

Effective Coaching

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this module is to develop a higher level of understanding and awareness of how you coach, and the teaching and coaching strategies, behaviours, styles, and methods you use. This module focuses on the ability to apply coaching skills to a positive environment to enhance athlete learning and performance. Coaches are encouraged to use peers and mentors to provide feedback so they can learn and reflect on their performance.

Upon completion of this module, you will be able to:

- **FOSTER THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ATHLETE-CENTRED COACHING ENVIRONMENT**
- **DEMONSTRATE AN UNDERSTANDING OF, IMPLEMENT AND REFLECT ON THE PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION, QUESTIONING AND FEEDBACK IN A SERIES OF TRAINING SESSIONS FOR YOUR ATHLETES**

WHAT DO COACHES DO?

The purpose of coaching is for athletes to learn about how things work best for them. First, this is about their individual physical and mental makeup, and where they are with technical and tactical development. Second, it is about being able to perform to their best when in competition or when challenged. The approach you take towards coaching should develop independent athletes who are aware of what is theirs (ownership) in terms of performance. This ownership encourages the athletes to be responsible for their performance and this responsibility will enable them to repeat that performance as and when required – consistently and sustainably.

This approach to coaching would lead a coach to:

- provide a planned and structured environment based on a shared goal (short term)/vision (long term)
- enable athlete/s to “do” the skill or “practice” the tactic
- then ask questions about what the athlete is noticing about his/her own performance.

The intended outcome is that in a competitive situation the athlete will preferably just compete, be in the moment and react based on his/her self-awareness of the situation or movement. Part of the self belief will be that he/she has an appropriate goal and knows that he/she can get back on track when something goes astray. The

learning that happens at training should be about developing that skill – the skill of self correcting or self coaching and being the best that you can be on that day.

If the athlete does find he/she needs to adapt then he/she will be able to draw on focused attention learned in training situations. The focused attention may be about:

- What am I noticing?
- What would I like to do better?
- Where is the discomfort?
- Where am I now? – rating scale
- Where would I like to be? How would I like it to be?

This focused attention is noticed 'in the moment'. A judgement that is tinged with the emotion of looking at the outcome (after the moment - either good or bad) can take away the focus. Focused attention will enable the athlete to avoid judging him/herself and his/her performance, as that awareness enables him/her to focus on something identified as important to him/her.

There will be times when coaches will decide it is necessary to give instructions. This can happen in particular when there is time pressure. The necessity to be directive is a signal for the coach that there is something that has not been learned in training and needs to be addressed at a future training session.

Coaches will need to develop their questioning skills to use this approach through gaining experience in asking open and probing questions. The GROW model provides a sequence that coaches can use to develop the types of questions to ask:

- G** What is your **goal**? (what are you wanting to achieve etc)
- R** **Reality** – what is happening now?
- O** **Options** – what options do you have?
- W** What **will** you do now? – What are you going to do? (then loop around to the goal again) – What did you notice now that you have had your turn?

When a coach uses this approach, an athlete has the opportunity to function as a complete, integrated, human being and this experience fosters the recognition that when performing, all aspects of the individual – physical, emotional, social and cognitive – are engaged (Lombardo, 1999). The purpose is to enable athletes to be self-aware and involve them in the process of sport by learning, doing, thinking, and feeling holistically.

COACHING MODES

It is recognised that effective coaching requires the coach to vary his/her approach according to the needs of the athlete at that particular moment. There is a range of coaching modes and coaches will shift within this range depending on factors like the immediate needs of the athlete/group, time constraints, health and safety issues and athlete receptiveness.

Athletes need to have self belief to just 'do it'. How does the coach help them to 'get there'? Three ways of working as a coach are: (There are lots of combinations within this.)

1. Instructional mode (doing as the coach says) – the coach talks, the athlete listens and tries to do what the coach tells them (the athlete’s body responds).
2. Analytical mode (creating analysis) – the coach encourages analysis (either with or without technology), discussion, thinking and/or planning, for example about what worked or what to try next time (the athlete’s mind responds).
3. NZ CoachApproach mode (creating awareness) – the coach helps the athlete to be in the moment and feel/notice what is happening (humanistic/holistic – mind and body respond together).

