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LUDIC ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING TEENAGERS AND
ADULTS

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Introduction

A review of modern handbooks for foreign language teaching as compared with the ones from the previous decades will immediately reveal a striking difference in the content and choice of materials and methods used. Handbooks dating from the 60s and the 70s differ significantly from those published in the 90s or the beginning of the 21st century. One of these differences is the incorporation of the ludic strategy in modern language teaching. At the end of the 70s, with the new communicative approach method of language learning developing, the ludic strategy started to penetrate into language learning and into the modern handbook. Although linguists (Cieśla 1960 in Siek-Piskozub 2001:51-56, Siek-Piskozub 2001) prove that various kinds of games have been appreciated and used by brilliant pedagogues since ancient times, it is only the last decade of the 20th century that popularised ludic techniques and made them indispensable in language teaching.

This paper will try to first of all describe some types of ludic activities and their function in improving the process of foreign language learning based on the research done so far. The second part will show examples of implementation of these strategies in the syllabus by presenting a few lesson scripts exploiting ludic activities. The final part will try to sum up various, more practical, reflections on using the play strategy in the classroom.

Chapter 1

Examples of various ludic techniques and their role in foreign language learning.

1. 1. Songs

Acknowledged linguists give numerous reasons for using songs in foreign language teaching. Music and songs are the natural environment for various human activities, among others – learning. Music can act as a powerful mnemonic device (Wach 2002), as it helps remember material easily. We tune in to the music and sometimes it simply cannot get of our head. Murphey refers to it as “the song stuck in my head phenomenon” (Murphey 1990). Activating repetition mechanism of the language acquisition device facilitates the process of remembering vocabulary or grammar structures. Music is said to enhance perception and improve our concentration (Bogdanowicz 1989 in Wach 2002), which in turn develops our cognition. Songs are a great motivating tool – especially for some age groups like children, teenagers and young adults as they represent some kind of subculture and ideology young people identify with. Using songs and music fulfills a social function of integration and feeling the sense of belonging. Music can also be used in therapy (Jourdain 1997 in Wach 2002) helping people to reveal or overcome their emotions. Siek-Piskozub categorizes these various functions of music and songs and distinguishes some other functions apart from those mentioned above – organising, didactic and cognitive (Siek-Piskozub 1995). In the lesson scripts presented in the second part the predominant aim of using songs in the classroom was to trigger the cognition mechanism – the students are supposed to learn something listening to the song, analysing its lyrics.

1.2. Projects

Project work is rarely referred to as “ludic strategy” in methodological handbooks. Its nature, however, has some elements in common with what is defined as ‘ludic strategy’.

Project work activates students because they work on something they are really interested in and very often these interests are centered outside the classroom. Projects develop students' communicative abilities as the main assumption about project work is that it is done in groups and based on exchanging information. Very frequently, the very idea of group work initiates some competitiveness as students want to perform best in their groups. Also, project work can evoke "peer group enthusiasm" which suggests that the activity is enjoyable and entertaining (Fried-Booth 2002). Among many strengths of the project work we can list the opportunity to draw together mixed-ability students, the idea of establishing student's autonomy, developing their confidence and independence in themselves as both individual human beings and learners, and all this seems to be the side effect of the main idea behind the project work, which is being able to communicate. The goal of the project presented in the second part was to raise students' cultural awareness, but also to do it in an entertaining way.

1.3. Role-play

Role-plays are part of a very broad play strategy which are simulations. Lardousse says "...it is included in simulations but not confined to them". By the very nature of their definition role-play is playing the role of somebody else. This "playing" element suggests that students are free to feel as inventive and creative as possible in the environment which does not cause any inhibitions. In the "imagined world" the students feel safe to adopt any role they would otherwise oppose to in the real life. Role-play is being somebody rather than being like somebody or thinking like somebody, but no matter if the participants play themselves as in the case of simulations or imaginary characters like in role-plays, both these kinds of activities prepare them for real-life communication, the language of which is often impossible to predict (Lardousse 1987).

