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Value of Traditional Games

BY SAIMA KHALID

Don't stay too long outside and waste your time playing. Come back home by 6 pm sharp. You need to finish your home work." "You only want to play all the time. When will you take time out for studies?" "There is no need to go outside to play. You can play games on your computer."

These are common phrases we hear in our surroundings where physical activity play is usually considered non-productive for children. Time spent playing is compared to time spent studying and more often than not, children are reprimanded for 'wasting time' playing outside. It is common observation that parents praise studious children and are ticked off by those indulging in sports and play. Parents are heard raising such concerns as, 'Why do kids always want to play? Do they realize how adversely it would affect their grades?' Owing to little awareness about the developmental benefits of play, it is often disregarded by parents and caregivers as aimless leisure.

Research endorses that play is the best form of physical activity for children and through traditional game playing children learn about the rules and values of their culture. Many early childhood practitioners also consider play as

an activity which promotes learning. Yet play is only considered relevant to some areas of the curriculum and still has not received a secure place in delivering the curriculum (Bruce, 2004).

With the gradual increase in awareness about the importance of play, early childhood practitioners started considering only those games that are either given in the reference books and teachers' guide for kindergarten schools. While talking about kinds of play, most literature depicts children's play with objects, pretend play and socio-dramatic play that are mainly focused by Piaget and Smilansky (Moyles, 2005). These kinds of play caught the interest of teachers and educators as well since they carry benefits and functions for learning different skills in classrooms. Physical activity play was evidently ignored. Through this article I wish to highlight some of the common traditional games and their developmental benefits in the hope that awareness may restore the legacy of physical games that I grew up playing and enjoying.

Traditional games including Pitto Garam, Aankh Macholi, Baraf Pani, Oonch Neech, Gilli Danda etc. carry immense benefits for healthy development of children such as

sharpened gross and fine motor skills, improved control and balance, enhanced hand-eye coordination, increased spatial awareness, and greater social skills.

Let us look at how some of the traditional games are played and their associated benefits.

Rassa Kashi

To play this game two teams of relatively equal weight are chosen. A rope is taken and a flag is tied midway along the length and a line is drawn in front of the team. Both the teams position at either end and upon signal of a referee. The teams start pulling the rope in their respective directions. The objective is to pull the flag over the neutral line and on the team's own side. Through participating in this game children learn the importance of team play as well as enhance their gross motor skills and improve balance and coordination.

Pitto Garam

This game is played between two teams. Player from one team uses a ball to hit a pile of stones and the other team members try and rebuild the pile while team two players try to tag by hitting the members of the first team with the ball. The next turn comes if the pile is rebuilt or the ball hits any of the team one players while rebuilding the pile. This is a very popular local game. It helps children to work as a team, support each other and at the same time, take steps for their defence. While hitting the pile, children learn better hand and eye coordination, and the process of rebuilding the pile sharpens fine motor skills, sequencing and sizing skills.

Baraf Pani

Baraf pani is a variation of the basic game of pakran pakrai (tag) except that the chaser has to catch everyone in the game. The game only requires a bunch of friends and an



open space to run. As soon as the chaser touches any player, he or she becomes baraf (frozen) and cannot move until unfrozen by the other players who are still untagged. This game promotes development of children's gross motor skills and team play.

Oonch Neech

This game requires a bunch of children who run around for safe spots while trying to escape being caught by a chaser. Safe spots include anything that is higher than the ground level so one can be safe by climbing on top of stairs, or tree or a bench in the playground. The children cannot remain standing at one spot for too long. The game helps children refine their gross motor skills as well as sharpens decision making and improves spatial sense i.e. measuring time and distance together.

Gittey

This game is played with small stones that are thrown on the floor. The player is supposed to pick the stones one

after the other while throwing one stone or a ball simultaneously in the air and catching it back. This game helps in developing excellent hand eye coordination and fine motor skills.

Kho Kho

Kho Kho is played between two teams each with odd number of players. Members of the chasing team stand equidistance in a line with each alternate player facing opposite direction. One player who is the chaser tries to catch the players of the other team. While the dodger team can pass in between standing players to save them from being tagged, the chaser cannot cut across the line of standing players and has to run around the entire row. The chaser however can pass off the chasing to another member of his team by nudging from behind and taking that player's standing position. The game helps children to work in a team, learn decision making and develop their gross motor skills. This also helps in language development.

Langri Pala

This is yet another informal playground game that involves one player attempting to tag other players by hopping on one leg and touching them with his/her hands. The game develops physical balance of the children and also uses gross motor skills of the children.

Each of the aforementioned games and many others have been locally played in one form or another for decades in our culture. With regional and generational variations these games are played without adult supervision and with minimum equipment. The rules and names of these games are not written but are agreed upon by the participants. Unstructured play has a crucial role in developing various aspects of children's growth, behaviour and interpersonal learning, therefore accentuates the need to restore traditional games in children's lives.



Traditional games expose children to a number of invaluable life lessons and they also develop fond childhood memories that are essential for healthy and holistic development. Both individually and collectively, children exhibit and sharpen cognitive and physical abilities through play. These include:

- making choices
- generating decisions
- negotiating
- pursuing their own interests
- using their own ideas and imaginations
- showing independence in thought and action
- exhibiting intrinsic motivation and persistence
- being physically and intellectually active in a sustained way
- being confident and prepare for challenges
- being creative
- learning to resolve conflicts
- setting their own goals and objectives
- learning new behaviour and practicing and consolidating established ones
- acquiring new skills and interest
- using skills and knowledge already acquired for different purposes
- using a range of social and interpersonal skills
- understanding rules and structures
- creating new combinations out of experiences
- problem solving
- acquiring flexibility and empathy towards others &
- developing cooperative skills.

Adapted from Moyles. J. 2005

Sources:

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