

Sharing and Learning

Hi Guys,

I hope that you don't mind me sending this bit of a ramble but I thought that it might be interesting for you to see some illustrations of what I am facing and how clumsily I am approaching this complex world of coaching. I have only copied you two guys in on this because I know your passion for the sport and I see you as friends.

I repeat – it is a ramble so might not flow like a good piece of prose. It might also be so pitiful that you give up quickly! You don't need to reply – I just wanted to share.

I am not looking for any feedback but will appreciate all that you ignore and all that you might say. It is just an exercise and an illustration of how, regardless of my 50 years of experience, I still have much to learn.

Context

I am doing some coaching / teaching at a local Primary School at different times of the year. I do this because my Granddaughter (Ella - 10 years of age) attends the school and the PE Teacher is a hard-working nice guy. Unfortunately, as with most PE environments, the curriculum does not satisfy the required needs of young children. They need at least 60 min per day of moderate exercise but don't get it. I tried to convince the Principal to move towards a movement-based curriculum where mechanical and metabolic elements were central to all activity but they didn't have any interest. I try to help my Granddaughter in two ways (a) she and her friends train with me (developing a movement vocabulary) up to 3 x per week all year round (b) I help her with the running, jumping and throwing techniques in the Athletics season and some swimming related stuff in that sport's season.

Her Mom (Daughter Tammy) wants a multi-sport experience for her so she competes in Swimming (State Championship finalist in Backstroke), Netball and in all the school teams she can get in. The work that I do on her movement vocabulary is done to support her general mechanical health so she gets exposed to Squat, Lunge, Pull, Push, Brace, Rotate, Hinge and Landing activities up to 3 x per week. She is always taught using explicit and implicit learning strategies so she can be a puzzle-solver and not just someone who simply follows instructions.

By this method, I hope to be able to develop her body awareness, coordination and all-round athleticism that she can feed into whatever sport she is involved in. If she can 'feel' where body parts are during actions she has a better chance of tinkering with the actions as part of her technical development. In one sense I am trying to give her the tools so she can be coached – the tools to be able to answer a physical question that a coach might ask her as he attempts to optimise technique. This is opposed to her just specialising in one set of sports-specific actions and postures that were learned by explicit instruction only. In the Athletics part of the year (like now) I do sessions that involve running, jumping and throwing development followed by some movement vocabulary work.

She is in the middle of a journey that sees her having to solve running, jumping and throwing puzzles e.g. Run / Jump / Throw forward, backwards, sideways at different speeds, amplitudes and complexities. At the centre of each of these puzzle environments are the 'core' technical elements that I have chosen as the foundational elements e.g.

1. Running – How the foot hits the floor and leaves the floor / force from above / toes-up, heel to hamstring. I use mini-hurdles, running with a skipping rope and myriad other puzzles to focus on these core elements. For example, we can be running / skipping / galloping forwards, backwards, sideways, in a circle; with hands above head, hands across chest, one-arm only; from standing start, jogging start, running start; etc and all the time trying to get 'toes-up' and 'heel to hamstring'. This variability is used so she has to peer through the fog of all the complexity to seek out and get to the chosen 'core' technical elements. Some sessions there are fewer 'fogs' to peer through, other sessions a lot more. I choose which depth of

'fog' once I see her frame of mind and attention observed during the warm up. The intention is that once she can seek out and learn these 'core' competencies the body will self-organise and the knees will follow, the hips will follow, the trunk will follow automatically at varying degrees of success.

2. Throwing – It starts from the floor and ends at the hand (toenails to fingernails); Heel out, Hip forward – then the arm moves ('make a bow'). This is attempted when solving the puzzles of throwing forward, backward, sideways, diagonally, one-handed, two-handed, low to high, high to low, for distance, for height, for accuracy, etc.
3. Jumping journey is very much the same in principle.

While all this 'general' development goes on we do visit the competition elements so that she knows what happens in the competitions she will have to do for the school. I help her refine her turns and starts for Swimming as well as her Athletics stuff. She has an appropriate standing and 3-point start for her running; can run a bend with no major problems; she has an accurate approach run for LJ; she knows what a 'foul' is in her Shot and Discus and knows how to 'wait' in the 800m. These 'technical' and 'arena' skills form only a very small part of her training. Nearly every session has variety, progression and definite FUN. I always watch out for her losing interest or focus so the sessions are made up of lots and lots of small 1-3min units of focus. I can jump between movement vocabulary work, running work, jumping work, throwing work, personal competition work, mirror work with a partner (usually me!), etc. While all this variety is available I still keep the 'theme' working.

