THE USE OF COOPERATIVE GAMES IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TO FOSTER
A SENSE OF BELONGING AND CONNECTION

BY
Rosemary Lynn Kelly
Bachelor of Science, May, 1983 University of Maine
Bachelor of Arts, May, 1979 University of Southern Maine

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Approved by:

______________________________________
Amy Betit, M.A. Clinical Psychology
Committee Chairperson

______________________________________
Tom Curley, Ph.D. American Philosophy
Committee Member

______________________________
Kevin J. Todeshi, MA, CEO Administrator
Abstract:
The purpose of this project was to use cooperative games as a way to help elementary students feel a greater sense of connection to each other and to foster a greater sense of belonging to their school community. With the emphasis on early academics public school has become highly competitive with little opportunity for students to cooperate in the classroom. A kindergarten class in a public school played a variety of cooperative games one to two times per week for six months. The students loved playing the cooperative games and they made progress in the level of cooperation they showed while playing the games. The potential of cooperative games to teach small children cooperation and foster a sense of connection is great. For the games to be most effective they should be played at least three times per week which is difficult for most public schools. Therefore, during this project, Brain Gym, a program of simple noncompetitive movements that improves communication between the left and right side of the brain and promotes a greater sense of well being was introduced and adopted school wide.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

When thinking of a culminating project I knew that after observing public school for a year that I wanted to do a project that would make public school a more enjoyable experience for the students attending. There were several areas that concerned me: competition, lack of movement, boys and school, and bullying behavior.

My son entered public school in August of 2005. I spent time in the classroom, lunchroom and on the playground. I soon realized kindergarteners were expected to sit and work on academics far more than I did as a kindergartener. Being the mother of an active boy I was concerned with what I was seeing. I know children need movement and this was evident in everything that I read. It is easier for children to learn when they are given the opportunity to move. I found that some public schools incorporate movement into the curriculum. I believe all children can benefit from more movement.

As my son progressed through kindergarten I became concerned with the level of competition that I was witnessing. It seemed everything was a competition. There was even a large poster of a tooth in the classroom to keep track of who was the first student to lose a tooth each month. While this seems like harmless fun it just added to the desire to be first in something.

I was also surprised to see bullying behaviors on the playground. I would often see one child being excluded from a group of children. During the 2005-2006 school year there were several incidents of fourth grade girls bullying each other.

I wasn’t sure how I could address all three areas but after much research I found Creative Spirit’s Healthy Play As A Solution program. Creative Spirit’s cooperative
games would give the students a chance to interact in non-competitive play allowing them to move physically while learning skills of cooperating with one another. I knew this would be beneficial for all of the children and I knew from my observations that the movement provided by the games would be helpful for the boys that have a greater need to move.

The Creative Spirit’s web site reports that a study of twenty-nine schools indicated that 85.5% of the teachers using cooperative games three or more times a week reported a reduction of behavioral problems of 50% to 100% in acts of aggression, bullying, threats, non-cooperation and teasing after five years of using the program.

Fortunately the principal and kindergarten teacher of our local elementary school allowed me to play cooperative games with the kindergarten class of 2006-2007. From November, 2006 - May, 2007 I met weekly with the kindergarten class and played a variety of cooperative games. Initially I was hoping the school would adopt the program but I came to realize the school would not devote time to playing cooperative games three times a week so effectiveness would be limited.

I wasn’t willing to give up so I continued to research for a program that would give students a chance to move in a non-competitive situation and would also be easy for teachers to use. I found a program called Brain Gym and my son’s school has implemented this program.

Chapter 2: Competition vs. Cooperation

One of the reasons that I wanted to play cooperative games with the kindergarteners is that children are faced with competition everyday in our culture and,
school being a reflection of our culture, it too promotes competition. I feel that the current educational system encourages far too much competition in public school. So much of public school centers around achievement instead of learning and I realize that some of this has happened as a result of the No Child Left Behind law. In many ways public schools are being put in an impossible situation. Public school teachers are stressed because it is their job to make sure that all students meet arbitrary standards at younger and younger ages. Children are stressed because they feel the pressure to meet these standards. The No Child Left Behind law was well intentioned but I can see that as a culture we are losing sight of the whole person. Everything in school is a competition from who can find the most words to who sold the most raffle tickets. I think it is difficult to create a sense of collaboration and cooperation when there is so much competition facing children in public school every day. By introducing cooperative games I wanted the children to have fun and not to worry about beating their friends.

In his book *No Contest the Case Against Competition*, former teacher, Alfie Kohn, describes two types of competition, structural and intentional. Structural competition refers to the win/lose framework, which is external, and intentional competition refers to the desire on the part of an individual to be number one. Competition between groups is called intergroup competition and competition among individuals is called intragroup competition.

Alfie Kohn says we are obsessed with victory in American culture and that from the earliest grades we are trained to see others as obstacles to our success that must be defeated. Kohn challenges competition in public schools, saying that competition focuses on a result rather than the process of learning and that people are less likely to do
their best if they are focused on some external reward. Kohn says that competition pits one person against another; you can win only by making others fail. He says that competition works like other external motivators and undermines a long-term commitment to learning and it is likely that competition will inhibit both self-esteem and positive relationships with peers. If you see others in the classroom as adversaries how likely are you to be compassionate and caring toward others. As competition increases the quality of relationships decreases.

Kohn says grades serve to create an atmosphere of competition. He says that when a student is focused on achieving a grade, an external motivator, there is a decrease in creative thinking, and a decrease in the process of learning. He also says that when a behaviorist carrot and stick approach to discipline is used in the classroom these too serve to pit students against each other. He says gold stars lead to divisions between the students in the classroom. When students are focused on the external reward of a star interest in learning decreases.

Kohn cites the example of the reading program of West Georgia College, during the early 1990s, that promised to pay children $2.00 for each book that they read. The types of books children began reading were short books with large print. The focus not on reading for enjoyment or learning but reading for money lowered the quality of reading material. According to Kohn putting students in competition for external rewards does not enhance learning.

quality, testing and sales in Japan. Deming showed that quality of work is better when
collaboration is used over competition. In the work place Deming diminished the use of
threats, prizes, and special rewards for doing what people are supposed to do. Instead he
empowered the worker by encouraging self-evaluation and he was able to demonstrate
that working together is better than working competitively.

Collaboration creates a situation where relationships enrich the whole and this
whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. This becomes the most empowering,
unifying and exciting part. Marshall says that our brains are inherently social and
collaborative so learning is enhanced when opportunities are provided to discuss our
thinking and to bounce ideas off peers.

Collaboration improves student participation in the classroom. By raising their
hands students compete for the teacher’s attention and the only winner is the person the
teacher calls on. Marshall suggests posing open-ended questions and having students
work in pairs and small groups for responses. This way all students have a chance to
participate creating a stronger sense of belonging.

Marshall says that ranking systems such as grades do not increase the quality of
learning. Instead, the focus becomes doing whatever is necessary to achieve that ranking,
which is not the same as quality learning. He says that competitive approaches influence
students to work against each other, rather then with each other. Competition fosters an
atmosphere of “serve yourself.” There can be no sense of community when the focus is
on oneself. Marshall says that unconditional self-acceptance, not self-esteem at the
expense of others, should be the goal. Class rankings destroy a sense of team spirit and
community. When the emphasis is on grades and not on learning some students will
focus on whatever it takes to get the grade, including cheating. External rewards change motivation from enjoying the process of learning to “Will it be on the test?” The more emphasis given to external rewards such as grades the more students look for the easiest way to obtain the reward. It is the excitement of the process not external rewards that produces quality of work.

Kohn says competition is not the only way to organize a classroom. He describes three ways of achieving one’s goals: competitively working against others; cooperatively working with others; and independently, working without regard to others. One can reach a goal and measure one’s progress without competition. Structural cooperation creates a situation where we have to work and coordinate our efforts together because I succeed only if you succeed and vice versa. A cooperative classroom would be one where successful completion of a task depends on each student so each student has an incentive to want the others to succeed. Tasks are developed so that by helping others each student is helping him or herself. Cooperation is more successful than competition in getting things done at school and can be a basis for creating challenging and enjoyable games that do not require competition. There is good evidence that cooperation is better at promoting psychological health and liking one another.

Kohn describes four myths of competition. Competition is unavoidable, competition motivates us to do our best, contests provide the only way to have a good time and competition builds character, good for self-confidence.

Most people tend to see competition as unavoidable. It is part of our nature. Rarely do we consider that we have been socialized to be competitive. Biology and genetics are used to promote the idea that competition is inborn and that play and
competition are virtually interchangeable.

Kohn argues that to say something is unavoidable usually will be in support of the status quo. For example, those that say unregulated capitalism is natural are those that are well served by it. Those arguing that any feature of the status quo is intrinsic are those that are benefiting from the status quo. It is far easier to accept that we must be competitive than to be given the freedom to choose our actions. To be relieved of this responsibility of choosing our actions is freeing because we need not think about it. We can just accept that we are competitive.

There is little evidence to support the inevitability of competition. Kohn reports that in Harvey Ruben’s self-help manual on competition he makes the claim that we have a competitive “code” in our chromosomes. A claim that he does not explain or provide evidence for.

The biologist Garret Hardin said that young people whose needs are taken care of by their elders don’t appreciate the inevitability of competition. Hardin sees this as negative but the positive is that for those that have had their needs met see competition as something that can be avoided therefore competition is not inevitable.

The animal kingdom is often offered as evidence of the inevitability of competition. But, Peter Kropotkin in his 1902 book *Mutual Aid* reported that competition among animals is limited to exceptional periods. Better conditions are created by mutual support. Habits of animals indicate that they don’t compete because it is injurious to the species. Kropotkin said nature teaches us to cooperate. What Kropotkin observed in animals has been seen by others including zoologist Marvin Bates who said that cooperation rather than competition is the basic theme in nature. Some biologists and
zoologists use the term competition in a broad sense when referring to natural selection. This broad use of competition should not be confused with the narrower definition of intentionally trying to best another.

The first comprehensive investigation into competition among humans was in 1937 by Mark May and Leonard Doob. The study was sponsored by the Social Science Research Council, an independent, not for profit organization that seeks to advance social science throughout the world. May and Doob reported twenty-four specific findings based on existing knowledge after surveying literature on competition. The first finding reported was: “Human beings by original nature strive for goals, but striving with others (cooperation) or against others (competition) are learned forms of behavior”. (No Contest The Case Against Competition, pg. 25) Furthermore neither of these can be said to be the more genetically basic or fundamental.

This conclusion has held up a half century later. Columbia University’s Morton Deutsch wrote in 1973, that “it would be unreasonable to assume there is an innately determined human tendency for everyone to want to be “top dog”. (No Contest The Case Against Competition, pg. 25) Sports psychologists Thomas Tutko and William Bruns agree that competition is a learned phenomenon. We are not born with the motivation to win, this comes through training. The sociologist Pavier Riesman said Americans are socialized to compete which fosters wanting to compete. The desire to compete is then cited as evidence of competition’s inevitability. By socializing children to act in a way that is said to be inevitable we make the practice inevitable. So the proposition that competition is inevitable becomes true.

Competition is self-perpetuating. Morton Deutsch found in his study of conflict
and social interaction that any mode of interaction breeds more of itself. He found that
competition produced a vicious spiral of intensifying competition, while cooperation
caused increasing cooperation. People who are generally cooperative become
competitive when dealing with others who are competitive.

At the University of Ottawa, psychologist Terry Orlick led preschool to second
grade age children in cooperative games. When the children were later left to play by
themselves he found a three to fourfold increase in the incidence of cooperative behavior.
Children reported being happier playing cooperative games and, given the choice, two
thirds of nine and ten-year-old boys and girls would choose games where everyone wins
rather than having winners and losers. Children can learn to cooperate and prefer it. On
the other hand, Orlick found that the control groups became more competitive as the year
progressed.

Orlick has found young children to be the most receptive to cooperative activities
and challenges. He maintains this is because young children have spent less time in the
competitive mainstream of our society. Orlick concluded that cooperation can be
learned, therefore competition is not inevitable.

Cross cultural research indicates there are cultures that still exist today that
appear to be noncompetitive. Margaret Mead described many noncompetitive cultures in
her book *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive People* (1937). For example,
the Zuni Indians display cooperative nonindividualistic behavior. Wealth circulates
freely in this culture and the accumulation of wealth is not seen as desirable. The Inuit of
Canada for all intents and purposes live with no competition. Their economic structure as
well as their recreation remains cooperative. Margaret Mead wrote:
the most basic conclusion which comes out of this research is that competitive and cooperative behavior on the part of the individual members of a society is fundamentally conditioned by the total social emphasis of that society, that the goals for which individuals will work are culturally determined and are not the response of the organism to an external, culturally undefined situation. (*No Contest The Case Against Competition*, pg. 36)

The United States has been shown to be more competitive than other cultures. Anthropologists Beatrice and John Whiting looked at six cultures, one of which was a small town in New England. They looked at the frequency of acts such as touching, reprimanding, offering help and insulting. The Whitings found that as a proportion of total acts observed, the town in New England scored the lowest on offering help.

