

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

For this Insight article Dick Bate, former National Coach, and Craig Simmons, Player Development Advisor, have joined forces in order to offer an overview on player development and coaching children.

Dick and Craig have drawn on their experiences and combined these factors with references from specialists within their own field of child development. These views are neither prescriptive, rigid nor complete, but simply offer some comments which may be of use to people involved with children in sport. The purpose of this article is to reflect a wider perspective for coaches, parents and teachers and is seen as a reminder of some issues worthy of consideration regarding the child/player development. Whilst lengthy, it's seen as offering some broad references for discussion and is compiled in sections for convenience.

The past two decades have seen an extensive increase in participation opportunities for children in football, and competitions are now fully organised for the most junior of participants both locally, regionally and nationally. Ages of children involved in international competition continues to fall with examples readily apparent in many countries. With the increase in children's participation, there has been an increase in the number of coaches, teachers and parents involved with children's sport. Therefore, educating coaches who focus on children (primary and secondary school ages) is crucial to the development of talented young performers. "Children are not mini-adults" - surely all parties are now aware of this statement and avoid the reproduction of coaching and training schedules in which they participated as adult performers. Meanwhile, games programmes with a focus on winning at all costs, create an age bias towards the eldest children being selected. This issue is under review and implies eldest is best, but is it?

The Value of Sport to Children and Youths

Sport and games may be highly valued by many children and can play a key role in their psycho-social development by introducing them to; beliefs, values, rules, discipline, competition and co-operation whilst also shaping behaviour. Sport may also have a large role to play in teaching children and youths about responsibility, conformity, collaboration, team needs, social and inter-personal relationships.

But does sport foster 'character development'?

Participation in Sport

Children often prefer participation in competitive sport than other endeavours. Sport may contribute to psycho-social development in which peer status and acceptance is established and developed.

Examples of the Impact Sport may have on Children

Games and sport are areas where young children compare themselves with peers and gain acceptance. Sporting experience may be highly valued by some children, whilst being good at sport may also be seen as an important social commodity for others. 'Being able' in the eyes of others is important to some children and has a bearing on relationships with others. This may enhance the development of social skills. It appears that children having above average skills are often accepted more and have a higher standing amongst peers. However, sporting performance can affect peer relationships, self-esteem and self-worth but can also lead to stress and anxiety.



Sport and Stress

Sport often focuses on the demonstration, comparison and evaluation of ability; therefore, being unable to demonstrate ability in a highly valued activity may produce subsequent stress to some children. Children involved in learning and developing new skills may be 'stressed' by an over-emphasis on inter-personal competitiveness and by being evaluated against other children or adult norms. Whilst conflict, low popularity and self-esteem plus the inability to be with friends may cause children to choose to drop out of sport. Stress and anxiety are important considerations in the experience of children in competitive sport; anxiety is often at its highest level during adolescence. Avoiding anxiety and boredom is the ideal scenario;

- Anxiety may be felt if the coach expects

too much.

- Boredom may occur if the coach expects too little.

Perception of Ability and Creating a Learning Climate

A child's perception of their ability may be a crucial factor in competitive sport.

This perception manifests itself in two ways:

- Demonstrating mastery of a task 'Mastery Goal'
- Demonstrating ability compared to others 'Competitive Goal'

Those who are 'competitive' behaviour orientated may be fragile in the face of failure or difficulty; as a result 'failure' may weaken the perception of ability and may lead to

behavioural problems. Children with expectations that are high in 'competitive goals' may be most expected to drop out of sport. Early teenaged boys and girls are more competitive goal orientated than younger children (nine-eleven years of age). Late primary school and early secondary school ages represents a crucial decision time for children who either continue their involvement or choose to drop out of sport.

The cues and feedback given by significant adults is important in determining goals and attitudes towards competition, especially for children for whom social approval is paramount. With this in mind, parents promoting competitive success, focusing on winning and being better than other children may be referring to their own goal orientation. Whilst



other parents endorse less competitive goals and value the formation of positive peer relationships and being accepted as part of a team. Research shows that the latter parental attitudes provide a better opportunity for the development of successful peer relationships. Therefore, the role of parents, teachers and coaches is vital in setting the motivational climate as one of competition, mastery or recreation. By making certain cues, rewards, behaviours and expectations prominent, a coach can express their favour towards competition not mastery as goal orientated behaviour. To enhance motivation, children often need to be evaluated for their improvement and mastery, not performance outcome and ability.

Factors which may help to create the development climate include;

How practice is designed. / How players are grouped. / How recognition is given. / How performance is evaluated.
 Congratulating ability or effort. / How a coach reacts to a loss. / Establishing realistic expectations. / How players are taught and encouraged.

