

Teaching Games and Sport for Understanding

Edited by Shane Pill, Ellen-Alyssa F. Gambles
and Linda L. Griffin



Teaching Games and Sport for Understanding

This new book brings together leading and innovative thinkers in the field of teaching and sport coaching pedagogy to provide a range of perspectives on teaching games and sport for understanding. *Teaching Games and Sport for Understanding* engages undergraduate and postgraduate students in physical education and sport coaching, practicing teachers, practicing sport coaches, teacher educators and coach developers. The contributions, taken together or individually, provide insight, learning and opportunities to foster game-based teaching and coaching ideas, and provide conceptual and methodological clarity where a sense of pedagogical confusion may exist.

Each chapter raises issues that can resonate with the teacher and sport practitioner and researcher. In this way, the chapters can assist one to make sense of their own teaching or sport coaching, provide deeper insight into personal conceptualisations of the concept of game-based teaching and sport coaching or stimulate reflections on their own teaching or coaching or the contexts they are involved in.

Teaching games and sport for understanding in various guises and pedagogical models has been proposed as leading practice for session design and instructional delivery of sport teaching in PE and sport coaching since the late 1960s. At its core, it is a paradigm shift from what can be described as a behaviourist model of highly directive instruction for player replication of teacher/coach explanation and demonstration to instructional models that broadly are aimed at the development of players self-autonomy as self-regulated learners – ‘thinking players’.

This innovative new volume both summarises current thinking, debates and practical considerations about the broad spectrum of what teaching games for understanding means as well as providing direction for further practical, pragmatic and research consideration of the concept and its precepts and, as such, is key reading for both undergraduate and postgraduate students of physical education and sport coaching as well as practicing teachers and sport coaches.

Shane Pill, PhD, is Associate Professor in Physical and Sport Education at Flinders University, Australia.

Ellen-Alyssa F. Gambles is an Academic Tutor in Exercise, Sport and Rehabilitative Therapies at the University of Sunderland, UK.

Linda L. Griffin, PhD, is a Professor in the College of Education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA.

‘There is a need for a text which (a) brings together the diverse game-based approaches for pre-service physical education teachers, and (b) provides detailed guidance on the nuanced application of a game-based approach within physical education. This text does both’.

Dr Phil Kearney, *Department of Physical Education and Sport Sciences, University of Limerick, Ireland*

‘This book offers comprehensive and up-to-date information about Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) and other game-based approaches (GBAs) around the world. Both physical education teachers and sport coaches can gain a lot of practical information to improve their teaching/coaching and maximise students/players potential in an inclusive and learner-centred environment’.

Dr Kanae Haneishi, *Valley City State University, North Dakota, USA*

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**Edited by Shane Pill,
Ellen-Alyssa F. Gambles and
Linda L. Griffin**

Designed cover image: Peter Cade / Getty Images

First published 2023

by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

and by Routledge

4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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ISBN: 978-1-032-28735-5 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-032-28729-4 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-29829-8 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003298298

Typeset in Garamond

by MPS Limited, Dehradun

Access the Support Material: www.routledge.com/9781032287294

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Contributors

Rick Baldock is the current Australian Council for Health Physical Education and Recreation (SA) (ACHPER) Branch Professional Learning Coordinator. After a distinguished career as a primary PE and class teacher and then Department of Education Health & Physical Education (HPE) Curriculum and Policy Officer, Policy and Program Officer, Physical Activity in the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development, Rick managed a primary school healthy weight project from 2009 to 2013. Rick also led a team in the development of a Physical Education curriculum in Qatar in 2008. Rick is a Life Member and Fellow of ACHPER.

Lars Borghouts (PhD) is a physical education teacher educator and researcher in the School of Sport Studies at Fontys University of Applied Sciences, in the Netherlands. His main area of teaching and research work is in assessment, student motivation, physical activity, teacher professional development and teacher education within the context of physical education.

Korey Boyd is an Assistant Professor in the School of Physical Education, Performance and Sport Leadership at Springfield College, Springfield, MA. He teaches Secondary method undergraduate and graduate courses in the Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE). His philosophy of PETE follows similar logic and produces the axiom: produce better thinkers, not better thinking. His research focuses on evidence-based teaching practices in PE that works towards achieving racial equity and cultural relevancy in PE pedagogy. He conducts and publishes research on the links between race and teaching physical education.

