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“THE S&C FRAMEWORK”

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Introduction:

S&C Coaching is a relatively young but growing discipline. With its development over time, a greater need for a more systematic approach to Coach Education has become evident (Massey 2010; Tod et al. 2012). Massey (2010) proposed the ‘Program for Effective Teaching’ (PET). This model was seen as an effort to “incorporate those behaviours and skills identified as contributing to effective teaching” (p.79). Whilst this was a positive move to focus on the pedagogical skills required of a S&C coach rather than the usual focus on physiology, anatomy, periodisation/planning theories and strength training techniques, it failed to take into account such things as knowledge of the sport and performance analysis, and the different emphasis on kinetic verses kinematic needs of the athlete, or need to maintain inter-professional relationships.

Dorgo (2009) and Tod et al (2012) noted that currently, S&C coaches build their knowledge and skill base through some formal learning but primarily through experience in the work-place and communities of practice created between fellow, and usually more senior S&C coaches. This gap between formal education and the informal education that coaches tend to rely on is mirrored in sports coaching amongst other fields (Cushion & Lyle 2010). Phillips et al (2012) demonstrated the value in the use of experts’ experiential knowledge to add to the current academic field. A framework for S&C has been created based on the authors experience both as a S&C coach and as a Coach Educator (see figure 1.) as well as knowledge gained from communities of practice, with the hope of creating a better model for Coach Educators to use.

Methodology:

Autoethnography is an autobiographical approach to research that allows the researcher to explore personal experiences and cognitions in order to better understand a socially constructed phenomenon or role (Bright et al. 2012). The process requires the researcher to critically reflect upon their experiences and knowledge bases, to unpick the influence of the socially constructed world and to then tell a ‘story’ of what there is to be known (Fleming & Fullagar, 2011). Autoethnography thus allows a means for the particular intuitive ontological knowledge, often claimed by coaches, to be expressed; access that is denied by the current discursive structure (Jones 2009; p.379). For a further discussion of this methodology see Jones (2009) and Sparkes (2000).

Discussion: The Beginning:

The initial ‘S&C Framework’ was created based on the authors experiences of twenty years in the field and consultation with other colleagues, past and present.

The field of S&C has a number of key influences/agents, all forging the approaches taken in the field. Olympic weightlifting and its coaches hold an influence as do those from the Fitness Industry. Academia plays a role too in the development of the processes and knowledge bases deemed necessary. There are also pulls from USA as well as UK based NGB’s e.g. UKSCA and BAWLA in the UK and NSCA and ACSM in the USA.

Both S&C Coaches and Sport Coaches in general are heavily influenced in their development through the knowledge and experiences gained ‘in the field’ (Dorgo 2009; Tod et al. 2012; Cushion & Lyle 2010). It is these experiences and knowledge and skills

base, honed over 20 years of practice that built this framework.

The first key part was the four key ‘lenses’ that an S&C programme should be viewed from:

- Kinetic
- Kinematic
- Energetic
- Structure/Shape.

Many programmes are written based around exercises that only achieve one of these elements, for example the use of elastic resistance to mimic the movements used in a sport, which matches the kinematic requirements, but through the nature of the resistance, actually gives a negative match in terms of the kinetic requirements of most sports (i.e. acceleration of a limb rather than deceleration). Or other examples have been the use of circuits to build programmes that may have the appropriate exercise selection in terms of kinetic and kinematic variables but does not replicate the energy system requirements of the chosen activity/sport.

Further analysis of the athlete and sport being serviced became key underpinning factors, which must be assessed and viewed through the afore mentioned lenses. This then also led to consideration of the planning and reflection processes of delivery; be it long term periodised plans (linear or non-linear).

The reality of people!

Whilst the above covered much of the technical knowledge and skills of the S&C field, it failed to take into account the reality of people. S&C coaching is a socially constructed series of interactions that both the S&C coach and athlete must negotiate in order to meet their needs and objectives.

The ability to actually be able to ‘coach’ your athletes has long been considered key to those in the field. Human beings work well when motivated, but may use many forms of sabotage if they are not, even if that means making themselves suffer as a consequence. A coach who has the ability to get the best out of their athletes in a week on week basis will be the one who gains the best results (Dorgo 2009). This therefore means the ability to deliver what many call the ‘soft skills’ or inter-personal skills is a prerequisite skills base for the expert S&C Coach. Therefore, any coach education programme must focus on this. This then led to two further skills and knowledge bases, namely ‘Sport pedagogy’ and ‘inter-personal and inter-professional skills’.

The Framework

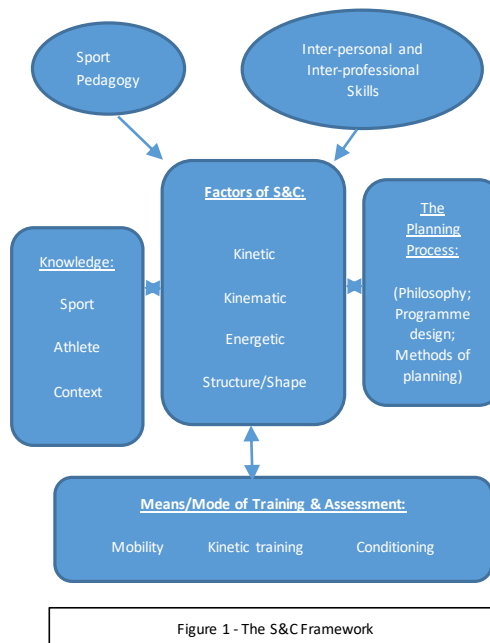


Figure 1 - The S&C Framework

Although this framework was being constantly tested and challenged through my professional practice as an S&C coach, and also as a Coach Educator, external interrogation was required. The model was used as the structural content for a Masters Level Module in S&C. While scrutiny of this kind was needed, due to the social relationships of all the ‘social agents’ meant that compliance to rather than challenge of the framework was the most likely outcome.

Four experienced S&C coaches, who were not involved in the original framework creation process, were then surveyed to ascertain the knowledge and skill bases they perceived as being required of a S&C coach in the line of their role. They were asked about pre-requisite knowledge required for the role; knowledge and skills required during the function of the S&C coach role, and finally, if they felt that anything was missing from formal S&C Coach Education that they had attended over the years.

Their responses were as expected by the researcher and replicated in content if not completely in emphasis. The pre-requisite knowledge and skill base included training technical knowledge, sport science knowledge (skills and assessment tools), an ability to interpret baseline data, and the function of programming. This falls in line with the findings of Dorgo (2009) and Tod et al (2012). When discussing the skills required for the role, there was a great emphasis on both inter-personal skills and inter-professional skills; again matching the framework and in line with the academic literature (Dorgo 2009; Massey 2010; Tod et al. 2012).

The final question about what maybe missing was one of emphasis rather than content, to build stronger ‘soft skills’ to get the best from the (S&C) coach-athlete relationship. This certainly has implications for coach education providers and mirrors closely Tod et al. (2012)’s outline of learning resources used by expert S&C coaches.

The one area not really mentioned was that of the key elements of what may be classified as ‘technical knowledge’, i.e. the central part of the framework. This is an area of further study scheduled later.

Conclusion

A robust Framework for S&C education and S&C coach development has been created based on the lived experiences of myself (professional and academic), and the inter-professional communities of practice that I have had access to over the years; the academic literature, and finally indirect content analysis through opinion survey. This is the first part of the journey in developing an ‘ideal’ S&C Framework, that can be used across the industry in the future to enhance the development of the field.

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