

Games Teaching : Changed or Unchanged?

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The Teaching for Understanding Movement is an innovation in games teaching and was first introduced by Bunker and Thorpe at Loughborough University of Technology in 1982. The main focus of this approach is on the understanding of the games and the development of the cognitive experiences through teaching of tactical awareness. Obviously, it is different from the skill-based approach which stresses the learning of skills and techniques. Over the past ten years, the innovation has been gradually disseminated in U.S.A., Australia and New Zealand. The studies on the effectiveness of this approach generally reported that this is a new direction on games teaching (Booth, 1983; Stoddart, 1985; Lawton, 1989). At present, many PE teachers in Hong Kong still adopt the skill-based approach in games teaching. Therefore the introduction of the Teaching for Understanding approach to Hong Kong should be a completely new and challenging movement. In order to provide a more reflective climate for the teaching of games in Hong Kong, and if appropriate, to start the process of introducing a different approach, a survey was conducted to find out the teaching approach or approaches PE teachers used during games lessons; how they felt and if they accepted this change.

「領會教學法」是球類教學中的一個新路向。在1982年，這方法首先由英國洛夫堡科技大學兩位講師——賓嘉 (Bunker) 及霍普 (Thorpe) 所提倡，其重點是教導學生明白該球類項目如何進行及透過教導戰術而發展學生認知的體驗。這些重點明顯地與「技巧教學法」中強調技巧學習有所不同。經過十多年的推廣介紹，歐美及澳紐各地也深受影響，其間有很多研究報告指出這個方法的優點，並被推崇為球類教學中的一個新路向。目前，香港大部份的體育教師仍採用「技巧教學法」教導球類課，因此引入此方法是一項新挑戰。為了提供多一種球類教學法給香港體育教師採用，本調查的目的是希望了解教師目前教導球類課的狀況，及對「領會教學法」新路向的看法。

The Teaching for Understanding Movement is an innovation in games teaching developed by two PE lecturers, Bunker and Thorpe, at Loughborough University of Technology, England during the 1970s. A model and explanation was first presented in 1982. The emphasis of this approach is on understanding of the games and the development of cognitive experiences through the teaching of tactical awareness. There are obvious differences between this and the skill-based approach, which stresses the learning of skills and techniques. This movement has aroused the attention of many PE professionals and physical educationalists. A series of seminars, workshops and practical sessions have been organized. The intention is to put the theory into practice and to

encourage more physical educationalists to adopt, promote and contribute to this approach. At present, this movement has spread widely over the world, reaching Europe, U.S.A., Australia and New Zealand, among other places.

In Hong Kong, however, it seems that there is no tendency in games teaching towards adopting this new direction. The approach currently used in games teaching is heavily biased towards skills and techniques. The emphasis is on how to learn and perform skills and techniques such as passing and catching, serving and shooting. Such an approach can be found in the PE Syllabus (CDC, 1988), which suggests a series of techniques to be taught in games lessons. For instance, in Basketball, the suggested skills and techniques include passing, receiving, dribbling, shooting, team defense and offense. The recommended Badminton skills and techniques are long service, overhead clear, fore-hand drive, etc. There is evidence to suggest that such an emphasis will have numerous drawbacks for the children being

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taught. These children are likely to know very little about the games and achieve little success in the games because of their undeveloped abilities, and lack of cognitive training (Bunker & Thorpe, 1986).

For the benefit of children, the approach of teaching for understanding promises to be a completely new and challenging direction for current practitioners in Hong Kong. This study aims to provide a more reflective climate for the teaching of games in Hong Kong, as a preparation for the process of introducing a different approach. As a first step the study seeks to understand the teaching approach or approaches that PE teachers use during games lessons in schools ; how they feel about the innovation and if they would accept change.

Literature Review

The teaching for understanding approach has been one of the most stimulating innovations (Sparkes, 1987; Smith, 1992) and a new phenomenon (Waring, 1991) in the world of PE in the 1980s and early 1990s. After the introduction of this approach in 1982, the climate for accepting such an innovation has gradually improved. Many studies reported the effectiveness of this approach and suggested that this is a new direction in games teaching. For example, based on the teaching for understanding approach, Booth (1983) outlined "An Introduction to Netball" which was concerned with the tactics and problems within the game. Stoddart (1985), a secondary school PE teacher, who taught his students with the teaching for understanding approach, reported that the students seemed to be enjoying the experience of being involved in the game. Lawton (1989) made a comparison between the effectiveness of the skill-based approach and the teaching for understanding approach in terms of improvement in subjects' level of skill and improvement in understanding basic tactics and game strategies. The findings reflected that teaching for understanding led to a greater level of improvement in both skills and tactical understanding of students.

As part of the establishment of the National Curriculum in England under the 1988 Education Reform Act, the document "Physical Education" in the National Curriculum was published. The content of this document indicates a shift towards

a more balanced games programme with considerable emphasis on cognitive aspects. This shift reflects the influence of the teaching for understanding approach.

