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TEAM SPORTS IN ADVENTIST EDUCATION
ANOTHER LOOK

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INTRODUCTION

In Australia sports and games are as much a part of the fabric of Adventist education as Nutmeat pies and Bible lessons. Within K-10 physical education and related school sport programs, a significant amount of time is allocated to these activities. On enquiry we could expect to be told that the reason for the inclusion of sports and games in the school curriculum is due to the many benefits which can be derived through participation. Mention would possibly be made of the potential for the development of values such as fair play, respect for officials, respect for opponents, and to appreciate the rewards which can be derived from evenly contested, well-played games. Some may mention that the attainment of competent sports skills by the end of compulsory schooling is an important consideration as these may become the vehicle for life-long participation in leisure activities which have health benefits. A justification which may not receive as much attention is the potential sports and games have to contribute to the development and affirmation of Christian faith and values. I can however recall two occasions when this did happen. My friend and mentor Dr. Jim Hanson who introduced degree subjects in physical education at Avondale College in 1981, when asked about his occupation would reply something like this, "I teach courage, dependability, honesty, perseverance and self-discipline." Having aroused the enquirer's interest he would then go on to explain that he was a physical education teacher working in the Christian school sector. All kinds of interesting discussion would follow! Another lasting memory for me occurred during a recent visit with Tim Windemuth, a lecturer in physical education and athletics director at Walla Walla College. As we spoke about their inter-mural sports program I asked Tim about the contribution he felt these activities were making to the Christian ethos of the college. He replied " When my primary focus becomes anything besides introducing the young people I work and play with to Jesus, I'll quit!" Before I left Tim, he invited me to pray with him in his office. As he asked for God's blessing on our respective sports programs I was encouraged that our efforts with respect to these activities can be seen to contribute in such an important way.

We are all well aware of the widespread abuses in sport, from children's sport up to professional and elite levels. Sadly I have observed some of these negative aspects in team sports conducted as part of school and college programs within Adventist education. Anecdotal reports the world over tend to support the idea that often sporting events played in Adventist environments are characterised by an inordinate amount of inappropriate behaviour. I have heard some use this as reason to curtail our participation in competitive sports. However with sport having such a powerful cultural and social significance in our world, to believe that we could have a school system free of competitive sports and games is similar to believing that our educational environments should be free of computers because we have heard that students can access inappropriate material and information via school computers and the internet.

I have a strong belief that positive educational outcomes can be derived through participation in team sport activities. Furthermore, the observation of some problems associated with the delivery of our team sports programs merely serves as an impetus to explore how we might better conduct this important part of the school curriculum from an informed Christian perspective. In this paper I wish to put forward a few ideas which may assist teachers in Adventist education to think further about new ways of actively seeking to integrate faith with learning in the teaching of team games.

A CHRISTIAN PLAY ETHIC

I have a Christian play ethic born of my own experience and informed by other Christian writers. Holmes (1992) says that man's very being is *homo religiousis.* To live our life in *responsible relationship* to God is of uttermost importance (248). It is this relationship he says which gives meaning to both work and play. In what he describes as a "Theology of Play", Holmes lists three ingredients. First, he says God allows us the "liberty to serve joyfully, even playfully, from the heart." Ecclesiastes 2:24: "There is nothing better for a man than he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in his labours. This . . . is from the hand of God." And further, "I commend enjoyment, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat and drink, and to enjoy himself" (8:15). Second he says the Sabbath day of rest tells us that our life depends ultimately on God not on our work. It's okay to be unproductive and to celebrate God's creation and our deliverance. Third, Holmes says play has a special place reserved in God's kingdom. Zechariah 8:5: "The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets."

The Christian play ethic arises out of this theology of play. Holmes cites Thomas Aquinas who expressed three cautions with respect to play. First, do not take pleasure in indecent or injurious play. Second, do not lose your mental or emotional balance and self-control. Third, do not play in ways ill-fitting either the hour or the man (251). Playing in *responsible relationship* to God, says Holmes, will forbid games which tend to dehumanise, or which make sex objects of people, which shatters self-respect, stifles growth, is unloving, unjust, unfair, or needlessly violent. We need to ask, he says, what Christian servanthood is in competition. On the personal level, play has aesthetic and intellectual potential. It can develop precision and grace and encourage qualities of cooperation, persistence and self-denial. While no play can develop character on its own, it provides opportunities for growth and personal development. Holmes puts forward the interesting idea that if play is enjoyment of God, if play reminds us that we rest in His provision, if it expresses the *shalom* of His kingdom, then we can no longer take ourselves so seriously. Play puts us in our place, it puts life into perspective, particularly our life in relation to God (252).

