

## INTERACTING IN ENGLISH THROUGH GAMES

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**A** project was conducted in order to encourage oral participation in English through the use of games, with second-grade students at Liceo de la Salle School in Zipaquirá. They were between 6 and 7 years old. As the sample for this study, the eight students who had the lowest oral participation were selected. According to the results, it is clear that the activities have improved their oral English.

### Introduction

This project intended to help shy and slow students improve their oral production, or, basically, their participation in English class. This research was done at Liceo de la Salle school. The sample taken was a group of eight second-grade students who were about six to seven years old. They took two hours of English a week at school.

There was a need to choose games that motivated and involved them enough so that they used English for communication and followed commands. The students were observed during English classes for a period of six months, once a week. Each class lasted ninety minutes.

### Research design

The main purpose for carrying out this research was to identify games that would stimulate the participation of students in oral activities and to analyze the procedures that encourage students' oral participation for a

period of time. Factors such as participation and pronunciation could be observed in detail in a small sample of students, so I could focus attention on selected aspects.

The methodology used for this study was action research. It let me collect information through techniques such as observation of different English activities, teacher's diary and audiotape recording over a six-month period.

In February, the first game was implemented to find out students' attitudes towards English and diagnose their individual levels. Then lesson plans were made taking into account what type of games the students wanted to be included in the lessons. Then, the lesson plans were applied including games that entailed the use of English. I used games to explain and practice in class. At the same time I observed the students and audio recorded almost all the lessons.

After each lesson, I reflected on the lessons and kept field notes to register students' attitudes, use of new vocabulary, use of commands, and in general any particular information that provided ideas about possible students' participation through games. Audiotape recordings were used as a procedure for acquiring information that could not be gathered in the teacher's diary.

## Theoretical framework

Children learn through playing. In playing together, children interact and via interacting they develop language skills. Games provide contexts for playing, reasons for playing and routines for playing.

Games create useful contexts, permitting an intensity of language practice. In addition to employing meaningful language, games also require gestures, handling of objects, touching, and many other forms of nonverbal communication. As they play games, students stop thinking about language and begin using it in a spontaneous and natural manner within the classroom.

Perhaps the main proposal for encouraging informal spoken interaction among children has been to promote games as a classroom activity. Games can be designed to help develop structure, vocabulary, pronunciation, or writing.

Children naturally adopt different roles in their play (using their own language) and these classroom activities imitate natural learning processes. Thus, we can set up a play situation and let the children use the language as they wish without much concern for language accuracy (Brumfit: 1991).

## Results

The results of the analysis of oral production showed a general improvement by the students.

While I developed games, I could observe progress in the students' oral participation. Before I implemented games the students did not participate in any of the classes because they did not feel confident, and after the process of games, they participated all the time. For instance they

showed more interest and involvement in what they were doing; they helped each other remember what to say, and so on.

In the teacher's diary, in general, it was noted that students said they liked English and felt they were learning through games. At first, some of the students had more difficulties understanding the vocabulary and participating in class, but by the end, they had gotten used to games and were able to understand in spite of not knowing all the vocabulary.

At the moment, participation in class has increased as a result of the development of games and students look more confident and are willing to speak more often during the class.

## Conclusions and implications

I can conclude that games are good activities for developing participation in a funny and interesting way because they permit students to use the second language in communicative situations related to topics such as greetings, clothes, commands and likes/ dislikes.

Another important conclusion of the study is that controlled games help stimulate students' oral participation because they help lower tension and anxiety that prevent students' acquiring the language. For instance, many students speak English best in situations where their attention is focused on meaning rather than on language and they use the oral language through games that involve movement.

However, it is necessary that we use games keeping in mind the following parameters (Byrne: 1997 and Brumfit: 1991):

- The focus of the game should match what the teacher wants to teach.

- The game should be controlled by rules and the teacher should teach a number of phrases to enable them to participate and maintain communication in English

- Organization of games (pairs, groups, teams, some with the whole class playing against the teacher or one leader).

- Define clearly the starting and stopping time for doing activities.

- Allow negotiation relating to dealing cards, taking turns, etc.

Playing games in our classes permits us to work with students who have different levels of English in the same class. I suggest that teachers work with games because participation in the activities is increased and students feel more self- confident.

### References

Brumfit, C. (1991). *Teaching English to Children. From Practice to Principle*. London: Collins ELT.

Byrne, D. (1997). *Teaching Oral English. New Edition*. London: Longman.