Competition is often seen as necessary to increase productivity. In the United States competition is seen as necessary for success. Competition has come to mean productiveness and goal attainment. Americans equate doing well with beating someone else. Alfie Kohn says success and competition are not the same thing. One can set and reach goals and prove one’s competence to self and others without competing. One can reach his or her goals without preventing others from reaching their goals.

Superior performance does not require competition in fact it usually seems to require its absence. In the school setting educational psychologist Margaret M. Clifford found that competitive games did not help fifth graders learn a set of vocabulary words. Neither performance or retention was noticeably improved. Psychologist Morton Goldman found that undergraduates solved anagrams more effectively when they were cooperating rather than competing with each other. Psychologist Abaineh Workie found that high school students were significantly more productive when working on a card game cooperatively than in competition with each other. Morton Deutsch found the same result while
working with college students in 1948. Twenty-five years later he was able to cite thirteen other studies that replicated his findings.

In 1981 educators David and Roger Johnson reviewed 122 studies from 1924 to 1980. They found that 65 showed cooperation promotes higher achievement than independent work and 6 found the reverse while 42 found no difference. The superiority of working together cooperatively held for all subject areas as well as for all age groups. Competition may produce better results in simple tasks such as rote decoding or carrying objects. The Johnsons would say even this is questionable and at worst the margin of cooperation’s superiority is reduced in certain tasks.

In some of Deutsh’s experiments he set up conditions where subjects were cooperating with others in their group but there was competition between groups. Many question whether the greater achievement was due to intergroup competition. There have been enough experimenters controlling this variable to be able to say that it is the cooperative condition that is responsible for the performance benefits. People in an intragroup/intergroup competition behave as if competition didn’t exist.

Deutsch also found no evidence that people work more productively when rewards are tied to performance than when everyone gets the same reward. Deutsch did find that when a task’s success depends on working together, a system of equal rewards works best and a competitive winner take all system gives the poorest results.

When looking at quality of performance competition fares even worse. In the 1920s some experiments found people did work faster at mechanical tasks when competing but the quality of their work was poorer under conditions of competition. More recent studies by the Johnsons suggest that cooperative groups promote higher
quality cognitive strategies for learning than does individual reasoning found in
competitive and individualistic learning situations.

A 1983 German study done by Marian Radke Yarrow found that competitiveness
of fourth graders actually correlated negatively with school achievement. In light of this
evidence it appears that a structure that pits us against each other works to inhibit our
performance. Children do not learn better in a competitive educational system.

Teachers may like turning a lesson into a competitive game to hold students’
attention making teaching easier, failing to take into consideration how well this method
teaches the children. Teachers report children like competitive games. This may be
because it gives them a break from the regular routine. Indeed research indicates that
children prefer cooperation once they’ve experienced it.

The Johnsons’ work indicated that students learn better when they cooperate.
They concluded that low and medium ability students benefit from working
collaboratively. They also found evidence that high ability students benefit from working
with their medium and low ability peers. At worst they are not hurt.

Edward Deci, a leading researcher on the topic of competition, creates a situation
where winning becomes the reward and is therefore extrinsic from the activity.
Subjective reports corroborate that people who regard themselves as competitive also
regard themselves as being extrinsically motivated. In a 1981 study of eighty
undergraduates, competition to solve a spatial relations puzzle served as an external
motivator decreasing intrinsic motivation for the activity. Therefore, competition leads to
less interest in the task over the long run.

The late John Holt said:
We destroy the love of learning in children, which is so strong when they are small, by encouraging and compelling them to work for petty and contemptible rewards - gold stars, or papers marked 100 and tacked to the wall, or A’s on report cards, or honor rolls, or dean’s lists, or Phi Beta Kappa keys - in short, for the ignoble satisfaction of feeling that they are better than someone else. (No Contest The Case Against Competition, pg. 61)

In a competitive situation the only interest others have in you is the desire to see you fail. Cooperation establishes a situation of accountability to others, one extrinsic factor that can have a positive effect because in a cooperative situation others depend on you.

Cooperation also allows a more efficient use of resources because it takes advantage of each individuals’ skills through the process of interaction where the group becomes greater than the sum of its parts. Competition loses out in this area because efforts are often duplicated by individuals. Structural competition can make people suspicious and hostile toward each other, discouraging any kind of cooperation.

Many argue that competition makes activities more enjoyable. Most recreational activities involve an individual or team triumphing over another. Kohn defines play as an activity chosen voluntarily because it is pleasing. Play is intrinsically gratifying and an end in itself. We do not play to perform well or master a particular skill, results don’t matter. We love play for its own sake. Play is process oriented not product oriented. Play has no goal. Play may teach skills to children, but the player does not engage in play for this purpose. Children play to have fun.

Competition and play oppose each other. If one is focused on beating someone else this is extrinsic to the activity and is therefore not play. Competitive sports and competitive recreation are not a time out for play. The goal is to win, not to play. In the Journal of Physical Education and Recreation, George Sage wrote:
Organized sport - from youth programs to the pros- has nothing at all to do with playfulness - fun, joy, self-satisfaction - but is, instead, a social agent for the deliberate socialization of people into the acceptance of … the prevailing social structure and their fate as workers within bureaucratic organizations. Contrary to the myths propounded by promoters, sports are instruments not for human expression, but of social stasis. (No Contest The Case Against Competition, pg. 85)

Play is not concerned with quantifying performance or keeping score. Play is pure enjoyment of the process. The pure pleasure of play then excludes sports and other competitive activities.

Engaging in activities that transcend time does not require engaging in a physical activity and certainly does not require engaging in a competitive activity. Abraham Maslow puts little emphasis on sports in describing phenomenon that allow the participant to transcend time. In Finding Flow, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi does focus on recreation, including activities like dancing and rock climbing, but specifically states that competitive sports are less conducive to the flow experience than non-competitive activities. We do not need to beat others to have a good time.

Kohn proposes that “we compete to overcome fundamental doubts about our capabilities and, finally to compensate for low self-esteem” (No Contest The Case Against Competition, pg. 99). An individual can simply be interested in doing well which is different than being interested in outperforming others. The need to prove that one can perform a particular task better than someone else can be viewed and understood in terms of low self-esteem. In wanting to beat others Kohn says is more “a push of self-doubt rather than the pull of accomplishment” (No Contest The Case Against Competition, pg. 101). Competition becomes more of a need than a desire.

Abraham Maslow described “B” (for being) and “D” (for Deficit) when
describing motivation with respect to love and cognition, B-love is an admiration for a specific person. D-love is described as an urgent need, experienced as a drive whose object is generic. A measure of psychological growth is moving from D to B. It is only after our basic needs are met can we move to higher levels of loving, thinking and living. Viewed in these terms, competitiveness is a deficit-motivated trait, and outperforming others is experienced as something we have to do because our self-esteem is at stake. On the other hand, being good at an activity is something we choose to do. Looking at what happens when a competitive individual loses gives insight into how much is really at stake. Kohn describes how a competitive business woman who, after being transferred to a non-competitive work environment, described feeling like she was “suffering a slow death”. Her reaction suggested she saw her very being as being on the line.

Low self-esteem alone is not a sufficient cause of competition. Low self-esteem coupled with the need to prove oneself at another’s expense gives us the ingredients that cause people to try to feel better by making someone else feel worse.

In 1981 psychologists Ardyth A. Norem-Hebeisen and D.W. Johnson studied 800 high school students to determine other characteristics of competitive individuals. Students reporting positive feelings toward competitive relationships also reported a greater dependence on evaluation and performance-based assessments. These students were far from having unconditional self-esteem. Their view of themselves depended greatly on how well they did at certain tasks and on what others thought of them.

The more importance placed on winning the more damaging losing will be. If one feels the need to triumph over others to prove oneself, one is likely to feel humiliated when losing to someone else. Losing is likely to be equal to being a loser. Losing is
always a possibility in competition, so for the competitor there is always some risk to
psychological health. The goal of competition is to win and this leads to win at any cost.
Evidence of this is smear campaigns in politics and drug use in sports. This evidence
suggests that competition may lead some to a lower moral standard. If one is committed
to winning at any cost there will be less commitment to values of fairness and justice.

Research indicates that the less competitive an activity is the less likely abuses
will occur. The higher the level of competition the more likely it is to be destructive of
our relationships, self-esteem and our standards of justice and fairness.

Cooperation can cause us to like each other more. Cooperation meaning that the
success of each individual is linked to that of every other participating individual. This
arrangement leads to mutual assistance and support.

We seem to have the need to raise each generation to be fiercely competitive
despite evidence that it is damaging to individual learning, social relations, self-esteem
and sense of responsibility to other group members.

We cling to the idea that competition is good for us. We continue to try to
succeed at the expense of others’ failure even when we are the “other” who fails. Making
our self-esteem contingent on winning means that our self-esteem is always in doubt.
Therefore, the more we compete to prove our self worth, the more we need to compete.

Jean Piaget observed that girls playing a game will stop playing it or play a
different game if there is a disagreement over the rules, suggesting that friendship and
relationships are more important than winning. But now pro-competition magazines like
Savvy and Working Women, where women are encouraged to compete without
reservation, are gaining in popularity. So competition is becoming favored over
cooperation for women.

In order to break this cycle of competition we need to find a way to build an unconditional sense of our self-esteem. The result being, the better I feel about myself the less I need to make you lose. Comparing ourselves to others is not the only way to measure progress. We can look at our own performance. Kohn says that if we expected to participate in structural competition we can reduce personal competitiveness by directing attention away from the results of an activity. For instance, when playing a competitive game we don’t need to keep score. We should avoid awarding prizes to the winner, to soften the blow of losing.

We should not set children against one another because pitting people against each other promotes selfishness. Our psychological state and relationships with others correlate with the framework of society. Being forced to compete against each other as in structural competition will serve to perpetuate selfishness. It is the need to participate in contests that needs to be changed if we are going to move in a healthier direction.

We can stop creating scarcity. Often contests are created to win a prize where none existed before. Instead of taking competition for granted we can develop a structure that does not require winners and losers. We can turn to creating a sense of community at school.

Kohn says it is important to create a community at school because children need a supportive environment to grow intellectually and emotionally. A classroom as a community is a place where students feel cared about and in turn care about each other. In this type of environment the students feel connected to one another and they know that they matter to the teacher as well as to each other. Students will experience being valued
and respected. When students feel a part of an us, as opposed to feeling isolated, they feel safe in their classes both physically and emotionally and will be prepared to take intellectual risks and grow in their creativity.

The Child Development Project (CDP) in Oakland California started in 1989 has been researching and implementing the idea of caring communities in elementary schools. A recent study of two dozen elementary schools around the country done by the CDP showed that the stronger the community feeling the more students reported liking school and viewing learning as valuable in its own right. So taking the time to help students to care about each other enhances learning.

The CDP study also found students in communities to be better at conflict resolution and more likely to care about each other. This supports the work of Jean Piaget (1965) and other researchers who said that “cooperative relations are the key to moral development” (*Beyond Discipline*, pg. 103). When students are given the opportunity to see things through the eyes of others they develop a deeper and less self-centered way of thinking.

A community approach in the classroom asks us to consider how everyone gets along together, not just the interaction between teacher and student. It also implies that the kind of people students become is also a product of the environment that has been set up. If we want children to become compassionate people we will need to change the way the classroom feels and works, not just the way each individual member acts. We will not be just transforming individuals but educational structures as well.
Chapter 3: Behaviorism vs. Humanistic Psychology:

The Theory of Behaviorism explains learning by describing the process of classical conditioning and operant conditioning. Classical conditioning observes that events or things can produce a natural response as when a dog salivates upon smelling food. An artificial stimulus such as the ringing of a bell can be paired with a natural stimulus, such as food. The dog now associates the ringing of the bell with food and now salivates when hearing the bell ring weather the food is present or not. The dog’s response is said to be conditioned.

Operant conditioning is concerned with how to control a particular behavior by a stimulus that comes after rather than before the desired behavior. B. F. Skinner applied the techniques of behaviorism to humans and said that a reward or reinforcement following a behavior will likely cause the behavior to be repeated. Essentially saying “Do this and you’ll get that” will lead an organism including humans to do “this” again.

Behaviorism is easy and this is probably why it is used in most public schools. Certain behaviors earn you a “gold slip,” star or sticker. Behaviors not desired mean you will not get the sticker and in my son’s school you have to pay a “strip.” Behaviorism can teach compliance and can control people, including children, to behave the way teachers want them to, but is behaviorism teaching children to think or to see that we are
connected and therefore, our actions affect others?

Evidence points to the fact that behaviorism leads to a me-me culture. If I do this what’s in it for me and how can I avoid being punished. Behaviorism pits individuals against each other in a competitive spirit. People want the reward and lose sight of the behavior and how it effects others. There is no sense of community in this approach. Kohn says rewards and punishments are used to control people. There is an inequity of power between the people involved. Those in control of the rewards and punishments are the ones in power doing the controlling, the individuals receiving the rewards and punishments are the ones being controlled. Rewards are often justified as being in the best interests of the people receiving them. The argument goes that rewards help teach people things that they need to be taught and it is in their best interest to be taught these things. Kohn asks who really benefits from a child sitting still and quiet. Is this in the best interest of the child?

Rewards can produce compliance but research shows that this compliance lasts about as long as the rewards do because rewards do not address the attitudes and emotions underlying our actions. By using rewards in school we may be creating people that are addicted to rewards and always looking to be rewarded.

