

Co-operative games in the primary school

The importance of games for children in the context of their social and linguistic development is widely acknowledged. Games are a valuable, fun and interesting way of helping children to work together and to raise the level of co-operative consciousness within the class. The Strand: **Games**, of the PE Curriculum, enhances the development of skills and provides opportunities for social interaction. A balanced programme of games ensures that the child experiences a wide variety of activities that provide enjoyment and challenge and that foster a lifelong interest.

In SPHE, active learning is the principal learning and teaching approach that is recommended and there is also a particular emphasis in SPHE on children working together. This can include many different types of group interaction, such as Co-operative Games, which enable children to work together in a caring and co-operative way, to include all children, to develop both co-ordination and problem solving skills and to help children to work together as a social unit. Co-operative Games link elements of the PE and SPHE curriculum very easily.

Games involve children at three levels: at a physical level, at an emotional level and at a cognitive level. Games range from active games that require space for movement to quieter games and activities that can be used in the classroom.

Games can keep small children busy, big children happy and all children active.

GAMES

Touch the ball

- You will need a variety of objects in a variety of sizes, eg, a soccer ball, a soft ball, a tennis ball, a golf ball, a coin.
- Ask the group to stand in a circle and place the largest object in the middle of the circle and tell the group they must all touch the object without touching each other.
- Once they can figure out how to arrange themselves so that they can do this for ten seconds, give them a smaller object.
- Work all the way down to the coin.

Rocket launch

- Count how many people, including yourself, are in the group.
- Sitting in a circle, one child calls out the starting number (which is the number of children in the group).
 - Anybody can stand up and call the next

number and so on down to number one but if two children stand up at the same time the countdown has to begin again.

- When number one is reached, all the group stand, raise their arms and shout "We have Lift Off".

Non verbal birthday line up

- The following instruction is given: "Without talking, line yourselves up according to the month of your birth and possibly even the day and date".
- The players themselves must work out the beginning, end and order of the line, by mime or any other non-verbal communication.
- Other suggestions for order of line up include alphabetically, numerically or by letters making up a sentence.

Pattern ball

- A ball is thrown from one person to the other in the circle until each person in the circle has received the ball once.
- No-one should be passed the ball more than once.
 - The group must then remember and repeat the pattern.
 - Two/three balls might be introduced to the circle or the pattern might be repeated backwards.

Hoop circle

- Ask the children to hold hands in a circle with a hoop hanging on each pair of joined hands.
- The children try to move the hoop around the circle without releasing their hands.

■ **Games are a valuable, fun and interesting way of helping children to work together and to raise the level of co-operative consciousness within the class.**

- Some older children can try this blindfolded.

Frogs and lily pads

- Divide the children into groups of three and give each group three vinyl spots or hula-hoops.
- In each group there must be one 'frog' and two 'tadpoles'.
- The objective is to get the frog from one side of the hall to the other, however the frog can only step on the vinyl spots to cross and the spots can only be moved by the tadpoles.
- Teacher can act as the 'Pond Police' making sure that no frog steps off the lily pads.

The great big hop

- Ask the children to hop around the hall.
- If a child makes contact with another child they must stay together hopping at the same time.
- Soon groups of hopping children contact each other and join to form a larger hopping group.
- Finally all the group are hopping as one group, creating the 'Great big hop'.

Dress the mummy

(Note to teacher – this game is great fun but can waste a lot of paper).

- Set up teams with two to four players on each team. One person on the team will be the mummy and each person will be given two rolls of toilet paper.
- The teams are to circle around the mummy and pass the toilet paper to each other while wrapping the mummy in it.
- Someone in the group could be assigned to decide who has created the best mummy design.

Leader of the orchestra

- One person from the group is asked to wait outside the room for a moment.
- Another person is chosen as leader of the orchestra and s/he must lead the group by 'playing' different

musical instruments which the group imitate (they must not look at, or indicate in any way, who is giving the lead).

- The person outside the door is called in and they must guess which of the group members is leader of the orchestra.

Hold the rope relay

- Class in groups of no more than five. Each group has a rope.
- All children must have both hands on rope.
- Each group face five beanbags, 10-15 metres away.
- On the signal teams must race to the beanbags keeping all hands on the rope.
- They must pick up one bean bag and put it on the head of one group member BUT teams cannot use their hands as they are still holding the rope.
- They race back to the finish line, drop the beanbag and repeat for each team member.
- If they drop the beanbag on the way back they must replace it without using their hands.

Ball relay

- Divide the group into smaller groups where they must arrange themselves into lines, with an average of about 10 children per line.
- Each line is given a ball and the group must pass the ball from one end of the line to the other without the ball touching the floor.
- This can be done in a number of ways, using their backs, from side to side, through their legs, from chest to chest, or giving the group an opportunity to make up their own way.

Bull ring

Divide the class into groups of four. Each group has a curtain ring, four pieces of string 1m – 2m in length and a ball.

- Task is to transport the ball from one end of the hall/yard to the other using the string and the curtain ring.
- Once moving they can only touch the string.
- Allow children to improvise.
- Eventually share methods between groups.
- Best method appears to be as follows: Each child doubles his/her piece of string around the ring. The four children are holding the string equal distance away from the ring. They keep tension on the ring so it stays horizontal and the ball balances on it.

Suspension bridge

- This is a stretching exercise where the children are divided into groups of about six.
- The first person in the group must be touching the wall and that person stretches their body as long as possible.
- The other group members lengthen the stretch by joining on, the objective being to see how far across the hall the group can stretch.

