

The use of parlour games in teaching journalism

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Abstract

This article suggests reasons for the use of parlour games in the university teaching of undergraduate journalism. As commonly used in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), parlour games develop flexibility and creativity in the use of grammatical constructions; as used in coaching and management training, they develop confidence in social situations; as used in the training of artists and speakers in performance, they develop quickness in response to others' unforeseen actions and reactions. Most importantly, perhaps, as used in middle-class families, they act as a tool to establish access to social and cultural capital. Put baldly, confidence is the confidence to fail and learn from failure: "Fail again. Fail better," as Beckett memorably puts it (Beckett 1984). This paper will show how, grounded in theory about social and cultural capital, performativity, ludicity [please note, correct spelling!] and cognitive/social development, London Metropolitan University's journalism team has developed the use of parlour games to deepen first-year students' facility with language and social skills.

As regards success, statistics from the National Student Survey (NSS) in 2012, found that 90% of final-year students from London Metropolitan University's BA Journalism were satisfied with the course: 83% said that the course

had helped them to present themselves with confidence; 83% said that as a result of the course, they felt confident in tackling unfamiliar problems; and 86% said that their communication skills had improved (Unistats 2012).

Literature survey

Building on a theoretical base which owes much to Pierre Bourdieu (1986), David Crystal (1998 and *passim*), Habermas (1984-7), the constructivism of Piaget (1945) and Vygotsky (1978), as well as anthropological notions of performativity (eg, Evans-Pritchard 1937 and Lyotard 1984), I have been developing session plans which link rigour and creativity in the exploration of grammar and rhetoric. These have mainly been used to teach undergraduate journalism students in the first year of a three-year degree.

In brief, Bourdieu (1986) outlines the immense advantage conferred on those who are brought up with sufficient social and cultural capital, often generated within the high aspirations and practices of successful families. Among these, I suggest, is the attention paid to young people by adults who often interact with them in a validating way: considering their arguments, taking time to correct their misapprehensions, and playing with them (structured and non-structured) games. Many of our students do not have this kind of home environment. Surveys show that they come from backgrounds which are more economically deprived ethnically diverse background than those at other UK higher education institutions (see, eg, Eddo-Lodge 2012). In consequence, they can be (of course, this does not apply to every student from any background) at a disadvantage in social environments other than those of their peer groups – a fatal limitation for a journalist.

As Bourdieu puts it (1986, online text):

Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee.

If we are then aiming to correct an imbalance in our students' readiness to enter the class-bound and class-limited spaces of the media workplace, it is worth considering what factors other than the obvious ones of parental income and scholastic attainment might be holding them back. Ethnic diversity, whilst potentially a rich source of social capital, may also inhibit access to social networks and jobs, since the cultural capital which inheres in specific ethnic groups may not translate into the media mainstream. (For a lively discussion of class barriers and how they might interact with ethnicity, see Zahir 2011.)

Bourdieu (1986) again:

The notion of cultural capital initially presented itself to me, in the course of research, as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from the different social classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions.

Bourdieu's theory is widely used by social commentators and analysts, including those making policy with the Labour Party (Cruddas 2010), and has become reified beyond its author's probable

intent. None the less, it remains a provocative starting point for practitioners trying to work within what can seem internal but rigid limits on individual students' capacities for intellectual and social development. [For a good discussion of the limitations and possibilities of Bourdieu's theories, see Weininger and Lareau, 2007.]

If cultural capital operates as a limiting force, then classroom practice needs to be aimed at breaking down its limits. For journalists, the cultural tool is written language, first and foremost. Yet, it is an accepted truism that "young people today can't handle the language". A typical newspaper article in the Daily Telegraph (Porter 2011) blares, "Too many young people are unable to read, write or communicate properly and do not work hard, a business leader claimed."

Crystal (1998, 1999) talks of "ludicity" as a way to gain confidence in and mastery of language, specifically with word games. Those teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) have long made use of word games, role plays and stories as ways to enliven and diversify the teaching of linguistic structures. At the time of writing, there are about three million Google hits for "Games and play in teaching English as a Foreign Language" (July 2011).

