

April Special Blog: Launder (2001) Play Practice

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Introduction

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) model, there will be a monthly 'spotlight' focused on key models/approaches within the field of Games-Based Approaches (GBAs). To start I would like to provide an outline of Alan Launder's Play Practice.

Launder describes himself as an "ill-prepared, and lonely young teacher" (Launder and Piltz, 2013, p.5) working in a Norfolk secondary school in 1957, who found the traditional methods of teaching PE to be ineffective for his pupils. A lack of equipment, poor facilities and large classes of adolescent boys - some described as "maladjusted youths" and "intellectually limited"- numbered as some of the issues he faced. Throughout his career in teaching and coaching in England, the USA and Australia, Launder adopted a process of trial, error, reflection and improvement to engage his pupils which gave rise to the rudiments of what was later formalised as Play Practice and was published in full in his 2001 book "Play Practice: The Games Approach to Teaching and Coaching Sports". His methods were initially applied to cross-country running and then track and field sports, although he states they can equally apply to all types of games and sports as diverse as skiing, table tennis, rugby and surfing.

Launder credits a number of influences for the development of the Play Practice approach. The notion of legitimised failure from pickup games provides players with the opportunity to experiment, freed from potential criticism by authority figures (Launder, 2001, p. 14). He also refers to the small-sided modified games devised for tactical play when teaching football as described by Allen Wade, director of coaching for the Football Association (FA), in his 1967 publication (see our [February Special Blog](#) for more details).

The philosophy is firmly centred on the importance of enjoyment and success in driving engagement in sport, using structured situations for learning, understanding and competence. Launder uses the anecdote of a child playing baseball, who makes a potential base hit but runs directly to third base instead of first base, to emphasise the equal importance of the players understanding the rules of the games as well as being technically competent (Launder, 2001, p. 15).

The initial process for beginners is to assure success of playing a game by implementing appropriate simplified activities and/or modified equipment. The teacher uses their knowledge of the game to analyse and determine the most appropriate learning aspects for a group of players. An element of play is identified to emphasise and shape the practice for learning by modifying some of the variables of the game (e.g. rules, number of players, scoring etc.).

The many benefits of Play Practice are stated briefly as (Lauder and Piltz, 2013, pp. 9-12):

1. Gives teachers ongoing opportunities to interact positively with their students.
2. Can make the learning environment more enjoyable for teachers and coaches.
3. Focuses on the learners and develops critically reflective practitioners.
4. Gives youngsters opportunities to cooperate with each other.
5. Provides a detailed analysis of skilled performance in sports.
6. Redefines the term “game sense” [i] and positions it as a critical element of skilled performance.
7. Introduces the strategies of simplifying, shaping, focusing and enhancing.
8. Emphasises the importance of time on task, maximum individual participation, and alignment.
9. Is supported by a clearly defined action plan for the instructional process.
10. Introduces the notion of working and advanced models of technique.
11. Introduces the notion of working tactical models.
12. Can be used to introduce a variety of sports - skiing, track and field, swimming, table tennis etc.
13. Can be employed by elite coaches.
14. Lends itself to innovation of all kinds and is continually evolving.
15. Its potential has yet to be fully explored
16. Can be taken up and applied piecemeal.
17. Has sound theoretical underpinnings (retrospective).

[i] ‘Games sense’, in this context refers to players needing an understanding of the rules, tactics, strategy and their strengths/weaknesses (and team-mates’) to solve problems. Lauder and Piltz (2013) suggest defining it in this way broadens the understanding of the nature of skills in sport. Previous uses of this term were included in Thorpe and West (1969) work on badminton and also as the tactical model and title for Rod Thorpe’s workshops in Australia during the 1990s.

Difference between Play Practice and TGfU

The developers of both TGfU (Bunker and Thorpe, 1982) and Play Practice (Lauder, 2001) shared similar origins of practical involvement in the English PE and coaching traditions and recognised their limitations. Play Practice arose from influences in the late 1950s with the publication of Modern School Athletics (McNab, 1970) and in 1973 the Journal of Health, PE and Recreation published an article by Lauder where he outlined his “modern approach” to teaching soccer in schools. This article states ‘practising the techniques of kicking, controlling, heading and dribbling in drills outside the context of the game is also of limited value for there is little transfer to the real game’ (Lauder, 1973, p.25).

Lauder and Piltz (2013) describe the shared similarities of TGfU and Play Practice taking the activity and student into consideration, however they state the original linear TGfU model provided limited guidance for guiding professional practice. The authors also state that the primary differences between the two approaches lie in their fundamental aims. TGfU employs the game as the learning context and is concerned with ‘redressing the balance between tactics and technique’ (Lauder and Piltz, 2013, p.13). Whereas the overriding aim of Play Practice was to make sports enjoyable, and to motivate and engage students enabling them to become competent enough to continue with it later (Lauder and Piltz, 2013). Whilst TGfU was devised for games teaching, Play Practice also has been applied to more diverse sports such as skiing and surfing.