The table below presents a visual picture of this range of coaching modes.

	Instructional Mode	Analytical Mode	NZ CoachApproach Mode
Coach	Instructs	Asks questions for analysis	Asks questions for creating awareness
What is the athlete doing?	Listening	Thinking, then doing and/or thinking while doing	doing
What is the primary outcome for the athlete?	Compliance	Understanding	Self correction and self belief
What is the athlete using?	The physical body	The mind/brain	The mind and body together

An example of ‘coaching’ someone to walk up the stairs with a hot cup of tea is posed here for consideration. The coach could:

1. Tell the person how to walk up the stairs – describe for the person what actions he/she needs to take.
2. Discuss with the person what he/she does when walking up the stairs, asks how could they do it differently and then ask the person try it.
3. Ask the person to walk up the stairs.

ATHLETE-CENTRED PHILOSOPHY

The following two tables provide an overview of the characteristics of athlete centred coaches and coach-centred coaches. As a coach it is important that you are aware that your approach (the “how”) to coaching significantly affects athlete learning. An athlete-centred coaching approach helps to develop talented people, who take responsibility for their own learning, regardless of their level or stage of development.

Table 1: Practices that characterise coach-centred and athlete-centred coaches

Coach-Centred Coach	Athlete-Centred Coach
■ provides an environment of dependency	■ provides a safe and confirming environment

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ expects the team to conform to his/her ways of doing ■ speaks to rather than listens to the athletes ■ tells athletes only what he/she thinks they need to know to suit his/her needs ■ expects athletes to conform to values established by him/her ■ has a 'winning at all costs' attitude, which promotes unfair or illegal practices ■ does not actively discourage acts of cheating or unprofessional ways of seeking an advantage ■ treats the team as one, rather than as individuals ■ does not accept athletes' opinions ■ insists that athletes abide by his/her rules ■ is organised ■ is inflexible and not open minded ■ makes the decisions for the athletes or team ■ asks closed and redundant, or few questions ■ criticises mistakes ■ uses threats or punishment to coerce athletes into following coaches' expectations of behaviour ■ provides feedback of what to fix ■ is a disciplinarian ■ insists on his/her way or the highway ■ coaches to win, rather than to develop or educate athletes ■ promotes fear of failure ■ does not ask for athlete' evaluations of his/her coaching ■ does not monitor or assess psychological and emotional experience as much as physical and technical ones ■ fails to exercise a caring, athlete-centred approach ■ stresses extrinsic rewards over intrinsic values ■ promotes the role of sport as the most important aspect of athletes' lives ■ promotes dictatorship and a 'one size fits all' philosophy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ encourages wairua (a spirituality Maori term encompassing all aspects of ensuring oneness within a team) ■ is empathetic and caring towards his/her athletes ■ listens to athletes and takes them seriously ■ is honest and open ■ reinforces values and morals through facilitation of teams' goals and the coach's own actions (role model) ■ values all athletes contributions equally, but accepts each athlete as a unique individual ■ gives athletes responsibility to encourage accountability for their actions ■ is purposeful and provides meaning to learning ■ accepts athletes' opinions ■ makes each athlete feel capable of succeeding ■ through athlete responsibility, establishes reasonable limits for behaviour ■ organises and plans training sessions ■ is flexible and open-ended ■ provides athletes with appropriate choices and opportunities for decision making ■ assists athletes in establishing team and individual goals and values; goals should be multiple (outcome goals should NOT be the only ones) ■ asks questions of his/her players; encourages problem solving and critical thinking ■ provides information to players about their performance and other matters related to the team ■ answers questions, encourages players to ask questions and seek knowledge ■ assists players in analysing their individual and the team actions and feelings ■ learns about his/her athletes, takes a personal interest in each one and "gets to know them" ■ promotes a healthy attitude toward sport and competition; stresses the intrinsic value over extrinsic rewards, the importance for respect
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	for opponents, and other ethical values ■ recognises the role of sport in a larger society, which should be democratic and egalitarian.
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Table 2: A comparison of characteristics of athletes who are coached by athlete-centred and coach-centred coaches

