

Extending a developmental focus into competitive school sport.

The challenge of implementing a developmental outcome focus in the FUNdamental stage within competitive School sport.

During lockdown one of the major positives has been the opportunity to step back and reflect on what we do and why we do it. In our PE Department we have six clearly stated aims, published on a display board in the entrance hall to our sports centre, that outline our mission and ultimately our measure of success as a department.



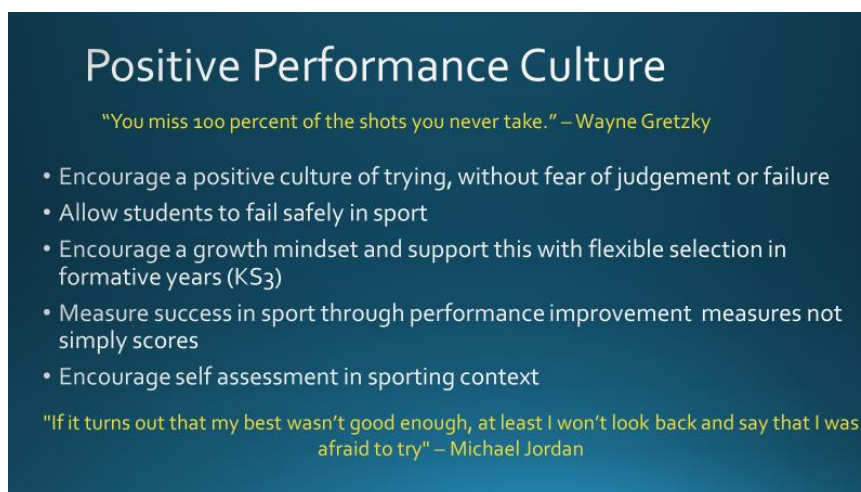
In all areas of this mission statement we have made progress and regularly reflect and look to improve. However, one aspect of our sport programme that has been a problem and a challenge for us is in our Lower School (year 7 and 8) competitive sport provision.

Like most schools our fixture programme is driven by finding schools available to play on a fixed Saturday date, who can match up with our numbers of teams and hopefully provide a full card of fixtures. In our situation we have a smaller cohort in our first two years (3 form entry), supplemented by a doubling of our cohort numbers at year 9 (6 form entry) and consequently the doubling of the number of teams we can put out at 14+. In addition, our early intake is largely from state primary schools where the exposure to team sports has been limited and knowledge and skill development is equally low.

This has meant an often challenging and demotivating experience of team sports for many of our younger students with traditional approaches to outcome-based measurement of sport. Too often we find ourselves on Saturday's coaching to get the students safely through a game; or protecting them from a drubbing or a mismatch (be that physical or sport specific skill or knowledge). This is in direct contrast to how we teach and coach them through the week when we focus very much on individual challenge and development, encourage creativity and autonomy and educating the students through the sport.

One of our stated aims is challenged by this when our behaviour as teachers and coaches is affected on match days in our Lower School. The focus on developing a positive performance culture (outlined

below in the graphic) is compromised by the way we organise and manage fixtures in this FUNdamental stage of the student's journey.



Positive Performance Culture

"You miss 100 percent of the shots you never take." – Wayne Gretzky

- Encourage a positive culture of trying, without fear of judgement or failure
- Allow students to fail safely in sport
- Encourage a growth mindset and support this with flexible selection in formative years (KS3)
- Measure success in sport through performance improvement measures not simply scores
- Encourage self assessment in sporting context

"If it turns out that my best wasn't good enough, at least I won't look back and say that I was afraid to try" – Michael Jordan

In reflecting on this issue and in trying to address this we have looked at seven key factors in assessing our approach and looking to resolve how we play sport in this stage of the students sporting journey.

- *Holistic approach/Individual child focus.*
- *Pupil Voice.*
- *Success measurement.*
- *Engagement.*
- *Behaviours: staff/coaches; pupils; parents.*
- *Progress and development.*
- *Place of competition.*

In consultation with the whole department and specifically our Head of Rugby, Jeremy Walmsley (who is currently completing a Master's degree with a focus on understanding what holistic development looks like in an independent secondary school and the strategies to achieve this), we have developed each of these points to help shape our approach, so that our behaviours will consistently meet our stated aims and therefore support the culture we have built and continue to build.

