



BOARD GAMES IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

I.U.Sarsenbaeva

*Karakalpak Institute of agriculture
and agrotechnologies Assistant
teacher of Department "Languages"*

Annotation: *Games are fun activities that promote interaction, thinking, learning, and problem solving strategies. Often, games have an aspect that permits the players to produce information in a short time period. Some games require the players to engage in a physical activity and/or complete a mental challenge.*

'Games... help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part and in order to do so must understand what others are saying or have written, and they must speak or write in order to express their own point of view or give information.'

'Language learning is a hard task which can sometimes be frustrating. Constant effort is required to understand, produce and manipulate the target language. Well-chosen games are invaluable as they give students a break and at the same time allow students to practice language skills. Games encourage learners to interact, cooperate, to be creative and spontaneous in using the language in a meaningful way.'

Key words: *board games, skills, communication, educational, associated with, learners, activities*

Using board games in the language classroom is an effective, low-anxiety, and fun way for students to learn and practice communication skills as well as develop their own communication strategies that can be readily applied to the real world. Board games are a versatile asset in the classroom because board games can be:

- used as intended for native speakers
- adapted to teach specific language forms and functions
- adapted for various ESL/EFL contexts, age groups, proficiency levels, and content
- adapted as communicative activities in the classroom
- adapted as a concept for making your own educational board game.

The benefits to using board games in the classroom are numerous, however, we would like to focus on the particular aspect of how board games promote communicative language learning through tasks, defined here as activities in which:

1. meaning is primary;
2. there is a communication problem of some type to solve;
3. the activity has some relationship to real-world activities;





4. task completion is usually required; and task performance can be assessed in terms of the outcome (Skehan, 1998, p. 95).

The activities that we showcase in this demonstration are a just a few of the things you can do with board games and games in general. When using board games, we should keep in mind how these five characteristics are exemplified in student interaction. Furthermore, it is important that lessons that implement board games should be composed of warm-up activities, formal instruction, tasks, and wrap-up/reflection activities that integrate all language skills to provide learners with a holistic language learning experience. Some board games naturally elicit target language forms (i.e., yes/no questions for Guess Who, Wh-questions for Clue) and other board games can be adapted to focus on forms. We suggest looking at the language used in a particular game and then emphasizing salient forms and functions when students play the game (i.e., colors for Candyland).

Being in a safe and supportive classroom environment is important for students learning a language since it may be one of the only opportunities for students to take risks in speaking and trying new language forms and functions. This is particularly important for EFL contexts since learners may only have access to the language in the classroom. Some explicit instruction in grammar has proven to be beneficial for learners in these contexts as well as heightening student awareness of their language forms and skills. Board games can be adapted for all age groups, proficiency levels, and content. Be sure to check the language and keep it at a level that students are comfortable with. For example, Go Fish may be a great game for beginning level students, however, Bohnanza would only be appropriate for students at advanced proficiency levels and older age groups. One thing to keep in mind: games are fun and engaging, but it frequently requires considerable work on the part of the teacher. Strategically indentifying simple games that lend themselves to the language being targeted can save teachers precious time and energy.

According to Richard-Amato (1996), even though games are often associated with fun, we should not lose sight of their pedagogical values, particularly in second language teaching. For real Games are effective because they provide motivation, lower students' stress, and give them the opportunity communication





The main reason why games are considered effective learning aids is that "they spur motivation and students get very absorbed in the competitive aspects of the games; moreover, they try harder at games than in other courses"

Naturally when playing games, students are trying to win or to beat other teams for themselves or on the behalf of their team. They are so competitive while playing because they want to have a turn to play, to score points and to win. In the class, students will definitely participate in the activities. Therefore, it is possible for a teacher to introduce students to new ideas, grammar, and knowledge and so on. As in the dictation game, students are so competitive that they want to finish first and win. It can be clearly seen that games can capture students' attention and participation. They can motivate students to want to learn more. Moreover, they can transform a boring class into a challenging one.

Another reason why games are often used in language classes is that they lower students' stress in the classroom. In conventional classrooms, there is a lot of stress put on students trying to master the target language. Schultz (1988) said that "...Stress is a major hindrance in language learning process. This process Learning language in traditional way is by its nature time consuming and stress provoking... raise the stress level to a point at which it interferes with student attention and efficiency and undermines motivation. One method has been developed to make students forget that they are in classrelax students by engaging them in stress-reducing task (games)."

