Outdoor lesson

primary

Competitive Chinese whispers

Exploring communication

Great for...

- **English** speaking and listening
- **PSHE** working together

Activity

Usually this well-known game is played for fun – to see how a message is changed as it gets repeated. In this version the winning team is the team that accurately manages to send the message down the line.

1. Outdoors offers plenty of space and no chance of being overheard. Arrange the children into teams (no more than 10 in each) and each team into a line. The children should be at least a few feet apart so that each has to run to the next in order to pass on the message.
2. Whisper a simple message or phrase (you could pick one at random from a book/dictionary or Thesaurus) to each first child in the line. He or she then needs to whisper it into the ear of the next in line, who in turn whispers it to the next and so on down the line. Remind the children that the object is to transmit the message exactly as it was heard – not changing it in anyway (even so, some interesting corruptions are likely to be made!).
3. Get the last child in the line to say the message out loud and compare this to the original.
4. If the message gets changed along the way, discuss the results. Talk about how easily information can become confused by not listening or speaking clearly. Then play the game again!

What you need

- **Plenty of outdoor space**
- **Book, dictionary or Thesaurus**
- **Stopwatch or similar** if playing the more challenging version (see below).

Preparation

- Tell the children about how in the First World War messages – such as 'Send reinforcements, we're going to advance' would be sent back to headquarters by being passed from one soldier to another. Often the message would be corrupted during transmission. In this case, 'Send reinforcements, we're going to advance' was, apparently, corrupted to 'Send three and four pence, we're going to a dance'!
- Talk about gossip – how information can get passed from one person to another, and changed in the process.

Less challenging

- Each child can ask for the phrase to be repeated once if they don't catch it the first time.

More challenging

- Tell the children they need to pass the message down the line as fast as possible. The winning team is the one that not only relays the message correctly but also faster than the other team(s).
- This is great for children learning a foreign language, where the challenge of speaking comprehensibly, and understanding, is more difficult because of the low volume, and a greater mastery of pronunciation is required.

Your notes

Use this space to evaluate the activity

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