Co-operative sitting circle

- Ask a large group of children to stand in a circle, each child facing the back of the child next to them.
- Ask the children to hold each others waist.
- The children must be standing close to each other.

- Slowly and carefully the children sit on each other's laps, thus creating the co-operative sitting circle.

Farmyard

- The players stand in a large circle and choose a number of animals.
- These animals should be divided as equally as possible among the group.
- With eyes closed the players should walk about and find their own kind by making the appropriate sound, eg, 'baa' 'meow' etc,
- When two animals of same kind come across each other they should hold hands and find others of their kind until the group is complete.

The blindfold trust walk

- Children are divided into pairs. One person leads the other person blindfold or with the eyes closed.
- The leader leads the blindfolded person around, explains where s/he is taking him/her and what to expect and also offers reassurance.
- The blindfolded person should have complete trust in the person leading.
- After a short while partners switch roles.

Human pretzel

- Two people leave the group.
- The rest of the group hold hands in a circle and twist themselves over and under and through each other without dropping hands.
- The people waiting away from the group come back and are challenged to untangle the group so they stand as they began, in a circle holding hands.
- The 'Pretzel' co-operates as the 'un-tanglers' figure out who goes where.

Co-operative great big jump

- One person stands at a starting line and jumps.
- The next person jumps from where the last person landed and so on until everybody has jumped.



- The aim is to see if the group as a whole can better their collective distance, the 'Great Big Jump'.

Animated alphabets

- Divide the children into groups of five or six.
- Explain that you will call out a letter of the alphabet and they are to make a body sculpture of it in their groups.
- After a while they can race to see which group can do this first.

CO-OPERATIVE PARACHUTE GAMES

Overhand grip

- The children stand in a circle around the parachute.
- Ask the children to lift the parachute and grip it firmly, clenching their fists around it and with knuckles facing the ceiling.
- The children can then lift and lower the parachute, which is a very effective strengthening and stretching exercise.

The sea

- The parachute in effect becomes the sea. Five words are introduced to describe the movements of the sea: still, gentle, breezy, windy and stormy.
- The teacher or any group member can call numbers from one to five, one = still and five = stormy, and the group must move the parachute as appropriate.
- Hand signals can then be introduced for the five words and one member of the group indicates how the parachute should be moved by using hand signals.

Frogs in the pond

- Beanbags are used as frogs for this game. The children must try to make the 'frogs' hop from colour to colour on the parachute.
- They then make the 'frogs' disappear to the bottom of the pond ie, down the hole in the centre of the parachute.
- Ropes can also be introduced to the parachute and these are called 'snakes'. These must disappear down the hole also!



Using a parachute for play activities

Big ball

- The parachute becomes the solar system.
- A ball (representing the planet) is introduced onto the parachute and the group must work together so that the ball travels all around the edge of the solar system.

Group co-operation is required in order for this to work.

Air conditioner

- The group are divided into two. Holding the parachute half the group crouch down while the other half try to lift the parachute above their heads.
- Alternate and repeat to create a breeze.
- An alternative game of air conditioner is for half the group to hold the parachute while the other half of the group lie underneath the parachute on their backs, heads facing towards the centre.
- The people who are holding the parachute raise it overhead and pull it back down but stop the parachute at elbow level, to ensure safety of the people lying underneath.
- Repeat a number of times and then swap around the groups.

CO-OPERATIVE STRETCHING ACTIVITIES USING A PARACHUTE

Activity 1

- Encourage the group to place their feet together and firmly on the ground as if they were frozen.

- Extend arms, take the strain on the parachute and try to lean back and look up at the ceiling.
- Repeat activity, this time taking two/three little steps under the parachute.

Activity 2

- All the group face in a clockwise direction and grip the parachute with the right hand.
- Now, take the strain of the parachute by pulling away from it whilst continuing to grip it.
- Point the left hand out straight from the parachute and try to balance.
- Repeat the exercise above, this time pushing the left hip away from the parachute and repeat on the other side.

Activity 3

Biceps curl

- Hold the parachute by taking an underhand grip, ie, with the knuckles pointing towards the ground.
- Hold the parachute at hip level.
- Ensure the elbows are flexed and feel the strain of the parachute.
- On the count of one, two, three, very slowly pull the parachute towards the body.
- On the repeat count of one, two, three, very slowly move the parachute away from the body.
- Repeat this activity, facing away from the parachute.

Activity 4

Triceps extension

- Place the parachute on the ground.
- Ask the group to lie on the ground on their backs, knees bent at a ninety degree angle.
- Extend the arms over behind the head and catch the parachute, ensuring that the parachute does not touch the head.
- Take the strain of the parachute (see Activity 2).
- On a count of one, two, three, pull the parachute over the head.
- On a repeat count of one, two, three, bring the parachute back to its original position.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN PLAYING CO-OPERATIVE GAMES

Efficient group learning requires the development of a wide range of learning and social skills and good classroom management. Group processes in the class will be more effective when the games are introduced at an early age and over time and when the process is regularly reviewed. The following reflections may enhance Co-operative Games in a class.

- Does the game work for everybody?
- How can we improve it?
- Do the suggestions work?
- Is everybody involved?
- Is everybody making an effort to make it work?
- Will we put this on the list of 'Games we like'?

This article has been contributed by the PE and SPHE team, PCSP