

THE USE OF GAMES ON FACILITATING THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH VOCABULARY FOR KIDS

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Resumo: O ensino de Língua Inglesa é um tema relevante no contexto da Educação contemporânea, porém repleto de desafios quanto à construção do conhecimento. Assim, o objetivo deste artigo é discutir sobre o ensino de vocabulário de inglês através de jogos. Para tanto, foi realizada uma pesquisa bibliográfica integrativa a partir das contribuições de Lindsay (2006), Lowes (1998) e Oliveira (2011), bem como os exemplos de jogos que podem ser utilizados para o ensino de vocabulário, sugeridos por Ardron (2010). Por fim, são apresentados dois jogos construídos no contexto do Projeto de Iniciação à Docência – PIBID com o intuito de motivar o ensino de vocabulário de inglês. Considera-se que os jogos contribuem com o desenvolvimento cognitivo, motor e linguístico das crianças, facilitando o ensino e aprendizagem de vocabulário de uma língua estrangeira.

Palavras-chave: Língua Inglesa, Jogos, Ensino de Vocabulário.

Abstract: The teaching of the English language is a relevant issue in the context of contemporary education, but it's filled by challenges in terms of knowledge-building. Therefore, this article aims to discuss on the teaching of vocabulary through games. In order to do this, important information was researched on the works of Lindsay (2006), Lowes (1998) e Oliveira (2011). Finally, it presents two games, both organized in the ambit of the Introduction to teaching profession project (PIBID), that intend to motivate the English vocabulary teaching. It considers the games to be contributing to the cognitive, motor and linguistic development of kids, making it easier for them to understand and learn many words of a foreign language.

Keywords: English Language, Games, Vocabulary Teaching.

Introduction

Language Teaching presents many challenges to any Teacher. We always worry about how we can teach or which way we can use to clarify some subject to our pupils. It is not different when we teach a language to kids. Sometimes, it is difficult to the English teacher teach a new language to kids, mainly children in kindergarten, because some of them do not know how to read or write. Then, which strategies teachers can use to make learning happen in these kids? How can we teach vocabulary for them?

This is one of the points that we will talk about in this article, however we try to be more

specific in relation to teaching vocabulary, and so we will discuss about how teacher can efficiently teach vocabulary for kids.

Firstly, we will try to understand more about language teaching according to Lindsay (2006). Secondly, we will specify to teaching and learning vocabulary according to Lowes (1998). After that, we will analyze, through Oliveira's (2011) contribution, language acquisition and Learning development of kids. Finally, we will reflect about how can we teach English vocabulary for kids and what strategies, like games, we can use to do that. Then, we will use some examples suggest by Ardron (2010) in BBC site and some memory games done by myself (in PIBID).

I. Teaching vocabulary for kids: what to consider in it.

I.1. Language Teaching and Meaning:

Before we start talking about English teaching vocabulary, we try to understand Language Teaching in a general form. According to Lindsay (2006), language activities are divided in the classroom into two categories:

1. Introducing language;
2. Using language that has already been encountered.

Based on this, the responsibility of the language teacher is understood. Firstly, he/she should introduce the language to his/her students, and then, complement the teaching with aspects already known to them. For instance, the teacher shows a new vocabulary to his/her students using names of fruits: "*Grape; orange; banana; apple; lemon; strawberry.*" After that, the teacher shows how they can use these new words: "*I like grapes.*"; "*Could you give me some bananas?*"; "*My mother doesn't like lemon.*"

At a first moment the teacher presents names of those fruits he/she is teaching the vocabulary for his/her students, but at the second moment when the teacher shows how they can use that new vocabulary he/she turns the language into something meaningful to his/her student. That is very important because it makes them able to choose how they could use the language in a large portion of communicative situations.

Before we think about how we could teach vocabulary, which strategies we could use, which activities and techniques are useful, we should first reflect on how this would – or will – bring meaning to the learning of new words.

Lindsay (2006) provides some suggestions to help learners understand the meaning of words and, consequently, phrases, at least in a smaller scale.

1. Translate the word from English into the LI:

Example: grape - uva; orange - laranja; banana - banana; apple - maçã; lemon - limão; strawberry - morango.