Most of the research that B. F. Skinner did in support of rewards was done on animals, and institutionalized individuals. Since 1961 many studies have shown rewards to be ineffective at improving performance and if some improvement was demonstrated it was only quantitative performance. In fact, rewards have been shown to reduce the interest in a task.

Kohn argues that rewards not only don’t work in the long run but they in fact
cause damage. Rewards punish people. People who do not get the reward feel that they are being punished especially if they feel that they have completed the things required for the reward. I have seen this at my son’s school. Some teachers give learning links for performing certain tasks or behaving a certain way. There is resentment in the children that don’t get a learning link when they feel that what they did was deserving of one. This can only serve to foster competition among the children, not a sense of community. Kohn says that because there is a power differential in the use of rewards and punishments this can lead to “brown-nosing” which is not part of a healthy relationship among people. We try to impress the person handing out the reward and this is not a relationship of genuine concern that will lead to taking risks or being open and honest. This kind of relationship does not inspire people to do their best or to speak up and make a difference.

Rewards and punishments serve to teach compliance and because they are successful in the short run it is difficult to see any alternative to this method. Rewards and punishments are so deeply rooted in American culture there is little reason for people to question their use.

I believe, as Alfie Kohn does, that there is an alternative to behaviorism. I believe that to find the key to fostering internal motivation we can look at Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow said to be intrinsically motivated we must first satisfy basic human needs. Maslow outlined eight levels of human needs:

Level 1: Physiological needs. These are the needs that ensure physical survival and include food, water, air, shelter and clothing.

Level 2: Safety needs. When our physiological needs have been met we are able to
concentrate on our safety and security needs which include order, stability, routine, control over one’s life and health.

Level 3: Social needs: These needs include love, belonging and acceptance. These needs are satisfied in relationships with other people.

Level 4: Esteem needs: This is the need for self-respect or self-esteem. We have the desire for strength, to feel competent, confident, independent and free. We also have a desire for prestige (respect from other people) importance, recognition, dignity and appreciation.

Level 5: Need to know: This level addresses our need to understand and explore.

Level 6: Aesthetic needs: Need for symmetry, order and beauty.

Level 7: Need for self-actualization. This level addresses an individual being able to reach their full potential as a human being. Satisfying the first six needs allows one to concentrate on reaching their highest potential. For example, musicians must play, writers must write to be at peace with themselves. We must be what we can be.

Level 8: Self-transcendence: Individuals at this level look to connect to something beyond the ego. They also help others find self fulfillment and realize their potential.

The first six levels are deficiency needs because they are only met by people or things external to us. Self-actualization and self-transcendence are growth needs. These do not address what is lacking in our lives but give us the opportunity to grow and develop as an individual. These needs are intrinsically motivated. We pursue these needs for the pure enjoyment and desire to grow.

The benefits of a cooperative environment include greater productivity, improved constructive thinking skills, social competency, motivation, social support, psychological
health, self-esteem, positive interpersonal relationships and improved intergroup relationships. I believe that the research indicates that a cooperative environment where students feel a sense of belonging, safety, acceptance, and respect will foster internal motivation and personal growth.

I don’t believe that safety, social or esteem needs can be adequately met in a competitive environment where students are pitted against each other. It is doubtful that problems such as alienation, violence, suicide, drug abuse, gangs, and school dropouts will lessen until schools, families and communities teach and model cooperation over competition.

It is clear that it is the isolated and alienated that most need to be included not excluded.

Chapter 4: Physical Movement in Schools:
Another reason that I wanted to play cooperative games in public school is that it gives the students a chance to move, and I feel strongly that there should be more movement in school. From the standpoint of physical health childhood obesity has nearly doubled since the 1980’s and tripled for adolescents. We are now seeing overweight children with high blood pressure and non-insulin dependent diabetes or type II diabetes. In some communities type II diabetes accounts for 50 percent of the new cases of pediatric diabetes. One in three elementary school students is likely to become overweight, leading to an increased risk of developing diabetes and heart disease.

Many elementary schools have reduced recess time and physical education. Government guidelines call for a minimum of 30 minutes of exercise a day. Sitting still for five hours will not foster the desire to move as adults. So it is important for children to develop the practice of moving every day.

There is also evidence that physical activity enhances learning. Dr. Lynnette Young Overby, associate professor of theater at Michigan State University taught reading using traditional methods, while using dance with another group. The dance group did significantly better than the control group.

Educator, Rae Pica says for the young child movement is the preferred mode of learning. She says children are active, concrete and experiential learners so lessons that are experienced physically by a child will have a longer lasting impact and will allow for optimal learning. Play is linked to greater creativity and problem solving ability. All of the evidence indicates that movement is a part of learning.

As the mother of an active boy I believe boys are paying a big price for inactivity in schools. Boys are twice as likely to be placed in special-education classes and to be
diagnosed with learning difficulties. Boys are fifteen times more likely than girls to abuse drugs and alcohol. Eighty percent of high-school dropouts are boys and less than 45 percent of students enrolled in college are male, down from 58 percent a decade ago. The percentage of males attending graduate and doctoral training is decreasing each year with 59 percent of all master’s degree candidates being women. The U.S. Department of Education, Centers for Disease Control report boys ages 5 to 12 are 60% more likely than girls to repeat one grade. A study done by the University of Michigan reported that the number of boys reporting that they disliked school rose by 71 percent between 1980 and 2001.

Young children are being expected to sit still far longer than what was expected years ago and many boys need more movement than the school day allows. Teacher Jane Katch and author of *Under Deadman’s Skin* reports that many boys are not ready to read at age five as is expected of them now. Boys haven’t changed but academic expectations have.

Many schools are eliminating recess, and education expert Joseph Tobin says eliminating recess as a punishment will only heighten boys’ active aggressive impulses. The boys most likely to be punished are the ones that most need a physical release from tension. Recess may be their only opportunity to deal with the stress and tension that many boys feel in school. Taking that away from them may make them more tense and it will be even more difficult for them to sit still and focus on schoolwork.

Michael Thompson, co-author of *Raising Cain*, says boys are often treated like defective girls. He says that while some boys thrive in school and there are more boy geniuses than girl geniuses, for the average boy school may not be as good a fit as it is for
the average girl. Because of their higher activity level boys have more problems with attention and focus than most girls do in school. Boys are not given enough opportunity to move around and they spend too much time sitting. Boys learn more effectively with hands on learning and are not given enough time to learn by doing, making and building things.

Based on brain studies, Michael Gurian, psychologist and coauthor of *The Boys and Girls Learn Differently Action Guide for Teachers*, reports that structural and functional brain differences between males and females explain gender differences in approaches to learning. While brain research remains controversial I think it can be beneficial if we don’t take it to the extreme of categorizing by physical differences only and forgetting our humanness.

Gurian says females’ brains mature earlier explaining why some preschool girls may acquire complex verbal skills a year earlier than boys do. While girls rely on verbal communication, boys often rely on non verbal communication, like physical aggression and are therefore less able to verbalize feelings as quickly as girls.

The process of coating the brain’s nerves with myelin, allowing electrical impulses to travel down each nerve efficiently is complete in young women earlier than in young men. For both genders the process of myelination is completed in the early twenties but brain studies indicate that female brains complete the process sooner.

Michael Gurian says that boys are at a disadvantage in learning because the process of myelination, coating the brains nerves with myelin, is completed sooner in the female brain. The myelin allows electrical impulses to travel down each nerve efficiently.
Brain research does indicate that middle school boys may use their brains less efficiently than girls. Deborah Yurgelun-Todd, director of the cognitive neuroimaging laboratory at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts says teenage girls appear to be able to process information faster than boys. By age 18 the gap starts to close with boys and girls processing information at about the same speed and accuracy.

Gurian says girls take in more sensory data because they can hear better and smell better than boys can. Males have more development than girls in the right hemisphere of the brain giving them the edge in spatial abilities including measuring, map reading and mechanical design.

There are also hormonal and chemical differences between males and females. For example, serotonin is responsible for producing a calming effect. A boys’ brain secretes less serotonin leaving him more fidgety and impulsive than girls. Females are dominated by the hormones estrogen and progesterone and males are dominant in testosterone. These differences create different effects in behavior. Beginning at around age ten males can receive as many as five to seven surges of testosterone everyday. Because testosterone is the sex-drive and aggression hormone it can cause boys moods to fluctuate between aggression and withdrawal depending on the hormonal flow. Females also experience mood swings depending on hormonal flow which is effected by the menstrual cycle, being pregnant, or hearing a child cry. Progesterone is the bonding hormone, so girls tend to manage social bonds through equalitarian alliances. Boys, on the other hand, may strive for dominance in a social situation.

A UCLA study done in 2000 indicates that women release oxytocin in response to stress, buffering the fight-or-flight response and leading to collaboration with other
women and caring for children. Under stress men produce high levels of testosterone which appears to reduce the effects of oxytocin, so the calming effect that occurs in women is absent in men, leading to their increased aggressive behavior (The Boys and Girls Learn Differently Action Guide for Teachers, pg. 11).

Gurian reports that hormones can affect learning. He says when a girl’s estrogen level is high she scores higher on standardized and in class tests than when her estrogen level is low. A boy scores higher on spatial exams such as math and worse on verbal exams when his testosterone level is high.

In the classroom boys are often bored more easily than girls and more and varying stimuli is needed to keep them attentive. Boys often need more space to learn and will tend to spread their work out more than girls. Because of boys’ lower serotonin level and higher metabolism, boys need to move more than girls. It may help a boy if he can touch something like a nerf ball while learning. This movement stimulates the brain, and can be done without bothering any one else.

William Pollack, psychologist and author of Real Boys says that, in general, schools are not doing enough to address the unique academic, social and emotional needs of boys and are failing boys. Pollack outlines four areas where schools are failing boys. First, schools are not paying enough attention to the fact that boys are lagging behind girls in reading and writing and because of this boys’ self-esteem as learners is plummeting.

Secondly, schools and teachers often are unaware of the specific social and emotional needs of boys. Pollack’s work using the Coopersmith-Self-Esteem Inventory shows that boys often report greater self confidence and competence than they are
actually feeling.

Boys often wear a mask of strength on the outside but on the inside they feel vulnerable so when communicating with boys it is important to do it in a way that does not shame them.

Thirdly, most school environments are not warm and friendly towards boys, especially when boys misbehave. Instead of probing the reasons for the misconduct and trying to discover a boy’s emotional needs, most teachers view a boy’s misconduct solely as a discipline problem. Because teachers and schools are often hostile toward boys they may push them even further toward academic failure, low self-esteem and many other emotional and behavioral problems.

Fourth, most coeducational schools have done little to develop curricula and teaching methods designed to meet the specific needs and interests or boys. Schools have not been creative in making instructional material interesting for boys.

Attending a school that does not address the specific needs of boys can keep them from fully realizing their academic potential. A bad school experience can determine whether boys succeed at nonacademic activities, and at worst may cause some boys to suffer from depression, become involved with drugs and alcohol, and turn to violence.

A report titled the Condition of Education 1997, issued by the U. S. Department of Education, stated that at all age levels “females continue to outscore males in reading proficiency.” This study also found that for the last thirteen years females of all ages have outscored males in writing proficiency. The study states “that a deficiency in writing skills is likely to undermine one’s academic success as well as one’s prospects for a meaningful career” (Real Boys, pg. 234).
By eighth grade a deficiency in basic reading and writing skills leads boys to be 50 percent more likely to be held back a grade than girls. Statistics indicate that boys have greater difficulty adjusting to school life, and account for 71 percent of school suspensions.

Pollack says many schools and teachers view boys as “toxic.” Boys are seen as the troublemakers. There is little effort put into addressing boys’ unique behaviors, needs or concerns. Boys are often seen as “little monsters whose aggression must be controlled and disciplined rather than vulnerable little boys who must be nurtured and encouraged.” Most boys are not receiving the right kind of attention and instruction.

Richard Hawley of the University School in Cleveland and former chair of the International Coalition of Boys Schools, says that there are different tempos in learning between the genders. Girls demonstrate reading and writing proficiency earlier than boys do. Boys develop language skills, large and small scale muscle proficiencies at a different pace than girls. If schools are going to be a successful learning environment for boys, then teachers and administrators need to be aware of the learning style of each boy. Boys that showed little interest in reading became active readers when given the chance to read subject matter that interested them, such as sports and adventure stories.

Gloria Van Derhorst, A Maryland psychologist, says schools are not organized to handle high-energy learners. In traditional classrooms students learn by sitting and listening. This is frustrating for students who could learn better by visualizing concepts and moving around. Research suggests that boys prefer to learn by doing by engaging in an action-oriented task. Boys can easily become frustrated in a learning environment biased against their strengths. Frustrated boys often act out. With their needs
misunderstood many of these boys are labeled as trouble makers. Many of boys’ behavior issues decrease with more freedom to move and to engage in hands-on activities.

Pollack states that the characteristics of boys’ learning style are well documented and many teachers are aware of them. Many teachers are able to accurately describe the different learning styles between boys and girls but often view the boys’ learning style in a negative way, as something that needs to be fixed instead of accepted. Even though teachers are aware of these differences in learning styles they don’t consider them in their classrooms.

