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# BOOK REVIEW

Play Practice: The Games Approach to Teaching and Coaching Sports  
by A. G. Launder, 2001, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.  
(Singapore distributor: Icon Books & Multi-media Pte Ltd.)

**Review by Michael C. McNeill and Joan Marian Fry**

*Often teachers' desire to give kids better techniques overrides children's intrinsic motivation to play the game.* (Thorpe, 1992)

In the revised physical education syllabus (MOE, 1999), the Singapore Ministry of Education mandates a specific tactical approach to teaching games from Primary 4 to Pre-university years. Originating in the United Kingdom and since taken up more globally, the *games concept approach* (GCA) as yet has few teaching resources to support its implementation. Launder's recently released *Play Practice* might help fill this gap. This review considers the book's suitability for Singapore physical education (PE) teachers while providing some background to GCA.

The traditional skills approach to PE (*warm up, skill development and games application*) is based on the idea that players have to have certain skills before they can play a game. However, there is a view that the skills-based lesson model is not necessarily the most effective way to improve young people's ability to play games and sports. First, the regimentation of drills (in the skill development lesson segment) can stifle children's need for play. Second, drills often either oversimplify or ignore skill application; they

become ends in themselves. In other words, the traditional model of PE teaching can not only take away the fun element of learning games, but also teach sports skills out of context. When there is an emphasis on drill, children and young people are often turned off PE. With their greater emphasis on game play, such alternative teaching approaches can be more motivating (Thorpe, 1992).

GCA is similar to a number of other strategic and conceptual approaches/models of teaching games and sports, including *teaching for understanding, games-centred games, tactical/technical problem solving* (Victorian Ministry of Education) and the *constructivist approach* to games teaching (Allison & Barrett, 2000). All follow a games-for-understanding model of teaching (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982) that emphasizes games play and skill learning in context. Essentially, the aim of such a tactical/conceptual approach is to improve students' game performance by combining tactical awareness and skill execution in specifically devised games situations, sometimes called *conditioned games* or *modified games*. When students develop an understanding of the similarities among certain games (their inherent concepts and strategies) and learn the games skills *in situ*, they

become better able “to transfer learning from one games situation to another” (Ministry of Education, 1999). The GCA focuses on developing students’ “ability to identify tactical problems that arise during a game and to select the appropriate responses to solve them” (Griffin, Mitchell, & Oslin, 1997, p. 9).

Early literature surrounding GCA was mainly focussed on defining its features and differentiating among teaching approaches (Asquith, 1989; Bunker & Thorpe, 1982). However, little research into the effectiveness of these approaches was undertaken until the last decade (Turner & Martinek, 1992, 1999). With the up-take of constructivist approaches to teaching PE in the United States, PE specialists have begun writing about how to teach this way. Several pedagogic texts (Capel, 2000; Metzler, 2000; Thorpe, 1992) include chapters on the approach, and in the last few years specific publications for teachers have been released (Allison & Barrett, 2000; Griffin, Mitchell, & Oslin, 2000; Launder, 2001). This review deals with the latest of these.

Launder’s purpose in writing *Play practice: The games approach to teaching and coaching sports* is to ensure sport is made more meaningful for children. The text is relevant to the Singapore GCA context, for it focuses on, without being limited to games; track and field, swimming and other individual sports, such as cross country running, are also included. The author provides insights into many aspects of the PE curriculum. Rather than providing a “recipe approach” through lesson plans, Launder applies pedagogical theory to teaching games in ways helpful for

specialist and non-specialist PE teachers. He does not forgo the traditional approaches to teaching and coaching, but advances their possibilities in teaching children and young people how to play games.

As with the GCA, *Play Practice* starts with teaching game *play*, rather than isolated techniques and skills. In reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of traditional approaches to teaching and coaching sports, Launder aims to help teachers understand why technical ability might be more useful in some games, such as badminton and table tennis, than in others, like netball and soccer. Drills are more appropriate for beginners when the game demands technique, but situational play is best when the game requires strategic decision-making. Similarly, in situations where coaches have more time, drills are important in raising the technical profile of athletes. Launder conceptualises teaching beginners as helping them to build “working models”, not merely to develop basic skills. However, teachers need to be astute in modifying their lesson plans according to the responses of students with different needs. This process he calls “reflective tinkering”.

This book is full of helpful hints for developing “games sense”: “the ability to use an understanding of the rules; of tactics and, most importantly, of oneself to solve the problems posed by the game or by one’s opponents” (ibid, p. 36). Three key knowledge strands are interwoven in this book: satisfying students’ needs in a sport experience, providing conditions under which young people learn best, and building the competencies young people need to participate effectively and

enjoyably in a sport (p. 45). A teacher's role is to shape play by manipulating specific variables (number of players, rules, type of equipment, boundaries). For instance, once students are in action (playing a small-sided game), the teacher's role is to focus their plan and attention by questioning individuals and groups. One particular strategy is the "freeze frame". In this, a game play is stopped momentarily; then, using the guided-discovery process, the teacher and students replay the action through movement and questions. Through such teaching strategies beginning players come to an early understanding of the sense of the game. This section of the book is supplemented with useful, simple advice for sound PE teaching.

Almost half the book focuses on teaching specific types of sports. *Play Practice* is useful for the Singapore context: the book uses Ellis's (1983) classification of sports, which also provides the basis for the GCA model used here: *invasion* (field and court), *net barrier* (court-divided), and *field-striking* (target and individual games). Each chapter includes useful practical suggestions for class organisation and the development of specific games sense. For this country, where fitness and conditioning are considered very important, the author has suggestions for making running interesting for children while de-emphasising competition.

Lauder offers interesting motivational strategies not seen elsewhere for "shaping play". He recommends the notion of *action fantasy games* where pupils are confronted with a games scenario before playing out the game. The idea of playing soft tennis as Sampras or

his partner with "two sets all in the Wimbledon final...down 3 games to 4 in the final set...serving at 15-30..." is exciting. It will certainly draw novices into the game more readily than never-ending drills.

As with other sport education models (Siedentop, 1994), *Play Practice* expounds a well rounded education. Students learn to captain, coach, umpire, score, and teach each other in structured games settings. The book is useful for supporting values of the Singapore education system. Through the promotion of sporting behaviour with links to Olympic education, *Play Practice* supports many ideals of a civil society. The ideas in the book are useful for both novice teachers and experienced coaches: "Teach through the game and in the game" (Lauder, 2001, p. 55).

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SPORT COACH: PNL Coaching Allenamento Motivazione Sport. GERALYN STAPLES. 3:09. VICTOR badminton coaching - How to hold the racket and manage the shuttlecock correctly. Super Sport. 2:17. HARRISH BATTING IN THE NETS | Practicing Front foot Drives (Cricket Training - Coaching). JACKIE TRAE. 1:21. An approach to teaching games which is based on the premise that if we can help children to understand games and to reduce the importance attached to the teaching of techniques in strictly controlled situations then the joy and satisfaction of games will be open to children of all abilities. (p.25) Developing Decision Makers: An Empowerment Approach to Coaching by Lynn Kidman (2001). Wayne Smith and Teaching Games for Understanding: Game Sense encourages players to understand and appreciate the game; it enables them to make informed decisions, take ownership of their learning and exercise choice and control over how they play the game. (p.195) Coach Logic is a collaborative video analysis platform for sports teams.