



Pestalozzi International

To nurture and develop



**Games in the Spirit
of Pestalozzi**

Cooperative Games in the Spirit of Pestalozzi

A manual of playful group activities for building trust and cooperation amongst all levels of students. To be played outside, many of them are short activities useful as breaks in the middle of class-based activity. The manual also provides an overview of how to use these games with the students.

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Joanna Nair for Pestalozzi International, 2025

Games in the Spirit of Pestalozzi

Type of Games

- Cooperative rather than competitive, encouraging students to feel at ease and trusting, and building both self-esteem and respect for others
- Enjoyable and supportive
- Inclusive - players are involved all the time and do not have to spend time sitting out as in many competitive games in which they may get eliminated early on
- Physical - involving movement to a greater or lesser extent
- Needing minimal equipment

Rationale for the Games

- Every child has the right 'to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child' (From Article 31 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child)
- Students' problem-solving abilities, creativity and ability to question improve through constructive play
- Students' empathy, kindness, trust, cooperation and respect for others and themselves develop through playing cooperative games
- Students learn better when the focus is on the game rather than on the learning, making them relaxed and therefore more receptive
- Students understand and remember things better if learning is linked to physical activity and music
- Students' ability to concentrate during classroom based and physically inactive lessons improves if interspersed with physical activity
- Students gain leadership skills and personal authority through the opportunities provided for them to lead games and fully participate in activities

Therefore, in the long term, the games contribute to Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's vision that education should:

- Involve academic learning (the Head); physical activity and learning (the Hands) and be led by love and understanding for others (the Heart)
- Enable individuals to contribute to the reform of their communities, countries and the world by bringing about democracy, world peace and security, and an end to poverty, corruption and inequality

Type of Games and Rationale for the Games 2

Getting the Best from the Games

When using the games:

- **Be prepared** Make sure you read through all the instructions and understand a game fully before using it. If possible practise the games with your partner-coach before playing them with the players. Decide on a few different games for each session. You do not have to use all the games you have prepared but it is important to have games ready to use so that players do not get bored while you decide on what to do next. Make sure you have any necessary equipment (listed at the beginning of each game) with you
- **Consider the space** When you choose which games to use, consider the size of the play area and the number of players
- **Consider age and ability** Have in mind the ages and abilities of the players when you choose which games to use
- **Consider your purpose** Think about what you want to facilitate in the players as you choose which games to use. For example: Do you want to help them to be more trusting or empathetic? Do you want to help them observe the world using all the senses? *The main purposes of the games are provided at the end of the description of each one.*
- **Forming groups or pairs and choosing a Leader or 'It' for a game** Use an activity to divide players into pairs or groups, or to choose a game leader. This will mean that players mix with players they would not usually work with. At the same time, do sometimes let them choose partners for themselves. Organise players into a circle, groups or pairs very quickly so that you keep their interest. When choosing pairs, assign players as As and Bs and specify which part As and which part Bs should take to avoid pairs wasting time deciding who should go first
- **Demonstrate** You and your partner-coach (and one or two players if necessary) should demonstrate any pair or small-group game you decide to use to all the players before using it. Have a slow practice run of whole group games, explaining it as everyone plays it. Do not try to give detailed instructions in advance as players are unlikely to listen
- **Provide variety** You can re-use the games but also gradually introduce new ones so that players do not become bored. Let the players also say if they would like to play any of the games again
- **Do not be afraid of failure** Stop a game if it is not working and use another one instead, or try it later when the players know each other better. Some games may never work well with a particular group
- **Be enthusiastic** If the players see you enjoying yourself, they will catch your enthusiasm and enjoy the games much more themselves. Show and keep your sense of humour and encourage everyone to have fun
- **Participate** If the players see you joining in, they will feel more relaxed with you and more comfortable participating. Sometimes one or both of you may need to join in pair or group activities to ensure everyone has a partner or that the groups are of the same size