For boys to thrive in school they must feel welcome. In the national longitudinal study on adolescent health, Protecting Adolescents from Harm 1997, researchers were able to demonstrate the importance of “perceived school connectedness” in preventing emotional distress, drug abuse and violence in young people. Other than closeness to family it is the largest contributing factor to emotional health in adolescents.

It is important for boys to feel at home at school and find the activities engaging. Being in a school where boys are punished for ordinary exuberance can be devastating. While experts agree boys need to manage their physicality to do no harm they should not be punished or shamed for expressing exuberance. Being at a school that does not address boys’ needs can mean years of struggling and doing worse academically and emotionally than they would in a school that caters to their needs.

In the United States boys are ten times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with attention deficit disorder. Three quarters of the one million children taking Ritalin are boys. Three times more boys than girls are enrolled in special education classes and
many of these boys are diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD). Nine out of ten children diagnosed with ADD are boys. Pollack says that much of the behavior we label as ADD is the externalization, through action, of boyhood emotions. He says action is the way many boys communicate their need for attention rather than saying “I need your attention.” Often when boys act out they are looking for understanding and empathy. Boys are often too ashamed to talk directly to someone else about what’s going wrong, so they use their behavior as an indirect way of communicating their emotions.

A boy’s outward rowdiness is often masked emotional pain. Pollack says that genuine hyperactivity exists and deserves a non-stigmatizing treatment, but much of the behavior labeled as ADD is closer to MDD male deficit disorder - with the deficiency not being in boys but within our society’s inability to correctly read boys’ needs and pain.

We label and treat too quickly when we should be listening. The hyperactivity in boys in the early elementary grades may be a symptom of the trauma of separating and the emotionally limiting environment they are entering.

Pollack has examined and worked with all-boys schools and has found them successful at providing an educational environment which boys can thrive in academically and emotionally. He feels this is due to the fact that all boys schools recognize the unique learning styles of boys. These schools are likely to be more flexible in their view of boys as compared to coeducational schools that ignore individual learning styles and paces. For boys ages ten and older a well run boys school produces a culture where boys feel confident about their abilities. With no girls around boys are less competitive and tough on each other. They are more comfortable with being themselves without the mask of bravado to cover their insecurities.
In coed institutions boys often fear being ridiculed if they behave in ways that might be seen as not masculine. Gender straightjackets are often enforced by students and teachers. Often boys feel self-conscious about appearing stupid if they answer a question wrong in classes. Many boys also believe they appear effeminate if they appear too smart, so they may not participate in class discussions. Boys may avoid subjects thought of as feminine.

In his work Pollack has interviewed boys and found most report they feel more relaxed in class when in an all-boys class. In these classes boys can shed their masks because they don’t have to worry about how they are perceived by the girls. In an all-boys school, boys report that it’s easier to take chances without girls around because they don’t have to worry about their image or what girls think of them.

Pollack says that its important for parents to advocate for their boys and make sure the school creates an atmosphere where he can succeed. Boys often need a more exploratory classroom rather than rote exercises and passive listening. When a school does not meet boys’ particular needs they will lose interest in school, leading to low self-esteem.

Pollack outlines what school systems can do. First the subject matter should be boy friendly. Classroom materials should cover a wide range of topics that will interest boys as well as girls. Schools need to be aware that many boys have a different learning style than girls and need lots of opportunities for hands on learning and interactive learning. For example, rather than just reading a fable to little boys, the teacher might put on a puppet show to convey the same literature. The students could talk to and interact with the puppets during and after the show. Schools need to respect the learning of every boy.
Boys often lag behind girls in reading and writing. Schools need to be sensitive to a boy’s individual pace as a learner. If boys need extra time to learn they should be given it. If they are pushed to learn something before they are ready their self-esteem as students will plummet.

Schools can experiment with same-sex classrooms for subject areas where boys may be falling behind. Boy-only classes will allow the teacher to focus on the needs of boys and develop classroom materials and a teaching method to meet these needs. Pollack says hiring more male teachers at the elementary level would give boys more male role models. It would give boys the opportunity to see learning as something men do.

Mentoring programs at school can benefit boys by having people who are sympathetic to them as learners. A mentor can check to see how a boy is doing academically as well as emotionally. A mentor should be someone who shares similar interests as the boy being mentored. For example, if a boy loves basketball, the mentor should be someone who can share this interest. By having someone older who cares about his social and academic progress boys will feel more confident at school.

Providing safe “guy spaces” can give boys a place to be themselves. For younger boys this may mean providing enough breaks throughout the day where they can engage in uninhibited play and gross motor activities. For older boys this may mean the development of peer support groups as “kids-only” centers or supervised by an adult. They can be single gender or coed. Because many boys do not get their emotional needs met at home it is important that they have the opportunity to discuss their emotional lives in safe spaces at school.
Chapter 5: Bullying in American School

Marvin Marshall reports that classroom bullying is more prevalent than many educators think. Estimates are that ten to twelve percent of children in schools are being bullied and fearful for their wellbeing. A large scale study was done in 2001 on sixth through tenth grade students. In this study 15,686 students completed a survey, 29.9% reported moderate to frequent involvement in bullying. Of those 29.9%, 13% identified themselves as bullies, 10.6% identified themselves as victims and 6.3% identified themselves as bully-victims. This study indicated that bullying occurs more frequently in
middle school than high school and that there is no difference across urban suburban and rural areas. The bully-victims displayed the most negative psychosocial outcomes.

Bullying is defined as youngsters purposely victimizing their peers by using physical, verbal or indirect aggression repeatedly. There is also a power differential where the aggressors are more dominant than the targets.

Bullies use their aggression in a calculated manner. Their aggression is directed toward a specific target, usually someone with few allies, to achieve some end, for example, to show their strength or move ahead of a peer in the lunch line. On the other hand, reactive aggression is an emotional response to a provocation. Peers may provoke other children in order to get a reaction.

By the time children reach preschool and kindergarten peer-directed aggression is common. It is difficult to label a preschooler or kindergartener a bully. A child is considered exhibiting bullying behavior if the child aggresses against peers at a frequency outside the normative range of aggressiveness for this age group.

Because younger children are more closely supervised by teachers than older children, teachers are more aware and involved in the bullying actions in younger children. Elementary school teachers are aware of bullying in about 25% of the instances. Teachers and peers of elementary school children set the tone for bullying and can either encourage or discourage aggressive behavior toward peers. Peers are present in about 85% of the bullying episodes that happen in elementary school. Peer reactions to bullying include active discouragement, passive on looking to active encouragement. When teachers are aware and actively involved in stopping aggression against peers, rates of bullying decrease significantly.
Dorothy Espelage and Susan Swearer say, in their book *Bullying in American Schools*, that bullying behavior does not occur in isolation rather it occurs as a result of the interrelationship between the individual, family, peer group, school, community and culture as a whole. Circumstances resulting from this interrelationship either encourage or inhibit bullying. For example, family dynamics influence bullying. There is a strong link between abuse by parents and bullying. Parents of bullies are more likely to be physically and emotionally abusive when interacting with their children. Bullies may be modeling the aggression they have witnessed at home. Bullying between siblings or caregivers can influence bullying behavior at school. Being part of a peer group that supports bullying might encourage an individual to participate in bullying.

Cultural norms and beliefs need to be factored in as contributing or inhibiting bullying behaviors. The ecological systems theory of bullying sees individuals as part of an interrelated system with the individual at the center then moving out from the center to include all systems that affect the individual. These systems interact to influence human behavior. In this framework children are seen as an inseparable part of their social network. A child’s social network is made up of four interrelated systems which include: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem.

A microsystem would include a child’s relationship with one system, for example, home, classroom or playground. The microsystem would include the child’s interactions with others within the system and includes others’ reactions to bullying behavior. This interaction with others either exacerbates or lessens bullying or victimization behaviors. The mesosystem would include the interplay between microsystems in a child’s life. For example, the interplay between home and school. The mesosystem represents the
congruence between two or more environments like the congruence regarding bullying behavior between home and school. The exosystem would include outside influences as the school districts antibullying policy and parental involvement in school. The macrosystem includes influences from cultural mores and attitudes toward bullying. Because children are affected by their surroundings, interventions to stop bullying will need to target the multiple environments that children are a part of.

The power of groups is extraordinary and can influence what an individual believes about others, self and the world as a whole. Groups can influence emotions and behavior for good or bad. Group ideologies can become internalized into an individual’s value system and be maintained long after the group has disintegrated. Some groups as an ethnic or racial group shape personal identity and a sense of self. Other groups wipe out personal identity and sense of self making individual will irrelevant.

Groups are a natural occurrence at school. Children sort themselves into groups and they are sometimes put into groups by adults. There are three classes of groups that are most common among children. First, children who behave similarly or share common beliefs are more likely to be in the same group. Groups can develop with similarities in aggression, shyness, prosocial behavior, academic motivation as well as other characteristics. Second, groups develop along demographic lines such as age, race, social class and gender. Most middle childhood groups involve segregation based on gender.

Third, groups develop because of shared interests including participation in the same extracurricular activities. Children in groups become more alike over time due to socialization to the group’s norms and standards.
Children in groups often fulfill individual roles within the group. Groups value individuals that have something to offer the group. For example, an academically-oriented group may be enhanced by including a child skilled in aggression. Some groups are organized by a hierarchy having one leader, a small number of lieutenants, and lastly many followers. There are groups that are more egalitarian without a definite hierarchy based on status.

Peer groups can function as a vehicle of defiance and nonconformity starting in middle childhood. In a study of fourth to sixth graders aggressive boys and aggressive girls were not relegated to low-status, deviant groups but instead belong to a wide range of aggressive and non-aggressive peer groups. Many non aggressive children support bullies by being members of bully-led peer groups. Research indicates that bullying is a group activity where group members have distinct roles and a network of supporters and subordinates.

While some bullies are friendless and gain acceptance only in small social networks of unpopular, aggressive children, recent studies show there are some bullies who are popular. In fact, some bullies are leaders of groups and manipulators of their social environment. These popular bullies rely on supporters and subordinates to help achieve their goals of aggression and victimization against others.

Until recently the dominant theory explaining bullying was based on social information processing. This model assumes impairment in social problem solving in the development of aggression. Specifically it was felt that aggressive individuals have a poor understanding of others’ mental states. The theory of mind is challenging this assumption. There is emerging evidence that some bullies do indeed understand others
and use this understanding to their advantage. Some bullies target vulnerable children who will tolerate victimization and who are not likely to have peer support. The ability to understand another’s state of mind is useful in relational bullying, a type of bullying that targets the victims’ relationships. Some bullies even report that they sometimes feel sorry for their victim.

It is generally thought that girls are more likely to engage in relational bullying using ostracism and character defamation. Girls are more likely to engage in indirect aggression, relational aggression and social aggression. Indirect aggression is defined as social manipulation. Relational aggression is any behavior that damages another child’s friendships or inclusion by the peer group. Social aggression includes behaviors that are meant to cause harm to another person’s self esteem or social status. Indirect, relational and social aggression do not include overt aggression as fighting or verbal threats. There are some studies that indicate that there is no difference in relational bullying between the sexes. So it is difficult to draw conclusions about gender differences in relational bullying. In general boys participate in physical bullying more than girls.

Girl bullying often starts in middle school and often escalates in high school. Author Rachael Simmons, spoke with 300 girls in 30 schools. Girls described themselves as “disloyal, untrustworthy and sneaky.” Girls report that girls are unforgiving and crafty and have an almost savage “eye for an eye” mentality.

The girls that are the most skilled in indirect aggression are the popular girls, the so-called “queen bees.” Simmons reports that girls are taught to be kind and sweet and are discouraged from showing anger toward others, so they develop a hidden culture of silent and indirect aggression. Girls become adept at backstabbing, and excluding peers.
Girls often torment their victims through the silent treatment or slang remarks or by starting rumors. Peer exclusion by girls has been observed in girls as young as four-years old.

The girls that want to be “queen bees” have earned the title “wanna bees.” These girls will often put up with abuse and do anything for the “queen bee” in order to belong to the top social group in school. Students often bully to fit in with a particular group. Some kids that bully others often struggle with wanting to fit in with a desire not to hurt others. During an interview study of bullying, a 7th-grade male bully responded by saying “Students bully so they can be a part of a group and they do it so the group will respect them more. I used to do it with my friends but now I don’t because it hurts people.”

Empathy generally does promote prosocial behavior but there is some evidence that this is not always so. Further research is needed in the area of empathy and bullying to fully understand the relationship between emotion and action and how empathy training can be used in bullying.

Adolescence is also a time when peer group membership becomes important. Peer groups are often based on similarities of gender, race and behavioral aspects such as smoking. There is evidence that aggression is viewed more positively during adolescence. This may be due to the fact that adolescence is a time when youngsters question and challenge adult roles and values and bullies openly challenge adult authority.

Adolescence also brings many changes to the physical appearance of children as well as changes in their social lives. Changes in body size for boys means bigger and
stronger boys often become more dominant than smaller boys. Boys’ dominance status is also related to their level of attractiveness to girls.

Middle schools do not support the formation of cooperative groups but instead encourages fractured social groups by having children attend large schools which stresses individual competition over cooperation. So with the move from primary schools to secondary schools it is necessary to reestablish social relationships. This is an especially important task since peer relations are particularly important during adolescence.