The communicative benefit of role-plays seems obvious, this communication however can also be achieved in other pair-work activities. What makes role-play so significant in language learning is its social aspect enabling the students to build up some social skills, preparing them for playing these roles in real life and also encouraging more intimidated students. Another benefit coming from role-plays which certainly cannot be undermined is pure fun they get from pretending to be someone else and setting their imagination free.

In the script presented in the second chapter the function of the role-play used was to evoke some communication and through this drill some grammatical structures provided by the teacher.

1.4. Games

Research shows that games enhance learners' concentration span, their activity and efficacy in using a foreign language (Gravey 1969). Games contribute to limiting our inhibitions and improving fluency and length of the utterances (Stern 1983). Kruszewski underlines the motivating function of the competition element in games (Kruszewski 1992), Rinvoluceri pays attention to the benefits of getting most students involved in work at the same time without making the teacher a key figure in the learning process (Rinvoluceri 2000). Most linguists agree that games are a powerful motivational tool in the language learning process as they provide variation, enjoyment and stimulus for meaningful communication in the language classroom. (Siek-Piskozub 1995; Wright, Betteridge and Buckby 2001; Lee 1991). This meaningfulness of the game has often been undermined by the teachers who treat play strategy as something additional to the learning process, often leaving it to the end of the week or term. It has been proved, however, that the games provide the learner with meaning, or rather that the learners fill the games with their experience and meaning, making them more personal activities and the language input they provide – more memorable.

Chapter 2 presents five lesson scripts which incorporate play techniques in the teaching process. The main focus of these scripts will be the motivational and cognitive function of ludic techniques used in teaching teenagers and young adults – the age groups which are not the primary target of the ludic strategy, yet their powerful effects on learning a foreign language in these age groups cannot be overlooked. The third, concluding, chapter discusses the influence of these techniques on the teaching/learning process.

Chapter 2

Examples of lesson scripts incorporating the play strategy.

2.1. Lesson script 1

Topic of the lesson: The Price of Fame

Objectives: To practice listening for specific information, to practice expressing opinions, agreeing, disagreeing

Age group: young adults/adults

Level: intermediate

<u>Warm-up</u> 3 min	The teacher asks the class to listen to the song “Candle in the wind” by Elton John.
<u>Lead-in</u> 6 min.	The teacher asks the class who the song is about, when it was written, why it was written, who originally it was written about. The students look at the pictures (p.50 Opportunities-Intermediate) and discuss the following questions: <i>Who can you see in the photos? What do you know about the lives of these people?</i> Open-class discussion
<u>Vocabulary pre-teaching</u> 2 min.	The students look at the words and match them with the definitions e.g. <i>celebrity – a famous person</i>
<u>Pre-listening</u> 2 min.	The students look at Listening Strategies, read them, before they go on to listen to the programme.
<u>Listening</u> 5 min.	The students listen to the radio programme, complete the notes about celebrities, fame and the price you have to pay for that, then compare their answers in pairs. The teacher plays the recording more than once if necessary and conducts

	feedback
<u>Pre-listening</u> 2 min.	The students read the sentences from the discussion they are going to listen to to check if they understand them.
<u>Listening</u> 5 min.	The students listen to the discussion and mark who expresses the opinions in the sentences. The teacher plays the recording more than once if necessary and conducts feedback.
<u>Function-file</u> 3 min.	The students work in pairs. They look at the Function-file and complete the sentences, showing agreement or disagreement, with the words given. Then they listen to the recording once again to see whether they were correct.
<u>Writing</u> 5 min.	The students make notes with their opinions on these things: <i>the quality of TV programmes; control of TV programmes; celebrities, privacy and the media.</i>
<u>Speaking</u> 5 min.	The students work in pairs and exchange their ideas about the media on the basis of the notes.
<u>Speaking</u> 5 min.	In pairs the students make a list of famous people and write down the reasons they are/were famous for.
<u>Homework</u> 1 min.	The students are supposed to write what their opinion of these people is.

