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Expanding the teaching games for understanding (TGfU) concept to include sport education in physical education program (SEPEP)

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Abstract

TGfU has been in the Australian sporting community for over a decade and more recently as part of school curriculums across Australia. It has focused on a problem solving approach which has been primarily student centred and involves questioning as a primary ingredient. Sport Education in Physical Education Program (SEPEP) also focuses on students and promotes the development of skills by students taking on roles such as coaches, umpires, managers, game analysers, publicity officer etc.These roles increases their knowledge and understanding of the sporting environment.This paper will outline the TGfU and SEPEP models as a starting point. It will closely analyse the questioning technique which is essential to TGfU. With TGfU the questions are primarily directed at the participant or player. The focus here will be how this is now expanded to the SEPEP roles. It will illustrate how questions can be given to the coach and game analyser so that they will have a better understanding of the game. These questions will include the following areas: strategy/tactics, technique, cognition (decision-making, communication and concentration) and rules. Practical examples will be outlined from one of the categories of games (striking/fieldimg, target, invasion and net/court). It will describe the activity/game, and give examples of SEPEP roles and questions.

Keywords: SEPEP. TGfU, Questioning

Introduction – Teaching Games for Understanding

Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) provides students with a more substantive base and clearer frame of reference for learning about critical elements of game play/ (Pearson, Webb and McKeen, 2008). It is a games based pedagogical model aimed at generating greater understanding of all aspects of games, while increasing physical activity levels, engagement, motivation and enjoyment in physical education lessons. (Forrest, Webb and Pearson, 2006),

TGfU is a holistic teaching approach that encourages student based learning and problem solving. It focuses on teaching games through a conceptual approach, through concepts, tactics and strategies rather than through a basis of skill, a technical games teaching approach, or TGT. (Wright, McNeill, Fry and Wang, 2005)

Primary aged children have recently been exposed to TGfU concepts through the Australian Sports Commission's 'Playing for life' approach adopted in their Active After School Communities (AASC) coach training program. AASC is a national program that is part of the Australian Commonwealth Government's $116 million Building a Healthy, Active Australia package. It provides primary aged school children with access to free, structured physical activity programs in the after school time slot of 3.30 pm to 5.30 pm. The program is designed to engage traditionally non-active children in physical activity and to build pathways with local community organizations, including sporting clubs (ASC, 2005). 'Playing for life' is an approach to coaching that uses games as the focus of development. By concentrating on game-based activities, children are able to: develop skills within a realistic and enjoyable context, rather than practising them in isolation and from a technical perspective. Become maximally engaged in dynamic game-based activities that use a fun approach to developing a range of motor skills' (ASC, 2005, p.53).

Research (Light, 2002, 2003; Thomas, 1997a; Turner & Martinek, 1999; Werner, Thorpe & Bunker, 1996) indicates the strengths of the TGfU approach and the desirability of it as one of the major approaches to the 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.

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). Research by McKeen, Webb and Pearson (2005) support the increased enjoyment of students exposed to the TGfU approach compared to traditional teaching of games. 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 et al, 1996, p.28).

The Implications of TGfU for teachers

There is no doubt a number of key aspects come to light. These include a deep understanding of games both within and across categories (target, invasion, striking/fielding and net/court) as is illustrated in a model for pre-service teachers (Forrest, Webb and Pearson 2006). The integrated approach refers to the ability to analyse and develop constructive lessons that go across sports and activities In addition, the response from teachers indicate

the need to develop and understand the questioning technique. (Webb, Pearson and McKeen, 2005). Finally the need to program is critical as integrating units within and across categories will involve more innovative and stimulating lessons.

TGfU involves four categories and subcategories. They are invasion, net/wall, target and striking/fielding. Invasion are team games where the purpose is to invade the opponents territory with the aim being to score more points within the time limit than the opposing team, while endeavouring to keep their score to a minimum. Subcategories include where the ball can be carried or caught across the line (eg. Rugby league, rugby union, touch), it can be thrown or shot into a target (eg netball, basketball, handball, lacrosse) or it can be struck with a stick or foot into a target area (eg hockey, soccer, Australian rules football) (Webb, Pearson & Forrest, 2006). The aim of net/wall games is for a player or team to send an object into an opponent's court so that it cannot be played or returned within the court boundaries. Tennis and volleyball are examples of net games while squash and racquetball are wall games. Striking/fielding games is a contest between the fielding and batting team where the aim is to score more runs than the other team using the number of innings and time allowed. The aim of target games is to, place a projectile near or in a target in order to have the best possible score. The subcategories are unopposed or opposed. In unopposed games the accuracy of the player in relation to the target determines an individuals success (eg golf, archery, tenpin bowling). In opposed games the players have an opportunity to interfere with the target or oppositions ball in order to create an advantage for themselves (Webb, Pearson and Forrest 2006).

There are also three different teaching approaches with TGfU. These approaches include the full sided (larger numbers), small sided (small numbers) and games for outcomes (setting outcomes for the game) (Webb, Pearson and Forrest 2006).

Sport Education and Physical Education Program (SEPEP)

SEPEP is a curriculum model that allows for the development of social, cognitive and sporting skills within students (Alexander, Taggart, Medland and Thorpe 1995). The SEPEP curriculum is defined by 6 primary features that create the sport context in physical education (Siedentop in Pill 2008).

1. Seasons. Sport is played in seasons that contain both practice and competition.

2. Affliation. Sport is played in teams and players connect with and usually belong to the one team for the season.

3. Formal competition. Sports seasons include a schedule of competitions between teams..

4. Record keeping. Records of individual and team participation are kept to provide feedback and enable goal setting by participants and the teacher.