The importance of play in education, first properly addressed by the ground-breaking theories of Montessori and Froebel (Saracho & Spodek 1995) at the turn of the last century (and theorised for deeper cultural impact by Huizinga in 1938 (Huizinga 1998)) is widely valued and promoted for children under the age of 11. Piaget, founding father of developmental psychology, wrote: "Education, for most people, means trying to lead the child to resemble the typical adult of his society...but for me and no one else, education means making creators... You have to make inventors, innovators—not conformists" (Bringuier, 1980, p 132). A playful approach has since Piaget's time been widely accepted in early-years education in the UK and Europe. For example, the Early Years Foundation Stage document produced by the Department for Education) calls for "planned purposeful play" (p 11) and support for young children's "curiosity, exploration and play" (p 15).

And although a cultural backlash in the UK seems at the time of writing aimed at taking that element of play away from young children -- according to critics of the curriculum plans of the current Education Secretary, Michael Gove (Rosen 2012) -- education theorists nevertheless continue to explore the importance of play in learning, while EFL classes, with games components, continue to multiply world wide (eg. 5500 schools listed on eslbase.com in July 2012).

Stuart Brown gave a TED talk in 2006 on the importance of play (2006), citing our mammalian inheritance as a basis for those social interactions which are not purely ends-focused – a more scientific version of Huizinga's stress on play as a basis of human bonds (Brown 1992) and the release of energy to learn. Narrowing that panorama of human playfulness from the vast array of games and pastimes to be found across the globe, to smaller-scale, more intimate interchanges, a UNESCO document on Cultural Statistics commented, "The great parlour games belong to the most perfect creations of human engineering. Almost all children know Chess and the Ladies; much of children from Asia are interested by Go ; African children play Mancala (more than two hundred alternatives exist : Akonga, Awele, Toguz Khorgol, Wali, etc...). Teachers and parents can use this quasi-spontaneous motivation of children for the great parlour games in order to arouse their interests for scholar disciplines." (UNESCO 2009)

Much theoretical work on the importance of play both within human society and experience and within education locates the time for learning games in childhood, within the family and close social bonds. Vygotsky (1978) thinks that language can grow as the child gains control of language used initially with other children and adults: development can be seen as internalising the conversational process of language and hence of cognition, stimulated by social interaction. Habermas (1984-7) writes that communicative action serves to transmit and renew cultural knowledge, in a dialectic process of achieving mutual understandings. For Habermas, communicative action is a dynamic process through which people form their identities. As such, a lifelong task, but one which is most often stamped in the mould of childhood and adolescent experiences (Penuel and Wertsch 1995).

Let us extend these notions into the sphere of higher education for journalists. Playfulness and

curiosity are key elements for journalism, from the development of satirical humour as in the British bi-weekly *Private Eye* to exposés like Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me* (2004) and such staples of the broadsheet press as parliamentary sketch writers and third leaders. To regard journalism, as many seem to (eg, McNair 2009), as simply reporting events, as reporting events to a political agenda, as analysing events and as investigating accounts of events is, I submit, to ignore a great deal of the processes and products of journalism.

Communicative action is surely the essence of journalism, both in terms of journalists as enactors of communication and for that concretisation of information now widely described as “content origination” (see, eg Wilhelm and Downing 2001). More baldly, journalists need to bond with interviewees, develop contacts, compete in the rough and tumble of news conferences, listen carefully to sources, analyse what is new and newsworthy, think up and pitch ideas, develop new formats and hit on new angles for existing stories. Thus assisting young people to form their own identities as effective communicators is the essential task of journalism educators.

