

BANG! BANG! You're Dead!

Power Playing in the classroom

The back story: “*Bang Bang!*” premiered at a half day workshop sponsored by Lisa and the then “Learning Through Adventure Company” (now Ooey Gooley Inc.) in 1998 in San Marcos, California. After two or three presentations we stopped doing the workshop. Why? Because of April 20, 1999. A date that is simply now referred to as “Columbine.” Why did we shelve it after the tragedy? Because folks wanted us to come and do an “anti-violence” workshop and “peaceful classroom” workshop; for some reason folks had an assumption that *Bang Bang!* would provide that. But that is not what *Bang Bang!* is about. *Bang Bang!* is about the importance of providing powerful opportunities for young children. Opportunities to be in control, to feel strong! It is about channeling that natural powerful energy into activities and playful situations. I would (now) go so far as to say that when children have outlets for their feelings and emotions and are in safe places where adults are not threatened by an angry, sad, energetic, loud or upset child, horrifying situations like Columbine won’t happen. We have decided to blow the dust off the material for Summer Session 2006 in response to yet another cycle of questions from folks all across the country. And as always, we take our cues from you. So what *do* you do with that sandwich gun? The topic of power playing also links to so many of our other themes: knee jerk policies, boy play vs. girl play, adult assumptions about and projections onto children’s play, trusting the process of removing the novelty, what are your buttons and how fast are the children able to identify them? As well as the big three of: communication, problem solving and social skills.

Ring around the rosie
Pocket full of posie
Ashes (achoo)
Ashes (achoo)
We all fall down!

Although this material has been created and researched by many players, the material in the context of the “Bang Bang!” workshop is ©1998 Lisa Murphy.

Why does Power Playing appeal to children?

Activity: Standing on the chair. Who has the power?

Activity: (kudos to Dan Hodgins): Driving the people car. Who has the power?

CONTROL: Being in charge, strong, physical power, capes, goggles, flying, all knowing, all good, instant powers with the wearing of a cape, loose parts, holding the hose, pouring own juice, making real choices, teachers not hovering, risk taking activities, hiding!

NEW ROLES: Characters, new roles new powers, new characteristics. How are things different when I wear a (insert an object or item here) cape, high heels, goggles, big boots, fire fighter hat, carry around a hose, etc. etc. ? How is everyone reacting? How is that different than when I'm **not?** Remember that children notice our various reactions and will respond to them!

TENSION RELEASE: A release of frustration, tension, stress, kids are able to exercise leadership, authority, jumping around, being loud! Moving around is a big release for children and adults! Look at me! I'm running with a cape which is different than running without one! Look at me! We are playing tag and chase with capes *and* goggles! This is more powerful than without.

VIGORUS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: Running, jumping, shouting, chasing, tying the cape, dragging the sheets, shouting, wrestling, climbing to the top of the fort, throwing something down, pulling something up...

Things to think about and talk about:

- Does your environment allow these needs to be met?
- Are there one or two specific kids in your room that need these needs met?
- Who are they?
- What can you do for them?
- Can you identify a few obstacles in the way of doing these things?
- What are your fears? Strengths?

When Power Playing emerges you have some choices:

1. Ban it
2. Ignore it
3. Allow it with limits
4. Facilitate it

Benefits of Facilitating:

- Power and prestige not usually available to them
- Language skills, creativity, divergent thinking, problem solving, cooperation, relationships with peers
- Take on attributes and characteristics of the things they (often) fear. This enables them to be the master of their fear....if even for a moment
- Vigorous physical activity

What happens when you ban it?

- Kids begin to hide their interests and activities
- You are no longer a part of it – disengaged!
- They do it when you are not looking!
- They keep the power but change the rule... meaning: *“It’s not a gun (sword, light saber, blaster), it’s a train, ship, plane...”*

Again: things to think about:

- What method (Ban it, Ignore it, Allow it with limits, Facilitate it) do you currently employ?
- What might you like to change? (If anything)
- Do you feel limitations set by policies that exist outside your room?
- How might you begin to address them?

CAUTION: Do not project your adult understandings, rationalizations and interpretations onto their fantasy play.