

## **Looking a Little Closer – an example of some workshop ‘specs’.**

These are some notes assembled from a recent workshop that dealt with the practicalities of skill acquisition. The workshop was intended to give the attendees some tools with which to be able to teach the fundamentals of running within a journey from a general movement vocabulary through to the specifics of an appropriate running technical model. Their previous experiences illustrated that they had been involved for many years in presenting activities that dealt with ‘How far’ and ‘How fast’ – here we were going to go deep into the real journey of ‘HOW.’ After some preliminary sharing and discussion, we agreed on what the keystones of the technical model should contain. They were happy to follow the keystones I always use but were encouraged to journey towards their own final decisions and descriptors as their careers unfolded. Each phrase/message/thinking point was immediately followed by guided and experimental teaching in small groups.

### **Keystones of a Running Model**

- (a) Head Up, Chest Up, Little ‘C’ posture.
- (b) Step over opposite Knee.
- (c) Heel to Hamstring
- (d) Toes Up.

The first stage was to examine aspects of the gait cycle in running to highlight the chosen keystones. Next, certain points of the cycle were chosen to act as additional descriptors of the where and when of the keystones e.g., at Toe-Off, at Maximum Vertical Projection, at Strike or Full Extension, at Touch-Down or Contact, and at Full Support. Some of these parts of the introduction were known by the coaches as these direct sports-specific elements featured heavily in their previous certification courses where direct technical information dominated proceedings.

**Now came the difference** – illustrating and linking the Foundation movements of Squat, Lunge, Pull, Push, Brace, Rotate and Hinge to the features of the start and gait cycle of sprinting. I have always found this to be a positive means of linking the importance of a movement journey to skill acquisition. The coaches always display a form of ‘light bulb’ moment when we present the appearance and relevance of the hybrids of the Foundation movements in the technical model. The key element here was that they experienced the movements and their hybrids in a practical setting. No better way of illustrating the role of a Foundation movement than by doing them. This section always creates plenty more ‘light-bulb’ moments as the coaches personally navigate the outcomes of trying to learn Squat, Squat and....., Single Leg balances, Lunges and..., Bracing, etc.

Once they were sat down again, I spent a little time illustrating scenarios and outcomes of when there was an appearance of a limited or dysfunctional interpretation of the movement. These repercussions serve as a motivation to arrive at the technical model via a journey of discovery and adaptation as opposed to an immediate and extensive exposure to the forces and pressures of the adult competition technical model.

### **Keystones of Learning**

As part of the introduction to the day I outlined what the attendees were about to be exposed to in terms of the new basic terminology I would be using and the journey the day would present to them. It must be clearly presented here that this group of attendees had already been exposed to a Level 1 type program that had exposed them to a theoretical and practical understanding of things like Learning Tools, Foundation Movements, Fundamental Movements, Progression, Maturation, etc. An example of these ‘learning tools’ are as follows:

Preparation  
Observation  
External Focus

Using Analogies  
Progression/Variability  
Manipulating the Task  
Feedback  
Reflection

Before, during and after each practical period I intervened, whenever appropriate, with an illustration of when all or some of the learning keystones might be appropriate to use. The coaches were also encouraged to play a part in the sharing of information by choosing an appropriate time to say things like, "Is this a good time to try manipulating the task with a change to external focus?" "Is a good analogy like 'xxxxxxxxxx' right to use here?" "Is this a good time to turn the puzzle down to an easier version?" I learned a long time ago not to allow such interventions if they interrupted the rhythm of learning taking place. I have also learned to be aware of the more narcissistic members of the audience who, too often, can like the sound of their own voice.

**The Order of Things** (Landmarks that help the journey – couple these with General-Related-Specific and Efficiency-Consistency-Resilience)

*"Get them physically literate - Get them strong - Get them fast - Get them fit."*

1. Get them physically literate enough to be able to seek out and solve the whole and part actions and postures associated with the required movement pattern (Running at speed).
2. Within these actions and postures build the physical resilience needed to create and survive the often 'insane' forces that solving the puzzle and progressing it can take you to.
3. Progress this appropriate and resilient (still vulnerable in certain areas) technical model along the speed continuum (further reducing vulnerability).
4. Progress this ever-evolving model towards the complex sports-specific world it will exist in.

### **Item 1.**

After exposure to some illustrations by demonstration, they operated in pairs for 30+min to create General, Related and Specific foundation movement activities (from the list of Squat, Lunge, Pull, Push, Brace, Rotate, Hinge). While it would have been good to let them explore all of the Foundation movements (this wider, more general experience is designed to appear in a much earlier weekend course that examines the Foundation movements and their progressions) the group was guided/attracted to Squat and Lunge (and plenty of hybrids like Step-Ups). These were seen as appropriate movement pattern vehicles to investigate the keystones of the running action.

Each pair was given a Medicine ball, a broomstick and length of rope (or an elastic cable or a Sand Sack or large Bean Bags, etc.) to weave into all the activities. After their exposure for 30+min each pair then shared, by demonstration and explanation, their choices and progressions with the whole group. Note that they experienced two distinct learning opportunities here (a) working with their partner to choose and progress the activity (b) repeating the learning when demonstrating and explaining to the audience.

During the demonstration/explanation time, I often, and in an appropriate manner, stepped in to remind them of things like, where to stand, what to look for, what to say in feedback as the movement patterns were being assembled with their partners. I also encouraged them to view their choices within either a progression or regression order. This is where the group were exposed to tools like Static to Dynamic, Slow to Fast, Simple to Complex, Small to Big, Unloaded to Loaded, etc.

