Commercial Games

Hi Ho! Cherry-O

This is a good game for kindergarten and early 1st grade. Children take turns spinning a spinner and taking the number of cherries indicated off their trees and placing them in their buckets. If the bird or dog are spun, children must take two cherries out of their buckets and place them back on their trees. If the spilled bucket is spun, children must take all of their cherries out of the bucket and place them back on their trees. This game can promote fine motor coordination as children practice putting cherries in and taking cherries out of their buckets.
Some problems we have encountered are:
a) The spinner does not have on it how many cherries to take away if the bird or dog is spun (players have to either remember or consult the rules).
b) The cherries are very small and may be difficult for little fingers to manipulate.
c) The placement of the trees is too close to the spinner, so that children often knock their or other players' cherries off the trees when they spin. One solution is to cut the board apart, so that each player has a tree and bucket of his or her own, not attached to the others.
Goals:
1. Counting from 1-10.
2. Fine motor coordination
3. Positionals (off, into)
4. Turn taking

Uno

Uno is one of those games that can be adapted to fit a number of different developmental levels. Some educational goals addressed by **Uno** are number recognition, color recognition, reading (the word cards), decentering to consider two characteristics of a card simultaneously (number and color), and directionality (when a *Reverse* card is played). In addition, children can figure out strategies (such as the benefit of saving a *wild* card to use to go out). Perspective taking is promoted as children think about the benefits of concealing their cards from their opponents. A preschool version is also available. Uno can be varied in the following ways, depending on the ability levels of the children playing:
a) Do not use the word cards. Sometimes the word cards, particularly the *Skip* and *Reverse* cards, can be confusing to young children.
b) Do not use the *Wild Draw Four* cards. Sometimes drawing four cards can be very discouraging to young children and can cause them to lose interest in the game.
c) Use the *Wild Draw Four* cards, but do not adhere to the rule that you can only play them if you do not have a card of the correct color. The rules governing how one determines if a *Wild Draw Four* card has been played legally or not are too complicated for young children.
d) Do not keep score. Simply play that the first person to get rid of his or her cards is the winner.
e) Do not invoke the rule that a player has to yell "Uno!" when he or she has only two cards. This is often very hard for young children to remember.
Goals:
1. Number recognition
2. Color recognition
3. Reading
4. Directionality
5. Classification (by number, word, or color)
6. Perspective taking

Dominoes

This is a good game for young children because it is so simple and many children can play at once. *Double Nine Dominoes*, described on the back of the box, can be adapted for young children in the following ways:
a) Do not require that players continue to draw from the draw pile until they get a playable domino. Simply have play move to the next person if the domino drawn from the draw pile cannot be played.
b) Do not keep score. Simply play until one person has used all of his or her dominoes, or until no more dominoes can be played. The person with the fewest dominoes is the winner.

Goals:
1. Number recognition
2. Classification (matching)
3. Turn taking

Connect Four

This is a good game for promoting spatial reasoning. Children have to decenter to think about lines going four different directions at once--horizontally, vertically, diagonally to the right, and diagonally to the left. In addition, they have to consider the role of gravity in deciding where to place their marker, because the marker will always drop to the lowest position on the grid. They also have the opportunity to reason about what the opponent might do next and evaluate possible moves.

Goals:
1. Spatial reasoning
2. Directionality
3. Physics (gravity)
4. Turn taking

Checkers

Checkers is a particularly good game for promoting perspective taking logical reasoning. Children learn how to evaluate possible moves in terms of what the opponent might do next, and how this will affect their position in the game. Children also reason spatially as they think about what constitutes a legal and an illegal jump, which direction to move, and how to block opponents' jumps.

Goals:
1. Spatial reasoning
2. Logical reasoning
3. Perspective taking
4. Turn taking

Physical Knowledge Games

The following games have in common the characteristic of promoting knowledge about physical phenomena. Children have opportunities to reason about gravity, balance, force, and trajectory. Therefore, they can be seen as making a contribution to the elementary science curriculum.

For more information about physical knowledge activities, see:
Kamii, C., & DeVries, R. (1978/1993). Physical Knowledge in Preschool Education: Implications of Piaget's Theory. New York: Teachers College Press.

