GAA GO GAMES

See introductory video to GAA Go Games here: https://youtu.be/i-nAyb3FUP4

GAA Go Games are small-sided (or adapted) versions of Hurling and Gaelic Football, two of the sports offered by the Gaelic Athletic Association in Ireland. They were devised in 2004 for children at the Under-7, Under-9 and Under-11 age grades. The primary aim of GAA Go Games is to:

- fun, friendship, fair play and sense of achievement
- to ensure maximum participation from members and reduce the drop-out rate
- Organise games that are appropriate to the developmental need of the participants; move away from the adult-type of competitive aspect of sport

This is all carried out in a safe, supportive and stimulating environment. The small-sided games also help to optimise decision making as well as enhance technical development. Playing rules are not set in stone to facilitate their modification to meet the varying needs and abilities of those involved.

Why GAA Go Games?

To support the participation and development of children from the Under-7 to the U-11 age grades, the following principles underpin GAA Go Games:

- All participants play in the full game.
- Participant needs are catered for, where possible, on the basis of two year age cohorts i.e. U.7, U.9 & U.11 in a manner consistent with the ethos of Go Games.

- Activities are structured in a manner which optimises the level of fun, friendship, fair play and achievement derived by participants.
- Participants train and play in a safe, supportive and stimulating environment where they are encouraged to risk error, to learn and to derive maximum enjoyment from their involvement.
- Players master the basic skills of Hurling and Gaelic Football and experience the sense of accomplishment, which derives from acquiring playing proficiency on the left and right hand side of the body.
- Everybody involved in Go Games, whether as players, parents/guardians, spectators, mentors, teachers, officials etc., should adhere to the key underpinning principles and give expression to the GAA 'Give Respect, Get Respect' initiative. (See more about the GAA's RESPECT Initiative here: http://www.gaa.ie/mm/Document/TheGAA/ChildProtectionandWelfare/12/20/75/GIVERESPECT-GETRESPECT_English.pdf)

Evaluation and outcomes

Evaluation of the Go Games sheds light on the error of imposing adult-type competitive models on young players who, in their formative years, are susceptible to dropout.

Whelan, M (2011)[1] looked at the activity patterns and responses of children playing the small-sided Go Games, and found that they:

- worked harder, (measured by heart rate)
- had more touches on the ball (catches, passes, lifts and scoring attempts)
- expressed a greater level of enjoyment in comparison to 15-a-side games

When questioned, they also gave the games a rating of 9.3 out of 10 for fun, 97% said they would like to play the games again and 80% felt that they got involved in the play.

Overall the results suggest that in terms of technical, tactical and physical development, improvements are greater when part-taking in small-sided games, while greater levels of activity, enjoyment and satisfaction clearly provide a counterpoint to the main reason for dropout among children; not having fun or not experiencing a sense of involvement and achievement.

Further information on GAA Go Games is available at www.gaa.ie/gogames with related learning resources on learning.gaa.ie Other best practice examples in small-sided games can be found here: http://learning.gaa.ie/node/269022

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[1] Whelan, M. (2011) *Effect of altering the number of players, the dimensions of the playing area and the playing rules on the number of selected technical skills performed, possession characteristics, physiological responses and levels of enjoyment and perceived competence during Gaelic football in prepubescent and adolescent boys,* Dublin: Dublin City University Press.