

UPSIDE-DOWN CHILDREN'S GAMES

AN INTRODUCTION

Much of what children enjoy to eat and drink may be bad for their long term health. And many of the games which children play may have equally damaging long term effects.

Almost all children's games - the games we teach children and the games children invent - have a common factor. They are preparations for an adult world. More often than not this adult world is based on competition. Children certainly enjoy acquiring and practising the skills involved in competitive games. Children learn as they play these games that there are winners and losers ; that two players become two opponents ; that players divide into two opposing teams and put all their energies into competing with one another ; that winning such competitions generally depends upon the abilities of opponents to practice their skills so as to mislead, to conceal, and often to intimidate ; and that winning in this way brings prizes as well as status. Such games are undoubtedly a preparation for a certain sort of adult world. But an unrestricted diet of such games may also be a seriously unbalanced diet so far as children's overall development is concerned. The games described in this chapter are all based on familiar children's games, and draw upon the skills associated with these games. But the structures of these traditional games - each holding a mirror up to the norms of an adult world - have been turned upside down.

THE DIY OF UPSIDE-DOWN CHILDREN'S GAMES

The four games described in this chapter are upside-down versions of the party games musical chairs and pic-a-stick, the playground game tig (or tag), and 'blind man's buff'. Turning a familiar children's game or competition upside-down, however, is not easy. It only seems easy and natural after it has been done. There is no formula which can be followed. Inverting skipping games or ball games - inverting blind man's buff, or pass the parcel, or hide and seek - may all require different approaches. But there are guidelines. First of all, the game which is being inverted needs to be well known and thoroughly understood. It may help to play, observe, and reflect upon this game on a number of occasions. Secondly, the skills involved in the original game should be retained, and enjoyed, and perhaps added to in the upside-down game. It often helps to start by practising these skills. When an upside-down version is being tried out, then answers to the following questions will provide a measure of success :- are the players communicating with one another ? or are players still hiding or concealing information and intentions from each other ? are the players coming together to tackle a common problem or challenge ? or are the players still challenging each other and intentionally causing problems for each other ? If the answers to the above questions are Yes, No, Yes, No, then the original game has almost certainly been turned upside down. But there remains one final question. Is the upside-down version as absorbing and challenging as the original game ? If the answer is not Yes, then game has not yet been successfully turned upside-down.

THE UPSIDE-DOWN CHILDREN'S GAME IN WHICH PLAYERS CREATE AS LITTLE

DISTURBANCE AS POSSIBLE

Some two dozen slim wooden sticks or rods, each one metre long, have been dropped into an interlocking heap on the ground. A dozen players are seated in a circle around the rods, clapping in rhythm. Each time the singing and clapping stops, one of the players moves forward to extract a rod from the pile. If the rod is extracted from the pile without any of the other rods being disturbed, then the player stands the rod in a box of sand to one side of the circle of players. If the extraction of the rod causes any disturbance in the pile of rods then the player stands the rod in an identical box of sand to the other side of the circle of players. The game continues until all the rods have been extracted, and stood in one of the two boxes. The players may then regard the two 'gardens' of dowelling rods and reflect on the number of rods in each box. Notes : - no words (or BSL) are used during this game - the group activity around the pile of rods and the actions of individual players following the removal of a rod may be changed to suit the circumstances in which the game is being played and the abilities of the players : variations may include singing for the group activity, and contributing to the creation of a shape, word, or pattern with the rods for the individual activity. - the choice of the player moving forward to the pile of rods may be left to chance and self selection, or may be pre-determined ; generally, no player may move forward for a second time until all players have had a first turn ; sometimes the players may take turns to invent and lead a clapping rhythm, with the player taking the lead being the player moving forward to the pile of rods. - in one variation of this game each player moving forward to the rods may remove as many dowelling rods as possible until there is movement within the pile : the removal of these rods is then celebrated in some way, say with a circular dance, and the rods are put on display : this variation generally requires many more than two dozen dowelling rods - players using wheel-chairs may direct another player as to which rod/s is/are to be removed on their behalf.