Don't Spill the Beans

Children take turns carefully placing one bean at a time onto the lid of the bean jar, which is balanced and can tip to one side or the other. If a player tips the bean jar and spills the beans, he or she must take the spilled beans and add them to his or her collection. The object of the game is to be the first person to get rid of all his or her beans. Children must try to figure out what causes the bean jar to tip (too many beans on one side), thus reasoning about the physics involved in balancing. Children have the opportunity to count their beans, although children do not need to know how to count to play this game. Finally, this game does not need to be played as a competitive game. Children can simply play the game, taking turns placing beans on the jar and watching as they succeed or fail in keeping the jar upright.

Note: The instructions to this game are also written in Spanish.
Goals:
1. Fine motor coordination
2. Counting
3. Physics (weight and balance)
4. Turn taking

Ants in the Pants

This is another good game to use with kindergarten children to promote fine motor coordination. It is sort of like tiddly-winks, but easier. Children try to flip plastic ants into a container shaped like a pair of overalls. Each child flips a different color. Children have to figure out what is the best way to exert pressure on their ant in order to make it fly up and into the pants. They must think about how to aim their ant to get it into the pants. And they must think about what is the optimum distance away from the pants to place the ant.
Problem: As the rules are written, children do not take turns, but all flip at once. The winner is the first person to get all of his or her ants into the pants. Played this way, it can get pretty chaotic. Also, cooperation is not promoted. If the rules are changed so that children take turns flipping one ant at a time into the pants, children can watch each other succeed or fail in getting their ants into the pants, and can learn from each other. Also, the teacher can ask questions such as "Is it easier to get your ant in when you put it closer to the pants?" "What happens when you press down harder?" etc.

Note: The instructions to this game are also written in Spanish.
Goals:
1. Fine motor coordination
2. Spatial reasoning
3. Physics (force, distance, trajectory)

Don't Break the Ice

This is a game of physics that kindergarten and first grade children can be successful at. The set up consists of a square frame and blocks of "ice" which are wedged into the frame. One large block is the size of four small blocks (2 X 2) and holds the Iceman. Children take turns tapping blocks of ice out of the frame with a small mallet. The object of the game is *not* to be the one to cause the Iceman to fall through the ice. Children have the opportunity to reason about the physics of what holds the ice in place. They must decenter to notice both the vertical and horizontal rows, and to notice that an ice block can remain in the frame only if it is being held in place by a row of ice blocks. Children must notice the effects on other ice blocks of tapping out any particular block of ice. Fine motor coordination is promoted as children must tap carefully, hitting only the block they intend to hit and not any neighboring ice blocks. This game does not have to be played competitively. Children can simply take turns tapping out ice blocks, trying not to cause the Iceman to fall.

Note: The instructions to this game are also written in Spanish.
Goals:
1. Fine motor coordination
2. Physics (force, balance, gravity)
3. Decentering (vertical and horizontal lines)
4. Turn taking

Topple

This is another good physics game. Children take turns rolling a die and placing a disk on the correct row (corresponding to the number on the die) of the balancing tower. The disks can be placed on top of each other, and the stacks can get very high. Fine motor coordination is promoted as children must be careful how they place the disks on the tower, so as to keep it from toppling.
Problems: The scoring system is much too complicated for kindergarten and first grade children. It may be better played as a cooperative game. Children take turns rolling the die and placing disks on the tower, and the object of the game is for them to get all of the disks onto the tower without making it topple. In this way, children can talk together about where the best place to put a disk is, and why.
Suggestion: The numbers on the tower (which determine which row to place the disks on) are simply stamped into the plastic. It might be a good idea to go over these numbers with some sort of paint or marker, to make them easier to read.

Goals:
1. Number recognition
2. Physics (weight and balance, gravity)
3. Turn taking

Ring Toss

This game is just what it sounds like, a ring toss game with two posts and plastic rings that children throw, trying to get the rings around the posts. It is a good way to promote gross motor coordination. It is also a good physics activity. Children have the opportunity to reason about force and trajectory, as they think about where is the best place to stand to throw the rings, whether it is better to throw the rings up or across, and how hard to throw them. Children exercise their reasoning as they make comparisons such as, "When I throw the ring softly, I can make it come down on the post, but when I throw it hard, it goes too far." This game can also promote number reasoning if children choose to keep score. Children can be encouraged to invent their own scoring system, or they can use the system suggested with the game, in which "touchers" score 2 points, "leaners" score 3 points, and "ringers" score 5 points.

Goals:
1. Gross motor coordination
2. Physics (force, distance, trajectory)
3. Number (score keeping)
4. Turn taking