Coaching Children

The coaching of children involves a game/sports education alongside personal development. We are reminded that coaching children is vastly different from coaching adults in that children are more easily influenced and constantly face new situations and experiences.

Many changes occur in life between five to 16 years of age, and children can be greatly affected by what happens 'to' and 'around' them. Given these changes, coaches should educate for both sport and life, knowing that their priorities, actions and values could have a significant impact on children. A coach needs to be clear about their personal philosophies and values or coaching may lack direction, impact and effect. coaching children is an educational activity concerned with the development of values amongst other priorities and not based solely on winning or competitive success. coaches should understand why they are involved in coaching and who they are doing it for.

TYPES OF GOALS

| Individual Goals | Common Features | Goal Type |
|---|-------------------------|-----------|
| Demonstrating ability Victory | Superiority over others | Outcome |
| Task Mastery Breakthrough | Personal progress | Process |
| Social Approval Teamwork | Pleasing others | Approval |

OUTCOME GOALS focus on the result of a competition and depends on others.
PROCESS GOALS focus on performing own activities and is under own control.
APPROVAL GOALS focus on pleasing others and is partly out of one's own control.

The Nature and Importance of Values

Values are forms of belief existing in the mind and are about what we know or feel to be true, or how we feel about something. They are what we have as a consequence of a belief and are frequently enduring from early adoption and are not easily changed. Many and differing values confront us as we progress through life but eventually we develop mature and core values. Values operate consistently across different situations, although what we believe may be right or wrong.

ATTAINMENT VALUES

Those goals and accomplishments we have for ourselves and not for others, eg gaining social recognition or self-respect.

SOCIAL VALUES

Goals that we have for society as a whole or part of society such as a team or a club, eg justice, freedom, equality of opportunity.

COMPETENCE VALUES

Are personal and are reflected in how we behave. They include the extent to which we feel the need to show how good we are at something. Failure to achieve may result in disappointments which may contribute to stress. However, perceived failure may drive some children on to further improvement.

MORAL VALUES

Determine how we behave in situations with others, eg honesty, forgiving, trust and respect.

VALUES AND COACHING

Values, guide our actions, with coaches prioritising differently. A coach's values are reflected in their behaviour and also in their motives for coaching. They are transmitted to children who may see the coach as a significant role model.

QUESTIONS FOR THE COACH / PARENT / TEACHER

1. Which values are dominant in your value system - attainment, social, competence, moral etc?
2. How do those values affect your coaching?
3. Are you consistent in sport and life in general?

Children's Values in Sport

Young players may express values that are specific to sport and may not apply in other areas of life. With this in mind, it is apparent that differences exist between sexes and different sports. It is worth remembering that a value culture exists for different sports that may be transmitted by the coaches. The most frequently mentioned values are winning, enjoyment and sportsmanship. As such, young people are primarily concerned with enjoyment and satisfaction within their sport.

"Good coaching increases the performance potential of children, gives enjoyment and contributes to their development as people."
 (M. Lee).

Suggested coach Appraisal;

1. Be clear about why you are coaching.

2. Examine your own values system.
3. Examine the relationship between motives, values and behaviour.
4. Be aware of the values you transmit to children.
5. Understand children's motives and values.

Children and Success

Children participate in sport in order to have fun and enjoyment, whilst they also gain proficiency and attainment. They can also associate with group belonging and gain recognition.

Children withdraw from sport for many reasons, eg lack of success or the effects of boredom or pressure.

Their loss of interest may also be affected by expense and the attitudes of significant others.

What is Success for Children?

Children don't see winning as the only kind of success.

Showing superior ability and feeling pride in performance are examples, as are, being needed by others; defeating others; experiencing the feeling of adventure and being noticed. Competing fairly; pleasing other people and improving are additional success issues. (J. Whitehead)

Goals

Six common performance goals.

Demonstrating Ability

- demonstrating high ability compared to others.

Victory

- doing better than others in direct competition.

Task Mastery

- mastering skills for their own sake.

Breakthrough

- doing new things or achieving difficult objectives.

Social Approval

- to please others.

Teamwork

- helping others.

Question for the coach / parent / teacher.

How would coaches help children achieve those goals?

Within sport, could coaches incorporate these goals in the planning of coaching programmes and sessions?

GOALS AND AGE CHANGES

Primary school age children

Task mastery is important in primary age children as young children are more concerned with mastering their own skills than with beating others. Fun and 'breakthrough' are important in primary age children because young children need realistic praise from others to satisfy social approval. To inform them of their progress rather than make comparison with others is a much more acceptable strategy.

