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Using Sports to Teach Different Skills

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There are many ways to encourage children to participate in learning activities. One of the best ways to encourage active participation is to plan activities that are both interesting and engaging. **Sports** are a great way for children to interact during events/practice and have fun learning a variety of skills. Many children participate in sports at early ages, whether through school activities, such as physical education (PE), or community recreation events, such as seasonal sporting leagues (basketball, soccer, tennis, etc.). From interest in a particular sport to a desire to be like their favorite sports hero, children make a connection to sports.

Through sports, children **learn the rules** of a variety of games. They also learn the important fundamentals of **turn-taking** and **teamwork** while **working together toward a common goal**. Whether children win a game or not, they should always exhibit **good sportsmanship**. These are skills that also apply to the classroom setting



when students **work with others to complete a task**. As well, children learn to give their best effort each time and be consistent with attending sports practices, which shows a **commitment to success**.

What Other Skills Can Sports Teach?

The benefits of sports include an increase in both physical and mental skills. Physically-engaging activities can improve children's attention to task and provide motivation. This interactive environment can foster a continued desire for learning – by making learning fun! **Here are some examples of educational skills sports can teach:**



Vocabulary building – Children build vocabulary skills when they learn words and sayings related to each sport. Each sport has its own vocabulary – the equipment, the rules, etc. For example: baseball – *home plate, curve ball, "Batter up!"*



Planning and strategizing – Sports help children develop thinking and processing skills as they learn to "plan ahead" and incorporate strategy.



Categorizing – Children can increase their categorizing skills as they learn new sports and how they are similar/different from each other. Some ways to group sports are *winter vs. summer sports, water sports vs. land sports, and sports with a single player vs. sports with a team*.




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Sports-Themed Activities in School


In school, sports-themed activities help students develop and apply many skills. Here are some fun, engaging ways to incorporate sports into classroom learning:




Have students take turns being news sportscasters. Students can share newly learned vocabulary and demonstrate expressive language skills, like storytelling, when they report on: the recent lesson or activity in physical education (PE) class; their favorite teams or players in professional sports; their own practices and competitions.



Take learning outside. Use the outdoors to encourage learning. The playground or an open field can be great places to practice different skills through sports. Teach *turn-taking*, *teamwork*, and *following rules* with different games, kickball for example.



Incorporate sports-themes into lessons. Use sports-themes to teach different concepts. For example, a fun way to teach *counting skills* is to have students play basketball with a small hoop and foam ball in the classroom. Have them count each basket (one, two, or three points) and keep the total score. You can put the students in teams to do this activity.



Design your own "Field Day." Have students work in small groups to create their own Field Day consisting of different sporting events. They will work on skills like *planning*, *organizing*, *sequencing*, and *describing* as they put the events together and then present their Day to the class.

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