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REVISION CAN BE FUN

Jim Madden

Teaching is a continuous process of decision-making and problem-solving. Here are just three common problems.

- * How can we constantly recycle learning so that knowledge and skills once mastered are not forgotten?
- * How can we usefully occupy pupils who have completed their school work ahead of others so that what we ask them to do is seen as a reward?
- * How can we include into our normal classroom routines learning activities that are also fun to do?

Perhaps we can solve all three problems with one solution — play games!

I am not advocating the playing of games for the sake of playing games. Our 'normal' classroom activities should offer almost as much challenge and satisfaction as a 'game', and our 'games' should produce as much learning as most of our 'normal' classroom activities. We should introduce games that increase or consolidate pupil learning.

What sort of criteria should we use to devise or select games that can help to solve the three problems mentioned above? First, the game should involve work that has been covered previously in class, since our intention is for pupils to take part in an enriching, enjoyable but unsupervised activity. Second, the game should force the pupils to think — to analyse, to compare, or at least to understand and recall. Some element of chance, however, may be introduced to add interest. Third, the instructional aspect of the game should be stressed so that the fun element does not obscure the learning value of the game. Lastly, the rules of the game should be easily understood; and, if possible, the set of materials or equipment involved should be adaptable to more than one game.

There are many possibilities for games. Fruitful sources of ideas can be found from traditional children's games and card games, commercially produced games, and games played on TV quiz shows. Let us take a look at an example of how one set of resource materials can be used in three different ways.

Much learning involves matching, so the teacher makes up pairs of cards to be matched. Some possibilities for matching are:

- * a maths problem and its answer
- * a word and its definition (This can apply to many subject areas: Vocabulary in English, people and dates in History, technical terms in Science, and so on.)
- * a sentence with a gap in it and the appropriate missing word (mainly for the testing of grammar knowledge).
- * a picture and a description of it (This has a wide application. Pictures can be matched with sentences that test vocabulary and also a knowledge of structure, particularly tenses. Pictures for Science can have parts indicated to be matched with technical terms. In Mathematics, a particular angle may be matched with its value in degrees.
- * a chemical equation and a description in words of the result.
- * questions and answers on any topic.
- * an important word that is printed in two parts (for spelling and word recognition).
- * beginnings of statements and their completions.

Let us imagine that a teacher has made two packs of cards, each card about the size of a normal playing card. One pack, made out of blue cardboard, has sentences containing words from a comprehension passage recently studied. The other pack, made of white cardboard, has simple stick-figure drawings to illustrate the sentences. There are fifteen cards in each pack. Even though the cards will take some time to make, the return for the effort invested will be good since the cards will be used at least once by every member of the class. With the two packs of cards, the teacher may enclose instructions for three different games as follows:

1. **Memory-match.** (A game for 2 to 4 players).
 - (a) Shuffle the blue and white cards together, then deal them out face down on the table.

- (b) The first player turns over one blue card and one white card. If the cards match and form a pair, the player picks them up and puts them in front of him. Then he has another turn.
 - (c) If the cards do not match, he allows the other players to see (and try to remember) the cards, then turns them face down again. The second player then has his turn.
 - (d) The game continues until all the cards have been matched. The winner is the player who has claimed the most pairs.
2. **Speed-match.** (A game for 2 or 3 players).
- (a) Shuffle the blue and white cards together, then deal them out face down on the table.
 - (b) On the signal "go", each player begins to turn over cards and to leave them face up. At any stage, he tries to pick up two cards that form a pair.
 - (c) The winner is the player who gathers up the most pairs.
- (NB. This game is fun, but has the disadvantage of being finished quickly. It can also be noisy and lead to the damage of cards!)
3. **Match-up.** (A game for 2 to 4 players)
- (a) Shuffle the blue and white cards together. Deal 4 cards to each player, and leave the rest in a pack on the table.
 - (b) The first player places one of his 4 cards face-up on the table. He then picks up the top card from the pack to replace the card he played. The object of the game is to form a pair by placing a card from your hand on top of its matching card already on the table. Naturally, if the first player has a pair of cards in his hand, he will play one so that he can complete the pair in the next round. If he has no pairs, he plays any card.
 - (c) The second player tries to see if he can 'complete the pair' by playing a matching card on top of a card already on the table. If he can, he takes possession of that pair. If he cannot make a pair, he plays any card. Either way, he then picks up a replacement card from the pack, and the next player has his turn.
 - (d) The game continues until all cards have been paired up.

The pupils can choose which game they want to play with the pack of cards. They may play all three in turn. This game sets up a period of 'painless revision' with the vocabulary of a particular passage, and remains available for all pupils to use until the end of the semester. The teacher can, of course, keep it then for next year's class.

The use of these games should be carefully regulated; perhaps they can be used once every one or two weeks. Even then, they will occupy only part of a period and may not be available to every member of the class. The teacher needs to build up a variety of games to maintain interest and provide a wide range of work for revision. He will also need to develop extra organisational skills, and train his pupils to work independently and quietly.

Games are fun, but they are also effective in helping to make learning permanent. Perhaps teachers who have devised games similar to the ones described here could write to this publication and share their ideas with others.