

# THE GAME SETTING: AN AVENUE TO MORE ENGLISH

by Emilio Cortez

The language-teaching game, especially when used with the young second-language learner, has been widely acclaimed as an effective and highly useful pedagogic aid. Faye Bumpass expresses the feelings of many ESOL teachers when she says:

Games can be an invaluable aid in teaching a foreign language on the elementary level. Nothing intrigues children more than the promise of learning a new game. By taking advantage of this playful inclination, the teacher is able to build new vocabulary concepts and to give additional practice in maintaining a previously learned skill.<sup>1</sup>

When playing a game, children focus more intently upon everything said. A situation which, needless to say, helps foster language acquisition.

In a game setting various opportunities arise for furthering the students' knowledge of English. Even prior to a game a host of contextually appropriate utterances are possible. Consider some of the following examples:

*"Are you ready for our game?"*

*"Who's ready to play a game?"*

*"Let's play a game."*

*"Who wants to play a game?"*

*"It's time for our game."*

*"Today we're going to play a game."*

*"I think we're ready for our game."*

*"It's game time"*

It is suggested that ESOL teachers be consistent in their use of language when announcing "language-game time." After the children have grown accustomed to a specific introductory expression, the teacher

may select a different opening statement, and so on.

Many times just the prospect of a game acts as a motivator. Often ESOL teachers fail to take full advantage of their students' spontaneous spurts of heightened interest when a prospective game is announced. Such heightened interest can yield positive results when coupled with an appropriate English utterance which is consistently reinforced.

During competitive games in which points are awarded, team efforts must be periodically assessed. Here again, a variety of English sentences can be subtly introduced such as:

*"I wonder who's winning?"*

*"How many points does Team B have?"*

*"How many points does Team A need to win?"*

*"What's the score?"*

On occasion the entire class may even participate in counting points. Such choral practice reinforces number concepts in a most meaningful way for young children.

It cannot be overstressed that, in addition to the language game proper, many expressions can be taught to the second-language learner if a primacy of consistency in presentation is maintained. By so doing, we can begin to capitalize more fully on the almost limitless versatility of the language-teaching game.

<sup>1</sup> Faye Bumpass, *Teaching Young Students English as a Second Language* (New York: American Book Company, 1963), p. 143.