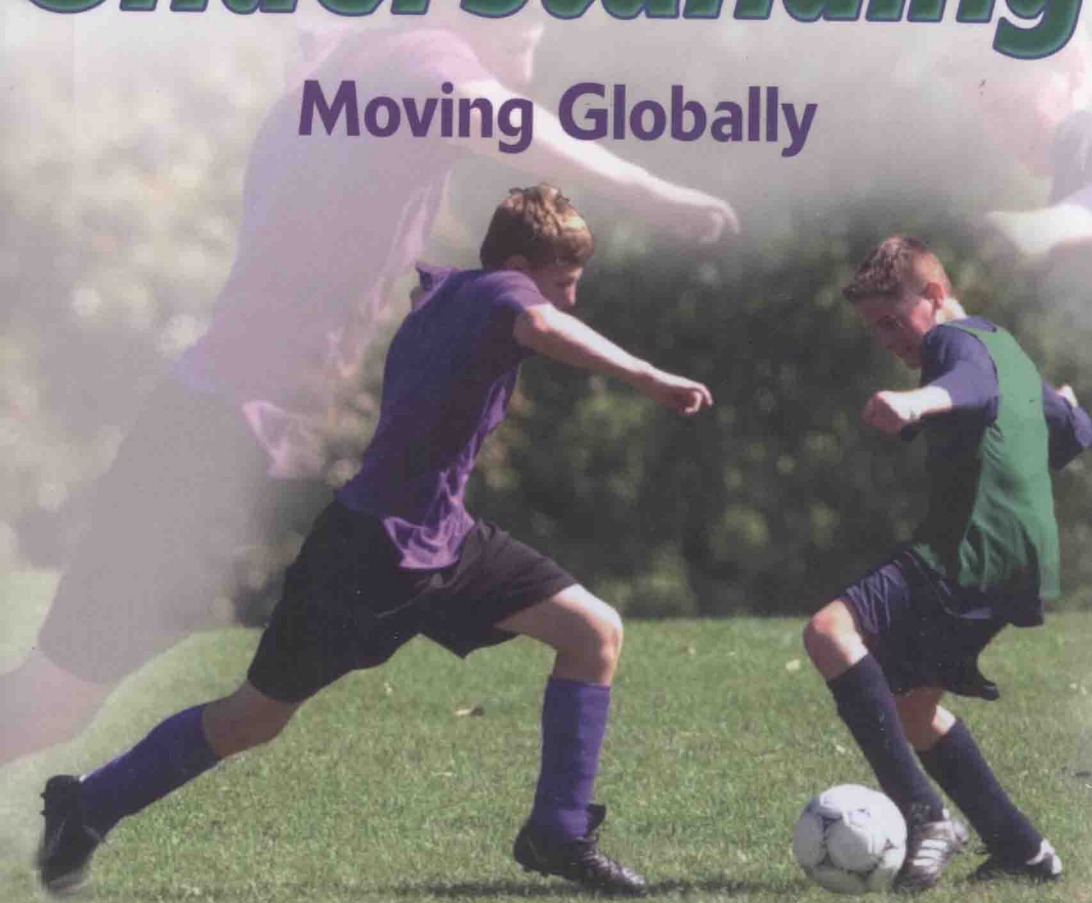# *MORE* Teaching Games for Understanding

Moving Globally

Joy I. Butler • Linda L. Griffin

Editors

More
Teaching Games
for Understanding

Moving Globally

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Foreword:
Revisiting the TGfU Brand

Len Almond

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, educators were concerned that children did not experience the thrill of playing games and very few understood anything about games. In the same way, many believed that neither children nor adults understood the games they were playing. As a consequence of these observations, a different approach was developed to teach children games through other games. The introductory games were representations of the real game with simplified rules that all children could play right away. This approach became known as Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU).

