Adapting Games

by Stacey L Guzowski

As teachers, service providers, and caretakers of individuals with learning differences, we are constantly searching for innovative ways to enhance the learning of the students we work with. And, although there are numerous avenues to do this, one area that can be both overlooked and under-rated are good old-fashioned games. Whether they are board games, file-folder games, physical/gross motor games or video games, each and all of the above have their place in the educational learning process.

5 Tips to Adapting Games

1 Know your focus

What is your target skill? Are you able to focus on more than one throughout the flow of the game? One can more easily adapt/create games that focus on core curricular areas such as: reading, mathematics, science and social studies but there are other extremely valuable skills that our students benefit from learning and/or refining. They include: communication - indicating the desire for a turn; social skills - waiting for a turn, following directions, sportsmanship; life lessons - persistence, boundaries, luck vs. skill and psychomotricity and coordination - fine/gross motor skill related.

2 Student Interests

Make it a focus to get to know what your student enjoys during his/her free time. Does he/she have a favorite TV show? Movie? Music? Cartoon/video game character? Food? Sport? Animal? These are a few example but there are plenty more. Our students' interests vary and if one of the above are motivating, use it to make learning more fun and meaningful!

3 Student Sensitivities

Just as we need to be aware of student interests, we also need to be equally cognizant of their sensitivities. Are there any aversions to certain things such as: lights (some games have flashing lights/strobes)? Sounds? Textures? Although we may feel as though these things make a game more inviting and interesting, for some students with sensitivities the game becomes a painful activity to participate in. In the same respect, students with visual impairments and/or hearing impairments need to have their needs met in order to fully participate as well. For instance, add textures to the game pieces for the Connect Four game for a student with visual impairments…one set of pieces has a soft texture and 1 set has a rough texture so they can easily be identified (and given that those textures are acceptable for the game player). Also, for a student with a hearing impairment, don't just yell "Freeze!" during a freeze-tag. Consider waving a colored flag so they can SEE the cue that their peers can hear ("FREEZE!"). This cue will also potentially help all of the game participants. In addition, students with more involved physical needs can access computer games using a switch interface. This piece of equipment makes a computer/laptop switch accessible!

4 What type of game should you use?

There are a variety of choices and 1 game type can be used &/or re-adapted for a different game type. Is there a preference for file folder games? Board games? Gross motor games? Video games? There are many instances that, once student interests/sensitivities are taken into consideration, the student will begin to like various game types! A once "gamer-only" may start requesting the gross motor large dice game because it's motivating to create a life-size paper video game character by rolling a number die and using the numbers to place corresponding character pieces together (eg. #1 – head; #2 – body, etc.). Try not to limit yourself: a student with a physical impairment can still play basketball – just make the "hoop" a hula hoop placed low and have the ball rolled from a ramp, lap or tray!

5 ALWAYS remember…

Meaningful learning is inherently fun and motivating (and, in turn, motivation creates increased focus, persistence and successful task completion). Games are educational whether or not they focus on academics. There is room for all types of games in each and every learning environment! HAVE A BLAST!!!