Secondary school age children

Demonstration of ability becomes important in secondary school age pupils, as they appreciate that teamwork is important for adolescents. In this age group children know which actions will earn approval, whilst recognising that peer group views are more important than adult views, at least in their opinion. This group realise that 'effort' is not sufficient and ability levels are crucial to success. They also perceive that coaches value ability very highly.

Goals and gender

Girls are mostly concerned with the quality of a performance, they view success as bringing self-satisfaction and are usually less depressed by failure than boys. However, social approval is important to girls.

Boys are concerned with the outcome of a performance and view success as leading to external rewards (fame, popularity, etc). They become more depressed than girls about failure and see victory is being important. They are usually more attracted to competition than girls. (J. Whitehead)

However, attitudes may be changing with regard to these historical gender statements!

Reasons for Giving up Sport

Reasons for 'drop out' include; the lack of suitable opportunities to meet goals, the lack of support to develop talent and the lack of goal achievement or attainment of goals.

A perceived lack of ability and attraction of other activities contribute to the reasons and include the importance of other life priorities such as; education, social, financial. The costs may outweigh the benefits of participation, whilst bad experiences, eg injury, rejection, ridicule, etc. will also have an impact. Physical or emotional stress may also influence participation.

Factors for a coach's consideration include helping children to develop multiple goals and not just outcome goals.

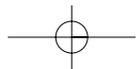
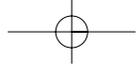
The coach / parent / teacher may be best advised to value factors other than ability and display their recognition of such factors, eg effort, loyalty, teamwork whilst understanding children's needs and goals. Outcome goals may be effective only as long as children get the good results, whereas mastery goals take time to achieve and may therefore sustain a child's interest in sport for a longer period. Adults are advised to actively show a sense of humour and fun to alleviate potential stress whilst adapting practice to improve the satisfaction that children gain from the sport experience. They will need to realise that sport may be a 'transient' interest until other interests replace it.

Communicating with Children

This link involves both imparting information and encouraging the discovery of knowledge, these approaches may be a major factor in promoting and maintaining relationships with others. How relationships are managed influences enjoyment, continued participation and ways in which children perceive themselves. Therefore, coaches must be competent 'senders' of messages and also expert listeners.

Successful communication involves;

- Selecting material.
- Organising it into an amenable form.



- Sending information.
- Reception by another.
- Decoding into meaningful form.
- Interpretation of material.

Communication Channels

Verbal

Speech provides the explicit content of the message and usually involves giving information, giving instructions, and asking questions. Good coaching involves all three. Care taken with the choice of words and vocabulary together with clarity of meaning is essential.

Para-Verbal:

This uses a language and manner that a child relates easily to; with variation in speed, tone of voice, pauses, intonations, and hesitations.

Non-Verbal:

Betrays attitudes very clearly whilst involving gaze, facial expression, gesture and posture. In neutral conversation people may look at each other for 60 per cent of time, whilst we look at a person 75 per cent of time when talking, but only 40 per cent when listening. This may be seen as unusual, but people look away from a speaker if they do not understand what is said. Facial expressions show emotions and attitudes; by the age of two, children can recognise happiness, surprise, fear, anger, sadness, disgust, whilst lack of expression can result in a lack of security in the observer. Children recognise false emotion as they can take account of context as well as behaviour.

Gestures:

Support and emphasising words offer feedback, whilst simulating movements in coaching with the gestures of the head, arms and hands are important.

Postural Messages:

Are given by the whole body and indicate the intensity of emotion.

Gestural and postural messages reveal our attitudes and can be used to convey important messages to children. Coaches should be aware of their personal body language and that of

children who are being coached. Cultural differences do exist in the use of body language.

Gaining Control

Being well prepared and organised whilst reducing all distractions will help with gaining control, as will being positive with body language and waiting until you have full attention. Using the voice as an instrument - change tone, pitch, volume, speed and using appropriate humour - is essential with children.

Giving Instruction

Choose material appropriate to the age, ability and experience of the children but do not give too much information as excessive overload may lead to confusion. Wherever possible, build on what has been learnt before and keep decision-making choices to a minimum. At young ages, the use of language that children understand from meaningful words and visual images which capture their imagination will help; as will being clear and concise. Watch and listen to their reactions and check that instructions are clearly understood before practice starts.

Giving Feedback

This feature can start by asking questions about a performance and then commenting positively - 'good news, bad news, good news'. Do not overload children with information but give messages high on information and low on judgement. Avoid using 'we' for good performance and 'you' for bad performance. How often and when to feedback will also need to address the method, eg verbal, visual or active.

