

Group Games

Constructivist Education

Constructivist education promotes learning and development by engaging children in interesting activities that inspire active experimentation with all its groping and error. These activities stimulate children to invent new problems and new solutions. Teachers foster cooperation between adults and children and among children themselves in a classroom atmosphere based upon mutual respect. This educational environment promotes children's self-regulation, assumption of responsibility, and a feeling of community among children and teachers.

Why Play Group Games?

Constructivist educators use group games not simply to teach children how to play the game, but to give them chances to **develop reasoning and the ability to cooperate**. Playing games with others provides children great opportunities to grow cognitively and socially.

- Because games are interesting, children actively engage in them and reason in many different ways, such as judging which of two numbers is more in High Card. In figuring out where to hide in Hide and Seek, and how to block and set up a two-way possibility to assure a win in Tic Tac Toe, children are stimulated to think about spatial relations and come up with their own ideas, strategies, and solutions to problems.
- By thinking about other players' moves and turn taking, children begin to recognize different perspectives (decentering*). Because they are motivated, they negotiate with others, make decisions, and deal with conflicts by coordinating different points of view.
- To play a group game, children must agree upon and follow a set of rules. If someone chooses not to follow the rules, children have an opportunity to decide upon consequences or to decide upon new rules that everyone can agree upon. In this sense, children learn to cooperate in the context of a competitive game.
- The desire to "win" gives children the impetus to reason about strategies that will outwit their opponents. As children try to figure out how to win, they begin to anticipate their partner's moves, make predictions about what will happen next in the game, and engage in "if _____, then

" thinking. Some teachers may be concerned about promoting unhealthy competition among children. However, by responding to children in a casual, matter-of-fact way, the teacher can promote the attitude that winning a game is not as important as having the fun of cooperating to play. It is important to note that for many young children "winning the game" does not necessarily mean finishing first, it simply means finishing. They often think that everyone who finishes wins. Therefore, we do not push competition. Young children typically play games first as if the games are cooperative. A competitive attitude emerges when children are able to take the other's perspective and think about opposed intentions. Therefore, the emergence of a competitive attitude represents developmental progress. (See chapter 11 in source)

* Decentering: Most young children can think of only one point of view or aspect of a problem at a time. Decentering happens when the child is able to think of more than one point of view at the same time. Social decentering involves being able to see things from another person's point of view and to reconcile those different points of view. For example, while playing the game of Tic Tac Toe, a child with a "healthy" sense of competition can anticipate the other player's possible next move and block it as that player tries to get three in a row.

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Types of Group Games

Many types of group games can be played in classrooms to promote development. Listed below are eight general types of games and some examples of specific games. (See also separate activity sheets on Tic Tac Toe, card games, and commercial games.)

Board Games (Hi Ho Cherrio, Tic Tac Toe, Checkers, modified path games such as a shortened version of Candy Land or Sorry, or teacher made path games)

Card Games (Go Fish, Odd Card {Old Maid}, High Card {War}, Concentration, and Rummy)

Aiming Games (Ring Toss, Drop the Clothes Pin, Marbles, Bowling, and Shuffleboard)

Races (Spoon Race, Wheelbarrow Race, and Three-Legged Race)

Hiding Games (Hide and Seek, Doggy, Doggy, Where is Your Bone, and Button, Button)

Guessing Games (I'm Thinking of Something . . . , Guess Who, and Charades)

Games Involving Verbal Commands (Simon Says, and Giant Steps)

Chasing Games (Tag, Cat and Mouse, and Dragon's Tail)

Criteria for Choosing a Group Game

An educational group game will:

- suggest something interesting and challenging for children to figure out how to do;
- make it possible for children themselves to judge their success;
- permit all players to participate actively throughout the play.

Ways to Facilitate Group Games

- Make a "big deal" out of reading the written rules to minimize the teacher's dominance and to give children the opportunity to submit to the rules voluntarily. When a disagreement occurs about how to play, encourage children to consult the rules.
- If children come up with new ideas for how to play, accept the children's ideas and suggest that they ask other players if they agree to try out some new rules. Write these down as an alternative way to play.
- Ask questions that encourage reflective thinking (for example, "Can you figure out how to make a straight line?" in Tic Tac Toe, "Can you figure out how to get your marker home?" in a board game, or, "Can you figure out how to jump one of my checkers?" in checkers).

For other tips on teaching group games, see chapter 12 in source.

Source: Kamii, C., & DeVries, R. (1980). Group Games: Implications of Piaget's Theory. Washington, DC: NAEYC

See also:

Kamii, C. (1985). Young Children reinvent arithmetic: Implications of Piaget's theory. New York: Teachers College Press.