- **Involve everyone** Make sure all players are involved all the time. If players arrive late let them join in the game immediately. If players are being disruptive, don't let this spoil the activity for the others. Don't stop the activity to tell them off, but ask them to sit out of the activity and explain to them that it is unfair to spoil the fun for the whole group
- **Be fair** Treat all players the same. If you need a leader or someone to be 'It', you could use an activity for choosing a Leader or 'It' or choose somebody different each time. Always make sure all players who want a turn get a turn (if not on the same day on another day). But, if players do not want to join in, there should be the option for them to sit out or, if it is a circle game, to say 'Pass' if they want to miss a turn or an activity. However, gently encourage these players to participate
- **Keep rules** When using these active games, the players may become boisterous and noisy and forget to listen. Therefore you need to have some basic rules which players must keep to. For example: No running unless the activity involves running. No shouting. When playing guessing games, ask players to put their hands up when they have guessed and not to call out the answer. When all the players have had a chance to work out the answer, ask one player to give the answer. If there is more than one answer, make sure you ask a different player for each different answer
- **Experiment** As you become used to playing these games, change them and make up your own. Encourage players to make up their own games by trying out any ideas they have. Allow players to take your place leading the games as you and they become familiar with them
- **Review** After using any of the games, discuss with your partner-coach what went well and what could be improved. Also consider if the game met its purpose (for example: Did it promote trust or cooperation? Did it improve language skills? Did it help the group to relax or to wake up?)

Games

Sample Games

Name: **Throw and Mnemonic**

Equipment: A soft ball

- Players stand in a circle with their hands out in front of them ready to catch the ball
- Throw the ball to someone in the circle while asking his or her name. Remind players to remember who they throw the ball to
- The person who catches the ball replies with his or her name and something he or she likes which begins with the same letter (e.g. 'My name is Jo and I like jam')
- All the other players then repeat this sentence in the second person (e.g. 'Your name is Jo and you like jam')
- The player who caught the ball then throws it to someone else, asking his or her name

- Once players have caught and thrown the ball, they stand with their arms behind their backs and the ball is only thrown to players with their arms in front of them
- This continues until all players have caught the ball and said their name
- Now throw the ball to the same player you threw it to first but this time say his or her name and what he or she likes (e.g. Your name is Jo and you like jam') If incorrect, the other players can give the correct information
- Continue, with each player throwing the ball to the same player as before, until all players have received the ball

(Purpose: Learning and remembering names; Physical activity to aid memory and relax players)

Let Me Tell You Something about X

- All the players walk about the room, mixing freely
- When you call out 'Stop!', everyone finds out something about the player nearest to him or her (e.g. 'How many sisters do you have?' 'I have five sisters.')
- Ask all players to move around again. When you say 'Stop' the players standing nearest to each other (except anybody they have already talked to) exchange the information they learnt about the previous player they spoke to, e.g. 'John told me that he likes chocolate')
- Players then exchange a new piece of information about each other which they have not shared with anyone else e.g. 'I like nuts better' ♦ This process is repeated until all the players have spoken to each other
- Players sit or stand in a circle and see what they can remember about each other

(Purpose: Getting to know one another; ; Memory; Mixing; Practising direct and reported speech)

ACTIVITY FOR CHOOSING A LEADER OR PLAYER TO BE 'IT' Random Leader or 'It'

- Explain that any players who would prefer not to be the first Leader or the first 'It' should stand out of the circle
- Pass an object round the circle. Close your eyes and turn away. After a pause, call out 'Leader' or 'It'. Whoever is holding the object leads the activity or becomes the first 'It'
- Alternatively, one of you leaves the room while the other assigns a number to each player. The coach who left the room returns and chooses a number at random. The player with that number leads the activity

(Purpose: Fairness; Random choice of game leader or player to be 'It')

ACTIVITY FOR DIVIDING PLAYERS INTO PAIRS

Lucky Match

- Players stand in a circle
- Name the players alternately A and B
- As face clockwise, Bs face anti-clockwise
- Players take the right hand of the person they are facing ◊ Players move around that person and take the left hand of the player coming towards them
- Players move around that person and take the right hand of the player coming towards them, and so on
- Look away and at some point ask the players to stop. Whoever players are now facing become partners

NB Players should move in slow motion throughout this activity

(Purpose: Mixing; Random pairing up)

ACTIVITY FOR DIVIDING PLAYERS INTO GROUPS

Blind Choice

- One player faces the wall, eyes closed
- The other players line up behind this player
- If you need 2 groups, the player facing the wall calls out '1, 2' over and over until all players have been assigned a group (If you need 3 groups the player facing the wall calls out '1,2,3 over and over)
- The first player in the line will be in the number one group, the second in the number two group, the third in the number one group and the fourth in the number two group, and so on

NB If you use this way of dividing players often with the same group, players may try to arrange themselves in the line so that they end up in the same group. Prevent this by using the activity to select different sized groups each time, without telling the players the size of the group you want in advance.

