

Yes, We Can Play Games Differently: Socialisation of PETE Teachers

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This paper investigated the educators' perspective of the effects of socialisation on physical education teacher education (PETE) students' confidence and competence in using the less traditional Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) approach to teaching physical education. A critical review of pertinent literature was conducted to allow for a deeper understanding of both the TGfU approach and concept of socialisation. From an educators' perspective, it was revealed that many PETE students do not understand what the TGfU approach is until they are exposed to it during their university course. While students were receptive to TGfU and enjoyed using it at university, this did not translate to them using it on their school teaching experiences. This was predominantly attributed to their colleague teachers (CT) not providing examples of TGfU in practice in a school setting. CTs were found to mostly use traditional approaches and to encourage pre-service teachers to do the same, therefore making it difficult for them to introduce alternative teaching approaches such as TGfU. This is problematic in light of research also revealing that pre-service teachers regarded their practicums as the most valuable experiences in their teacher preparation.

Keywords: *Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU), physical education teacher education (PETE), socialisation*

Introduction

The traditional approach to teaching physical education has long been grounded in behaviourist/behavioural theory (Butler & McCahan, 2005) and usually consists of a warm up, technique based skills exercises and finally a game incorporating these skills. Use of this theory to explain how learning in physical education occurs sees behaviours acquired through conditioning which happens through interaction with and adaptation to the environment (O'Donnell et al., 2012); in other words, a student performs a skill, is praised for doing it correctly, and repeats the skill thereby learning the skill. Students often approach the initial phases of the lesson with low motivation and often ask "When can we play a game?" (Werner, Thorpe, & Bunker, 1996). In contrast to more traditional technique based approaches, TGfU is grounded in constructivist theory which links thoughts and actions to enable learning to occur (O'Donnell et al., 2012). It incorporates a more student centred tactical emphasis by focusing on students developing a critical understanding of and effective responses to, various game play situations

(Howarth, 2005). This article presents and analyses the TGfU approach within the context of a physical education teacher education (PETE) course and investigates the importance of socialising pre-service teachers with this less traditional approach. Making the TGfU approach a fundamental part of PETE programs extends the knowledge base of pre-service teachers and promotes the use of the approach in schools due to increasing exposure to practicing teachers (Wright, McNeill, & Butler, 2004). This should lead to less physical education lessons being continually plagued with questions of "When can we play a game?"

Brief history of TGfU

The Teaching Games for Understanding approach (TGfU) was introduced through the work of Bunker and Thorpe (1982). Bunker and Thorpe developed the approach after noticing that many students completed school without the ability to use their decision making skills in game situations (Araújo et al., 2007). They believed that traditional approaches to physical education teaching were largely ineffective. These approaches usually

focussed on skills being introduced, mastered and then integrated into a modified game and often led to many children not achieving success because of the focus on performance. Students who were unsuccessful at certain drills felt that they could not participate successfully in the game, often students wanted to play the game rather than focus on skill acquisition drills and many 'skilful' players were produced who in fact had very inflexible techniques and poor decision-making skills (Barrie, 2008). Students also found it difficult to use previously learned skills in game situation because of little or no class time being devoted to strategy and games sense. The more learner-centered TGfU model was developed in order to tackle these issues.

The philosophy of the TGfU approach is to enhance physical literacy through the teaching of game-like activities in an inclusive, non-threatening, highly motivational environment. This type of environment with an emphasis on player decisions and individual readiness is able to provide students' with the most favourable learning experience (Light, 2005). The teacher or coach is then able to take the role of facilitator and creator of problem situations. TGfU has a tactical focus which is different to traditional technique based approaches. It is an approach which directs student learning and understanding to why a skill is performed before they then actually learn how to perform it. This increases the learning motivation of students as they are able to understand why they need to work on a skill; to be successful in game situations (Araújo et. al, 2007). Since the release of Bunker and Thorpe's (1982) article the TGfU approach to physical education teaching has received a great deal of attention internationally, with many academics and teachers writing their own articles about this relatively new model of teaching (Mandigo, Butler, & Hopper, 2007).

Use of TGfU

Bunker and Thorpe believed that the traditional technical approach to teaching physical education, which usually involved a skill being introduced, mastered and then incorporated into a game, was largely ineffective because these skills practiced in isolation did not transfer into the game (Barrie, 2008). Bunker and Thorpe (1982) further noted that a technique based approach created a large

percentage of children who achieved little success in physical education because of the emphasis on performance, skilful players who have inflexible techniques and poor decision making abilities, students who are teacher dependent in regards to decision making, and a significant number of students who leave school knowing little about games.