Play Practice firmly defines ball control in games as techniques, not skills, and that skilful players also need a willingness to play fairly, communication, tenacity, resilience and mental strength, agility and fitness. Emphasis is given to the elements of skilful play that a player might display whilst never having ball contact as well as times when on the ball.

The Ps of Perfect Pedagogy

The Ps of perfect pedagogy were devised as a clear basis to inform and encourage pre-service teachers undertaking their initial teaching experiences (Lauder, 2001; Lauder and Piltz, 2013).

- **PLAN**- Plan the lesson effectively: consider the nature of the activity, ability and experience of pupils, the desired short and long term outcomes of the lesson and available time. These factors must take into account the required techniques, agility, understanding, and fitness levels of the pupils.
- **PREPARE A PROTECTED LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**- A protected learning environment includes not only the removal of physical hazards but also considers psychological issues such as fear of failure. Pupils will perform better if they find the activity engaging and accept that failure is both inevitable and natural on the path to success.
- **PREPARE THE LEARNER**- A welcoming attitude from the teacher develops a positive pupil environment. This could be further encouraged by dressing appropriately, using the child’s

name, giving positive comments, etc at the beginning of the session so as to provide a major incentive for commitment to the session.

- **PRE-TEST**-Starting a session with a challenge to help determine the groups' entry level competencies in key aspects of performance. The challenges are structured to produce early success and rapid improvement to meet pupils' knowledge, competence and attitude levels. The pre-test assessment underpins future sessions and the whole unit.
- **PRESENT THE TASK EFFICIENTLY**-The teacher provides a clear understanding of the task to the pupils by a practical demonstration of the technical or tactical learning point/s supported with a verbal explanation using key words and phrases.
- **PROVIDE PLENTY OF PRACTICE**- In practical terms, ensure a sufficiency of equipment to ensure pupils are provided with opportunities for purposeful relevant practice. Optimise planning, presentation, organisational and management strategies to maximise playing practice time and learning experiences.
- **PERTINENT PRACTICE**- Practices need to be purposeful, demonstrating a clear relationship between the activity and the real sport. This must be developmentally appropriate for the pupil's ability level.
- **PROVIDE FEEDBACK**- Performance feedback is critical to enhance the learning and teaching process. For improvement to occur, the pupil needs an understanding of why a particular result occurs and what is required to prevent the problem – using key words and phrases can be helpful for a consistent message. The teacher provides structured situations that give learners immediate knowledge of the results of their efforts.
- **ENSURE GOOD POSITIONING AND PERCEPTION**- The teacher needs to consider their position within the play area to observe and monitor the pupils. This will aid with providing feedback, assessing performance and progress, modifying practices, managing the group and task, progressing the lesson and ensuring good pacing.
- **PLAYFUL PRACTICE**- Pupils will learn best when the lesson is playful and prepares them for real game situations.
- **PRAISE PERFORMANCE**- Positive reinforcement from the teacher motivates pupils to engage more in their practice, helping them to recognise their efforts, improvements and successes.
- **PROGRESSIVE PRACTICE**- Increase the challenge and complexity of the learning situation as pupils become more proficient. However, revisiting previous levels of performance and reviewing them will reassure pupils and reinforce a positive attitude for new activities.
- **PACED PRACTICE**- Practice should be paced to avoid boredom and fatigue for the players.
- **PERSONALISED PRACTICE**- Practices should be modified to meet the individual needs of the pupils

Play Practice Approach

The Play Practice approach adopts simplified games with modified equipment to allow students to get beginners playing the game quickly whilst providing the teacher with an insight into which aspects of performance require development. Teachers can apply the Play Practice approach incrementally (Lauder, 2001, p.48) to select and implement into their teaching methods.

Thorpe, Bunker and Almond (1986) had introduced the pedagogical principles of 'exaggeration' and 'representation' in game-forms, and which are comparable to the processes that Lauder described as 'shaping', 'focusing' and 'enhancing' play.

