AROUND THE SQUARE

This is a game that surprises players with its difficulty.

I sometimes play this at Professional Learning Workshops, causing some teachers to quit in frustration or leave for the toilet to escape the difficulty and pressure.

It's a very valuable game simply because it makes so many things happen. Many of the negative reactions that pop up will be akin to those that occur in the classroom. Given the chance to identify, understand and control them in the game, will make it easier for students to control those reactions in class.

Successful teams can act as models for those students finding it difficult and help them to persevere while in the grip of frustration, annoyance, confusion and often, more than a little hint of embarrassment.

Teams must discuss their problems, find effective solutions, organise themselves and remain optimistic if they're going to improve and succeed.

Feelings of inadequacy and helplessness can rise quickly in the game, as can anger and teachers need to be observant of behaviour so that accurate and beneficial discussions can occur.

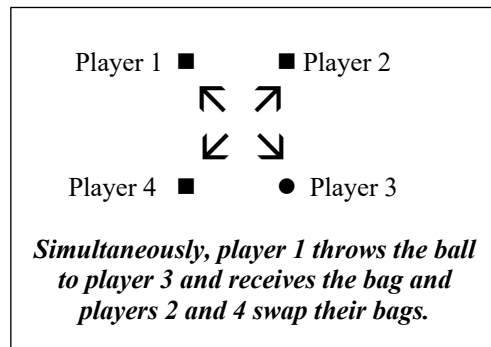Once students achieve the game, they are often surprised and bewildered they found it so difficult.

BEST VENUE	Outdoors or indoors. The space needs to be large enough to accommodate the whole class standing in teams of 4. Each team occupies a 3M x 3M square.
NUMBER OF PLAYERS	Minimum of 8
EQUIPMENT	• 3 Beanbags per team • 1 Soft foam or air-filled ball (8 to 10cm) per team.
SUGGESTED AGES	7 - 12+
OBJECTIVE	Each team must successfully complete the 10 moves of the game. Players throw the beanbags and the ball around the square in a clockwise direction for 1 round. Then, after a diagonal swap of the objects, everything goes back in the opposite direction for 1 round and finishes with a diagonal swap of the objects. This makes a total of 10 moves.
SET UP	• Break the class into teams of 4. Extra players can go with teams to help in the planning and be rotated in at regular intervals.

- Make sure each team has a clear space to itself. Each team makes a square with players about 3 metres apart.

- Player one holds the ball and players 2, 3 and 4 hold a beanbag.

Player 1 – Ball ● → ■ Player 2 – Bag

↑ ↓

Player 4 – Bag ■ ← ■ Player 3 - Bag

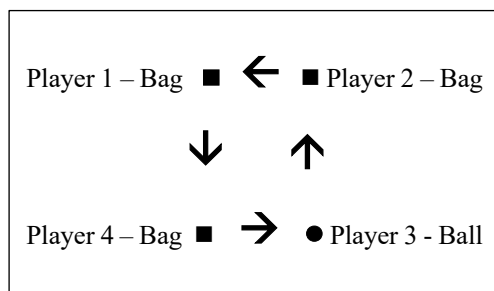***Players are 3 metres apart***
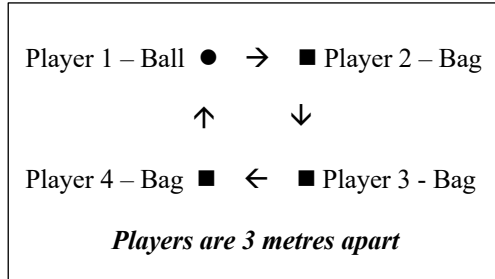
THE PRACTISE

- Players can start in their own time and practise the game until they achieve its objective.

- All players must throw and catch **simultaneously.** Doing this requires cohesion, timing and a system to help it happen.

- On the first move (clockwise) players simultaneously throw their object to the player on their left. This is repeated 3 more times, returning the ball to the first player and completing round 1.

- At this point all players do a simultaneous diagonal swap of their objects.

Player 1 ■ ■ Player 2

↖ ↗
↙ ↘

Player 4 ■ ● Player 3

Simultaneously, player 1 throws the ball to player 3 and receives the bag and players 2 and 4 swap their bags.