The TGfU approach to teaching physical education has a more student centred approach and focuses on teaching tactical elements of game play in a series of progressively more challenging situations (Hopper & Bell, 2000). Students become more tactically aware and more capable of making decisions about "what to do" and "how to do it" and would decide to work on technical skills because they were aware that they needed them in order to be proficient (Hopper, 2002). The idea of putting the "why" of a game before the "how" means that students are able to gain an understanding of a game by participating in a modified version that was tailored to be appropriate for their physical, social, and mental development (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982). Bunker & Thorpe suggested that early exposure to game-like experiences helped children to make correct tactical decisions during game play. They further believed that a teacher's role was to present a game that students could play with some of the skills already developed and that improvement could be achieved through their increased understanding of the game. For teachers to develop the ability to present games with the TGfU approach, they must also be exposed to the approach early in their pre-service training and be given adequate opportunities to develop their familiarity and confidence with using it.

Due to the complexity of developing tactical understanding, it must be taught in a progressive manner that is appropriate to the growth and experience of students (Hopper & Bell, 2000). This progressive manner should also be used when teaching the approach to pre-service teachers. University lecturers should introduce the approach to pre-service teachers by teaching them basic, and then progressively more complex games. As the pre-service teachers' knowledge and understanding increases, they should be given more responsibility. This would progress from teaching basic and then

more complex games to their peers, and then being given the opportunity to teach children using the approach.

In the TGfU approach a teacher uses a games focus; Chandler (1996) commented that "Skill learning is not for playing games; rather, playing games is for skill learning" (p. 50). The thinking behind the TGfU approach is that the purpose of rules should be to make games playable (Hopper, 2002). Games can be simplified by making changes to factors such as the area of play, player numbers, rules and equipment (Bell & Hopper, 2003). The standard adult rules of the game are only used when students are capable of understanding and following them. Pre-service teachers should initially be shown the effects of changes to these factors through participating in games run by their university lecturer. They should then be challenged to teach games to their peers and progressively make changes to encourage participants to develop their tactical knowledge and understanding.

A vital part of the TGfU approach is the teachers' ability to introduce developmentally appropriate games that increased in complexity to meet the needs of their learners (Barrie, 2008). Technical instruction is given when required, but this is always within the context of the game and at the performance level of the students. Skill progression and practice is vitally important to the TGfU approach, as is teaching students why a skill is needed before teaching them how to perform a skill (Hopper, 2002); for example, a student who can see the value of hitting a drop shot in tennis is more likely to be ready and able to learn the correct technique (Werner et al., 1996). It can also be argued that a teacher is more likely to use the TGfU approach if they have seen the value of it, and used it successfully during their pre-service training.

Some teachers avoid the TGfU approach because its tactical focus can take more time to implement and teachers require a greater depth of knowledge and questioning ability in order for effective learning to occur (Howarth, 2005). The flow on effects of placing more emphasis on TGfU during PETE programs increases the knowledge and confidence of both pre-service teachers and practicing teachers in using the approach (Wright, et al., 2004). Some students may be frustrated if their skills prevent them from fully executing their

tactical understanding. This may motivate some to practice harder whereas others will simply be further discouraged. Pre-service teachers must be taught that an important aspect of the TGfU approach is the removal of the limitations brought about by skill deficiency. When players are developing tactical awareness they must be able to focus on understanding the tactical problems, thinking of solutions and then be skilful enough to see if their solutions are effective.

Within the TGfU approach, teachers are required to ask questions in a way that supports the learning process. These questions encourage a development from lower to high order thinking skills and progress from teacher centred to student centred approaches in order to develop students' games based decision-making skills (Barrie, 2009). Teachers must also plan "progressively challenging activities and select critical and timely interventions that challenge understandings and enhance learning" (Hubball, Lambert & Hayes, 2007, p. 19). Many teachers can find that successful and effective questioning is a skill that they have to actively focus on in order to become proficient, as it can only be developed with practice and experimentation. It is essential that pre-service teachers are required to focus on practicing and developing their questioning ability. They should be given ample practical and written theoretical opportunities to practice and improve. Barrie (2009) suggested a teacher should write out a list of potential questions when planning their lesson in order to give them a starting point and help develop confidence. For example, these questions could start with "what will you do if..." or "what happens when..." The teacher should have these questions to refer to but should not restrict themselves to only using these questions as the activity could present the teacher with the opportunity to ask other questions as well.

