USING GAMES IN TEACHER TRAINING

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In these days of a "communicative" approach to language teaching, language-learning games are a standard part of most teachers' repertoire of techniques for classroom use. So far, though, less thought seems to have been given to using games in teacher training and development.

Training courses often cover games for classroom use. But my intention here is to propose games that do not require the trainee or teacher to pose as a student. The games described will all be adaptations of fairly standard classroom games. They can be used in the real training situation, but trainees can be invited to take the format and adapt it back to a game suitable for target student groups, in the framework of materials design sessions.

For me, there are at least three justifications for the inclusion of games in training sessions. The first is that intensive training courses are often competitive and therefore create tension. The trainer, like any other teacher, must be concerned with lowering thresholds of fear and with channeling positive motivation towards high levels of achievement. A well-timed game can do this effectively.

My second justification is that the format and style of the ELT teacher training course (TTC) should in itself provide a model of good classroom practice. Tessa Woodward (1) points out the need to link content with process in a TTC, in practical ways that will reflect what we hope our trainees will achieve in their own classrooms. If the aim is to reduce teacher talk and increase student input in the ELT classroom at the end of the line, the same should be true of the training course.

My third justification is the necessary devolution of power from teacher to learner and from trainer to trainee. In this context, I am grateful to Julian Edge, who commented recently that the power-dichotomy for teachers and learners resolves itself when the teacher or trainer provides "a structured space within which the learner or trainee can develop" (2). This, in my view, is an excellent metaphor. In the early stages of this process, the space may need to be clearly and closely structured. Games normally provide this structure in palatable ways. It is understood that a game involves rules, but that the rules will be obeyed. But the players themselves administer and interpret the rules and negotiate variations. Having set the game in motion, the trainer can really withdraw.

Finally, I would like to take up a comment by Alan Maley (3) about student language learning materials, which he sees in many cases as "either excessively serious or overpoweringly trivial". I feel that the majority of teacher training materials err on the side of the excessively serious. I believe that playing with serious ideas can sometimes remove the threat from academic learning and bring back a lost element of fun.

Here, then, is a series of games for use in training or development sessions.

Game 1: Career Development Snakes and Ladders

Objective: To encourage trainees on an introductory Teacher Training Course to think of ELT as a career, rather than just a job. It can also be used in in-service or Teacher Development courses to give teachers a chance to think how far they have got in their career and where they would like to go.

Materials: One large blank sheet of paper or cardboard and one dice per group of 3-4 trainees. A ruler is also useful.

Procedure:
1. Arrange trainees/teachers in groups of 3 or 4.
2. Give each group a large sheet of paper, and ask them to divide in into 32 or 64 squares depending on the size of the sheet of paper. (32 or 64 squares can be produced by folding the paper). Each square should then be numbered, as in a snakes and ladders game (i.e.: begin in the bottom left hand corner. Number the first line of squares from left to right, the second line from right to left, and so on.)
3. Tell each group to arrange about 10 snakes and about 10 ladders anywhere on their board. They should then write a negative career event (e.g. "Burnout: you are unable to face your beginners' class") at the head of each snake, and a positive one (e.g. "Your article is accepted for publication by a teaching journal") at the foot of each ladder.
4. When boards are complete, invite the groups either to play their own game (by throwing the dice and moving a marker the appropriate number of squares), or to change boards with another group and play the game prepared by their colleagues.
5. After one round of the game, compare the boards and discuss the different perceptions of success and failure in an ELT career that they contain.

Comment: I have a feeling that part of the fun of this activity comes from the product, and that sessions where trainees, teachers, or students, actually work on an end product are usually very stimulating.

Acknowledgement: The idea of using Snakes and Ladders for student activities comes from "Grammar Games" by Mario Rinvolucri (published by Cambridge University Press). This is an adaptation of much the same idea to Teacher Training/Development

Game 2: Terminology "Call my Bluff"

Objective: To take a light-hearted look at some of the terminology trainees may come across and have to deal with in their reading.

Materials:
List of words to be defined. Copy of "The Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics" or other source of ELT terminology definitions.

Method:
1. Trainer arranges class in groups of 3 or 4.
2. Each group is given about 4 key words (or phrases or acronyms) to define. (Alternatively, trainees can select their own words.)
3. For each word, 3 definitions are prepared (one true definition and two false ones).
4. After a reasonable period (10-15 minutes) for preparation, two teams are formed. Each team should contain the same number of groups.
5. Each team presents one word at a time, reading out the 3 definitions. The other team must try to identify the correct definition.

Example: INTERLANGUAGE (possible definitions)

a) a language used as a means of international communication (False)
b) the type of language patterns that occur in interviews (False)
c) the type of language produced by students who are in the process of learning a language (True)

List of 20 possible terms for definition:

phoneme	contrastive	analysis	overgeneralization	SLA
salience	illocutionary force	proxemics	CALL
dyad	RP		
chain drill	construct validity		
homophone	IPA	TPR	
monitoring	code switching	fricative	

<u>Acknowledgement:</u>
The idea of using EFL/Linguistics terminology for "Call My Bluff" comes from my colleague, David Coles, who also suggests Terminology Charades (in which each syllable of a term would be acted out and then the whole word.)

References:
(1) Woodward, Tessa: "Process Options 2: Loop Input" in The Teacher Trainer, No. 0 Autumn 1986
(2) Edge, Julian: Communication during a session on "Cooperative Development" at the University of Brasilia, November 1989 (unpublished so far)
(3) Maley, Alan: "Exquisite Corpses, Men of Glass and Oullpo: harnessing the irrational to language learning" in "Humanistic Approaches: and Empirical View" ELT Documents 113, the British Council, 1982