Therefore, journalism educators need to develop a pedagogy which aims to build students' performance within taught sessions and allows both students' creativity and their (dread buzz-word!) employability to flower, encouraging them to explore the cornucopia of English usage whilst also assisting in their development as social beings, within professional and ethical guidelines. The social skills so frequently identified by contemporary commentators as missing from young entrants to the workplace (Porter 2012, as above), can be developed by games as well as by the trusted routes of work simulations and work experience. As one of the students graduating from London Metropolitan University in 2012 confided (personal communication), “I can see the point of all those stupid games where you made us stand up and do things now. I really didn't like it, but now at the magazine [where she was an intern] I don't feel scared talking to anyone.”

Our pedagogic approach also has roots in another branch of social theory. Performativity, a notion about the embodiment and enactment of social values in successful agents, was first adumbrated in the analysis of the African Azande people by British anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1937). In two seminal works, Evans-Pritchard (1937, 1940) analysed religious practices as the embodied performance of political power structures. “Values are embodied in words through which they influence behaviour” (Evans-Pritchard 1940, p135) Later anthropologists, thinkers and educators have developed these ideas and applied them to our own society. For example, a paper on Awkward comedy and Performative Anxiety: the self as communicative machine was given at a conference at York University, Toronto (Goldstein 2011). The comedy of Ricky Gervais in British TV series *The Office* (2001-2004) explicitly played on the triumphs and discomforts of this notion as applied to modern workplace life.

With more obvious relevance, the notion of performativity has been applied to education by Lyotard (1979) and his many followers. They seek to explain social action and agency in terms of power accrued by and attention paid to social actors. Although journalists may not seem to be prime social movers in the same way as chiefs and sorcerers in an African clan, yet they surely need to be adaptable: to play the parts of listener, investigator, adjudicator, narrator. In short, they need to be fluid post-modern controllers of their impact in social situations à la Lyotard.

For journalists, the means whereby they will control their social impact will partly depend on their control of language (Bernstein 2003). Thus we link back to the importance of linguistic control for social subjects. Language operates not just as a means to control social situations but as a guarantor of a measure of individual autonomy. Given this, developing personal performativity in language-based social situations like parlour games offers students the wherewithal to adopt effective linguistic and social skills -- even if the material may at first seem difficult for them.

Finally, as educators, we are also involved, whether we like it or not, in helping our students develop as whole people. Here, Daniel Goleman's ideas about emotional intelligence (despite their now seeming yesterday's buzzwords which state the obvious) may be pertinent. Arguably, if British tabloids had been more emotionally intelligent and less focused on obeying the proprietors' greed for the bottom line, they would have avoided the unwholesome excesses which the Leveson

Inquiry (2011-12) has unearthed – publishing intimate details of murder victims’ lives, pursuing celebrities with loaded cameras.

At one time myself a journalist, ex-New York Times science writer Goleman argued (1996) that our emotions play a much greater role in thought, decision-making and individual success than is commonly acknowledged. He defines “emotional intelligence” a trait not measured by IQ tests, as a set of skills, including control of one’s impulses, self-motivation, empathy and social competence in interpersonal relationships. Over a number of books (1998, 2006) Goleman has developed his idea of key competencies in life – and hence as subjects to be taught in formal education -- as being more than “reading writing and ‘rithmetic”, but rather those “soft skills” which employers – and fellow-citizens – value in everyday relationships. Goleman’s (2007) synthesis of the latest findings in biology and brain science revealed that we are “wired to connect” and pointed to the surprisingly deep impact of our relationships on every aspect of our lives, including in education.

Such insights are commonly discussed in the earlier stages of education and in teacher training, but often discounted in favour of a hard-edged cognitive and training bias in higher education. Employability, skillsets, learning outcomes and key performance indicators, as touted on the UK’s HESA website, HE academy and QAA documentation, are all very well and good but as Goleman remarks, we are designed for sociability, constantly engaged in a “neural ballet” that connects us brain-to-brain with our acquaintance. Put more simply, we need to learn to get along without sacrificing our individuality.

These elements, then, of the importance of social and cultural capital, of ludicity in pedagogy, of social performativity and of the need for emotional intelligence, underlie the practice of games within the journalism classroom, where it in no way diminishes or undermines the intellectual rigour of other parts of the curriculum. To quote the NSS once more, 93% of final-year students said that staff made the subject interesting and 79% that the course was intellectually stimulating (Unistats 2012).

