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**Paper Title: A Model for Professional Development of Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) for Teachers in NSW, Australia**

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## **A Model for Professional Development of Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) for Teachers in NSW, Australia**

### **ABSTRACT:**

With the advent of a new syllabus for secondary schools (years 7-10) and a quality teaching focus in New South Wales schools the Australian Council of Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER, New South Wales) determined that there was a need for the professional development of teachers in teaching games for understanding (TGfU) and relating this to the new syllabus. The result was a full day professional development workshop for teachers of which five have been held and which approximately 200 teachers have attended. This paper will address the content of the workshop and respondents comments about the workshop.

The format for the day was: a review of the literature and key definitions of teaching games for understanding (TGfU) and relating it to the new syllabus (45 minutes), practical sessions 1 and 2 (approximately 1.5 hours each) and programming TGfU and the new syllabus ( 1.5 hours) . The paper will clearly outline the content for each of these sessions including the practical components. The teachers responses indicated that it was highly beneficial with a good mix of practical and theory.

## **Introduction – Teaching Games for Understanding in Australia**

Whilst the concept Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) has been around in the literature since the early 1980s, it was not introduced to the Australian sporting community at large until 1996, when Rod Thorpe from Loughborough University, England visited and conducted 'Game Sense' workshops around the country.

Many sporting authorities (for example, Australian Sports Commission, Australian Touch Association, Soccer Australia) and State Education bodies promoted the TGFU approach via professional development and accreditation courses. In 2005, a new *Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) Years 7–10 Syllabus* replaced the current syllabus in NSW secondary schools. One area that has undergone major changes within the syllabus has been that of the teaching of games, with the move towards a Game Sense or Games for Understanding framework.

This change has implications for practicing teachers in relation to both the content and teaching strategies traditionally utilised in the teaching of games. Teachers have been teaching games for many years in physical education lessons and with sporting teams. The difference with TGfU is the approach that is used. The key to the teacher is the questioning technique and the relevance to the student of the introduction of rules and techniques. The focus is on the student and problem solving. In addition, fun is the key ingredient. TGfU is an approach to teaching that makes very effective use of active learning in that the students are learning through playing the games. The use of questioning is a powerful method of encouraging players to analyse their actions, both individually, and as a team. Questions will generally relate to a particular tactical aspect. Effective phrasing of questions can also help to guide the player to an answer, in the event that they are struggling with an activity. Age, experience and ability level of the players will affect the complexity of the questions used.

TGfU has been shown to result in improved learning outcomes for students. Games are a significant component of the physical education curriculum, with research suggesting that '65 per cent or more of the time spent in physical education is allotted to games' (Werner, Thorpe & Bunker, 1996, p.28).

New syllabus outcomes (Board of Studies, 2003) and quality teaching models (DET, 2003) highlight the need for students to not only participate, but also to be cognitively involved in games. The Department for Education and Skills (2004) in England highlights the importance of inclusiveness in physical education with an emphasis on teachers having a deep knowledge and

understanding of effective teaching strategies with a focus on student engagement and enjoyment. Whilst Game Sense is not the only pedagogical model for teaching games, it is most certainly one that can be used effectively to achieve the student outcomes.

Research (Light, 2002, 2003; Thomas, 1997a; Turner & Martinek, 1999; Werner et al,1996) indicates the strengths of the TGfU approach and the desirability of it as one of the major approaches to quality teaching of games. Light (2002) highlighted the effectiveness of TGfU for engagement and cognitive learning. Higher order thinking occurs from questioning and discussion about tactics and strategies and also 'through the intelligent movements of the body during games' (Light, 2002, p.23). Cognitive development through decision-making and tactical exploration are combined with skill development within modified games to provide meaningful contexts. Light (2002) suggests that it is difficult for some physical educators to address cognition in games. TGfU is one pedagogical approach that may assist teachers and coaches to address this issue.