(Purpose: Cooperation; Mixing; Random choice of group members)

WHOLE GROUP GAMES

Alternate Leaning

- Players stand in a circle holding hands so that everyone's arms are outstretched but not taut
- Number people around the circle alternately 1 and 2
- On a count of 3, ask all the Number 1s to lean in towards the centre of the circle and all the Number 2s to lean outwards. They should counterbalance each other. Repeat the activity until players are able to do this without moving their feet
- Swap the direction players lean
- **Alternatively**, play with arms linked

- Encourage players to move backwards and forwards following a rhythm which you can clap or sing

(Purpose: Balance; Cooperation; Self-control; Trust)

Breath Song

- Players stand in a circle
- Players close their eyes and breathe in deeply, then breathe out slowly. Encourage players to hold their breath for longer and longer periods
- Use the same exercise, but players sing a given note for as long as they can as they breathe out
- Players sing a note as they exhale, starting strong and gradually fading away
- Players sing the same note as they exhale, starting weak and gradually getting stronger
- At the same time, one half of the group starts strong and gradually fades away, while the other half starts weak and gradually becomes stronger. All players should hold the same note

(Purpose: Breath control; Calm; Coordination; Relaxation; Self-control)

Chase the Dragon's Tail

Equipment: a blindfold

- Choose a leader
- All players line up behind the Leader (the Dragon's head) to form the Dragon, each player holding on to the hips or shoulders of the player in front of him or her. NB If the line breaks the dragon will die
- The player at the end of the line makes a tail out of the blindfold ◊ The Leader tries to catch its own tail. The player with the tail tries not to be caught!
- Begin a new round with the next player in line as the Dragon's head and the first player becoming the tail
- Repeat several times

(Purpose: Balance; Cooperation; Coordination; Physical dexterity)

WHOLE GROUP GAMES CONTINUED

Fizz Buzz

- Players sit or stand in a circle
- Players count from 1 upwards around the circle
- Any number which is a multiple of 3 must be replaced with the word 'Fizz' (e.g. 6)
- Any number which is a multiple of 5 must be replaced with the word 'Buzz' (e.g. 10)
- Any number which falls into both categories must be replaced with the words 'Fizz Buzz' (e.g. 15)
- See how high the group can count without making a mistake ◊ Vary the numbers you play with (e.g. 4 and 6 OR 5 and 7)

(Purpose: Concentration; Multiplication table practice)

Giant Knot

- Players hold hands in a circle
- The group tangles by players going under and over arms, without letting go of hands, to form a giant knot
- When players cannot move anymore, start to unwind back into a circle. *Nobody needs to let go of hands to be able to form the circle again*

(Purpose: Communication; Cooperation; Coordination; Patience; Problem solving)

Magic Ball

Equipment: A soft ball

- Players sit or stand in a circle
- Hold up a ball and explain to the players that it will represent different things. Ask them to imagine how they would hold it if it was e.g. a block of ice OR a heavy weight OR a helium balloon OR a sticky honeycomb OR a sweet smelling rose OR a fragile glass OR a dangerous spider OR a prickly cactus
- Players hand the ball around the circle as though it were a block of ice etc.
- Encourage players to come up with their own ideas
- Alternatively, players throw the ball back and forth and once caught the player must hold it as if it were a block of ice etc.
- Alternatively, ask players to decide what the ball represents without telling anyone, and to hold it accordingly. Other players guess what the ball represents but keep quiet. They show what they think it represents by their movements when they hold the ball
- Only after all the players have shown what they think the ball represents by holding it in a certain way, ask players what they think it is

(Purpose: Expression; Imagination; Self-control)

Rhythmic Sentences

- Players sit in a circle
- Begin by saying a grammatically correct sentence and clapping out a rhythm for the sentence, e.g. 'I walked to school' OR 'Oranges are delicious'
- Several times over, all players repeat the rhythm while saying the sentence
- Each player takes it in turns to introduce a sentence and a rhythm

NB If any players find this activity difficult, encourage the others to help find grammatically correct sentences and good rhythms for them

(Purpose: Concentration; Listening skills; Spoken English)

Straight-armed Drinking

Equipment: A drink for each player

- Give each player a drink
- Inform the players that they have to have a drink but must hold their drink in their hands while keeping both their arms completely straight. They are not allowed to bend their elbows

- Wait to see if any players realise that the easiest way to have a drink without spilling any of it is if they feed each other the drink ◊ Discuss the value of helping each other and of cooperation

(Purpose: Cooperation; Empathy; Opportunities for helping each other)