In contrast to the often teacher centred styles required by the traditional approach, TGfU enables teachers to use a variety of different teaching styles to enhance the inclusion of all students. This constructivist approach can result in a wide range of opportunities for students to be more involved in their own learning and the critical thinking and problem solving skills they develop should be transferable to numerous other situations (Hubball et al., 2007) such as the tertiary learning context.

PETE programs should require pre-service teachers to use multiple teaching styles during their training to develop their understanding and give them multiple options for their future teaching.

If the TGfU approach is poorly implemented it can resemble a 'teaching games with *no* understanding' or game focus approach in which the students are merely occupied in an organised recess type lesson with the teacher umpiring. This approach does not involve any development in tactical understanding and also fails to include the complex teaching skills required when presenting students with adult game playing skills. This is therefore not a TGfU lesson, despite opponents of the approach often seeing them as one and the same (Hopper, 2002). University lecturers must ensure that this does not happen in PETE classes by ensuring they regularly stop games and ask questions, modify rules, teach techniques when required and explain what they are doing throughout. They must also stress the importance of all these actions to the TGfU approach. If pre-service teachers are taught in this way then they are more likely to also teach using a TGfU rather than games focus approach.

Comparison to traditional approaches

The TGfU approach organises games into four different categories according to their similar elements. These categories are target games, net/wall, striking and invasion. By teaching different games from the same category, children can see similarities between different games (Werner et al., 1996). For example, common principles of attack and defence can be explored through different invasion games such as hockey and ultimate frisbee. Just as skills such as throwing or kicking can transfer between different sports and different contexts, so can tactical knowledge (Thorpe & Bunker, 1989). Opponents of the model have stated that students can become proficient at performing the skills required for modified activities, but can have trouble adapting these for use in the full version of the game. It is vital that teachers are aware of this and have ample opportunity during the PETE programs to design their modified games to incorporate the correct technique required for the full version of the game.

One of the initial criticisms of TGfU was that its

supporters could not present significant empirical data to show its effectiveness (Mawer, 1999). Numerous studies have now been conducted, with the majority comparing the effects of the traditional and TGfU approaches in terms of games knowledge, game playing ability, skill development and enjoyment. Investigations of basketball, tennis, soccer and other sports have all shown the TGfU approach is most effective in developing tactical knowledge (Mawer, 1999). An example of these studies is that of Turner and Martinek (1999) who used hockey to test the legitimacy of TGfU approach by comparing it to a technique based approach and a control group. Two groups were taught hockey using the different approaches for 15 lessons of 45 minutes each. The control group did not receive any hockey instruction and were taught softball for the duration of the study. They found that the TGfU group scored significantly higher on passing decision making, declarative and procedural knowledge, and on control and passing execution. Mawer (1999) noted that short term studies often have very little effect and that a longer time frame, such as that used by Turner and Martinek is necessary. This may be because it takes students a few weeks to get used to the new approach and begin to develop and consolidate their tactical knowledge and awareness.

Most studies have interestingly not found any noticeable differences between the two approaches in terms of skill development (Mawer, 1999). These findings reduce the impact of another common criticism of TGfU; that students' skills are negatively affected by the lack of technical emphasis in this tactically focussed approach. A study by Hopper (2002) found that children taught within a TGfU approach model reported increased enjoyment when learning. Jensen (1996) believes that inducing positive learning states is an important facet of human learning. The study of Griffin and Oslin (1997) found that students felt the tactical approach provided deeper meaning to the games played and they enjoyed not having to continually repeat skill drills they had already mastered.

Influence of socialisation

Research shows that when people decide to enter a certain profession, such as physical education teaching, they pass through three separate phases of socialisation: recruitment, professional socialisation

and occupational socialisation (Wright et al., 2004). The recruitment phase consists of the experiences that people have in their youth; in this case sport and physical education experiences in and out of school. These have a significant influence in helping someone select to pursue a teaching career in physical education. The professional socialisation phase contains the experiences of people when they are training to become a teacher. These experiences occur at university and include coursework subjects and practicums in schools. The final stage of teacher socialisation is occupational socialisation and is made up of the experiences teachers have when they are working as physical education teachers in schools. This phase includes learning the reality of what works in the real world of teaching and dealing with workplace conditions, both inside and outside the classroom (Solomon, Worthy, & Carter, 1993).