2.2. Lesson script 2

Topic of the lesson: The Conditional Game

Objectives: To practice mixed conditional sentences, to revise all conditional forms in speaking

Age group: teenagers/young adults/adults

Level: intermediate/upper-intermediate

<u>Warm-up</u> 2 min.	The teacher gives the students slips of paper with beginnings of sentences. The students are supposed to finish them any way they like. They are all examples of Conditionals 2 and 3.
<u>Lead-in</u> 3 min.	The teacher asks them to read out the sentences and identify the conditional. The students then decide which part of the conditional refers to which time sequence, e.g. <i>If I hadn't overslept (past situation), I wouldn't have been late for school. (past result).</i>
<u>Grammar</u> <u>lead-in</u> 5 min.	The teacher puts these three sentences on the board, and asks them to identify time sequences: <i>If I were you I would have called him long ago. (present situation+past result)</i> <i>If we had saved some money we wouldn't be broke right now. (past situation+present result)</i> The teacher then explains that these are examples of mixed conditionals and provides the students with the patterns.
<u>Grammar</u> <u>activity</u> 5 min.	The students look at the sentences in the book (ex.2, p.130 – INSIDE OUT INTERMEDIATE) and write conditional sentences according to the prompts, e.g. <i>I ate too much last night. I'm not feeling very well.</i> <i>If I hadn't eaten so much I would be feeling O.K.</i>
<u>Reading</u> <u>and</u> <u>Speaking</u> 10 min.	The students read the stories (p.132 INSIDE OUT INTERMEDIATE) and discuss in pairs what they would have done. The teacher monitors their work.
<u>Listening</u> 5 min.	The students listen to the cassette and find out what the people did. The teacher conducts feedback and compares the opinions.

<p><u>The game</u> 15 min.</p>	<p>The students are put into small groups (3-4 people) and play The Conditional Game. This is a communicative activity based on some situations, cues and sentences to finish. The game revises all conditional forms (mainly 2, 3 and mixed). While the students are playing the teacher supervises and monitors the game.</p>
<p><u>Homework</u> 1 min.</p>	<p>The students are supposed to do an exercise revising conditional forms.</p>

2.3. Lesson script 3

Topic of the lesson: A visit to Sydney

Objectives: To prepare a project about Sydney, to raise students' cultural awareness

Age group: teenagers/young adults

Level: intermediate

<u>Warm-up</u> 7 min.	The teacher asks the students all the information they remember, know about Australia and particularly Sydney.
<u>Lead-in</u> 3 min.	The teacher explains that the students will play in groups in the Web Quest and they will have to find some information about Sydney, and also they will have to prepare a project about places worth visiting in Sydney.
<u>Pre-reading task</u> 6 min.	The students work in pairs. They open the web page at www.onestopenglish.com to access the Web Quest about Sydney. They read the sentences about the history of Sydney, mark if they are True or False according to what they know.
<u>Reading</u> 12 min.	The students right now have to find relevant information in e-guides to read and see whether they were correct. The teacher conducts feedback.
<u>Reading and Speaking</u> 15 min.	The students right now work in two groups. Each group has to design a quiz on one of the landmarks of Sydney: Group A about Sydney Opera House, group B about Sydney Harbour Bridge. The students read about these buildings in the net and think about 6 questions they are going to ask another group.
<u>Homework</u> 2 min.	The teacher shows the students the web page from which they can write postcard from Sydney and asks students to send her an e-postcard from Sydney as homework describing what they are doing there.
<u>Lead-in</u> 5 min.	The teacher comments on the homework and reads the examples of the best postcards to the whole class.
<u>Playing a quiz</u> 15 min.	The students play the quiz about the landmarks of Sydney they prepared during the last class.
<u>Speaking and writing</u>	The teacher explains that the students will have to prepare a project (a poster, a Power Point presentation) about things worth visiting in Sydney. <i>Plan a</i>

25 min.	<i>three-day sightseeing tour around Sydney.</i> The students, in groups of 3-4, will make a plan of things to see and distribute tasks among themselves. They decide on the form of the project. The teacher discusses the plans with the groups and monitors their work. They finish working on the projects at home. They have about a week to complete it. One class will be devoted to presenting and evaluating projects.
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2.4. Lesson script 4