Three-step Tag

Equipment: A blindfold

- Choose one player to be 'It'. 'It' wears a blindfold
- The other players spread out around the play area and stand still and in complete silence
- The blindfolded player wanders around attempting to catch someone ◊ Players are allowed three steps to escape 'It'. These steps can be used individually or all at one go but once used the player must not move again
- Players may also crouch down or lean out of the way to avoid 'It' ◊ When somebody is caught he or she becomes 'It'
- Each time there is a new 'It', all players are allowed three steps again

(Purpose: Empathy; Listening skills; Observation through sense of hearing; Self-confidence; Self-control)

PAIR GAMES

Mirroring

- Divide players into pairs (A and B). Pairs spread out around the room. Tell the players that all movements should be made in slow motion
- Players in each pair stand facing each other with their hands raised to shoulder height, palms facing outwards and as close as possible to their partners without actually touching
- Player A is a mirror. Player B makes different movements, always keeping palms outwards, which Player A must imitate OR Player B makes slow, familiar movements (for example brushing teeth, getting dressed) and then makes up movements and increases their speed. Player A must imitate all these movements OR Player A stands behind Player B and shadows Player Bs movements
- Players switch roles
- Alternatively, Players A and B put their palms together and close their eyes. In slow motion, they move their palms in as many different directions as they can without losing palm contact. They move slowly around the room.
- Pairs open their eyes and join up to form groups of four with everyone touching palms in a circle and repeat the same activity in their new group OR Pairs change partners every two minutes OR Pairs or groups of four perform a dance or series of movements in front all the other players

N.B. To encourage slow movement and concentration, you could beat out a slow, regular rhythm which the players move in time to

(Purpose: Concentration; Cooperation; Coordination; Observation; Physical awareness and dexterity; Self-control)

Points Down

- Players stand in a circle
- Explain and demonstrate that there are nine 'points' of the body which can touch the floor in this game – two feet, two hands, two elbows, two knees, one forehead
- Call a number up to 9. Each player must touch the floor with that number of points
- Divide players into pairs and repeat the same game, but this time with people working together so that *between them rather than individually the total number of points called touch the floor*. In this case the maximum number of points that can touch the floor is 18 and the minimum 1

N.B. Advise players to be careful when playing this game in pairs

(Purpose: Balance; Cooperation; Coordination; Self-control; Physical awareness; Trust)

PAIR GAMES CONTINUED

Puppet Game

- Players stand in a circle
- Demonstrate with one of you as the Puppeteer moving the imaginary strings, and so controlling the movements, of the other (the Puppet). However, when the Puppeteer lets go of a string the Puppet does not collapse as a real puppet would but maintains the position the Puppeteer has put it in
- Ask players to imagine that they are puppets with imaginary long strings attached to their heads, elbows, hands, knees and feet ◊ Practise movements as a whole group by going around to different players in the circle and pulling one of their strings and encouraging the players to move accordingly
- Divide the players into pairs A and B
- In each pair there is one Puppeteer (Player A) and one Puppet (Player B)
- Ask the Puppets to lie down or crouch and the Puppeteers to make them stand
- Swap roles
- Pairs can work on other movements, such as making the Puppet sit in a chair or lie down
- Puppeteers could also try to make their Puppets express emotions ◊ Pairs can put on a puppet show for others to watch
- Pairs can team up into groups of four to prepare a short drama and then perform it in front of the other players

(Purpose: Concentration; Cooperation; Coordination; Observation; Physical awareness; Self-control)

Robots

Equipment: Blindfolds for half the group (optional)

- Divide the players into pairs with members A and B
- Demonstrate being a robot and a robot controller. Explain that the robot has three imaginary buttons on its shoulders: Press the button in the middle and it moves forward. Press the button on its left shoulder and it turns left. Press the button on its right shoulder and it turns right. Stop pressing any buttons and it stands still
- Tell the robots (Players A) to close their eyes (or give them blindfolds) ♦ The robot controllers (Players B) direct the robots to move around the room by pressing their imaginary buttons. The robots can only walk in straight lines and must avoid bumping into each other
- Swap roles

(Purpose: Cooperation; Empathy; Physical awareness; Trust; Use of senses of hearing and touch)