DELIMITATIONS

I need to point out that this paper examines some possibilities for improving the way we conduct our team sports instruction in physical education and related areas. I would not wish that in doing so, we lose sight of the many other important aspects of physical education. Physical fitness, aquatics, track and field, outdoor pursuits, and gymnastics are equally important activities. And although team sports and particularly inter-school team sports seem to provide the vehicle for some spirited dialogue with respect to their place in the curriculum, my purpose is not to spend time defending the place of team sports but rather to move on from that debate and to look for ways which may help to improve the state of play on the playing fields of at least some of our school, college and university campuses. This of course is not intended to devalue discussion dealing with whether or not team sports should be encouraged in our schools. We must continue to try to understand the point of view of those who argue against these activities. To explore this particular debate further I commend the work of Graybill (1974), Hammerslough (1988, 1993), Nelson (1988), and White (1988) who have made significant contributions to this ongoing discussion.

THE MODELS

I would like to put forward for consideration two sport education models which I believe have potential to overcome some of the negatives which surround the place of sports and games in our physical education and sports related programs. The first reflects the ideas of Darryl Siedentop from Ohio State University. I heard Siedentop present his ideas for the first time at an Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation Conference held in conjunction with the Brisbane Commonwealth Games in 1982. Subsequently the model was included in his 1986 textbook : *Physical education: Teaching and curriculum strategies for grades 5-12* (Siedentop, Mand and Taggart), and in 1994 he authored a book entitled *Sport Education.* The second model originated with Rod Thorpe, David Bunker and Len Almond at the University of Technology at Loughborough in England. Their ideas on *teaching games for understanding* (TGFU) were first published in 1982 in the *Bulletin of Physical Education,* and later in a booklet, *Rethinking Games Teaching* (1986). More recently their approach has featured in the *Journal of Physical Education Recreation and Dance* (Werner, Thorpe and Bunker, 1996). I have used both of these models in the preparation of teachers at Avondale College during the last ten years, but only recently have I begun to see more clearly the possibilities these ideas have, with respect to teaching Christian values.

The *Sport Education* Model

In the preface to his most recent book, *Sport Education: Quality PE Through Positive Sport Experiences*, Siedentop (1994) says,

> Sport, when taught properly, provides important developmental experiences for children and youth, not only through increasedplaying competence but also through personal growth and responsibility (ix).
>
> Sport education shows how to implement a true "sports- for-all ethic" and to educate students so that they are not only more knowledgeable game players, but also are stronger advocates for good sports practices in the larger sports culture (x).

Sport education goals seek to educate players in the fullest sense and to help them develop as competent, literate and enthusiastic sports people. Siedentop provides the following explanation:

> •A *competent* sportsperson has sufficient skills to participates in games satisfactorily, understands and can execute strategies appropriate to the complexity of play, and is a knowledgeable games player.
>
> •A *literate* sportsperson understands and values the rules, rituals, and traditions of sports and distinguishes between good and bad sport practices, whether in children's or professional sport. A literate sportsperson is both a more able participant and a more discerning consumer, whether fan or spectator.
>
> •An *enthusiastic* sportsperson participates and behaves in ways that preserve, protect, and enhance the sport culture, whether it is a local youth sport culture or a national sport culture. As members of sporting groups, such enthusiasts participate in further developing sport at the local, national, or international levels. The enthusiastic sportsperson is involved (8).

Sport education objectives which students can achieve through participation include:

> •Develop skills and fitness specific to particular sports.
> •Appreciate and be able to execute strategic play in sports.
> •Participate at a level appropriate to their stage of development.
> •Share in the planning and administration of sport experiences.
> •Provide responsible leadership.
> •Work effectively within a group toward common goals.
> •Appreciate the rituals and conventions that give particular sports their unique meanings.
> •Develop the capacity to make reasoned decisions about sport issues.

•Develop and apply knowledge about umpiring, refereeing, and training.
•Decide voluntarily to become involved in after-school sports.

The structure of sport education is quite different to sport taught in association with school physical education. It has features which are found in institutionalised sport, the sport form which is such an important part of our culture, and particularly the culture of our young people. The typical context for institutionalised sport in society is illustrated in Figure 1.1. It depicts six primary features which make up sport giving it special meaning and making it different from other forms of motor activity.

