

3.10.4 The Yarn Network

Brief description and rules for conducting the learning activity

The “Yarn Network” is a quick energizer (and/or icebreaker) exercise in which the teacher uses a physical object to teach a concept relevant to the lesson. In this exercise, the teacher uses a simple ball of yarn. The students stand in a circle and, by tossing the ball of yarn to one another (while holding the yarn in their hands), create a large, physical web. When one child lets go, the sagging web proves everyone is essential. This activity helps the elementary students visually understand connectedness.

Skill focus

- **Primary Skill Focus**
 - Connectedness
- **Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus**
 - Valuing people and nature,
 - Emotional regulation,
 - Flexibility,
 - Curiosity,
 - Sense of wonder and openness,
 - Creativity

Age group	Student number	Duration
6-10 years old students	whole class	10 – 15 minutes

Proposed step by step implementation of the learning activity:

In this exercise, students use a simple ball of yarn to visualize the connections among themselves, while each one shares their thoughts on the current lesson topic, demonstrates their existing knowledge, or solves the current task.

Rules:

1. Everyone must have a turn (the ball of yarn may only be thrown to someone who has not had it yet).
2. The yarn must be held tightly, but not too tightly.
3. While throwing a ball of yarn, the student must answer a short question that is given by the teacher.

Running the activity:

1. **Setting up the space:** The teacher asks the students to stand in a large, spacious circle (by moving the desks aside).
2. **Presenting the subject/exercise/task:** The teacher gives an open-ended task related to the lesson’s topic.

3. **Starting the net:** The teacher starts by holding the end of the yarn, answers the question, and then throws the ball of yarn to a student on the other side of the circle.
4. **Knitting the net:** The student who catches the ball also grabs the thread (they can wrap it around their finger once), answers the question, and then throws the ball to someone who has not had it yet. This continues until the ball has been caught by everyone, and a large, tangled spiderweb forms in the middle of the circle.
5. **The discussion:** The teacher asks the students to take a small step back so that the web tightens. Then they ask 1–2 students to let go of the thread. The web immediately sags and loses its shape. "See? If someone doesn't participate or is absent, the entire community's network is weakened." What did those two or three students who just let go of the string say, or what clever ideas did they contribute to our work?

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

This activity requires a spacious area. Desks and chairs should be pushed to the walls of the classroom so that the entire class can form a single large, unbroken circle. It can also be carried out perfectly outdoors in a schoolyard.

How does this learning activity develop this primary skill?

Connectedness is an invisible, abstract concept that can be difficult for 6- to 10-year-olds to understand. This energizing exercise makes connections visual and physically tangible. The children hold a piece of the community's network in their own hands, figuratively and literally.

They not only visually see but also physically feel the yarn being pulled when their partner moves, our missing. The exercise visually demonstrates that the class is a network, and if someone is not part of it (or lets the yarn go), it affects everyone, while the children also feel how their shared knowledge is built and how valuable it is to connect and help each other.

What do we want to achieve regarding primary skill development (student understanding and/or behaviour)?

As a result of this activity, students will be able to:

- recognize and understand that, as members of a team or class, everyone is responsible for the others.
- Understand that everyone is needed to maintain the "strong network," regardless of their role.
- connect the network metaphor to real-life relationships and choose one caring action
- practice respectful communication and encouragement while working in a group
- understand that actions can affect others because we are connected
- actively pay attention/listen to their peers (so they know who has not been passed the string yet)
- maintain eye contact,
- consciously involve their quieter peers in the game as well.

Suggested use, and practical subject-related examples

The activity can be used as a warm-up before any lesson or group work, or as an energizer during the lesson for 10 minutes.

- Subject-independent class teacher lesson: The topic could be "What do you bring to this community?"
- Math: A student says a number, and whoever catches the ball must add 3 to it.
- Language Arts: Word chain (students must say a new word starting with the last letter of the previous word, then throw the yarn),
- Literature: collaboratively creating a story where everyone adds a sentence.

Materials and tools needed for implementation:

One large, brightly coloured (e.g., red, or yellow) ball of thick yarn (that does not break easily).

Guiding questions

- Who hasn't held the yarn ball yet? Look around to see who is left out!
- What do you feel on your fingers when someone on the other side of the circle pulls the yarn?
- How can we hold the network so that it is nice and taut, but doesn't cut anyone's hands?

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Students drop the yarn when they throw the ball of yarn.
Tip: Ask them to loosely wrap the yarn around their index finger once before throwing.
- **Challenge:** The yarn gets too tangled, or the ball falls apart during the throw.
Tip: Teach the "underhand throw" technique. Ask the students to toss the ball to their partner gently, not with force.
- **Challenge:** The same popular kids always get the yarn, while others are left out.
Tip: The strictest rule: you may only throw the ball to someone who is not already holding the net, and you must call out their name loudly before throwing.
- **Challenge:** Students pull the net too hard, which can cause it to break or hurt others
Tip: Make it clear from the beginning that this is a sensitive net. If someone pulls on it, the activity stops.
- **Challenge:** Children freeze up and cannot answer the question when they have the ball of yarn.
Tip: Keep the question simple and with low stakes (e.g., "What is your favourite colour?"). The focus should be on physically creating the web, not on complicated answers.

Difficulty level tailoring

Teachers can tailor the learning activity to three difficulty levels to meet students' needs.

- **Beginner learners (6-7 years old):** The simplest questions requiring one-word answers (e.g., favourite animal). The focus is on the visual experience of the network.
- **Advanced learners (8-9 years old):** Ask a question that requires them to respond to the previous person (e.g., "Peter likes apples, and I like pears," then throw).

- **Expert learners (9–10 years old):** Once the network is formed, the real challenge begins: the group must unravel the thread backwards without getting tangled up. To do this, they must remember exactly who gave them the ball of yarn and say that student's name when passing it back.

Debriefing and Reflection questions

- How did it feel to look at the network you created together?
- What did you feel when someone let go of the yarn? What does this mean for our class/group?
- How does this yarn network resemble the way we work together here at school day after day?
- Could this net have been created if we had left even just 3–4 people out of the circle? Why is the presence of every single person important?
- Did you pay attention to someone today to whom you usually pay less attention? How did that feel?