

Teaching English through Games for Children¹

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Introduction

The need to participate in the global communication has made English as first foreign language in this country and at the same time made it as one of the compulsory subjects to be taught in Indonesian schools starting from Junior high school up to the high level of education. Moreover, the Indonesian government has even declared English as the local content that needs to be taught at elementary schools and even kindergartens.

Teaching English for Children

In terms of their intellectual development, children are said to be in the period of function. They tend to understand to the purposes of language rather than on the rules and also explanations of the language items. Therefore, considering children's intellectual development, in conducting the teaching and learning in the classroom teachers need to avoid explaining grammar explicitly (e.g. by using terms like "present progressive" or "relative clauses"), and also stating the grammatical rules by using abstract terms. It would be better if they show their children certain patterns and examples in explaining the grammatical concepts (Brown, 2001: 88).

In teaching children teachers need to consider also their length of attention. Most children will spend many hours to watch their favourite cartoon movies and they may spend less than an hour listening to their teachers' explanation. This commonly happens when they find the explanation or the

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lessons boring, useless, or too difficult. Teachers, however need to make the lessons more interesting, lively, and fun. They need to know their students interest, use variety of activities, as well as having sense of humor to get their students attention. In conducting the teaching, teachers also need to stimulate all five senses of the students (Brown, 2001, 89). Therefore, they need to consider using physical activities (such as role-play, playing games), use sensory aids and also their own nonverbal language. Teachers should realize that their nonverbal language is very important for their students since most children tend to be very sensitive to facial features, gestures and touching (Brown, 2001: 89).

Finally, in order to have an effective English classroom, teachers also need to consider the category of authenticity of the materials as well as the use of meaningful language in their classroom. This is particularly in line with their students intellectual development. Children are commonly very sensitive to the language which is used in their familiar context of situation, therefore the use of story lines, familiar situations and characters, real-life conversations, meaningful purposes in using language are strongly recommended in establishing the context of the language use as well as improving children's attention and retention (Brown, 2001: 90).

The Importance or Benefits of Using Games

There are some benefits of using games in teaching English. The following are some of the benefits proposed by Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1994: 1)

1. Games help and encourage learners (fun and interesting)
2. Games help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful.
3. Games provide intense and meaningful practice of the language
4. Games provide practices in all the skills (R, W, L, and S), in all the stages of the teaching/learning sequence (presentation, repetition, recombination, etc), and for many types of communication (encouraging, agreeing, explaining)

5. Using games can engage the students and motivate them to interact with the topic.

In addition, Sugar and Sugar (2002: 6-8) also identify some benefits of using games to teach English. They mention that

1. Games are experiential.
2. Games allow special tutoring for one or two.
3. Games provide choices for your classroom.
4. Games reinforce learning.
5. Games provide immediate feedback.
6. Games improve test-taking skills.
7. Game playing shows that classroom energy is good.
8. Games can introduce new or difficult material.
9. Games complement reading assignments.
10. Games improve teamwork.
11. Games teach playing within the rules.
12. Games foster both individual and team achievement.
13. Games reinforce and improve multitasking.
14. Games can replace drill work.

In choosing the games to play, teachers need to consider few things (sugar and Sugar, 2002: 12-17). The following are elements that the teachers need to consider before playing a game in the English classroom as proposed by Sugar and Sugar (2002: 12-17). Those include the following elements.

- Target Audience
- Level of Play (Language Level Required)
- Number of Players
- Size of the Class
- Learning Outcomes
- Playing Time
- Game Variations

Once teachers decide to use a certain game to teach English, they need not only to know how to play the game also they need to follow some steps. Those are: explaining how to play the game to the class, demonstrating parts of the game, and the last introducing the key language and/or instructions of the game.

Kinds of Games

There are many kinds of games that can be used in the classroom as well as outside the classrooms. Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1994) divide games based on their general characters and spirits as the followings.

- Picture Games
- Psychology Games
- Caring and Sharing Games
- Sound Games
- Story Games
- Word Games
- True and False Games
- Memory Games
- Question and Answer Games
- Guessing and Speculating Games

Conclusion

It is widely believed that in the practice of teaching English either as a second or a foreign language, one of the important things that teachers need to consider is the learners. Teachers need to know who are the learners and their level of language proficiency in order that they can select the suitable materials and they way to conduct the teaching.

In teaching children for instance teachers need to consider also their length of attention that the students have as well as the purpose of teaching English to children. Therefore, games will be one of the effective ways to teach English for

children. In using games to teach English, teachers need to choose the one which is suitable with their learners as well as the class condition. It will be a good thing also to consider kind of games which can effectively facilitate the students/learners learning of English.

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