

Casino Game

When it comes to promoting the development of communicative competence in a second language class, games provide great opportunities for interaction in the classroom as they allow learners to take an active role in language learning and use this language in a meaningful way.

Description

Learning a foreign language is different from other kinds of learning. Foreign language classes are far from being just lectures. Students are expected to participate and produce output in the target language, and teachers have to create those opportunities for genuine interaction.

This is a simple group work activity that will help students review and retain information in a way that is fun, enjoyable, and effective. Learning happens best when learners feel at ease, and when they feel that they are having fun. Group work and games are perfect for that purpose because “playing is a way to make learning interesting” (Castrillón, 2003). Games have been validated as pedagogical tools which, if used correctly, yield enormous benefits for language learners, including student motivation.

Intended audience

This activity was designed for undergraduate students from different departments who are studying Spanish as a foreign language. It has been used to review material covered in class in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and culture. Due to its nature, it can be adapted for different levels of Spanish proficiency and different foreign languages, and it can also be used in other disciplines to review class content before an exam or to help students assimilate theoretical concepts in a practical way.

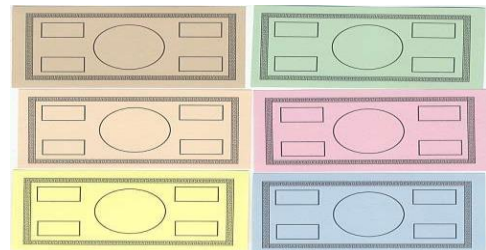
Learning Outcomes

By participating in this activity, students will recall important information presented in class, compare and contrast pieces of information, explain class concepts in their own words, and illustrate their understanding of class material before the exam. They will also use the target language while they work cooperatively, hence improving their oral skills.

Lesson Outline

Materials:

- Play money (printable)
- List of True or False questions (on PPT or on paper)



Preparation before class:

Print the play money and make \$5, \$10, and \$20 bills.

Prepare a list of true or false statements with the material that you want to review.

Examples:

1. Vocabulary: *El antónimo de ‘joven’ es ‘viejo’* (the opposite of ‘young’ is ‘old’) - TRUE
2. Grammar: *El gerundio de ‘oir’ es ‘oiendo’* (the gerund of *to hear* is ‘oiendo’) - FALSE → It is *OYENDO*
3. Culture: *El fútbol es el pasatiempo más popular en América Latina* (Soccer is the most popular hobby in Latin America) - TRUE

For extra listening comprehension practice, I bring my questions on a piece of paper and simply read them slowly. For promoting noticing, I bring my questions in PowerPoint slides with input enhancement of some sort (bolded, underlined, highlighted, etc.) to direct students’ attention to relevant information.

Teachers can be creative as to what to put on the list. Questions can go from very easy to very difficult. The list can cover Math, Chemistry, Business, Literature, Science, Music, and Law, among many others.

The Actual Activity:

- **Setting up (5 minutes)**

The class is divided in pairs or groups of three students. Each group receives \$100 from the play money previously printed, and students decide on a name for the team. Selecting a name does not sound significant, but students enjoy coming up with creative names, especially in the foreign language that they are learning. In addition, the negotiation that takes place in the target language is priceless.

- **Explaining the rules (2 minutes)**

The teacher will read a statement. Students will have to work together to decide whether the statement is true or false according to what they have studied in class. As a language teacher, I believe that this is the most important part of the activity; the part where they work collaboratively to make a decision in the target language.

Once they have decided on their answer, they will place their bets. They can bet minimum \$5 and maximum \$20 per question. They will have to agree on the amount to bet, and this will depend on how confident they are that their answer is correct. If they answer correctly, the teacher will double their bet. If they do not, the teacher will take away their money. When the last question has been played, the team with the most money will be declared the winner. There should always be a reward. I always reward them with stickers considering that stickers are motivational for students of all ages (adults included).

- **Playing the game (20 minutes)**

The actual amount of time that the activity will take will depend on how much material there is to be reviewed. However, the goals can be achieved in 20 minutes as to leave time for other class-related activities.

- **Ensuring assessment (10 minutes)**

Every time the answer to a question is ‘FALSE’, students should be given the opportunity to say what the correct answer is. If they know that the question is false, they probably know the reason why, and asking them to explain

Diana Fernandez
dferna52@uwo.ca

Ph.D. Student – Hispanic Linguistics
Department of Modern Languages

it to their classmates provides an extra opportunity for learning. If they do not know that the question is false, listening to their classmates' explanation is, again, an extra opportunity for learning.

On a final note

I believe in the power of group work and games. I always use them in my classes. I have done this activity many times, with many different students, and it works every time. I truly believe that this is a **Great Idea For Teaching**.

References

Castrillón, O. (2003). Encouraging the development of children's oral communicative competences through play. *Profile, Issues in Teacher's Professional Development*, 4, 58-64.

Printable play money image: http://www.printablee.com/post_blank-play-money-printable_109760/