SMALL GROUP GAMES

Alphabet and Number Shapes

- Players stand with enough space around them to stretch outwards and not touch any other player
- Show how to make a few letters of the alphabet using your body and stretching as much as possible
- All the players copy
- Ask individual players to suggest and show how to make other letters of the alphabet using their bodies and stretching as much as possible ♦ All the other players copy.
- Choose several of the players to form a word. These players stand in a line and each player makes the shape of the relevant letter in the word with his or her body. The other players guess the word
- Divide players into groups of four to six. Ask them to choose words with the same number of letters as number of players in their group. *Groups must keep their words secret from other players*
- Groups take it in turn to 'write' a word using their bodies in front of all the other players, each player 'writing' one letter of the word each ♦ The other players guess the word, putting up their hand when they have guessed but only saying what the word is when you ask one of them or all of them to do so. *Give all players time to guess what the word is before asking for the answer*
- **Alternatively**, divide players into groups with an even number in them (two, four, six or eight). Each group finds words with half the number of letters to players in the group (e.g. a group of eight chooses a word with four letters)
- Within each group players form pairs and each pair makes the shape of a letter using both their bodies. *If the number of players is odd, one of you can join in or a letter can be formed using three players*

- Groups take it in turn to 'write' a word using their bodies in front of all the other players
- The other groups then guess the word
- **Alternatively**, use the activities with numbers. Call out a number between 0 and 9. All players form their bodies into the shape of the number and hold the position until a new number is called. Repeat with all the numbers 0 to 9.
- **Then**, divide players into pairs. Each pair forms a two-digit number (e.g. 22, 75) for the other players to guess
- Also use the activity with groups of three and three-digit numbers (e.g. 256, 999), groups of four and four-digit numbers (e.g. 6894) etc.

NB Encourage all players to stretch their bodies as much as they can during these activities

(Purpose: Balance; Body stretching; Cooperation; Imagination; Physical awareness; Physical coordination; Vocabulary reinforcement and revision)

Bell Ringing

- Players stand in a circle
- Sing various bell-like sounds to the players (e.g. 'Bong!' 'Ding!') and ask them to suggest their own bell-like sounds. All players imitate each sound made
- Divide the players into groups of approximately five
- Each player creates his or her own sound by singing a bell-like sound and then learns it (*each player is only allowed one sound*)
- Group members compare their sounds
- Each group composes a piece of music using all of its members' sounds as many times as they like
- Each group 'plays' its composition to the other groups

(Purpose: Exercise musical ability; Cooperation; Creative thinking)

Spot the Difference

- Players form two groups (A and B) which face each other ◊ Group A looks very carefully at all the players in group B and tries to notice everything about them
- One of you takes Group A outside the room, while the other helps each member of Group B to change at least one thing about themselves (they could exchange an item of clothing with another Group member, undo a button, remove a pair of glasses etc.)
- Group A returns to the room, faces Group B and members of Group A take turns to spot one difference in any member of Group B ◊ Group B now looks carefully at Group A, leaves the room and the same activity is repeated

(Purpose: Observation; Memory)

Wax Works

Equipment: Blindfolds for one player in every group of three

- Divide the players into groups of three, assigning each group member a different number (1, 2 or 3)
- Players Number 1 wear blindfolds
- Players Number 2 adopt a particular shape or pose to form a 'statue' ◊ Players Number 1 feel the outline of the 'statue' (i.e. They feel Players Number 2) and mould Players Number 3 into the same shape. *All players should be completely silent throughout this activity* ◊ When they have finished, Players Number 1 remove their blindfolds and compare the original 'statues' with the ones they have made ◊ Swap players and repeat three times so that all players get a chance in each different role

(Purpose: Concentration; Empathy; Self-control; Tactile contact; Use of sense of touch)

SMALL GROUP GAMES CONTINUED

Willows in the Wind (Trust Circles)

- Divide the players into groups of 6-12
- Each group forms a circle around one player who stands in the middle with his or her arms crossed in front with hands on opposite shoulders. This player remains straight but relaxed, with feet together
- Those in the circle stand close enough to catch the player in the middle, when he or she falls towards them. They stand with legs slightly bent, one leg forward and one back and their hands up ready to catch the player in the middle
- The player in the middle falls backwards (keeping his or her body straight and feet together) and is gently caught and passed around by people in the circle. The middle person can close his or her eyes if there is sufficient trust in the group
- The circle should start close to the player in the middle to make the player feel safe (and if the player in the middle is bigger than those in the circle). The players can gradually move further out if the player in the middle wishes
- Change the person in the middle frequently

NB Trust is needed for this activity and it should not be attempted if you feel any doubts about the reliability of any of the players

(Purpose: Attentiveness; Balance; Cooperation; Letting go of control; Self control; Strength; Tactile contact; Trust)

Sources

The games included in this manual have been adapted from the following sources:

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