TEACHING INCLUSION THROUGH PLAY: LESSONS FROM PARTICIPATORY SPORT IN HONG KONG

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THE CHALLENGE

Diversity does not guarantee interaction

- Chinese and South Asian students may share a school but remain socially separated.
- Cultural events can become symbolic rather than genuinely interactive.
- Inclusion requires meaningful opportunities to learn, act, and solve problems together.



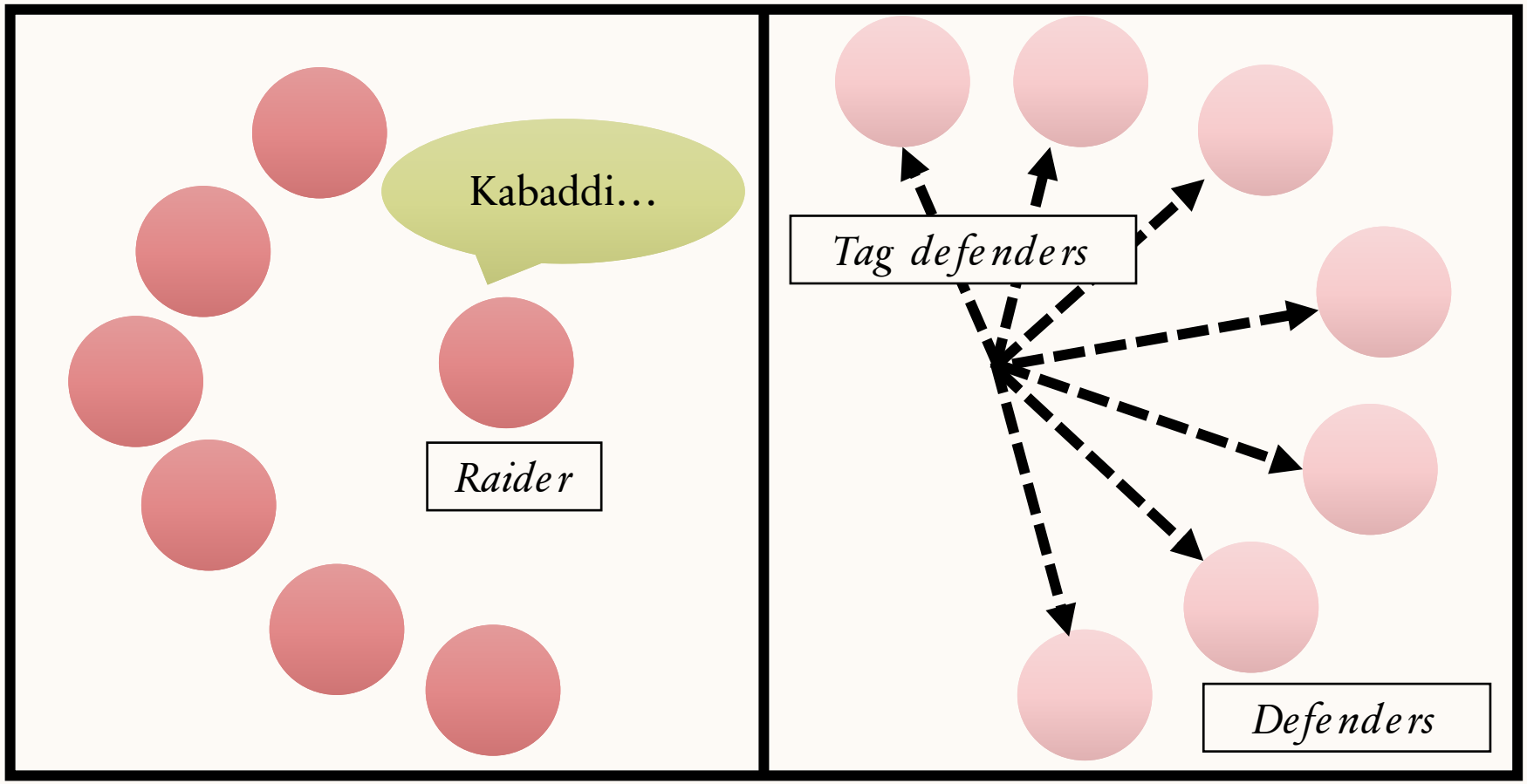
Multicultural Night: celebrating diversity, but largely in parallel

WHY KABADDI?

