



feature article

Games sense approach to practical lessons

When teaching physical education lessons, PDHPE teachers use a variety of approaches. One new approach that teachers are finding useful in recent times is the *games sense* or *teaching games for understanding* approach.

The approach is based on the assumption that certain principles are common across a range of games and that teaching students about the principles will enable students to be able to perform in the game with more understanding.

The *games sense* approach categorises team games into four areas:

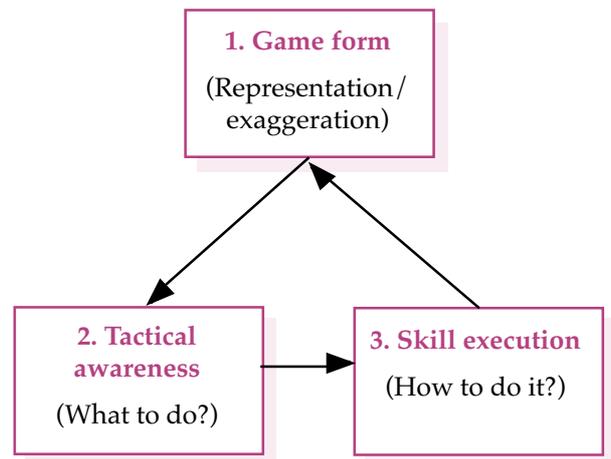
- invasion games e.g. soccer, touch, netball
- target games e.g. golf, archery, bowls
- court and net games e.g. volleyball, tennis, badminton
- striking and fielding games e.g. cricket, softball.

Each category has sports which have similar principles. For example, invasion games are those which are played within a shared area. The objects of invasion games are:

- to score by sending or carrying the ball (or equipment) to a special target, such as a line or goal, through territory defended by the opposing team
- to prevent the opposing team from scoring
- to have the higher score at the end of an agreed period of play.

The games sense approach is essentially a student-centred approach. It allows students to develop their own skills and understanding, while being actively involved in the game. By playing the game, students realise the reason for particular skills and rules that are necessary to play the game successfully. The game itself becomes the central focus of the lesson rather than being played at the end of a lesson, as is often the case. Skill development then occurs after the students have been exposed to the game.

The following model outlines the approach.



The model suggests that teaching should commence with a game or “game form” which is modified to represent the advanced form and exaggerated to present students with tactical problems. By changing the rules of a game, teachers can exaggerate playing conditions to ensure that every player must address the question: “What must I do to succeed in this situation?”

For example, by establishing a 2 v 2 game in a restricted playing area with the objective of making a specific number of consecutive passes, students are forced to confront the problem of what to do to maintain possession. Through questioning by the teacher, students will soon realise that accurate passing and swift ball control are essential skills.

Once students have identified that accurate passing is necessary, students are prompted to ask: “How do I do it?” Formal teaching of passing skills is now appropriate before students return to the game.

The process continues with additional modifications to the game so that new aspects of tactical understanding can be explored.

Following is an example of teaching the tactical aspect of maintaining possession.

Sample activity: invasion games

Tactical problem: maintaining possession (suited to netball, basketball, touch, rugby league etc.)

Game form

- Number of players: 3 v 3 for novices, 4 v 4 or 5 v 5 as skills improve
- Equipment: marked rectangular court with centre spot or line, coloured bibs or braids
- Score goals by passing ball
- Players throw to team mates or to goal, no movement allowed with the ball
- Play is started with a centre pass from the centre spot
- Ball may be regained by interception or by capturing a loose ball

Variations:

- introduce time factor (e.g. maximum 5 seconds with ball)
- change shape, size, number and location of goals.

Possible questions

On the ball

When did you pass the ball?

When did you keep the ball?

What strategies did you use to keep the ball away from your opponent?

What did you do to make it easier to pass the ball?

What did you do to make it easier to receive the ball?

Off the ball

What strategies did you use to make it harder for the ball to be passed or received?

What did you do to try to win back the ball?

What else could you have done?

Variation

How did having a time limit affect the game?

Source:

Mitchell, S. *Improving Invasion Game Performance*. Adapted from Bunke & Thorpe, 1982; Thorpe, Bunker & Almon, 1986.

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