Evidence to support the changes to a developmental approach rather than an outcome focussed approach to FUNdamental stage of LTAD model.

If we sum up the six sections of our PE/sport mission statement it would be:

Teach physical literacy through a broad range of activities, and "*inspirational teaching*" that prepares pupils for wider life, encourages them to do their best and instils a "*positive performance culture*" of effort.

Holistic approach/Individual child focus

Our mission statement is distinctly pupil focused and holistic in outcome, which refers to the acquisition of multiple skills and behaviours that will help pupils across all of life's domains (Cassidy, 2010). Finding the potential' and 'holistic' can be hard to turn into quantifiable terms that then link to teaching behaviours and pupil outcomes, so we use Self Determination Theory (SDT), due to its

grounding in practice based research and positive correlation with holistic pupil outcomes. SDT is dedicated to creating intrinsically motivated pupils through the interrelated and definable areas of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Implementing these three outcomes in practice-based sports coaching research is referred to as an *autonomy supportive coaching style* (Ahlberg, Mallett, & Tinning 2008).

- Competence is the desire for pupils to achieve self-efficacy through skill improvement or mastery.
- Relatedness refers the connections between pupils and significant others and assumes that pupils have an innate need to connect and belong.
- Autonomy means to act with choice and refers to the urge for pupils to have a sense of control over their destiny (this does not mean to be independent of others).

Facilitating these three needs can result in self-motivated pupils that display improved persistence, performance, wellbeing, prosocial behaviours, moral engagement, healthy development, and vitality but Deci & Ryan (2008) acknowledges that pupils can also become disillusioned if their need satisfaction is not achieved.

Behaviours: staff/coaches; pupils; parents.

From a coaching pedagogy perspective, autonomy supportive coaching promotes coaching behaviours that link to holistic pupil outcomes. In practice, holistic coaching is coaches “*claiming such a status without knowing what it means or bragging that we are holistic coaches because it sounds good*” (Cassidy, 2010, p. 439), and observations of independent school coaches during Saturday block fixtures reveal controlling coaching behaviours that focuses on winning. This prevalent controlling approach is typified by an emphasis on memorising, repetition, increased motor proficiency, winning and strategic knowledge over the holistic, pupil centred and developmental, neglecting the social nature of coaching and learning (Light, Evans, Harvey and Hassanin, 2014).

These coaching behaviours affect pupil’s relatedness, correlating with antisocial behaviour toward teammates and opponents (Hodge and Lonsdale 2011), and undermines pupil competence and autonomy as implementing an environment that takes control away from the pupil will produce disempowered, robotic pupils in both action and thought (Kidman, 2010). To coach holistically requires a shift of focus from what the coaches does, to what the players learn, and linking these learning outcomes to coaching behaviours (Ahlberg, Mallett, & Tinning 2008).

Pupil Voice: - *autonomy and independence*

“*what matters is not how the institution defines it, but how the student perceives the meaning of their experience*” (Elias and Drea, 2013, p. 1).

Pupil voice is often ignored or not considered in education with pupils frequently being taught the same time in the same way (Brooks and Brooks, 1999). Autonomy does not mean handing over all control but providing players with rationales, acknowledging their feelings and perspectives, providing opportunities for initiative taking, providing feedback regarding their competence, avoiding controlling behaviours and creating a task-focused rather than ego-focused (winning) outcomes (Ahlberg, Mallett, & Tinning 2008).

The CARDS movement (and similar approaches i.e. Game Sense, Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU)) have seen these initiatives take place during trainings and games sessions, but fixtures are still motivated by tradition and the need to secure convenient 'block' fixtures that measure success through winning instead of promoting enjoyment and personal development.

Success measurement:

Measuring success through a match result means that only half the participants can be 'successful' and that those who win have not necessarily developed. Ego originated outcomes such as winning have a negative correlation with intrinsic motivation and therefore are not compatible with SDT or holistic development.

Coaching for winning changes how coaches' coach, reinforcing value systems of absolute terms over relative. And is, therefore, not focused on the development and welfare of each pupil. This narrow 'win' focus is controlling and manifests itself with closed coaching traits to achieve 'success', resulting in disempowered and disinterested pupils (Kidman & Lombardo, 2010).

