

Play Activities for the First Day of School

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Children learn very easily when they are having fun. So, when a play activity is conducted with the aim of purposefully teaching something, the pace and result of learning increase manifold. Play can be used for teaching new and difficult concepts easily, in a short time and in an interesting way. One only needs to keep in mind that any play activity that is used is purposeful, well planned and well prepared.

Play activities are important and necessary for very young children (in the age group of 3-8 years). Schools work in different areas of development through various play activities. I am sharing some play activities that can be used for the emotional development of children, especially at the start of a new academic year.

Ice-breaker games

At the beginning of a new academic year many children come to the school for the first time and everything around them is new, including the school building, other children, teachers, classrooms. This newness is not only for children but also for some teachers. We see so many new children in a new academic year - some of them are enthusiastic and happy, running around, some holding hands of their siblings, some scared, some sobbing and some insisting on going home. In such an environment, it is a big challenge for both the teacher and the child to instil confidence in each other's mind and create an environment for working together.

The challenge for the teacher is to instil confidence in the children about the school and to ensure their safety. The teachers are not familiar with each child and their behaviour, interests or willingness to be in school. The children are expected to cooperate, make friends and get used to the new surroundings and their classmates. Many children have these qualities naturally – of making friends, learning new things – but not all. Some children need to learn these qualities. So, it is important to organise some activities or games in which children take part readily and happily.

Introductory activity (throwing ball)

Material - A ball with colourful, attractive pictures. This could be the first activity on the first day of class I when children and teachers are unfamiliar with each other. This game can be played in class to know everyone's names. Children and teachers stand in a big circle either in the classroom or outside, in the field. They discuss the pictures on the ball. Whoever has the ball in his or her hand, throws it to someone else. Whoever gets or catches the ball tells his/her name and then throws the ball to a new person. In this way, the game goes on till everyone's name has been told or known.

Children get acquainted with each other very easily through this activity. They become friends. They call out each other's names asking them to throw the ball to them. They freely run after the ball if it is thrown away from them and bring it to the child whose turn it is.

Neta-neta chal badal (follow the leader)

Children and teachers sit on the ground (classroom or field) in a big circle. The teacher becomes the leader first and says that everyone should look at her/him, follow the action that he/she is doing and keep singing this song together '*Neta-neta chal badal*'. At the word, *badal* (change) the teacher changes her/his action, and the children have to copy it immediately. The teacher can start the game by clapping and singing a song. Children will also clap and sing. Then, the teacher can make some changes in the clapping style, like clapping his/her thighs with hands. The children need to follow that. There is an endless number of actions that the teacher can do. Some may make the children laugh, like making a funny face or scratching the head.

Next, one child is chosen and sent out of the group. The rest of the children choose a leader. When the child comes back, he or she has to figure out who the new leader is. Once the new leader is identified, he or she would be the one to go out.

In this game, children learn qualities such as suggesting names, agreeing on the choice of leader, team spirit, observing closely, singing and acting.

Udd/Kha (fly/eat)

Children and teachers stand together in the classroom or outside in the field in a circle. Everyone plays *Kha* together. The left hand is stretched out in front and the right hand is placed over it. The teacher then mentions the name of any food item. Everyone has to say *Kha* in a loud voice while bringing their right hand towards their mouth. If the teacher mentions the name of something that cannot be eaten, then no one should say anything nor do any action, if they do, they will be out of the game. Similarly, when playing *Udd* if the teacher calls out the names of things that can and cannot fly.

These games help develop the qualities of honesty and decision-making in children. Small children accept their mistakes with sincerity and go out of the game. Children also observe others and decide whether they are right or wrong.

Bolo bhai kitne (say how many)

Children and teachers stand together in the classroom or outside in the field in a circle. Everyone runs in a circle, clapping and singing. The teacher says, *Bolo bhai kitne?* (how many?); the children reply, *Aap bolo jitney* (you tell us how many)! The teacher calls out a random number. The children have to form groups with that many members. For example, if the teacher says, 'three', then three children form a group. Any group that has fewer or more children is out of the game. If the teacher says *Murti* while the children are running, everybody stands still like a statue in their places. They should not move until the teacher says, *Surti*. Whoever moves is out of the game.

Through this game, children develop qualities like friendship, quick decision-making, team spirit, honesty, leadership and concentration.

Poem recitation

Poem recitation with actions is incredibly powerful in the development of small children. In this activity, children are invited to recite a poem after the teacher has demonstrated it. Although many children scuffle to present their poem first, they understand once it is explained to them that they have to recite by turns. This is how they learn to wait for their turn and listen to others patiently.

Many times, they collaborate with each other for group presentations and display exemplary team spirit.

Story reading and role-playing

After narrating the story with gestures and voice modulation, the teacher asks the children to enact it. The children have a discussion and reach an agreement in selecting the characters. They also suggest an appropriate name for a particular character. They make arrangements and prepare necessary props, discuss various issues during practice and give suggestions for dialogues, content and visuals with consensus.

In this way, children learn and practice human qualities such as decision-making, agreement, working together, appreciating each other's work, etc.

These are some activities and experiences from my practice. It has been observed that while playing in school, children learn the valuable qualities of cooperating and seeking cooperation, making collective decisions, waiting patiently for their turn, listening carefully to other children and teachers, encourage and respect their friends and ask questions to understand things.



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