Coach-centred Athletes often:	Athlete-centred Athletes often:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ have their goals set for them ■ feel as if they don't have a say in any direction ■ lack enthusiasm ■ are treated as a means to an end ■ make no decisions ■ talk back when they've had enough ■ compete 'robotically' ■ display anger and stubbornness ■ listen to the coach's way ■ have a disrespectful attitude ■ are defensive when challenged ■ get easily frustrated ■ are not listened to ■ feel that there is no respect or trust from the coach ■ are encouraged to be individuals and therefore show uncooperativeness ■ lack confidence and competence to make informed decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ set their own goals and have an intrinsic desire to reach them ■ enjoy their sport ■ show enthusiasm ■ develop self-efficacy and confidence in their ability and are enabled to control results produced by their skill and effort ■ understand that they contribute and take responsibility for their learning and direction ■ are accountable for their actions ■ are resourceful and innovative ■ feel that they are important because of coaches' actions in understanding the athletes (e.g. listening, empathy) ■ understand that there is a mutual trust and respect ■ cooperate to enhance mutual goals and directions ■ are more coachable because they have freedom and choice ■ are highly committed to achieving levels of excellence ■ are willing to engage totally in what they believe

Adapted from Kidman, L. and Davis, W. (2006), Empowerment in Coaching, In J. Broadhead and W. Davis (Eds) , *Ecological Task Analysis Perspectives on Movement*, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Communication

Communication is a basis to effective coaching. Both the coach and the athlete must be prepared to transmit and receive messages. Too often coaches are excellent at transmitting, but not at receiving messages. To be athlete-centred, coaches must understand the messages that athletes send, but also the messages coaches send. It is not only what you transmit, but how it is transmitted. Every verbal and non-verbal piece of communication reflects the sender's and receiver's attitude towards each other.

To be truly athlete-centred, coaches need to use various communication strategies. The one chosen and how it's applied depends on the athlete(s), the situation and the

need in that situation. It is about knowing the athlete individually and responding to the communication needs of each athlete.

Communication Process

The following is the communication process for a coach and athlete(s):

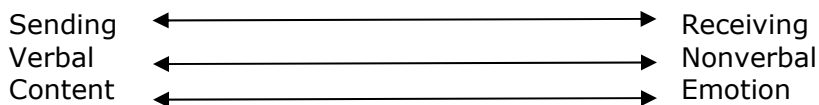
- The coach has thoughts (ideas, feelings, intentions) that he/she wishes to convey.
- The coach translates these thoughts into a message appropriate for transmission
- The message is transmitted through some channel (verbal or nonverbal)
- Each athlete receives the message (if he or she is paying attention).
- Each athlete interprets the message's meaning. The interpretation depends upon the athlete's comprehension of the message's content, the intentions of the message and the athlete's understanding of the message.
- Each athlete responds internally to his or her interpretation of the message.

(Martens, 1990)

The same communication process works for athlete to coach, parent to coach, coach to parent, etc.

THREE DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNICATION

There are three dimensions of communication:



Communication is not only about sending messages, but also receiving them. Coaches should not only be able to send clear, positive and concise messages, they also need to be astute listeners to understand their athletes. By truly listening coaches show empathy in their athletes, a key to the athlete-centred coaching approach. The key is to send less information and observe and receive more.

While most people tend to focus on communicating the verbal message, research indicates that more than 70 percent of all communication is non-verbal, such as facial expressions, body language and tone of voice. We tend to have more emotional control over what we say than how we express it non-verbally. Athletes from all communities are very perceptive in reading coaches non-verbal messages.

Coaches need to practice to be sincere and positive in their communication as athletes know when they are not being honest through reading body language and other nonverbal signals.

The third dimension of the communication is content, the actual information contained in the message, and the emotion of how the sender feels about the message. Coaches can at times have difficulty containing their emotions under pressure or during competition. For example, when something happens in competition, we often see body language and gestures of coaches, parents or supporters indicating the emotion of that moment.

