The ethnic and cultural diversity of students in U.S. public schools is continually increasing. Between 2000 and 2017, the percentage of students who were White decreased from 61% to 48%, and that number is expected to decrease to 44% by 2029, while the percentages of all other identified ethnic groups (Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and two or more races) is expected to grow or remain steady (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). As our schools are currently more diverse than ever and will only continue to become more diverse throughout the next several years, increases in diversity awareness and education should occur within schools as well.

The physical education (PE) classroom may arguably be the most opportune location within a school to incorporate multicultural instruction into curricula. Children are naturally inquisitive and often enjoy both socializing and learning through physical activity (Murphy & Maeda, 2012). Physical activity therefore is an excellent medium through which students can experience, learn and value sports and games from different cultures (McGehee & Reeske, 1999). In addition, most physical education classrooms encompass a wide range of knowledge, experience and physical literacy among students. The continual practice of traditional American sports and games will often further widen this
range. However, the introduction of novel games and activities allows all students to begin at a relatively even level and ideally provide a more unified and equitable experience for all learners (Murphy & Maeda, 2012).

The purpose of this article is to identify several traditional games from diverse cultures around the world, and to describe simple, effective modifications for their use in a physical education classroom. Inclusion of these multicultural games into a physical education curriculum can provide opportunities for students to develop respect for other cultures and exhibit responsible personal and social behavior, while also enhancing other components of the physically literate student. Each game could be taught and played within a specific unit dedicated to cultural diversity or could be included within a different unit that may focus on a particular skill or fitness concept. In addition, physical educators are encouraged to explore opportunities with classroom teachers from other content areas in an interdisciplinary collaboration.

**Catch the Tail (Nigeria)**

*Equipment:* Several scarves or flags.

*Background/cultural significance:* With the expansion of Western culture into many African nations, Indigenous knowledge systems—or the cultural integrity of native people in such areas—have experienced waves of dissolution over the past several years. Traditional playground games, such as Catch the Tail, have become less popular and have given way to more popular televised sports, such as soccer, golf, cricket and rugby (Mawere, 2012). However, through efforts such as marketing and government influence (through laws) in protecting these Indigenous knowledge systems, Nigeria and other African nations are now attempting to prevent the extinction of valued customs. Catch the Tail is a traditional playground game of children of Nigeria; however, it can also be included within a physical education program not only for its physical benefits, but also as a tool to teach the skills of teamwork, strategy and spatial awareness within the cognitive domain and the appreciation of other cultures within the affective domain.

*Traditional play:* Each child chooses or is assigned a partner. One partner places a handkerchief or scarf in the waistband of their pants and places their hands on the back of the other partner’s shoulders (making a two-person “train”). When play begins, the “trains” move throughout a designated playing area. The partner in the front will attempt to pull the scarf from the backside of the opposing teams. The person in the back will try to avoid having their scarf pulled from the other teams. If a team loses their scarf, they are eliminated from the game. Play continues until only one team remains.

*Suggested modifications for use in PE:* The game can begin in the traditional manner, with several groups of two. One partner will be in front and will attempt to grab the scarves from other groups, while the partner in the back tries to avoid their team’s scarf from being grabbed by other groups.

However, the following adaptations can be made to avoid Catch the Tail from being an elimination game:

- Teams who lose their scarves go to a location outside of the playing area and must perform a fitness activity before picking up a new scarf and continuing with the activity.
- Allow each team to start with multiple scarves. A team may only pull one at a time from another team, but after each steal they are allowed to reattach that scarf to their back. Even if all scarves are removed from a team, that team can still continue to play by grabbing scarves from other teams. The team with the most scarves after a given time period is the winner.
- Teams begin with one scarf. Any team that loses their scarf must connect to the team that stole it from them. Eventually, larger groups of four, six, eight and so on will emerge until one final group of the entire class remains.

**Kick Ball Relay (Northern Mexico and Southwestern United States)**

*Equipment:* Tennis balls, soccer ball, or other playground ball

*Background/cultural significance:* Kick Stick Relay and Kick Ball Relay are activities derived from Indigenous cultures of Northern Mexico and the Southwestern United States. The activity has a strong environmental theme, as a traditional relay was held to encourage bringing rain to local crops (Parker & Ninham, 2002). The Pueblo root words of the event translate to “The Game of the Clouds.” As cited in Parker and Ninham (2002), according to a native Pueblo, Jose Rey Toledo (The Earth Circle Foundation, 1995):
You see the clouds up there, you invariably see clouds racing with each other. Some go faster than the others, and that’s why the race is called the game of the clouds. We don’t know where the clouds are going to, but I’m sure they’re racing somewhere where the rain is needed.

