

Track Games in the Early Years

This is a short guide to introducing the games around stories disseminated by the project.
Last updated 17th December 2007
Webaddress: <http://www.collaborativelearning.org/tracks.pdf>

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING PROJECT

Project Director: Stuart Scott

Supporting a cooperative network of teaching professionals throughout the European Union to develop and disseminate accessible interactive teaching materials in all subject areas and for all ages.

17, Barford Street, Islington, London N1 0QB UK Phone: 0044 (0)20 7226 8885

Website: <http://www.collaborativelearning.org>

BRIEF SUMMARY OF BASIC PRINCIPLES BEHIND OUR TEACHING ACTIVITIES:

The project is a teacher network, and a non-profit making educational trust. Our main aim is to develop and disseminate classroom tested examples of effective group strategies that promote talk across all phases and subjects. We hope they will inspire you to develop and use similar strategies in other topics and curriculum areas. We want to encourage you to change them and adapt them to your classroom and students. We run teacher workshops, swapshops and conferences throughout the European Union. The project posts online many activities in all subject areas. An online newsletter is also updated regularly.

*These activities are influenced by current thinking about the role of language in learning. They are designed to help children learn through talk and active learning in small groups. They work best in non selective classes where children in need of language or learning support are integrated. They are well suited for the development of speaking and listening. They provide teachers opportunities for assessment of speaking and listening.

*They support differentiation by placing a high value on what children can offer to each other on a particular topic, and also give children the chance to respect each other's views and formulate shared opinions which they can disseminate to peers. By helping them to take ideas and abstract concepts, discuss, paraphrase and move them about physically, they help to develop thinking skills.

*They give children the opportunity to participate in their own words and language in their own time without pressure. Many activities can be tried out in mother tongue and afterwards in English. A growing number of activities are available in more than one language, not translated, but mixed, so that you may need more than one language to complete the activity.

*They encourage study skills in context, and should therefore be used with a range of appropriate information books which are preferably within reach in the classroom.

*They are generally adaptable over a wide age range because children can bring their own knowledge to an activity and refer to books at an appropriate level. The activities work like catalysts.

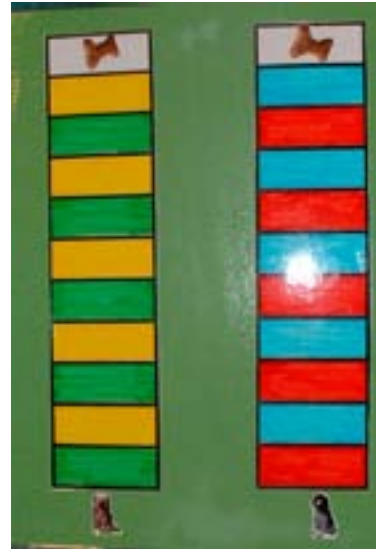
*All project activities were planned and developed by teachers working together, and the main reason they are disseminated is to encourage teachers to work more effectively with each other inside and outside the classroom. They have made it possible for mainstream and language and learning support teachers to share an equal role in curriculum delivery. They should be adapted to local conditions. In order to help us keep pace with curriculum changes, please send any new or revised activities back to the project, so that we can add them to our lists of materials.

Track Games in the Early Years

For many years the project has developed activities including track, lotto and matching pairs games around stories that are used regularly in Foundation Stage settings. The value of using stories to support language and literacy development has always been acknowledged. Activities based on stories are also particularly useful for supporting mathematical development as stories themselves imply routes and pathways. The range of activities can offer opportunities to explore and develop literacy skills and mathematical skills side by side at a time when learning is more holistic. Activities are ideal for providing differentiated experiences where children can collaborate and teach each other.

We are going to concentrate on track games here and explore the different ways in which different tracks, spinners and dice can be used to introduce and embed some of the baseline knowledge needed. The most essential concept needed is the importance of shared rules. To play collaboratively children also need to understand turn taking, start and finish and how to move on. Using simple tracks initially to introduce and practise these skills helps to build confidence and enables the children to see themselves as experts before moving on to the more complex track games.

Why are we encouraging you to develop your own track games? It enables you to eliminate some of the problems encountered with commercially produced games. Home made game can be closely related to the children's current interests and knowledge; they have simple rules which are easy to understand; they teach a wide range of skills and concepts which can be used to play more complex games; you can eliminate the element of frustration e.g. almost getting to win and then having to slide down a snake to near the beginning.