As a result of inviting many practitioners and lecturers to explore this approach, a series of papers (Bulletin of Physical Education, 1982) and a book titled *Rethinking Games Teaching* emerged (Thorpe, Bunker, & Almond, 1986). Since this time, hundreds of publications, conference presentations, and workshops have been developed to discuss and debate TGfU. A number of national coaches have adopted the rationale for TGfU in the United Kingdom, but the practice has mainly been embraced in other countries. In addition, an approach for all sports has emerged called *Play Practice* (2001), which guides practitioners through teaching games and goes beyond TGfU in important ways. Although TGfU was enshrined in the 1990s in the first UK national-curriculum recommendations for physical education, the rationale seems to have passed by practitioners without any major effect. TGfU currently thrives in only a few areas where practitioners are faithful to its original approach.

I would like to suggest that pedagogy in physical education needs to be a central theoretical and practical issue if we are to develop a more informed vision of the potential of physical education in the lives of all children and young people. In this piece, I would like to use TGfU as the basis for generating a debate about pedagogy. It is short because my motive is to generate debate and criticism and to encourage practitioners and teachers to explore the relevance of TGfU for today's children.

I would like to propose that we revisit TGfU in a different format to enable today's teachers to explore the relevance of a rebranded TGfU and to start to rethink its relevance. One of the major strengths of TGfU, its pedagogical approach, was never spelled out in more precise terms.

Therefore, I would like to suggest that we explore TGfU as an approach with a number of key pedagogical principles.

Pedagogical Principles

1. All games need to be represented in their simplest form to enable all children to play and learn the game. How can games be represented to all children?

At the 1984 Olympic Congress in Oregon, a paper titled A Change in Focus for the Teaching of Games proposed four fundamental aspects of games curriculum:

- Sampling
- Modification – representation
- Modification – exaggeration
- Tactical complexity

However, these fundamental aspects represent two quite discrete concepts. First, a curriculum decision (a sampling of the richness of all games) determines which games we should teach and why. Second, pedagogical decisions about modification (representation, exaggeration, and tactical complexity) determine the order in which games should be taught. Should some games be taught earlier, as in the case of building toward more complex games?

These pedagogical decisions represent the most significant features of TGfU thinking. The team (Dave Bunker, Rod Thorpe, and Len Almond) believed that we needed to modify adult versions of a game and to represent them in their simplest form in order to reduce the problems and demands faced by children. Modification involved changing rules, playing areas, and time frames and increasing the size of implements or balls to suit the needs of children and to reduce the technical demands. Exaggeration was used to illustrate the primary rules of the game and to highlight the tactical problems of the game. Bruner's spiral curriculum and theory of instruction (motivation, representation, structure, and sequence) were the inspirations for this development.

In this way, the team believed that we could make all games amenable to all children and attractive enough to sustain their interest and stimulate further participation both in and out of school. We could encourage more practice, which would improve game techniques and help children increase their level of activity and enjoyment.

2. All games need to be shaped in order to progress and develop. At the same time, they must also address the different needs of children in a developmentally appropriate format. How can we shape games?

When Margaret Ellis (1986) used the term shaping games, she meant basic modification. More recently, Alan Launder used the terms shaping play, focusing play, and enhancing play in a pedagogical sense in his book, *Play Practice* (2001). His use of the term shaping is important because its goes beyond representation and basic modification of TGfU. The ideas he uses merit close scrutiny: creating appropriate learning opportunities, changing games, and meeting the needs of different students. His forthcoming rewrite of *Play Practice* should illuminate the second pedagogical principle.

3. In order to understand games and make intelligent decisions during play, both children and teachers need to acquire and develop what one could call games sense. What does games sense entail?

The term games sense emerged in Australia, where it was used to make the game the focus for developing tactical and strategic thinking. In this approach, the teacher or coach becomes a facilitator, creating situations for players to find solutions to game problems themselves. This is a very specific use of games sense.