Another rotation of their choices was then experimented with for another 20+min where they could look for opportunities to view any relationship with their chosen foundation movement pattern and the keystones of the running model. A quick example of this is seen in the Forward Lunge where the 'Heel to Hamstring' keystone from the running model was coached into the entry into the Lunge. Finally, they demonstrated to the group these findings which encouraged everyone to see not only the foundation movement being carried out but to use their enhanced observation skills to link them

to the final outcome of the running model. The audience was encouraged to walk around the demonstration so as to see the movement pattern from a variety of angles. In this way both the audience and demonstrators were continuously observing, calculating, questioning, and brainstorming what was happening. My job was to keep this intense sharing moving forward and on task by guided discovery.

### **Item 2.**

"Using the equipment where possible, now create activities that stimulate adaptation to making these movement patterns more resilient." Again, the tools of Static to Dynamic, Slow to Fast, Simple to Complex, Small to Big, Unloaded to Loaded, etc., were promoted. During this challenge, some pairs were creative enough to manipulate their Squat patterns to include Single Leg versions which then opened the door to Jumping, Hopping, Galloping and Leaping activities. After their exposure for 30+min, each pair then shared their choices and progressions with the whole group. This was another opportunity to see their choices in terms of a learning order (progression and regression) and to keep referring to where to stand, what to look for, what to say, etc. Once the door to Jumping, Hopping, Galloping and Leaping was opened it was a perfect time to take the progression into 'Get them Fast' (Item 3) by demonstrating how each of the Jump, Hop, Gallop and Leap actions could be linked strongly to the keystones of the running model.

### **Item 3.**

Now the more well-known activities of the Mach drills, Marching, Dribbles, High Knees, A-Skips (the well-used Related and Specific types) could be drawn out of the Jumping, Hopping, Galloping and Leaping discovery. The practical of this section was done slightly differently by having the pairs put together a triumvirate of movements that progressed from General (e.g., a Squat pattern) to a Related (e.g., Marching Punch Downs) to a Specific (e.g. progressive Dribbles). After 40+minutes of creativity and sharing each pair demonstrated their results. All the time during these explanations and demonstrations by the coaches the reference to the chosen keystone movements of running was always present. It was hoped that the coaches would see the value in looking at a range of movement patterns and being able to see elements of the keystones for the running action taking place. For some this was a brand-new challenge for their observation skills and for others a reminder of how good they already were at linking all these things together.

By the time we were halfway through Item 2 the confidence of the individual within each pairing was growing. They were always encouraged to experiment and to be creative as they found the words to defend their choices. It was important that learning rules were adhered to from the perspective of the coach's experience. It was never going to be helpful for the more confident, outgoing coaches to dominate proceedings. It was of no use heaping only direct criticism of any of their faulty decisions but to involve them and others in a questioning situation (just like the process of all feedback in the learning environment). "What might you see if you stood there to observe?" "Look again, are you happy with that posture?" "What happens if you slow it down?" "That worked well, now how will you make it harder?" "Do you let them try again or do you say something?" "What other movement could be considered?"

If you try any of this, you will quickly experience the joys of creating a learning environment where your demeanour, tone of voice, encouragement, praise, truthfulness, humility and empathy with the attendees make all the difference. You are not there to let them know what your title is or how great you have been or inform them of how much you know or to do anything but help them get better.

### **Item 4.**

After much physical input by the coaches the 'Get them fit' element was more a sit-down discussion with some illustrations of those well-known and experienced components like distances, directions, speeds, repetitions, sets, games and relays, recovery.

Added to this for those from a field or court sport were some illustrations of the sport's specific activities where the running development was challenged by running and.....catching, passing, and evading, etc. The key was, however, to keep the focus on the journey of movement efficiency acquisition as it is exposed to consistency and resilience along the general to related to specific long-term pathway.

## **Planning**

The final stage of the workshop was to offer ideas on the structure of a lessons or sessions of varying lengths with respect to time management, space management and equipment management. Here the Warm up was considered as being part of the journey followed by the use of 'movement breaks' and related games and relays.

## **Overview**

I have presented this detail as an example of the 'specs' one might consider when piecing together a curriculum for the creation and subsequent journey of a movement vocabulary as it progresses to a general well-being destination or a high performance one. I was stimulated to have a go at presenting this by a comment from my colleague Simon Harling to a previous post where he suggested, "First step is to decide the 'spec' of the project." Now this effort here does not offer the deep specifications required to create a curriculum of work applicable to all environments, but I am hoping that it drills deeply enough into the content and rhythm of courses and workshops enough to stimulate further thought.

The full-day workshop illustrated should be viewed as being part of a strategy initially for PE Teachers and Coaches. Introduced as a Level 1 and possibly level 2 Athletic Development pathway (similar to the original one created 10 years ago for Scottish Athletics) where the language and terminology of 'Why' and 'What' is dealt with extensively with short illustrative practical sessions demonstrating the delivery elements, could be a starting point. The described workshop would then be part of a powerful series of in-depth 'delivery' components that focus on the 'How.' They would form a collection of progressive workshops that would feature the Foundation movements that connect to the Fundamental movement patterns of Running, Jumping, Throwing, Kicking, Catching, Striking and Flotation.

One can easily see the need for a team of outstanding practitioners being trained nationwide to deliver this extensive curriculum in all Universities and Colleges and in all Coach and Coaching Development strategies. Clubs would be able to access them as ongoing in-house CPD probably under the guidance of an Athletic Development qualified Coaching Director. Schools would have the opportunity to put the 'physical' back into Physical Education. Its effectiveness in everything 'physical' and 'behavioural' would be enormous as Parents, Coaches, PE Teachers, Games Teachers, Gym Instructors, Personal Trainers, Physiotherapists, Nurses and Doctors would finally be able to recommend and deliver appropriate practical prescriptions for community well-being as well as for the few involved in recreational and high-performance sport.

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