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Innovation or Recipe?

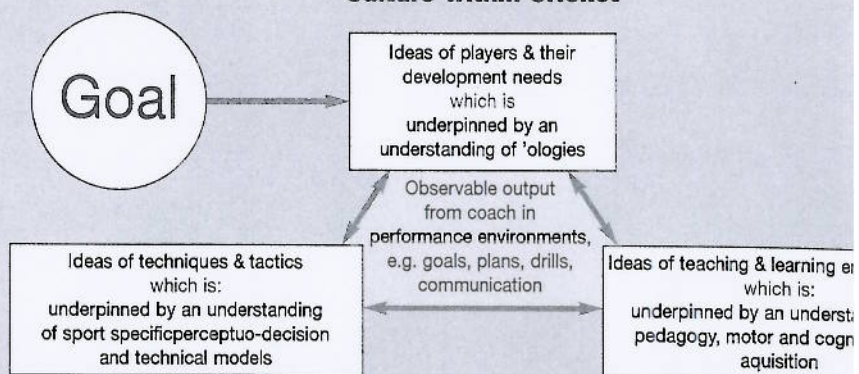
Do you own a cook book? If you don't then you're probably one of the few in this country not to be bitten by the TV chef phenomenon! For those of you who do own one, have you ever wondered why you bought one? Are you trying to become the next Jamie or Gordon or do you simply want to have some more ideas available so you can make the odd treat now and then? We would imagine that more of the readers of this publication fall into the latter of these two categories. What has this got to do with an article on coaching you may be asking? We would argue quite a lot.

If you think about the expert chef, they have an in-depth knowledge of why different foods, spices and herbs taste like they do and why different cooking approaches change the final flavour and texture, etc. of the food. This enables the chef to create new dishes, not to mention selling recipe books to exploit this creativity! By contrast, the willing, enthusiastic, but lower level cook who goes out and buys the book can follow a procedural recipe to recreate a dish like the innovative chef...so long as everything goes smoothly. However, if even a small part of the procedural recipe starts to go wrong in practice, the enthusiastic cook is soon at a loss as to what to do since they lack the in-depth knowledge needed to solve the problem.

Identifying Your Type

So what type of coach are you? Are you

Understanding of the wider Social, Political, Structural and Performance Culture within Cricket



the innovator who is constantly searching for new knowledge and insight so that you can develop new coaching ideas, or are you the coach who uses other people's recipes? Importantly, both have their place. Not every coach has got the time to learn about all of the ingredients of coaching and will benefit their players far more by using tried and tested recipes and adding their own insightful tweaks to personalise them. However, everyone must recognise the limitations of this approach if the utopian dream of coaching - player-centred coaching - is to be achieved. True player-centred coaching requires individualisation of coaching which is dependent on an in-depth knowledge of all the ingredients for the creation of successful coaching programmes.

Importantly, this idea of needing in-depth knowledge is backed up by research examining the practices of expert coaches. However, this research also reveals that it is not just about knowing, it is about being able to use this knowledge to identify a player's developmental needs (both in the short- and the long-term) from both a sport-specific and individual point of view. This process is then added to by identifying appropriate teaching and learning approaches, leading to development programmes that, as far as is practical, individualise coaching. In short, high performing coaching is about thinking and then doing! Since a picture tells a thousand words, we have adapted the

work of Abraham and Collins (in press) to pictorially model the coaching process as displayed in the figure above:

Working Through the Process

In essence we would argue that high performing coaches' practice (i.e. the observable output) entails the constant integration of knowledge to identify and solve problems in order to progress their players towards short-, medium- and long-term goals using the process above. So, for example, a coach of a talented 14 year old batsman may have a long-term goal for getting the player into county cricket, while keeping in mind potential for progressing to international cricket. In order to achieve this goal the coach will require ideas about what that batsman will need technically and tactically. Equally, the coach will have ideas about what the batsman will need (mentally, physically, mechanically, socially, etc.) in order to progress through the performance culture of cricket (i.e. player development structures & pathways) of trying to make it as a county player. Finally, the coach will have ideas about the types of learning environments that they need to create in order to enable the player to achieve their personal and sport-specific goals.

