'ZOOM OUT' ACTIVITIES
CREATE A SYSTEM

An unplugged interactive systems thinking activity for children of all ages.

Children and young people are challenged to find their balloon or other item using systems thinking.

Aim

To show, with a very simple interactive activity, how systems thinking can take us from chaos to harmony.

Age range

Suitable for anyone – from early learners to secondary school.

You will require

— A group of children, preferably around 20 or so.
— Balloons or any substitute item. You will need one item per child taking part. These items will be used to write the names of each child onto. You could use paper plates, pieces of paper, popsicle sticks – the possibilities are endless.
— A marker pen to write the names.

Lesson Plan

Blow up balloons, one per child, and name each balloon with a child's name. (You could also do the activity with everyday objects such as paper plates, popsicle sticks, or pieces of paper.) You could ask the children to blow up their own balloons and name them as part of the activity, depending on their age. Scatter the balloons around the room.

Let the children know that there will be two rounds to this activity. The goal is for each child to finish holding the balloon with their name on it.
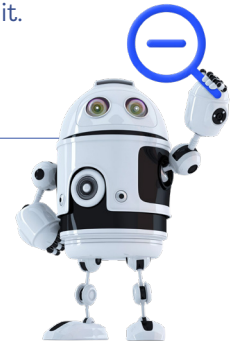
Activity Overview

Round 1

Ask the children to find the balloon with their name on it.

If you are using pieces of paper, paper plates or similar, it's best to place these face down, and spaced on the floor around the room so the children cannot see their named item until they are physically holding it.

Allow enough time for some children to find their balloon, but stop the activity before all children have their balloon. (It's likely there will be an initial period of chaos, followed by some children perhaps starting to find a way to get balloons to their owners.)

Round 2

Return all balloons to the floor.

Ask children to pick up the balloon closest to them, and take the balloon to the person whose name is on it. (It's likely this will result in a fairly quick orderly distribution of the named items to their owners.)

Discussion (and suggested answers)

— Which round was more efficient? (Round 2)
— Why did round 2 work better? (Children worked as part of a single system to get balloons to owners, rather than each person working alone to meet their own goals).
— Is there a better way to get balloons to owners? Children may like to design their own algorithms (sets of instructions) and test them out.
— Are there examples you can think of where it's better to work together rather than alone?
— In this activity we are acting as a system: what other systems are you part of?

Learning Loop (to read to children and discuss)

It's not very often that we're truly alone. In our daily lives our actions can affect people around us. Sometimes the group can make things more complicated. If I only have to think of myself and I see a slice of cake, I think about whether I am hungry or not. But when I am in a group I also need to think about whether other people have had cake or not, and how the cake should therefore be shared.

Thinking about the group can sometimes make things simpler. What looks like a difficult task can become much easier if everyone in the group follows simple instructions.

Source of inspiration

'Balloons are like happiness.
No one will find it looking for theirs only.
Instead, if everyone cares about each other's,
they will find their own as quickly as possible'

Source: https://www.facebook.com/346654298688802/posts/what-a-wonderful-teacher/2966413863379486

COMMISSIONER'S DIGITAL CHALLENGE

A free systems thinking challenge for children in South Australia. Learn more at:
CommissionersDigitalChallenge.net.au

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