Reinforcement

Rewards good performance contingent on behaviour, whilst making sure body language matches words. Saving 'superlatives' for the appropriate occasion and being consistent with no favourites is important, whilst an acceptable firmness is required. Eg sanction misbehaviour but do not punish poor performance.

Asking Questions

The coach can use questions to check comprehension and listen to answers and use

open-ended (but not too open-ended) questions - give the children the opportunity to talk. Use eyes and ears whilst not interrupting answers is recommended - where is the child coming from? Which emotional and 'ego state' is the child coming from?

Communication - How? When? Where? Why? What?

Adapting Sport to Suit the Needs of Children: Children differ from adults in the proportion and development of their bodies and minds and in the ways in which they respond to exercise. Many of the rules, equipment and playing areas may be unsuitable for young children. It is possible in all sports to modify and structure coaching situations and competitions, so that the competitors have a greater number of successful experiences before the demands and pressures of the adult game are required. Rules and conditions applied to children's games can have a vital influence on their immediate enjoyment and prolonged involvement. Any modifications should not alter the nature or integrity of the game and should embody similar experiences to the adult game.

A focus on enjoyment, participation, success and developing self-esteem is seen as a priority. However, an assumption that sport helps develop team skills and co-operation may not always apply. Progress is developmental from fundamental movement skill to sport-specific skills with children developing at different rates. Therefore, games should be modified to take account of children's physiological and psychomotor limitations. Competition for school children should differ from adults by emphasising fun, participation, performance, enjoyment and satisfaction rather than outcome. (Educ: Dept. of South Australia)

Children have limited capacities in such aspects as growth, physiological capabilities, perceptual motor and psycho-social development.

Areas to consider for modification:
Playing areas / Equipment / Rules / Game and competition organisation.

Questions for the Coach to examine

- To what extents are children's needs being seen as the priority?
- Are those needs being met through the learning programme?
- Is the competitive programme in line with the needs and development of the children?

"The readiness for competitive sport is determined by the individual characteristics of children, ie growth, maturation, development, ability and the nature of the sport. The focus should be on the children".

R. Malina (University of Texas)

Modifications which may support children's development include

- Competence
- Confidence
- Enjoyment

In order to

- Promote success
- Encourage continued participation in the sport
- Maintain the integrity and essence of the activity.

Sport can be a powerful influence on the physical, sociological and psychological development of young people. Consequently, adults not conversant with these facts may be inefficient and could be harmful to those children whom they are involved with.

Coaches Responsibilities

Before and after the session.

Within the session.

Showing care to those you coach.

Identifying foreseeable risks and taking action to prevent them.

Consider

- Avoiding overuse injury.
- Correct footwear and clothing.
- Re-hydration and nutrition.
- Appropriate equipment.
- Safety factors.
- Balanced physical development.
- Balanced technical, tactical development?
- Conflict between school and sport commitments.

- Success affected by age and maturation? - early and late developers.
- Parental involvement and relationships.
- Psychological factors of participation and competition.
- Relationship between coach / teacher / parent - programme, assistance, aims.
- Attitudes to winning and losing.

How Children Learn

Coaches need to know how children think, learn, perceive, remember and make decisions.

By knowing this a coach would be more efficient in:

- Choosing material to be learned.
- Choosing methods of learning.
- Choosing appropriate teaching styles.
- Choosing how to use feedback.

Attentional Characteristics of Children

Learning sports skills involves learning movement patterns and which 'cues' to pay attention to, eg environmental cues, the 'feel' of the movement. In team games such as football, many environmental cues are displayed to the player and choosing which are most appropriate for successful strategy can be complicated, especially for young children. Children 'scan' the environment in a disorganised and exploratory way, sampling both relevant and irrelevant cues, (adults are better and more experienced in focusing on relevant cues). This behaviour is age and experience related. Selective attention becomes more apparent at around eleven to 12 years of age. For young children; removing unwanted information from the situation by simplifying the practice or game situation may be more appropriate, eg adjust numbers, space and intentions etc. before gradually introducing irrelevant cues. Young children, experience difficulty in performing two tasks simultaneously. Coaches should develop 'automation' in one aspect before freeing the attention for perception and decision making, eg dribbling and looking for a team-mate.

Perceptual Characteristics of Children

Perception refers to interpretation or recognition of information detected by the sense organs. However, children will be naïve in their perceptions because of inexperience. A wide

range of perceptual experiences best equip children to make accurate judgements, although care should be taken to avoid excessive overload. Children have difficulty (up to the age of about 16 years old) in picking out items of interest and relevance from a background. Coaches can help 'perception' by teaching children to look for patterns, eg of defences, not individual defenders and teaching anticipation from early cues. Coaches should encourage children to 'feel' movements as they watch demonstrations or try the activity themselves. Coaches of children between five - eleven should give them plenty of time and opportunities to develop perceptions of fast moving objects, eg footballs, players.

