

Teaching preservice teachers the Teaching Games for Understanding approach: A proposed PETE program

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Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) is a curriculum model that emphasizes a tactical approach to teaching games. Over the last decade there has been an international consensus on the need to incorporate this model into Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) programs. The present paper proposes a PETE program that employs TGfU as conceptual framework to encourage preservice teachers to use it for teaching games and sports at schools. Combining theory, observation of demonstration, practice, and feedback under protected conditions and in real school settings, the proposed program provides preservice teachers with adequate opportunities to develop familiarity and confidence with TGfU as well as to experience success in using it. A number of courses that are part of a PETE program, courses in which TGfU is integrated, are presented.

Keywords: Teaching games, teacher education, teaching

Introduction

Educational reformers have always directed questions at teacher education programs, such as, who prepares teachers, in what manner, and how well. Undoubtedly, teacher education can be an important agent of change in quality education in schools (Tsangaridou, 2009) as well as in teacher quality (MacPhail & Tannehill, 2012). However, there is a strong criticism against teacher preparation programs for not providing meaningful education to future teachers (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2006) or physical education (PE) teachers (Locke, 1992; MacPhail, 2011; Tsangaridou, 2009). Under the circumstances, there is a need for initial teacher education programs, including Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) programs, to demonstrate their contribution to teacher development (Collier, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

It has been argued that PETE programs should encourage and challenge undergraduate students to explore and use alternative teaching approaches or strategies of teaching PE (Light, 2002; Wright et al., 2004) such as Sport Education or the Spectrum of Teaching Styles (Byra, 2000). Recently, there has been a widespread consensus on the need to employ Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) as a conceptual framework in PETE

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programs (Ayers & Housner, 2008; Cruickshank & Swabey, 2013; Wright, McNeill, Fry, & Wand, 2005; Wright et al., 2004).

The reasons for using a tactical understanding approach to teaching games and sports in PETE are quite a few. TGfU can be useful in managing the volume of sport skill-related courses of a PETE program, in understanding how skills and strategies are similar, and in organizing K-12 content into conceptual categories to take advantage of the time available in teachers' school schedules (Ayers & Housner, 2008). In addition, TGfU may encourage preservice teachers to think critically about pedagogical models, thus, enabling them to reflect on why and how they teach sport and games to their pupils (Wright et al., 2004). Finally, PETE programs that emphasize TGfU can be seen as working at the forefront of educational change due to many researchers' embracing it as a framework to conduct research (e.g., Harvey & Jarrett, 2014; Light & Butler, 2005; Moy, Renshaw, Davids, & Brymer, 2015) and its adoption by governing bodies and practitioners responsible for education (Light & Butler, 2005).

In the light of the aforementioned arguments for incorporating TGfU into PETE programs, it is reasonable to suggest and describe a four year PETE program in which the TGfU approach is used as a conceptual framework.

Teaching games for understanding

It is not within the scope of this article to go into detail about this tactical approach to teaching games. Therefore, only a brief overview will be given for those readers who are not familiar with TGfU. In the United States the dominant approach to teaching games is called the technical approach that emphasizes the technique-based methodology for skills and strategies (Butler, 1996). An alternative to that approach is the TGfU that has been used for many years in England (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982). TGfU focuses on teaching games through a conceptual approach, tactics, and strategies rather than through a basis of skills.

Within the TGfU framework games are classified according to similar characteristics (i.e., target, court or net/wall, field or striking/fielding, and territory or invasion games) (Werner et al., 1996). This allows students to see the common concepts and tactics that these games share adding greater understanding to the learning of games.

The TGfU approach is based on four principles: (a) sampling allows teachers to select games from the same classification and then lead children to understand similarities between apparently dissimilar games within a game form, (b) modification through presentation allows teachers to develop small sided, modified games that are played with adaptations to suit children's size, age, and ability, (c) modification through exaggeration allows teachers to exaggerate certain aspects of a game to enable children discover its specific primary tactics, and (d) tactical complexity allows teachers to introduce games in an order, with the less complex games being introduced first (Werner et al., 1996).

An important aspect of TGfU is teacher's questioning. Questioning is utilized during or immediately after game playing. A teacher-led question and answer period focusing on children's performance encourage them to reflect not only on what they did and why, but also on how they can improve their play through better decision making (Griffin et al., 1997; Curtner-Smith, 1996).