Jia Yi Chow (PhD) is currently the Associate Dean (Programme & Student Development) with the Office of Teacher Education (OTE) at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. His research interests include examining multi-articular coordination, visual perception in sports expertise and in a pedagogical approach (Nonlinear Pedagogy) where the focus is on exploring individualised

movement solutions to support nonlinearity in learning. For his excellence in teaching, Jia Yi was inducted as a Fellow to the NTU Teaching Excellence Academy and was accorded the NTU Educator of the Year in 2018.

Christina Curry (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer and researcher in Health and Physical Education (HPE) in the School of Education at Western Sydney University. Her research interests are in learning and curriculum, with a focus on health and physical education pedagogy and game-based approaches, and she also continues to work with teachers and schools in this area. She was previously head of a HPE department and has taught in both Primary and Secondary Schools for 14 years.

Aspasia Dania (PhD) is an Assistant Professor of Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy working at the School of Physical Education and Sport Science, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece. She lectures at an undergraduate and postgraduate level, and she oversees preservice teachers' practicum in schools and sport clubs. She has an extensive record of research publications in the areas of physical education and school sport, teacher and coach education and continuing professional development, game-based learning, qualitative research and curriculum development, with a principal focus on equity, equality, diversity and inclusion.

Michael Davies (PhD) is an early career researcher. Michael's research experience includes outputs in the Spectrum of Teaching Styles and the Game-Sense Approach in Physical Education, Aboriginal sports pedagogy and Sport and Exercise Science. In practice, Michael brings nine years' experience of teacher and practitioner education and is a current teacher educator for the Bachelor of Primary and Secondary degrees in Health and Physical Education, where in 2021, he was an Australian Awards for University Teaching Team Citation recipient for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning in Primary Health and Physical Education.

Frank de Kok is a physical education teacher educator in the School of Sport Studies at Fontys University of Applied Sciences, in the Netherlands. His main area of teaching is in game-based approaches and assessment in the context of physical education.

Sarah Doolittle (EdD) is a professor in the Department of Health and Sport Sciences at Adelphi University in New York. In 1982–1983, as a visiting graduate student at Loughborough University, she was involved (TGfU) with the development of Teaching Games for Understanding with Len Almond, Rod Thorpe, David Bunker, David Kirk and others. This group collaborated on re-thinking how sports and games were learned and taught in school physical education and produced the initial articles and books on TGfU. Since then, Dr Doolittle has published

articles on TGfU, and on curriculum, teaching and assessment for secondary physical education.

John Evans (PhD) is Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous Engagement at Swinburne University of Technology. John was previously professor Indigenous Health Education at the University Technology Sydney (UTS). He has extensive academic and industry experience in Indigenous sport, physical activity and education and more recently in the area of building and infrastructure. John is an ARC Indigenous Research Fellow and holds several ARC competitive research grants. He has also been the lead academic from UTS's Faculty of Health in the establishment of The Indigenous Infrastructure and Sustainable Housing Alliance, which has had recent success in undertaking evaluation and monitoring research for Indigenous communities on the implementation of infrastructure and housing.

Ellen-Alyssa F. Gambles is an Academic Tutor in Exercise, Sport and Rehabilitative Therapies and Chair of the Enabled (disability) Staff Network at the University of Sunderland, in the UK. Ellen is also the Treasurer and Communications Coordinator for the AIESEP Teaching Games for Understanding Special Interest Group (TGfU SIG). For over 15 years she has been teaching and coaching sports, most notably swimming, to children, novice adults and triathletes. Her current teaching and researching interests are in game-based approaches, teacher education and equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within the context of physical education and sport.

Linda L. Griffin (PhD) is a professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. She has spent the past 30 years focused on a game-centred approach to teaching and learning sport. She has numerous publications and presentations on this topic. Linda has received several awards UMass Amherst Exceptional Merit Honor, Frostburg State University Wellner Scholar, AERA SIG: Research on Teaching and Learning in Physical Education, Exemplar Paper Award, and National Association of Sport and Physical Education, Physical Education Teacher Education Honor Award. She is Chair of the AIESEP Teaching Games for Understanding Special Interest Group.

