

Using Game as a Way to Teach English

By Novi Rachmawati, S. Pd

What is game actually? Well, based on the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, game is referred as a form of usually competitive play or sport with rules. In order to make it clearer, let's put it this way; a boy is playing a ball, dribbling it around the field with the intention of aiming it into a basket. If he succeeds, he gains scores. His coach has told him to use his hands only and never the feet.

From the example above, we can draw a definition that game is an activity which involves players, rules, objectives, a beginning an end and a supervision from another person. A language game shares similar characteristics.

Learning a language is not an easy task, it's not as easy as counting one to ten. It needs constant effort and sometimes can be frustrating especially when the learners found that understanding, producing and using the target language difficult. Language games contribute fresh and interesting break from the routine and at the same time keep the students in the right path of learning the language by allowing them practicing the language skills.

There is a common misconception that learning activity should be carried in a serious condition, that when the learning participants are having fun and there is laughter involved then it's not a real learning process. In learning a language, it is possible to learn and have fun at the same time. In fact, one of the challenges in language teaching is to make the learning as effortless as possible. When learning is held in an easy and fun way, the students would feel ease to receive, understand and memorize the subject than when it is held in a plain, serious kind of way. This would help the student to sustain the effort of learning.

Language is all about meaning and context. Games offer a great solution in which the students may be able to find the meaning and context in the language they are learning by experiencing it. Moreover, games demand interaction, which is essential since language itself, is a means to communicate. Games, promote the practice of English without letting the students aware that they are asked to do so. Or, even if they are aware, the situation would not seem to be a threat since it is performed in a relaxed and friendly competition atmosphere.

However, a successful game requires planning. Lots of things should be concerned in organizing language game to be played in a classroom. The teacher should prepare:

1. Decide what skill or skills involved in the game
2. Choose a game that serves the purpose of promoting the language material being taught in regular class. Games are beneficial if the right types of games are used. The game should have a linguistic purpose which is relevant to the lesson in hand.
3. Make sure the vocabulary or grammar that are going to be introduced or practiced can be transferred with this game
4. The difficulty level of the game should be equal to the students to the students' ability level. The game must not too be easy or too difficult
5. The selected game should be both entertaining and educating. Whether the students will like it or not is an important factor.
6. Prepared the properties needed to play the game. Before letting the students get into the game area, make sure that all necessary material like worksheet, dice, board, board marker, or pictures ready. Also prepare the place where the game will take place. Decide indoor or outdoor, and whether the game requires a large space or a smaller one.
7. Competition can make the game more interesting and motivating, but it is not always needed. Sometimes, it is better to make everyone finishes as the winner and not those who finish first. The important thing that it should always be challenging. So, prepare the rules of the game carefully.
8. Reward, if the budget allows extra expenses, can be a good motivating factor. A present is not essential. Praise, smile or a point to be put on the point board are more than enough.
9. An extra control from another teacher is always welcomed since it would be better if we have more teachers to ensure the children are on track.

The teacher has an important role in creating a successful game. The game rules must be delivered to the students as clear as possible. Lengthy explanation is not always work, so set up a demonstration. If necessary use the mother tongue of the students. Before playing the game, tell the students that losing doesn't mean losing,

but losing only means try again. In that way, they will feel the competition is a friendly one and they will not be afraid to try, because it's ok to make mistakes.

After they understand the rules, set up the game. When dividing the students into groups, the formation of the team is important. The teacher must put together groups where there are players with different levels of competence.

Start the game with cheerful and enthusiastic tone. This is because cheerfulness and enthusiasm are contagious. The student soon will feel the spirit of the game and they will be encouraged to play the game until the very end. During the game, keep motivating especially those who missed a point and at the same time try to take notes of recurrent mistakes. The mistakes that might occur can be grouped into pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary mistakes.

After the game finished, the mistakes should be mentioned and corrected. But never point as any student as the mistake maker. The teacher should carefully encouraged the students and praise every good points that comes up during the game. And then close the session by motivating them to do better in the next meeting.