However, I believe that games sense should be used in a different way. Games sense represents a whole mind-set in which players accumulate the wisdom to make intelligent decisions about their play. There is huge potential here. I believe that the characteristics of games sense need to be articulated because they represent a key pedagogical principle that needs to be nurtured and cherished. Games sense enables participants to enhance their understanding of games and to appreciate their own potential to excite and challenge themselves. I believe that this notion is a worthy target for creative thinking, a sharing of ideas, and the emergence of an important dimension of a revised TGfU. Perhaps we should consider some of the following goals:

- Comprehending the shape and flow of the games
- Understanding the available options quickly and decisively
- Understanding the location of other players on the team and anticipating the type and direction of their future movements
- Identifying how the team links together and copes with changeovers
- Understanding which roles individual players have during times of offense, defense, and neutrality
- Understanding how the opposition plays
- Developing positional sense

4. If they are to teach games to all children, teachers need what I call a pedagogy of engagement. What does this entail? This fourth pedagogical concept was originally missing from TGfU because we failed to articulate

it in detail, assuming that the concept of engagement would be part of teachers' training and skill set. Teachers must learn to achieve the following goals:

- Reach out to children
- Connect with them
- Engage them constructively
- Draw out their confidence and potential
- Stretch their capabilities

These competences can be practiced and learned to build up a whole repertoire of teaching skills that will help instructors in their games teaching.

Conclusion

In summary, I have attempted to identify four pedagogical principles within a TGfU framework that need to be considered in the development of teaching games. I believe that play practice challenges our thinking about shaping games and provides another dimension to TGfU. With critical analysis and application of its characteristics, games sense may well be the key to the idea of intelligent performance in a game. Finally, I have introduced a pedagogy of engagement which complements TGfU.

I hope to stimulate debate and reawaken interest among practitioners of TGfU. Although this approach has the power to transform games teaching, it needs to be presented in a format that allows practitioners to recognize its significance. The next stage is to provide practical illustrations of TGfU that all teachers can use.

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Preface

Rod Thorpe • David Bunker

We have always been surprised that the TGfU model has attracted such a great deal of interest. Perhaps it is not surprising when one considers the slow evolution of the approach and the field testing it received. It seems to tick many boxes for many people. Although it was first developed for implementation into the physical-education (PE) curriculum, TGfU has subsequently been embraced by programs as varied as games-based activities taught by inexperienced teachers and beginning coaches for children under age 11 (Playsport[1]) and coaching of elite players by experienced coaches (Games Sense[2]).

Both of us changed our teaching as physical educators in the late 1960s. At college, we had been taught to follow a lesson plan of "warm up, skill, game," but this approach did not seem to be the answer. This being said, many of the ideas presented by our lecturers, such as concepts from educational gymnastics and modified games, influenced this change. As lecturers and preparing teachers in the early 1970s, we observed games lessons that followed the traditional pattern and noted any failure to meet a number of intended learning outcomes. We began to evolve the TGfU model with our students, local teachers, and other members of the Loughborough staff. It is worth noting that when the model was presented to some teachers, they responded by saying, "Thank you for that. I was doing something similar, as I was not satisfied with traditional games lessons, but could not rationalize or explain quite what I was doing." Real impetus came when Len Almond, a curriculum developer, joined the staff and convinced us that the ideas we were working with, grounded in skill acquisition and social psychology, needed to be articulated in a more coherent framework in order to inform games teaching. Len not only brought his own ideas to the development of this framework but also encouraged us to test our ideas with other colleagues working in the UK. As an executive member of AIESEP (Association Internationale des Écoles Superieures d'Education Physique or International Association for Physical Education in Higher Education), he proposed that we promote these ideas to a wider international audience.

We present this short résumé of the development of TGfU to reinforce our belief that when people work together, great progress can be made. Students make their critical input; the barriers between teachers, coaches, and researchers break down as each informs the other in a fruitful exchange of ideas. TGfU conferences facilitate this progress,

since individuals who represent these groups are invited to make their contributions. This process is both rewarding and exciting, but we suggest that this exchange should be transferred from the conference room into practical situations.

Writing this foreword presents us with an opportunity to reflect on our past practices as teachers, coaches, and researchers who have developed the precepts of TGfU. We are reassured by the unanimous view that the learner is all important, that the teacher or coach will no longer be expected to control highly structured sessions based upon correct techniques, and that the teacher or coach will not be expected to throw a ball into the mix and let a game continue unfettered.

