



The first 5 steps

to creating happy and powerfully positive playtimes

Therese Hoyle

Your first step is to talk with the kids.

Students can spend up to 25 percent of their school day in the playground, and if the playground is an angry, hostile place, or if there are pockets of problems, we face challenges after play wasting good learning time resolving conflict. Teachers frequently find that playground problems wind up some children so much that their brain is no longer wired for learning. Investing time and energy in creating positive structures that encourage positive play is worth its weight in gold.

You can take five steps to create happy and powerfully positive playtimes.

Step 1: Playtime audit

The process involves evaluating, developing and improving playtimes (including development of the outdoor playenvironment).

The audit needs to look at:

- Children's involvement
- Level of enjoyment for all concerned
- Behaviour
- Rules and responsibilities
- Rewards and consequences
- Time
- Space
- Staffing
- Resources: fixed, hand-held and non-equipment
- Storage of resources
- Links between class-time and playtime

And most important:

- The organization of all of the above.

Once you've identified the school's strengths and weaknesses, you can create action plans.

Step 2: Design and create your dream school playground

Schools have always found it invaluable to ask the children to design their dream playground. You can glean lots of fresh ideas this way. With the design and technology challenge, we like to get the whole school involved. Firstly children put their designs onto paper; secondly they work together to create a 3D model of their playground.

Get children to think about:

- Activity areas
- Equipment small and large
- Use of space
- Use of jungle gyms, sand pits, etc
- Storage
- Playground clubs: eco club, dance club, netball, football, chicken club (looking after the school chickens), etc.

Most of my schools are amazed by the imagination, creativity and skill that can develop from such a project.

Step 3: Playground games activity area

As I mentioned in issue five of *Teachers Matter*, some of our children have lost the art of knowing how to play. I encourage schools to set up an activity area where teachers, support staff, playground buddies or anyone else interested in helping out at playtime can encourage and teach games. *101 Playground Games* is a great resource with lots of old and new games.

Games have the capacity to be hugely inclusive of all children, no matter what age, culture, race, creed or ability; they offer opportunities for everyone in the school playground to get involved.

Choosing a playground games activity area:

Get the adults and children to work together on deciding where the best place would be to have a games area. It helps if the area has boundaries and is a good size. This will always be the game area, so children and adults know where to congregate at playtimes when they want to play games.

You may also want to create additional zoned activity areas.

Explaining a game:

- Read out the game to the group and explain the rules as clearly and simply as possible. Do it in a fun way, encouraging participation and playfulness.
- Make sure everyone can see and hear you. Stand on the edge of the circle rather than in the middle.
- Ask if there are any questions.
- Extend an invitation to play. Say "let's play...." Rather than, "you are going to play...."
- Always ask for a volunteer to be "it."
- Play each game a couple of times.
- Always look for opportunities to make a game more fun - add fantasy, chanting, singing, change the name to the latest craze, etc.
- Encourage participation, effort and satisfaction rather than winning.
- Ask for feedback on how it went.
- Once there is agreement that the game is working, the responsibility for playing the game with the agreed rules and guidelines can be left with the children.

"Game of the week" or "Games menu":

Choose a new game to learn each week. You can introduce this in an assembly and display it in the playground so that children can learn and practice it at break time. Additionally, children may like to select a "games menu," which has a selection of games to be played each week of the term.

Step 4: Games training for the adults

I would suggest that teacher aides, teachers and any other adults involved in play have at least two hours of games training. This would be to introduce new games and reinforce and remind them of old ones. As Confucius' saying "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand" indicates, the best way of learning anything new is to do it.

What to do:

- Select 10-20 games. You can download a free copy of the traditional games chapter from my website, www.successpartnership.co.nz or use a selection of other games. Copy and laminate them onto a coloured card. Give one set to each member of staff. Select a leader to organise the games.
- Go play.
- Evaluate the games.

This is also a great team-building exercise and lots of fun.

Step 5: Organising games in the playground; adults and children playing together

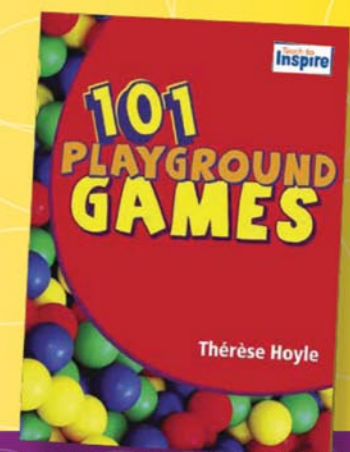
The best playtimes are those that are well organised with a balance of free play and structured activities children can choose to join.

It is important to remember that if we are to expect children to play games in the playground, then it helps if we adults get involved, too. It is also great fun. I have often found that if I have children who are well trained in the games, they can take over once I have left.

Next time, Part II of this article will include five more steps to powerfully positive playtimes.

A collection of active and engaging games for young children

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available from www.spectrumeducation.com and www.thesuccesspartnership.org