Developmental success focuses on pupils need satisfaction, accounts for relatedness, autonomy and competence and helps explain the reasons why pupils participate in sport. These reasons include achieving their goals, enjoyment, and satisfaction (Kidman & Lombardo, 2010).

Engagement:

Our current junior school competitive sport provision has good relatedness, enjoyment and engagement between pupils and coaches, but pupil's competence is called into question regularly.

Depending on their coach they experience varied levels of on field autonomy, but the mismatched standard of comparative opposition and experience means that coaches can still coach in a controlling manor to get a 'result' (which for us is to get them through a game without getting pummelled).

Adopting a more flexible Saturday festival/small sided games system with developmental score lines, that better resembles our games and training sessions, would help to raise pupil competence and autonomy, and therefore intrinsically motivate and empower pupils.

Place of competition

Competition is healthy and pupils need to be allowed to compete, experiment, learn through failure and experience failure. Intrinsic motivation is not built in the absence of competition, but a constant imbalance of competition affects pupil self-efficacy and competence (Kidman & Lombardo, 2010).

Therefore, competition needs to be developmental and achievable for all participants, otherwise we are not only forfeiting our stated holistic aims, but we are simply compelling pupils to play to fulfil our own bureaucratic ends. We believe effective competition at the FUNdamentals age group ties into measures of success, and measures of scoring, if success is overtly developmental then success becomes individual and achievable for all participants.

Progress and development

Taking these factors into account, a coach would need link their coaching intentions to their coaching behaviours, measuring success through developmental outcomes that provide choice, encourage decision making, problem solving, and encourage ownership and responsibility.

In accepting that the evidence in support of a developmental focussed, rather than outcome focussed, approach to sport is educationally more valid and important then it poses the question of how do we modify or adapt the games that children play at this stage of their sporting journey?

This is something we fundamentally believe needs to happen in School sport. We currently practice this approach to a point, that point being a Saturday! We are then modifying our behaviours to accommodate tradition, normal expectations for that sport and a society that values high-stakes examination outcomes above all other educational goals.

If we are to match our behaviours to our stated aims, then we need to adapt our practice.

What might this look like?

- Festivals/triangular fixtures rather than block matches – each with a specific developmental focus agreed by the participating schools – even allowing the students a choice of how they will be measured or successful.
- Agreements between groups of schools on key developmental performance indicators and implementation of these as measurement tools in competitive context. Devising a seasonal plan of events to support the development of skills and love of the game with a group of like-minded schools in an area.
- Measurement tools – the methods of scoring adapted to focus on the development of skills and strategies to improve individual and collective performances. Goals/Tries/baskets/points etc can still be integrated but are not the only measurements that have value in these games/activities.
- Education of parents, teachers, coaches, and students as to the rationale behind this approach through meetings, consultations, and presentation materials.
- CPD for staff working in this stage to ensure their knowledge and competencies are supported not threatened by this approach. Overcoming their potential inertia, as their own experience will have been measured and focussed on outcomes.
- Get student feedback on their experience to shape, refine and develop this process further.
- Acceptance that the traditional block culture may be impacted and shaping your fixture card may be more challenging than simply playing every age group because it's convenient.

Ultimately our decisions about our provision come down to what is the purpose of our programme and do our behaviours match up to our stated aims?

We believe that the statement of Kidman & Lombardo (2010) “athletes gain and take ownership of knowledge, development and decision making that will help them to maximise their performance and their enjoyment. This athlete centred approach provides athletes with a chance to be part of the decision-making process” succinctly explains what our measurement of success must look like and we must adapt our behaviours to adopt an approach that would lead to the creation of intrinsically motivated, self-aware athletes who are more likely to enjoy sport and therefore stay in life long sport, make better decisions and ultimately produce superior athletic performance.

With this as our driving force we must adapt our approach to fixtures in the lower school to strive to achieve this. This is certainly what we will be looking to do and would like 'like-minded' schools to join us in this quest!

Please do get in touch if you are keen to discuss the potential of this approach further. Mjlangston@st-albans.herts.sch.uk

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