How does this process match up with the innovative chef versus enthusiastic cook idea from earlier? Firstly, both can be good at their job. However, in order to be an innovative coach we would argue that the ideas above would come from the

coach's in-depth knowledge in each of the areas. So, greater understanding of the player would come from developing a sound knowledge of the 'ologies such as the sport sciences (psychology, biomechanics, physiology, etc.) and other related knowledge areas like sociology; in turn, this extensive knowledge enables high performing coaches to recognise the differences between individual players' needs. Equally, there should be a depth of knowledge relating to the perceptual, technical and tactical sport-specific requirements of being a top-level batter. This knowledge would be informed by the depth of knowledge within cricket coaching & the knowledge coming from sport-specific research commissioned in the sciences such as motor control, psychology and biomechanics. Finally, (and, in our experience, the least well developed) the coach would need a depth of knowledge of learning (i.e. motor learning, skill acquisition, games for understanding) and how this impacts on the design of effective practice and communication methods.

Orchestrating the Music

However, thus far, we have predominantly focused on the internal, 'thinking' aspect involved in this process. In order to 'do', coaches are required to communicate their intentions through the manipulation of interpersonal, teaching and instructing behaviours to reflect the needs of the players and the context. This process of thinking about, organising, and then implementing knowledge has been equated to a conductor orchestrating all the different parts of an orchestra to produce beautiful music as opposed to an awful din (Jones & Wallace, 2006)!

The really innovative skill that high performing coaches exhibit is the synthesis of ideas from these three areas (player, sport specific and learning) to inform their actions, decisions and behaviours during the **planning, delivery and reflective** process (i.e. the **observable output**). Hence, coaches that spend time considering these three areas while

planning prior to their session are more likely to be attentive to their players' needs, clearer with task instructions, and be able to provide specific, congruent feedback more frequently. In addition, coaches that deliberately reflect on their players' progress towards sport-specific objectives and the teaching and learning environment they create are more likely to improve their instructional practices and, in turn, facilitate players' learning and progress towards specified performance goals - which leads us back into the planning process!

The Reality of It All?

Does this emphasis on depth and breadth of knowledge through experience mean that the enthusiastic, but less knowledgeable, coach can't be innovative? In short, yes, since trying to be innovative without a depth of knowledge is akin to the notion of throwing some ingredients in a pot, stirring it, and hoping it tastes good. Sometimes it might do, but more often than not it will probably be a miss rather than a hit. This is why coaches with less knowledge and experience generally deliver someone else's recipe. However, these coaches can and should still think about the most effective ways of meeting the needs of their players. As we said, both chef and cook can be - and in coaching need to be - good at their job.

Supporting the Development of Cooks and Chefs

We have painted a very black and white picture of the difference between chef and cook and, obviously, things are never so black and white in real life. Certainly, every cook reserves the right to attempt to become a great chef but anyone wishing to progress towards this level of expertise must recognise the work required. Equally though, coaches wishing to develop expertise also require a great deal of support from various sources - not least the national governing body - in cricket's case, the ECB. In fact, developing innovative coaches through a programme of coach education from

level 1 to level 4 requires innovative and thoughtful coach education. Reflecting our argument that expertise underpins innovation, there must therefore exist an expertise in coach education.

As a result of our seconded work with the UK Centre for Coaching Excellence we have been proud to add our own little bit of expertise in coach education (developed through our research and through our design and delivery of a Sports Coaching degree at Leeds Met) to the substantial expertise within the ECB, as they progress to being one of the first governing bodies to validate a Level 4 Coaching Qualification through the new UK Centre for Coaching Excellence. Consequently, just as there is a need for athlete-centred coaching, the ECB have been responsive to developing coach-centred coach education. There has been real thought put towards the curriculum, understanding the needs of coaches coming onto the level 4 award, and identifying optimal teaching, learning, and assessment approaches to support coaches through to achieving their goals of being a better coach. Such innovation can only have positive effects through the level 1-3 awards. Indeed, in an article we will publish in the next edition, we will describe how we have adopted a similar approach to the development and delivery of our own Sports Coaching degree, and consider how we attempt to help coaches develop along the coaching pathway.

References

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