HOW TO DEVELOP COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR SUCCESSFUL COACHING

Successful communication depends on developing good people skills and showing a human face. If coaches want athletes to listen and to trust them, they cannot deliver messages full of sarcasm or threats.

Another major influence is social learning. Social learning means that coaches must practice what they preach, so if they are telling athletes not to yell at referees, coaches should not yell at referees. Being fair is crucial to all athletes – the 'golden rule'. Athletes expect consistent and fair standards and often read messages of unfairness (of each other, coaches and, where relevant, parents, coaching support staff and administrators) before coaches do.

It is also important to maintain a positive and open communication channel with the athletes. Ongoing and open communication will often deal with minor concerns before they become major problems.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Following are some important tips that will assist coaches in communicating more effectively during training sessions and with athletes in their particular coaching community:

■ Demeanour

Dress appropriately, like you are keen to take part with the athletes and have an open, positive enthusiastic approach. Look like you love being there. If you exude enthusiasm, so will the athletes.

■ Acknowledgement

Greet participants warmly; always by name. Be careful with the use of nick names. Often nicknames were 'earned' or labeled by other people and not valued by the athlete.

■ Positioning

In the coaching situation, ensure you can see everyone and they can see you. Ensure you give all athletes equal attention by roaming around to communicate to every one and acknowledge their worth.

■ Body Language

Adopt a neutral body posture, facing your athletes. Try to make sure that your emotions are in control, also watch athletes' faces and gestures for clues on how they are reacting. Adjust your communication according to the reactions of the athletes.

■ Eye Contact

Looking at athletes in the eye shows sincerity and confidence. However, be aware that eye contact may not be appropriate in some cultures.

■ Voice

Speak clearly and use words at a level that the athletes can understand.

Vary the tone of your voice to keep the interest up and adjust the volume according to the situation. A voice gesture that exudes frustration will be read directly by some

athletes. They are very intuitive and know what you mean, even though you may not use the words.

■ **Listening**

Listening tends to be one of our weakest communication skills. Being a good listener is an essential coaching skill. Listen carefully to athletes' questions and comments. Try to listen from the athletes' perspective.

■ **Feedback**

Have a positive and constructive attitude when both giving and receiving feedback from athletes. Offer sincere compliments and encouragement as athletes of all communities are very perceptive and know what you mean.

■ **Cultural and Gender Communication**

New Zealand is a multi-cultural society with a mix of ethnic groups. As a coach, it is important to be sensitive and alert to cultural differences. If coaches are unsure of the most appropriate communication approaches with various cultures, they should ask someone for advice. Above all, friendly, sincere (trusting and honest) communication will always be appreciated, and remember, the smile is a positive international sign of welcome and support.

As for gender, males and females do see things differently, and read and give messages differently. Remember, the whole approach is athlete-centred, so in reality everyone is going to receive and send messages differently. It is about finding out how to interpret and give those messages so athletes understand and feel confident there is mutual understanding.

■ **Empathy**

The key to quality coaching is to show empathy. Empathy is trying to understand others' perspectives from their eyes. It is about understanding yourself, so you can try to use that understanding of self to understand others' points of view. There are several types of empathy:

- Cognitive: the person observes the athlete's behaviour carefully (body language and actions) and interprets the meaning of what is observed. Coaches need to know or be aware of what the physical and emotional effects of certain events are.
- Affective: sensitivity to others' feelings and listening to what the athlete is saying about those feelings in words, gestures, and actions.
- Communicative: communicating through words and gestures to the athlete that he/she is being understood.