More dominant individuals use both prosocial and aggressive behavior to acquire status with peers. Aggressive strategies are often used in the early stages of forming a dominant relationship such as entering a new school, more prosocial behavior is used to maintain status, and to reconcile with former foes.

Studies of the dominance theory of bullying show that bully increases the first year of middle school to form dominance relationships then decreases the second year, once dominance relationships have been established. Once dominance has been established bullying behavior decreases.

Victims of bullying are divided into two categories. The first is called the submissive victim and described as passive/submissive. These victims are anxious and insecure and generally withdraw or cry when bullied. The submissive victim does not retaliate against the bully and is the most common type of victim. While the submissive victim may have friends the friends have a low social status within the peer group so are unable to offer much protections. The second type is the provocative victim. This victim provokes bullying through his or her actions toward peers. Provocative victims are also likely to retaliate against their aggressor. Individuals that become provocative victims
are usually not liked by their peer group and are at risk for adjustment difficulties.

Depression and low self-esteem are problems for both types of victims. Depression and feelings of hopelessness are the result of viewing environmental events as uncontrollable. Depressed children give up because they feel they can not influence their environment with their behavior and they often see their future as hopeless. Depression is common among students that bully as well. But it is the bully-victims that have the highest reported levels of depression.

There is a link between victim status and anxiety symptoms, although it is not clear if anxiety primarily serves as an initiating or maintaining role. Several studies show anxious behaviors to be both preexisting characteristics of victims as well as consequences of being victimized. Victims of bullying are often withdrawn individuals which may provoke bullying by aggressive peers that view this individual as weaker or less likely to receive support from others.

Anxiety is also seen as a result of victimization and this anxiety serves to maintain continuing victimization. A child who is continually victimized will tend to avoid social activities altogether. With limited exposure to social activities and therefore denied socialization experiences necessary for learning social skills, and positive peer interactions. Once a child becomes embedded in this situation it is difficult to break free.

Anxiety may increase aggressive responses in children. Some children may see their anxiety as a weakness so they try to compensate by acting aggressively toward their peers. Anxious children may also misinterpret the intentions of others. For example, an anxious child brushed by another child may interpret this as staring a fight and retaliate aggressively against this perceived threat. Some studies indicate increased anxiety with
bullying other studies show no such correlation. Because of these inconsistencies it is difficult to make any conclusion regarding the role of anxiety in bullies.

In children as young as preschool acts of aggression are greeted with rejection by the peer group. There is evidence that children who participate in bullying also have a problematic relationship with their teacher. Several studies indicate that children who have behavioral problems or problems with peer relationships have relationships with teachers that are insecure, distrusting, and filled with conflict. Children who are aggressive develop relationships with teachers that are described by teachers as being distant. Young children who have experienced a secure, warm relationship with teachers and daycare providers show less physical and verbal aggression toward peers at age four than insecurely attached children.

Both children who are aggressive and those who are victimized experience a negative relationship with teachers. It is not known whether this negative relationship is the result of child attributes, teacher attributes or the interaction of the two or a result of the teachers response to the functioning of all of the children in the classroom.

Not all aggressive acts are considered bullying. Children often engage in rough and tumble play using verbally and physically aggressive behaviors that are not intended to dominate or inflict harm on the other child. Rough and tumble play takes place between friends where each takes a turn at jostling the other for entertainment and to strengthen their friendship. If this rough and tumble play transitions into hurtful play most children will stop the aggression.

Aggression occurring between classmates having equal social power represents legitimate conflict. Children often disagree about such things as games to play and these
friends rather than non-friends. Friends work to resolve these conflicts. Unresolved conflict outside of friendship can lead to bullying where one student uses aggression to gain power over another student.

There appear to be specific classroom characteristics that foster bullying. Peer inclusion is an important part of a classroom. Students that have friends in the classroom, someone to play with at recess and some one to eat with during lunch enjoy the daily activities of the classroom more than students who don’t feel included. Fewer conflicts occur in classrooms where more students are included and the conflicts that do arise are easily solved. Having friends offers protection against bullying if these friends are able and willing to protect the victim. Being friends with other children who are themselves victimized offers little protection against bullying.

In a typical class there can be as many as 4% of the children that are not included as a friend by any classmate. These are the children who are the most likely targets of bullying. Bullies are most likely to target children who are isolated from their peers because there is little chance of retaliation. Victims who are the most rejected become increasingly victimized over time.
Chapter 6: Cooperative Learning as a Way of Reducing Bullying in School

The practices and routines of a classroom can have a powerful effect on how much each student feels included and a part of the class. Friendships develop when children have frequent opportunities to have fun together. Cooperative learning can foster friendships by providing students the opportunity to learn in non-competitive groups.

Cooperative learning programs enhance the classroom environment by promoting tolerance of peers. In a cooperative learning classroom students have the opportunity to practice listening and communicating with each other. By practicing tolerance in the classroom students learn skills that can be used outside the classroom. Peer inclusion can be promoted during recess with ample opportunities to play games where a lot of children can participate and there are no winners and losers.

Classroom meetings can teach children to brainstorm, negotiate and problem solve. Students that have been taught strategies to identify conflict are more likely to be able to resolve aggressive interactions without help from an adult. A teacher that is warm, caring, and responsive while holding high expectations for the students creates a
sense of class membership for all students. Feeling a sense of class membership reduces peer conflict and promotes a sense of security and comfort.

A teacher that responds quickly to a bullying incident sends the message that bullying isn’t acceptable making it more likely that students will protect each other when confronted by a bully. Teachers need to be aware of bullying in order to stop it. If a teacher is not in tune with the possibility of bullying it becomes easy to overlook soft spoken assaults that occur in the corners of classrooms or playgrounds.

Teacher monitoring plays an important part in protecting students against bullying.

A consistent finding in bullying research is that school personnel including teachers do not act on student reports of bullying. School personnel appear to either fail to recognize bullying or fail to intervene to stop bullying. While the majority of teachers report that they do intervene in bullying incidents, students report that teachers do not intervene in bullying. This discrepancy may be because teachers are not aware of the extent of bullying at school or are not effective in stopping the bullying.

Many teachers only intervene in physical bullying and don’t recognize social exclusion, spreading rumors and name calling as bullying. Many teachers do not intervene in indirect bullying believing that the victim is responsible for overcoming the victimization. Victims often do not report bullying incidents to teachers fearing retaliation from the bully and feeling the teacher is unable to protect them. About half of the victims of bullying do not report it to adults. Children who do report it are more likely to tell their parents rather than teachers. This still leaves many parents unaware of the bullying that goes on in their children’s classroom.
Successful anti-bullying programs must start with teachers having a caring understanding relationship with the children. The relationship must be one of mutual respect and trust. Parents also play a major role in successful anti-bullying programs. Anti-bullying programs are more successful when parents are concerned about their children’s peer interactions and experiences in the classroom. Behavioral problems are more likely when parents are disengaged from their children’s education.

Parents need to be informed of the classroom interventions targeting peer aggression. Parents need to be aware of the rules and social skills being used to govern children’s interactions in the classroom. Some children come from families that view aggression positively and these families need to be made aware that peer aggression is not acceptable in school. It is also helpful to have parent participation in developing a student code of conduct.

Some schools still use aggressive measures to control student behavior. Twenty-three states allow corporal punishment and schools that use corporal punishment have higher assault rates by children. Research shows that children who are victims of violence learn to devalue people and consequently victimize others. Therefore, school authority figures who use punitive measures as an acceptable way to control the classroom may foster coercive and aggressive behaviors in their pupils.

It is important for children to be able to manage their behavior away from adult supervision so greater emphasis is being placed on self-management strategies in anti-bullying programs. These strategies empower students to change or maintain their own behavior in monitored and unmonitored school settings. By teaching students self-monitoring and self-reinforcement strategies they can decrease inappropriate behavior by
self-control.

Clarifying the classroom rules can discourage bullying. Weekly class meetings can be an important tool in integrating the rules into class routines. During class meetings students have the opportunity to discuss how well students are following the rules and their overall satisfaction with school. Children can be taught how to communicate their emotions during class meetings. Children who are able to calmly communicate their emotions will be more successful in resolving conflict.

The physical environment of the classroom can either promote or discourage bullying. If a classroom is overcrowded too hot or too cold, this can raise tensions and for some students make it more difficult for them to regulate their emotional responses to other students. Therefore, classroom environments should be made as comfortable as possible.

Reinforcing antibullying rules may set up victims for revenge. When strict punitive measures are used to punish the bully, they may retaliate by further punishing the victim. To prevent retaliation some schools use the “No Blame Approach to Bully Prevention.” Once the teacher becomes aware of a bullying incident, the teacher meets alone with the victim to learn about the bullying and how this is impacting the victims life. The teacher assists the victim in communicating his feelings about the bullying through a written note, picture or video. Then the teacher meets with the bully and any onlookers without the victim being present to discuss how bullying is effecting the victims life. The teacher then asks the bully and onlookers to explain what they will do to stop bullying. Research shows that in 60% of all cases these no blame meetings are enough to stop the bullying from recurring.
Creating a classroom climate that discourages aggression can reduce the frequency and severity of bullying interactions that occur. Students report that peer inclusion is a defense against peer aggression. By decreasing social isolation in a classroom it is more likely that all students will have friends and friends are a powerful defense against bullying.

Chapter 7: Social Support Theories

Social support appears to be a powerful element in bullying. Social support is defined as: feeling loved, feeling valued or esteemed and belonging to a social network. Victims and bullies may experience support in a manner that differs from other students. Victims generally don’t receive the emotional support that they would like from peers. They may try to seek emotional support from parents, teachers and close friends to help them cope with being bullied. Bullies often lack emotional support from teachers due to their negative behaviors.

The relationship between perceived social support and children’s functioning has been explained in literature by the stress-buffering model and the main effect theory. The stress-buffering theory assumes that the children who benefit the most from the positive benefits of social support are those that are at risk or under stress. For example, if students who are the victims of bullying receive social support, they may be buffered from the negative effects of bullying such as anxiety, depression and drug use.

The main-effect model states that social support has a positive effect on all children regardless of circumstances or their stress level. Social support provides a sense of worth, belonging, security and stability. This social support provides for an improved
psychological state and in turn reduces psychological problems. Social support is correlated with healthy physical, social, psychological and educational outcomes.

Several theories provide an explanation on the mechanics of how social support improves one’s overall well-being and provides a protective factor under stressful situations. The social-exchange theory states there are at least two people involved in a supportive relationship: the provider of the support and the recipient. Individuals try to maintain a relationship that is mutually beneficial. The bully-victim relationship represents a power differential that results in an inequitable relationship and therefore becomes destructive in nature.

The prosocial behavior theory examines the motives and intentions of providers of support. Many factors influence the degree to which people will assist others. In a situation of distress a recipient of support needs to ask for help before others will intervene. It may be difficult for a victim to ask for help in a bullying situation. Even if a victim is able to ask for help it may be difficult for others to intervene. Many students may not feel that they have the skills or social status to intervene. Prosocial theory looks at the group dynamics when examining the role of social support in bullying. Research shows that the more bystanders there are present in a distress situation the less likely one of them will intervene. Having many bystanders present may lessen the responsibility for intervening.

Social comparison theory proposes that people generally try to emulate individuals of a higher social status than they are. Therefore, bystanders may not intervene because they focus on the higher status of the bully rather than the victim who belongs to a lower social status.
It is clear that bullying behavior does not happen in a void. Many factors effect an environment that allows bullying to occur. An environment that decreases support for the bully and increases support for the victim could help decrease the incidences of bullying.

The family can impact the behavior of potential bullies and victims. The attachment theory states that children raised by a loving, sensitive caregiver develops a secure attachment to that person and this allows the child to deal with new situations in a confident manner. Children raised by an unresponsive, insensitive and inconsistent caregiver develop an insecure attachment to the caregiver. The insecurely attached child approaches new situations with distress and discomfort and may behave aggressively to gain attention from the caregiver. The attachment style developed between the child and caregiver serves as the model for the child’s relationship with others.

Children who have developed an anxious-resistant attachment to the caregiver tend to be anxious, cry easily and explore little. These are the children most easily targeted by bullies. Children with an anxious-avoidant personality are children who have negative peer interaction and have aggressive tendencies and research shows they are the most likely to become bullies. Bullying takes place when an anxious-resistant child is paired with an anxious-avoidant child. In contrast, securely attached children avoid being involved in bullying.

The social learning theory proposes that children learn behavior from modeling others’ behavior and being reinforced for these behaviors. Research indicates that toddlers physically abused by their parents are more aggressive towards others including their peers. Parents may unknowingly reinforce a child’s aggressive behavior. For
example, a parent asks a child to perform a task and the child refuses. The parent now yells at the child and the child yells back. The argument escalates and the parent completes the task out of frustration reinforcing the aggressive behavior. Over time the child learns to be oppositional and learns that aggression and coercion get the child what he wants. The child will be more likely to use aggressive behaviors outside the home to get what he wants.

