

Hello Everybody,

4-30-14 2/3/3

We've been playing gym games in our 3am and 3pm classes, and are about to introduce the first gym game to our 2am class. A game with rules, which all the children play at the same time, can seem simple to adults, but requires much intellectual and physical coordination.

First, gathering on the circle can take a while, as children shift from following their own idea - whether it's pedaling a bike or jumping on the mats - to being one of the group, all participating in the same activity at the same time. Listening to the rules, internalizing the various parts, and following the structure can be a challenge.

Take, for example, the Color game. We usually start with this very simple running game, which children really like. It involves the thrill of running and the fun of identifying colors, and introduces to the group some of the recurring elements of group gym games, like the 'Starting Line'. This is the painted line along the back of the gym, near the wall, and we use it for many of our gym games. Just finding a place to stand, with all the jostling and moving and vying for favorite positions and people to stand next to, can be tough. Some don't even want to go there! (We provide a 'Watching Place' where children can observe until they're ready to try, and usually a teacher is providing support and commentary there during the game, and offering periodic invitations to join in.)

In the Color Game, once children are standing on the Starting Line, a teacher calls out a color. Those wearing that color are expected to run to a designated stopping place - either a line of cones or the stage - and the teacher may try to tag them as they pass. In the beginning there is a range of responses to the calling of the color. Some children know right away that they are wearing brown or pink, but it takes a while to understand that means they should.....run! They may just call out, "I have brown!" and need a reminder to run. Or, they may not know all their colors, and teachers are on hand to help kids identify them. Some are daunted by the space, and like a teacher's hand to make the passage; others are caught up in the exhilaration of running, and have a hard time going to the stopping place or stopping once there. Coordinating body movements within the group of

children and retaining the ideas – rules, goals, colors – while holding still, then running, then stopping, takes practice. Eventually, all the children understood the rules and structure and began participating in this simple game.

So, we switched it up. This year, we introduced Freeze Tag after Color Shoe. This poses even more challenges to those who have mastered waiting on the starting line, going when it's their turn, and stopping. Especially the stopping! We start out with teachers as taggers, and after explaining the rules we hope children will run when we say "Go!", stop if tagged, and then run again if another child tags them. In an example of how literal children can be, there was one child who became pretty worried as we explained the rules. Upon hearing that a tagger would 'freeze' him and that any other child could 'melt' him, he began to cry. While sitting with a teacher as the game began, he watched intently then asked, "But what will happen to my body when it melts?" Once reassured that it was only pretend, he was able to give it a try.

After the group plays Freeze Tag a few times, we offer the chance for children to be the taggers. Some enjoy this so much they would like all the turns, so being able to wait a day or two to be a tagger requires patience. Being a tagger has its own challenges, including all the others, plus the need to catch up to the other runners and use just the right amount of force to tag.

Yes, there are some collisions...and tears.....but mostly lots of smiley runners, all out of breath at game's end. They're not just worn out by the physical exertion, but all the intellectual balls they're balancing while in motion.

The idea that there are rules we all follow, that by playing we agree to stop when tagged and melt the frozen, is just the beginning. Then, there's the need to remember who the taggers are, figure out how fast to run to avoid being caught (or, for those who like it, how to put yourself in the tagger's vision and reach) combine all of that with moving through the space and avoiding collisions, coordinating your movements with others, melting

those you see frozen, halting your own motion if tagged, calling for a 'melter' and waiting til they tag you, running again.....

After many days, and turns for all to tag (if they wish) we introduced another tag game – Stuck in the Muck. This has all the same elements as freeze tag, but a different method for releasing those stuck. Instead of tagging to release somebody who has been tagged, children slide between the widely-planted feet of the person who is 'stuck'. This involves even more coordination with others and shifting ideas to remember new rules.

We've also played a simple team game in 3pm, the Up n Down Cone Game. Kids are divided into either the 'Up' group or the 'Down' group, and on "Go!" they run to put cones that are scattered around the gym either up or down. At this point, the main idea is to coordinate your movements with the others on your team, while the other team is engaged in an opposing action. We haven't emphasized the results – no counting how many cones up vs down at the end to determine a 'winner' – but we may one day bring in this sort of counting and comparing and thinking about number. For kids this age, winning and losing in games is pretty uncomfortable. Well, mostly the losing. We'd rather encourage participation, with an emphasis on building physical skills and coordination, team collaboration, and fun.

We hope you'll wear your running shoes the next time you assist, so you can join us in a gym game!