

# *An Alternative Approach to Games Teaching in the Training of P.E. Teachers*

## 培訓體育教師進行球類教學的新方法

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### 摘要

球類課在體育課程中佔了一個十分重要的位置。目前，香港體育教師大部份都採用技巧教學法(Skill-based approach)教導學生學習球類活動，1995年筆者曾對本港中學體育教師採用技巧教學法的現況作出調查，在155位的中學體育教師中，有92.9%的教師都採用技巧教學法，但30%的教師卻指出採用技巧教學法授課時出現困難；其實技巧教學法於80年代初期備受英國體育學者(Bunker and Thorpe, 1986)的批評，指出其弱點是過份重視技巧學習，而忽略了學生對該球類活動的認識及本身智能的發展，因此他們提倡另一種新教學法：領會教學法(Teaching Games for Understanding)，重點是以認識該活動為主，並透過戰術的學習，讓學生能依自己能力作思考及作出適當的表現。

為了解決體育教師面對技巧教學法的困難，本文主要的目的是探討體育講師採用哪一種教學法訓練準體育教師教授球類活動，希望找出問題所在，並嘗試介紹一個新教學方法作為日後培訓一班更能幹的準體育教師教授球類活動。

### Introduction

The major role of the P.E. Department in the Hong Kong Institute of Education is to train competent teachers to teach P.E. in Primary and Secondary Schools. The P.E. student-teachers in the Institute are trained with different domains including Curriculum Studies, Academic Studies and Practicum. Through the Curriculum Studies, the P.E. curriculum planning and teaching methods are being taught. The content of the Academic Studies consists of P.E. knowledge and various sports activities. In Practicum, the student-teachers are arranged to teach in different schools in which opportunities are provided for them to integrate what they have learnt in the Institute and then put theory into practice. During their teaching practice, they are encouraged to teach different sports activities, namely, Athletics, Dance, Games and Gymnastics.

At present, the dominant approach used in games teaching is the Skill-based Approach which has been adopted in Hong Kong since the 1960s. It puts emphasis on learning of skills and techniques. An example can be found in the P.E. Syllabus for Primary Schools, 1995. The techniques of Basketball like passing and receiving, dribbling, shooting etc. are recommended to be taught in schools. In Volleyball, the suggested techniques include underhand dig, overhead pass, service, spiking, respectively. It has been suggested that such an emphasis will have numerous weaknesses for the children being 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).

The Teaching for Understanding Movement is an innovation in games teaching developed by two P.E. Lecturers, Bunker and Thorpe, at Loughborough University of Technology, England during the 1970s. This approach puts emphasis on the understanding of the games and the development of the cognitive experiences through teaching of tactical awareness and it is different from the skill-based approach which stresses the learning of skills and techniques. A series of seminars, workshops and practical sessions have been organized to encourage P.E. professions to use this new approach. This movement has stirred up the attention of many P.E. professions all over the world, especially in Europe, U.S.A., Australia and New Zealand.

Over the past 15 years, many studies reported the effectiveness of this approach and confirmed it as a new direction on games teaching. For example, based on the Teaching for Understanding approach, Booth (1983) outlined an 'Introduction to Netball' which focused on the tactics and problems within the game. Stoddart (1985), a Secondary school P.E. teacher, who taught his students with the Teaching for Understanding approach, indicated that students seemed to be enjoying the

experience of being involved in a game. Lawton (1989) examined the comparison between the skill-based approach and the Teaching for Understanding approach on the effectiveness in terms of improvement in subjects' level of skill and improvement in the subjects' understanding of the basic tactics and games strategies.. The findings reflected that the Teaching for Understanding group had a greater level of improvement in both the skill level and their tactics understanding.

Recently, the Education Reform Act 1988 in England proposed to establish the National Curriculum for all students in schools. One of the document 'Physical Education' in the National Curriculum was published. The content indicates a shift to a more balanced games program with considerable 'cognitive' aspects. This shift reflects the influence of the Teaching for Understanding approach.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the current climate of games teaching in the P.E. Teacher Training Institute. It is hoped that a genuine, updated and clear picture can be portrayed.