The Family Systems Theory proposes that a child’s emotional and behavioral difficulties are the result of problems within the relationships of the family rather than problems with the child. This model proposes that the family is a single unit make up of a variety of interconnected relationships and when conflict occurs in one subsystem the emotional climate of the family unit as a whole is effected. When conflict occurs in more than one of the interfamily relationships, for example, parent/child or child/sibling conflict with teachers and peers is more likely. Families with little warmth and high levels of competitiveness and conflict cause poor peer relationships in children. Families of bullies are less likely to have a father and are characterized by little warmth.

The families of victims share some characteristics of the families of bullies. Fathers of victims are generally distant and critical or absent like the fathers of bullies. Mothers of male victims tend to be overprotective, controlling and restrictive. Female victims described their mothers as hostile and rejecting. They reported their mothers threatened to reject them when they misbehaved. Behaviors of mothers tend to impact children differently depending on the sex of the child. If a mother prevents the development of autonomy in a boy or connectedness in a girl these children are more likely to become victims.

To prevent bullying the school climate has to be one that encourages peer action to eliminate bullying. Teachers and administrators need to respond immediately to
aggressive behavior and actively create a school climate where bullying can’t take place.

Chapter 8: Creative Spirit Healthy Play as a Solution

Creative Spirit is owned by Spencer Gorin and Charlie Steffens, both are registered nurses and have worked extensively with children in therapeutic institutions. Steffens and Gorin have developed a program called “Healthy Play as a Solution.” The philosophy of Creative Spirit is that “what children play they become as adults.” Gorin and Steffens report that scientific research indicates that by playing organized, cooperative games rates of aggression will drop by 50 percent or more on the playground.

As a culture we have come to see play as having little value. Most games have one winner and many losers. These games attack our self-esteem and self-worth and most of us end up feeling like a loser. This effects every aspect of our life and our relationships. If we don’t learn compassion for others how can we be successful in relationships? Creative Spirit is based on the premise that creativity, humor and play are the foundations of successful personal and professional performance. Play has been successful in fostering cooperation and in decreasing aggression. Play is a way to learn how to be a caring, honest, and patient human being.

Play is a natural way for children to learn. Playing cooperative games creates a safe, nurturing experience where self-improvement is constantly achieved. Children are given the opportunity to practice behaviors and skills they can use now and as adults.

Gorin and Steffens say that in recent years play has been focused into two areas: entertainment and competition. The usefulness of play and its educational potential has been lost with the overuse of entertainment and competition.
Creative Spirit’s “Healthy Play as a Solution” is a program designed to allow children to learn and develop positive social skills while playing. Steffens and Gorin say because children are concrete thinkers it is not enough to talk about positive social skills or self-esteem. Children need to live these principles. Healthy play gives children the opportunity to practice how to get along and promotes positive life values like caring, sharing, being compassionate and honest. Students are held accountable for their actions and for caring for each other.

Play is good for students physical and emotional health. Children can’t sit still and focus for six hours in a classroom. They need to get out of their seats and move. Games can be an important part of the curriculum. When students can no longer sit still they have stopped learning. Even a brief session of exercise and laughter will help students become more productive. Playing cooperatively will create a positive peer culture and encourages positive values.

To use play therapeutically we need to follow two philosophical principles. They are: 1. We play to have fun. 2. People are the most important part of all games. I like these two principals because it allows the players to focus on having fun with the other people involved in playing the game instead of winning. There are also two rules that need to be followed: 1. If someone gets hurt, who ever is closest to that person will stop playing and stay with this person until he or she is ready to play again. 2. If two individuals have a disagreement during the game, they must leave the game until their argument is settled peacefully. After the game a processing time where students identify only positive experiences and behaviors will help the students in creating a positive peer culture.
The “Healthy Play as a Solution” program suggests starting with creative play progressing to compassionate play then soft aggression. Creative play recognizes that all games are made-up, so the rules can be changed to suit your needs. For example, if you are playing tag and creating safe zones, the unpopular children can be designated safe zones by describing their clothing and the other children need to hug them in order to be safe. The unpopular children immediately become the most popular children.

The next level of play is compassionate play. The goals of compassionate play are to develop the values of sharing, playing fair, and being safe. Compassion is fostered among the game participants by creating trust in oneself and others. There needs to be trust on the physical level as well as the emotional level.

Most games in the Western culture are designed for one or a few to win by defeating others. For games to be therapeutic everyone needs to benefit from playing. The New Games Foundation, a foundation started in the late 1960’s that challenged many of the traditions of competitive games, developed the five Cs formula to determine if a game is a trustworthy activity for children.

First a trustworthy game is one that is contained. Children will know where they need to be to play the game. If a child is not ready to play a game he or she can move outside the boundaries of the game knowing no one will ridicule them for not playing. Giving children the chance to decide their readiness to participate gives them practice in making decisions. This will help to foster healthy risk taking and awareness of oneself and others.

Secondly, a trustworthy game is cushioned, being played on the most appropriate and safe space. We are to do what we have to make the games as safe as possible. If
wearing protective gear as a helmet to ride a bicycle then that is what is done.

Thirdly, trustworthy games are controlled. Adults need to stop games that are getting out of control. By stopping unsafe activities children can improve on their social skills and learn behavior to bring the game under control.

Lastly, a trustworthy game creates caring and community. We bring children together to play cooperative games to teach them skills that will help them become caring people. To do this, a compassionate and trusting environment needs to be created. Children need to know that they are accepted and valued no matter what their skill level is in playing the game. They need to feel a sense of belonging.

Creative Spirit recommends addressing issues like appropriate touching. Children need to learn boundaries by learning that it’s not appropriate to put down or call others names. Hard tags don’t count and it is important to reinforce the rule that if someone is hurt, the person closest needs to stay with this person until this person is ready to return to the game.

Soft aggression is the third type of game in the Creative Spirit program. I didn’t play any soft aggressive games with the kindergarten students. Creative Spirit says soft aggression is not appropriate for all grade levels. It is very important to play creative and compassionate games before moving on to soft aggressive games. Typically aggressive games like dodge ball favor the physically strongest, fastest, and most coordinated children who can protect their safety. The game experience for the other children is painful and humiliating. This is not the kind of aggression we want to promote at school.

In order to teach children to channel aggressive energies in a positive manner they will need to be taught to control and soften the impact of aggressive play. Creative
Spirit’s program allows children to practice and internalize compassion and caring for others before teaching soft aggressive games. Some of the rules of soft aggressive games include hard tags, feet tags and accidentally hitting someone on the head with a ball don’t count. Anticipate problems and be ready to stop a game if necessary. Have children continue to focus on the people not the score. If some students insist on scoring to the detriment of others adults need to stop the game and initiate another game.

Chapter 9: Cooperative Games

The following is the list of cooperative games and their descriptions that I had
prepared to play with the kindergarten class. We were not able to play all of the games.

T.P TANGLE

Purpose: To develop cooperation. The children must work together to reach the goal.

Have players stand in a line, all facing the same way. Give the first person in line a roll of toilet paper. Instruct the first person to step on the tissue then carefully pass the roll through his or her legs to the next person in line. Direct that person to pass the toilet paper over his or her shoulder to the next person. Have the children continue to pass the tissue over and under until it reaches the end of the line. Then have them pass the roll back up to the front of the line in the same way. If the toilet paper breaks at any time, have them start over. Yarn or string may be used.

WRAP-O-RAMA

Purpose: To build cooperation and communication skills.

Form trios and give each group three rubber bands, a square of gift-wrap, tape, three sheets of paper, and crayons. Have trio members link their wrists together with rubber bands so that each member is connected to the other two members in a threesome. Challenge the children to use their paper and crayons to create three colorful pictures that show ways friends help each other, such as mowing the grass, washing dishes, or picking up toys. Then instruct them to put the finished pictures in a cereal box and to gift-wrap
the boxes. Assure the children artistic ability isn’t important, creative cooperation is the goal. After the children are finished wrapping, have the trios pass their gifts to other groups. Be sure each group has three gifts to open, then unwrap the gifts and tape the drawings to the wall to remind kids that it is fun to work together.

COOPERATIVE BALANCING:

Purpose: To develop cooperation and trust.

Form pairs. Children link lift arms around shoulders. With right hand pick up right foot. Have children count. Switch and have children link right arms and use left hand to pick up left foot.

BACK TO BACK:

Purpose: Good for children in conflict to develop trust and cooperation.

Two children sit back to back and attempt to get up without using their hands. If difficult, suggest children link elbows.

UPSIDE DOWN CYCLING:

Purpose: Good for children in conflict to develop trust and cooperation.

Lie on back and touch bottom of feet with bottom of partner’s feet. Do
simultaneous cycling action first in one direction then in another. Can have children close their eyes. Can play music in the background.

DON’T LET GO:

Purpose: Builds trust.

Partners face off, extend arms and hold hands. Now move in to positions that would leave each partner totally off balance were it not for the support of the other. Can try support with other parts of bodies. Music in background is nice.

IN AND OUT:

Purpose: To develop trust.

Partners face one another with feet spread to shoulder width. With hands up, palms open, bodies rigid, the partners lean forward and catch one another. Then push off and spring back up. Play on soft surface and match pairs consciously.

HANDLE WITH CARE:

Purpose: Develop respect for ecology.

Players stand in a line. A broad leaf is passed overhead until it reaches the back of the line. Then that person brings it to the front and starts again. The aim is for everyone to
be first and not to damage the leaf. Can be done with any natural object. Take the opportunity to talk about the damage that can be done to the ecology.

DOWN THE HOLE:

Purpose: Brings children together as a group for a common goal.

Cut a small hole, just big enough for the ball, in the center of a sheet or blanket. Children hold the edges of the sheet and try to get the ball to go through the hole. Can use several balls.

LEG BALL PASS:

Purpose: Cooperation.

Players sit on the floor in a tight circle and extend feet towards the center. A ball is placed on one player’s lap. The idea is to move the ball around the circle as fast as possible without using hands. Can vary the size and number of balls. If it doesn’t work the first time try again.

ANIMAL ACTING:

Purpose: Develops listening skills. Equal playing field.
Children choose an animal and act it out. Others try to guess what it is. Let children choose their own animal, if possible.

SLOW MOTION TAG:

Purpose: Strengthens listening skills, following directions, gentle touching.

Children move in slow motion. Choose an “it”. When tagged that person joins “it”. When 4 players are joined as “it”, they split into twos and tag others. When everyone is tagged all chant A-lo-ha so all will know that the game is over.

FREEZE DANCE:

Purpose: Equal playing field, listening skills.

Have children walk, skip, or hop, or dance while music is playing. When music stops children must freeze.

GHOST:

Purpose: Sets the tone for playing fair, using safety and taking care of each other. It involves all of the players in an equitable way. This is a good game to start each session.

Have all players form a circle holding hands. (No hand squishing or arm pulling). Pick four ghosts to stand in the center of the circle and pretend to be sleeping. The
players making up the circle begin to walk around clockwise while counting out loud the
hours of a clock from one o’clock to midnight. At midnight the players let go of each
other’s hands and begin to run away from the waking ghosts. Upon waking the ghosts
begin waving their arms in the air while making ghostly sounds as they chase the other
players. Each person tagged becomes a ghost who begins waving their arms in the air and
making ghostly sounds. The game is over when everyone is a ghost. This game is
versatile. On Thanksgiving everyone can be turkeys that run around catching everyone
while clucking, “gobble gobble”.

THE BLOB:

Purpose: To develop cooperation in young children.

   Establish boundaries. Start with calling yourself the Blob. Chase the children until
you catch one. That child then grabs your hand and becomes part of the Blob. Together,
still holding hands, you catch others. The Blob grows larger with each capture. Only the
outside free hands can tag. The Blob may either tag or encircle its prey. One of the
characteristics of the blob is that it can split up in to different numbers of smaller Blobs,
but there must be at least two to a Blob. When one, two, or three children are left,
whichever you specify, the game ends. Those children unite and begin the next Blob.

CATCHING THE DRAGON’S TAIL:

Purpose: This game encourages playing fair, safety, caring for others and cooperation in
Gather ten or more children in a line. Each person places hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. The first in line is the head of the dragon. The last is the tail. The head tries to catch the tail by maneuvering the line around so he or she can tag the tail player. When the tail is tagged, the tail player moves to the front of the dragon to become the new head. The old head is now in second.

MAGIC SHOE:

Purpose: To develop trust and cooperation in young children.

Each child takes off one shoe and balances it on top of his or her head. Have everyone line up on one side of the playing area. The object is to walk about twenty-five feet to the other side without having the magic shoe fall off their heads. If the shoe does fall off, the child becomes frozen. Any unfrozen child can help by picking up the shoe and giving it back to its owner. Once the shoe is placed back on the head from which it fell the frozen player may move again. No one wins until everyone reaches the other side at which time everyone wins. Can use bean bags.

COOPERATIVE MUSICAL HOOPS:

Purpose: To develop trust and cooperation in young children.

Just like musical chairs only hula-hoops are used. When the music stops children
stand inside the hula-hoop. As the hula-hoops are removed the children that can not find room to stand inside a hula-hoop can hold the hand of a child inside a hoop and be safe.

DOUBLE SIMON SAYS:

Purpose: Encourages honesty and builds self-esteem. Improves listening skills.

Randomly split class into two groups each with a leader. When a child makes a mistake encourage the child to say, “oops I goofed”. They do not have to stop playing instead they go to the other group and continue playing. Thank and praise children for being honest.