The PETE Program

The design of the program was based on the procedures that Joyce, Weil, and Calhoun (2014) propose for the successful implementation of a newly acquired teaching strategy. In particular, preservice teachers learn the TGfU approach by participating in courses in which TGfU is

employed, understanding the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of TGfU, observing modeled teaching episodes in a school setting, practicing the model in controlled conditions (teaching peers, teaching one pupil, teaching small group of pupils) under the supervision of an expert faculty member who gives feedback to the preservice teacher, and solo instruction of intact classes (e.g., without veteran teacher presence). An overview of each course is given in table 1. The reader should bear in mind that only the activity, professional preparation, and field experience courses of this program are described here.

Table 1: Courses of the TGfU-Based PETE Program

Semester 1 (Year 1)				Semester 2 (Year 1)			
Title	Credits	Class meeting per week	Hours of contact per week	Title	Credits	Class meeting per week	Hours of contact per week
Pedagogy of target games	3	4	4	Active participation TGfu	2	4	4
Pedagogy of striking games	3	4	4				
Semester 3 (Year 2)				Semester 4 (Year 2)			
Title	Credits	Class meeting per week	Hours of contact per week	Title	Credits	Class meeting per week	Hours of contact per week
Pedagogy of invasion games	3	4	4	Teaching lab 1	2	4	4
Pedagogy of net/wall games	3	4	4				
Semester 5 (Year 3)				Semester 6 (Year 3)			
Title	Credits	Class meeting per week	Hours of contact per week	Title	Credits	Class meeting per week	Hours of contact per week
Teaching lab II (K-6)	3	3	3	Teaching lab II (7-12)	3	3	3
Semester 7 (Year 4)				Semester 8 (Year 4)			
Title	Credits	Class meeting per week	Hours of contact per week	Title	Credits	Class meeting per week	Hours of contact per week
Teaching lab III (K-6)	5	4	4	Teaching lab III (7-12)	5	4	4
Curriculum Development I	2	2	2	Curriculum Development II	2	2	2

First year

During the first year of the program students attend three courses: 1) Pedagogy of Target Games, 2) Pedagogy of Striking Games, and 3) Active Participation: TGfU.

In the first two courses preservice teachers learn the tactical and technical elements of target and invasion games (concepts, skills, offensive and defensive strategies) by means of lectures and discussion. First, they are taught the basic games and progressively learn more complex games. Also, they learn to modify existing games or design simplified games of their own.

In the third course, preservice teachers actively participate in sessions where games are presented through the TGfU approach. The purpose of this course is to enable them to take the role of the learner and experience the TGfU model from the perspective of the learner. The sessions are taught by a faculty member who is well versed in the tactical approaches to teaching games. According to Joyce et al. (2014) observing demonstrations by persons who are expert in the model develops preservice teachers' comfort and confidence with using it.

Second year

During the second year of the program preservice teachers attend three courses: 1) Pedagogy of Net/Wall games, 2) Pedagogy of Territorial Games, and 3) Teaching Lab I.

In the first two courses preservice teachers learn the tactical and technical elements of net/wall and territorial games (concepts, skills, offensive and defensive strategies) by means of lectures and discussion. First, they are taught the basic games and progressively learn more complex games. Also, they learn to modify existing games or design simplified games of their own.

In the third course preservice teachers are given the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and develop the skills needed to teach games and sports with the TGfU approach. The course combines theory and practice. During the first seven weeks of the course, they gain an insightful understanding of TGfU through lecture, discussion, demonstration, and peer teaching. Through peer teaching they are challenged to teach other preservice teachers using this approach. A faculty member gives regular feedback and makes sure that each preservice teacher regularly stops games and asks their peers questions, modifies rules, and explains what he/she is doing throughout.

After peer teaching, they are involved in one-on-one teaching for the remainder eight weeks of this course. One-on-one teaching takes place on campus. Each preservice teacher is required to teach one elementary school child modified games employing the TGfU approach. Preservice teachers learn from these experiences through reflections and video analysis conducted by a faculty member. Teaching Lab I can give them the opportunity to practice TGfU in a highly controlled environment and gain a minimal level of competence in using the TGfU approach.

