

Active playgrounds – it's more than just good fun!

Promoting physical activity during break times is an ideal way of increasing activity levels of students whilst they are at school. It can also make a substantial contribution towards students' fundamental movement skill development, socialisation, problem solving skills and overall health.

The playground is an essential part of any school. Students spend many hours of their day occupying themselves with what the playground has to offer. Well marked game activities provide increased motivation for children to participate in physical activity and become engaged in purposeful play, and as a result, improve their fundamental movement skills and reap the benefits of an active lifestyle.

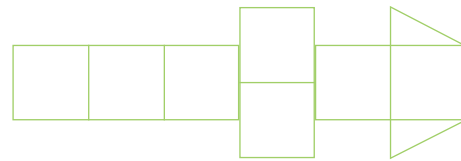
Playground markings are currently a popular intervention strategy in the United States and Great Britain in the promotion of physical activity during school hours. Research supports the use of playground markings for improving students' physical activity levels. One review of research literature¹ in the United States concluded that the use of playground markings can:

- increase children's physical activity levels
- increase children's energy expenditure
- decrease bullying and playground confrontations
- decrease playground injuries.

Considerations for designing an effective playground activity program

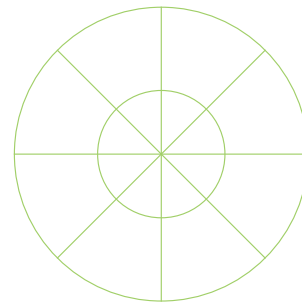
The types of game markings that you have and the space available to create more designs will determine the types of activities that students can undertake in the playground. Most markings can be very simple and can be adapted to suit a number of different activities. Illustrated below are a few designs that can get you started and some simple ideas for activities that can be played using the designs and easily accessible equipment.

Hopscotch hockey: This is a variation on the traditional game where students need to push a puck into the required numbered square. This activity will help develop the two-hand strike as well as the hop and vertical jump.



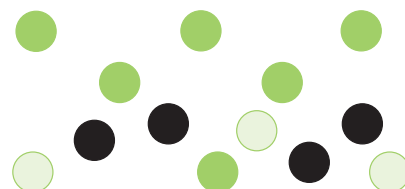
Include numbers in each box. The formation of the hopscotch can be modified to create greater difficulty for older students.

Target throws: use bean bags or other soft items to throw at the targets painted on a wall. Students can simply add their total scores or, if you include mathematical signs on the target, they can create a maths challenge. The thrower creates a maths equation from their three throws (two numbers and a sign) and the other players must work out the equation to score bonus points.



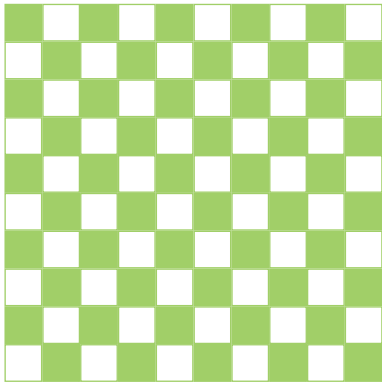
Include numbers in each segment. As a variation include +, - and x signs.

Dot matrix: A series of different coloured dots on the playground can allow for the creation of an abundance of activities. Younger students can play simple games of stepping stones and balancing acts. Older students can practice throwing and catching using corner spry activities and other passing games. The use of colours as a system to indicate positions for various games can ensure that students are in the correct position for the activity. For example, in the diagram opposite the plain grey dots would be the positions students stand in for corner spry.



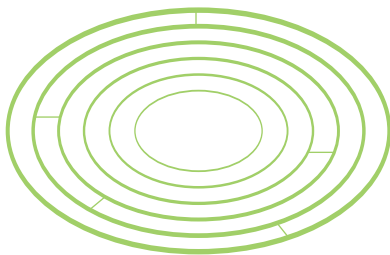
Human snakes and ladders: Make a large dice out of foam and use braids and markers to signify the snakes and ladders. Rules can be adapted to add variety and make the game more active such as students waiting a turn must perform star jumps, push ups or various

balances. If two players land on the same square they must find a way to balance together.

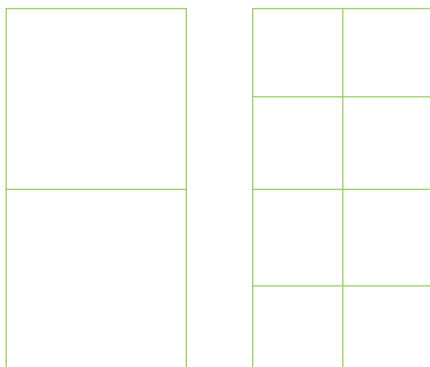


The addition of snakes and ladders to the grid provides a fun variation to the activities.

Mazes and tracks: Students can be encouraged to practice their locomotor skills through participating in relay races through a variety of mazes and tracks. Relays can require students to use such skills as hop, skip, jump, run or gallop in order to complete the relay.



Sphairee and court games: Simple games can be created to play on small marked court surfaces. All students need are tennis balls and paddles for tennis. Variations on traditional games can include soccer volleyball (where the ball is kicked over the net rather than using hands) and upwards handball (each hit must go above the players shoulders before it bounces in their square).



One of the most important factors in ensuring that students effectively use the playground to be physically active is to ensure that students know what activities they might be able to undertake during break times. This requires teachers to explicitly teach a variety of playground games during physical education and sport lessons.

Students need to experience the activities in a controlled and supervised environment initially, to reinforce a consistent set of rules for each activity. By doing so, it will minimise possible playground confrontations during break times when students have the capacity to organise themselves.

Whilst undertaking the activities in structured lessons, students can be required to design activity cards for each activity they learn and these can be collated and kept in an activity card box in the playground for students to access during break times. The cards could include a brief description of the activity, diagram of activity, main rules, number of players and equipment needed.

During lessons, teachers can emphasise to students that the activities that they are learning in class can also be played during lunch breaks. The more this message is promoted the greater the chance of students becoming physically active during break times. Students can develop an agreed process for borrowing and returning necessary equipment, strategies for initiating an activity with a group of students and procedures for resolving any conflicts that may arise.

As a staff, teachers will need to develop a system for making available a pool of equipment that students can access during break times. This pool can be accessed as a whole school or grade or Stage groups (depending on student numbers). Many playground activities only need simple equipment that is safe and durable. A pool of equipment might include:

- bean bags
- variety of balls
- quoits
- hoops
- braids
- skipping ropes
- rolled newspaper bats or other soft bats.

In order to further motivate students to participate in physical activity and develop their problem solving skills, weekly challenges can be set linked to activities. For example, the highest number of consecutive catches in corner spry, the highest number of points scored on a target game. Students can also be challenged to design an activity using only selected equipment and a designated area in the playground. Awards can be presented for the most innovative new games created.

References

1. Bissell, O and Associates (August, 2004) *The effects of playground markings on children's physical activity levels: a review of scientifically based research*. Los Angeles, California.
2. Chedzoy, S (2000) *Physical education in the school grounds*. Southgate Publishers, Devon, England.