2. Show some pictures to students. They can link the pictures to words:



grapes



orange



banana

3. Provide an explanation or definition in English:

Grape – *“a fruit, typically green, purple, red, or black, growing on a grapevine, eaten as fruit, and used in making wine”¹.*

Orange – *“a round juicy fruit with a tough bright reddish-yellow rind”.*

Banana – *“a long curved fruit that grows in clusters and has soft pulpy flesh and yellow skin when ripe”.*

Apple – *“the round fruit of a tree of the rose family, which typically has thin red or green skin and crisp flesh”.*

Lemon – *“a yellow, oval citrus fruit with thick skin and fragrant, acidic juice”.*

Strawberry – *“a sweet soft red fruit with a seed-studded surface”.*

4. Tell the learners to look up the word either in a monolingual or bilingual dictionary;
5. Give them sentences using the new vocabulary:

“I like orange.”

“I do not like strawberry.”

“My mother does not like grape.”

¹ Concepts taken from Google Translator. At: <https://translate.google.com.br/?hl=pt-BR>.

“My friend likes banana.”

These are some examples on how teachers could bring meaning to teaching vocabulary and how they could make their students able to choose and use the new vocabulary. We must not teach vocabulary only to our students do a kind of homework, but the vocabulary must be taught with the goal to produce meaning in the words, so our students may use these words in their lives in social contexts such a conversation among friends or families.

I.2 Teaching and Learning Vocabulary:

According to Lowes (1998, p.37), “Vocabulary learning is a large part of the work when studying a language”. He also points that we such as teachers need to do three things; “help students to understand how vocabulary is learned”, “get them to think about what is meant by learning a word” and “introduce them to a variety of methods and activities for vocabulary learning”.

Teaching vocabulary is not a simple thing. We need to bring meaning to words and to create many situations to do our learners understand that. It is a big challenge that we, teachers, have to face in order to find solutions and alternative ways to bring the students toward the defined aim, learning vocabulary. To Lowes (1998, p.38), vocabulary can be worked on some levels: Cognitive, affective and Physical.

- Cognitive – “students can process, make decisions about, categorise or rank words.
- Affective – “they can associate words with feelings about words and through words.
- Physical – “they can learn the sound and stress pattern of a word, and can give a physical reaction to it, a technique used in a method known as Total Physical Response”.

She also gives us some examples of activities to teach vocabulary following these levels, as shown below:

- Cognitive Activity: “Students read a text and answer questions about difficult vocabulary which encourage them to work out the meaning from context”. (p.39).
- Affective Activity: “Students think of someone very important to them and choose five words or phrases to describe

that person, e.g. kind, blond hair, funny, fat, pretty”. (p.39).

- Physical Activity: “Students follow the teacher’s instructions, acting them out: Walk to the wall, raise your left hand and touch the wall above your head”. (p.38).

I.3 Teaching vocabulary for kids:

According to Oliveira (2011, p.164): *“By playing, affection, motricity, language, perception, representation, memory, and other cognitive functions are deeply intertwined. The play favors the affective balance of the child and contributes to the process of appropriation of social signs”*.²

Then, when we teach vocabulary to kids it is necessary think in different techniques and strategies. Teachers need to be creative and dynamic developing funny ways for their students to memorize and learn new words. **English as an Additional Language** – EAL teachers can use games, songs, pictures, drawings, and many situations to provoke the learning in the children. And it is about that we talk about in the next topic.

II. The use of games in the teaching of vocabulary for kids:

According to Ardron (2010), we need to encourage our learners to keep vocabulary records. We can do that getting them to write new words at the back of their notebooks during class, checking if they know how to pronounce each word, if they could also write a translation, or draw a picture of the word, and doing games in the class. In BBC site ³, she suggests us some games, as presented below:

- **Bingo.** Give your learners a photocopy of flashcards for the vocabulary and a blank bingo card. Ask them to choose a certain number of vocabulary items and stick them onto their bingo card. Alternatively, they could either draw or write the vocabulary. Place a complete set of flashcards into a hat and pull them out one by one. The first player to cross off all the items on their bingo card shouts 'Bingo!'
- **Hangman or Shark.** Play traditional hangman, or a variation on hangman: draw a shark in the sea with its mouth wide open and lots of teeth. Draw ten steps going into the shark’s mouth. Indicate the word to be guessed with lines as in regular hangman. Each time a

² “Ao brincar, afeto, motricidade, linguagem, percepção, representação, memória e outras funções cognitivas estão profundamente interligados. A brincadeira favorece o equilíbrio afetivo da criança e contribui para o processo de apropriação de signos sociais.”