An account of practice

Since many of our BA students at London Metropolitan University come with a non-academic attitude to analysis, this kind of mingling of more traditional academic thought with enactments, scenarios, parlour games and small group activities has been an effective way to build with them not only facility with language and confidence in social interaction, but also understandings of theory. Student intake for BA Journalism at London Metropolitan University is currently (2012) based on 260 points on the first run of applications to university via UCAS – a mid-range requirement for skills on graduating from secondary education – but this is frequently dropped to a far lower level at the final stage in the process, where students scramble for left-over places and universities scoop up those whose results were less than they had hoped. Our first-year undergraduates also include many on hybrid degrees (where students also take modules from other faculties or course areas) with lower entrance requirements. Thus, our students commonly have little experience of dealing with abstract ideas or of detaching their own responses from what they read or hear (subject of a forthcoming paper).

In most first and second-year sessions, tutors often use ice-breaker or game activities to free students’ creativity and help them form social bonds. Students are also required to take notes, debate intellectual ideas, write in small groups or individually, and present to the class. This set of activities mimics -- or prepares them for -- much of the activity required of a journalist: capacity to originate stories and look at information in a fresh, inquiring way; literary capabilities; the social skills to interact with a wide variety of people, be they primary sources or colleagues; the need to present information concisely and confidently.

Piaget says (1945) that the world is actively constructed by the child (or learner), as he or she takes action to solve problems. Our students learn by doing, which is why, like most journalism

degrees, we also make full use of our newsroom and website for the course. Both of these are now extremely helpful for our students, who rehearse the experience of employment, working in teams to produce journalistic product. But that is scarcely novel for any journalism department, no more than beat or patch reporting, daily classes in shorthand, or scouting for vox pops.

When it comes to ideas, learning by doing is much harder. Hence the place of games, not only in writing classes, the subject of this current paper, but also in more theory-based courses, like those on history, culture, law and ethics. As Leslie Viney, former colleague, writes, “Through investing cultural theories with realtime examples and bringing them to life in the classroom through games and challenges, the level of student learning and performance has grown steadily.” (personal communication, 2011). This dynamic approach is the subject of another article.

Why parlour games?

Patrick Beaver writes, in *Victorian Parlor Games*:

All games, from the Roman gladiatorial battles to a quiet round of cards or charades, are imitations of real-life situations. This is equally true of physical or mental contests, games of chance or combinations of any of these. Team games, whether played in field or parlor, are all essentially exercises in combat. Games in which the individual pits his wits against other individuals are only a reflection of the struggle to live and better oneself in the world of reality. (page 13)

Since the reality of the modern journalism workplace is a see-sawing between individual entrepreneurship and collaboration, games provide the perfect preparation. A typical advertisement, from the online jobs site, Gorkana outlines everything you need be good at the games – as well as to be good at the job (2012):

We are looking for a hard-working, motivated individual who is capable of working as part of a team or alone, with a proven record of great editorial experience, broad interests and knowledge, a sense of fun and excitement, technical ability and an eye for detail.

Some general rules for practice

Playful is not the same as trivial; conversely, serious need not mean dull. Before each game, staff stress to students that we are going to play but that our play has a point and a rationale. While there is no need to be over-solemn about this, the quality of adult commitment must be clear, since an important aspect of playing games is the validation conferred by staff attention and participation, just as it is crucial for middle-class children to absorb the attention of their parents.

Tempting though it is to play the part of entertainer, to do so would be to negate the point of the game, which is to elicit creative responses from the class, rather than model them from the front.

Thus we have established a checklist for staff, which should be explained to students.

Everyone participates

No one wins; no one loses

The purpose of the game is explained

The game is summed up

The game is linked to the next activity

We don't take it too seriously: bonding and building confidence is more important than competition.

These rules embody in social strictures the ideas of building social and cultural capital, exploring ludicity, developing performativity, fostering intellectual development and nurturing emotional intelligence.