Running Observations

I am not showing you these photos because I need technical feedback. Mike - I noticed your response to Maree when she mentioned Jack's straight arm. We can all get a list of technical differences from armchair coaches but seldom do we get the information on (a) does it need to change? (b) how do we change it?

The core elements that are repeated and repeated as a theme are – 'toes up', 'force from above', 'heel to hamstring'.

She seems to have worked things out going over the mini-hurdles and she has some consistency in creating a decent model over the hurdles. While she naturally has to create the optimum actions and postures because the hurdles make her do it, I still mention the 'core' points while she is doing it. I want her to know what she is trying to do even though the hurdles actually make her do it. See her 'full contact' and 'toe-off' pictures below.



The aim must be to be able to transfer the acceptable qualities she may display over the mini-hurdles (or the running with a skipping rope) to a natural running situation – permanently. Herein lies the problem. Her natural running action is not as good as what she displays over the hurdles – see below



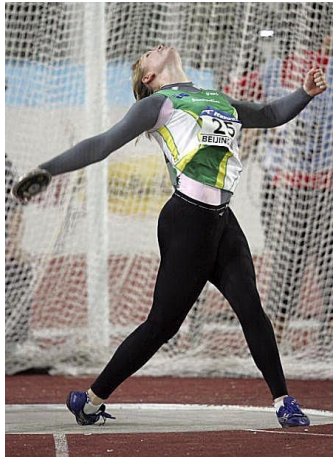
So – what to do? First of all, I need to raise some questions that arise from this overall situation. I guess this is one of the main reasons to send you all this rambling – these questions are never seen in any Coach Education content I have seen.

- Is this transfer problem really a problem or will time sort it out?
- Does she already have a unique running model that she will always default to when under the pressure of a competition?
- Am I just seeing the 'bandwidth' of difference that all people have?
- Is this a maturation issue? In the last 4 months she has grown 4cm and 3.5kg which changes loads and loads of things from proprioceptive ability through to force reduction changes.
- Is the current process correct and all it needs is patience?

Throwing Observation

I know, I know – you guys are sprint specialists! I want to just raise some more illustrations of what happens (and doesn't happen) as an athlete learns something.

The core stuff in the Throws is to start the forces from the ground, through the legs, into and through the hips all the way to the throwing hand. The slow-moving muscles work first and the faster ones last. The strong muscles first (legs, hips and trunk) and the weaker muscles last (arm and hand). A displacement should take place between the hand and the hips with the hips driving forward while the hand remains late in the movement. In the Shot, Discus and Javelin this results in the thrower 'making a bow' shape. See below Stevens and Ella examples



I know all the technical errors she is displaying relative to Dani BUT the 'core' elements described earlier are happening quite well. While I feel good about this it quickly comes crashing back to reality when another throwing action is looked at – Shot. See below:



While the 'Heel-out', 'Hips-to-front', 'make a bow' is happening in the Discus it fails in the Shot. In my mind, I have failed to create an appropriate vocabulary of throwing movements from which she can choose the correct movement pattern regardless of where the implement is being held (throw, sling or push).

Questions

1. Is this a 'bandwidth' issue – or is it a fundamental error?
2. The 'core' movements in throwing are OK in one pattern (Discus) but fail in another (Shot – so what should I do. My choice has been to go back to variability and add a complexity 'fog' through which she has to seek out the Heel and Hips pattern under ALL circumstances.
3. Have I got some related movements that could help e.g. Lunge and Reach, Lunge and Rotate, etc.

Let me re-iterate – you are probably scratching your heads at all this stuff but I just wanted to share some thoughts. Not that I think that you don't know any of this but more to illustrate the different world that we all live in and how much more we all have to learn. No person's environment will be the same as another's and I really wish that Australia's Coach Development strategy (there isn't one) would create a model that was truly helpful in all the things that I have described here. If I face them

then so does everyone else. If coaching was just about a list of occurrences (see ALTIS Kinograms) at certain parts of the event-specific action, then coaching would be easy. I don't need another list, I need solutions for when it doesn't work, when there is a learning hitch. I need to discern between an error and a 'difference'. I need to know when to progress (and how to) and when to regress (and how to) to keep the athlete moving forward.

All the previous rambling is just an illustration of reality. Enjoy – or – laugh and throw it in the bin.

Love seeing you guys work together.

All the Best

Kelvin

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