

Alison, S., & Thorpe, R. (1997). A comparison of the effectiveness of two approaches to teaching games within physical education. A skills approach versus a games for understanding approach. The British Journal of Physical Education, 28(3), 9-13.

Summery by Kirsten Card

Issue/focus:

This article is intended to expose some research done by Stuart Allison and Rod Thorpe that occurred in order to add to the evidence that a tactical approach is more effective at developing proficient physical education students than the traditional skills approach. Allison and Thorpe used two groups to compare the differences of tactical teaching versus skills teaching: one teacher taught a group (40) of year 9 boys basketball, and the other taught hockey to a group (56) of year 8 girls, all from the same school. Within these two categories, the students were randomly assigned to two further categories, including "Games for Understanding" and "Skills-based". It was their intent to prove, once again, that the tactical approach to PE is much more effective in terms of students development, both tactically and technically, as well as teacher ability for assessment and teaching strategy. In addition, they took the following factors into account: for the pupil, involvement in planning and assessment, enjoyment levels, and the development of skill and tactical understanding, and for the teacher, opportunities to observe and assess student development.

Reasoning:

The authors have recognized the need for evidence to support the TGFU method and set out to research and study the effect of the two separate approaches to PE. They realized that many teachers have remained within their comfort zones and have been teaching PE traditionally. Without solid evidence that TGFU is beneficial, and perhaps superior, teachers are unlikely to change their teaching style. Allison and Thorpe want to inspire introspection and reflection on current teaching styles in order for students to receive the best possible physical education. In addition, they argue that the traditional approach to teaching games does not promote student interaction with assessment and planning, which are National Curriculum objectives, or allow for optimal teacher evaluation. Their research is based on the findings of previous studies (Allison 1996; Bunker and Thorpe, 1986) that identify a dominant skills-based approach in PE.

Assumptions:

A few assumptions that Allison and Thorpe have are: that the results of this study are transferrable and applicable to all students irrespective of their upbringing and schooling experience and that both teachers' methods for each sport and application of the skills and tactical approaches were similar enough to compare findings. In addition, they assumed that the reader audience would be able to reflect on their own teaching through the use of only a few questions, limited information, and without support to consult.

Conclusion:

This article displayed the evidence brought about by yet another study to confirm that TGFU is a more effective and affective teaching method. I thought that Allison and Thorpe managed an appropriate comparison study of the two teaching methods in question. Again, just like what we've been experiencing and learning in class, Allison and Thorpe convince the reader that TGFU should be the premise on which physical educators base their curriculum on. The two researchers concluded that it is essential for teachers to become "reflective practitioners" in order to provide children "with the best physical education possible". They admit that being introspective as a teacher, and questioning our teaching methods, is a difficult task to do; however, without the reassessment of our pedagogy, it is likely we are failing our students.

Significant Information:

Allison and Thorpe found that students with lower abilities were not able to overcome the technical problems found within the skill based teaching technique (due to a sense of failure, low motivation/effort, lack of enjoyment and poor self-concept). However, the students who took part in the games for understanding group, reported significantly higher levels of enjoyment and effort. In addition, the students with lower abilities reported better attitudes about their ability to play basketball and hockey, as well as increased enjoyment of PE in general. The TGFU method produced no decline in technical abilities, as well as improved significantly the students tactical knowledge and understanding of the games. They also discussed the importance of student involvement in planning and assessment and reported that there was an increase in student responsibility, as well as enjoyment in the class.

Personal Comments:

This article was concise and accessible in the presentation of findings and information. I think that this article highlighted the expected outcomes of such a study and definitely falls within the constraints of our class. As I mentioned above, the authors provide evidence to support tactical awareness in games teaching and affirm what we have been learning to employ as our primary teaching strategy for Physical Education. Allison and Thorpe give us important statements and questions, such as “are we failing our children through the teaching we adopt?” to to refine our teaching and to be introspective regularly to ensure that our students are receiving the best possible instruction to enhance their learning of games in PE.

Basically, this article is a reminder that we need to constantly re-evaluate our teaching methods to ensure that we are providing the best education for our students. It also suggests that we review and keep up-to-date with current literature and pedagogical ideologies so that we can be reflective and informed on best practices.