Some examples

Some games which can be used in this manner successfully are:

I love my love with an A
 My uncle does not like peas
 Smile
 How/ What? Where/ When?
 Fizz-Buzz
 The Traveller's Alphabet
 Detective
 In the manner of the word (adverbs)
 Who am I?
 Taboo

To explain the general principles of how the strategy works, let us examine the game of Storybuilding or Conjunctions. A list of games, how to run them and possible developments follows.

Storybuilding

This is suitable for groups of up to 25. The tutor introduces the concept of conjunctions, in a standard grammatical formula and then links it to this game. A list of conjunctions is displayed on the projector screen. The tutor explains: "We're going to go round the circle quickly. Each person will add a sentence or two of a story: we'll keep it this time to a crime news story.

The only rules are:

Nothing disrespectful to any individual or group
 You must end each contribution with a conjunction."

It is best if the tutor starts with an anodyne sentence, which lets the story develop where it may. I tend to use, "Jones lay on the sofa, BUT...." and then look inquiringly at the person next to me. Tutors may find it helpful to pick an extrovert as the first person, to get the ball rolling. At first, students will need prompting, coaxing even, but it is important for the cohesion of the group not to let any "pass". The tutor needs to be gently inflexible.

After, usually, some hilarity and everyone having taken a turn, the game concludes. It is important then to consolidate the learning through explanation, which might go like this:

We did this because – well, first of all, we all need some fun and to get to know each other. But more seriously, conjunctions are words that help us join phrases or clauses (that is, pieces of information) together in different ways. In writing stories, the journalist takes the responsibility not just for relating a series of facts but for making them into a coherent narrative. You do not want to bore the reader.

If we always use "and" to join clauses, we are simply stringing facts together, without judging their relationship. You owe it to the reader -- or listener -- to make the language flow. Now try in your next portfolio piece to use as many different conjunctions as you can, without torturing the sense.

Tutors need not overtly explain that responding quickly to social stimuli and developing confidence at being, however, briefly, in the public eye, is also of benefit, but students quickly develop their own understanding of this, as the remarks by a graduating student quoted above demonstrate.

Developments of Storybuilding

The same game could be used with adverbs, for a second iteration. To make it yet more complex,

tutors can insist that adverbs of place, time, intensification and manner are used in any particular order. To emphasise how dull the repeated use of one conjunction sounds, they may insist that only that one instance of any particular item (eg, “and”) is used.

I love my love with an A

A game about adjectives, this can be played two ways. In the first, each participant progresses the game using an adjective from each letter of the alphabet – I love my love with an A because he (or she) is amazing, beautiful, cuddly, desirable and so forth. In the more difficult version, the whole group sticks with the first letter until it is exhausted, then chooses another letter to continue.

In the first, the play is linked to the use of commas in lists and the merits or otherwise of the Oxford comma. In the second, ideas about alliteration are explored, including its use in journalism as headline builder and memory-snagger.

[NB: Other versions of this use a cat: “My aunt’s cat is an adorable cat, etc.”]

Developments

This game may be developed into “I went to market and I bought...” items beginning with either the same or successive letters of the alphabet. This exercise develops listening and memory skills as well as verbal ones, and therefore needs to be flagged up as so doing. Again, it can be further used to develop ideas about listing and the use of conjunctions or no conjunctions (technically, asyndeta and polysyndeta) in lists. [Also called, I Have a Basket.]

My uncle does not like peas (Opposites)

This is a simple round-robin game. One person says “My uncle doesn’t like peas.” The next must answer with an opposing sentence. “But my aunt likes blancmange.” The third must find a riposte to this, such as “My cousin hates strawberries.” And so it goes on, until everyone has had a turn.

The idea of the game is to come up with ever more outlandish opposites. For journalism students, it is also meant to stimulate the writing skills of using balance and antitheses, and the research skills of asking the contrary question. For example, “Why did you sack Bob Diamond?” But also, “Why didn’t you sack him before?”

