

# Understanding Games by Playing Games An Illustrative Example of Canada's PlaySport Program

*Presented at:  
Teaching Sport and Physical Education for Understanding  
Melbourne, Australia  
December 12<sup>th</sup>, 11:30 – 12:30  
Sports Centre*

By:  
Joanna Sheppard & James L. Mandigo,  
Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

*Here are some comments from students who took part in a pilot program last year:*

"I really like PlaySport.  
I hope we can do play sport again next year!!!!!"

"I quite enjoyed it, it was quite challenging."

"I really liked doing PlaySport games.  
I liked when we hit the balloon with a tennis racket.  
Also I liked when we go to make up games by ourselves. Thank-you!"

**Funding Provided by ...**

Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada



**Brock University**



Ontario Physical  
and Health Education  
Association

Joanna Sheppard: [jcssheppard@msn.com](mailto:jcssheppard@msn.com)  
James Mandigo: [Jamie.Mandigo@BrockU.Ca](mailto:Jamie.Mandigo@BrockU.Ca)

[www.ophea.net](http://www.ophea.net)

## Abstract:

At the heart of the Teaching Games for Understanding (TGFU) model is the learner. As a result, game activities that are introduced at step one in the model need to accommodate the learner's needs and abilities. The PlaySport program developed in partnership with the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA) in Canada is based around this basic premise. Developmentally appropriate activities from the four game categories (target, net/wall, batting/ fielding, and invasion) were created to enhance game competence and understanding for elementary aged students. Four basic pedagogical principles of exaggeration, sampling, representation and tactical complexity served as the foundation in the development of each activity. Participants in this session will take part in a number of PlaySport activities from each of the game categories and will learn how to implement each of the pedagogical principles into their own programs to enhance game performance, understanding, and motivation. Results from a province-wide pilot study of teachers and students in the program will also be briefly presented.

## Pedagogical Principles

### Sampling:

- instructors use different game examples from the same category and provide students with an understanding of similar tactical problems and solutions.

### Game representation:

- instructors create developmentally appropriate game-like scenarios that represent how a particular skill or tactical solution is used within a game.

### Exaggeration:

- instructors choose a particular focus for an activity (e.g., maintaining a rally) based on game structure and creating a developmentally appropriate scenario that exaggerates the concept that is chosen.

### Tactical complexity:

- based upon the premise that there is a developmental progression of tactical solutions that include on and off the ball skills and movements.

## Target Games

Emphasize accuracy and control. Modify challenges by changing target size, distance and equipment, by using stationary or mobile targets and by having the players shoot while stationary or mobile (e.g., croquet, golf, archery, curling, bowling)

Tactical Problems	Level of Tactical Complexity		
	1	2	3
<b>Scoring</b> Close Proximity to Target  Avoiding Obstacles  Creating a Dynamic Reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aim/ Accuracy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Placement (e.g., draw, lie)</li> <li>• Using other objects/ obstacles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raise</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Spins/ Turns</li> <li>• Placement of Contact</li> </ul>
<b>Preventing Scoring</b> Defend space  Getting Last Shot		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take-outs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guards</li> <li>• Blank an End</li> </ul>

## Net/ Wall Games

Net/wall-type games involve moving and controlling an object and hitting it within a specified space. Players work to make it difficult for other players to gain possession of the object or to send it back to the wall or across the net. Small numbers of players are usually involved in net/wall games (e.g., tennis, 4-square, badminton, table tennis, volleyball)

Tactical Complexity	Generic Tactical Problem	Potential Generic Tactical Solutions
1	Consistency (offensive and defensive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• positioning</li> <li>• footwork</li> <li>• skill mechanics</li> </ul>
2	Setting up for attack (offensive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• accuracy</li> <li>• shot placement to create space</li> <li>• corners</li> <li>• sides</li> <li>• front/ back</li> <li>• communication (doubles +)</li> </ul>
3	Defend Space (defensive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recovery position</li> <li>• formations (doubles +)</li> </ul>
4	Win the Point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shot selection</li> <li>• spin</li> <li>• force</li> <li>• shot location</li> <li>• at open space</li> <li>• at person</li> <li>• between partners</li> <li>• body fakes</li> <li>• serves</li> <li>• attacking the shot</li> </ul>
5	Defending against attack	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shot return</li> <li>• block</li> <li>• dig</li> <li>• close to net</li> <li>• formations (doubles +)</li> <li>• cover (doubles +)</li> </ul>

## Batting/ Fielding

Striking/fielding-type games can involve running, striking, throwing, kicking and catching. Runners hit, kick or throw an object then score runs by running to designated areas. Fielders retrieve the object and get it to a specified place to stop runs from being scored and to get opponents out. Because of the many aspects of the game, strategy for striking/fielding games can be challenging (e.g., baseball, cricket, rounders, softball)

Tactical Complexity	Generic Tactical Problem	Potential Generic Tactical Solutions
1	ACCURATELY HIT BALL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hit ball between fielders</li> <li>• Height &amp; Force of ball</li> <li>• Place hitting</li> </ul>
2	MAKE HITTING THE BALL DIFFICULT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pitches (mix between spatial and effort)</li> <li>• Spin on ball</li> </ul>
3	AVOID GETTING OUT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hit away from “base”</li> <li>• Protect “strike” zone</li> <li>• Hit ball over fielders</li> <li>• Hit ball on the ground</li> <li>• Hitting Behind Runner</li> <li>• Delay the throw</li> <li>• Run quickly</li> <li>• Decide when to run</li> <li>• Pathway taken to “base”</li> <li>• Breaking up Double Play</li> </ul>
4	SCORE RUNS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advance base runner</li> <li>• Steal bases if allowed</li> <li>• Tagging Up</li> <li>• Draw a Throw</li> </ul>
5	STOP SCORING RUNS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fielding Fly-balls &amp; Grounders</li> <li>• Accurate Throws to Cutoff Person and/or Base</li> <li>• Relay Throws</li> <li>• Rundowns</li> <li>• Create a Force Out</li> <li>• Distance to Base To Prevent Run Scoring</li> <li>• Positioning to Cover Space</li> <li>• Base Coverage</li> <li>• Back-Ups</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>

## Invasion Games

Invasion/territory-type games involve controlling an object, keeping it away from opponents and moving it into a scoring position to score on a target. Games can be modified to be simple running games or to use a specified skill (kicking, throwing) (e.g., soccer, handball, ultimate Frisbee, football, basketball, lacrosse, field hockey).

Tactical Complexity	Generic Tactical Problem	Potential Generic Tactical Solutions
1	Maintain Possession (Offensive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short passes</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Support ball carrier</li> <li>• Retaining Skills</li> </ul>
2	Regain Possession (Defensive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anticipation</li> <li>• Tackling</li> </ul>
3	Create Space (Offensive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give and Go</li> <li>• Width</li> <li>• Depth</li> <li>• Placing ball into open space</li> <li>• Overlapping runs</li> </ul>
4	Defend Space (Defensive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marking</li> <li>• Zone defense</li> <li>• Clearing the ball/ puck</li> </ul>
5	Attack the Goal (Offensive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shooting/ shot placement</li> <li>• target player</li> <li>• rebounds</li> </ul>
6	Defend the Goal (Defensive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goaltending</li> <li>• Covering the area around the goal area</li> </ul>
7	Set Plays (Offensive & Defensive)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varies by sport (e.g., corner kick in soccer, penalty stroke in field hockey)</li> </ul>