

## **Alphapong**

**Focus:** Working together, group goal setting, success/failure, making mistakes, communication

**Materials:** A ping-pong ball for each small group of 3 to 5; a book (or notebook) for each person

**Level:** Grades 4 and higher

### **Suggested Procedure**

1. This is best done in a larger space.
2. Divide the class into smaller groups of 3 to 5.
3. Give each person a book or a notebook (something to use as a ping-pong paddle) for bouncing the ping-pong ball back and forth.
4. The object of the activity is for each small group to get as far down the alphabet as possible.
5. Every time the ball is bounced, another letter of the alphabet is called out.
6. If the ball touches the ground or is bounced twice in a row, the group starts over.
7. Allow the small groups to do this for a while without setting a conscious goal.
8. After a few minutes ask each group to set a goal for themselves. How far down the alphabet do they think they can go?
9. If a group gets all the way through the alphabet, suggest that they come up with a phrase they want to spell out and see how far they can get.

### **Sample Processing Questions**

- How did your strategy change as you experienced this activity?
- How did you cooperate to get the task done?
- How did you feel when you reached your goal (or did not reach your goal)?
- Did having a goal help? Why or why not?
- What role did communication play in this activity? How did we communicate?
- How did we react when the ball was dropped? Was it okay to make a mistake?
- Was everyone included in both the planning and the solving of the problems?

### **Variations/Modifications**

- Do this first with a partner to allow people to practice. Then join pairs into groups of 4 or 6.

### **Facilitation Notes**

Although this activity can be done in a regular sized classroom, it is better to have more space if it's available. If done in a classroom, students must be more controlled with their actions. Caution students to keep their "paddles" below their own heads so that they don't accidentally hit someone else. Also, tell students to allow errant ping-pong balls to go. If they chase them, they may run into a table or desk. This is a good metaphor for "picking one's battles." Sometimes we just have to "let things go." I have a crate of old novels that I use for this activity. Students are asked to choose a book that they connect with in some way. After the activity, have them share why they chose that particular book. Sometimes it's because they read it, or they like the author, or there was some word in the title that caught their attention. This can provide some interesting connections for processing.