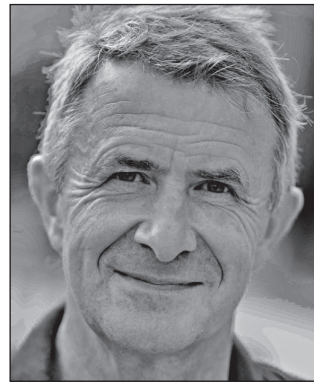


Preface

In my probationary year as a P.E. and Drama teacher in London I was struck by the quality of learning, cooperation and fun the kids had during the break times. I pondered how I could harness that energy and joy in more formal learning environments. Thus began an odyssey of experimenting, collecting and researching games. After 20 years it is a delight to come across a fellow seasoned adventurer in the educational value of play.



In nearly every workshop, I use games and energisers. It stimulates people to explore, to be active, to have fun and to learn in a more vulnerable way. It loosens up the atmosphere and provides an interaction where people allow themselves to learn from others and from their experience. With my workshops I want to contribute to a better world where people realise that there is enough for all to be happy.



This is our second book on learning games. It reflects the gathering of the many games we have used in our workshops and training over the last twenty-five years. Some of the games we have invented – or imagine we have –, others we have played since our own childhood and hope will be played by many generations to come.

We would like to thank the many colleagues that have introduced us to new games or creative variations of old favourites and favourites over the years, and the many people we have played with. We would also like to thank Silajala and Laura for their help with proofreading this book.

Our aim has been to collect these games together and present them in an accessible way for teachers, trainers and others who would like to enrich their work with playful games and ideas.

Spring 2018

Jayaraja
Erwin Tielemans

Introduction

Eight parts

In writing this book we wanted to give as much information as succinctly as possible. This introduction gives you the essential structure of the book.

The games are arranged in eight different parts to help you find the games you need. On pages 5-8 you will find an overview of the games in each part. A full alphabetical index of games is found at the end of the book.

Instructional language

An important skill is to be able to explain the games quickly and clearly. So to help you, the suggested verbal instructions for you to read out loud are preceded by a vertical line. As you become more familiar with the games you will find your own words. It helps enormously to use clear, expressive body language and to demonstrate what is meant when you introduce the game.

Technical aspects

For each game we have included technical information, such as:

- Risk level
- Energy level
- Number of participants
- Minimum age
- Suggested length of the activity
- Materials required

The energy level gives you a sense of how much energy is needed to play the game and/or how much energy you get from it.

The risk level indicates the kind of group the game is suitable for, such as new groups (low level) or experienced or confident groups (high level).

Tips for working with energisers and games

Safety

If you have ever participated in an energiser game you will probably remember the fun and inspiration you got from it. With skilled trainers the process can look very simple but there are important factors to consider before, during and after each game, session or workshop.

Before

Is the game appropriate for the group and the space? For example, avoid playing fast running games either in a confined space or on hard, rutted or uneven ground. Notice the obstructions and hazards and if necessary draw people's attention to them. Even though you love a particular game it is best not to play it if the group or the environment is not suitable or safe enough.

For psychological/emotional safety make it clear that it is fine for people to sit out of a game either because they are tired or not quite ready to play, or it is too strong on their back or their knees etc. Promote choice! When introducing a game, include the safety points. When an accident happens (if you play physical games regularly, they will happen) make a note of it and reflect on the conditions that gave rise to the accident and see what safety point might have helped avoid the incident – remember it for next time. It might be that the order of the games, i.e. playing Predator and Prey after a rough high energy game, may not be the best idea. We find Predator and Prey, an absolute favourite game of ours, is best not played with a tired group. It requires a lot of sensitivity and subtlety.

In a classroom you can put the tables and chairs to the side or at the end of the room, though you may also use the chairs to form a circle.

For some games it is better to be outdoors or in a gym. If you are outdoors check to see that the ground is safe, with no glass or dangerous potholes.

It is also important to be aware of your position within the circle. If you have your back to the sun the group will have to squint to see you. With a large group outdoors you may need to be conscious of the wind direction and other factors that make it difficult for the participants to hear you.

As far as possible speak at a normal level. Avoid talking very loudly as this tends to generate a noisy group and you will soon lose your voice.

Silence sign

A useful ritual we use is the silence sign. Explain that when you put your hand in the air you would like everyone to do the same to signal that you would like silence. Once the group has understood this you can save time, energy and your voice.



Passing is OK

Make it clear before you start that it is OK if participants want to sit and observe a game instead of participating. We recommend that after giving the instruction you check if everyone wants to participate. It is important that people participate from choice rather than thinking they have to.

Safety

At the start of the session make it clear that safety is everyone's concern. We often say: "If you have a bad back for example, look after your body, engage with the games with a sense of what is right for you. The only thing we would request is that you don't join in on a rough game to start, as we like people to have developed a sensitivity before getting into the rough games."

Risk level

When choosing a game consider the risk level and the needs of the group. Start with low risk activities, and decide when to increase the risk level by observing the group and learning from the debriefing.

Outline goal beforehand

Give a reason for doing an activity and an indication of what you want to achieve with it in general terms. Avoid saying what the learning effects will be or what participants will feel – that is something you can explore in the debriefing.

Instructions

Use short, clear sentences to tell the participants what to do. Practice the instructions before the session, formulating them in your own words or using the suggested instructions in this book as a guide.