When athletes feel understood they are more likely to follow any recommendations you make. When given the opportunity to express their emotional needs and concerns, athletes feel they can trust you to function in their best interests.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

■ **Self reflection**

The best way to learn how you are verbally communicating is to self-reflect. Watch the body language of athletes, listen to what they say, know yourself and why you react the way you do to certain situations. Use video to see the communication process, identify areas to develop, and then practice. Practice with your own children/peers, others and of course your own athletes. To practice verbal communication, coaches should:

- Understand why the skill is important and why it is of value to them
- Understand what the skill is and the component behaviours they have to engage in to perform the skill
- Find situations in which they can practice the skill
- Get someone to watch them and discuss how well you are performing
- Make a video of the communication process and discuss with someone what is seen
- Keep practising
- Load the practice towards success
- Practise until it feels real

■ Explaining

Explaining is an essential part of coaching. It is important that during explanations, you are concise and clear and at the level of the athletes. Many coaches tell terrific stories, but those stories should be kept for times outside of training. Explanations should be knowledgeable, but brief.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION:

Non-verbal communication is the ability to give and receive messages without using expressive verbal language. Some components of non-verbal communication include body language, gestures and voice tone. Of all the communication components, non-verbal messages are the ones that other people interpret most accurately. In other words body actions, gestures and voice tone speaks louder than words.

There are cultural and gender differences in how we read and express messages through our body. It is important for coaches to understand the individuality of the message being given or received. Individuality includes cultural and gender understandings.

Demonstrations of skills (which is non verbal) should accompany verbal messages. A quality demonstration is worth a thousand words, but it is essential that the demonstration is appropriate so a visual picture can be gained by the athletes.

■ Listening

Many coaches would admit that listening is probably their greatest communication downfall. Coaches are often great at jumping straight into a situation and giving advice, not always the best for the athlete at that particular time. Unfortunately, when we go into advice mode, we often do so without being entirely clear about the situation. Listening is an incredibly underrated skill. Take your time and really listen to what is being said or conveyed through body language to you.

While passive listening (remaining silent) can be appropriate at times, it does not guarantee understanding, nor does it build a relationship or any empathy with the

sender. Active listening on the other hand, involves interacting with the sender, seeking clarification to ensure one fully understands what is being said. Instead of just guessing the meaning of a message, one actively works to figure it out. Being an active listener will help you to 'read between the lines' to decipher the real (sometimes hidden) meaning of the message. Active listening requires not only the physical hearing, but also receiving and sending non-verbal cues. The following tips might help coaches to work on their active listening:

- Adopt a neutral and relaxed posture facing the athlete and lean slightly forward.
- If appropriate, look at the athlete when communicating with him/her. Maintaining eye contact shows that you are interested in what he/she says.
- If a person is not looking you in the eye, try to read the meaning of that. It could be embarrassment, frustration, anger or just a sign of his/her culture.
- Show that you are following what the athlete is saying by nodding your head and making verbal comments such as "Yes, ... I see... Un-huh" every now and then.
- Paraphrase or summarise what was said in your own words to ensure that both of you understand what was said and meant.
- Ask questions if you don't understand or if you require further clarification.
- Search for the real meaning behind what is being said rather than focusing on the details.

There are many other aspects of communication. The three main communication components here (verbal, non-verbal and listening) are only the beginning to enhancing coaches' communication. The key to all three components is to exude a positive, caring approach where athletes feel like they are respected and understood and where coaches gain trust.

COMMUNICATION SUMMARY

- Communication is a two-process that involves sending and receiving (interpreting) messages
- There are three dimensions of communication, sending/receiving; verbal/non-verbal and content/emotion.
- To be athlete-centred coaches need to understand their Middle/Late Childhood athletes and how they send and receive messages
- Empathy is a key to trying to understand others' perspectives and the skill of listening is the most important skill in athlete-centred coaching.
- Verbal communication consists of words used to communication
- Non-verbal communication consists of body movements, gestures, voice tones and its meaning is more powerful than verbal.
- Active listening is the key to successful communication interpreting others' meanings.
- Practising communication in every day tasks and activities is a great way to work on communication.
- A good way to learn about your communication skills is to self-reflect.

QUESTIONING

A primary tool in an athlete-centred coaching approach is an ability to ask athletes meaningful questions. Questioning raises awareness of the athlete and encourages internal feedback. When the coach asks questions, athletes must find an answer, which in turn increases their awareness, knowledge and understanding of the purpose of particular skills or tactics in the context of competition. Questioning creates independent athletes, by providing them with a chance to take responsibility for their own interpretations and understandings and make decisions. Questioning creates athlete curiosity as long as the coach is non-judgemental. It is also an extremely powerful means to inspire in athletes, an intrinsic motivation to learn.