Socialisation experiences help teachers to decide what, why, and how they teach (Wright et al., 2004). Lortie (1975) claimed that the past experiences of pre-service teachers observing and interacting with their teachers throughout school were often more influential than what they learnt at university in determining how they were going to teach. Research has shown that the majority of students who chose to enter a PETE course have had positive physical education and sport experiences. They also showed a strong interest in a custodial approach to teaching, meaning that they expected to teach in a similar way to how they were taught (Bain, 1990). PETE programs should present a wide variety of curriculum models so that pre-service teachers can make informed decisions about how, why and what they teach. By doing this pre-service teachers can be encouraged to teach differently to how they were taught.

Socialisation research (Wright et al., 2004) has shown that it is often difficult for a physical educator to teach in a way that is different to how they were taught. It is also difficult to teach differently to physical education colleagues at their school. Wright et al. observed that many PETE students enter university with no experience of the TGfU approach which means that many practicing physical education teachers are not using the approach. Pill (2011) encountered similar results when he studied pre-service physical education teachers in South Australia. He found that many students do not

observe or understand approaches such as TGfU until they are exposed to them during their PETE courses. While the students were receptive to these new approaches at university, this did not extend to them using them on their school practicums. Pill observed that this was primarily due to their CTs not providing examples of TGfU in practice in a school setting. CTs were found to mostly adhere to “traditional behaviourist orientated textbook teachings aimed for little more than ‘busy, happy, active’ time” (p. 13). Although all schools are unique, the results of Pill’s research shows that physical education is taught in a similar way in many South Australian schools. Pre-service teachers are encouraged to teach in this similar style when they undertake their practicum placements, therefore making it difficult for them to introduce different teaching approaches. While PETE programs may encourage students to try new ideas and approaches, Pill’s data indicated that pre-service teachers found it difficult to reproduce these new approaches in school settings.

Sparkes (2003) suggested that there are two types of learning communities; the first is one where teachers work together to instigate innovations that will advance their teaching practices, and a second where teachers consent to conform to traditional teaching practices. The evidence from Pill’s (2011) research suggests that the second type of community is the one that is more likely to occur in South Australian schools. More research needs to be undertaken exploring why this is the case.

Conclusion

Wright (2001) found that pre-service teachers regarded their practicums as the most valuable experiences in their teacher preparation. Universities should require pre-service teachers to use a TGfU approach for some of their teaching during these important phases of their development. This should involve their university lecturers modelling and teaching the approach in class and providing opportunities to practice using it with both peers and local students. While university supervisors can provide support and feedback, it is their practicum colleague teacher (CT) who has the most influence due to the amount of time they spend together (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996). This will require PETE programs to not only provide authentic

exposure on how to implement the approach during lectures and tutorials, but also match pre-service teachers with CTs who are familiar with the TGfU and confident to provide feedback. Wright found CTs who did not want the TGfU approach used in their classes and hypothesised that this could be due to them not accepting TGfU as a legitimate approach, not feeling sufficiently qualified to provide feedback and feeling embarrassed that a student teacher knows more about an approach than they do.

If PETE undergraduates are immersed in TGfU, provided with opportunities and support to teach on practicums using the approach, it is far more likely that they will use the approach when they are physical education teachers in schools (Wright et al., 2004). This will have a flow on effect as they will be able to become TGfU mentors for the next wave of pre-service teachers and their own students will also be exposed to the approach during their school years. This will not be a quick or easy process due to the strong demand for teachers to maintain the status quo in their teaching (Wright et al., 2004).

Like all approaches to teaching physical education, problems with the TGfU approach can arise from poor implementation or inappropriate use of teaching styles (Hubball et al., 2007). PETE programs must ensure they educate their pre-service teachers about these problems and how to avoid them. The TGfU approach is one of many available for teaching physical education and it should be considered and used for appropriate situations such as teaching invasion games and their attacking and defending strategies. Additional time may be required for teachers to plan for TGfU, but if both teachers and students engage in the approach it could be a rewarding experience for everyone involved. As TGfU is a more recent and less well known approach, care must be taken during the professional and occupational socialisation phases of a physical education teachers' development in order to provide the knowledge, experience and support necessary to enable and encourage the use of TGfU (Wright et al., 2004). Only through a constant emphasis on TGfU at university will PETE undergraduates have an opportunity to become confident and competent in their use of the approach. This is the essential step in increasing the acceptance and popularity of the

TGfU approach.

This article precedes a submission for a research grant to investigate the effects of socialisation on the perceptions of pre-service teachers' use of a less traditional approach to teaching physical education, TGfU. This study will follow the students as they progress from learning the approach in a unit of work studied at university to implementing the approach in a school setting.

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