

“Different Paths up the Same Mountain” – The Third Teaching Games for Understanding International Conference 2005 in Hong Kong

The four-day event was attended by participants from every continent. Steve Mitchell, Roderick Thorpe and Joy Butler were the main contributors.

What could make a person want to take an eleven-hour flight to Hong Kong with a brutal seven-hour time difference just before Christmas? That’s right, the third “Teaching Games for Understanding” International Conference 2005, which took place from 14 to 17 December in Hong Kong. This is the largest international event for sports games research in the fields of movement science and sport pedagogy. For more than 24 years, over 20 American scientists at different universities have been working together on a comprehensive teaching model for sport. It goes by the name “Teaching Games for Understanding” (TGfU) and focuses on developing an integrative game teaching concept (cf. Griffin & Butler, 2005; Griffin, Oslin & Mitchell, 2003). One result of this research work is that this science community has succeeded in setting up several peer-review journals, some with relatively high impact factors. Furthermore, its general teaching ideas long ago entered into the local education plans for the major sports games in North America and Great Britain – a feat which not many research results have managed to accomplish. Unlike in Germany, teachers are therefore obliged to put the theses presented into practice.

The TGfU conference began with the traditional opening ceremony and a humorously choreographed lion dance performed by students. This was followed by a real highlight of the conference. Steve Mitchell, who has published a series of articles and books on the TGfU together with Linda Griffin and Judy Oslin, opened the series of lectures as the keynote speaker. He took a look back over the concept’s beginnings and the developments it has made in the various countries in which it has been applied. In his talk “Different Paths up the Same Mountain”, Mitchell reported that there are different ways of constructing and developing teaching models. It emerged that the TGfU concept has varied and been greatly modified over time, although its aim has remained the same. *It is a model that places the learner in problem solving situations, where decision-making is of critical importance and where skill development takes place within its context.*

In the afternoon, the *grandfather of TGfU*, as he was fondly introduced at the conference, appeared: Roderick Thorpe. Together with David Bunker, Thorpe developed the TGfU concept in 1982. In his lecture he presented the two models TGfU and Games Sense, compared the role

of a trainer for sports games beginners with that of a sports teacher, and drew parallels between tasks from both fields. On the second day, Richard Light from the University of Sydney received the honor of acting as keynote speaker. Light was the organizer of the second TGfU International Conference 2003, which took place in Melbourne. He pointed out that several theories of constructivism are to be found in the TGfU concept. In a more general talk in the afternoon, Frank H Fu from the Hong Kong Baptist University revealed that an alarming 60-67% of Hong Kong's inhabitants does less than 30 minutes sport per week. Programs intended to counter this negative trend would need to be introduced during childhood. The last keynote speaker on the third day was Nathalie Wallian from the University of Franche Comté. Wallian presented three measurement methods, the first two of which are used in TGfU: the Games Performance Assessment Instrument (GPAI) and the Team Sport Assessment Procedure (TSAP). In addition to these, she reported on a third, qualitative measurement method which is *based on dynamic assessment perspective in order to (1) describe, (2) interpret and (3) understand the learner activity as a problem-solving task*. In the afternoon, Joy Butler from the University of British Columbia gave her lecture. Under the notion of democracy she presented a method in which the learners get together in groups, develop a game themselves, and improve it. The aim of this method is that the learners respect one another as equals and protect their individual and collective rights and freedoms. The last main speaker on the last day was David Johns from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. He reported on how the TGfU was introduced in Hong Kong, how it has developed over the past years and what future prospects the concept has in Hong Kong.

All in all, the main lectures were of a very high caliber and the speakers clearly enjoyed lecturing to a receptive yet critical audience. The large number of free communication papers, all with speakers from all corners of the globe, as well as various symposiums dealing with the current TGfU status (empirical method/implementation) in individual countries (e.g. France, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Australia), underlined the high quality of the congress. The event was complemented by seven practical workshops. The great practical competence of the speakers was most impressive and effectively showed that the concept can be transferred successfully to various sports games (football, cricket, handball).

A big thank you goes to the event organizers Raymond Liu, Alberto Cruz and Chung Li. They showed what friendliness, hospitality, creativity and organizational skill Hong Kong has to offer. After the second TGfU conference in Australia, a large-scale affair with more than 400 participants, this event, attended by around 100 participants, was comparatively informal. This proved to be a great advantage for our two-strong German delegation, as we were able to talk in-

depth with all leading scientists and make personal contacts. What is more, we received – albeit somewhat surprisingly – a place for Germany in the TGfU Task Force. This is a speakers council which represents the interests of the TGfU approach and is responsible among other things for the continuation and organization of the meetings with regard to the scientific presentation (quality assurance/review system at TGfU congresses).

The next TGfU meeting will be organized by Joe Butler in 2008 and shall be held in Canada (www.tgfu.org). We believe that the ideas and concepts of the general TGfU approach are also of interest for movement scientists and sports teachers from Germany. The comprehensive teaching model and its main representatives are not a closed science community, but are always open to further discussions (implicit vs. explicit learning; specific vs. non-specific concept) of the basic model.

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