Development

Teachers may also use the structure of this game with hyperbole. One person starts, “I would rather eat my liver with a rusty spoon than have dinner with the Queen.” The next has to outdo that. “I would rather dance naked in the rain than eat my liver with a rusty spoon.” And so on, around the group. We use this successfully to raise the students’ game before getting them to try their hand at press releases and blurbs.

Smile

In this game, one person is chosen as It. He or she is the only one allowed to smile. They can do anything they want (within limits of the classroom and institution code) to try and get anyone to smile. Once someone does smile, he or she becomes It in their turn. Anyone who never smiled is a winner.

This is obviously a game about self-control, but also about social interaction. As well as engendering good feelings in a group, it can be used to explain to students about mirroring in interviews: the old “Nod if you want someone to agree with you” trick. Empathy, humour and conviviality go hand in hand.

Development

This game can also be used more analytically. Questions that might be raised include: What makes people laugh? How spontaneous should journalists be in interviews? How much of your “real self” should you use? How do you build a relationship with interviewees? Do jokes have a part to play? Could they be risky? We find that students from non-UK backgrounds can be quite scandalised to begin with but, as one shy Muslim woman from Turkey confided, “I like the games, Victoria. They make me feel comfortable.”

How? What? Where? When?

In this game, one player thinks of the name of an object. This can be made more difficult by thinking of a word with multiple homonyms, like male (masculine), mail (letters) and mail (armour). The other players then try to find out what it is by asking (but only once) the following four questions: How? What? Where? When? For example: How do you like it? Why do you like it? When do you like it? Where do you like it?

The player on the spot must answer questions truthfully, but can of course, alternate between the homonymic meanings as appropriate for each question. The person who guesses correctly wins, and then has to think of a word.

This game has clear affinities with the infamous “Five soldiers” or Five Ws which journalism educators use to teach newswriting. Tutors can also use the game as a jumping-off point to discuss with students how simple questions can elicit information. This game remains useful with second and third-year undergraduates.

Development

If these are useful questions, what are useless ones? Tutors can try the Yes/No game, where people must submit to a barrage of questions to which the only requirement is that they must not answer “Yes/No/Black/White”. In discussion, this can be linked to the technique of slipping in a sneaky closed question as in Jessica Mitford’s famous “Cruel/Kind” questioning, outlined by her in *Poison Penmanship* (1980).

Buzz or Fizz Buzz

In this perennial favourite, players begin by counting one by one in turn until the number three is reached. The player whose turn it is to say three instead says “Buzz”. Players keep counting in turn until the next multiple of three is reached when the player whose turn comes on six will say “Buzz” instead. Once this is going well, tutors may add in “Fizz” for every multiple of five. Thus, 10 will be “Fizz” and 15 “Fizz Buzz”. This game is useful for focusing students on the need to pay attention and pick up the detail of what other people have said.

Development

Tutors may be able to build on this pattern to discuss onomatopoeia and the use of sound words to build pictures. The debate can be elaborated with an explanation of “screamers”: why journalists should eschew 90% of the use of exclamation marks.

The Traveller’s Alphabet

There are many ways to play this game and it goes by many names. In one, the first player says, “I am going to Amsterdam” (or any other place beginning with A). The player on his/her left then

asks, “What will you do there?” and must be answered with a sentence in which the activity begins with the letter A. Players then go through the entire alphabet. For more advanced play, the answering sentence must contain noun, verb and adjective all beginning with the same letter – no matter how ridiculous the sense.

In the other, simpler, version, players construct mini-biographies along the lines of “My name is Alfred; I am married to Alice; I live in Africa; I work as an acrobat; my favourite food is asparagus.” This can lead into a discussion of what information is crucial for readers or listeners, and hence what are essential and inessential questions for journalists.. It is also a good way in to a more formal discussion of nouns, adjectives and verbs.

Development

In pairs, the students ask five questions of each other. They then construct a mini-biography to share with the class. This is a standard ice-breaker. However, it can be developed with a more advanced first or second-year class by encouraging other class members to discuss the questions and suggest what better ones might have been asked: specifically, the construction of a question that led on from an answer rather than one that was prepared earlier.

