

The games children play:

How often do we allow children to devise their own games in our PE lessons? Are we addressing the strand unit of 'creating and playing games' as often as we like within the games strand? How do we even go about it? This article is based on a practical workshop delivered at the Irish Primary PE Association 2017 conference (Lannucci et.al. 2017). It provides some practical ideas on how to structure child-designed games activities in PE lessons. The full workshop notes are available in the members section of www.irishprimarype.com.

Starting point: Guiding children to design and play their own game is a skill in-and-of-itself. A little like a group project in the classroom, just telling students to make up what they want without a clear structure can lead to an unproductive experience. Some basic guiding principles

may include:

1. Limiting each group to six or less children (a station teaching or grid style set-up is helpful here).
2. Providing a clear structure. Make sure to outline to the children:
 - the equipment they can use;
 - the space they are allowed use (get them to mark it out with cones);
 - the movements/skills that you want to develop in the game.
3. Adequate time: children will require time to:
 - think creatively and discuss their ideas (but also to be aware that they should begin trying out their game when the signal goes);
 - re-think or 'sort-out' the game after they've tried it out. They may need to adapt or change it in some way;
 - play their game once they are happy

that it 'works';

- demonstrate and teach their game to other groups/the rest of the class.
4. Create accountability: in order for children to appreciate and invest in their game ensure they:
 - give their game a name;
 - have clear and identifiable rules for their game;
 - teach other groups their game when indicated;
 - encourage other children to play their game on another day or perhaps during yard time;
 - write about their game in class/draw pictures or diagrams/use iPads.

Teachers who have been successfully using child-designed games have also highlighted the following tips for engaging children (illustrated below):

If children are to make worthwhile decisions about their game and invest in it, you must try and stay out of decisions as much as possible (except where there are safety issues).

Games may be co-operative, competitive, active or passive, depending on what you/ the children want to achieve.

The three 'Cs' are helpful when helping children design games.

- **Clarification:** Provide possible options and/or rules to consider when students get 'stuck'.
- **Criteria:** Provide for games design expectations, 'it must have all students touching the ball at least once'.
- **Critique:** Monitor children's decisions and critique them.

Consider developing the create a game concept over a number of PE lessons.

It is helpful to suggest and remind children regarding a structure for the game – purpose, rules, boundaries.

Using child-designed games in PE

Curriculum objectives with regard to 'Creating and Playing games'

Infants	create and develop games in pairs rolling a ball at a target kicking a ball to a partner through a 'goal'
1st/2nd	create and develop games in pairs or small groups pig-in-the-middle passing games
3rd/4th	create and develop games with a partner or with a small group striking, kicking, throwing and catching games
5th/6th	create and develop games with a partner or with a small group bowling, striking, kicking, throwing and catching games



The Irish Primary Physical Education Association (IPPEA)

The Irish Primary PE Association is a voluntary organisation which was founded in 2002 by and for primary teachers who were particularly interested in the subject of physical education. The IPPEA is dedicated to heightening awareness of PE issues in primary schools and it aims to promote physical activity in an educational context. The IPPEA holds an annual conference as well as workshops throughout the year. This year's conference took place in Galway on 24 February with the theme of 'Moving Forward: Physical Education for the future'. For more information on the IPPEA or to become a member please visit www.irishprimarype.com

References:

- Government of Ireland (1999) *Primary school curriculum physical education*, Dublin: The Stationary Office.
- Graham, G, Holt, S A and Parker, M (2013) *Children moving: a reflective approach to teaching physical education*, Ninth ed., New York: McGraw Hill.
- Iannucci, C, Mangione, J, Parker, M (2017), *The games children play: Using child designed games*, Irish Primary Physical Education Association Conference, Croke Park Conference Centre (Practical workshop).
- Rovegno, I. & Bandhauer, D. (2013) *Elementary physical education Curriculum and Instruction*.

Sample Lesson structure

(May be undertaken over a number of lessons)

Context: 3rd/4th class children have been practising throwing and catching skills with bean bags/foam balls in prior PE lessons

1. Begin with a warm-up game and perhaps include a focus on some of the movements/skills/components that can be used in their games (e.g. chest pass/fist pass/dodging). Discuss how someone must have invented this game in order for us to be playing it.
2. Split children into groups (three – six children).
3. Tell children that they will be creating their own game using the skills of throwing and catching. Mark out areas for each group and encourage children to brainstorm their ideas. Tell them to think about some games that they already know and like that have throwing and catching in them.
4. Start by giving groups one ball, some cones/hoops and ask them to create a game. Try playing the game to see if it works. Ask children 'Is it fun? /do you need more equipment/are you using throwing and catching skills?'
5. Stop the game and discuss what the rules are and if they need to adapt any and allow the game to continue.
6. Allow continual revisiting of game and once finalised, each group may then present their game to the other children who may then play the games that have been designed.

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