COLUMN: " The New P.E. & Sports Dimension "

The column that opens your day by opening your mind

Increasing physical activity in schools through the use of playground games

by Dr. Joanne Margaret Hynes-Hunter

Numerous physical educators are taking their classes outside onto the playground due to limited space and/or equipment, large class sizes, inadequate budgets, and as an intervention strategy in the increasing epidemic of childhood obesity.

Teachers still want to provide students with the best possible learning experiences given limited resources and increase children's physical activity levels. Research findings performed by Peaceful Playgrounds (2006) found playground games: (1) increase children's energy expenditures. Students utilizing playground markings increased their energy expenditure significantly over the control groups, (2) increase activity levels in primary and junior schools. Use of playgrounds painted with multicolored markings increase physical activity, and (3) increase student's knowledge in game rules, and sports skills. If these increases can be sustained on playgrounds, it could be a valuable contribution to health-related physical activity recommendations for young people.

How does a teacher decide what games to play on the playground that will increase (1) energy expenditures, (2) physical activity levels, and (3) student knowledge in game rules and sport skills? There are many games and activities that have been played on playgrounds for generations. Unfortunately, many "traditional" playground games (i.e. King of the hill, Red Rover) are not developmentally appropriate because as part of the rules, children are hitting, pushing, knocking down one another in an effort to win. However, there are some playground games that offer an excellent opportunity for growth and learning: i.e. teach good sportsmanship, fairness, taking turns, and personal and social values.

<u>When leading games, the teacher must:</u>

- Make sure all of the children are included and get the most out of their experiences.
- Be able to change or modify the rules/equipment to fit the situation.
- Avoid situations where the children pick the teams.
- Arrange the teams so that they are equal in skill level.
- Choose games that allow the children to be active most of the time.
- Explain the rules of new outdoor games to the entire group in a confined area before going outside.
- Have all of the equipment ready and the play area determined before beginning.
- Not tolerate teasing or unsportsmanlike behavior.

<u>The games listed in this article will help the children learn the following skills:</u>

- the importance of cooperation
- to improve decision making skills in situations that require quick thinking
- to take turns and be patient
- to accept and follow rules

- to accept winning and losing gracefully
- to enjoy physical fitness

Name: Tunnel Race

Equipment: none

Number of Players: an odd number of 11 or more players

Directions:

Select one player to be "it" Divide the remaining players into two circles. Direct one circle to stand around the other. The people in the inside circle should face the people in the outside circle. The people in each circle should then take the hands of the people they are facing so that the entire circle forms a tunnel of pairs. The player who was chosen as "it" walks through the tunnel, tags any pair, and then steps into one of their spaces. Then, the two tagged players each run in opposite directions until they return to their original spots. The first person to return will be able to slip into the remaining space. The last person to get there will be "it" for the next round.

Name: Leapfrog Relay

Equipment: none

Number of Players: an even amount of players 10 or more

Directions:

Arrange the players in a circle facing counterclockwise. Divide the circle in half to create two teams and then number the players on each team. Assign the players numbers so that each player has someone with the same number directly across from him or her. (For example, if there are 12 players, number half the circle 1-6 and then also number the other half of the circle 1-6. The ones should be across from each other, as should be the twos, threes, etc.) Ask the players to get down on their hands and knees. When the leader calls out a number, the two players with that number have to leapfrog over the others in the circle all the way around and back to their original spots. The first player to return to the correct position wins a point for his or her team. Play to a predetermined number of points.

Name: Balloon Volleyball

Equipment: Five-foot length of string per group; two-foot length of string per group; one balloon per group

Number of Players: an even amount of 4 players per team

Directions:

Divide the number of students into groups of four. For each group, tie a two-foot length of string to an inflated balloon. Tie the other end of the string to the center of a five-foot length of string. Each end of the five-foot string is held by a student at waist height. The remaining two players will stand on either side of the string and bat the balloon back and forth across the string. Instruct the students to hit the balloon with their right hands. After a couple of trials, have them just use their left hands to hit the balloon. Switch positions of the players playing and holding the string frequently.