Third year

The first six courses aim at achievement of minimal levels of confidence and competence with the TGfU approach and preparing them for the real world. During the third year preservice teachers are required to use the TGfU at real school setting with elementary (fifth semester) and secondary school children (sixth semester). In teaching Lab II they visit parochial schools that serve as the site for this course and are assigned to teach small groups (10-13) of learners games from each of the four classifications, described previously. Preservice teachers still teach in relatively controlled conditions in this course. At the same time, university

supervisors coach them. Teaching Lab II may increase further preservice teachers' awareness of the model and may improve their confidence and comfort in delivering instruction with TGfU.

Fourth year

In the fourth year of the PETE program preservice teachers have to enroll in three courses in which TGfU is integrated: 1) Teaching Lab III, 2) Curriculum Development I, and 3) Curriculum Development II. In Teaching Lab III preservice teachers teach daily physical education in elementary public schools (seventh semester) and in secondary schools (eighth semester) for a period of five weeks in each semester.

Preservice teachers form pairs and are assigned to a cooperating teacher (cooperating teacher is the teacher of the school who supervises and supports preservice teachers). One preservice teacher is responsible for teaching a lesson and the other together with the cooperating teacher for supervising him/her to collect information about the preservice teacher's teaching skills. In the next lesson the two preservice teachers switch roles. The peer student teaching model (one cooperating teacher and a preservice student supervise another preservice teacher doing his/her practice) has been found to be effective in bringing about change in preservice teachers' teaching behavior (Verabioff, 1983). According to Joyce et al. (2014) peer student teaching provides companionship and helps preservice teachers analyze the application of a given model as well as their expectations concerning student learning. In assigning preservice teachers to cooperating teachers, the faculty members need to make sure that the cooperating teachers have knowledge of the approach, otherwise they will not provide adequate constructive support for the preservice teachers (Wright et al., 2004).

By the end of this course the preservice teachers will have practiced the TGfU approach multiple times at both the elementary and the secondary school level. This course gives preservice teacher the opportunity to apply theory and concepts on the TGfU approach learned in the previous three years to PE teaching in public schools. This is a critical phase of preservice students' professional development because if they are provided with opportunities and support to teach during practicums using the TGfU approach, it is more likely that they will use this approach as physical educators in schools (Wright et al., 2004).

In the Curriculum Development courses (I and II) preservice students are required to reflect on their teaching experiences they gained in Teaching Lab III. An important aspect of practice-teaching is the audio and video recording of each lesson. Throughout this course university supervisors guide preservice teachers' experiences through discussion, feedback, and question-answer sessions. The preservice teachers need to learn to analyze and control their own teaching behavior and to resolve problems related to the implementation of the model. Watching the videotaped lesson and reflecting on their teaching with the assistance of the supervisors can help towards that goal (King, 2008; Metzler, 1990).

Summary

A carefully constructed PETE program offers those "conditions needed to produce graduates who make a positive difference in the quality of physical education in school programs" (Siedentop & Locke, 1997, p. 31). Many of the components of a carefully constructed teacher preparation program, as described by Siedentop and Locke (1997), are included in the PETE program proposed in this article: 1) a focus that ensures that the program is explicitly about something, 2) enough time (or credits) to make sure that undergraduate students learn both content and content-specific pedagogy, 3) enough school sites where every student can

practice and receive expert mentoring by collaborating clinical personnel and 4) full accreditation by an official body for accreditation of PETE programs.

The TGfU approach serves as the theoretical framework of the PETE program. This approach is integrated into 12 of the courses of the program over a four-year period (four activity, two pedagogy, and six field experience courses). Preservice students learn about the TGfU through a combination of lecture, discussion, observation of demonstrations, practice, and feedback in protected conditions as well as in real school settings.

Faculty members, who decide to design a PETE program such as the one described in this article, need to share a common belief about the merit and the educational significance of TGfU and agree on the same interpretation of this approach. Also, faculty members need to be well educated and practiced in TGfU. I believe that preservice teachers who will graduate from TGfU-based PETE programs will have the opportunity to become competent practitioners of TGfU and effective teachers.

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