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THE SELECTION AND USE OF READING GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

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The use of educational games and related game format experiences, have within the past several years gained some degree of acceptance (Tassia, 1979). Many critics still voice repeated concern over the apparent misuse, overuse or segmentation of learning processes created by the use of educational games (Andrews and Thorpe, 1977; Allington and Strange, 1977). Others provide some feasible suggestions for integrating games into an instructional setting (Carney, 1978; Ensminger, 1980; Hautala and Mason, 1978; and Mann and Fridell, 1980). The present discussion includes a checklist for evaluating and selecting game-type activities and a list of resources from which specialists, teachers, and parents may select appropriate reinforcement procedures and games.

There is a useful place for educational games and creative activities in the classroom if a teacher is willing to be selective in the type and utilization of such experiences. The following checklist and annotated resources are intended for those who use such experiences to 1) reinforce existing or newly taught skills or concepts; 2) improve social interactions among youngsters; 3) provide circumstances for student-directed learning; and 4) bring an enjoyable alternative to learning in the classroom.

Selecting a Gaming Activity

A gaming activity is ultimately a student-directed learning experience that involves two or more of the following elements: 1) risk taking; 2) competition; 3) measurement of gain or achievement; 4) decision making; and 5) interaction with other students or a teacher. The overall effectiveness of a gaming activity may be determined through teacher observation during and following an activity. The amount of formality for the observations is a matter of personal preference. The checklist which follows was developed with the assistance of one hundred seventy-eight teachers who use educational games in their classrooms. It is intended to be used as an informal guide for teacher observation and selection of game-type learning experiences and not as a formal evaluation instrument.

USABILITY CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING EDUCATION GAMES*

	Yes				No			
1. Most students can be successful.	5	4	3	2	1			
2. The experience builds enthusiasm.	5	4	3	2	1			
3. The players can easily understand the rules.	5	4	3	2	1			
4. There is ample learning involvement.	5	4	3	2	1			
5. Teacher supervision is limited.	5	4	3	2	1			
6. A record keeping or progress indicator is kept.	5	4	3	2	1			
7. The activity requires an appropriate length of time.	5	4	3	2	1			
8. The experience is directly related to skills necessary for other academic tasks.	5	4	3	2	1			
9. Decision making (not chance) is involved.	5	4	3	2	1			
10. The activity is, in format and skill practiced, appropriate for my students.	5	4	3	2	1			
11. The activity is adaptable to other skill or content areas.	5	4	3	2	1			
12. The experience can be used more than one time without becoming boring.	5	4	3	2	1			
13. The level of noise generated during the experience is acceptable.	5	4	3	2	1			
14. The physical format of the game is easy to maintain and store.	5	4	3	2	1			

* A score of fifty-five points or higher is deemed acceptable.

Wise investors rarely invest all of their dollars in a single venture. Similarly, a wise teacher should not use one particular instructional strategy to the exclusion of all others. Because games may be used at times, it does not imply that they should not be used at all. A variety of different learning experiences is a prerequisite for providing a balanced program of instruction.

Children learn from infancy to assimilate new information about reality through play activities. As a result, students are comfortable with games and they usually enjoy the direct involvement that games offer. However, teachers should be wary of the "happiness index" when considering the use of a particular gaming experience. A pleasurable experience is not a valid indication of the success of a learning experience. While a child's responses are important, the overall joy or repeated requests for particular games may represent more of a task avoidance behavior of classroom work than a genuine desire for the activity. Our survey, involving more than 480 elementary age youngsters, revealed that most children play games because they "want to win." While the possibility of winning is usually there, teachers are generally concerned

about the reinforcement of skills and "winning" represents the needed motivation to help students remain on a task.

Activities for teaching reading work if the teacher-directed conditions for learning are appropriate and if a variety of interesting experiences are maintained. With this in mind, your authors suggest the following resources which represent books from which reading and language arts games and creative activities may be selected for use in remediation programs, classroom supplements and tutorial lessons.

Suggested Resource Books of Reading Games and Activities

Blake, Janet; Susan Rybert and June Sybastion, Bag of Tricks: Instructional Activities and Games, Denver: Love Publishing Company, 1976. Ideas are provided for teachers or parents to make language and game board activities. Easy to follow directions and possible variations are given.

Bryant, Cathy J., Coding Games: Active Ways to Enhance Reading and Thinking, Denver: Love Publishing Company, 1971. The book is designed to integrate movement with cognitive learning. Areas of instruction include communication and thinking skills, problem solving and recognition of symbols.

Burns, Paul C., and Betty D. Roe, Reading Activities for Today's Elementary Schools, Chicago, Rand McNally Publishing Company, 1979. The book includes several sketches and illustrations along with ideas for using a variety of materials, word recognition, vocabulary, comprehension and study skills, oral reading, drama and recreational reading strategies.

Forgan, Harry W., The Reading Corner: Ideas for Individualizing Reading, Santa Monica, Goodyear Publishing Co., 1977. Many illustrations are used in this handbook for teachers. Special attention is given to the role of the teacher along with teaching ideas for four basic reading skill areas. Over seventy ready-to-use pages are provided for individualizing along with twenty helpful lists for teachers.

Herr, Selma E., Learning Activities for Reading, 3rd edition, Dubuque, IA, Wm. C. Brown Co., 1977. This book represents a traditional approach to basic skills with several illustrations and plenty of suggestions. There is a special section for teaching bilingual children.

McIntyre, Virgie M., Reading Strategies and Enrichment Activities for Grades 4-9, Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publ. Co., 1977. A useful blending of fifteen chapters is used to combine theory and practice. Suggestions are offered for areas of difficulty, including special areas such as student interests, building enthusiasm, motivation and involvement.

Nichols, Arline and Susan Coleridge, Reading Games and Activities, Carthage, IL: The Good Apple Publ. Co., 1980. The collection of ideas is directed toward the areas of reading and mathematics. The ideas were developed by teachers for use in grades K-3.

- Noble, Eleanor and Sondra Kutzman, Pick-Me-Ups for Your Reading Program, Hattiesburg, MS: Univ of Southern Mississippi, 1977. More than one hundred ideas are provided for creating pre-reading and reading activities. Multiple suggestions are given for using containers, newspapers, magazines, catalogues, bottles, rocks, strings and other everyday items to teach reading.
- Seaman, Rosie. Through Their Looking Glass, Nashville, TN: Incentive Publications, Inc., 1979. Forty-nine sensory games and activities are suggested for use with pre-schoolers.
- Spache, Evelyn B. Reading Activities for Child Involvement, 3rd edition, Boston: Allyn & Bacon Inc, 1980. The book offers nine chapters containing teaching ideas for making reading kits, pre-reading and basic reading skills, locational skills, content reading and other areas.
- Thomas, Ellen L., Reading Aids for very la s: 40 Activities for Every Class, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1980. This big paperback includes most areas of reading and study skills. A helpful subject area index and some 75 master copies for ready use are also provided.

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