³ At: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/kids-vocabulary>

learner says the wrong letter draw a stick man going down the steps. They lose (and get eaten by the shark!) if the stick man runs out of steps.

- **Noughts and crosses.** Select nine flashcards and number them 1-9. Draw a grid on the board, numbering each square 1-9. Divide your learners into two teams, noughts (O) and crosses (X). In turns, each team chooses a number between one and nine. If noughts choose square 5, for example, show them flashcard 5. If they can correctly identify the card, draw (O) in the square. Each team should try to choose squares that block the other team from making three in a row, horizontally, vertically or diagonally.
- **Telephone.** Put learners in a circle. Whisper a word to the learner on your left. They whisper the word to the person on their left and so on. The last person to hear the word has to write it on the board – see if the word is the same or if it's changed! Change places to give everyone a go.
- **Categorise.** Give each group a set of flashcards and ask them to put them into categories. For instance, animal flashcards could be divided into those with four legs, those with two; those that can fly, those that can't.
- **Guess what it is.** Place a number of flashcards on the board. Describe one of the cards without saying its name, for example, 'It's big.... It's got wings... It can't fly but it can run...' The team that guesses the correct card wins a point.
- **Backs to the board.** Put learners in pairs, A and B. Ask As to sit with their backs to the board, Be facing them. Write a word or put a flashcard on the board. Bs facing the board must describe the word to their partner without saying what it is. The first A to guess the word correctly wins a point.
- **Board rush.** Place flashcards on the board. In teams, ask your learners to stand in a line facing the board, a little distance away. Say a flashcard, learners must then run and touch the correct flashcard.
- **Snap.** Give each group of learners a set of flashcards with two copies of each card. Ask them to shuffle and deal the cards equally, face down. Each player now has a pile of cards. In turn, the players turn over a card, say what it is and place it in the middle of the table. If a player turns over a card which is the same as the previous one the first player to say 'Snap!' wins all the cards. The game ends when one player has all the cards.

- **Odd one out.** Write up four words on the board, one of which is the odd one out, e.g. cheeky, happy, curly, and nice. 'Curly' is the odd one out because it describes physical appearance and the others all describe character. Get your learners to make their own examples and test each other.
- **Pelmanism.** Give each group of learners a set of flashcards with two copies of each card. Ask them to place them in a grid face down on the table. In turn, each player turns over two cards and says what they are. If they turn over the same cards, they keep them and have another go. If the cards are different, they turn them back over and the next player has a go. The player with the most pairs is the winner.
- **Kim's game.** Place the flashcards on the board or a table. Ask your learners to close their eyes. Remove a card. Ask them to open their eyes and tell you which card is missing. For even more of a challenge, gradually increase the number of cards that you remove. Having demonstrated the activity, this is another game your learners can play together in groups with their own set of flashcards.

The games presented above are possible suggestions of dynamic activities that can be performed in the classroom with different age groups, including children. This is to promote vocabulary teaching. One of the more simple games is the "telephone", because the teacher does not need to use any material. The teacher needs to ask for his / her students to make a circle in class and one of them, firstly, say some word (one of the words that teacher presented for them in class). After that, this student must whisper on the ear of his/her classmate that is by his/her side, this classmate must do the same thing on other colleague's ear and so on.

III. Using memory games:

Memory games are a great way to teach vocabulary. They arouse curiosity in children and make them want to play. They also produce a spirit of competition amusing the learners. Games like this improve children's memory capacity, producing learning effectiveness.

According to Oliveira (2011, p.152) *"By moving the body in space, the child receives own-perceptive (cenesthetic, labyrinth) and external-perceptive (especially visual) information necessary to interpret and organize the relationships between elements,*

*formulating a representation of that space*⁴. In the same paragraph she continues:

*Motricity also develops through the manipulation of objects of different shapes, colors, volumes, weights and textures. By altering their postural placement as it deals with these objects, by varying the contact surfaces with them, the child works on several body segments with muscle contractions of different intensities. In this effort, it develops.*⁵

Knowing this, we can agree that memory games are a great form to teach vocabulary for children; because when they play this game they are developing, as well as the motricity of the body and the acquisition of language. That in another moment Oliveira (2011, p.157) affirms that: "To represent something, the child must exteriorize it as a distinct object through images that eliminate the subjective elements and accentuate the stable and general traits"⁶. This means that when children are playing games like these, which will be presented later, they develop themselves, which is very important in teaching vocabulary of another language.