- Now the objects travel in an anticlockwise direction with each player throwing their object to the player on their right.

Player 1 – Bag ■ ← ■ Player 2 – Bag

↓ ↑

Player 4 – Bag ■ → ● Player 3 - Ball

	• This is repeated 4 times returning the ball to player 3 and completing round 2. • At this point all players do a simultaneous diagonal swap of their objects. Player 1 ● ■ Player 2 ↖ ↗ ↙ ↘ Player 4 ■ ■ Player 3 ***Simultaneously, player 3 returns the ball to player 1 and player 4 and 2 swap their bags.*** • With the objects back to their original positions and the 10 simultaneous moves completed without error (this includes no missed catches), the game is over. • The first team to complete the game during the practise session, informs the teacher. All the other teams are asked to sit and observe as the team demonstrates. If the team makes a mistake, the demonstration is stopped and everyone returns to the struggle. If the team is successful, it is asked to continue practising to fully secure the sequence in preparation for competition. • After a period of 10 minutes or so, irrespective of how many teams have successfully completed the sequence, the 3 round competition begins to see which team can attain the highest score.
TO PLAY	## THE COMPETITION • Ask all teams to set up and sit in preparation for the competition. • Select a team to be first and ask them to stand and prepare. Then advise the class of the order in which the teams will compete. This will allow every team to be mentally ready in time. • Advise the start team they can start whenever they are ready. It is important that you do not call the start. The first move is critical and often goes wrong. • Your task is to call out the score as they play. Each successful simultaneous throw and catch is given a point and every error receives a resounding "**NO**." Hearing the score can be unsettling for some and uplifting for others; either way it makes a difference to hear the score and it should be called out loudly. **EXAMPLE:** Move 1 - Performed correctly, shout, "ONE." Move 2 – A player had 2 bags in their hand, shout, "NO." Move 3 - Performed correctly, shout, "TWO" Move 4 - Performed correctly, shout, "THREE." Etc. etc…..

SCORING

- Give 1 point for each successful simultaneous move (total 10 points). Shout "**NO**" for each error.

- If, for example, a mistake is made on move 2 to 3 then no point is awarded. The players prepare themselves with the objects they are meant to have on move 3 and then continue to complete as many moves as they can.

    NOTE 1: *On the first playing of the game you can be slightly generous with the how simultaneous each move is. However, remember that acting simultaneously is the crucial part of the game and undue generosity in this area undoes its developmental benefits.*

ROUNDS

- After every team has had its first turn, round 1 is completed.

- Give all teams 1 to 2 minutes to practise between rounds when they are competing for the first time. In subsequent competitions try maintaining momentum and increasing pressure by moving from round to round without time to practise.

- The winner is the team with the highest cumulative score after 3 rounds.

RULES	
	1. Players MUST stand approximately 3 metres apart.
	2. Players may talk to team members during the competition.
	3. No player may have 2 objects in their hands at the same time.
	4. The 10 moves may be performed at a speed that best suits the team.

USEFUL TIPS	
	• A wise move with some classrooms is to avoid a competition entirely and present the game as a problem to overcome. By tackling it in this manner, students have less to prove, are less defensive and may be more open to the life messages within the game. When they are able to play the game reasonably well, you can try a competition of 3 rounds to give them the experience of performing under pressure.
	• Let the students devise their own ways to develop cohesion and efficiency
	• Move around the space observing the working processes of different groups. Occasionally, sharing a thumbnail sketch of various working styles can help teams make helpful adjustments.
	• Keep your eye out for those who feel defeated by the game and are resorting to time wasting, aggressive or dejected behaviour. Help them to see which Life Raft concept and which virtue most needs to be employed if they are to overcome their predicament. Urge them not to run away from the problem but to deal with it.