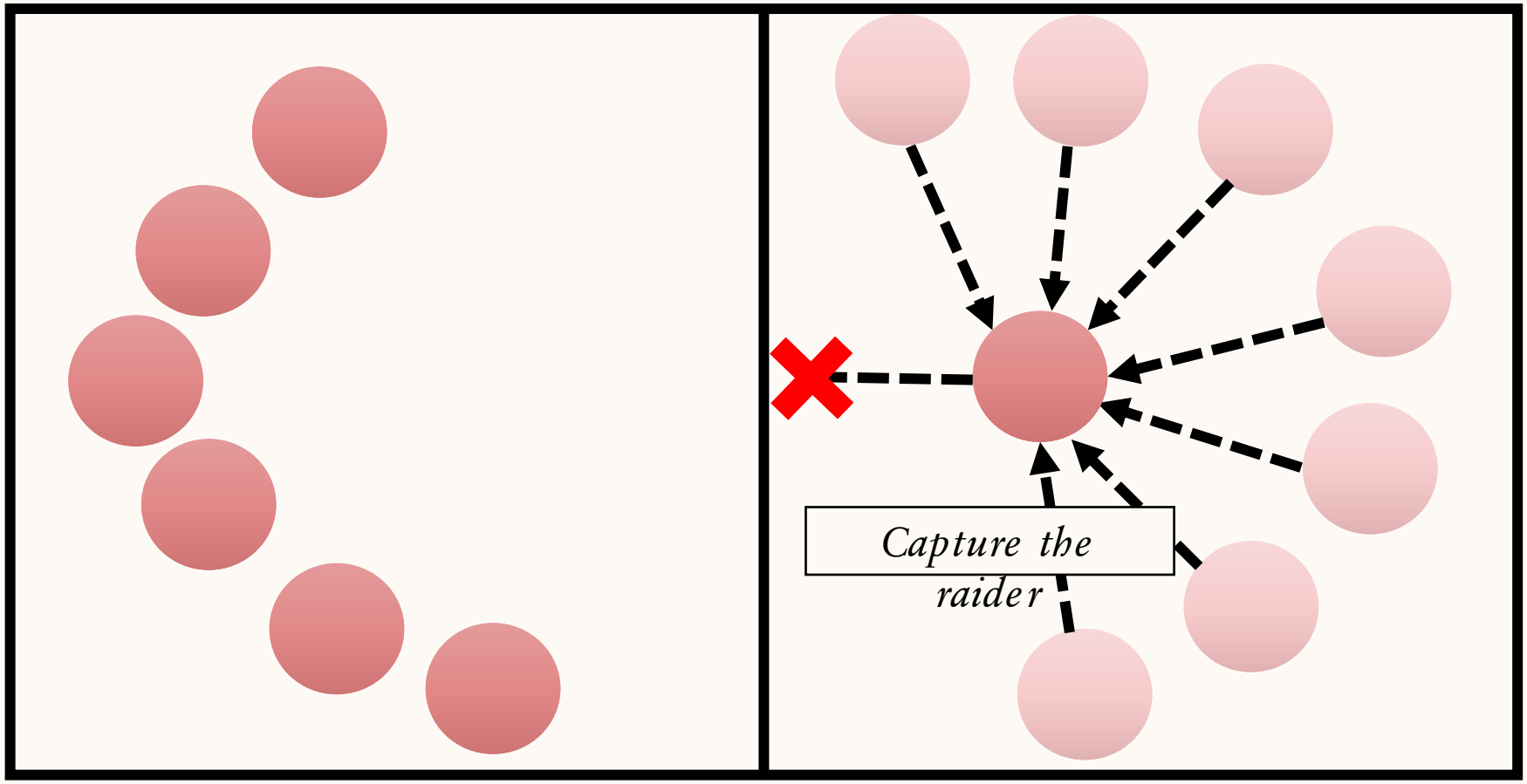
A different starting point

- Accessible rules and minimal equipment.
- Unfamiliar to most students, creating a more level playing field.
- Connects embodied learning with South Asian cultural knowledge.

WHAT IS KABADDI?



WHAT IS KABADDI?



THE INTERVENTION

Learn together, then play together

1. Introduce kabaddi's cultural context.
2. Teach only the essential rules and skills.
3. Form ethnically mixed teams.
4. Let students devise tactics and assign roles.
5. Conclude with a mixed-team mini-game.