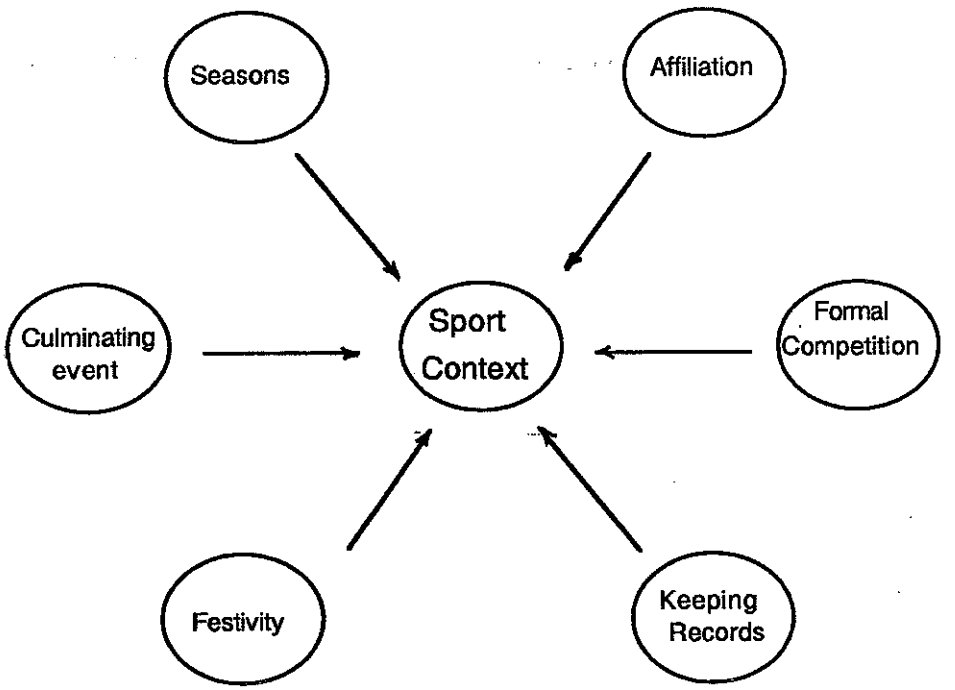


Figure 1.1 — The primary features that define institutionalised sport and provide unique meaning for participation (Siedentop, 1994, 8).

These key features and their definitions are:

•**Seasons.** Sport education seasons are longer than typical physical education units. . . . [They] are longer for two reasons. First, there is

more to accomplish because sport is taught more completely and more authentically. Second, it takes more time for students to learn to be competent games players so that strategic play within competitions reaches an appropriate level, given the backgrounds and developmental capabilities of the students.

•**Affiliation.** In sport education, students quickly become members of teams and maintain that affiliation through the season. Team membership allows for role differentiation and individual responsibility relative to the group, which, in turn, creates the potential for self-growth. Team membership creates enthusiasm. It can also create problems, but it is in working through those problems of peer relationships within teams that children and youth grow and mature. Students typically have different team affiliations with each new season. In the primary school model, students are members of a team for the school year.

•**Formal Competition.** In sport education, a formal schedule of competition is arranged early in the season. The formal schedule often requires that teams make decisions about optimising team performance in various competitions. The formal schedule allows for individual and group goals to be set. The sport education season focuses heavily on practice early in the season as team members learn skills and teams develop strategies. As the season progresses, less time is devoted to basic practice and more time is devoted to competition and to competition-specific practice. . . . The formal schedule allows for teams to prepare for upcoming competitions by working on weaknesses or preparing new strategies. The format for scheduling competitions can be as diverse as the world of sport.

•**Culminating Event.** In sport education, the season ends with a culminating event. This might be a one-day track and field meet, a 3 vs. 3 volleyball championship, a gymnastic team competition, or the bringing together of place winners from two separate competitions. The culminating event should be festive, designed to provide a fitting climax to a sport season. It should also involve all participants, because total participation is one of the ways that sport education differs from other forms of sport.