RUN RUN FOX GO HOME:

Purpose: To teach gentle touching, and cooperation in young children.

Find a space to run across from wall to wall or wall to fence. The children will run from one safe zone to the next, but in the middle is the catcher, who calls, “Run run fox go home” to signal the others to run across the mid space. Any one tagged becomes part of the catchers for the next run, proceeding until all are caught and the game begins anew.

FRIENDSHIP FREEZE:

Purpose: Helps everyone feel special for being who he or she is.
Have children stand loosely together. Instruct the group that whoever can answer yes to your questions is to raise his or her hand. Those that do not raise their hands will clap. The questions should celebrate the ordinary things about being a human being. For example, raise your hand if you have an older sister, step parent, smiled today, have a dog, like vegetables and so on.

HA! HEE! HO!

Purpose: To build cooperation and trust.

Number the children by saying “ha”, “hee”, “ho”. Mix the group by having the students close their eyes and turn three circles in place. Explain to the kids that when you say, “go” each one may find his or her group by saying the special word. Once one group member locates another, have the two join hands and find the rest of their group. When all the group members have been found, ask each group to say their word, ten times with straight faces. Allow other groups to make silly faces to get them to laugh.

FRIENDLY FANNING:

Purpose: Students will have to work together in pairs and as a whole group. Requires cooperation. Supplies: paper plates, balloons, watch with a second hand.

Form pairs and give each person a paper plate. Have pairs line up at one end of the room. Give a balloon to the first pair. Show kids how to use their paper plates as fans
to keep the balloon in the air. On “go”, have the first pair work together to fan the balloon
to the other side of the room, bounce it off the wall, then fan it back to the next pair
without letting it touch the floor. Keep track of time. Continue play until everyone has
had a chance to fan a balloon across the room. Have kids change partners and try again to
improve their time. For a fun variation, have kids form a circle and keep a few balloons
in the air with their fans. Keep adding balloons to see how many they can keep airborne.

SQUIRRELS:

Purpose: To develop cooperation. Supplies: peanuts in a shell, napkins, a watch with a
second hand.

Scatter peanuts over a large grassy area. Have children form pairs, linking arms.
Let kids chose to be “squirrels” or “trees.” Explain that the squirrels gather the nuts and
the trees store the nuts. Allow each pair to take one napkin and place it away from the
main playing area. The napkin is the nest. When a pair finds a peanut, direct the squirrel
to grab it and hand it to the tree. Both run to stash it in the nest. The goal is for pairs to
find as many peanuts as they can in three minutes. Variations: have children crawl, hop,
or skip.

THE THREE MUSKETEERS:

Purpose: Develop cooperation, and listening skills.
Form groups of three and tell the children to prepare to work together. Have the children in the trio link arms. Tell the children to complete the following tasks while joined to their partners. Possible tasks: scratch your ears, touch your toes, take four steps to the right.

MERRY-GO-ROUND:

Purpose: Develop cooperation in young children.

For groups of eight or more. Children form a circle and walk around like a merry-go-round. They need to move toward a designated destination while continuing to keep their moving circle.

SHOW-ME:

Purpose: Develop listening skills, maximize participation.

Children stand in a circle. The leader will say show me and then name something for the children to act out, for example, a frog, a rock, a tornado. Each child is given the chance to be the leader.

PARTNER PULL UP:
Purpose: Develop cooperation among children.

Children sit in pairs facing each other with knees up and feet flat on the floor. They reach out to hold hands and help each other stand up. Once they are successful in standing up they can try to sit down while they continue to hold hands.

Chapter 10: Cooperative Games Journal

November 16, 2006

My first day of playing cooperative games with the kindergarten class. I introduced the concepts of: 1. We play to have fun. 2. People are the most important part of the game. 3. The person closest to someone who is hurt stays with that person until he or she is feeling better then both return to the game. 4. When people disagree they must leave the game and return to the game when they can agree. Even when we disagree we continue to be nice to each other. We don’t yell at each other, hit or push each other.

We played Double Simon Says. I led a group of seven students and Mrs. Walo, the kindergarten teacher, led another group of seven students. I explained that when someone makes a mistake you say, “oops I goofed” and go to the other group and keep playing.

After playing Double Simon Says I asked the children how they liked it. I heard “it was fun and it’s awesome.” The guidance teacher asked how it felt when you had to go to
another group and one little boy said he felt lonely until he got to the other group. I liked hearing that because I think I am going to emphasize that it is okay to make a mistake, and it’s more important to be honest than to lie about making a mistake. I am going to emphasize that we play Double Simon Says to have fun and it helps us to be better listeners.

One little boy said he wants his friends to keep playing Simon Says not sit out when they make a mistake, a sign that small children have not been socialized to be competitive. Young children are still more interested in relationships and having friends. I was surprised to find that I felt that Double Simon Says felt more competitive than I had expected. Even though the students could join another group they did have to leave the group they started in when they make a mistake and that felt competitive to me. I know the children liked the game because Mrs. Walo said that after I left the students wanted to play it again so she and Ms. Perrelo, the guidance teacher played it and Mrs. Walo ended up with everyone in her group!

November 17, 2006

Today we played Magic Shoe. The children took off one shoe and placed it on their heads. They had to balance the shoe on their head with out holding it with a hand and walk about twelve feet. If the shoe fell off someone else had to pick up the shoe and put it on the person’s head. I explained that no one won until everyone reached the desired destination. The little girl that reached the destination first yelled I won. I expected someone would do this because winning is so much a part of our culture. I reminded her that their were people who had lost their shoes from their head and needed help so she needed to put her shoe back on her head and help these people. One little boy
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kept losing his shoe (Sam) and another little boy (Jacob) stayed beside him and kept picking up his shoe and placing it on his head. I had them sit down and asked what it was like having to help others and what it felt like to need help. Jacob said that he felt happy helping. Sam said he did not like the game, which sent a strong message to me. It is difficult to ask for help in this culture. I said that it is okay to ask for help because we are here to help each other. I want to revisit this issue because I think there is a good lesson to learn. I definitely want to play this game a lot. I told Mrs. Walo that if she sees the children not treating each other well she can say “Is that taking care of people?” as suggested by creative spirit.

November 30, 2006

Today the children played Run Run Fox Go Home. I chose two children at random (I drew names) to be the catchers. The other children lined up and were instructed to run to the safe zone, which was a fence, about fifteen feet away. The catchers stood half way between the fence and the line of children. On the count of three the catchers yelled Run Run Fox Go Home. The children in line started running. It was difficult for the children to stay in the boundaries that I had specified. A few children were running all over the field. There’s a strong desire to run to get away when you are being chased. Once the children were tagged they became catchers. The children also played Dragon’s Tail where the children lined up one behind the other and the child at the head of the line became the head of the dragon and the child at the end became the tail. The object was for the head to tag the tail and then the child playing the tail became the head. One child fell twice during this play session so it gave the children a chance to practice the rule of the person closest staying with the hurt person until that person can
return to the game. I asked the child that had fallen how it felt to have the others stay with him and he said “really nice”. Sam fell at the end of our play session and immediately got up. He said no one helped him get up. When we played Magic Shoe Sam didn’t like being helped so he had a change of heart!

December 8, 2006

Today I felt a little like the “kindergarten cop.” We played magic shoe again and no one wanted to help. It was constant reminding to get them to help each other. The children that caught their shoes when they fell did not want help so I let them set the rule so they would have some say in the game. This led to no one giving or receiving help. They wanted to play Run, Run Fox Go Home. I tried to set boundaries but there were still children that ran outside of the boundaries to escape being tagged so I am realizing how difficult it is in our culture to just play for fun and not think about winning or losing. We played Dragon’s Tail again and we had a disagreement and I reminded the two children involved that they needed to leave the game and come up with a solution. I stayed with them and gave them some direction. They did a pretty good job of solving the problem.

While playing Dragon’s Tail there were a couple of children that fell and I was happy to see at least two children who went over to the child that had fallen and ask if he was okay and if he could get up. So that is progress! It is interesting to note that it has been boys that have fallen and only girls that have come to their side to see if they are okay. I am waiting for a boy to step forward and ask if a fallen child is hurt. Next Friday
I am going to have the children pair up in threes and fours and lock arms at their elbows and I am going to give directions to have them touch their toes and scratch their ears to foster helping one another. I am also going to have them sit in a circle and practice tagging each other in slow motion so they can get used to tagging each other gently and accept being tagged. I also plan to do The Blob another tag game. Mrs. Walo is giving me thirty minutes on Fridays, which is great. I am not sure that I will get another time slot during the week but I am not going to complain because it is nice to have thirty minutes as opposed to two fifteen minute time periods each week.

December 15, 2006

I was planning to play The Blob but was unable to get the gym. So we played T.P. Tangle with a roll of paper towels in the classroom. The children wanted to play Double Simon Says so we played that and it went well. The kids seemed more comfortable with being honest about making a mistake and going to the other group. So I think they are getting the concept that we are playing for fun and it doesn’t matter if you stay in one group or go between two groups. Watching them I also felt that the game illustrated that when we make a mistake we deserve another chance. I’m going to review this with the children the next time we meet.

December 21, 2006

Today the children played Musical Hoops. We started with five hula-hoops and when the music stopped the children had to stand inside one of the hoops to be safe. The children did well with this game. There was one little girl that forgot she could be safe by holding hands with someone inside the hula-hoop and the children were great at calling to her and putting their hands out in order to hold her hand so she would be safe.
Even though the children knew everyone would be safe they stayed in close proximity to the hula-hoops. I did review Double Simon Says and told the children I liked seeing them having fun with the game because it doesn’t matter if you stay in one group or run between the two groups.

**January 5, 2007**

Today I tried to show the children that we are alike in some ways and we are different in some ways and it is all great. I would ask a question and those that could answer the question with yes would raise their hands and the others would clap. Sample questions included: Who rode the bus to school? Who likes chocolate ice cream? Who has a dog?

After this game I had the children pick up a sheet with two holes cut in it. I put a ball in the middle of the sheet and they had to work together to get the ball to go through one of the holes. When they were successful with one ball I added another. When they were successful with two I added a third. The children loved this game but they had trouble focusing on the goal, they wanted to bounce the ball off the sheet. Mrs. Walo helped the children to focus on the goal of getting the ball through the holes which was helpful. In my next session I think I will review what a community is and what it means to play a cooperative game in terms of how we treat each other.

**January 12, 2007**

I played “I Spy” with the children. I gave just one clue and encouraged them to ask me questions to figure out what I saw. I explained that they would be working together because they would have to listen to each other’s questions and remember the clues that I gave them. I let them walk around the room and look for the item as they
were asking me questions. They loved it! Then we played with the sheet with the holes. I asked the children if they remembered what they were suppose to do and they answered to get the balls through the holes. Wow! They did a great job! They worked in sync to get the balls through the holes. Next week I plan to work in the gym and we discussed rules of the gym (no pushing, be aware if someone is close by so you don’t hit them by mistake) so no one will get hurt.

January 25, 2007

Today we sat in a circle and I had the children laugh and clap their hands while the guidance counselor watched. I asked the children how a child would feel watching us having fun and not being allowed to play. Answers included sad, and left out. I asked them if they should tell a child on the play ground that he could not play. I want to repeat this exercise. The children wanted to play “Magic Shoe” so we did. It’s still difficult for them to stop and help others, they want to get to the goal without losing their shoe and this is their goal. We played “Blob Tag” for the first time. It would have been easier to play if we had a smaller area to play in. The gym is big so once I tagged two children I explained they had to hold hands and chase the others. I had to let go in order to catch the other children and the children holding hands let go and were chasing the other children on their own. It was difficult for them to remember we were building a blob. I am not concerned that they get every aspect of the game. Piaget played cooperative games with children and he found that children under the age of seven are not as good at learning all of the mechanics of the games but that the games remain powerful tools in moral development in young children.

February 7, 2007
Today I had the children work in groups of three and played a version of “Wrap-O-Rama”. I put elastic bands around their wrists and gave each child a card and an envelope. I instructed them to print their name in the card and put the card in the envelope then exchange the card with another child. Exchanging the card was a difficult concept for them. I went to each table to make sure everyone exchanged cards. Two of the children didn’t want to exchange cards, so I explained it made it more special to receive a card from a friend and for them to give a card to a friend then gently took the card and exchanged it for them. After we sat in a circle and asked them if it was hard to sign the cards connected to the others. Most said it was not difficult. One little boy said there was only pencil box at his table and everyone took turns using the pencil in the box. I decided to ask the children what it meant to them when I said that people are the most important part of the game. They struggled with this, a couple of the children said it meant we helped people. It’s interesting to learn how they interpret what we are doing.

February 16, 2007

Today I dressed up like Queen Guinevere (King Arthur’s wife). I told the children that the knights worked for King Arthur and they met at the castle (King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table) and reported to King Arthur and told him how they had helped people. I said that the knights too played games to strengthen that skills for helping people. I than asked the children to tell me one thing they had done to help someone else during the week. We played “Magic Shoe” again. I had them pair up in twos and told them they needed to stay with their partner. I also explained that just because a pair reached the safe zone before the others this didn’t mean that they had won. So I asked them to cheer the others on once they had reached the safe zone. This went
well I didn’t hear “I won”. The children did well cheering each other on. For the most part the children did stay with their partners. There was one little boy who left his partner in the dust so there is still work to be done but I was happy with what I saw. We then played “Run, Run Fox Go Home”. The children enjoyed the queen outfit!

