

NEWS RELEASE

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Teaching Playground Games to Kids

Twenty fifth-graders sat in a circle in the school gymnasium. They passed around the odd-looking ball. It had the texture of a soccer ball, but it was bright yellow and only the size of a grapefruit.

They listened as two students from the University of Saint Mary explained the rules of a game they had never heard of before. The children at Muncie Elementary School, 541 Muncie Rd., in Leavenworth, were about to learn how to play team handball.

Popular in Europe and Asia, the game is a hybrid between basketball and soccer. It's an Olympic sport, but few in the United States know what it is.

The reason the fourth and fifth graders were learning team handball during their physical education class was a Service Learning Project at USM .

Students from an international business management class hoped to share appreciation of other cultures by showing the children four games played by children in other countries.

"As part of our class, the USM students learn to address four concepts of management," said Carlton Philpot, instructor in Business/Accounting. "The need to address globalization, interconnectivity, change, and diversity.

"We partnered with the service-learning office by studying other cultures and found a fun way to share other cultures with the community."

For the service learning project, the students were divided up into groups of 20. Every 20 minutes, they rotated to a new area where USM students taught them a new game.

In team handball, each side has seven players with one player as the goalkeeper. The soccer-style goal is 6'7" tall and 10' wide. Versions of the game are played outdoors, but most leagues play indoors.

Players pass the ball around similar to basketball, but are only allowed to hold the ball for three seconds before they must pass the ball or shoot. Players can take three steps without dribbling the ball. And they are restricted from getting any closer than 18 feet to the goal – marked by a line on the floor.

Like any new game, the first few minutes were slow and awkward. But the game picked up speed. Soon, teachers could see a sparkle in the eye of the children as they shared a game played half-way around the world.

The students also learned three other playground games from USM students – Australian Hopscotch, British Bulldog, and Italy's "What time is it, Mr. Wolf?"

Australian Hopscotch is similar to the game played here. A walkway of 18-inch squares was drawn on the playground asphalt with the numbers 1 through 10 placed sequentially in each square.

Students tossed a stone which landed in one of the squares. Then they had to avoid hopping in that square. On the return to square one, they needed to pick up the stone.

British Bulldog is played in an open field. Students marked off a square that was 40-feet long north-to-south and 20-feet wide east-to-west.

Two children are designated “bulldogs” and can roam within the box while the rest of the children had to run through the box from east-to-west without getting tagged.

Any student that gets tagged remains in the box as new bulldogs. Then the remaining children run through the box from west-to-east. The round continues until everyone is tagged. Then they start a new round.

In Italy’s “What time is it, Mr. Wolf?,” one child is designated Mr. Wolf. The rest of the children stand along a starting line about 50 feet away. They call out “What time is it, Mr. Wolf?”

Mr. Wolf can call out, “12 o’clock,” or any of the 12 hours of the day. The children must take that many steps in the direction of Mr. Wolf. Then they call out again, “What time is it Mr. Wolf?” The wolf can answer with any of the 12 hours of the day, but the wolf can only use each of the 12 numbers once in each round. Children can ask the question up to four times.

But at any time, Mr. Wolf can say “It’s dinner time,” turn and chase all the children back towards the starting line. The first one the wolf catches becomes the new wolf.

“I liked team handball best,” said one of the children, confirming the survey taken at the end of the period. British Bulldog came in second.

“The children really enjoyed learning the games,” said Margaret Howard, AmeriCorps-VISTA Service-Learning Specialist at USM, who helped arrange the session. “And the teachers were glad to add some new games to the mix.”

“We’re going to see what we can come up with in the future,” she added.

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