•**Record Keeping.** In sport education, records are kept and used to enhance the educational experience. Records can be as simple as shots on goal and saves for a 2 vs. 2 soccer competition for fourth graders or as complex as complete sets of basketball statistics (shooting percentages, rebounds, steals, assists, and turnovers) for tenth graders. They can also involve judging performance as in

> gymnastics, diving, or skating, with students acting as judges. Records have many uses. They provide feedback for individual and group performance. They can be used to set goals for future competitions. Records provide teachers with an authentic form of assessment. They provide part of the local tradition of the sport within a school, such as the fifth grade girls' team long jump record, the top score in balance beam for seventh graders, or the highest team total of the year for aces in a team tennis competition.
>
> •**Festivity.** In sport education, teachers attempt to make each season festive. Teams have names and can develop uniforms. Records are publicised. Individual and group performance is recognised and appreciated. The gym can be decorated for a culminating event. The rituals and traditions of the sport are emphasised and honoured.

These characteristics are present in nearly all sport education units, regardless of school level or sport. Siedentop believes that by incorporating these features into school sport, participants will be able to contextualise their involvement thus leading to more authentic sport experiences. In school physical education he says, sport skills are largely taught in isolation from the game setting and team affiliation is usually absent. Further, short units do not allow students to experience the ups and downs which teams typically experience in a season, nor do they enable students to develop an appropriate level of skill considered necessary for enjoyable involvement. With students being reported in the literature as describing physical education as boring, repetitive and irrelevant (Tinning and Fitzclarence, 1992), and Stroot (1994) and Locke (1992) suggesting that current practices are not working, it would seem that as Thorpe, Bunker and Almond (1986) suggest we would do well to rethink our games teaching.

Siedentop says:

> Sport education presents developmentally appropriate competition to all students regardless of skill level, gender, or disability. The issue in sport education is not too much or too little competition, but appropriate competition. There is much to be learned from appropriate competition, both individually and as a member of a competitive group: The biggest lesson is to play hard, play fair, honour your opponent, and accept that when the contest is over, it is over. What matters most is taking part fairly and honourably, not which individual or team wins or loses. These lessons need to be taught and reinforced as key components of sport education (13).

Among the many contributions which sport education offers to sport in the Adventist school context, is the special emphases the approach has toward teaching values such as fair play and equal competition opportunities. It is suggested that these

values be taught just as specifically and actively as the development of skills which is typically the primary focus in the teaching of games. Teachers can,

> •Ensure that specific behaviours related to fair play are made clear to students.
> •Use an accountability system that promotes and rewards fair play.
> •Encourage positive, supportive spectator behaviour.
> •Use a well-defined team selection system with equal competition as a primary objective.
> •Develop an elected sports council which decides on issues to do with competition and fair play.
> •Make fair play awards as important as awards for winning competitions.
> •Teach and reward ritualistic ways of showing that fair play is valued in sport and that opponents are honoured for their efforts. (31)

Teacher's reports on the success of sport education in their schools is encouraging. They have cited reduced discipline problems, a greater acceptance of responsibility, and more skilled and knowledgeable games' players who play fairly, appreciate the competitions, and acknowledge and respect the efforts of both teammates and opponents. (Dugas, in Siedentop, 1994) Research which examined student role involvement during a unit of sport education (Hastie,1996) found that students enjoyed the responsibility of administrative roles and preferred student coaches over teacher instruction. Another study (Carlson and Hastie, 1997) which looked at the student social system within sport education found positive gains in the development of teamwork and cooperation, improved opportunities for personal and social development including leadership skills, and a change in the way students viewed learning in physical education. In regular physical education contexts student social systems often conflict with the teacher's agenda however with students placed in both instructional and managerial roles, these usually teacher-driven task systems became part of the student social system.

It seem to me that this model with its emphases on personal growth and development has considerable potential to contribute positively to our quest to have both individual and corporate aspect of our sports programs conducted in *responsible relationship* to God.

The *Teaching Games for Understanding (TGFU)* Model

The proponents of this model suggest that,

> The primary purpose of teaching any game should be to improve students' game performance and to improve their enjoyment and participation in games, which might lead to a more healthy lifestyle (Werner, Thorpe and Bunker, 28).

Their ideas are put forward to overcome some of the problems they see as being inherent in games teaching. At best they see games teaching as a series of highly-structured lessons leaning heavily on the teaching of skills and techniques, or at worst lessons which rely on the children themselves to sustain interest in the game. They believe this approach has led to,

> •a large percentage of children achieving little success due to the emphasis on performance, i.e., "doing"
> •the majority of school leavers "knowing" very little about games
> •the production of supposedly "skilful" players who in fact possess inflexible techniques and poor decision making capacity
> •the development of teacher/coach dependent performers
> •the failure to develop "thinking" spectators and "knowing" administrators at a time when games (and sport) are an important form of entertainment in the leisure industry (Thorpe, Bunker and Almond, 1986, 7).

