

GAMES

Language instructors have always made use of games in language classrooms, mostly as a mechanism for stimulating interest and often as a reward for working diligently on other presumably less entertaining portions of the course. Our position is that games can serve very well as the basis for an acquisition activity and are therefore not a reward nor a “frill”, but an important experience in the acquisition process.

Games qualify as an acquisition activity since they can be used to give comprehensible input. Students are normally interested in the outcome of the game, and in most cases the focus of attention is on the game itself and not the language forms used to play the game. Indeed, experienced instructors who work with children know that they become more involved more quickly with an activity if it is presented in a game format.

Games can take many forms and there are many different sorts of elements which make up a game activity. We will discuss only a few of these in order to show how games function as acquisition activities. In any particular game we may focus primarily (but not exclusively) on: words, discussion, action, contest, problem solving, and guessing. Of course, most games exhibit a combination of these elements.

It is simple in many games to focus on particular words. One common technique is to make up illogical combinations and ask the

students (in teams, if desired) to figure out what is wrong with the combination.

Other games focus mostly on discussion. In one such game each student has a word or a description written on a sign taped to their backs, which other can see but they cannot. They may ask any question they want of the other students or the other students may try to give them clues to help them figure out what is written on the sign. A simple action game for adults is to give them a list of descriptions and ask them to find a person to match the description.

Almost any activity can be made into a contest. Traditional contests can also be fun and at the same time provide input.

Most games have an element of problem solving. Very popular with most students are problem-solving "situations". They are presented with a situation and have to figure out an answer. Guessing games such as the well-known children's game "Twenty Questions" is available.