David Gutierrez (PhD) is professor in the Faculty of Education at Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha (Spain). He has taught physical education at secondary-school and university levels since 1998. His main research focus is on pedagogical models, especially on TGfU and Sport Education Model, and more recently on the increase of movement time during the school day to enhance students' school wellness. Former TGfU Special Interest Group chair, David is currently chair of the international board of this association, whose mission is to promote and support game-based approaches to teaching and coaching.

Kanae Haneishi (EdD) is an Associate Professor at Western Colorado University and represents the US for the TGfU International Advisory Board. Her recent research focus is on pedagogical strategies to promote Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Physical Education and Sport Coaching. She was an accomplished soccer player winning the NCAA D2 National Championship with her university and the Silver Medal at the World University Games with the Japanese National team as well as serving as the team captain for New York Magic.

Stephen Harvey (PhD) is Professor of Coaching Education at Ohio University, USA. Stephen's research is focused on coaching behaviour and game-based pedagogies. He is author of over 100 peer-reviewed publications and book chapters and is the author/editor of several textbooks. In addition to his research, Stephen is a licensed physical education/geography teacher in the UK, has coached junior and master's level international field hockey teams, and currently coaches' youth soccer. Stephen is a qualified International Council for Coach Education Coach Developer through participation in the Nippon Sport Science University Coach Developer Academy and currently works as a coach educator for USA field hockey and is a trainee coach educator and coach educator developer for US Soccer.

Ruan Jones (PhD) is a senior lecturer in physical education within the Carnegie School of Sport at Leeds Beckett University. Ruan has a particular interest in phenomenological research perspectives on game-based approaches. He leads modules on the undergraduate PE degree specialising in models-based practice, social psychology and history. Prior to this he worked at Canterbury Christ Church University and University of Worcester. He also has over a decade of experience working in secondary PE departments where he coached girls' and boys' representative rugby union in Kent and North Yorkshire.

Jeroen Koekoek (PhD) is senior lecturer at the Physical Education Teacher Education faculty of Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, in the Netherlands. He teaches games. His research interests are in game-based approaches and teacher education related to game pedagogy. Jeroen is chair-elect of the executive board Teaching Games for Understanding special interest group (TGfU-SIG). Jeroen contributed to several books and papers on physical education and sport with a focus on teaching and learning. Jeroen co-edited a book on digital technology in PE. Jeroen has played Handball at national elite level.

Richard L. Light (PhD) is Professor Emeritus at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand and now works at The University of Sydney. He is a prominent international figure in the development of learner centred and inquiry-based teaching and coaching with a focus on Game Sense and Positive Pedagogy for Sport Coaching. He has held fulltime

appointments in Australia, the UK and New Zealand and published 12 research books on sport, physical education and learning with the influence of culture on teaching or coaching and learning a prominent theme in his work.

Brendan Moy (PhD) is a senior lecturer in physical education teacher education at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia. His ongoing research have primarily focused on investigating the practical application of the constraints-led approach, an alternative physical education teaching approach informed by contemporary motor learning theory. This research combined with over 38 years of practical experience, and ongoing collaborations with expert colleagues and real-world partners has informed his own teaching. He recently received a national teaching award for developing university graduates as agents of change in physical education teaching practice.

Steve Mitchell (PhD) has been at Kent State University in Ohio since 1992. He is the Associate Dean for Administrative Affairs and Graduate Education in the College of Education, Health and Human Services, and a Professor in Physical Education Teacher Education. He has authored numerous articles and book chapters related to standards-based teaching in Physical Education, and has co-authored four textbooks, including two related to teaching games for understanding within public school physical education, with one now into its fourth edition. Steve has served in leadership roles at the state and national level organisations.

Bruce Nkala (PhD) is currently the Athletic Director at Sandy Spring Friends School in Maryland and is the former Physical Education & Pre-K to 12 Department Chair at the Shipley School. Previously he served as a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion coordinator at Shipley and mentor to Students and Staff. He specialises in teaching Invasion Games using TGfU in both Elementary school and Middle school. Bruce's previous research are on developing Pedagogical Content TGfU Knowledge for in-service training and developing student Content Knowledge using TGfU. His current interest is in developing pedagogy that intentionally embeds DEI concepts in PE lessons, while maintaining GBA PE lesson objectives.