Light (2003) examined the response for teaching games for understanding pedagogical approach in an Australian University to Bachelor of Education students studying primary teaching. Student evaluations were generally positive indicating an increase in enjoyment, understanding and cognitive engagement in the games. In comparing games sense to skill-based teaching, Werner et al, (1996) state that... 'while the teacher may be convinced that skill-based lessons are having a positive effect in that some immediate skill improvement is made, the social and skill related interactions might over time convince the youngsters of their lack of ability' (p.32). Thorpe and Bunker (1986, cited in Allison & Thorpe, 1997) argued that a skill-based approach to teaching less physically able students is likely to: '...result in a sense of failure, a lack of enjoyment, poor self-concept and subsequently inhibition of long term participation' (p.11). In contrast to this, the students who exhibited low physical and technical ability in the Game Sense lessons consistently reported significantly higher and more positive scores for these same factors. 'It appears that a skills-based approach serves only to highlight, confirm and reinforce – often publicly – the pupils lack of physical ability' (Allison & Thorpe, 1997, p.12).

Given the decreased involvement of children in physical activity, TGfU is aimed at encouraging children to become more tactically aware and to make better decisions during the game. As well, it encourages children to begin thinking strategically about game concepts whilst developing skills within a realistic context and most importantly, having fun. Essentially by focusing on the game (not necessarily the 'full' game), players are encouraged to develop a greater understanding of the game being played. Thomas (1997b) states that

the desired effect of this is 'players/students who are more tactically aware and are able to make better decisions during the game, thereby adding to their enjoyment of playing the game' (p.3).

Following TGfU workshops where participants were asked to identify what they perceived as the strengths of TGfU, a number of themes emerge. Teaching games for understanding was found to:

- encourage a holistic approach to the teaching of games
- develop critical thinking and problem solving
- develop deep knowledge and understanding of the game
- promote high levels of participation and enjoyment for participants
- promote player centred learning and relevance of skills and tactics
- cater for varying abilities
- foster efficiency in aspects of implementation

(Pearson and Webb, 2005)

**Professional Development of Teachers in New South Wales on TGfU and relating it to a new Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) Years 7-10 Syllabus (Board of Studies 2003)**

In 2004 the Australian Council of Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER, NSW) ran all day workshops throughout New South Wales with the main purpose of providing teachers an opportunity to update on TGfU and relating it to the new Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) Years 7-10 Syllabus (Board of Studies, 2003). The format for the workshop was as follows:

TGfU overview (45 minutes)  
Practical session 1 (1.5 hours)  
Practical session 2 (1.5 hours)  
Programming implications (1.5 hours)

TGfU Overview ( 45 minutes)

This session introduced the concept by giving definitions and also discussing related terminology such as play practice, games concept approach, game centred and play for life. The benefits of these approaches and the link to technique based approach was also discussed. Following this an activity asking the participants to list all the elements of an effective player in a sport eg basketball so that the participants could understand the relationships between technique, game sense, rules, psychological aspects etc. This was followed by another activity where the participants were asked to apply the Bunker and Thorpe (1982) model to a sport or activity. Categories of games; invasion, net/court, striking/fielding and target were discussed and the reasons

for having these categories. The three different teaching/coaching approaches were outlined-the full sided approach where numbers mirror close to the game itself, the small sided approach eg 1 versus 1, 2 versus 1 etc and the games for outcomes approach where outcomes are set and a game designed to meet these outcomes. This session concluded by relating TGfU to the New South Wales Personal Development, Health and Physical Education Years 7-10 Syllabus. (New South Wales school system goes from Kindergarten to year 6 which is Primary school and year 7 to year 12 which is High school). The NSW PDHPE syllabus consists of Stage 4 (Years 7 and 8) and Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10). There are 4 strands: self and relationships, individual and community health, movement skill and performance, lifelong physical activity. Examples were then given from the Movement Skill and Performance strand. eg. Stage 4: Students learn to: demonstrate movement skills through a range of experiences including: games from categories such as striking/fielding, invasion and net/wall .