### **Background**

The Hong Kong Institute of Education, formerly the 5 Colleges of Education, namely, Northcote College of Education, Grantham College of Education, Sir Robert Black College of Education, Technical Teachers' College and the Institute of Language and Education, was newly established in 1994. It is mainly responsible for training non-graduate Primary and Junior Secondary School teachers.

There were all together 22 P.E. Lecturers serving the various Campuses in 1994-1995. Nearly 1/3 of them have undergone overseas P.E. training (in England) and the rest are trained locally. They specialize in various sports such as Athletics, Ball Games (Basketball, Football, Handball, Volleyball, Badminton, Table Tennis and Tennis), Dance, Gymnastics and Trampolining and Swimming. All of them are competent to teach all sports activities to P.E. student-teachers. However, most of them are normally assigned teaching according to their specialization, interest and competence.

Games teaching is a dominant area in both Primary and Secondary levels. In general, nearly 30% of the P.E. curriculum time is allocated to games (CDC, 1995). Certainly, the P.E. student-teachers must follow the curriculum content of games to ensure that they have the competence to teach these games after graduation from the Institute. On the whole, the approach that the P.E.

Lecturers used is the Skill-based Approach. For example, in Basketball, they teach the P.E. student-teachers ball sense, passing and receiving, bouncing, dribbling, shooting, offense and defense respectively. The reasons why they adopt this approach are as follows:

Firstly, the P.E. Lecturers themselves were trained through the Skill-based Approach to teach games. Whenever they learned any games, they first started to practise techniques such as passing and receiving, dribbling and shooting. Eventually, they were indoctrinated by their P.E. teachers that techniques were the central aim of the games lesson. Later when they were trained to become P.E. teachers, they were also taught by adopting the Skill-based Approach. This will give them an impression that learning techniques is the sole aim in a game lesson.

In addition, they are influenced by the National Sports Associations (NSA) when they attended coaching courses in which learning skills and techniques is the focus of the lesson. Little time is given to the understanding of the game and how to play the game. Following this trend, they will practise what they have learnt from the course in their schools. Obviously, they will imitate the approaches to teach skills and techniques to their children and put emphasis on learning techniques in class.

Secondly, the climate of the Skill-based Approach in games teaching in Hong Kong has been firmly established since the 1960s. Not only the NSA advocated the importance of learning skills and techniques from which skillful players can be trained through practising techniques, P.E. Inspectors and P.E. Lecturers also recommended P.E. teachers to teach children to learn techniques in the games lessons. A list of skills and techniques can be found in the P.E. Syllabus. Example of skills and techniques in Badminton (CDC, 1995) include (a) the grip; (b) in pair, practise long service; (c) forehand, over-hand clear; (d) forehand drive; and (e) half court single practice (CDC, 1995, p.110).

As a result, many P.E. teachers in Primary and Secondary schools tend to use this approach to teach their children. In this situation, it is really difficult for P.E. Lecturers to use other teaching approaches.

Thirdly, it is easy to quantify the student-teachers' performance with the Skill-based Approach (Bunker and Thorpe, 1986). Marks and grades can be given subjectively by means of the techniques criterion-referenced assessment method. The usual practice to

assess the performance of the students is that the teacher sets up a list of criteria for one or two techniques in advance. Then the students are asked to perform the techniques in front of the teacher. Results are obtained through observation. However, they would never challenge on the subjectivity and disadvantage of this approach.

Generally speaking, the P.E. Department has no strict instructions given to P.E. Lecturers on using what approaches to teach games. Actually, each of them, to a certain extent, exercises his or her discretion and flexibility to teach games with different approaches.

