

Teachers too Need to Play

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A three-month Continuous Engagement Programme (CEP) for teaching English with teachers of one zone in Puducherry was in progress. Schools had just resumed after many months of lockdown, and we were happy at the prospect of having a face-to-face workshop with teachers. We followed up the first session with school visits and scaffolding. But after the second session, before we could even gear up for school visits, schools were closed again.

What should we do to engage teachers further when they had not yet been able to implement what they had already learnt? What could be done about the learning gap that children would face when they return to school? While we were pondering over these and many other such questions, we thought of playing some language games with teachers just to keep the CEP *WhatsApp* group active. Although we had earlier shared some teaching ideas and invited teachers to share theirs, there had been scant response from the teachers. Games, we thought, might create some excitement in the group.

I am sharing how these language games gradually got the teachers interested and how more and more of them began to participate.

Rebus puzzles

Rebus puzzles are pictures made with letters and words. We shared a few of these in the *WhatsApp* group, such as: *If the answer to the first one in the*



figure is 'Green with envy', what do you think are the others?

Two teachers were quick to respond. So, we shared some more of these puzzles. Three more teachers joined in. We started with easy puzzles to boost their confidence and encouraged all answers with positive smileys and *gifs*. And when they were wrong, instead of explicitly stating so, we gave clues to help them arrive at the correct answers.

Language riddles

The next day, we shared some language riddles with the condition that the respondents should not use the internet to find answers.

Can you try to answer some of the riddles?

1. Which four days of the week start with the letter T?
2. Which word in the English language is always spelled incorrectly?
3. What is a word made up of 4 letters, yet is made up of 3? Although is written with 8 letters, and then with 4. Rarely consists of 6 and is never written with 5.
4. A man says, 'Brothers and sisters have I none, but that man's father is my father's son.' Who is he pointing to?

Two new teachers joined the fun. And as they solved the riddles, we gave some more, gradually increasing the level of difficulty.

Analogy puzzles

Since the teachers were showing interest, we fixed a convenient time so that everyone could join and play together. We gave them some analogy puzzles and permitted them to use the internet since the answers would not be explicitly available; they would still need to apply themselves. These puzzles were a big hit and the teachers continued to play for more than an hour. In the end, they thanked us profusely for the 'brain-boosting' puzzles.

Can you try answering the ones below?

109	Import : Export :: Expenditure : ?
<input type="checkbox"/> A. Deficit	<input type="checkbox"/> B. Revenue
<input type="checkbox"/> C. Debt	<input type="checkbox"/> D. Tax
110	Country : President :: State : ?
<input type="checkbox"/> A. Governor	<input type="checkbox"/> B. Minister
<input type="checkbox"/> C. Chief Minister	<input type="checkbox"/> D. Citizen
111	Bread : Yeast :: Curd : ?
<input type="checkbox"/> A. Fungi	<input type="checkbox"/> B. Bacteria
<input type="checkbox"/> C. Germs	<input type="checkbox"/> D. Virus

Cows and Bulls

We made a video of how to play *Cows and Bulls* and shared it in the group. If a 'Bull' is for a right letter in the right position and a 'Cow' for a right letter in the wrong position. Can you guess the word based on the scores given in the figure?

ROAD	1 bull
COAT	1 bull
COST	1 bull, 1 cow
GOAT	1 bull, 1 cow

The next day, we started the game with simple three-letter words. Once they got a hang of it, we gave the teachers four-letter words to guess. They found it difficult, but as we supported them with

clues, they cracked these. Now they were hungry for more. Finally, we introduced them to the board game, 'Mastermind' in which instead of words, colours are used, and they could also buy the game from the market and play with their families.

What's the good word?

We started by making teachers guess simple words, like *tram* and *windmill*, and then moved to more difficult words, like *irresponsible* and *witness*. Teachers loved this game so much that we played it again the next day; this time, teachers thinking of the 'good word'.

If these are some clues: amusing, comical, funny, witty, joke; can you guess the good word?

By now, there were about seven teachers who joined the games off and on. To encourage more teachers to join in, we shared the rationale of playing such games: these would equip them with tools and ideas that they could adapt to the requirements of their classrooms, apart from these being fun, interesting and educative for the teachers themselves.

Word-building games

We gave the teachers the first and last letter/sound and asked them to come up with one-syllable, two-syllable and three-syllable words using them. Can you guess the word I have in mind with these clues? It includes the sounds /s/ /t/ and /m/ and it is related to duty.

Another word-building game was about creating more words from a given word by changing/adding/deleting a letter. For example, we gave the word 'TEAM' and asked the teachers to come up with five more words changing one letter at a time. So, a teacher came up with TEAM-BEAM-BEAT-BOAT-BOOT-HOOT and then strung them together to make: The TEAM followed the HOOT sound in a BOAT with BOOTS and BEAMED with the BEAT.

The outcome

Within just two weeks of playing these and other such games, we could sense the impact. These six to seven teachers who were regularly involved were more friendly than before. When we spoke to them over the phone there was excitement in their voices. One teacher said that the games made them use their brains after a very long time. Another said that she looked forward to these games every day. A third asked to reschedule the games since she could not participate at the given time. And a fourth said that although she was not

able to participate *live*, she followed the games later when she had the time. The participation of these teachers in the third and final session of CEP which happened online was perceivably better than earlier. They shared their classroom experiences, actively interacted during the session, and shared positive feedback. It was evident that these games had struck a chord with them and had ameliorated our relationship.

My reflection

Although we work as teacher educators, our concern is largely for the students. And understandably so, since we have the potential to determine to a good extent not only the quality of their present (considering that they spend half their waking hours in school) but also of their future. We may not have the same concern for the teachers since we see them as independent adults in secure government jobs. So, it is quite possible that we perceive teachers as the means to fulfil our end of a better learning experience for students. But the above experience shows that it is not so.

Instead of seeing teachers as persons who need to change their beliefs and practices, we need to think of them as autonomous, rational individuals who have the potential to learn, unlearn and relearn through observation and dialogue. They are not mere professionals out to deliver, but rather human beings juggling multiple responsibilities and dealing with manifold needs just as everyone else. Among their needs is the need for breaks from work, some fun and play even if it is just another way of getting more conversant with the subject that they teach.

Answer Key

Rebus: Broken Promise; A friend in need; Travel overseas

Riddles: Tuesday, Thursday, Today and Tomorrow; Incorrectly; It does not need an answer since it is not a question; His son

Analogy: B, A, B

Cows and Bulls: SONG

What's the good word? Humour

Word-building games: Must

Resources

Cows and Bulls game: <https://youtu.be/ydpnUviPPWE>

Sources

Rebus puzzle: Rebus Puzzles, Jainco Publishers (an imprint of Jainco Enterprises), Delhi

Language riddles: From different sites on the internet

Analogy puzzle: Analogy Puzzles, Jainco Publishers (an imprint of Jainco Enterprises), Delhi

Word scramble: <https://www.treevalleyacademy.com/back-to-school-unscramble/>



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