Memory Characteristics of Children

Without memory one would learn nothing.

Research indicates that all information is registered for approximately one second after moving to the short term memory or being lost. The short-term memory holds between five-nine items for about 30 seconds. The items are then replaced by incoming others unless they remain in a short-term memory store by 'repetition'. However, children do not spontaneously use rehearsal strategies - encouraging children to repeat what you say helps them memorise and talk through practice or performance. Memory is helped by 'chunking information', eg using analogies. Retrieval from the memory store by linking new experiences to those already stored or by storing information in a meaningful manner, eg acronym, rhyme and visual image.

Research on Practice

'Blocked practice' to groove skills is useful for beginners. However, a range of experiences



given in random order in general may be more effective. Whilst learning can be optimised if several quite different skills are practiced in each session and later recalled. The learner remembers and thus learns more when forced to process and recall information. When learners change from one skill to another, they forget the solution to the first skill and so have to regenerate the solution on returning to it. Therefore, a considerable amount of problem solving is involved during practice. Changing tasks on each activity enables the learner to distinguish more clearly so that the actions become stored in the memory in a more meaningful way.

"The most effective coach is the one who finds ways of involving the learner in selecting responses rather than mindless repetitions of skill execution". R. Connell

Question; Repetition is important, but how important and why?

Decision Making Characteristics of Children

Children are slower than adults in making simple decisions; Sporting decisions have to be made quickly and coaches must help learners to apply the most effective response. Children need to be taught to anticipate and to plan ahead. Coaches should work with children on 'what to do when'. The value of playing a game, first in practice and then working on a skill that causes the game to break down shows the need for and value of practice and provides a specific game context to practice. Players learn to link responses to situations. Therefore, 'Teaching games playing for technique and understanding' is vital.

Response Characteristics of Children

Children need help in paying attention to relevant feedback - feedback can only be used during the activity if the action is slow and comes from the sensory organs. Children rely heavily on visual feedback and are more interested in the result than the process of their actions. In learning correct technique, it is valuable for the learner to note what the action feels like. This forms the basis for error detection in later performance. As far as

possible, coaches should encourage learners to evaluate their own performances with help from the coach - depending on the range and depth of the coaches' experience. Knowledge of results and feedback from performance act as reinforcement of good behaviour and must be given often, although not to the point of overload. Too precise feedback can overload the child.

Selecting a Coaching Style

A coaching style should take into account children's thinking and learning abilities. Coaches should teach children 'how to learn' as well as what to learn (the coaching culture). Coaches should encourage children to be coach independent and increasingly self-reliant.

1. Autocratic Coaching Style

Coach:

- Decides on the session goals.
- Plans the practice.
- Evaluates performance.
- Provides feedback.

2. Independent coaching style Learner - self programmes

- The goals
- Method of practice.
- The content of practice.

Advantages

- Higher motivation?
- Goal-setting aligned with confidence levels?
- Engage in practice with more thought?
- Become self-learners?

3. Interdependent

- A combination of 1 & 2

Selection of coaching Styles;

Dependent on:

1. Physical and intellectual abilities of individuals.
2. Levels of motivation and confidence.
3. Aim of the session.
4. Time available.
5. Coaches ability.

Summary

The Aim - Player Development.

Possible objectives;

- Fully train and qualify people in the principles of child development at primary and secondary school ages.
- Produce a recognised award for coaches of young players which is quality controlled.
- Create a learning environment which addresses the varied teaching and learning issues.
- Produce a school-age games programme which has alternatives to mirroring the adult game.
- Question the reason for including such an obvious birth bias towards the older children.

We have recently established a discussion group for people interested in "player development".

Please feel free to contribute and forward your ideas on this subject to;
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Acknowledgements:

D. Parkin, L. McNaughton,
N. Armstrong & J. Welsman, M. Lee,
Lee & Cockman, J Whitehead, R. Malina,
R Connell, Educ: Dept of Southern Australia.

Recommended reading

Young People and Physical Activity.
Armstrong & Welshman
ISBN 0 19 262 659 0 (Pbk)

Coaching Children in Sport
Lee
ISBN 0 419 182 50 0

Growth, Maturation & Physical Activity.
Malina & Bouchard
ISBN 0 87322 321 7

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The Football Association, National Coach.
Craig Simmons;
The Football Association,
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