Practical sessions (1.5 hours)

The following is an example of one of the categories i.e. invasion games. The same format was used for the other categories.

Let's now use the sport of Touch (Football) as an example for invasion games. Touch is a sport where the object of the game is to score more touchdowns than your opponents by passing the ball backwards. Each team has 6 players on a 50 by 70 metre field. Modified games are available for junior players. There are 3 scenarios that are used.

1. The full sided approach.

This involves starting with a minimum of 4 a side and a maximum of 7 playing in a minimum of a 20 metre square grid. The object is to score touchdowns ie placing the ball on the ground behind the scoreline. We start with minimum rules and gradually build up teaching techniques as they are needed.

Progression 1: start with players in their own half of the grid. Players may run with the ball, pass the ball forwards or backwards. The only rules are that if touched you must stop and pass the ball within 3 seconds. No kicking and if the ball hits the ground it is a change of possession.

Progression 2: add the 6 touch rule and a change of possession. Teach the skill effecting a touch.

Progression 3: add the rule of only passing backwards and offside. Teach the basic catch and pass.

It is important to constantly challenge the participants through questioning. Questions to ask include: what are our options when we have the ball? Eg. Running into space, passing into space etc. What are we trying to do in defence? Eg mark a player etc.

## 2. The small sided approach.

This is where we begin with a one on one situation and gradually build up. Launder and Piltz (1992) developed an approach to teaching Touch. Under a modified version of this model the types of activities demonstrated are: one versus one in a 10 by 10 metre grid. The object is for the ball carrier to make metres before being touched. Mark the spot where touched and change over. The new runner tries to get further. Questions include: what are the best ways to beat the defender? What can the defender do?

This is then followed by 2 versus 1, 3 versus 1, 3 versus 2 etc. Similar questions would be asked

## 3. The games for outcomes approach.

Here you have a specific outcome. Eg line defence. You then design a game to meet this outcome.

Finally at the end of the session the teachers formed groups of 6-8 and were then allocated a task. These tasks were: design a full sided, small sided and games for outcomes for a particular sport or activity with appropriate questions for each activity. Each group then demonstrated their work.

## Programming Implications (1.5 hours)

The last session of the day involved utilising TGfU information and applying it to the NSW Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) Years 7-10 Syllabus (Board of Studies 2003). This included addressing the following: overview of the syllabus, what are the main messages of strands 2 and 4? What does this mean for programming and teaching? Developing a unit of work including where are my students now? Where are my students going to? Examples of common themes eg invading your space. How will my students get there? What makes a quality program?

### Teachers Responses to the Professional Development day.

Overall, the teachers responded favourably to the workshop. The following are the responses recorded from 70 teachers:

Score average: (score from 1-10 where 1 is poor through to 10 which is excellent) was 9.22 out of 10.

Table 1 describes the most worthwhile aspects of the workshop as indicated by participants (three most frequent responses).

Aspect of workshop	Number of responses
Learning the questioning technique	12
Developing practical ideas	11
Learning a different style of teaching	6

Table 1. Worthwhile aspects of the workshop.

Table 2 shows the recommendations for improvement of the workshop as indicated by participants (three most frequent responses).

Recommendations	Number of responses
More time needed for the workshop	18
Using a better facility and having more space	8
Introduce more novel activities	6

Table 2. Recommendations for improvement of the workshop.

Overall the teachers found the workshop to be beneficial rating it 9.22 out of 10. Interestingly the most worthwhile aspect was learning the questioning technique in the TGfU approach followed by them developing practical ideas for their teaching. More time was the major recommendation for improvement with some respondents suggesting an extra day although this recommendation could have financial implications with the teacher taking another day away from the school.

## Conclusion

Given that TGfU is still new for many current Physical and Health Education teachers continuing professional development courses/workshops are paramount for the opportunity of the TGfU approach to be adopted by teachers and coaches throughout Australia. The model illustrated above allows teachers new to the approach as well as teachers familiar with it to further update and apply it to the new syllabus in New South Wales.

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