Name: Total Movement Relay

Equipment: None

Number of Players: any amount

Directions:

Divide the students into teams of five or six players. Have each team form a circle by holding hands. Have one team member stand in the center of the circle. Each team will travel from the starting line to a designated turnaround point. When the team returns to the starting line, the student in the middle of the circle trades places with one of the students forming the circle. The game is completed when each student has had a turn to be in the middle of the circle. The students forming the circle must hold hands throughout the course, and they may not touch the student in the middle.

Name: Four Corners

Equipment: Four square court (or four cones per group of 5)

Number of Players: groups of 5

Directions:

Divide the students into groups of 5 players. Each player stands in one of the corners (or cone) with the 5 th person standing in the middle of the square. When the player in the center of the court yells out "Go left" or "Go right," each player standing in a corner must move in that direction to the next corner. The person in the center must try to run to one of the corners before one of the other players. He/she is allowed three attempts to accomplish this task. If the player in the middle cannot get to a corner in three tries, he/she must choose one of the other players to switch places with. If the player in the center beats another player to a corner, he/she becomes a corner person. The other player will move to the center.

Name: French Cricket

Equipment: 1 bat and ball per group

Number of Players: Groups of 6 to 8 players

Directions:

Divide the class into groups of six to eight players. Each group forms a circle, with players evenly spaced around it. One player, the Batter, holds a bat and stands in the center (12 feet) away from the circle players. Give the ball to a circle player to start the game. Circle players, throw the ball and try to hit the Batter below his or her knees, or catch a fly ball hit by the batter. If a player does so, he/she become the new Batter. The Batter uses his/her bat for defense. Keep the bat near the floor so the batter can react quickly to a ball coming toward the lower part of the body. If the ball hits the batter below his/her knees, the batter must change positions with the thrower. Circle players may pass the ball around the circle before throwing it, trying to catch the batter out of position.

Name: Touchdown

Equipment: One set of pinnies; cones to mark field dimensions; any small object such as a marble, piece of chalk, button, ping-pong ball

Number of Players: any amount

Directions:

Use cones to mark a play area with a center line that suits the players' level of running ability. Form two equal teams and have one team wear the pinnies. Each team stands side by side in its half at the center line, facing the other team. Flip a coin or choose a number to decide which team receives a small object, representing the "football," at the start of the game. Encourage teams to be "tricky" when deciding how the football will be carried and who will carry it. The offensive team, with the "football," has ten seconds to meet in a huddle to decide on the team's game plan: Who will carry the object in his or her hands? How can you fake it to look like everyone in your team is carrying it? On the signal "Go!" offensive team players, run toward the opposite end of the play area. Meanwhile, defensive team players, try to gag the opposition with a one-hand touch. If an offensive player is tagged, he/she opens his/her hands and show what he/she is carrying. If his/her hands are empty, he/she freezes on the spot. If the offensive player has the object, the teams change roles and the other team gets the "football." If the offensive player carrying the "football" reaches the end of the play area without being tagged, he/she will shout "Touchdown!" The offensive team then earns one point. The other team gets the "football" and the game continues.

Name: Hunt the Bean Bag

Equipment: 1 bean bag per 4 students, 1 pinnie per 4 students

Number of Players: any amount

Directions:

Distribute pinnies and bean bags to players (pinnied players, i.e. "taggers" do not get a bean bag). Everyone

finds a free space. The taggers try to tag players without a bean bag. To avoid being tagged, run and dodge the tagger or throw a beanbag to another player. If tagged, the tagger and the player tag switch places (tagger gives the player tagged his/her pinnie).

Some questions to generate a discussion:

1. What are some developmentally appropriate games or activities you played or teach on playgrounds?
2. What additional advantages or benefits have you experienced or can think of, regarding the teaching of playground games?
3. Are there any disadvantages?
4. Do you feel physical educators should teach developmental appropriate games/activities on the playground, or are the playground/recess games of the past satisfactory for addressing the objectives listed above?

References

Peaceful playgrounds, (2006). " Scientific Research Review,"

http://www.peacefulplaygrounds.com/research.htm