March 16, 2007

I hadn’t seen the children for a month because of school vacation, early release day, and snow day. So I started by sitting in a circle and reviewing the rules of the cooperative games and asking them how their vacation was and what was new with them. They remembered that we play for fun, people are the most important part of the game and that if someone gets hurt we stop to help that person. The children always have the option of passing. Out of thirteen children about five passed. I forgot to ask Mrs. Walo about her vacation and the children called me on it which I thought was wonderful. They didn’t want to leave their teacher out. I told them that before I came to school I was at home dancing alone in preparation for today’s session. I asked them if they could image me dancing at home alone and they laughed. One little boy said that he could image me dancing in his living room and one little girl said that she could image her cats dancing with me. I love to get them talking and telling stories. They have such interesting stories to tell. I did some free dancing with the children. At the end of the session I had them put bean bags on their heads and try to keep the bean bags on their head while skipping. The children don’t like the dancing as well as the games. They look forward to the games. There is no school next Friday so I will see the children in two weeks. I think I will play T.P. Tangle, Double Simon Says and Musical Hoops with them during the our next meeting.
March 30, 2007

Today went really well. The children played T.P. Tangle and enjoyed it. We started with two short lines of six people each. Both lines were successful in passing the roll of toilet paper over and under without tearing the toilet paper. We then combined the lines to make one long line of twelve people. The children did great, they got to the last person in line before the toilet paper broke. Then I put down four hula-hoops to play Musical Hoops and played music. When the music stopped the children had to stand inside the hula-hoop. You are safe outside of the hula-hoop by holding the hand of someone standing inside the hula-hoop. The children were more comfortable playing this game then they were the first time playing this game. The first time they just walked around the hula-hoops they really didn’t dare get to far away from them. Today they danced around and had a ball! Next week I am going to take pictures of them playing the games.

April 6, 2007

We did T.P. Tangle again and I did take pictures. I had the children do the Upside Down Bicycle where they had to work in pairs with their feet together and pedal. They did well with this. We ended with the song YMCA. I let the children free dance and they decided to do a train. When the song said YMCA they stopped and made the letters with their hands. I got some great pictures!!

April 27, 2007

We were not able to play in the gym and it was raining so we couldn’t go outside so we had to play the games in the classroom. We played Magic Shoe. They are getting
better at balancing their shoe on their heads so there isn’t much challenge left to this
game. I tried two new games. We played Merry-Go-Round where we held hands in a
circle and walked around in a circle as we also moved in a straight line to a designated
destination. They did well with this game. Then we played Show Me where I would say
show me how a frog acts or show me what a tornado looks like then I gave each of the
children a chance to say Show Me……. They loved this game. Boy did they get rowdy
which I didn’t mind but it was a bit to rowdy for the Mrs. Walo, the teacher. I am hoping
that in May the weather will be warm enough that we can go outside to play. The
children want to play Run Run Fox Go Home and space is needed to play this game
safely. The children really need to move!

May 4, 2007

It rained today so we played in the gym. We played Merry-Go-Round, Run Run
Fox, The Blob and Magic Shoe. I plan to go outside next week and play Dragon’s Tail
and a Partner pull up.

May 11, 2007

The weather is not cooperating, it is raining so we were in the gym again. We
played Squirrels today and the children liked it. We played Musical Hoops and Run Run
Fox go Home. I would like to be outside because the ground is softer than the wood
floors in the gym. Two children were hurt today. The good that came from this is that I
saw much more compassion coming from the children than I did in the beginning of the
year. Maybe we’ll be able to go out next Friday, my last day with the children.
May 18, 2007

Well it is raining again so we danced to some songs, and reviewed the principals of cooperative games. I gave each child a certificate of appreciation for participating in the cooperative games and we had a farewell party eating donut holes and drinking lemonade. The children decorated a giant pink heart for me and they all signed it.

Chapter 11: Summary and Conclusion
My journey with the kindergarteners was certainly an interesting and enjoyable experience. I saw great potential with Creative Spirits program of cooperative games. I often felt like a speck of cooperation and community building in a sea of competition but at least the children had some exposure to cooperative games. I know meeting only once a week didn’t do justice to the program but I was grateful for the time that I had. I believe that these games will have an impact on the children in the long run.

I did see evidence that they understood the concepts. They always made sure that I asked Mrs. Walo, the kindergarten teacher, her opinion if I forgot. At the Christmas party I heard one little boy say he was leaving the game if the others didn’t stop fighting. The rule in the cooperative games is the people that have a disagreement must leave the game until they can reach an agreement. He knew someone left the game during a disagreement.

Four of the children made a point of coming up to me during recess to tell me that they were working together to build a snow fort. They knew that my message was cooperation.

I liked the cooperative games because it gave the students a chance to move and play something I feel elementary students don’t get enough of. Since The No Child Left Behind law has been in effect many public schools, including my son’s, have reduced physical education and recess time.

I know the children enjoyed the games because I see them this year at school as first graders and many of them will come up to me and say “I remember playing games with you in kindergarten. That was fun.” It is nice to know that they looked forward to
the games and have fond memories of playing them.

One of my hopes with doing these games was to introduce the school to a classroom management program that promoted community building rather than punishment. The school currently uses a carrot and sticks approach to classroom management. The school issues gold slips to students when a teacher feels the student is acting in accordance with the school's core values of being responsible, honest, courageous, kind, respectful, compassionate. At first I thought that this was great, but the more I was involved in the school I came to see this practice as destructive. Each Thursday during the assembly students that have received a gold slip stand up to be "recognized." The practice creates a clique, you may be a part of it this week, you may be out the next week. Not exactly a sense of belonging. Some children receive far more gold slips than the rest of the children and there are teachers that use them far more than other teachers. The reasons children receive gold slips are for things all of the children do and I wonder what it’s like for a child to know that he or she does these things but doesn’t get a gold slip.

Some teachers use food as a reward. One teacher had a popsicle club. If you didn’t lose any strips during the week you were given a popsicle on Friday. One teacher gave out gold slips to children in the cafeteria for eating all of their lunch. Being a dietitian I felt I could address the detrimental effects of using food as a reward and for giving gold slips to children for eating all of their lunch. I went to the school nurse and she agreed that food should not be given as a reward, so gold slips for eating all of your lunch and the popsicle club was stopped. At least children were not eating in front of other children and children were not frantically trying to eat everything at lunch.
Children are punished by losing a strip. Some teachers give three each day, some give four. There is no consistency, the reason you lose a strip varies with the teacher. Some teachers take a strip if a child forgets their folder or forgets to put their name on their paper or has too much mud on their shoes. Students get punished for being human not for bad behavior. The consequences of losing a strip are often not logical, and it does nothing to help the child learn responsible behavior. I worry that with this behaviorist carrots and sticks approach a child’s self esteem will be like a roller coaster going up and down in accordance with the gold slips they receive and the strips that they lose.

I was hoping that I could convince the principal and teachers to use a community building approach to classroom management using cooperative games several times a week. I also found a program called Caring School Community created by the Developmental Studies Center in California that could be used along with the cooperative games. The Caring School community program has four components. The first component is class meeting lessons including guidelines on how to conduct weekly meetings that invite every student to participate.

I and another parent met several times with Mr. Anderson, the school principal, from March to June, 2007 to discuss a community building approach to classroom management. In April, a representative came to the school to discuss this classroom management approach and displayed materials for teachers and principal to look over. I was pleased that I found a community building classroom management approach that other schools used with success and followed through by contacting a representative and arranging for him to come to the school. I can’t force the school to adopt a community building style but I can make the school aware of this approach and I did this.
On a hot day in May, the second grade teachers came out to playground during recess and began selling freeze pops for $0.25 as part of the school store. This certainly caused an uproar. Children were frantically asking their friends for money so they could buy a popsicle. Many of the children approached me and ask if I would buy them a popsicle. One little boy was in line to buy a popsicle, when it was his turn to buy a popsicle he gave the teacher a penny and he was told that he couldn’t have one because he didn’t have enough money. He left the line crying. I approached the teachers and tried to explain that many of the children were upset, some crying. I tried to explain that it was 95 degrees and all the children want a popsicle and some have no money. One teacher replied that notices were going home today. The other teacher replied that it was no different than selling hot chocolate in the winter. I had never seen hot chocolate sold at school during recess so I couldn’t respond to this.

I went inside to tell the principal that many children were upset because they wanted a popsicle and felt left out because they were not able to buy one. I did find him and explained the situation but he took no action. I went back out to the playground and bought popsicles for about ten children before the teachers picked up and went back into the school. I realized then that I was not going to be successful in completely ridding the school of it’s carrots and sticks approach to classroom management but I did not want to give up completely. Any change toward a more inclusive atmosphere at school was worth striving for.

My son did bring a notice home saying that popsicles would be sold every hot day after lunch on the playground. I know of two other parents that talked to the principal about concerns over popsicles being sold on the grounds of a public school during recess,
when the children should be playing. Every day I saw the same scenario, children frantically asking for money to buy a popsicle. Speaking with the principal did not change the situation. My husband suggested writing to the school board so I did. I received a letter back from the chair of the school board saying that this would not happen again at Holden Elementary School. I was happy that at least children did not have to watch others eat something that they wanted leaving them feeling left out of the school community. I felt some progress was made in making children feel more connected to the school community.

While I think cooperative games offer great potential in helping children feel more connected to each other and to school I know they take more time than most public schools have. I did not want to give up, so over the summer one of my friends and I kept researching to find a program that would offer the children noncompetitive movement, fun and learning and the teachers a quick easy way to incorporate this. We came across a program called Brain Gym that fit what we were looking for. The theory behind Brain Gym is that specific movements help integrate the right and left side of the brain. Brain Gym contributes to living life more fully and joyfully. Practicing Brain Gym on a regular basis can promote a state of calmness and greater feelings of joy.

Brain Gym was created by educator and reading specialist Paul E. Dennison PhD. and his wife, Gail Dennison, a dancer. Dennison feels that learning difficulties are caused by the right and left hemisphere of the brain not working together making it difficult for the student to retrieve the information. In the 1970’s the Dennisons began experimenting with physical movement to enhance learning which began the field known as Educational Kinesiology (Edu-K) “learning through movement.” Movement is the key
to engaging both sides of the brain in learning by developing the brain’s neural pathways.

The Edu-K model is based on the premise that without the analytic brain (left side of the brain) the receptive brain (right side of the brain) is unable to access information and connect it with experience. In order to learn the left side of the brain needs to be able to access information from the right side of the brain.

Brain Gym consists of about 26 simple movements; some can be done while sitting, others can be done while walking in line. The 26 movements help the analytic and receptive brain to function as a whole improving concentration, memory, reading, writing, organizing, listening, and physical coordination. Because Brain Gym helps learning and academic performance I felt there was a chance that the teachers would be supportive of this program and the children would get more movement and psychological benefits as well.

On October 9, 2007 my friend, Anne Murphy, and I went to our Parent Volunteer Association to give an overview of Brain Gym and everyone was enthusiastic about it. We went to our principal with this information and he said he was willing to learn more about it. I was able to locate Margaret Marshall, a local retired reading teacher who used Brain Gym in the classroom for five years and now is a licensed Brain Gym instructor. She agreed to come to the teachers staff meeting on Nov. 1, 2007 to give an overview of the Brain Gym program. Anne and I attended this meeting and were pleased to see that the teachers are interested in receiving additional training in Brain Gym.

Many teachers commented to us that it would be easiest for them to attend a training during a workshop or early release day. We went to our principal to request a time for Margaret to come back in January preferably on a workshop or early release day.
Margaret Marshall is scheduled to speak at length with the teachers on January 30th, an early release day. I am excited about the possibility of the school using Brain Gym and feel this would be positive for all students.

It’s January 29th and a little girl in first grade ran up to me and hugged me and said “Mrs. Kelly I want to play games with you, I want to play that fox game.” My heart went out to her because there is very little movement in first grade at our local school. It is all academics and I believe young children need to play and move.

Today, January 29th, is an exciting day for me because the Brain Gym workshop for teachers is tomorrow. Attendance is voluntary and I am hoping for a good turn out. The teachers that I have spoken to are excited and looking forward to the workshop. The art teacher said that she saw a segment on the local morning news about Brain Gym that really peaked her interest. If most classroom teachers come to the workshop and begin using it in their classroom it will be a dream come true. Our physical education teacher is very enthusiastic about Brain Gym and has already begun incorporating some of the moves into his classes.

Today is January 30, and Margaret Marshall came to Holden school and presenting a riveting presentation on Brain gym to fifteen teachers and support staff. Teachers are enthusiastic and looking forward to implementing Brain Gym into the classroom. The principal says that he is going to have the entire school start the day doing Brain Gym tomorrow at morning meeting.

Today is January 31, and the principal ended morning meeting with a session of Brain Gym. I helped lead the activity and it was so exciting for me to see the children performing Brain Gym movements while music played in the background. I finally feel
like I accomplished something positive for the children. This may be the conclusion of my project but it is not the end rather it is an exciting new beginning.
**References:**