It is not surprising, given current customs and practices, that our apparent disregard for technique and skill execution has received some criticism. It is not that we consider skill as unimportant, quite the contrary (see later), but skill depends on the learning situation, a contextualized game form, which is a key component of the TGfU model. From our perspective, practitioners have not given enough thought to game form and researchers have tended to pass it by when writing about learning theory. We welcome the fact that small-side games have become an established feature of games-based activity, but rarely have we seen games in which five players pit their wits against three others in an invasion game, or one plays two in a net-court game. These games challenge all the participants and help prevent situations in which the best players tend to take over in small-side games of three on three or four on four.

We feel that more time needs to be given to game appreciation, which shapes a game by setting out rules and the means by which goals, points, and touchdowns are scored. At the same time, we must make sure that students understand the rules and are playing the game we want them to play. We will need to make modifications to the game and changes to the rules as a game develops, but we must not forget that we may need to change a rule to make the game easier in order for individuals to progress. A situation might occur in which an individual or team exploits a particular tactic, demonstrating good game understanding, but in so doing, spoils the game. The opposition may demand a new rule! Youngsters frequently change rules in the games they play, saying, "That's not fair, you can't do that." Indeed, this is how our traditional games develop, with continual changes to rules to make the game better. With more thought given to game form and game appreciation, there is an excellent chance that a good game will result, learning will take place, and that stated learning objectives will be achieved.

The most disappointing reaction from teachers to the TGfU approach is that it is difficult, requiring the ability to select and modify games to suit the needs of the moment and an in-depth knowledge of the principles of play across the games spectrum. But why should this not be required of

professionals responsible for the physical education and sport education of young people? Is it any wonder that physical education as a subject on the school curriculum still lacks credibility for many?

A positive outcome of the TGfU approach has been to draw attention to the importance of developing tactical awareness in games playing. As we all know, games present problems to participants no matter what their age, ability, and experience. Therefore, it seems logical for the teacher or coach to take a problem-solving approach, to ask the right questions, and to help the players search for solutions by drawing from their involvement in the game form. We must recognize that when players are heavily involved in the game, they may not have time to think and, of course, when they are part of a team, they have no time to work out solutions. We should build time to think into our sessions.

One such example, often forced on the teacher or coach by a shortage of space, is when two 4v4 games are going on while another team waits in the wings. Much of our teaching takes place with the students not on court, as we use questions to direct their attention and prompt facets of play that they might try to implement when they are on court. In this manner, they find ways to score a goal, win a point, hit a run, and stop opponents from scoring. To be sure, the answers are found in core principles, whether creating or denying space, working with the construct of time, or responding to the moment when possession is lost, handed over, or regained. We should be mindful, particularly with the young, not to become too sport specific when seeking to developing tactical awareness, and should remember that much can be learned from the application of principles in other sports. Why not select one such principle, say depth, and work in a practical situation to apply this concept to different games (in game form) and to break out games such as soccer-rounders? Importantly, a principles approach makes it possible for teachers and others involved in sports development to achieve a broad-based games education. More specifically, greater tactical awareness makes more than one option available to students and requires them to decide what they will do.

There is little doubt that two outcomes of the approach, decision making and empowerment, made it attractive to the coaching world in the 1990s. As knowledge of the physical elements (conditioning, nutrition, and biomechanical analysis) became more refined, many realized that the development of decision making, based on reading the environment and selecting a response that works for individual students, had been largely neglected. Indeed, observation of tactical teaching and coaching seemed to rely on telling players what to do in given situations, rather than challenging them to find out. This is one reason why, when we ask tactical questions, we will often say, "Don't tell me; show me." We do not want a logical, verbal answer; we want to see a movement response to a situation that must have already been perceived.

We feel that many of the most creative players in a range of sports come from countries where coaching is absent or minimal. Their playful activity, forced on them by circumstances, encourages a broad range of personally developed responses. Making decisions at a high level of performance is virtually reflexive, since responses often occur at speeds that do not allow time to consider. We argue that decision making should be developed throughout a child's games education, and that the key to doing this, once again, is to design games that are challenging. Leave the youngsters alone to play; structure and order can come later.

