

Play Games, Learn Words and Speak English

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This paper presents some ideas on how to use games for the learning of vocabulary in the context of communication activities so as to give students the maximum opportunity of practicing lexical items in situations in which they feel a real need of using the words being studied. This is very important in as much as the strategies suggested 'create a sense of a need for a word' (Allen, 1989). This approach is quite different from that observed in many English classes. In fact, traditionally vocabulary has been taught through long lists of isolated words, in some cases with their equivalents in the students' native language, through definitions and explanations in simple English, etc. At first sight, there is nothing wrong with these procedures. Nevertheless, in the long run through these practices students are prevented from the opportunity of playing around with the new vocabulary, of practicing it over and over again, in other words of making an active and thoughtful use of it. The games suggested aim at making up for the afore mentioned weaknesses, thus creating a 'real sense of a need for a word'.

Another feature that can be seen in the games and in the communication activities is that they call attention first to the meaning and then to the English word. Indeed, the games depict fruits, professions, etc., the words for the items presented are not given. This encourages the students to speculate with the vocabulary they already know or to look up the new words in the dictionary. This is much better than being given the lexical

items by the teacher or being provided with lists of English words with their translation. The communication activities also lead the students first to concentrate on the meaning. In some cases they are required to draw first or to think of situations which involve the words to be learned. Only later do they have access to the new vocabulary. In other words, the students first have to concentrate on the objects, situations, etc. Then they get the English words for the items being studied (Allen, 1989.)

I suggest three games. Each includes its objectives, instructions and examples to lead in the students. Then follows a series of pictures for the students to examine and work according to the instructions. These games are adaptations of some of the games included in the book 'Play Games with English' by Colin Granger. Each game is followed by two communication activities. Some of these are variations of the ideas recommended by Dr. Virginia French Allen in her book 'Techniques for Teaching Vocabulary'; others are the result of my trying out different procedures in my teaching.

To be used in class I recommend that each game be printed on a separate sheet to facilitate such matters as handling, vocabulary focus, communication activities, etc. The teacher needs not to use the two activities suggested, he can decide which one to use depending on his class objectives, vocabulary to be introduced, time allocation, etc.

Game 1

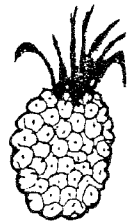
MEMORY

Objective: To give students practice in the use of vocabulary concerning fruits.

Instructions:

- Look at the pictures carefully for one minute. (first, look at the example)
- Write under the pictures the correct word for the fruit (s). Use your dictionary if necessary.
- Keep this sheet in your English book.
- Take a piece of paper and write down all the names of the fruits you remember.

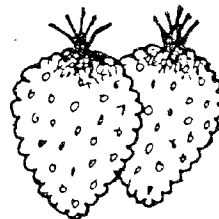
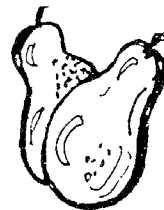
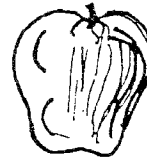
Example: A pineapple, two bananas



pineapple



bananas



COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY 1

The students are asked to take paper and pencil. Then they are told to draw as many fruits as they can. For the sake of organization and competition they may be given a three or four minute period to do this. At the end of this phase, the teacher selects a student (We'll call him Ralph) and asks him to come to the front of the room with his paper, which he is not supposed to show to any of his classmates. Next, the teacher says to the whole class: 'Ralph has drawn several fruits on his paper. Could you guess how many fruits he has drawn? How many pears? How many lemons?, etc.

Several students try to guess, i.e. two pears, three lemons. Ralph and the teacher look at the paper and accept the answer if it is correct. If it is wrong, Ralph corrects it, i.e. 'No, three pears, two lemons, etc.' Then, he shows his paper to the class and tells them how many fruits (pears, lemons, etc.) there are on his paper.

Finally, some students (in pairs) are asked to walk to the board. One writes a question and the other the answer. Then they read them aloud, i.e. 'How many oranges did Ralph draw?', 'He drew three oranges'.

This communication activity can be repeated with more students depending on time availability.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY 2

The students are asked again to take paper and pencil and draw as many fruits as possible. Then they are told to work in pairs to construct dialogues like this: (Naturally, they should not be allowed to see each other's papers.)

Student 1: How many apples are there on your paper?

Student 2: Two

Student 1: Do you like apples?