Topic of the lesson: The Irish Conflict

Objectives: To practice listening for specific information, to raise cultural awareness

Age group: teenagers/young adults

Level: pre-intermediate/intermediate

<u>Warm-up</u> 5 min.	The teacher asks the students to listen to a compilation of the songs and try to guess who is singing. The students listen to bits of U2, Shineead O’Connor, Enya, Cranberries and Boyzone and write down the names of the singers.
<u>Lead-in</u> 2 min.	The teacher conducts feedback and asks the students what all these singers have in common. The students are supposed to come up with “They are all Irish”
<u>Pre-reading</u> 4 min.	The teacher explains that the students will listen to a whole song by one of these bands the Cranberries, but first the students will read something about the group.
<u>Reading</u> 4 min.	The students read the text (HEINEMANN HITS ACTIVITY BOOK, p. 27) and answer the reading comprehension questions.
<u>Pre-Listening</u> 3 min.	The students look at the words from the lyrics and try to find the ones that rhyme. Also on the basis of these cues they are supposed to discuss what they think the song might be about. (The words are: <i>violence, family, slowly, silence, dying, 1916, theme, crying, lowly, see, me</i>)
<u>Listening</u> 4 min.	The students listen to the song completing the lyrics. They check their answers in pairs and listen to the song once again. The teacher conducts feedback.
<u>Cultural awareness - stating the topic</u> 10 min.	The teacher asks some comprehension questions concerning the song (<i>What is the topic of the song?, Which people are in the song? How do they feel? Who is the ‘Zombie’? How does the singer feel about war? Where are the group from? What relation might it have to the song?</i>) and using the map explains about the Irish conflict, six counties of the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. The teacher asks if students have ever heard of IRA or seen violent scenes in the streets of Ireland on TV, or maybe have seen some movies which tackle the problem.

<u>Speaking</u> 5 min.	The Students right now think of a sound, a taste, a smell, a sensation or an image they associate with peace; they write down these associations and exchange ideas with their partner.
<u>Writing</u> 5 min.	In pairs the students complete the poem using the framework on the worksheet and then read them to the class.
<u>Homework</u> 2 min.	The teacher asks the students to choose another topic and write a similar poem using the prompts (<i>It looks like, It feels like, It sounds like, It smells like, It tastes like</i>) without writing the title. At the beginning of the next class the students will read their poems and guess the titles.

2.5. Lesson script 5

Topic of the lesson: Reporting

Objectives: To practice reported speech

Age group: teenagers/young adults/adults

Level: upper-intermediate

<u>Warm-up</u> 2 min.	The teacher asks the students if they ever heard of the term <i>marriage from hell</i> and if they know any famous couples who have been fighting with each other by the means of the press.
<u>Reading</u> 5 min.	The teacher gives each student a copy of a newspaper article describing such a couple and asks them to read it and to identify what the problem with the marriage is.
<u>Lead-in</u> 2 min.	The teacher then explains that the students will play a kind of a role-play and that some of them will be reporters for “ <i>Movie World</i> ” and some of them will be a man or a woman in a couple.
<u>Pre-Speaking</u> 7 min.	Half of the students is given a <i>reporter</i> role card and they are supposed to work in pairs to come up with the questions they are going to ask the couple. The other half is given either a <i>Jim Small</i> card or a <i>Catherine Hunt</i> role card and they also should prepare for the interview.
<u>Speaking – the interviews</u> 7 min.	The students are put in pairs so that we have one reporter and Catherine or Jim working together. The reporters conduct interviews and make notes.
<u>Speaking – the interviews, reporting</u> 7 min.	The reporter then swap roles so that they talk to the other half of the couple. They tell their interviewee what their husband/wife said and ask them to respond. The teacher monitors and encourages the reporters to use reporting verbs and reported questions/statements. As help in this stage the teacher puts some reporting verbs on the board as prompts: <i>say, tell, ask, accuse, deny, threaten, warn, decide, urge, promise, offer, assure, order, suggest, blame, refuse, insist.</i>

<u>Writing</u> 10 min.	The reporters then are put in pairs or small groups so are Jims and Catherines. The first write their article for <i>Movie World</i> the latter write the letters to their lawyers.
<u>Feedback</u> 5 min.	The students read their letters and the teacher conducts feedback paying special attention to reporting forms.