It has always annoyed us when people have said that we don't teach skill in TGfU or when they have failed to teach skills, used TGfU as an excuse. The model has always addressed the importance of skill. Current thinking about skill acquisition supports the notion that it is best developed in circumstances that most closely resemble the situation in which they will be used. Indeed, what we did in the past was teach technique—a movement in isolation. Becoming skillful requires practice, and we are again forced to recognize the value in presenting carefully designed games. These games challenge players tactically and technically. The skill to be used will be individually assessed. If the game is enjoyable and offers many chances to use the skill, the players will have a lot of turns. We know that observational learning is a powerful form of learning; demonstration by the teacher or coach may be useful in learning a skill. However, structuring sessions to allow students to play with and against their more highly skilled peers helps them develop, in many cases, a more powerful image of themselves. Models similar to observation are most effective. A major advantage of this incidental learning is that the observer does not have to copy a skill, but can do so if needed. That being said, we believe there are times to teach skill more directly, but no single input would be suitable for most teachers and coaches, who deal with large groups of mixed-ability players. This type of teaching cannot be a class activity. If players are involved in small-sided, challenging games, they can be left to play. This means the teacher or coach can extract players with similar skill requirements and can spend some time with them. Of course, in doing so, we are back to our basic premise that a class or group is made up of individual players; we have to find ways of meeting their needs. There is no single right way to teach or coach, but we feel that TGfU works to meet the needs of the individual student and provides the opportunity for all to engage with games.

Readers of the book will be impressed by the breadth, depth, and quality of the essays drawing upon TGfU, which range in topic from video gaming to TGfU's connections to physical literacy, and from teaching games to elementary children to TGfU as a coaching methodology. There is little doubt that TGfU is in great health and good hands, and that all involved can look to the future and to the next international conference

in 2012. Having said this, we should come back to earth and not lose sight of the reasons why TGfU came into being in the first place: to motivate young people to be interested and involved in games, to be more engaged in their own learning, to develop their knowledge of games, and to understand the causes and consequences of their games activity.

Endnotes

[1] In the early 1990s, Rod produced a series of progressive games while working with a research assistant, Ben Tan, on sports. These were simply presented on cards designed to lead a parent or beginning coach through a play approach to games. He recognized that this method provided an excellent starting point for inexperienced teachers (as well as a starting point for TGfU). Initially called Playsport, this method was the basis for the development, by the Youth Sports Trust (UK), of the TOP play programs.

[2] In 1992, Rod received a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship to look at Mini Games in Australia and New Zealand. His critique of these, although mainly positive, led to his invitation back to Australia to develop TGfU ideas in the coaching domain. The outcome was Games Sense.

Acknowledgments

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

— Margaret Mead

We would both like to acknowledge the entire international TGfU community for sharing their passion and enthusiasm for moving this approach along its path. We hope that we will continue to learn as a global community. We would also like to thank all the authors for their commitment to their work, for meeting timelines, and for working meticulously and thoughtfully on their chapters along the way.

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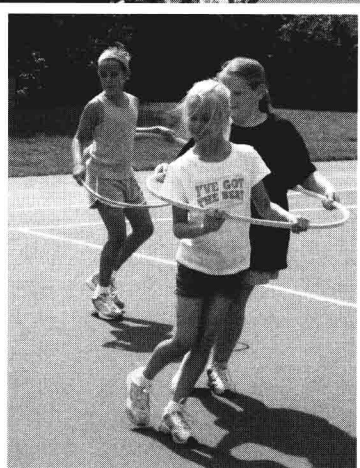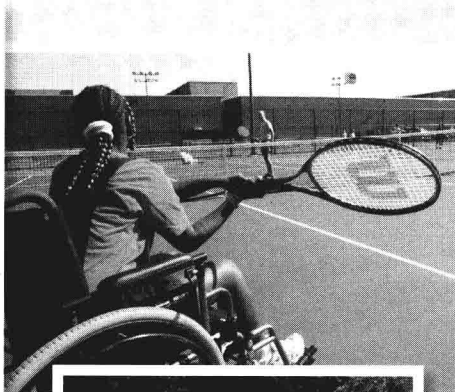
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