An athlete-centred coaching approach is ineffectual without a high level of questioning and clarifying to generate answers from the athletes. Athletes learn well and generate long-term learning, if they are given the opportunity to work out for themselves what to do and how to do it. Effective questions encourage attention to the task, thought and observation. The first question to the athlete to encourage these concepts will often be, 'What did you notice?' As part of athlete-centred coaching, a coach needs to learn to apply an effective questioning technique at training sessions, to enhance athlete learning.

Enhanced awareness, ownership and responsibility come from asking meaningful questions. When the coach poses questions and gives athletes an opportunity to solve a problem, the athletes will generally try hard to solve it. The solution they generate is theirs; thus they will take ownership of it and remember, understand and be able to apply the solution more effectively than if they were told what to do, when to do it and how to do it. Solving problems through coach questioning enables athletes to explore, discover, create and generally experiment with a variety of movement and tactical processes of a specific sport.

The key to effective questioning is the coaches' ability to listen to their athletes' responses, then redirect, prompt or probe for better or more complete answers. The better a coach understands his/her gym sport, the easier it is to delve in more deeply. However, in situations where the coach may have limited knowledge or understanding, good questioning can encourage both athlete and coach understanding because it enables the athlete to work it out for him/herself.

The following is a structured framework of important considerations in the questioning process, which serves as a guideline to help coaches ask meaningful questions.

Table 1: QUILT Framework for Questioning

Stage 1: Prepare the Question

- Identify the purpose
- Determine the content focus (according to athlete needs)
- Understand the cognitive, physical, social and emotional level of athletes
- Formulate the question for the athletes' level
- Use G.R.O.W. as a framework (explained below)

Stage 2: Present the Question

- Indicate how athletes can respond (e.g. not all shout out at once)
- Ask the question, then 'step back' and let athlete formulate answer

- Select athlete or athletes to answer

Stage 3: Encourage Athlete Responses

- Use wait time to determine whether to encourage responses
- Assist athlete(s) to respond (if necessary)
- Use athletes' cues to encourage responses

Stage 4: Process Athlete Responses

- Listen very carefully
- Pause following the athlete's response
- Provide appropriate feedback (according to athletes' responses)
- Expand responses
- Encourage athlete reactions and questions

Stage 5: Reflect on the Questioning Process

- Analyse questions asked
- Reflect on who and how athletes responded
- Evaluate athlete response patterns
- Examine coach and athlete reactions

(Adapted for coaches from Walsh, J.A., & Saties, B.D. (2005), *Quality questioning: Research-based practice to engage every learner*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage).

Stage 1: Prepare the Question

Formulating meaningful questions is a key element in establishing a great questioning environment. Planning the questions that might be used in the training session is a very important step, especially if questioning is a very new part of the coaching repertoire. Asking the 'right' question is crucial to athlete learning. The 'right' question depends on the needs of the athlete. The questions can be open or closed. Asking an open question like, "What did you notice?", then stepping back to listen is a powerful tool in creating athlete awareness and responsibility for learning. Indeed, once questions become a comfortable part of a coach's repertoire, he/she doesn't need to worry about preparing the actual question, because the process of asking questions will become easier with purposeful practice.

To plan meaningful, clear and coherent questions, an athlete-centred coach might use some of the following strategies:

- consider the nature of the content to be mastered and the athletes' readiness to contribute
- practise the questions for the next training session by writing them down
- ensure there is a variety of open and closed questions
- ensure there is a solution to work towards, where the questions planned lead systematically to a solution (please note that the solution should be owned by the athletes)
- formulate the questions appropriate to the athletes' level of learning.

The goals of effective questioning include actively involving athletes in the learning process, and enhancing their task mastery and conceptual understanding. Another goal is to promote both simple (closed) and complex (open) thinking. These two forms of thinking require different types of questions.