Another important point that must be taken into account is the motivation that games can provoke in the children, according to Oliveira (2011, p.153). "Language development relies on strong motivation to communicate verbally with another person"⁷. Thus, the motivation provoked by this game is also responsible for the acquisition of language, which in this case starts with the vocabularies presented in the game.

Below, we have two examples of memory games made by myself, an English graduating student at UEPB, at PIBID. The first example was made for the purpose of teaching fruit vocabulary to children. In some cards, colored fruits pictures that the children may know are used, in other cards the fruits name in English are used so that, as Lindsay (2006) suggested, they could make assimilation between the images and the names to get meaning. In the second example, students separated some vocabularies related to the daily routine. Some cards were separated with the verbs in English and the other half with the translation. Thus, students could link verbs in English to their translations by acquiring vocabulary.

⁴ "Ao movimentar o corpo no espaço, (a criança) recebe informações próprio-perceptivas (cenestésicas, labirínticas) e externo-perceptivas (especialmente visuais) necessárias para interpretar e organizar as relações entre elementos, formulando uma representação daquele espaço."

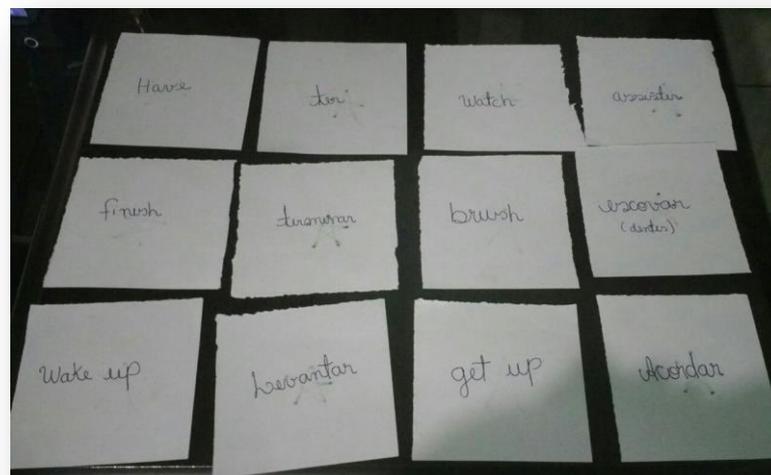
⁵ "A motricidade também se desenvolve por meio da manipulação de objetos de diferentes formas, cores, volumes, pesos e texturas. Ao alterar sua colocação postural conforme lida com esses objetos, variando as superfícies de contato com eles, a criança trabalha diversos segmentos corporais com contrações musculares de diferentes intensidades. Nesse esforço, ela se desenvolve."

⁶ "Para representar algo, a criança deve exteriorizá-lo como um objeto distinto, por meio de imagens que eliminem os elementos subjetivos e acentuem os traços estáveis e gerais."

⁷ "O desenvolvimento da linguagem apoia-se em forte motivação para se comunicar verbalmente com outra pessoa."



(1st example)



(2nd Example)

Conclusion

In summary, the development over this article made possible the analyze about how is probable to teach English vocabulary for kids, which strategies and techniques can be used to get the learning real and which games can be used to facilitate the vocabulary teaching.

Firstly, it is possible to see through Lindsay's (2006) contribution, the importance about assign meaning to words during teaching vocabulary process, because it is important to learners understand what mean each word to use them in social situations. Secondly, we focused in teaching and learning vocabulary using some contribution of Lowes (1998). After that, it was used some games examples that can be used to teach vocabulary for kids. The suggestions used are from BBC site made by author Ardron (2010). We talked about the importance to use these games and how they facilitate learning to kids. Assuring this, it was used some quotes by Oliveira (2011) about Language acquisition and development of Children. Finally, two memory games examples made by myself were presented in this article to contribute with this analyzes.

From everything that was exposed, it can be pointed that teachers and pupils shall not be constricted by traditional rules to understand English, but the exact opposite: alternative ways and forms of knowledge-building may be not only a good but necessary idea to be promoted in schools and courses.

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