Student 2: Sure, what about you?...

Student 1: Well, ...

Game 2

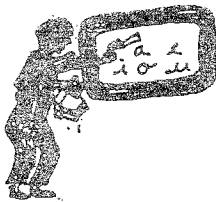
SHADOWS

PROFESSIONS AND OCCUPATIONS

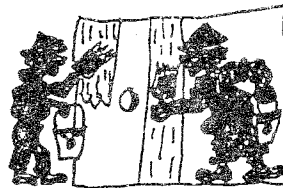
Objective: To give students practice in the use of vocabulary concerning professions and occupations.

Instructions:

- Look at the shadows carefully for one minute.
- Then look at the initial letters for each profession/occupation given at the bottom of this sheet. Complete the words. Use your dictionary if necessary.
- Write under each shadow the word that matches the profession / occupation depicted. First, look at the examples. (Shadows 1 and 2).



1. He's a teacher



2. They're painters



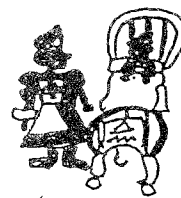
3.



4.



5.



6.



7.



8.



9.



10.

S P M C E F W N

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY 1

The students are told to take paper and pencil and draw as many shadows as they can. They may be given three or four minutes for this. Next they are told to stick their papers on the wall and write under each shadow the profession/occupation they think it represents. Right after this they are asked to observe the various pictures drawn by their peers. When they are done with this, they go back to their seats and form small groups. At this point, each student is to report to his partners what he examined, he might start his rendering like this: 'I saw many shadows. Some of them portrayed teachers, others drivers, secretaries, etc.' All the students should be encouraged to participate.

While a student is sharing his findings, the others may interrupt him to get further information or to clarify their doubts, i.e. 'How many secretaries did you see?', 'Didn't you see any firemen?', etc.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY 2

The teacher tells the class something like this: 'I am thinking of someone who works in a.....' He asks his students to offer guesses, i.e. supermarket, restaurant, hospital, etc. When a student supplies the correct guess, let's suppose 'hospital' in this case, he has to ask his teacher questions until he finds out the profession/occupation his teacher had in mind. This may be done in dialogue form, i.e.

Student: Are you thinking of a nurse?

Teacher: No.

Student: Are you thinking of a doctor?

Teacher: Yes, I am.

Next, several students (one at a time), take over the teacher's role and continue

working as suggested.

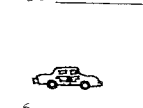
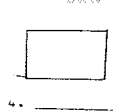
Game 3

ANTONYMS

Objective: To provide students with meaningful situations for the practice of attributive adjectives.

Instructions:

- Look at the following pictures for one minute.
Next write under each picture the best adjective that describes it.
- Then in the line provided supply the opposite to the adjectives you wrote.
- Before you start look at the examples (pictures 1&2).



COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY 1

The teacher asks his students to place various objects on his desk, i.e. short pencils, long pencils, new books, old books, etc. Then he asks three students to come to the front of the room and gives them a series of commands: 'Take the long yellow pencils. Take the new English books. Show them to your classmates. Put them back on the desk'. After this, he gives the commands to another group of three students. Next, different students,

one at a time walk to the desk, pick up one thing and ask the corresponding question, i.e. 'Whose is this long yellow pencil?'. The student whose belonging is being shown answers accordingly. He then goes to the desk, picks up another thing and continues working as suggested. Finally, the questions and answers are written on the board.

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY 2

The teacher asks the students to put some things on his desk, i.e. short pencils, new books, old keys, etc. As they place the objects, they should be told to utter the sentences that describe their actions, i.e. 'I'm putting my new book on the desk', 'I'm putting my new pencil on the desk', etc. When they are through with this, they work in pairs to build dialogues like this:

Student 1: What did you put on the teacher's desk?.

Student 2: Some new books?.

Student 1: How many?

Student 2: Two. What about you?...

The previous games can also be put to good use through the computer as this is a device that has contributed greatly to improving the standard of language learning and teaching. Papert, (1980) claimed that cognitive factors emerge using games through computers as he did in his approach in a game format. Games besides introducing a motivating aspect, include the competitive ingredient stated by Benavides (1998) when he indicates that through a program in a game format the students interestingly included this competitive factor in the development of their activities and this "eventually allowed

them to learn more and better and in a more autonomous and responsible way" (p.43).

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