Figure 1.2 outlines the procedural steps of the TGFU model which they have put forward to address these perceived difficulties,

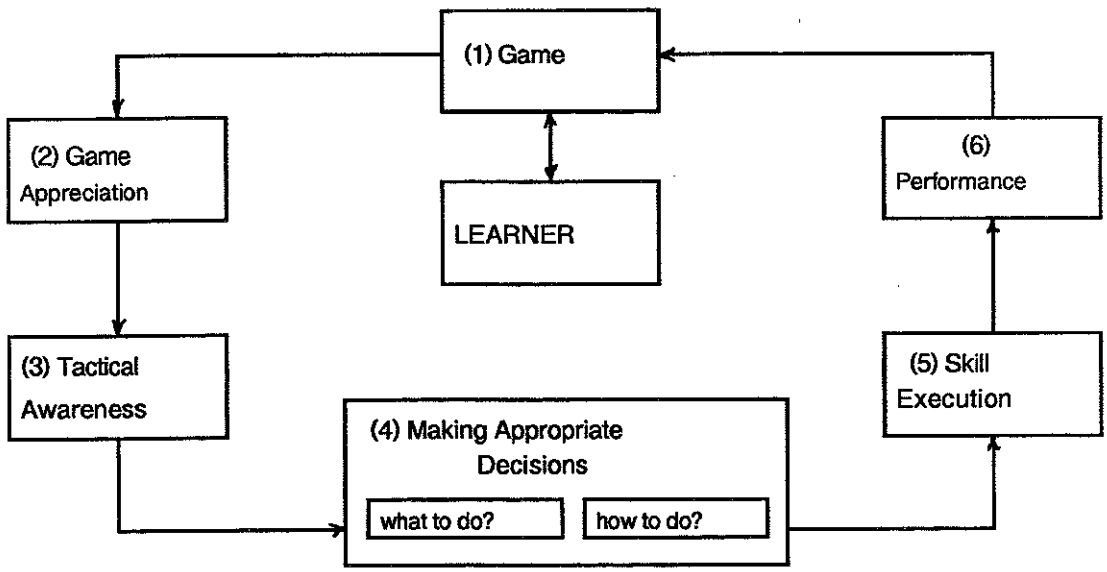


Figure 1.2 — A model for the teaching of games (Thorpe, Bunker, Almond. 1986)

At each phase the teacher helps children achieve a new level of skilful performance. While absolute levels of individual performance with respect to game skills will vary, the key feature of this approach is that each and every child is able to participate in decision-making based upon tactical awareness, thereby retaining a better interest and involvement in the game.

The sequential nature of the model is important. Thorpe, Bunker and Almond explain,

> 1.Game Form. Execution of the model begins with a modified games according to the age and experience of the players. Fundamentally it is designed to introduce the concept of creating space to attack a target while being denied space by your opposition.
>
> 2.Game Appreciation. The rules of the modified game need to be understood no matter how simple. Rules give games shape and meaning.
>
> 3.Tactical Awareness. Ways of creating and denying space must be found. An example of a fundamental first principle to be learned is that the use of fast breaks will help to achieve penetration.
>
> 4.Decision-Making. Recognising cues and predicting possible outcomes makes it possible for players to answer "what to do?" questions. Selecting appropriate responses from alternatives, answers "How to do it?" questions.
>
> 5.Skill Execution. This is the actual production of the right movement response recognising the limitations of the learner.
>
> 6.Performance. The observed outcome measured against a criteria.

The authors support from a different perspective Siedentop's view that traditional methods have failed to take account of the contextual nature of games. They suggest there is a tendency for teachers to teach "how" with respect to the execution of game skills before they teach "why". Here the authors are speaking about shifting the emphasis from very prescribed responses such as teaching the overhead clear in badminton to tactical considerations such as the significance of the shot in the game which may be used to drive the opponent to the back of the court and to deny them an opportunity to make an offensive stroke. So that student can be led to understand tactical similarities between apparently different games, use is made of game classification systems which identify four game forms - target,

court or net/wall, field or striking/fielding, and territory or invasion games (Ellis, 1983; Werner and Almond, 1990). Thus common principles of attack and defence in games such as soccer, basketball and water polo can be explored.

