

Using games and songs in the English classroom

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Children enjoy songs and games. They are useful and common language learning activities and they are essential when teaching English.

They delight in imagination and fantasy. While children are growing up, they are making sense of the world. In the language classroom this capacity for fantasy and imagination has a very constructive part to play.

Language teaching should be concerned with real life, but Primary teachers work with children and we should know that imagining is a part of being a child.

Teachers should accept the role of fantasy and imagination in children's lives for real language use. It is important to stimulate the children's creative imagination so that they want to use the language to communicate their ideas.

ADVANTAGES OF USING SONGS AND GAMES

There are some advantages for using songs and games in the English classroom:

1. They increase students' motivation.
2. They provide a range of learning situations.
3. Listening and speaking skills are provided.
4. Concentration is improved.
5. Children's participation and confidence is encouraged.

USING SONGS

Songs are useful for practising new grammatical patterns or vocabulary once they have been presented. Songs can be sung by the whole class or groups. They are particularly useful for practising pronunciation.

They can be used to practise fluency and pronunciation skills. Students' are also practising listening skills, and at the same time reading and writing practice. There are lots of activities they can do while listening to a song, the most common are the following:

1. Listen and fill in the blanks: The teacher has to provide the words and leave a gap between the lyrics so that children complete the missing words. This activity is especially useful for traditional and pop songs. It is

also interesting to choose songs and rhymes to fit in with the topic they are studying: colours, songs, weather, etc.

2. Listen and order: Pupils have the sentences of the phrases and they have to put them in order at the same time they listen to the song.
3. Favourite songs: Children can have a book with their favourite songs so that they can listen to them and sing them whenever they want.
4. Listen and dance: Students have to mime and dance at the same they listen to the song. This activity helps them to understand the lyrics of the song.

GAMES

Communication games are the most useful to develop fluency. There are many games which focus on speaking only, but there are others that develop the other three linguistic skills: listening, reading and writing.

Games can be played at any stage of the lesson. It depends on the way we have prepared the lesson. They can also play games they already know in their mother tongue. In this case, the advantage is that they already know how to play them.

It is essential to prepare the game in advanced. Teachers have to know the objectives they want their children to achieve. Most games need visual resources and they have to be prepared beforehand, otherwise disruptive behaviour may appear in the classroom.

It is important to remember that games have to provide a variety of activities and that there is not always a competitive element.

But, how to play games? The teacher has to give clear instructions and ensure that all the students have understood them. If the game requires grouping the students it has to be done quickly. The game could be explained in their mother tongue but teaching English in the target language contributes to the learning process by providing an element of indirect learning when they are trying to understand the explanations the teacher gives to them. The most important reason is that teaching English in the target language increases the amount of exposure the children get to the language.

There are plenty of games which provide a useful combination of real communication.

When playing a communication game the teacher can leave the children talking to each other without fear because the students will have the need to communicate. The most popular game is the 'information-gap' activity. Pupils work in pairs in this game. They sit opposite each other and they have a barrier between them (a book, a folder). Each child has a different picture. Child A starts to draw the picture. By questioning and answering, the student has to get the child B's picture drawn identically, but without looking at each other's pictures. When Child A finishes, they change roles and Child B has to draw the picture Child A has.

This game involves real communication because one of the participants has the information that is needed by the other, as in real life situations.

Other communication games are the following:

1. Find the differences: Students work in pairs. In each pair Child A is given a different picture from Child B. The pictures are similar but different in some vital aspects. They do not have to look at each other's picture. Children ask questions to each other in order to guess which the differences are.
2. Story reconstruction: Students work in pairs or groups. Team A has the pictures of a story in order. They have to describe each picture so that Team B has the pictures ordered.
3. Song reconstruction: Students work in pairs or groups. They all listen to a song and they try to remember it. Then the teacher gives the sentences and the pairs or groups have to try to put them in order. The first pair or group to do it properly is the winner.
4. Ask the right question: Students work in pairs. Child A has to ask Child B questions so that B gives exactly the answer written on A's card.
5. Twenty questions: Students work in two groups. Team A asks Team B a question which can only be answered with 'yes' or 'no'.
6. Quizzes: They can be used to practise specific language items in a motivating way. Students are divided into teams. Team A asks a question to Team B. If the question is said correctly Team A gets one point. If the member of Team B gets the answer the team gets two points.

CONCLUSIONS

Games and songs have been widely used for many years. They are great fun and provide practice in an amusing context. They encourage real communication in the classroom. The feedback that a teacher gives in these activities is vitally important. Games and songs used in a communicative way get the students to do things with language, so that they are aware that language is something you actually use for 'real' and not just something you do exercises and games in. ●

Bibliography

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