

Practice & Skill Development: Games

In the situations in which an Instructor operates, games can be an effective method for by which interest can be sustained and technique improved.

Repetition and practice are key ingredients for improving technique and having participants' focus on improving particular skills. Encouraging participants to focus on a particular skill for long enough is a quite challenge. Devising a game that helps focus attention on a specific skill or technique is one solution to this challenge.

An Instructor should have an assortment of games and enjoyable focussed tasks that he/she can use when instructing canoeing. It would be very difficult to learn a series of games by heart so an instructor should understand the principle behind using games and then seek to think up new games to suit each different group and situation they find themselves in.

Characteristics of good canoeing games

- Enjoyable
- Simple and easy to understand
- Have a clear challenge
- Safe

Games could be divided into three general categories

- Individual task orientated games
- Group or team games
- Wet games

Individual task orientated games

These games or tasks form a very important part of EDICT. The "T" in EDICT stands for task and is often the most neglected part of this teaching methodology. The task affords the participant an opportunity to utilise what they have learned and improve and perfect the new technique. The task reinforces the techniques and encourages the participant to spend more time practising and focussing on the technique they might in normal circumstances.

While it is important that an instructor learns to invent new games and tasks for those being taught a few examples are listed now to encourage and stimulate ideas in the instructor. Naturally the best way to learn, evaluate and remember a task/game is to see it in action.

Sweep Stroke.

Aim of Task / Game	That the participant develops an effective sweep stroke
Object of the Task / Game	The group is set the challenge of completing 5 complete circles using the sweep stroke. When finished they stick their paddle up in the air.
Developments	The next challenge might involve using reverse sweeps or combined sweeps with those who won the last competition being set an additional task. A relay race involving a sweep strokes at each changeover.

Group or Team Games

Group or team games are very important in canoeing. They: encourage group awareness and group identity, which is important for all canoeing. Group games also take the pressure away from the individual and change the focus to the group winning or succeeding at a particular challenge. This is important for those, who are feeling unsuccessful or lacking in confidence in their canoeing. Again there are as many possibilities here as ones imagination allows, the following example has been used successfully with both adults and children.

Sponge Ball.

Aim of Task / Game	That the participants develop group co-operation and improve their manoeuvrability and paddling speed.
Object of the Task / Game	One person is selected to be "on". Usually the best paddler is picked. A playing 'pitch' is outlined - the size of which depends on the experience and fitness of the group. Emphasise safety points; no ramming and use of paddles near face etc... if someone capsizes suspend play. The- paddler who is on must hit the back of the canoe of another paddler in order that they may be caught. When someone is 'caught' they are added to the team that is on and can now pass the sponge between themselves in order to get into a good shooting position close by a paddler who is yet to be-caught.
Developments	Playing the same game with the additional rule that all paddlers can paddle on one side only; or that they can paddle backwards only. With more experienced paddlers mixed with beginners you could get the more experienced paddlers to paddle with their hands only.

Wet Games

Light-hearted paddling games can encourage relaxed, efficient skill development at any age and at any ability. The purpose of these games is to enhance the enjoyment and safety of canoeists and kayakers through interesting activities that build solid skills and knowledge. Having participants get wet towards the end of a session and get over anxieties regarding the water and capsizing is an important part of a canoeing session. The instructor must use their experience to ensure that these games are appropriate to the experience of the group and that they are organised in a sufficient depth of water. Don't beat a good game into the ground. Stop it when interest and energy is high. Then players will want to return to the game at another time.

The role of the instructor in these wet games is especially important. Instructors with limited control over their groups often have ill-defined objectives. Having fun is an important goal, but it has to be accompanied by more specific objectives targeted to key paddling skills to be effective for learning. Be flexible, and change the guidelines to increase safety and to enhance enjoyment. Be ready to stop the game immediately if you sense the energy is spinning out of control. A "freeze" or "time-out" signal understood by all is essential. A whistle is an effective tool and is more likely to be heard in a game situation.

Tandems

Aim of Task / Game	That the participants develop good balance and improve on their low brace and body position in the kayak/canoe.
Object of the Task / Game	The group are taken off the water and paired off. Each pair is given one kayak and a paddle each and are shown how to sit on the kayak in front of and behind the seat. The object of the game is more of a challenge than a race and involves the crew of two completing a very short course without falling into the water. If they fall in they are encouraged to swim back to shore and start again. This game inevitably involves capsizing and instructors should be alert for participants getting cold.
Developments	There are endless variations on this basic game, which include the easier challenge of just one person on the kayak or one person sitting in the kayak with their feet dangling over the sides.

Recommended Books

1. "The American Canoe Association's Kayak and Canoe Games", By Laurie Gullion
2. "Canoe Games", By Dave Ruse