

## Using Games in the language class

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Games and activities play a vital role in learning – whether that of adults or children. Games need not be ‘add-ons’ or ‘fillers’ for those numerous times when the children are saturated by ‘studies’ – though they play that role admirably well too!

Games can in fact be used at any stage of the learning process – when you are introducing a concept, when you are attempting to either deepen or widen the application of that concept, when you are practicing it, when you are evaluating it’s understanding in the children and even when you are attempting to remedy errors.

Language class is a space that lends itself to the use of games very readily. A creative teacher can convert almost any language concept into a game. Well-known existing games can be modified or new ones created.

### Why games?

- Playing games allows learning to happen in a non-stress atmosphere;
- Boring tasks of memorization can become not just palatable but exciting if done through games;
- All children like to ‘win’! In wanting to ‘win’ while playing games, children stretch themselves to understand and apply concepts that are otherwise difficult for them;
- Since ‘chance’ has a role in most games, success or failure doesn’t convert into ‘smart’ and ‘stupid’ and therefore removes the edge that is present in tests and other modes of evaluation;
- Games put children in an active mode of ‘high alert’ as opposed to the passive mode of receptivity;

### Pointers you could keep in mind when you are trying to devise a new game:

- Language objectives need to be clearly defined;
- There should not be too many objectives for one particular game;
- It is wise to try the game out with a colleague or friend before taking it to class – just to see that it works!;
- It is good to involve the children in the preparation of materials for the games;
- Children often come up with very practical suggestions about modifications of certain rules, which make the game more effective. Teachers need to be open to these.
- When handling large groups, it is good to visualize beforehand grouping patterns: these could be random, but they could also be based upon your prior knowledge of the children. Well-conceived games sometimes fall flat because suitable combinations of children in particular groups have not been visualized and children get over-competitive.

- When dealing with young children, it has been noticed that games based on the principle of exclusion (where children need to get ‘out’ at various stages) lead to an unhappy end. Therefore games based on co-operation are best suited to the language class.

So it is up to your creativity to devise new games for your children!

### **Some suggestions of well-known games and activities that may be adapted to teach specific aspects of language:**

#### **A: Games for introducing and reinforcing new vocabulary in a second language class:**

- Flash cards – match picture to word (the cards can be created by using vocabulary encountered in lessons)
- Memory game – object pairs (lock-key, sun-moon, bucket-mug etc.), the adult & the young of animals; opposites, synonyms.
- A set of picture cards is placed face down in the center. A child picks up one card. If he can name the object he gets to keep the card otherwise he places it back in the center.

#### **B: Games for reinforcing particular language structures:**

- Substitution of one element of the sentence by another (suggestions come from the children):  
Ex: I am going to the market (substitute ‘I’ by ‘Sheela’)  
Sheela is going to the market (substitute ‘going’ by ‘coming’)  
Sheela is coming to the market (substitute ‘Sheela’ by ‘you’)...
- 20 questions – a great game for practicing the interrogative form. For younger children, you can choose to simplify the game by limiting the choice of persons to known people in the school.
- Simon says... is excellent for practicing the imperative form in any language. Children should, in turn, be asked to be ‘Simon’

#### **C: Bingo Games for testing particular concepts:**

- Letter Bingo (for recognition of the letters of the alphabet)
- Picture Bingo (for sound-meaning correspondence of noun words)
- Clock Bingo: the bingo game wherein it is clocks, not numbers that are there on the student cards.

**D: Game for encouraging children to play with the physicality of the word, reinforce their vocabulary and even extend it.**

- Ask children to make up their own completed crossword puzzles. (The answers, not the questions). Then you can work out the clues and give it back to the children to complete.

**One last tip:** A ‘game’ that *you* could be playing periodically, without forewarning, consists of making deliberate spelling errors. Children are very alert to any mistake on the part of the teacher! It also helps you gauge the level of attentiveness of the class.