SHAPING PLAY: this is the notion of manipulating one or more of the critical variables of the game - the number of players, the size or shape of the playing area, the rules, the scoring system, the equipment, the goal etc- to make the game easier or more challenging as appropriate for the players. For example modifications could include:

- Using small-sided mini games to give players more opportunity for increased participation and on-the-ball activity.
- Altering the defender/attacker ratio to encourage passing options or teach players how to overcome the disadvantages of being outnumbered
- Varying equipment-using larger/slower balls, hand pads or larger rackets with shorter handles to allow beginners to be more successful in adjusting their position to hit the ball. Alternatively raising the net in racquet games has the effect of slowing the game for beginners.
- Adjusting the dimensions of the court to a long and narrow rectangle so as to encourage the tactic of hitting shots to the back of the court.
- Modifying a secondary rule of the game such as replacing a throw-in with a less demanding kick-in in football, or improving inclusion and practising passing by ruling a minimum of passes before allowing a shot at a goal.
- "Handicapping" more competent players can help prevent them dominating the game at the expense of weaker players. They may not be allowed to shoot goals, or be imposed with an alternative scoring system, or restricted to certain game positions.

FOCUSING PLAY: The teacher or coach uses questioning, cues or prompts with the players to help them gain insight into technical and tactical aspects of the game. Lauder describes this as 'teaching in the game' (Lauder, 2001, p. 57). This might take the form of the teacher stressing a particular tactical option, the similarities and differences between the activities and real game, focusing players on aspects of teamwork as required for defence or attacking moves or other components within the game (Lauder, 2001). For example, instructing the player on how to hold the stick, asking them what to do when they get the ball, reminding the player to watch out for opposing team members etc (Lauder and Piltz, 2013). Teams may also be permitted a small number of short time-outs to allow clarifications on the

rules, or discussions of strategy and to make tactical decisions. The players benefit from these time-outs as it provides them with learning opportunities of the game and skilled play (Lauder and Piltz, 2013).

ENHANCING PLAY: Players commitment and performance can be encouraged by adopting enhancements to play such as introducing time constraints, handicapping particular players, playing fantasy games and other challenges. One way of enhancing play is to restrict playing time to a few minutes so that motivation and attention is increased and fatigue less likely (Lauder and Piltz, 2013). Another suggestion is to allocate leadership roles to the better players and emphasise the ways they can use their position to help their teammates. This both provides opportunity and recognition for their positive role model to offset what they could have got by dominating the game (Lauder and Piltz, 2013). Lauder (2001) also encourages Freeze Replay to help focus and enhance game play. In this situation all the players freeze in position on a given signal to allow a rewind back to a critical point for replay and consideration of alternatives.

The culmination of Play Practice is to use action fantasy games to enhance play (Lauder, 2001). Children love to act out as their favourite sports player, something many of them do when playing in informal pickup games worldwide. Emulating their sporting idol playing for victory against their rivals in critical scenarios is an engaging concept. Action fantasy games are devised by selecting a scenario based on a particular team, match, score position etc. This might be a cup final with two teams at equal score and a limited amount of play time to win. A game card may be used to describe a scenario based on great players in major tournaments, and the students toss a coin to choose who to play out the match as (Lauder, 2001).

Lauder (n.d.) describes a number of stepping stones in the development of action fantasy games, one being the development that came from a table tennis game. As the players were not equally matched, the weaker players were becoming disengaged. Play was re-energised by ruling that fewer points were required to win so as to prevent the demoralising effect of significant differences in scores. Lauder (n.d.) found that the fantasy games approach was effective at class management as its popularity kept pupils engaged and on task.

Fantasy Game Card Example

Taken from Lauder and Piltz (2013, p.49)

“Figure 4.2 Sample Fantasy Scenarios

Lakers versus Bulls

It is the opening game in the final series. Before starting the game, the Lakers warm up with a 2v1 fast break. The Bulls warm up with 3 attackers outside of the key and 2 defenders. It is the last 4 minutes of

the game. The Lakers are up by 1 point, 50 to 49. The ball is passed to set up a player with a clear shot.

Italy versus Argentina

It is the World Cup. Italy focuses on controlling the ball quickly and playing it off, using just 2 touches. They work in a 3v1 square. Argentina focuses on a 2v1 break to score a goal from 20m (66 feet). It is 5 minutes from half time and the score is 0-0. Two attackers dribble and pass to get past the goalie to score.

Williams versus Stosur

It is the final at the US Open. Both players work on their serve to improve consistency. Williams looks at placing the ball with depth in the serve. Stosur focuses on placing the ball wide in the serving area. It is the final set. Scores are one set all and it is 4-4 in the third."

Final Thoughts

Both Launder (2001) and Launder and Piltz (2013) provide detailed examples of the application of Play Practice in action across sports including invasion games, court, striking/fielding, target and individual sports. Ultimately Launder's work is focused on helping PE teachers and coaches provide enjoyable experiences that encourage their young players to continue with physical activity throughout their lives.

We would like to encourage you to continue supporting the 40th Anniversary of TGfU celebrations; including our next instalment in the special blogs where we will be discussing Griffin, Mitchell & Oslin (1997) Tactical Games Model. Please visit <http://www.tgfu.info/40th-anniversary.html> for our other events.

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