

What Do Tag Games Teach?

by David Belka

Tag games have been described as “Chasing, fleeing, and dodging” type activities (Graham, Holt/Hale, & Parker, 2004 and in earlier editions). Most “fleeing” activities these authors advocate involve dramatic play, use of movement concepts (such as quick and light), or movement changes without a partner. Many of the chasing and dodging activities mentioned by Graham et al. utilize dodging concepts between partners or within small groups and are intended to transfer to other games involving invasion tactics.

Belka (1998) explains four main tactics of skills in tag games that transfer well to later competitive team sports, such as basketball, soccer, and field hockey:

1. Being balanced and ready to move in any direction,
2. Using a variety of fakes when tagging or when avoiding tags,
3. Dodging by changing speed and direction quickly and unexpectedly, and
4. Knowing what is happening in front, behind, and to the side areas.

Many of the activities Belka proposes involve partners or small groups applying these four tactics.



In too many cases, tag games are used less effectively, or even inappropriately, to teach dodging tactics that instructors mis-assume will transfer to later competitive games, if not simply for fun. For example, tag games organized in circles and two opposing lines have been criticized significantly (Belka, 1999; Williams, 1992). Whole-group tag games, with one or several taggers and most players simply trying to avoid being tagged, are also problematic. The taggers most often simply run after others, trying to tag them without using any *game* or tag tactics, while the children trying to avoid being tagged often stand still until the tagger takes notice of them and/or try to run from the tagger with none of the four tag tactics in mind.

Designing tag activities to enhance specific skills in a matter suitable for transfer to subsequent team games or sports must begin with an analysis of those games. The design, then, of a particular tag activity should fit those games. I cannot think of a game or sport that involves one or several taggers chasing an entire group.

On the other hand, tag games have been used in physical education for warm-up, fitness, and fun, especially for young children, for the past several decades. Therefore, I have two suggestions. First, if a tag game is used for warm-up and fitness purposes, the teacher should avoid any claim that the game is developing tactics that will transfer to other team games. In such a case, students are involved in vigorous physical activity, not a tactical game. Second, consider reorganizing tag activities to both achieve warm-up or fitness objectives and contribute to one or more game tactics, as advocated by Belka (1998).

As long as the objectives are clear and unambiguous, tag games might be modified for other purposes as well, such as integrated curriculum. Townsend et al. (2006) describe several activities that use non-elimination tag within a multidisciplinary approach. One activity uses verbs, subjects, and adverbs, while others involve fractions and science concepts. While it is commendable that the authors avoid the elimination aspect of common tag games, I have a few additional suggestions.

Warm-up and fitness: Change the organization. With only four taggers chasing any of the remaining large group, it is possible for some students to avoid participation.

Focus: Decide whether the game is to focus primarily on tactics, with a secondary emphasis on multidisciplinary content, **or** the activity will focus mainly on integrated concepts (math, science, etc.), with a secondary (or perhaps no) emphasis on movement concepts and tactics. The activities described by Townsend et al. (2006) are rather complicated, especially for primary children, so it may be appropriate to focus mostly on the integrated concepts.

The remaining question for teachers who use tag activities for both fitness and integrated curriculum purposes is this: Do they also want the activities to develop Belka's four tag game tactics? If *yes*, the organization of the activity needs to be restructured to specifically emphasize at least and one or more of those tactics. If *no*, the organization of the activity need not be changed, but neither should there remain any claim for how the game *might* contribute to the development or quality of tag tactics.

Tag games appear to be very important for developing a number of objectives. The organization of tag games needs to be carefully constructed if the intent is for them to contribute to tactical objectives. Similar organization is important when tag activities are used for other purposes. One cannot specifically address one objective and simply *assume* the game makes a contribution to another objective or purpose.

References

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Little Known Facts About The Human Body

- A human being loses an average of 40 to 100 strands of hair per day.
- A cough releases an explosive charge of air that moves at speeds up to 60 mph.
- A sneeze can exceed the speed of 100 mph.
- Every person has a unique tongue print.
- According to German researchers, the risk of heart attack is higher on Monday than any other day of the week.
- An average human drinks about 16,000 gallons of water in a lifetime.
- A fingernail or toenail takes about 6 months to grow from base to tip.
- An average human scalp has 100,000 hairs.
- It takes 17 muscles to smile and 43 to frown.
- Babies are born with 300 bones, but by adulthood there are only 206 bones in the body.
- Beards are the fastest growing hairs on the human body. If the average man never trimmed his beard, it would grow to nearly 30 feet long in his lifetime.
- Each square inch of human skin consists of twenty feet of blood vessels.
- Every square inch of the human body has an average of 32 million bacteria on it.
- Fingernails grow faster than toenails.
- Humans shed about 600,000 particles of skin every hour—about 1.5 pounds a year. By 70 years of age, an average person will have lost 105 pounds of skin.

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