	• Inviting a struggling group to stand up and demonstrate while the class offers solutions can help every team. Collectively helping a group to get through, builds up the stockpile of information in the class, which in turn assists players to confront difficult problems and relationships and find a way towards a rewarding solution. • In the early stages, only a few students (the successful ones) will enjoy this game but all can benefit from it. It's vital that students are actively engaged in the feedback and discussion process and effectively farming out penetrating questions can help. • Much as there is a need to talk, it's also important not to over talk. Keep observations and comments sharp and incisive and get the students back to working on the problems by tackling the game. • If one team has mastered the game or does it reasonably well, letting them demonstrate their process can raise the overall level of competence. • Should a team demonstrate the game and make an early error, let them start again. Mistakes under pressure are commonplace and recovery takes focus, commitment and confidence and that in itself is a worthwhile lesson.
SUGGESTED QUESTIONS *(In no particular order)*	These questions can be rephrased to suit the age and capabilities of the students in your care and guidance. Questions can be asked before, during or after games sessions. Selecting the right and best moment can make a substantial difference to the depth of the answers and the quality of the student driven discussions. • It is obvious that this game requires throwing and catching skills. Are they the most important skills to have or are there other skills that are equally or more important? • Please share some of the things you are going through in this game. • People have different ways of dealing with difficulty. Assuming you are finding the game difficult, how are you dealing with that? Is anyone in your team dealing with it in a way that annoys you? Is there someone you think is dealing with it better than you are? Does everyone have to deal with it the same way for the team to work effectively? Yes or no, can you say why? Can you also say what you think is the best way for a group or team to deal with something that is difficult? • Do you think your team has the right mix of people to be effective? If yes, what makes them the right mix? If no, what makes them the wrong mix? If nearly, what is not quite right and does making it right require a change of one or more players or a change of one or more player's behaviour? • Please share with your teammates one thing you personally need to improve that would help this game. Please ask your teammates to advise you of the one thing they think you could do to help this game.

	• Generally speaking, do you find it uncomfortable or enjoyable to work with others? Whether you find it uncomfortable or enjoyable, what is the thing you find hardest about working with others? • Do you think being popular makes it easier for people to work with you? Do you think being easy to work with makes a person popular? Can a person who is challenging to work with be a productive person to work with? Please explain your thinking. • When you are working on something with others, what is one thing you want be sure of about each person in the group? • In a team situation, what is the difference between everyone working hard on something and everyone making hard work of whatever they are working on? • Can you describe the behaviours and attitudes of a team of people working hard on something? In other words, if you were watching them what would you see, hear and sense? • Can you describe the behaviours and attitudes of a team of people who are making hard work of something? In other words, if you were watching them what would you see, hear and sense? • Of course, people can also work hard or make hard work of something as individuals. When you are working alone do you generally work hard or make hard work of things? Does that change when you work with others? If it does change, can you say why?
VARIATIONS	1. Playing the game in silence requires sensitivity and awareness, especially starting together after a mistake. 2. Try setting a time limit and having all teams playing at the same time and keeping their own score. Teams try to complete as many circuits as possible. The team with the highest score wins. If teams have the same score, they compete in a playoff. 3. Swap the ball for a much harder object to catch such as a marble or table tennis ball. I have played it with both hard-boiled eggs and raw eggs, but the classes were self-managing enough to resist the temptation to break the eggs for the fun of it. 4. Put a simultaneous clap in-between every catch.
ISSUES & OBSERVATIONS	• This game has a peculiar ability to make people want to give up. The game appears simple but does require a reasonable skill level, as throwing and catching must be done simultaneously. This is not the main difficulty however. The real problem lies in coordinating your actions with 3 other people.

It would seem an easy thing for 4 people to devise a system that allows them all to do the same thing at the same time. But it's not, especially if there are personality clashes, varying skill levels and conflicting needs to be the leader of the group.

There will be groups who endlessly fight about what system to use and groups who never think to use a system at all. The variations of responses to the demands of the game are surprisingly varied.

- For many, the embarrassment of continuously dropping objects and the awkwardness of being out of sync with each other gets too much and escape from the game is the only option left.

  Some will escape by laughter and mucking around. Some will throw the objects at one another in anger and frustration. Others will abuse fellow players, abuse the game or abuse the teacher. It's not unheard of for people to cry or entire teams to sit down dejectedly and refuse to participate.

  Usually though, a team (and it's usually only one) will have found a way to survive, if not to succeed. It's the crisp and insightful analysis of this team and how each player is handling the demands of the game that will prove fruitful.

- If emotions in the class are running high and a strong sense of helplessness pervades the group, it may be best to move to another game and discuss this one at a time when emotions have leveled off and people are feeling better about themselves. If discussion can occur during the process so much the better.