David Piggott (PhD) is a senior lecturer in sport coaching at Leeds Beckett University, where he also leads the MSc programmes in Coaching and Coach Development. His main research interests are in coach development, model-based approaches to coaching and understanding peak experiences, such as flow. David is a basketball coach of 25 years and coach educator and has worked at every level of the sport in the UK.

Shane Pill (PhD) is an Associate Professor in Physical Education and Sport at Flinders University, Kaurna Yerta (Adelaide, South Australia). Shane teaches and researches in physical education and sport pedagogy and

curriculum, sport coaching, sport development and educational leadership. Shane is a Life Member and Fellow of the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER). He has been an active sport coach across several sports since 1988, and formerly taught physical education and science in schools for 18 years.

Ian Renshaw (PhD) is an Associate Professor at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia. Previously he has worked as a PE teacher and then in the Higher Education Sectors in the UK and New Zealand. He currently teaches skill acquisition and coaching to trainee HPE teachers and Sport and Exercise scientists. Ian's research focus is in applying the ideas of Ecological Dynamics and specifically, the Constraints-Led Approach (CLA). Ian is working across a wide range of sports to support the uptake of CLA and bridge the gap between academia and practitioners.

Jean-François Richard is Professor and former Dean of Education at l'Université de Moncton in New Brunswick Canada. Specialising in sport pedagogy, Jean-François has contributed to the growing body of knowledge centred on TGfU during the past 25 years including the first two edited publications celebrating its evolution. His initial work in relation to TGfU were related to applications and adaptations of the Team-Sport Assessment Procedure (TSAP). Further collaborative work led to the 2005 publication *Teaching and Learning Team Sports and Games* (Routledge, 2023) co-authored with Jean-François Gréhaigne and Linda Griffin. Jean-François is a former Dr R. Tait Mckenzie Scholar (2007) awarded by Health and Physical Education Canada.

Karen Richardson (EdD) has been on the faculty at Bridgewater State University in Bridgewater, MA since 2003. She is the Chair of the Health and Kinesiology Department in the College of Education and Health Sciences and a Professor in Physical Education Teacher Education. Karen has published on game-based learning focused on modification through adaptation, lesson study; technology in physical education; and tactical decision-making competence in gameplay. Over her career, Karen has also been a leader in faculty development at Bridgewater State University and worked with colleagues to develop and then research the impact of student-faculty partnerships.

Teng Tse Sheng is a Master Teacher from the Physical Education and Sports Teacher Academy (PESTA), Ministry of Education, Singapore. Teng has a keen interest in game-based approach. Upon completing his Master of Education at the University of British Columbia, Teng has played an active role in deepening the understanding of GBA and promoting its use through conducting workshops, collaborating with teachers and presenting at local and overseas conferences. His current

interest is in the use of Inventing Games Model to promote the learning of values and 21 century competencies in PE.

Brendan SueSee (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Southern Queensland, Springfield, Australia. He was a high school teacher for 21 years and taught HPE, geography and history. He has coached from U7-to-adult in cricket, netball, Australian football, baseball, athletics, cross country, volleyball, touch football, softball and triathlon. Brendan has worked at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) for 7 years. His research interests include teaching styles, alignment between HPE syllabus documents and reporting, and cognition. He is most recently the author and editor of *The Spectrum of Teaching Styles in Physical Education* (Routledge, 2020) and co-author of *The Spectrum of Sport Coaching Styles* (Routledge, 2021).

Naoki Suzuki (PhD) is currently Associate Professor of Tokyo Gakugei University in Tokyo. He completed his PhD in 2007 at Tokyo Gakugei University in Japan. He has an interest in teaching and researching about Physical Education and Teacher Training. He was a chair of the Executive Committee of the 6th International Game Sense Conference. At the conference, he made a platform for sharing information related to not only “Game Sense” but also a wide range of game-based approaches for researchers and practitioners. He contributed to the integration and development of a derivative teaching approach that was based on TGfU.