Bunker and Thorpe (1986) expressed that many PE professionals in schools, however, considered teaching for understanding to be just another "bandwagon" which would soon be replaced by something else. The shift in emphasis from techniques to tactical awareness is heavily criticized. Practitioners stress that skills and techniques are important in teaching games. If emphasis is put on tactics instead of skills and techniques, they think that the pupils will not be able to play the games.

From the above criticism, it is clear that a large proportion of PE professionals have misinterpreted this approach. By adopting this approach, they think, skills and techniques will disappear from the PE lessons. Why do they worry about this change in games teaching ? Bunker and Thorpe (1986) observed that many of them refused to accept anything new because they believed that the skill-based approach was still effective and no serious problems had arisen from its use. Alternatively, they fear that if they accept the teaching approach for students' understanding, others might see them as not teaching anything important unless they teach skills and techniques.

This kind of attitude indicates a misconception. They have interpreted the approach wrongly, claiming that if skills and techniques are ignored, the pupils would play the game at a mediocre standard (Buck & Harrison, 1990). Actually, in using the teaching approach for understanding in PE lessons, skills and techniques will still be taught, but they will no longer be the main focus of the lessons. Of course, the approach starts with the game rather than with the techniques, skills are still introduced when and where appropriate to the students once they need them in the game situation. Thus the approach recognizes the needs and the place for techniques relative to the subject's development as a games player (Thorpe, 1990).

Unfortunately, many teachers continue to confuse skills with techniques. Bunker and Thorpe (1983) define skills as the application of techniques to specific situations and contexts and stress that techniques are quite different when taken out of context. Therefore the emphasis of the teaching for understanding approach must be on skills because it is the core of the game (the

context). Techniques, however, can be divorced entirely from the context of the game, removing the game as central to the learning process (Waring, 1991).

In practice, children can play a game even if they haven't learnt the techniques of that particular game. It is possible to play a good game with poor techniques. Thorpe (1990) further explained that it was impossible to develop some of the skills needed to play the adult form of the games within the PE programme, but it was possible to help the children succeed. He emphasized that if motivation was enhanced and opportunity provided, children might wish to commit themselves outside the PE programme to improve all elements of their games. Success might therefore be measured in continued commitment to sports rather than short term performance changes.

There are very few local literature on games teaching in Hong Kong. Most of the literature comes from the western world. With a strong influence from Britain and U.S.A., games teaching in Hong Kong is leaned heavily towards skill-based approaches. The games lessons are highly structured with emphasis on the teaching of techniques.

Evidence can be found in PE syllabuses for both primary and secondary schools. In the syllabus, 'A Scheme of PE for Hong Kong Primary School, 1964', a game lesson is structured with the following steps (1) Opening activity, (2) General activity, (3) Games and (4) Order activity.

All materials taught in each step are mainly centred on techniques which are the central aim of the lesson, with the games serving as a vehicle for the techniques. An example is outlined in Table 1 for reference.

Table 1
Procedures and Contents on Teaching Strategies on Games

Procedure	Content
1. Opening activity	Ball control
2. General activity	Target throwing Skills
3. Games	Captain ball
4. Order activity	

After thirty years, the teaching strategy in games lessons has remained unchanged. This gives the impression that the teaching of techniques is in the commanding position. For upper primary classes, the syllabus recommends that the teaching materials of games should be more demanding in techniques. With suitable equipment and facilities, basic techniques in Basketball, Football, Volleyball, Badminton, Table Tennis and Handball should be introduced (Curriculum Development Institute, 1995, p.68).

With no exception, the PE Syllabuses for Secondary Schools published in 1975, 1980 and 1988, also put an emphasis on techniques. For example, in Volleyball, the basic skill practice includes underhand dig, Volley pass, underhand service, floater service, setting, spiking and blocking. The recommended football skills and techniques are kicking and passing, ball control, heading, tackling, shooting, goal-keeping.

From the above literature, it is not hard to understand that games teaching in Hong Kong is strongly influenced by Britain and U.S.A. In fact all PE teachers have adopted the skill-based approach to teach children games since the 1960s. The reason is that many PE professionals and key people in the PE section of the education department are from Britain. It is likely that they had a strong influence on those formulating the PE policy and planning and developing the PE syllabuses. At the same time, many local PE lecturers and teachers have been trained either in Britain or in U.S.A. As a result, the approaches adopted in Britain and U.S.A. will be learnt and followed. It is, therefore, really hard for them to reject the adoption of skill-based approach in games teaching since the approach for understanding movement in Britain and U.S.A. has not established an impact on the existing skill-based approach.

Method

A survey was conducted to investigate what teaching approach or approaches PE teachers used during games lessons at schools; how they felt and if they were willing to accept change. In 1993-1994, there were 562 Secondary Schools in Hong Kong and 63 of them were private, commercial or international schools which had different curricula. By adopting the systematic sampling

method, a questionnaire with six questions was sent to 170 secondary schools representing one-third of all secondary schools in Hong Kong. Of the 170 secondary schools surveyed, 75 schools (44.12%) returned the questionnaires. Normally, there were two PE teachers, one male and one female, in each secondary school. Therefore, there were totally 155 teachers involved in this survey.