Long instructions

Watch the participants' expressions while giving the instructions to gauge if they have understood, and then check if they have questions about the activity.

Where possible demonstrate and use your body language to support the verbal instructions. Practice and reflect on the outcome.

If a game is complex you can break it down into discrete stages adding a new aspect each time. It is best to give no more than three things to do at one time.

E.g. when you want participants to move around, ask them first to stand, then let them form groups, wait until they have formed groups to give the next assignment...

Kind language

Use invitational language when you give the instruction. Start with: "I would like you to...", "Please come and...", "May I invite you to...", etc.

Progressive

Start simple with maximum engagement and a low level of challenge. Asking people to be gorillas straight from the start can be challenging for a group who don't know each other or you, so gradually build trust and open heartedness. If you keep a sensitivity to where the group is at, then even with a group of image-conscious teenagers you can get them fully engaged in crazy, silly fun games having lost their inhibitions. One of the main skills of a games leader is this sensitivity to where the group is at, and perhaps the main tip for development is to keep a sensitivity to your own gut feelings. Remember the games are interconnected, experiment with what games go well in which order. The order of the games also contributes to safety. We love to play rough games, though with a new group we will try to gauge the level of sensitivity, competitiveness and trust before playing the roughest games. To assess this we often play cooperative and sensitive games prior to the rough ones.

Show don't tell

When you are introducing a game explain and demonstrate at the same time. Use your body to speak, practise your visual explanations and gestures. Keep the words brief. Use circles, huddles and lines depending on the situation, game, the group, the strength of your voice, have clear gestures to indicate each. Is the huddle standing or sitting? The gesture should be clear. Experiment with saying as little as possible. Do check before beginning, I usually say: "Is everyone clear?" and I scan the group trying to see from the body language if everyone has got it.

During

Participate

Participate as much as possible in the games. Your enthusiasm will affect the participants.

Of course when you give the groups a problem to solve you stay in the role of the observer.

Stop if needed

If you need pairs for a game and the group is uneven then join in, but if the group is even stay at the side.

Observe

If a game doesn't go as you anticipated, or if they have misunderstood your instructions, stop and give the instruction again.

Stop before fun goes down

How long should a funny game last?

Stop it ten seconds before it loses a bit of its magic. This means that there is always more fun to be had, and you finish each game having fun.

After

Reflection makes the difference! A simple game transforms into a valuable activity when the person who leads the game is able to help the group reflect on the activity. Most energisers have suggestions for the debriefing to enhance the learning and social development.

Open or closed questions

Mix open and closed questions in the debriefing. A closed question, requiring a yes-or-no answer, is easier than an open question.

For some participants it is wise to start with a closed question followed by an open one, a format you will often find in the book.

E.g. "Did you see any relationship with this exercise and...? If so, what?"

If you use open questions you can relate them to the goal you mentioned before the game.

You can focus your questions on different aspects:

- What participants feel
- What they think
- Parallels and differences between the game and their experience in life
- What they have learnt or are learning
- How they will apply what is learnt in their own life

Ask everyone

If you ask questions invite everyone to respond. Look at all participants and illustrate with your body language that the question is addressed to everyone.

Invite more than one participant to answer.

One question

Avoid giving judgements on the answers. If an answer is not clear or is very abstract, you might ask: "I am not quite clear. Can you tell me what you mean?" or "Can you give me an example?"

Treat each offering respectfully – it has meaning and purpose even though that may not be immediately obvious.

Golden silence

Ask one question at a time, avoiding multiple questions like: "How was this game? And what can you learn from it?"

When participants aren't used to answering open questions they will often have to think. Remain silent, trust that they are thinking and wait for the first person who wants to answer. If you talk you are likely to interrupt the creative process of thinking and reflection.

Keep it safe

In some groups participants can be reluctant to respond before the whole group. If you have long silences after your open questions then form groups of four and ask the people to discuss the question in their group. The groups can write or draw their answers, which can then be used for discussion and reflection.

Another safe way to reflect on your questions is discussion in pairs. If you ask your question and let them reflect in twos or threes then participants will be more spontaneous.

Learn by doing

At the end of each session reflect, asking yourself questions to improve your ability in using games as a means for learning.

The following questions might help:

- What went well?
- Did the game go as I wanted?
- What would I do the same?
- What would I do differently? How?
- Did the participants learn? What was helpful?
- Could I get more out of it? How?

Be creative

Experiment with games following each other: what games are the best to start with, and finish with? If you want to play a rough energetic game: what is the best game to precede it, or follow it?

Change games; try and play a new game each time; adapt a familiar game by changing one aspect of it; blend two games together. Take something out of a game: for example, a chase type game might be played in slow motion or three legged, or in a drunken style, if the surface is too rutted to play at full speed.



Invent

Keep a sensitive connection to your heart and guts, this will help you maintain your sensitivity towards the group. This sensitivity improves the safety of the group. It is also important to be in touch with a playful energy, the best sessions come from this energy of sharing rather than teaching. This may not always be possible if you are set to lead a session and you are not feeling particularly playful. There are ways to access the playfulness gradually but again staying in contact with yourself is important.

Think of incidents or emotions in your life: can you invent a game around them, to explore them? For example fear, inclusion, exclusion, things you dread getting wrong, saying no, etc. Have fun!