Adrian P. Turner (PhD) is an Associate Professor of Sport Pedagogy and Coaching at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, USA. Since the early 1990s his scholarship on TGfU has provided empirical support, as well as practical application of the model, to teaching and coaching practices in various sports. Adrian teaches a course on invasion sports, and another on educational games, to undergraduate students. He also teaches an instructional strategies class for pre-service physical education teachers, situated at a local secondary school. As the coaching facilitator, to a 150-player youth soccer club, he invokes a game-based approach to player development.

Wytse Walinga is senior lecturer at the Physical Education Teacher Education faculty of Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. He teaches games. Wytse is chair of the games teaching staff. His research focuses on game-based approaches and the development of pedagogical tools for PE and youth sports. Wytse is co-author of the book *Discovery Learning in Youth Football* (daM uitgeverij, 2017). He worked as PE-teacher in secondary education. Wytse has played Volleyball at national elite level.

Gwen Weeldenburg is a physical education teacher educator, educational designer and researcher in the School of Sport Studies at Fontys University of Applied Sciences, and PhD candidate at the University of

Technology Eindhoven, in the Netherlands. Her teaching and research interests mainly focus on student motivation, game-based approaches, motivational learning climate, curriculum development, assessment and teacher education within the context of PE.

John Williams (PhD) is an Associate Professor in Physical Education in the Faculty of Education, University of Canberra, Australia, where he has taught for the last decade as a teacher educator for primary and secondary specialist Health and Physical Education (HPE) programmes. John is also an active researcher in the areas of quality physical education, transformative physical education and sport pedagogy, and the sociology of physical education. He is currently a National Board Director for the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER), the national professional association for HPE teachers in Australia.

Enrico Zondag is a physical education teacher educator in the School of Sport Studies at Fontys University of Applied Sciences, in the Netherlands. His teaching interests mainly focus on creative and motivational learning climate, game-based approaches and practical teacher coaching and supervision within the context of PE.



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Introduction

A History of Teaching Games and Sport for Understanding from Mauldon and Redfern to Bunker and Thorpe, Until Now

Ellen-Alyssa F. Gambles and Linda L. Griffin

This edited book marks the 40th anniversary of Bunker and Thorpe's seminal work published in the Bulletin of Physical Education special edition, which presented the Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) model as a concept for games teaching and learning. In the late 1960s, physical education (PE) practitioners were starting to explore game-based approach (GBA) concepts however, it was not until the 1982 Bulletin that there was an acceleration of interest amongst both academics, practising teachers and coaches.

Since the inception of the TGfU model, GBAs have been proposed as leading practice for the design and delivery of PE sports teaching and coaching. TGfU's influence has spread across the globe, and elaboration has given rise to the development of a variety of 'second generation' pedagogical models stemming from TGfU. There has been a considerable body of research to advance the model that has described both a sound pedagogical underpinning and detailed tools for practical application. Despite these efforts, there has been conceptual confusion at many levels and a sense of theory vs theory and model vs model within the field of teaching games for understanding.

The intention of this book is to provide a coherent, non-versus understanding of the rich diversity of the various 'second generation' models and inform their implementation in practice. In doing so we hope to engage our GBA community of practitioners and provide them with possibilities and perspectives on game-based teaching and sport coaching.

We recognise readers of this book will have differing levels of knowledge about GBAs. We hope that this edited book will support games teaching and learning for undergraduate and postgraduate students, practising teachers, sport coaches, teacher educators and coach developers to learn more about how GBAs can help your research and practice. Each chapter provides conceptual and methodological clarity of GBAs, which can assist readers to understand and stimulate reflections on their own teaching or coaching. This edited book summarises current global debates, knowledge and practical considerations about what teaching games for understanding means as well as providing direction for further practical, pragmatic and

research considerations of the concept and its pedagogical principles. In this chapter we will provide (a) a brief history of GBAs and TGfU, (b) a description of the growth and consolidation of GBAs, (c) an overview of each chapter and (d) some final thoughts.