### **Method**

A survey on the study of the approaches that the P.E. Lecturers use would unveil the current method in games teaching in the Teacher Training Institute. Ten (2 female and 8 male) experienced P.E. Lecturers (representing all P.E. Lecturers teaching ball games in the Hong Kong Institute of Education) were invited to participate in this survey. On the average, all of them had more than 15 years of teaching experience. Four of them had got overseas training experience in England and the rest was trained in local colleges or Universities. A questionnaire was sent to these 10 P.E. Lecturers who were mainly responsible for teaching games (Basketball, Volleyball, Football, Handball, Table Tennis and Badminton). Before completing the questionnaire, they attended a briefing session and were given adequate introduction and explanation on the purpose of this survey and the questions.

### **Results**

To understand the current situation in games teaching in the P.E. Teacher Training Institute and the influence of the Teaching Games for Understanding Approach on them, four questions were raised in the questionnaire and their feedback was summarized as follows.

#### **1. Do you work closely with the Inspectorate Syllabus for teaching games with skill in having a major class forms ?**

Eight out of the ten P.E. Lecturers gave a definite answer 'yes', that is they followed the P.E. Syllabus closely for teaching games with skills and techniques. Two of them gave a negative answer, but the reason was due to environmental constraints such as shortage of time, inadequate P.E. facilities and equipment respectively. For instance, two of the Lecturers reported that they would not conduct the Concluding Activities step when time was inadequate. In other words, they preferred to reduce concluding activities instead of not shortening the

duration of time for practicing skills and techniques because they thought that this part was the central aim of the lesson.

#### **2. Are there any other approaches that you use a little ?**

Although three out of the ten P.E. Lecturers didn't give a 'no' answer, the findings reflected that they were in favour of the Skill-based Approach in games teaching. There was no evidence that they didn't know or had not heard of the Teaching Games for Understanding Approach.

#### **3. Do you teach with transfer between games ?**

All of them reported that they taught with transfer of skills among games. Emphasis was given on the transfer of skills. They always reminded the student-teachers that the practice of passing and receiving in Basketball could be transferred to learning of Handball. At the same time the stroke skills in Badminton could be transferred to Table Tennis. However nothing was being transferred on 'understanding' of the principles. They didn't think or become aware that 'understanding' of the game was very important and worth teaching student-teachers. Their reaction implied that the Skill-based Approach was still a dominant approach for student-teachers to learn and later to teach games in a similar way after graduation.

#### **4. Which games do you teach your students in training ? Why ?**

The results showed that they taught various games including Basketball, Football, Handball, Volleyball, Badminton and Table Tennis. Indeed these games were taught in each Campus. Each of them was assigned to teach, at least, two to three games. On the whole, the findings on the reasons why they taught these games were (1) it was their teaching duties assigned by the Section Head, and (2) these games were in the P.E. Syllabuses and there was a need to teach student-teachers to enable them to teach with competence after graduation.

### **Discussion**

Although the Teaching Games for Understanding Approach has been disseminated for 15 years, it seems there is no strong impact on the P.E. Lecturers in Teacher Training Institute. The current climate of games teaching in the P.E. Teacher Training Institute still emphasized on the Skill-based Approach. Several implications from the findings should be considered.

Firstly, the P.E. Syllabus not only serves as an important reference to P.E. teachers but also to P.E. Lecturers. It exerts great influence on them. In order to train P.E. student-teachers to become competent P.E.

teachers, the content in the P.E. Syllabus must be taught.

Interestingly, this phenomenon might reflect that not only the P.E. Lecturers tend to use the Skill-based Approach, the P.E. Inspectors in the P.E. Inspectorate and the P.E. Curriculum Officers in the Curriculum Development Institute also supported the Skill-based Approach in games teaching. It is evident that in these few years, there were many seminars, workshops and training courses organized. Some of these training courses were related to teaching of games, but the approach used was still heavily leaned on learning techniques. In other words, none of them were related to Teaching Games for Understanding. For the P.E. Curriculum Officers, their intention to support the Skill-based Approach is evident in the recent revised P.E. Syllabus for Primary School, 1995 which advocates the adoption of the Skill-based Approach in the teaching of games.