Results and Discussion

Do you still use the approach you were taught at College for games teaching, i.e., warm-up, skill practice, games and cool down?

In answering this question, 144 PE teachers, representing 92.9 % of the total number of PE teachers, gave a “yes” answer. The implication was that these PE teachers still adopted the skill-based approach in games teaching because they taught what they had learnt from the College of Education. They seemed to have never questioned the approach or considered the problems arising from it. Moreover they did not appear to be aware of any changes of teaching strategy in games. That means teaching skills and techniques were the central aim of their lessons.

Are you aware of any other approaches to the teaching of games, e.g., teaching games for understanding ; inner games, etc. ? If yes, please state.

When asked if they were aware of any other approach to the teaching of games, a very high percentage (81.3%) of the PE teachers reported to be unaware of any other approaches in games teaching. This is not strange because there is a climate, firmly established in Hong Kong, of adopting the skill-based approach in games teaching. The sources and information available to them, including the National Governing Bodies and PE lecturers, were in favour of the teaching of skills and techniques in games lessons. Among the 29 PE teachers giving “yes” for an answer, eight of them clearly stated that they were aware of other approaches to the teaching of games. From this proportion, there is no question that the skill-based approach has become the corner stone in games teaching in Hong Kong.

Have you changed the way you teach games since leaving College ? If yes, please state.

Although in question one, 92.9% of PE teachers were reported to follow the approach which they had been taught at the College of Education, they had made modifications to their teaching approaches in games after their graduation. For this question, 33.6% of the PE teachers stated that they had changed their ways in games teaching. This might be seen as very encouraging. However, from their responses, it was found that their changes were due to environmental factors but not to their teaching approach itself. The environmental factors included shortage of time, inadequate facilities, difference of students’ ability and large classes.

Do or did you have any difficulties in using the skill-based approach to teach ball games? If yes, please state.

By asking the teachers if they had any difficulties in using the skill-based approach, 108 out of 155 PE teachers gave “no” for an answer. This showed that 69.6% of PE teachers had no difficulties in adopting the skill-based approach in games teaching. On the other hand, 47 PE teachers stated that difficulties were found from the students and the teachers themselves. They found that the students:

- (a) lacked interest in learning skills and techniques in the games lesson;
- (b) had difficulties in learning because of their different abilities;
- (c) were unable to give appropriate responses in the game.

At the same time, the teachers themselves were also aware of the difficulties arising from adopting the skill-based approach. They reported that:

- (a) they had spent a lot of time teaching skills and techniques and little time was given to the games;
- (b) there was no real games situation provided for the students;
- (c) technical approach might not attract students because they wanted only to have fun in the games lesson.

The above findings indicated that these discontented practitioners might be a group of people prepared to accept change. It might be possible to start by introducing the Teaching for Understanding approach to them. It was significant that they faced difficulties and would therefore be ready to change.

Have you any other comments about games teaching? If yes, please state.

As expected, a majority of PE teachers did not give any response in answering this question but the remaining 33 gave quite a number of constructive and supportive comments about games teaching as listed below. They felt that:

- (a) games teaching should be fun-oriented;
- (b) games and tactics should be emphasized and introduced earlier;
- (c) the students found difficulties in integrating skills into the games situation by using the skill-based approach;
- (d) references about different approaches in games teaching were inadequate;
- (e) the total number of students in one class was too large and the playground was also too small to accommodate 40 students.

All of these comments reflected the present situation in adopting the skill-based approach in all secondary schools. It was very interesting to note that one of the respondents was aware of a lack of relevant references about the different approaches in games teaching. This is really a vital issue of concern.

Would you like to know more about a different approach to the teaching of games like teaching games for understanding in which the game and the tactics of the games are central in the lesson?

In responding to this question, a high percentage (87.1%) of the PE teachers showed an interest in knowing more about a new approach. From this figure, a large number of PE teachers were indeed eager to know and understand the new approach and also how it worked. This implied that if they had opportunities to find out about other approaches, they might probably think

of adopting them to teach students in their games lessons.

Would you like to know the results of this questionnaires ?

Predictably, the finding indicated that 117 out of 155 PE teachers responded with interest to know the results of this questionnaire. The main reason was that many of them had shown an interest in knowing more about the new approach in the previous question and they naturally would like to know the results of this questionnaire.

From the results of the questionnaire, there was a general impression that a large number of PE teachers still taught the students skills and techniques in a games lesson. Apart from that, they were seldom aware of the changes in teaching approaches. The reason was not because they did not want to change but mainly because they found no ways to find out about the innovation.

Conclusion

The findings confirm that there has been little change in games teaching in Hong Kong since the 1960s. More than 90% of PE teachers still adopt the skill-based approach to teach their students during games lessons. However one-third (47) of the respondents in the present study reported that they found difficulties in using this approach. Interestingly, more than 75% (117) of the PE teachers showed an interest in knowing more about the teaching for understanding approach. One of the reasons might be that they hoped to find a solution to overcome the difficulties faced during games lessons. If this is the case, there will be a crucial task for the PE lecturers and inspectors to introduce this new approach to Hong Kong in the future.

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