A brief history of Game-Based Approaches (GBAs)

In the first half of the 20th century the recurring concerns of war led to a focus on military drills in the UK PE curriculum. Later, gymnastics and systematic exercises were widely adopted to promote health and fitness (Donovan et al., 2006). PE teaching in the 1950s and 1960s exhibited a paradigm shift towards emphasis on student proficiency (i.e., mastery approach) in sports techniques (Kirk, 2010). Games teaching in this approach focused on 'skills and drills' both prior to, and in isolation from, gameplay. Whilst the mastery approach was widely adopted, some educators had growing concerns about children not 'knowing' and understanding games (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982). In the late 1960s, some practitioners began to move away from skill-based mastery based on the behaviourist model – what is now referred to as the 'traditional approach' to games teaching – and embraced the ideas of researchers such as Bruner, Piaget and Vygotsky that focused on learner-centred learning.

The rudiments of a GBA as applied to an English primary school setting described in 1969 by Mauldon and Redfern, presented a challenge to the prevailing skill-based mastery approach of games teaching. In place of teaching individual sports, they proposed a thematic curriculum of games with similar properties or game classifications to guide pupils' perceptions of the underlying principles of games in their wider sense. They based their four-stage approach upon the capabilities of the developing young child, progressing from exploratory play towards an emphasis on a fuller game that included competition and an understanding of rules and tactics (Mauldon & Redfern, 1969):

to share ultimately in the process of making a new game or a variation of one already known, finding answers to problems arising and then playing it according to mutual consent, is surely of greater value than only learning prefabricated games with externally imposed rules.

(Mauldon & Redfern, 1969, p. 17)

This quote embodies a vision of a learner-focused GBA for thinking players. The work of Mauldon and Redfern was a part of the changing tide towards more innovative sport pedagogy during this time, however, their ideas had a limited impact on transforming PE.

Similarly, at Loughborough University in the 1960s, Allen Wade, Eric Worthington and Stan Wigmore had introduced their students to the possibilities of small-sided games and teaching through the principles of

play. Although they were exploring the use of small-sided games, it is important to note their focus was primarily on teaching '*games skills*' (Thorpe & Bunker, 1986, p. 5). At the time one student, David Bunker, was employed as a school PE teacher and involved with National Governing Body coaching awards. He expressed a sense of dissatisfaction with the lack of progress he saw from his students when using a skills-based mastery approach in his teaching (Thorpe & Bunker, 1986). In 1968, Rod Thorpe moved to Loughborough and was later joined in 1972 by David Bunker, where they began to investigate a more conceptualised approach to teaching children incorporating modified equipment into modified games. This conceptualised approach led to the setting up of an undergraduate course with Rex Hazeldine and Stan Wigmore, which foregrounded the core elements of games and understanding what they were about (Thorpe & Bunker, 1986).

In the late 1970s, Loughborough University had become a focal point for researchers who shared the desire for educating students to understand the wider concepts of games and the problems that they raised. Len Almond, David Bunker and Rod Thorpe collaborated with a team of colleagues to refine their ideas into what would become known as the TGfU model (Ovens et al., 2021).

The 1982 publication of the Curriculum Model, commonly referred to as the TGfU model (Bunker & Thorpe, 1982), was the watershed event that launched GBAs, gaining national and global attention in the sporting community. Alongside it was numerous articles that focused on this different perspective in games with its editor, Len Almond, inviting a dialogue from readers into the potential of teaching games for understanding (Almond, 1982).

The Loughborough team sought to build upon the 1982 Curriculum Model, and throughout the 1980s they tested ideas at seminars and in practical sessions with teachers before sharing their ideas in several publications (Thorpe & Bunker, 1986). The impact of the 1982 articles was such that most English local education authorities set up working parties to investigate the practicalities of the ideas or ran courses for teachers (Thorpe et al., 1986a). In the following 1983 spring edition of the *Bulletin of Physical Education*, Rod Thorpe and David Bunker responded to this interest and request for specific examples, with further articles that discussed GBAs and detailed their practical application for teachers and coaches.

Len Almond was aware of the work of Terry Williamson, PE advisor for Suffolk, on raising questions around games, and together with the Loughborough team, introduced their ideas to PE teachers across the UK (Thorpe & Bunker, 1986). This collaboration led to a long-term action research project on understanding games by Len Almond, that consisted of Rod Thorpe presenting practical sessions to a group of teachers working in Coventry and culminating in a book publication of their findings entitled,