Traditional play: Participants would continually kick a small stick or ball made of tree root over an 8- to 20-mile-long course in the desert or mountains. The activity would be performed individually, with partners, or with a small group (Parker & Ninham, 2002).

Suggested modifications for use in PE: Older (high school) students could perform this activity on an outdoor field of 50 to 100 yards. For younger (elementary) students, the length of a gym or a shorter 20- to 30-yard space on an outdoor field would be more suitable. Similar to traditional play, the game can be performed individually, with a partner, or in a small group. Any type of ball may be used, or, for a greater challenge, a stick or other oblong-shaped object could be utilized as well. If in partners or small groups, students can be evenly separated behind a line on the field or in the gym. On "go," each partner will alternate kicking the ball to the opposite end line. Once the ball crosses the end line they will reverse and alternate kicking back to the start line. The activity ends when the ball and all partners cross the start/finish line. While the activity could certainly be competitive in nature, teachers may choose to encourage active participation and support rather than competition.

Koolchee (Aboriginal Australia)

Equipment: Tennis balls or other playground balls

Background/cultural significance: Koolchee is a ball-throwing and hitting game that was played by the Diyari people of the Lake Eyre district of South Australia. The balls used in the game were similarly called koolchee. These balls were made from gypsum, sandstone, mud, or other material that was easy to mold together into a round shape. The traditional koolchee balls were approximately 8 to 10 c.m. (approximately three to four in.) in diameter. The game was typically played by children for hours at a time and only ended when many of the balls became broken or otherwise unusable and too few were left to cause enough excitement (Australian Sports Commission, 2008).

Traditional play: Two opposing sides of equal numbers would stand behind end lines of a court that was about 20 to 30 m (approximately 60 to 90 ft.) long and 10 to 15 m (approximately 30 to 45 ft.) wide. Each player would have multiple koolchee balls. The game would begin with each team rolling their koolchee balls toward the opposing team. The idea of the game is for players to roll their balls and hit koolchee balls that were rolled by the other team. Players may only use one koolchee at a time. Players would stay outside of the designated lines of the play area during the game. However, when no koolchees were left, the game would temporarily stop to allow players to collect the koolchees within the playing area so the game could continue. Koolchee is a traditional cooperative game, as no set scoring method is used.

Suggested modifications for use in PE: Koolchee can be played using the lines on a traditional volleyball, tennis or badminton court. For younger students or students with physical or cognitive disabilities, a smaller court could be created using cones or any preexisting lines on the gym floor. No matter the size of the court, teachers may choose to structure the game in a modified cooperative format or a competition format.

Cooperative koolchee: A number of bowling pins (approximately 10) are placed along a line halfway between the two groups of players, and the two teams work together to knock them over. The teacher may choose to time how long it takes to accomplish the goal so the students can attempt to break their team record. Players must stay behind their designated end line. To ensure continuous play until the game ends, the teacher should either ensure there is ample supply of balls at each end or designate two students to knock or roll balls that are in the playing area back to the players at the end lines.

Competitive koolchee: Two opposing teams line up at opposite end lines. Five pins are set up approximately 10 feet in front of each team. The goal is for each team to be the first to knock down all the pins that are lined up at the opposite end of the court. Players may “defend” their own pins by rolling koolchees at other koolchees that may knock over one of their pins. However, they must be careful not to knock down one of their own pins, as all pins stay down regardless of how they are knocked down. No players are allowed on the court during game play. Depending on the ability of the players, the pins may be knocked down randomly or in order.

Pebble Toss (Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon)

Equipment: Hula hoop or bucket/trash can, several small objects, such as yarn balls or bean bags

Background/cultural significance: Many African schools do not have a required PE program. Furthermore, both children and adults in many geographic locations have little
access to sports equipment. Therefore, many traditional and cultural games of Africa involve either no formal equipment or simply use whatever resources are available (Clements et al., 2008). While there are several traditional games from Africa that are more physically active in nature and include dancing or chasing-and-fleeing components, pebble toss remains a fun and popular option because of the lack of sports equipment and the heat of these west-central African countries that lie along or near the equator. It is a game that includes both strategy and eye-hand coordination, so the inclusion of pebble toss into a PE curriculum could help to build students' physical and cognitive skills in addition to their affective appreciation of another culture.