5. Festivity. Individual and team performances are recognised and celebrated throughout the season and during a culminating end of season event.

6. Culminating event. Sport seasons typically come to a conclusion with a defining event. The seasons therefore conclude with a festival type of event that celebrates the success of all students who participated.

   One of the key aspects of the SEPEP model is that students participate in roles which are utilised in the sport environment. These can include coach, referee/umpire, publicity offficer, game analyser etc. As part of these roles questions can be set to guide the participant and to integrate TGfU with SEPEP. These questions can be directed at cognition (concentration, communication, decision making), strategy and tactics and technique,

Integrating TGfU and SEPEP

TGfU is based on a problem solving approach and one of the key aspects is effective questioning. Generally these questions are directed at the participant but now utilising the SEPEP model this can now be focused at other roles such as the coach or game analyser. Let us now look at a practical example of a striking /fielding game**.**

Voluntary Run T ball is an introductory activity to the striking/ fielding category of games. This simplified T ball game allows participants to run at any base (in a anti-clockwise direction), even off their initial hit. All runners have to be home after the last batter bats otherwise the team loses home runs for every batter left out. Batters and runners can only be out if hey are caught off the bat or they don't make a base by the time he ball reaches the base. If a runner decides to run they have to go and cannot go back. The ball must also be hit in a designated area.

The focus should be on principles of play for both the fielding and batting team. For the fielding team this would include whole team, sub team (two or more players but not a team) and individual players state of play adaptations. Cognition – when to throw, where to throw (based on the state of play), what needs to be communicated and what do you concentrate on. The technique focus is throwing and catching. For the batting team this would also include whole, sub team and individual state of play adaptations. Cognition – when to run, where to hit (based on the state of play), what needs to be communicated and what do you concentrate on. The technique focus is the swing.

There are adaptations that can be made to the rules to introduce other principles of play. For example, if a ball is thrown to a base and there is no fielder behind the base, all runners advance home. This will require the batting team to take advantage of this rule while the fielding team strategy is to minimise the impact.

The next progression is 5 a side T Ball where there no longer is the voluntary run, the batting order is flexible and there is the 3 out rule. The focus as before is on implementing principles of play.

The types of questions with some possible responses for the coach or game analyser to answer are as follows:

Fielding team:

Cognition (concentration, communication, decision making)

Q List all of the decisions that a fielder may have to make (consider

Both on ball and off ball decisions plus in play and before play decisions)?

Possible Responses:

Where to field, throw, move and who to support.

Q. How do runners on base increase the complexity of the above decisions? Explain why?

What is the link between communication and concentration? (Listen to the verbal communication occurring to answer this question)

Strategy and tactics

What was the initial strategy and how did the positional play reflect this?

Describe any tactical changes that were made as each batter came to the "T"? What elements if play were taken into account to make these changes?

Technique

What suggestions around technique would you give the fielding team?

What changes occurred in technical ability during the innings?

How did the fielding team use technical ability to determine the roles and positions of their strategic and tactical plans?

Batting team:

Cognition (Concentration, communication and decision-making)

List all the decisions that those on the batting team must make (consider both at bat and on base decisions)

How do runners on base increase the complexity of the decision of batter at the T? Explain why?

What are the elements a runner should concentrate on to allow them to decide to make a run to the next base/bases?

Strategy and tactics

What was the initial strategy and how did the selection of the first batter reflect this?

Describe any tactical changes that were made as each batter came to the "T"? What elements of play were taken into account to make these changes?

Technique

What suggestions around technique would you give the batting team?

What changes occurred in technical ability during the innings?

How did the batting team use technical ability to determine the roles and positions of the batters in their strategic and tactical plans?

Figure 1 Questions for the game analyser in the SEPEP model

Effective Questioning and Responses

As important to the whole TGfU and SEPEP approach of deep understanding of games is the art of successful questioning and evaluating responses because without it the approach will not succeed. Questioning skills and the ability to develop appropriate activities to allow the questions to be answered are central to the success of the Game Sense (TGfU) approach (Light 2003) which are fundamental reasons for the approach being so valued as a pedagogical model of quality teaching (Pearson, Webb and McKeen, 2005). Questioning can be applied to four areas: strategies, technical, rules and psychological which has been illustrated above. It is important that teachers can move beyond the beginning stage of asking questions to an intermediate or advanced stage. An example of this related to Voluntary T Ball is as follows. The teacher may ask the following question to the game analyser which is illustrated in figure 1 above."List all of the decisions that a fielder may have to make (consider both on ball and off ball decisions plus in play and before play decisions) Response: "Where to field, where to throw the ball, who to cover, who will cover them and where to move?". Teacher says "Good answer". However, the questioning has only reached the beginning stage as each situation has to be extended. For example, where to field is related to the whole fielding team and requires the spaces in the field to be covered according to the abilities of the fielding team but also must take into account the batter's strength and weaknesses.It is important that actual situations are illustrated on the field so that a deep understanding develops.

Conclusion

Teaching games for understanding has been adopted by teachers and coaches around Australia for over a decade. SEPEP has also been used by teachers to increase participation

by students in both the Physical Education and sporting environments. This paper has illustrated how both approaches can be integrated to increase understanding of the learner in the game environment through the effective use of questioning. It illustrated how questions can be directed to the coach or game analyser in the areas of strategy/tactics, technique, cognition and rules. A practical example was given from the striking/fielding category of games but the same approach can be utilised within invasion, target and net/court games.

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