

A Description of Teaching Games for Understanding

The Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) approach developed from the work of Rod Thorpe and David Bunker at Loughborough University during the 1970s and early 1980s (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982; Thorpe & Bunker, 1989). Other terms that describe developments of this approach include the Tactical Games Model (Griffin et al., 1997) and Game Sense (Australian Sports Commission, 1997a). Thorpe and Bunker observed that much games teaching and coaching was dominated by the development of techniques within highly structured lessons. They also observed that in school physical education, the development of techniques took up the majority of lesson time with little time left to actually play the game. Even when game play was included in lessons, teachers and coaches rarely made connections between the technique practices and how and when these techniques should be applied in game play.

A common complaint voiced by teachers and coaches was that the techniques learned laboriously in lessons and training sessions broke down in game play. Bunker and Thorpe's response to this problem was to develop an alternative

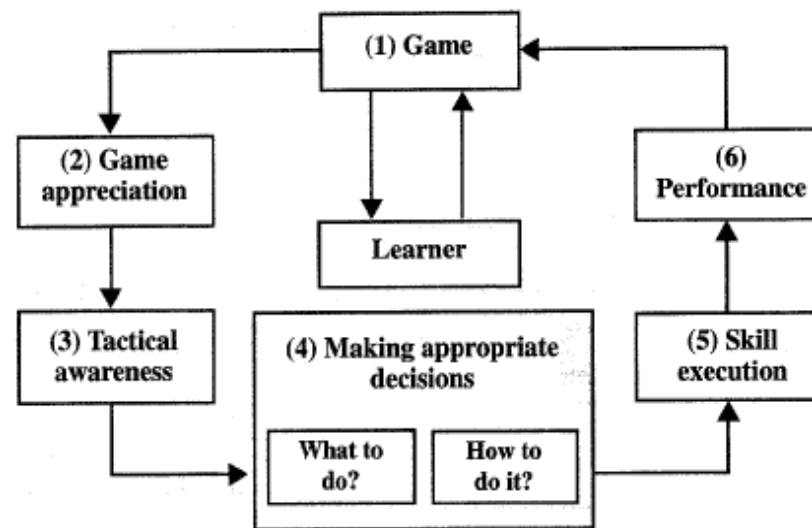


Figure 1 — The Teaching Games for Understanding model (from Bunker & Thorpe, 1982).

approach to games teaching and coaching that helped players to learn the tactics and strategies of game play in tandem with technique development. The Bunker-Thorpe TGfU model can be seen in Figure 1.

At the heart of their approach was the use of modified games to suit the developmental level of the learners (Thorpe, 1990). All TGfU teaching and coaching takes place within the framework of game play and the modified game form. Modifications are made to rules, playing area, and equipment. Techniques are developed using drills and other training practices common to the traditional approach. A technique is only introduced when the players reach a level of game play that requires them to learn the technique. As the players' expertise develops, the game form is changed to continue to challenge the players in terms of game appreciation, tactical awareness, decision-making, and execution of technique.

Reference

Kirk D. and McPhail A., (2002) Teaching Games for Understanding and Situated Learning: Rethinking the Bunker and Thorpe Model. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*. Vol 21. P.p. 177-192.