Detective

In this game, the tutor chooses an extrovert member of the group. They are taken outside and given a rhyme or nonsense rhyme to recite. They need to be well briefed: the tutor tells them that they are going to rush in and recite it in a particular way – at top speed, or in tears, or like a crazy person or in a foreign accent or very, very slowly. Everyone else is informed that they have to take notes. The irruption into class should be mildly shocking and take students by surprise. Afterwards, tutors ask individuals to give an account of recent events.

The idea of the game is to get students to understand the need accurately to record not only words (which can be hard enough) but also the manner, body language, demeanour and emotions of people about whom they are reporting. For example, after a road crash or concert or election result, people’s appearance is as telling as their words. This exercise also builds confidence in the subject who has to act out; they deserve congratulations from the class and tutor.

Development

This game can be integrated into class exercises, by asking students to take notes from small Youtube or TV clips. Again, the stress is on how important information is found in non-verbal aspects of witnesses.

In the manner of the word

In this well-worn favourite game, one person goes out while the others think of a promising adverb (one that is quite specific works best, such as bizarrely, childishly, euphorically). He or she then comes back in and asks the other players to mime everyday tasks (doing the ironing, running for a bus, brushing your hair) in the manner of the word, until he or she guesses the adverb. This game can also be played with one person acting and everyone else guessing.

The game is a lively introduction to adverbs, tout court. When players get more skilled they can playing it with adverbs of degree like “very” or “scarcely” – or even “not”. It is useful to note and point out that in their writing, inexperienced students often stick with adjectives when adverbs might be more powerful.

Development

This can again be developed into a class exercise where students are asked to look at a news

article and see what adverbs could have substituted for the ones used.

Who am I? or Metaphors

In this version of a popular game, one person goes out and the others choose a famous person (it needs to be someone known to most in the group). When the outsider (again, tutors need to choose someone who is not shy for the first round) returns, they ask questions in the form, “If I were an X, what would I be?” EG, “If I were a kind of weather what would I be?”

This is often hard for students to grasp at first, so it is an imagination-stretching exercise as well. It is important to note that the questions are about comparison, not habits, so a knowledge of the celebrity’s eating habits, cars, clothing etc, is not required. Instead, the metaphors are about how the celebrity is experienced in the public discourse. Discussion can then lead on to the uses of imagery in description, from metaphor and simile to personification. For foreign students, this game is also a good introduction to the unreal conditional (“If I were... etc).

Development

If the group is confident, tutors can develop more defined categories, such as music or film. Or they can reverse the process and ask the person who goes out to choose someone and the other members of the class to ask the metaphor questions. This can also feed into a news-gathering chestnut, “How do I ask a question that’s never been asked?”

Ask questions

Taboo

There are several version of this game, including a popular board set. In the simplest version, a chosen player has to avoid using a particular letter. Other players ask the chosen one questions, trying to force him or her to use the forbidden letter. For example, if the forbidden letter was “C”, players might ask, “What animal purrs?” The answer “Cat” loses, but the answer “Kitten” stays in the game. In more difficult versions, players must answer in complete sentences, and may not use the forbidden letter as initial anywhere in the sentence, as in: “The little kitten meowed for some milk.”

A more Charades-based version asks for someone to describe a film without mentioning its title, the main actors or the main plot device. For example, “It’s a love story with unusual exchange of body fluids,” might be *Twilight*. This connects then to a discussion of how humour and elliptical description may be useful in bringing stories to life, or in reviewing.

Development

The game can be linked to an exploration of clichés and how to avoid using them. A standard exercise is to see how many clichés can be spotted in a passage: this is developed into an understanding of how comparisons evolve and then stiffen into lifelessness.

Hestia (thanks to the Observer (2012)

This game is also known as Coffee Pot. Two people start with a homophone -- for example: plain/plane, shore/sure, bye/by/bi, etc. So far, it’s the same as How? What? Where? When? But the idea is that as people catch on, they join in. This game is only suited to more sophisticated second or third year groups.