Secondly, P.E. Lecturers know very little about the Teaching Games for Understanding Approach. The findings reflected that they taught transfer of skills with nothing to do with the understanding of the game. For example, the students were told to transfer smash strokes in Badminton to Tennis, passing and receiving in Basketball to Handball. Yet, they didn't realize the transfer of the understanding of games. They were not concerned with the importance of understanding of the games. Their concern was mainly on techniques. This might be due to the lack of the suitable and appropriate channels to keep in touch with the current development of the P.E. world. One of the main reasons was that the job nature of the P.E. Lecturers was to train competent P.E. student-teachers, and little attention was given to research work. Reading Journals for update knowledge and approaches was not absolutely necessary. As a result, they would deliberately move away from the current development of the P.E. world particularly in sports pedagogical content. This would lead to inadequate attention to the development of the Teaching for Understanding Movement.

Thirdly, apart from their own specialized sport, all P.E. Lecturers are assigned to teach other sports. The findings reflect that the P.E. Lecturers' teaching duties were assigned by their Section Heads. This arrangement might lead to the problem that when they taught their non-specialized area, they would pay little attention to the development of that particular game sport. Obviously, they would just follow the usual approach or approaches to teach that game, viz. the Skill-based Approach. They wouldn't challenge the disadvantages of the Skill-based

Approach especially when that sport was not their specialized area.

With the above implications, the present environment is not favourable to train competent P.E. student-teachers to teach games in Primary and Secondary Schools. In other words, the P.E. Lecturers should use the Teaching Games for Understanding Approach, to train their P.E. student-teachers to teach games with competence. To achieve this target, a number of remedial measures should be taken immediately.

For the benefit of the P.E. Lecturers, it is recommended that sports teaching duties allocation is based on individual's specialization. For administrative convenience, the Lecturers in one campus would mainly teach in that campus. However, this arrangement would lead to the present situation that each Lecturer might teach some non-specialized games sports. For the benefit of the student-teachers, it is suggested that all P.E. Lecturers should teach in cross campuses. They could teach their specialized games sports and would pay more attention to the development of that particular games sports. In addition, the best means to keep in touch with the current development of that game is the accessibility and availability of journals. All P.E. Lecturers should be encouraged to read the journals regularly and frequently. Apart from that, staff development programs should also be provided including sponsorship for attending local or overseas conference and conducting research.

Another recommendation is to form a core group among P.E. Lecturers who are mainly responsible to teach games. They meet frequently and regularly to formulate the action plans for developing this new approach. With this plan, it is very important that the initiators of this new approach from Loughborough University of Technology should be invited to present seminars and workshops to all P.E. staff, P.E. Inspectors as well as the P.E. Curriculum officers. Through the seminars, they will have an overview of the Teaching Games for Understanding Approach and by practice and observation in the workshops, they can also understand the implementation of this new approach. For further development, if possible, a close liaison among the P.E. Lecturers and the P.E. Inspectors in the Inspectorate and the P.E. Curriculum Officers in the Curriculum development Institute is recommended. This will enhance exchange of ideas on the development of the Teaching Games for Understanding Movement in Hong Kong.



For the benefit of the student-teachers, the core group of the P.E. Lecturers should start to introduce the Teaching Games for Understanding Approach to them. With the understanding and implementing of the new approach, the existing games curriculum for the Skill-based Approach should be revised. However, it is crucial that revision should be practical.

Through these short-term and long-term strategies, the P.E. Lecturers will be well-equipped with the updated P.E. knowledge and can keep in touch with the current development of the outside world. They will pay more attention and be more competent in their specialized areas. With the introduction of the Teaching Games for

Understanding Approach to the P.E. Lecturers, the P.E. student-teachers can be trained with this new approach and eventually have competence to teach games in schools after graduation.

### **Conclusion**

It appears that current P.E. Lecturers only need the Skill-based Approach and know very little about the Teaching Games for Understanding Approach. It is recommended that the Teaching Games for Understanding Approach should be introduced to the P.E. Lecturers. Eventually, through their understanding on the new approach, they can train the P.E. student-teachers to teach games with competence.

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