Traditional play: The game is traditionally played in small groups. A small hole is dug in sand or dirt, and each player stands a given distance from the hole. This distance would vary based on the size of the hole and the skill level of the players, but would often be between 10 and 20 feet. One at a time, each player tries to toss their pebble into the hole. Any player who misses their pebble into the hole retrieves their pebble and sits near—but not blocking—the hole. The others then attempt another toss for a goal. All seated players are allowed to toss their object at the other students’ airborne objects, attempting to block shots. The game continues until all players are seated after they score a goal. The last player to score begins the next game as the sole seated defender, while others join them in the seated position after they score a goal. While softer objects, such as yarn balls or bean bags, should be used in a PE setting rather than pebbles, the teacher should always stress safety and instruct the students to never throw their object directly at another student.

Suggested modifications for use in PE: Instead of a hole dug in the ground, a hula hoop can be placed on the ground and bean bags, yarn balls, or other equipment can be used as the “pebbles.” The game could be played using the traditional rules in small groups, or it could be played in one larger group. For the larger group, instead of the players tossing their objects one at a time, each student would simultaneously toss their object. Those that land it in the hoop would retrieve it and sit near the hoop. Those that do not land their object in the hoop also retrieve their objects, return to the boundary outside the hoop, and continue to attempt to score while the seated players try to block by tossing their objects at the other students’ airborne objects (Bassett, 2010). Other suggestions using this method might include the following: (1) each player must stand on a poly spot or other marker that is placed a predetermined distance from the hoop; (2) after a player scores a goal, they must sit behind the goal rather than scattered in various places around it; (3) two to three players are selected to be “blockers” prior to the start of the game. They will sit near or behind the goal and try to block the airborne objects of the other students. Once a player scores a goal, they switch places with one of these “blockers.” This method would keep the “tosses” and “blockers” consistent and would prevent the game from becoming an elimination-type game.

To make the large-group version more active and faster-paced, adaptations may include using a large can or pail as a goal and tennis balls instead of bean bags and having students continually toss balls as quickly as possible. When a player makes a goal, they step in and try to block the others with their hands, body and so on. Students must retrieve balls as quickly as they can and continue to attempt to score a goal. Note: If using this option be sure to emphasize to the students that throwing directly at the blocker is not permitted.

Peteca (Brazil)

Equipment: Shuttlecocks or petecas, badminton or volleyball nets and court

Background/cultural significance: Peteca is a traditional Indigenous sport of Brazil that can essentially be described as badminton played with the hands. The word peteca is a Tupian word for “to strike” and describes both the sport itself and the shuttlecock used during play. The Tupi people were an Indigenous tribe who occupied much of the coastal region of Brazil when the Portuguese first arrived in the 16th century. The Tupi people would play peteca during celebratory occasions along with dances and songs, but would also play during the cold weather months to keep warm. Early peteca shuttlecocks were very primitive, consisting of stones wrapped in leaves tied inside an ear of corn. Current petecas used in competition now consist of a filled leather bag with feathers stuck to it (Horowitz, 2009). Although the sport has been around for generations, the first official rules of peteca were written in 1985, and put into place in 1987 to allow for matches between cities and states of Brazil.

Traditional play: Singles’ games are played on courts 15 m x 5.5 m (approximately 49 ft. x 18 ft.). Doubles’ games are played at 15 m x 7.5 m (approximately 49 ft. x 24 ft.). Mini-peteca is played on a standard-sized badminton court. Men’s games are played using a net 2.43 m (approximately 8 ft.) high, while the net for women’s games is set at 2.24 m (approximately 7 ft. 4 in.). In a traditional game, the first team to 12 points wins the game, while points can only be scored by the serving team. Best of three games wins a match. Serving must be underhand and made from behind the end line. It is illegal for the peteca to hit the net during the serve, and the service must be served. There is no set rotation for service order.

During game play, only one hit per side is allowed. All hits must be made with an open hand. It is legal for the peteca to hit the net and go over as long as it is not a serve. There is a 30-second limit on the volley. If the volley is not completed in 30 seconds, the serving team loses its service.