THE UPSIDE-DOWN CHILDREN'S GAME IN WHICH CHANGE IS BROUGHT ABOUT BY TOUCH

A group of players are dancing with hoola-hoops. Some players are keeping the hoola-hoops in motion around their waists, some around their hips, and some around their necks, arms, or legs. Whenever a hoola-hoop falls to the floor the player simply picks up the hoop and starts again. Meanwhile, one other player - in an area with flowers and vases - is practising flower arrangement. From time to time one of the players with a hoola-hoop chooses to lay their hoola-hoop on the floor and moves over to touch the flower arranger on the shoulder. The two players then change places and each takes up the activity of the other player. A little while later another player may choose to lay their hoola-hoop on the floor and tig (tag) the flower arranger to change places. The game continues so long as the players enjoy dancing with their hoola-hoops and there are flowers left to arrange. Notes : - no words (or BSL) are used during this game - an alternative is for the tiggig (or tagging) to be done by the flower arranger choosing to touch one of the players in the group - the group activity and the solo activity may be changed to suit the circumstances in which the game is being played and the abilities of the players : variations may include skipping, or playing with tennis balls for the group ; and creating a structure with building bricks, or telling a story, or singing (if the group activity is quiet) for the individual player. - the group activity and the solo activity may be adapted for disabled players ; for example, players in wheelchairs may make journeys around a network of paths drawn on the floor, pausing at every intersection to perform an exercise ; while the solo player makes rhythms with maracas : alternatively, this arrangement may be reversed, with the solo player making the journey, and the group of players playing maracas.

THE UPSIDE-DOWN CHILDREN'S GAME IN WHICH THE PLAYERS' FEET LEAVE

THE GROUND WHEN THE MUSIC STOPS

Twenty four colourful carpet tiles have been placed randomly on the floor. A group of twenty four players are stood quietly alongside the carpet tiles. Music begins and the players start to dance - being careful not to touch any of the carpet tiles as they dance. The music stops and each player steps to stand motionless on a carpet tile. The music begins again and the players leave their tiles and dance. While they are dancing a carpet tile is removed. When the music stops one player is now without a carpet tile to stand on. Two players come together to share a tile. The music and the dancing begin again and another carpet tile is removed. When the music stops this time twenty four arrange themselves to stand motionless on twenty two carpet tiles. The game continues as the number of carpet tiles diminishes. Small groups of players begin to balance together on two or three carpet tiles when the music stops. The game continues until the whole group - balancing, lifting, and supporting one another - are stood remarkably as a human sculpture on just five carpet tiles. Notes : - the stillness of the players on the carpet tiles makes a contrast with the animation of the dancing ; the music should not begin again until all the players are motionless and on carpet tiles. - players may not touch the carpet tiles while dancing, but as the tiles become scarce they may move the tiles closer together during the periods of silence - the players may not talk (or use BSL) during the game - players who do not wish to dance may walk, or simply listen to the music - the music chosen determines both the nature and the development of the dancing - an attendant umpire may assist in safety as it becomes increasingly a challenge to accommodate all the players on the tiles - when played by groups of disabled and non-disabled players, the carpet tiles should be arranged to facilitate participation by wheel-chair users.

THE UPSIDE-DOWN CHILDREN'S GAME IN WHICH ONE VOICE MAY SPEAK FOR ALL

All of the players are wearing blindfolds, except one. The players wearing blindfolds are led individually into the space for the game and turned around. They don't know where they are. The sighted player begins to speak. One by one the blindfolded players are told how and where to move. Gradually the speaker brings the blindfolded players together into the centre of the space. Some of the players are talked into taking low positions, and others into positions reaching up towards the sky. The blindfolded players are being talked into the shape of a flower. When the flower is completed the sighted speaker talks the flower into opening and closing. The blindfolded players then take off their blindfolds and repeat the opening and closing movements with their eyes open. Notes : - the game may repeat with each player in turn becoming the speaker, and with each flower being different (very different or subtly different) from the flowers which have gone before. - the image of a flower may be changed to that of a tree (which may move in the wind) ; or an aeroplane (which appears to fly) ; or a ship (which sets sail) ; or a wheel (which turns) ; etc. - the speaker may move each player a little at a time ; may concentrate on moving one player for a period of time ; may move players in groups, or collectively ; etc. - the speaker may sing or chant their instructions, or improvise their instructions in rhyme, to the blindfold players. - the speaker may move the blindfold players in any (appropriate and safe) way, including rhythmic movements, hops, turns, glides, etc. - the blindfolded players may be allowed to determine elements of their own journey ; for instance the direction and distance may be determined by the speaker, but the mode of motion determined by the blindfold player. - the care and imagination of the speaker often determines the sense of involvement which the blindfold players have in the game - visually impaired and blind players may also play this game provided there is a sighted speaker ; visually impaired and blind players should also wear blindfolds ; the game can be concluded with the players listening to a recorded audio description of the moving image which they created.

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