3.6.3 The Country Game

Brief description, and rules of the game

This is a dodgeball-style game designed for children over the age of 6, where the objective is for the active player to hit the fleeing opponents with a ball and gradually eliminate them from the game. The children standing around the circle each choose a country name – this is where the game gets its name from.

Skill focus

- **Primary Skill Focus**
  - Flexibility
- **Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus**
  - Emotional awareness (emotional regulation and communication)
  - Curiosity, sense of wonder and openness
  - Resilience
  - Empathy
  - Problem-solving

Age group	Student number	Duration
6 +	6-12 children	20-40 minutes

How to play - brief game rules

1. Children stand around a circle with a diameter of 1.5–2 meters, positioned in a way that allows them to run away easily. A ball is placed in the centre of the circle. Each child chooses a country name, which the game leader writes down on a sheet of paper.
2. The game leader then begins calling out the country names one by one, saying: “Let it be the famous and well-known country... (e.g., Poland).”
3. The child whose country name is called grabs the ball and tries to hit one of the others, while the rest try to escape.
4. If the thrower successfully hits someone, the hit player receives a penalty mark. If the throw misses, the thrower receives the penalty mark. The game leader keeps track of the penalties.
5. Any player who receives three penalty marks is out. The last remaining player wins and becomes the next game leader.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

It is primarily an outdoor game, but it can also be played in a sports hall.

How does this game develop the primary skill?

In the game, children need to pay attention simultaneously to their own movements, the intentions of the player holding the ball, and the positioning of the others. Since players do not know in advance when they will become targets, quick reactions and continuous adaptation are required.

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During the game, children:

- Experience sudden changes in situation, such as when their country name is called and they instantly become runners,
- Practice quick decision-making and rapid adjustment of their movements, for example, when dodging the ball or choosing a new route,
- Learn to cope with making mistakes and the unpleasant feelings that come from being hit,
- Develop concentration as they must constantly watch the game leader and the player throwing the ball,
- Experience how to be present physically, mentally, and emotionally at the same time during a game situation.

The game supports the development of flexibility by helping children adapt in dynamic, fast-changing situations, find new solutions, and process setbacks. Through playing, they learn that change is a natural part of the game – and life – and that every new situation also offers a new opportunity for success.

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

As a result of the activity students:

- Detect changing situations more quickly and flexibly adjust their movements accordingly (e.g., sudden changes in direction, finding new routes),
- Become capable of emotionally shifting from a “I am safe” state to a “I am in danger, I need to act” situation,
- Accept failure as part of the learning process and remain motivated to participate in the next round,
- Develop social flexibility by cooperating in alternating roles and applying the rules during the game,
- Acquire positive self-regulation strategies (e.g., quick situation assessment, seeking new tactics) that can be applied in other situations as well.

Suggested use, and practical examples

Game variant with chalk, without a ball, and without a game leader:

A circle is drawn on the ground and divided into equal sections, with the names of countries written inside each section. The starting player calls out the first country: “Let it be the famous and well-known country .....”

The called player jumps into the centre of the circle and loudly shouts: “One, two, three, stop!”

The others who were not called must run away, but when the shout is made, they are required to stop immediately at the spot where they are. The called country chooses whom to “attack” and measures three steps from the centre of the circle toward the chosen player.

If the attacker reaches the chosen player, they cut off a palm-sized piece from that player’s country section (marked with chalk to shorten the section). If the attacker does not reach the target, then the target takes a palm-sized piece from the attacker’s section. All players return to stand around the circle,

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and the next country to be called is the one that lost a piece in the previous round. During the game, previously lost pieces can be regained using the same method. A player is eliminated from the game when their territory runs out.

This game can be used as a ball game in physical education classes.

It can also be played on a flat, grassy area during excursions or forest schools.

In schoolyards with paved surfaces, the chalk-only, ball-free version is feasible.

Instead of country names, other categories such as flower or animal names can be chosen. This way, the game can also be used to practice multiplication tables, for example.

Materials and tools needed for implementation

a. Ball version: ball, and optionally chalk, stick, or rope to mark the circle depending on the terrain. (The game can also be played without these.) Paper and pencil.
b. Version without ball: sidewalk chalk.

Guiding questions

- What helped you decide quickly which way to run next?
- What did you do when your movement didn't go as you wanted?
- How did you decide when to stop or change direction?
- How did you feel when you got hit or were out? What helped you stay motivated for the next game.

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Students may feel disappointed when they are eliminated from the game.
  Tip: It is helpful to emphasize that elimination is not the end of the game, but a time to prepare for the next round – during this time, they can observe others, learn tactics, and regain motivation to rejoin.
- **Challenge:** They find it difficult to switch roles quickly, for example from a safe position to a runner.
  Tip: At the beginning of the game, it's useful to point out that roles change quickly and this is part of the game. Short warm-up exercises or intentional role changes can help practice this transition.
- **Challenge:** They feel tension if they think they were eliminated unfairly.
  Tip: It is important to emphasize that every attempt is valuable, and elimination is part of the learning process. Reassure the children that the rules apply equally to everyone, and every new round offers a fresh opportunity

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Difficulty level tailoring

Beginners (6-7 years old):

- Gameplay adjustments: Players stand in a smaller circle, reducing running distance and simplifying the situation. Only a few easy-to-remember country names are used.
  The thrower announces in advance whom they will target, giving the runner more time to react. Eliminated players can take on helper or observer roles instead of remaining inactive.
- Children practice adapting their movements to predictable situations while still responding to changes. They learn to anticipate and adjust quickly, gaining confidence in shifting between running, dodging, and observing. This level supports gradual development of flexible thinking in a low-pressure environment.

Advanced learners (8-9 years old):

- Gameplay adjustments: The circle is larger, requiring longer and faster movement. More complex country names, including multiple syllables or similar-sounding names, are used. Multiple balls or dual throwers may be introduced. Roles may change more rapidly, such as calling two country names at once.
- Children experience faster and less predictable changes, requiring quick reassessment of strategy and movements. They strengthen their ability to adjust in real time, make split-second decisions, and cope with multiple simultaneous challenges. This level enhances adaptive thinking and situational awareness.

Experts (9–10 years old):

- Gameplay adjustments: The circle can be maximized in size, and all rules for advanced play apply. Additional challenges such as multiple balls, rapid role changes, and complex country names increase the unpredictability.
- Children must continuously shift attention, adapt their tactics, and anticipate opponents' moves under high-pressure conditions. They develop advanced cognitive and physical flexibility, learn to recover quickly from mistakes, and coordinate their actions with changing circumstances. This level encourages resilience, rapid problem-solving, and mastery of adaptive strategies in dynamic environments.

Debriefing and reflection questions

- How did you feel when you got out?
- Was there a moment when you had to rethink how you moved or what you did? How did you solve it?
- How did you feel when you faced a difficult or surprising situation during the game?
- What did you learn about yourself while playing today?
- If we played again next time, what would you do differently to feel even better or react more skilfully?

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