Suggested modifications for use in PE: Since the hand-striking action of peteca may be a relatively novel skill and since the peteca shuttlecock may be a new piece of equipment for the students, it may be advantageous to practice skills through lead-in games prior to beginning official gameplay. One lead-in game might be structured the following way:
Students form circles in small groups of four to six. The server calls out another student’s name from the group prior to serving, then strikes the peteca with the palm of their hand and serves toward that student. The student whose name was called calls a different student’s name, then volleys the peteca in the direction of that student. The activity continues in this manner, striking the peteca up—rather than laterally—so the next student has a better chance to continue the volley and hit it to another. Once the peteca hits the ground or a player strikes the peteca two consecutive times, the round is over and play begins again with a different server. Groups can also count the number of consecutive volleys and try to break their own group’s record in subsequent attempts.

Once gameplay begins using official (or modified) peteca rules and courts, the teacher may wish to employ one or more of the following adaptations:

- allow the server to move closer to the net,
- allow for more than one hit per side,
- use badminton courts (slightly smaller size than official peteca courts) and badminton nets (likely easily available),
- adjust the court size even smaller than that of a badminton court,
- lower the net, and
- add more players to each team (3-on-3 or 4-on-4).

**Spearing the Disc (Ethiopia and Aboriginal Australia)**

**Equipment:** One hula hoop, foam noodles or several small objects, such as balls or beanbags

**Background/cultural significance:** This was a traditional game in which variations were played among aboriginal tribes of Australia as well as several of the 80+ tribes of Ethiopia. While the game was inherently fun in nature, it was also used as a method to develop spear-hunting skills in young boys.

**Traditional play:** Variations of this game exist; however, a common form in both Australia and Ethiopia included one individual rolling a thick bark disc across a cleared space or down a gradual slope. In the Aboriginal version, one individual would roll the disc and yell “gool-gool” (“going-going”) (Australian Sports Commission, 2008). Players would then hurl a small spear at the disc as it rolled past them. The player whose spear hit closest to the center of the disc was the winner. Another Aboriginal version used two sticks tied together to form a cross in place of a wooden disc. The cross was thrown so it bounced along the ground, which was meant to resemble a bounding wallaby. The line of players would attempt to knock down the cross with boomerangs and/or small spears (New South Wales Office of Sport, n.d).

**Suggested modifications for use in PE:** One student is designated as the “leader” and provided with a hula hoop. All other students are provided an object (e.g., foam noodle, ball or beanbag) to throw. These students form a line, shoulder-to-shoulder, arm’s length apart, facing the path the rolling hoop will take. When the leader rolls a hoop, each player attempts to throw the object through the moving hoop as it passes. After the hoop passes everyone, players retrieve their objects. In another traditional version of this activity, players would be eliminated if they failed to throw their object through the hoop and play would continue until only one person remained. However, to prevent the negative stigma of being eliminated, to increase activity levels, or to use alternate equipment, any of the following modifications can be made:

- Students receive a point if they successfully throw their object through the hoop. Students keep track of their points and share their scores after a given number of rounds.
- Two students are designated as “leaders” and placed at opposite ends of the playing area. The students roll the hoop back and forth to each other as quickly and accurately as they can. The other students must then be quick to retrieve their object after each throw in order to be ready for the next round. Play can continue for a specified number of “rounds” or a period of time determined by the teacher. This is a faster-paced modification that can provide more excitement and increase heart rates rather rapidly.
- A large ball (any ball from the size of a basketball up to a large inflatable exercise ball) is rolled by the “leader.” Instead of “spears,” the other players throw tennis balls or beanbags at the larger ball. Points could be earned for each hit, and the continuous method of two students rolling the ball back and forth could be utilized if desired.

**Conclusion**

Similar to the diversity in cultures and traditions of each of these games, they are also diverse in their own ways in the types of locomotor and nonlocomotor skills represented and the strategies involved. While different suggestions for modification were presented for each game, there are certainly various other ways to modify each of them to fit the various skill levels and unique needs of your particular students. Different equipment could be employed, boundaries of the playing area could be reduced or extended, and rules could be modified to encourage more cooperative play or increases in movement levels and heart rates of students. Just as numerous sports and games currently popular in the United States can be adapted for students with physical or cognitive disabilities, so too can sports and games from different cultures.

Regardless of whether a multicultural game is modified in multiple ways or closely aligns with its traditional method of play, the inclusion of such games into a physical education curriculum can provide benefits far greater than increases in physical fitness levels or the development of skills. It can be a history lesson about a unique culture that can be taught using fun, interactive and physically active methodology. It can allow students
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to establish connections between the origins of contemporary sports and activities and the ways in which they are currently played. Perhaps more importantly, it can promote respect and appreciation for individuals from different backgrounds—attributes that will most certainly become more valuable as students grow, mature and endure new experiences throughout the remainder of their lives.

References

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