepted for some years. A useful interpretation of meaningfulness is that the learners respond to the content in a definite way. If they are amused, angered, intrigued or surprised the content is clearly meaningful to them. Thus the meaning of the language they listen to, read, speak and write will be more vividly experienced and, therefore, better remembered.

In my opinion games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language, and they must be regarded as central to a teacher's repertoire. They are thus not for use solely on wet days and at the end of term.

Constant effort is required to understand, produce and manipulate the target language. Well-chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow students to practise language skills. Games are highly motivating since they are amusing and at the same time challenging. Furthermore, they employ meaningful and useful language in real contexts. They also encourage and increase cooperation. Games are also highly motivating because they are amusing and interesting. They can be used to give practice in all language skills and be used to practise many types of communication.

There is a common perception that all learning should be serious and solemn in nature and that if one is having fun and there is hilarity and laughter, then it is not really learning. This is a misconception. It is possible to learn a language as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. One of the best ways of doing this is through games.

There are many advantages of using games in the classroom, among which mention can be made of:

1. Games are a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class.
2. They are motivating and challenging.
3. Learning a language requires a great deal of effort. Games help students to make and sustain the effort of learning.
4. Games provide language practice in the various skills- speaking, writing, listening and reading.
5. They encourage students to interact and communicate.
6. They create a meaningful context for language use.
7. Games are fun and children like to play them. Through games children experiment, discover, and interact with their colleagues.
8. Games add variation to a lesson and increase motivation by providing a plausible incentive to use the target language. For many children between four and twelve years old, especially the youngest, language learning will not be the key motivational factor. Games can provide this stimulus.
9. The game context makes the foreign language immediately useful to the children. It brings the target language to life.
10. Games make the reasons for speaking plausible even to reluctant children.
11. Through playing games, students can learn English the way children learn their mother tongue without being aware they are studying; thus without stress, they can learn a lot.
12. Even shy students can participate positively.

When choosing a game the teacher should take into consideration the following:

1. A game must be more than just fun.
2. A game should involve "friendly" competition.
3. A game should keep all of the students involved and interested.
4. A game should encourage students to focus on the use of language rather than on the language itself.
5. A game should give students a chance to learn, practice, or review specific language material.
6. Games should be regarded as supplementary activities. The whole syllabus should not be based on games only - even for young learners.
7. When choosing a game, the teacher should be careful to find an appropriate one for the class in terms of language and type of participation.
8. Once the game has begun, the teacher should not interrupt to correct mistakes in language use.
9. The teacher should not compel an individual to participate. Some learners may not want to participate due to personal reasons. Forcing students to participate usually does not have successful results.
10. A game which looks wonderful on the paper may not work in the actual classroom setting. If it is tiring or boring, it should be stopped.

11. The teacher should give clear instructions. Unless the learner knows what he is expected to do and how to do it, the aim cannot be achieved, and the game cannot be played.

Here are some examples of games which can be used in class.

#### Game 1: Whisper Circles

- Aim: Speaking (using a whisper), pronunciation, listening, grammar (it takes ...to do ...)
- Notes:
  1. Divide the students into groups of 7 to 10.
  2. Choose one leader from each group. Give the leaders the card which has the sentence "It takes about six seconds for something you drink to reach your stomach." Ask him to memorize the sentence, go back to his group and whisper what he has read on the card to the person on his right. Each person will whisper the sentence to the next person and the sentence can be said only once. The last person will say the sentence out loud. If the sentence is the same with the one written on the card, that group wins.

#### Game 2: Match and Catch the Riddle

- Aim: Reading silently, reading aloud, pronouncing segmental and suprasegmental features correctly, listening selectively, grammar (simple present tense), linguistic and nonlinguistic reasoning.
- Notes:
  1. Divide the class into two groups: The QUESTION group and the ANSWER group.
  2. Give the questions to the first group and the answers to the other group.
  3. Each student in the first group is supposed to read the question he has aloud and whoever has the answer in the other group reads the answer aloud.
  4. If the question and the answer match, put the students in pairs. If they don't, continue till the right answer is found. Each student can read his part only twice. When all questions and answers are matched ask the pairs to read the riddle they have just for fun.

#### Some Suggested Riddles:

##### QUESTIONS

What animal is gray and has a trunk?

What animal eats and drinks with its tail?

Why do mother kangaroos hate rainy days?

How can you tell the difference between a can of chicken soup and a can of tomato soup?

Why is an eye doctor like a teacher?

Why did the cross-eyed teacher lose his job?

Why is mayonnaise never ready?

Do you know the story about the skunk?

If a papa bull eats three bales of hay and a baby bull eats one bale, how much hay will a mama bull eat?

What does an envelope say when you lick it?

Why do cows wear bells?

Why shouldn't you believe a person in bed?

What is the best way to prevent milk from turning sour?

Why does a dog wag his tail?

##### ANSWERS

A mouse going on vacation

All do. No animal takes off its tail when eating or drinking.

Because then the children have to play inside.

Read the label.

They both test the pupils.

Because he could not control his pupils.

Because it is always dressing.

Never mind, it stinks.

Nothing. There is no such thing as a mama bull.

Nothing. It just shuts up.

Because their horns don't work.

Because he is lying.

Leave it in the cow.

Because no one else will wag it for him.

#### Game 3: Crazy Story

- Aim: Writing, reading aloud, listening, grammar (simple past tense, reported speech)
- Notes:
  1. Prepare sheets of paper with six columns which bear the following titles at the top
    - WHO?  
(a man's name)
    - WHOM?

- (a woman's name)
  - WHERE?
  - WHAT DID HE SAY?
  - WHAT DID SHE SAY?
  - WHAT DID THEY DO?
- 2. Divide the class into groups of 6. Give each group one sheet of paper. Ask the first student to write under the first part and fold the paper so as to cover what he has written. Tell the student to pass the paper onto the next person. As each person writes, he should only look at his fold. When all students finish, one student from each group will be asked to read their story in the following format. You can write the format on the blackboard.
  - ..... met ..... in/at .....
  - He said .....
  - She said .....
  - And so they .....

#### Game 4: Missing Headlines

- Aim: Reading silently, reading for specific information, speaking (discussing in pairs).
- Notes:
  1. Cut out news items and their headlines from a newspaper. Paste the news and headlines on separate sheets of paper. Photocopy them.
  2. Ask students to work in pairs. Give each pair the photocopies of the news and headlines.
  3. Ask them to match the headlines with the news items.

#### Game 5: Find the Differences

- Aim: Speaking (describing people and actions), listening, grammar (there is/are....., s/he has ....., s/he is .....ing, s/he is + adjective)
- Notes:
  1. Find or draw two pictures which are the same except for seven features. Photocopy them on separate sheets of paper.
  2. Ask students to work in pairs. Give one copy of each picture to the pairs. The pairs are not supposed to show their copies to each other. Partner A's will describe their copy and Partner B's will listen carefully and examine their own copy to find the differences. They can ask questions if they require more detailed information or need any clarification. The pair that finishes first wins the game.

It is important that the language teacher be creative and innovative in his/her job. Dare to deviate occasionally from the humdrum routine and do something refreshing and different in the class. It does not require too much effort, and the rewards are plenty-the joy on the students' faces, the mirth, the hilarity, and the enthusiasm generated. Finally, when playing the game, teachers should be totally committed and enthusiastic

In conclusion, games are highly motivating because they are amusing and interesting. They can be used to give practice in all language skills and be used to practice many types of communication.

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