AIESEP SIG Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) Pre-conference Session
Wednesday, 8 June, 13.00-17.30
Corbett Building Room 138 and Corbett Gymnasium

Conceptual Thinking Underpinning the Practical Art of Making Games Accessible to Players

Introduction
In recent years a number of very important papers have outlined a number of evidence-based theoretical frameworks that can enhance the teaching and coaching of games. At the same time other studies have highlighted also how co-operation or questioning strategies can be used. Nevertheless, there appears to be a neglect of the practical art of making games accessible to young people.

Aim of Pre-conference Session
We propose to outline the conceptual thinking that underpins this practical art and to illustrate what it means in practice.

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PRESENTATION 1
Len Almond, Visiting Professor, St. Mary’s University, England

TITLE
A Conceptual Framework for Making Games Accessible to Players

ABSTRACT
In this presentation a conceptual framework for the teaching of games will be outlined. This framework needs to be translated into practical possibilities that can guide teachers’ informed practice. Following is an outline for presenting this conceptual framework:

1. Creating a Sense of Direction
   - Translating complex games into meaningful game forms to develop:
     - Understanding of the game which includes recognising the similarities and differences between different game categories (e.g., invasion) as well as within a category
     - Understanding in the game leading to intelligent performance
   - Developing understanding
     - Grasp the structures and inter-relationships of the components of a game
     - See possibilities for outwitting opponents
     - Make sense of what games have to offer

2. Identifying the Focus for Each Phase of Development
   - Beginners to talented performers

3. Principles for Shaping Games
   - Meaningful modification of game forms
     - Reducing the demands of a game
     - Exaggeration
     - Constrains
     - Challenge
   - Creating enabling environments to support learning in game forms
     - Scaffolding processes
     - Affordances – what can be enabled?
     - Spiral curriculum
   - Creating developmental appropriate game scenarios
   - Developing an enabling attitude of the teacher/coach

PRESENTATION 2
Liam McCarthy, St. Mary’s University, England

TITLE
Making Sense of Handball

ABSTRACT
Introduction
Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) is a pedagogical model, which has gained widespread popularity among teachers and coaches in recent years (Bunker and Thorpe 1982; Thorpe and Bunker 1989; Thorpe, Bunker, and Almond 1986). TGfU implores practitioners to account for three fundamental principles in their game-design; representation, modification and exaggeration. In doing so, the puzzles presented by well-designed games, can afford the learners opportunities develop an understanding both of the game and within the game.
Focus of Inquiry

Nevertheless, Casey (2013) contends that the extent to which practitioners are able to operationalise games which embody the principles of TGfU is questionable. Further, Launder (2001) likens TGfU in the hands of teachers, to jumbo-jets in the hands of test pilots; it is clear that much work is yet to be done to enable coaches and teachers to effectively use this model-based approach. Answering Casey’s (2013) call to aid teachers and coaches in making a conceptual shift in their practice, this paper aims to provide some explicit mechanisms through which handball may be delivered; true to TGfU principles.

Contributions to the Field

In this presentation how we might make sense of handball and the need to do so is considered (Richards et al., 2012). Further, we propose ways in which teachers and coaches might create the tactical problems, which are National Governing Body stated principles of play (England Handball, 2015). Handball specific examples of how these puzzles can be represented, exaggerated and modified are suggested. In addition, it is considered how this sits within a wider planning and reflective practice framework for coaching, where practice design is aligned to coach behaviour, learner engagement and outcomes (Muir, 2012).

PRESENTATION 3
Barrie Gordon, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

TITLE
Developing Thinking Players in Softball/Baseball

ABSTRACT
Introduction and Focus of the Practical

This practical session will introduce participants to a sequence of activities and modified games that are designed to introduce students to the games of softball and baseball. The emphasis for the activities and games is on developing a sense of the game, tactical understanding and good decision making.

Contribution to the Field

The sequence of activities has been carefully constructed in order to scaffold the learning of students as they progressively develop their knowledge and understanding of the game. This development is dependent on the students being able to concentrate and be engaged in these particular areas of learning. This will not happen if the specific skill requirements of the activity mean that they are unable to implement their decision-making through a lack of skill. A student may decide they want to field the ball and throw to home but if they are unable to field a baseball with a glove successfully, then the opportunity to enact tactical decision-making is lost. For this reason there are a number of differences from “real” softball or baseball in the equipment used and in the way that the activities and games are played. Soft, easily caught balls are used throughout and for many of the activities the “batter” throws the ball directly to a fielder.