There is a high level of stress in the classroom because students have to face unfamiliar or unknown grammatical structures, words, texts and so forth. Therefore, students often feel uncomfortable and insecure in class, which inevitably affects their ability to learn. As a result, games can help lower their anxiety, make them feel comfortable, and want to learn more. It is believed that when students play games, they relax and have fun. Since students know that they are playing games and want to communicate efficiently. They do not worry about making mistakes and do not try to correct themselves in every single sentence. When students are free from worry and stress, they can improve their fluency and natural speaking styles.

Next, students learn without realizing that they are learning (Schultz, 1988.) For instance, when playing a game called "What Would You Do If?" students will have to pick one hypothetical question from those that they have written in a box, might get





a question like "What would you do if a lion came into this classroom?" Next they have to pick one answer that they have written before. The answer they get may be "I would be a fly." Usually the question and the answer they get do not match each other, so students have to use their own imaginations to explain their bizarre answer, and everyone has fun listening to it. The explanation might be "If a lion came into this classroom, I would be a fly because I am a good person, so an angel would come and rescue me by turning me into a fly." While to explain, students do not worry too much about grammar mistakes because they want to communicate and to explain why it can happen. Apart from having fun, students do not worry about errors and punishment; moreover, they will learn a grammatical rule and have a chance to use it. Thus, they learn unconsciously-learn without realizing they are learning. Students stop thinking about language and begin using it in a spontaneous and natural manner within the classroom

Another advantage is increasing students' proficiency. Playing games in the classroom can enormously increase students' ability in using language because students have a chance to use language with a purpose in the situations provided. Hadfield (1990) confirms that "games provide as much concentrated practice as a traditional drill and more importantly, they provide an opportunity for real communication, albeit within artificially defined limits, and thus constitute a bridge between classroom and the real word." Like in a traditional classroom, students have an opportunity to drill and practice using grammatical rules and other functions.

When to use games?

A game must be more than just fun.

A game should involve "friendly" competition.

A game should keep all of the students involved and interested.

A game should encourage students to focus on the use of language rather than on the language itself.

A game should give students a chance to learn, practice, or review specific language material.

Students may wish to play games purely for fun. Teachers, however, need more convincing reasons. Teachers need to consider which games to use, when to use them, how to link them up with the syllabus, text book or programmed, and how, more specifically, different games will benefit students in different ways. The key to a





successful language game is that the rules are clear, the ultimate goal is well defined and the game must be fun. According to students' achievements we can assess through utilizing pre, and post tests if our students have improved or not, and if our procedure is useful, effective or not. Games and especially educational games are one of the techniques and procedures that the teacher may use in teaching a foreign language. Games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of a lesson.

A game should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do. Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages, games should be used at all the stages of the lesson, provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen. Games also lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners recall material in a pleasant, entertaining way. All agree that even if games resulted only in noise and entertained students, they are still worth paying attention to and implementing in the classroom, since they motivate learners, promote communicative competence and generate fluency and may have a significant role in improving a second language acquisition.

When using games in the classroom, it is beneficial for teachers to have a complete understanding of the definitions of games, which usually are defined as a form of play concerning rules, competition, and an element of fun. Teachers should also consider the advantages of games: the ability to capture students' attention; lower students' stress; and give students the chance for real communication. Lastly teachers need to assess how to use games appropriately in the classroom. It is important to choose an appropriate time and integrate them into the regular syllabus and curriculum. However, because of the limitations of the syllabus, games often cannot be used, as much as they should be. Therefore, it may be challenging for teachers to try to add some games in class in order to develop students' English proficiency of the target language.

In conclusion, I feel that this section of my qualification thesis is very important in explaining the usefulness and educational value that games can have in a classroom. It is becoming increasingly important and necessary for teachers to justify their classroom procedures to administrators, parents and their students. When we started having my students play games, it was mostly for taking a break from the monotony of teaching from a book, filling extra class time or reviewing for a test. Now, having





researched and learned about the deep, critical learning that takes place while game playing, we realize that games have more purpose than creating fun in the classroom.

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