Thus, the original pair start a conversation discussing the word. For example if the word is plain/plane: “How did you travel when you went on holiday? Did you fly?” “Yes, but I wasn’t allowed to take my woodworking tools in my hand luggage.” “Did you get much precipitation in Spain?” “Mainly where I was, where the land is flat as a pancake.” “Talking of which, what kind of flour

do you use to make pancakes?” And so on. Everyone else joins in when they think they know what the word is. This can be quite bewildering, which makes it a good game to discuss bullying and in-group, out-group behaviour.

In the hard-nosed original Victorian version, the original pair tease anyone who joins in with a wrong word -- or even try to make them have doubts even if they are correct. It can even be played with the whole group agreeing on a word, except for one person who has to work out what it is. But that will only work with someone very confident.

For our first-year students, I prefer the sillier version called Coffee Pot. In this, someone starts a conversation, but every time they come to the chosen word, they substitute it with a silly word or phrase, such as “Coffee Pot”. For example, instead of the word park: “How did you manage to coffee pot your car?” “It is true, coffee-potting can be a problem at the coffee pot, so we walked and wore our coffee-pot-ers to keep warm.”

This game is an excellent way to kick-start a discussion about the power of words and the need to build a good vocabulary.

Development

Tutors who have a more confident or literary group can go on to use dictionary-based games, like Call My Bluff (when players have to guess at real meanings for a word from a set of three or four). These explore confidence as well as lexical knowledge; adept players who think of a cod meaning can make it sound more likely than the real one

Conclusion

Parlour games may seem like the last thing that journalism education needs, with serious challenges facing the industry; among them, the UK Leveson Inquiry on ethics and practices of the press, the possible extinction of the printed press by the Wild West of the internet, aggressive cost-cutting by media owners and declining participation in mass politics in Western democracies. Yet journalism educators may take the example of EFL teachers, who have long mixed the rigours of grammar teaching with the games and activities summarised by Crystal (1999) as “ludicity”.

To play is not to be foolish or shallow. Theorists from the historian Huizinga (1998) to the child psychologist Piaget (1945) have emphasized the deep foundations of creativity and sociality in the play of children and the pastimes of adults. Play is the work of the child, Maria Montessori (1964) wrote; for an adult, imagination is a transformative capacity. Educators, in whatever sphere, need to be sure that they are not drowning their students’ creativity. Parlour games offer a light-hearted mechanism to relax and open up innate capacities, to mingle the play of a child with the work of an adult.

Evans-Prichard (1937) and Lyotard, (1979) among others, have attested to the importance of performativity as a means for social subjects to attain agency. Playing parlour games can be a rehearsal for the performativity required in real-world journalism: the ability to listen, to speak with confidence, to respond quickly and to develop thoughts in speech are all foreshadowed in the pleasant pastimes of the parlour.

Our students have told us repeatedly how much they enjoy the structure of our sessions. Our recent graduates, 25% of whom have already got media jobs (three months after completing their course) have told us many times, in person and through the NSS, that they value our attention to social and linguistic skills. Of courses, running the games requires commitment on the part of tutors – they certainly won’t work if the lecturer thinks they are silly – and emotional intelligence as described by Goleman (1995) so that more extroverted students do not overwhelm the others and so that the shyer ones can gain confidence.

None the less, the rewards are great. As Bourdieu so trenchantly demonstrated (1986), social and cultural capital distinguishes the economically successful from the economically repressed

almost as much as a simple measure of wealth. Confidence in a variety of social situations can, however, be built from the outside rather than being ineluctably determined by birth into privilege or otherwise.

So, if you are one of those “hackademics” tired of endlessly ploughing through basic newswriting, the errant apostrophe, Dreamweaver for dummies or interviewing skills, parlour games can serve to lighten a session, draw talents out of your students and develop social skills and bonds.

As the 2012 graduate said, “I’d tell anyone: Just try it!”

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