Pedagogy: Teaching Games for Understanding



Kabaddi workshop: learning and playing together

RESEARCH APPROACH

Phase 1: Ethnographic Study

- 4 multicultural secondary schools
- 16 kabaddi classes observed
- Participant observation
- Interviews with 4 PE teachers + 20 students
- Grounded-theory analysis

Phase 2: Participatory Action Research

- Coaches became co-researchers
- 5 co-researchers from diverse backgrounds
- Interviews with 15 participants
- Participant observation + reflexive journals
- Collaborative analysis → program redesign

WHAT CHANGED?

An unexpected moment of trust

- “I never thought Ali would trust me enough to ask me to be the raider.”

Chinese student

- They had hardly spoken before.
- During the game, Ali patted his shoulder and told him, “Go!”
- Playing together made a different relationship possible.

From assumptions → recognition

BUT SPORT IS NOT AUTOMATICALLY INCLUSIVE

When competition took over...

- “Some classmates don't realize their strength and rely solely on brute force rather than skill.”

Chinese student

- Competition intensified
- Injuries occurred
- stereotypes resurfaced

The lesson:

Sport does not produce inclusion by itself. Design matters.

REMAKING THE GAME

From competitive contact to collaborative play

Retell

- Shift from individual heroism to collective defense.

Redesign

- Introduce tag kabaddi to reduce tackling and physical dominance.

Open participation

- Support mixed-gender and parent-child formats.

Share ownership

- Use the kabaddi-mat mascot to invite participant contribution.

Coach observation:
"The games ran smoothly. Unlike regular kabaddi, there were no quarrels."

Before	After
Tackling	Removing a tag
Physical dominance	Strategy and positioning
Individual heroism	Collective defense
Participants as recipients	Participants as contributors

REMAKING THE GAME



Tag kabaddi: replacing tackles with tags

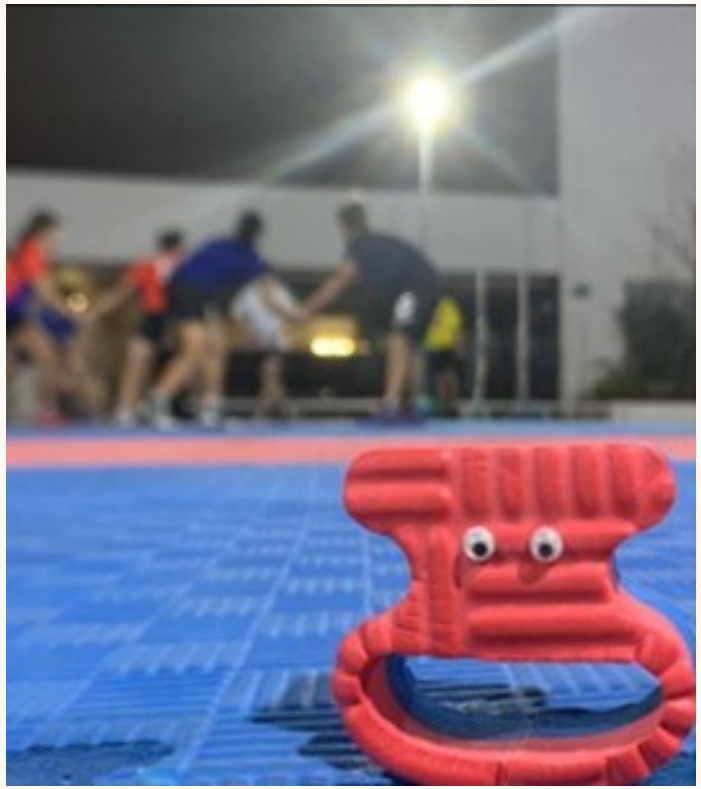


Coaches assembling the kabaddi court before participants arrive

REMAKING THE GAME



Leftover mat edges: from waste to possibility



The kabaddi-mat mascot: a gift that invites contribution

PRINCIPLES FOR YOUTH PROGRAMS

Six Design Principles

1. **Level the field**
   Start with an unfamiliar activity.
2. **Mix intentionally**
   Do not assume diverse participants will interact naturally.
3. **Reward collaboration**
   Avoid making winning the only meaningful outcome.
4. **Adapt for access**
   Modify rules for safety and equitable participation.
5. **Co-design**
   Give young people and facilitators real decision-making power.
6. **Evaluate relationships**
   Measure interaction, trust, contribution, and conflict, not attendance alone.

Inclusion is not an automatic outcome of diversity, contact, or sport. It is something we have to **design**, **practice**, and **remake together**.

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