PRESENTATION 4
Barrie Gordon, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

TITLE
Developing Thinking Players – A Scenario-based Approach for Teaching Softball and Baseball

ABSTRACT
Introduction and Focus of the Practical
This second practical session is an extension of the first. The session will be based on the Developing Thinking Players programme and will examine a scenario based approach to teaching and coaching baseball and softball. In this approach players participate in game scenarios that mimic real life game situations. The scenarios are played out as in a real game and the fielding and batting teams are then awarded points depending on the outcomes of the play. It is designed to place the players in situations whereby they develop a deep sense of the games tactics and gain experience in making tactical decisions.

Contribution to the Field

This session will give participants an opportunity to experience practical applications of a number of the scenarios. They will also have the opportunity to develop their own outcomes for specific scenarios.

PRESENTATION 5
Amy Price, St Mary’s University, England

TITLE
Conceptual Framework for Understanding Digital Video Game Design and Its Relationship to Teaching Games for Understanding

ABSTRACT

Introduction

In recent years, the Game Centred Approach (GCA) arena for academic research has been well populated with evidence-based studies that enhance the theoretical underpinnings of teaching and coaching of games. Nevertheless, there has been limited attention paid to how GCA models such as Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) can be merged with alternative fields of game studies, outside of physical education and sport, in order to make games accessible for young people.

Aims of the Presentation

In this session, we use principles of ‘good digital game design’ (Gee, 2013) to propose a conceptual framework for understanding the practical design of games. We consider similarities between a teacher and coach, and a digital game designer using the notion that “good game designers are practical theoreticians of learning” (Gee, 2013, p. 21). This session will acknowledge that the rationale for TGfU and for digital video games are similar; to attract and sustain participation and performance through challenging and enjoyable practice.

Contributions to the Field

The session will promote ways in which complex games can be learned and mastered, through practical application of game design. The session will specifically interpret TGfU’s four pedagogical principles, and merge with Gee’s (2013) features of good game design, which are considered to enhance learning and performance. Further discussions will build upon Almond’s Foreword in Butler and Griffin (2010), to use game design for developing a whole mind set for game sense, with a specific focus on how video game play can stimulate the human mind and its learning capabilities, in today’s digital world.

PRESENTATION 6
Stephen Harvey, West Virginia University, Morgantown, US, and Shane Pill, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia

TITLE
Comparisons of Researchers and Physical Education Teachers’ Perspectives on the Utilization of the Tactical Games Model

ABSTRACT
Introduction

Despite the emergence of Tactical Games Models (TGMs) to games teaching in physical education (PE) emphasizing small-sided/modified game play, inquiry and reflective practices with students, research suggests the utilization of TGMs only exist in isolated instances, particularly where teachers demonstrate ‘true’ fidelity to these models. In contrast, university-based academics retain an overwhelmingly positive view of TGMs.

Aim of Presentation and Focus of the Inquiry

The purpose of this study was to investigate reasons for this disparity. Participants were 50 academics and 80 PE teachers. Academics were included based on the search for publications on TGMs and associated game-centered models (i.e., Teaching Games for Understanding, Game Sense, Play Practice, etc.) over the past 20-years undertaken using a number of multidisciplinary academic search engines.

Research Findings

Academics responded to six online survey questions that probed their perspectives on current and future research on TGMs. PE teachers participated in a Twitter chat held at four different time zones. Data were analysed inductively. Results showed that academics provided a myriad of reasons why teachers may not utilize TGMs, although all agreed there was a need for increased teacher professional development in TGMs. PE teachers outlined that numerous competing versions of TGMs was confusing and they required more ‘hands-on’ examples of TGMs in practice. Results further highlighted disparities between academics and PE teachers’ conceptual understanding and pedagogical applications of TGMs. There is a critical need to create improved connections between academics and PE teachers, which could be achieved through the extended examination of the micro-pedagogies of teachers practice in TGMs via a practice-referenced approach.