The notion of "games representation" is fundamental to the understanding approach (Werner, Thorpe and Bunker, 1996). This requires that the teacher develop small-sided, modified, conditioned games which are adapted to suit children's size, age, and ability but which still include the same essential tactical structures as the official game. By modifying the number of players on a team, the size of the court, and the type of equipment used, children can learn game essentials such as attack and defence of space, point scoring opportunities, one-on-one and zone defences, running fast breaks and setting up plays. Certain key tactical aspects of a game can thus be exaggerated to enable understanding to develop.

Research which has examined the use of the understanding approach in schools is encouraging. Berkowitz (1996) reported that although little impact had been made toward improving soccer skill in a sixth-grade class she taught using the understanding approach, there was a significant improvement in game play. She reported higher levels of activity by students during practice sessions and an increased ability by students to deal with similar tactical issues as they moved from one game to the next. Turner (1996) found that in a 2 vs. 2 field hockey game, that players taught using TGFU, were able to learn fundamental tactical aspects of the game such as passing to teammates who are in the open, running fast breaks, and staying goalside when defending, before they had mastered the fine points of skills such as passing and tackling. Hopefully with their interest thus aroused and skill development contextualised, they would then see some meaning in practice designed to develop those skills.

I see considerable potential for this model to also contribute to better team sport delivery and practice in Adventist schools. While the approach may not have the same overtly stated objective to teach values as the sport education model, I'm drawn to it for the following reasons.

First, I like the redirecting of our attention away from the teaching of skills to strategic and tactical considerations wherein I believe lies enjoyment. I well remember when one of my daughters and I attended a limited-overs cricket match between Australia and South Africa. It wasn't until I had spent an hour or two answering questions she had about the tactics being used by the captain of each team that she was able to get "into" the game. Her desire to understand strategic and tactical considerations such as the setting of offensive and defensive "fields" transcended in importance her own cricket skills and even the skill being displayed by the flamboyant batsmen and tearaway bowlers of two of the world's great cricket teams. She needed answers to the "why" questions before we could sit back and enjoy the game. No student participating in our sports programs should feel that

their emerging skills are inadequate for full and active involvement. When our focus is skill development there is potential for the less skilful participant to look at the more skilful and say "I can't do that!" The message of TGFU is that enabling skills are not as important as our emphases may have suggested. With teachers using purpose-modified games to awaken understanding the likelihood of capturing and maintaining the enthusiasm of our students to play games would seem to be enhanced. With greater enjoyment and meaning being derived through participation, the greater is the potential for personal growth and development.

Second, I believe positive affective outcomes are likely should the model be implemented. Think of the contribution to self esteem when the not so skilful but nevertheless enthusiastic participants in the class, feel for the first time that their emerging skills are not on display, and that their contribution to answering the "why" questions are just as acceptable as the perceived "skilful" members in the class. Think of the positive role modelling at work as students participate in a carefully modified game of soccer, appropriate to their skill level, and designed to focus attention on player's movements off the ball into open space to receive passes and attack space. As the teacher is observed moving around, perhaps even participating in the game, and is heard making positive and appropriate suggestions, students involved would I believe be receiving a large dose of constructive and enduring messages associated with their team games instruction.

The work of Alderman and Wood (1976) provided us with valuable information with respect to the reason why students desire involvement in sports and games. Affiliation (making friends, social interaction), achievement (doing something well or at least noticing improvement), stress/sensation (excitement, appropriate nervousness) and self-direction (opportunities to make choices) were reported as primary motivations. We need to take careful note of these desires and tailor our delivery of team sport instruction accordingly.

I believe each model provides an opportunity for the teacher to exploit these reasons for involvement, and to prayerfully explore issues of faith and learning, or in other words, to contextualise game play within the *"responsible relation to God"* concept. Just as Thorpe, Bunker and Almond believe it is important to ask "why" before "how" in respect to game play, so I believe "why" needs to be discussed with students in relation to the bigger picture of their involvement in sports and games.

These ideas need considerable development and may be "long shots" at seeking to address some of the problems I see with the delivery of our team sports programs. Nevertheless I believe that by taking the best of what is currently available in our discipline, and through the processes of dialogue between the growing number of specialists in our field, and through curriculum development, we must seek to find new and creative ways to bring our teaching of team sports onto safer, more meaningful ground.

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