Chapter 3

The evaluation of ludic activities in teaching teenagers and adults.

In two of the lesson scripts presented in the previous chapter the goal of introducing the ludic strategy is to raise cultural awareness among the students. These lessons have been highly successful, and the students have enjoyed them immensely. The first one, about Sydney, was very interesting for the students as it broke the normal routine of sitting in the classroom, and although we do use computer technology from time to time it is always a nice change for the students. The students really enjoyed doing the internet quiz about Sydney and they also got involved in designing their respective surveys. I got very interesting postcards from Sydney, all written in such a convincing way as if all my students had really visited this city. The lesson devoted to their presentations was enjoyable for both my students and me. The groups were really excited about their projects, they prepared maps, posters and multimedia presentations in which they guided us around Sydney. Certainly they would never have learned so much about Australia had they only read the text about this country in their handbooks.

The same conclusion can be drawn from the lesson about the Irish conflict. The students really liked “Zombie” and I was really surprised when they insisted on singing the song out loud, which is something I never suggest due to my poor singing skills. This song really appeals to teenagers and young people because it is relatively recent, fairly popular and by gaining some background knowledge about the lyrics, I could sense they also felt the advantage of being more “informed, or educated” on the topic. Some of the students have finally sorted out all the confusing information about the Irish conflict, and Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Another successful activity was writing the poem. The group of students I worked with are a very creative and imaginative people so they came up with some very nice poems.

Two of the scripts presented ludic strategy as the tool in revising grammar. Both of these lessons involve grammatical structures usually disliked by the students and labelled “difficult” and “complicated” such as Reported Speech and Conditional sentences. The role-play was a very successful activity, because it is far from drilling Reported Speech in lengthy exercises. The students (teenagers as well as adults) got very excited when they were supposed to make up the details of a relationship that is falling apart, and as it was said in Chapter 1 already, getting in a role of someone else is not as inhibiting as it would be if they were supposed to talk about themselves. This activity provoked a lot of laughter in the classroom and even if students kept on forgetting about Reported Speech rules, the patterns of reporting verbs visible on the board facilitated the employment of the desired structures.

The Conditional game was maybe not as entertaining as the role-play, as it didn’t really demanded any creativity on the part of the students, but the element of the competition involved and the fact that all the players were at the same time the referees as they had to judge whether the sentences were correct or not made it different from routine grammar exercises. I had time to supervise all the groups, correct and explain individually which isn’t always possible in the feedback to grammar activities.

The song “Candle in the Wind” in the lesson about “The Price of Fame” provoked a lot of discussions about the life of celebrities. Even teenagers had their say about the invasion of privacy by the media, and they did remember the accident of Princess Diana. The adult group could also say something about the original addressee of the song Marilyn Monroe – and the influence of public opinion on her life. Generally, the aim of the play strategy here was to warm up before the discussion, to introduce the topic, and this song fulfilled this role very well.

To sum up I would really underline the importance of incorporating ludic activities in teaching teenagers and adults. Common practice shows that teenagers, like children, are very

responsive to these types of activities and their language skills can really benefit from the use of this strategy. Adults, on the other hand, who are said to be rather reluctant towards “playing” during the language lesson, have also broken this stereotype as they willingly participated in these activities and seemed to have been enjoying them very much.

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APPENDIX

1. *Candle in the Wind* – lyrics (Lesson Plan 1)
2. Opportunities Intermediate, *The Price of Fame* (Lesson Plan 1)
3. Inside Out Intermediate, *The Conditional Board Game* (Lesson Plan 2)
4. Heinemann Hits, *Zombie* (Lesson Plan 4)
5. Cutting Edge Upper-Intermediate Resource Teacher's Book, *Marriage from Hell* (Lesson Plan 5)