

‘Is TGfU a model only Test Pilots can fly?’: Teacher-coach development in game-centred approaches

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The question ‘is TGfU a model only test-pilots can fly?’ was posed by Alan Launder (2001) in the first edition of his book *Play Practice*. His question, in part, reflected the widespread view that some 20 years after the introduction of TGfU to the physical education teaching and sports coaching communities, this approach to games was still regarded as something of a novelty, as a radical departure from so-called ‘traditional’ methods of teaching and learning in games. The question also held a possible explanation for this situation, which was that TGfU is too complex and demanding for ‘ordinary’ teachers and coaches. This was an explanation that Launder himself had some sympathy for.

As I will elaborate in the first part of this paper, this explanation continues to be used by scholars puzzled at the apparent reluctance of teachers and coaches to fully embrace TGfU. I will cite a range of studies published since 2001 by for example Harvey et al (2015), O’Leary (2015), Harvey and Jarrett (2014), Roberts (2011), Diaz-Cueto et al (2010), Evans and Light (2007) and Butler (2005) that report on a lack of progress with the use of TGfU among pre-service and experienced teachers, and among participation and professional sports coaches. These authors and others offer a range of explanations, in addition to the complexity and demanding features of TGfU, for the continuation of this situation for over 30 years, despite its merits as an approach which Butler (2005, p. 226) claims with some exasperation “seem blindingly obvious to its proponents”.

I will show that many of these authors have important and helpful things to say about how teacher and coach development might be progressed within game-centred approaches. I will also argue however that few of these studies identify the sources of the impediment to the more widespread use of TGfU and related approaches and, as such, some of their valuable recommendations will be bound to fail since they cannot address and resolve the root causes of the problems in games teaching and learning.

In the second part of the paper I build on my analysis set out in the book *Physical Education Futures* (Kirk, 2010) to argue for a different explanation for the 30 odd years conundrum of TGfU in physical education and sport. The crux of my argument is that there are different explanations for the lack of progress of TGfU in physical education teaching compared with sports coaching. While both activities are ostensibly pedagogical practices, it is a mistake to assume that they also share the same explanation for their apparent preference for traditional pedagogies over TGfU.

The case of physical education teaching is the main focus of *PEF* and is possibly the more complex. In the book I use Rovengo’s (1995) concepts of the molecularisation of learning and the hegemony of biomechanics to reveal in detail the dominant form of physical education in schools, which I call physical education-as-sports-techniques. I revisit these concepts here to show what the so-called traditional approach to physical education looks like in practice, which is the approach TGfU ostensibly seeks to replace and is thus often portrayed in the literature as

the antithesis of TGfU ... this traditional practice is what TGfU is not. I point out that many scholars in physical education have taken this sports-technique based approach seriously, as a valid (if flawed) pedagogical practice.

I will argue here that this is a misconception that has led to lines of research that compare traditional sports-technique based approaches with TGfU. I argued in a keynote paper I gave to the first TGfU conference held in New Hampshire in 2001 (published as Kirk 2005) that such comparative studies should cease because they sought to compare two approaches to games that had fundamentally different purposes. In *PEF* I explained in historical detail why I made this call. The so-called traditional approach to physical education is not practiced today because it is a valid and effective pedagogical practice. In its own terms it has been shown by any number of empirical studies to be an ineffective pedagogy (eg. Van Der Mars, 2006). The practice has survived nonetheless from its historical roots in a gymnastics-based form of physical education because it is an effective means of single teachers working with classes of up to 30 or more pupils who have a wide range of abilities in and motivation for physical education. The so-called traditional approach is centrally concerned, as was its gymnastics/ drilling and exercising predecessor, with the social regulation of children's bodies in time and space. In short, it is primarily a practice of social control required by the school as an institution, what Lawson (2009) dubbed 'the industrial age school'. In the paper I provide more evidence for this claim and its consequences for the professional development of teachers within TGfU.

I propose that the institutional context for sports coaching is quite different, and swings around two axes, of professional and participation coaches, and those who have an adequate level of education as a coach and those who draw primarily on their own experience as former players. Here the issue IS about pedagogy and the argument for retaining traditional practices that resemble molecularisation have in my view no defense whatsoever on pedagogical grounds (see Kirk, 2010b). In the paper I again elaborate on the evidence for this claim and consequences for coach professional development in TGfU.

I will argue in summary that it is not only test pilots who can fly TGfU. But 'ordinary' teachers and coaches never will in use TGfU in great numbers until we identify and then tackle the different root sources that impede its progress as a games pedagogy.

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