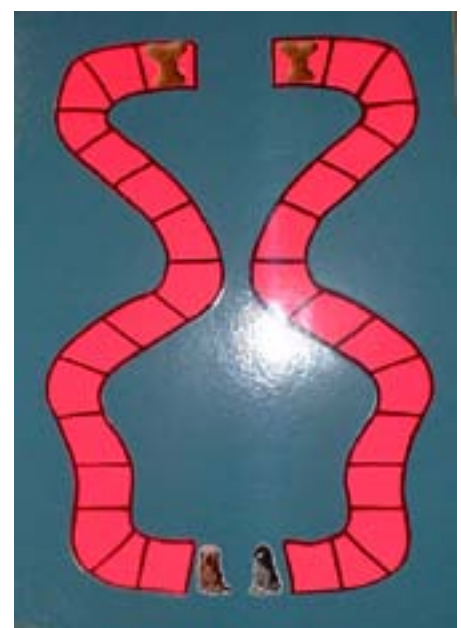
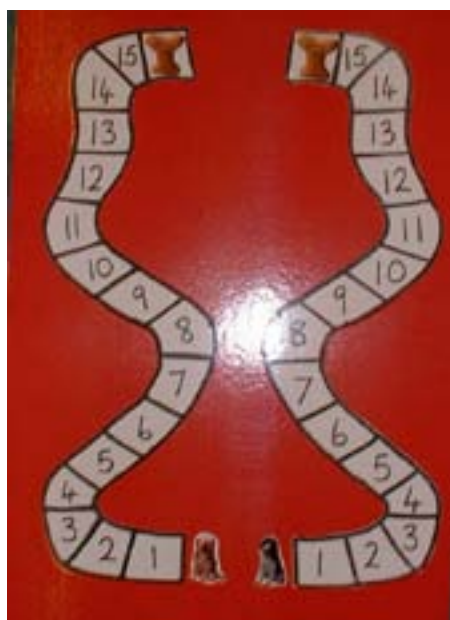
These tracks use a spinner with four colours. You could also colour the sides of large blank dice. Blank spinners and dice are easily obtainable in educational catalogues. Both sets of tracks are the same; the longer one only wiggles to fit more spaces in. They are both quite short to reduce frustration.

There is a lot for children to learn here and lots of practice for agreeing rules and sticking to them. If a child throws or spins to green do they need to move to the next green or can they move to a green further up the board? Can they keep throwing/spinning until they get the colour they want? Can they spin any colour to get to the white space at the end? They need to discuss and understand how shared rules work.

Games can be non-competitive allowing the child to practise and consolidate rules without the pressure of winning or losing. The game can be played by a child alone. When two children play, they may appear to work together, but not necessarily be competing or following the same rules. The children are learning turntaking, moving on and the concept of start and finish

Some of the track examples use stories e.g. The Shopping Basket, others use familiar items: dogs to bones, bears to honey etc. You need to decide the best items for your children.

In this case the tracks are one colour. Children are introduced to playing with a die or a spinner with one and two spots. They move up the board. They get practice in moving one or two places and learning not to count the place they start from. There is a very clear start and finish. Using a one and two spot die allows the child to consolidate the rules of moving the same number of spaces as spots without getting confused by having to count larger numbers up to six. These tracks also introduce the other number concepts e.g. sequence, number bonds etc.



These boards introduce numbers to mark the places on the track. The game is used with a one and two spot die to reinforce adding on as the counters go up the board. There are some new rules to be decided on here. Do you have to throw an exact number to land on the bone or will any number do? Another rather sophisticated concept is introduced here - the number on the square does not relate directly to the number on the die.



This board based on 'The Shopping Basket' is wiggly, linear and long (up to 62, every multiple of five is in a different colour to add another numerical dimension counting on in fives!) and can be used with dice with spots or spinners. You can increase the number of spots. The characters are placed on the board in the order in which they appear in the story so you can retell the story as you play linking literacy and numeracy perfectly



This is the kind of track we have disseminated through the project, but which requires all the skills developed by the simpler tracks.

This track is used with lotto/collecting boards: one per player. There are a number of rules to agree before playing. Children have to decide whether they can start anywhere or whether everyone starts in the same place. Do you have to throw a six to start? Do they all have to go in the same direction or can they choose which way they go? Can they change direction when they want to? When they land on a basket they have to decide whether they can collect any animal or whether they have to collect the animals in the order they appear in the story. The track can be used with numbered or spotted dice or with a blue/yellow coloured spinners or dice.

When you can make your own rules for a game you are powerful. However, your rules must make sense and to play with others you must agree and share the rules.

The next stage are track boards with branches so you have to look ahead to choose the best route.