CLOSED QUESTIONS

When athletes need to remember specific ideas or concepts, simple or closed questions are appropriate. These questions serve as reminder cues that might be important to a learning sequence. Closed questions are often what? or where? questions asked during drills. Closed questions are factual, generally with only one possible answer.

Examples of closed questions used in coaching could be:

- How many skill elements are required for junior athletes in Aerobics?
- What length is the ribbon in Rhythmic Gymnastics?

OPEN QUESTIONS

Open questions require higher-level thinking processes. These questions challenge athletes to apply, analyse, synthesise (yes even for Middle/Late Childhood athletes), evaluate and create knowledge and understanding. Research indicates that coaches tend to use more closed than open questions.

- What do you notice when doing a handstand?
- How did that throw feel?
- In how many different ways can you balance on the balance beam?

GROW questioning framework (Whitmore, 2002) is a simple way for coaches to focus on the types of questions to ask.

- The first question would be related to the goal of the athlete, e.g. 'What are you trying to do?'
- R stands for the reality, e.g. 'Ok, what is happening now?'
- O stands for the options athletes (or coaches when mentoring), might have, e.g. 'What could you do?' and
- W stands for the question, considering the options, 'What will you do?'

TECHNIQUE QUESTIONING

To help athletes to become aware of their technique, formulating questions helps provide them with purposeful feedback. Through this mechanism, coaches prompt athletes by asking awareness questions.

What? where? how far? or how much? questions are useful for athlete's technical awareness (e.g. 'What did you notice when you released the ball?', 'What do you notice when you balance?'). These types of questions help athletes become aware of their own body movements in executing a skill. If athletes are still unaware of what their bodies are doing, the coach can use 'shaping' questions. Listen to athletes' answers use their wording and explore further based on their understanding.

Next the athletes execute the technique using their knowledge and movement awareness. At this stage, the coach should allow the athletes to experience the technique several times before asking another question. The purpose of such sequences is to enable the athletes to become self-aware in using the technique and to take responsibility for making decisions. In this way, when they are performing the technique in a competition, the athletes can understand how to perform it and when it feels right.

Athletes could rate awareness answers e.g. from 1 to 10 (or some other scale). This is a great way for athletes to gain self-awareness of their movements.

Stage 2: Present the Question

Coaches need to choose the moment of athlete readiness to ask questions. The ability to pick this moment is considered a key aspect of effective coaching. There is no formula for the right time to ask questions. The answer is 'It depends'. It depends on fatigue, it depends on 'coachable moments', it depends on individual differences such as intrinsic motivation and it depends on whether the athlete is capable of solving the problem by himself or herself. A coach should read or analyse each situation to determine the athlete's need to solve a problem at that time and in that situation. Often coaches jump in because they feel like they are not doing anything and need to advise. More often 'well coached' athletes can determine their own mistakes and fix them because of their own decision-making ability and self-awareness. When an athlete makes a mistake and obviously knows it, there is nothing so stressful as being reminded of it by some significant other. In the traditional coaching approach, coaches were expected to be doing all the talking.

The first strategy to present a question is to ensure that all athletes are quiet and listening and ready for the questioning sequence. To this end, a coach could get the athletes to make rules to encourage attention for example by asking the question, 'What do we need to do to make sure everyone hears?' The athletes will take responsibility of ensuring the rule is followed if they have ownership of the rule.

Stage 3: Encourage Athlete Responses

VERBAL RESPONSES

One of the reasons for gaining and maintaining athletes' attention is to provide wait time for athletes to consider their responses to the question. Increasing wait time enables athletes to formulate better responses and encourages them to give longer answers because they have had the opportunity to think. When given this 'thinking time', athletes tend to volunteer more appropriate answers and are less likely to fail to respond. They are more able to respond to open questions because they tend to speculate more. With a longer wait time, athletes tend to ask more questions in return. If they do not understand or they need to find out more information, athletes also feel they have been given an opportunity to clarify the question. With a longer wait time, athletes exhibit more confidence in their comments and those athletes whom coaches rate as relatively slow learners offer more of their own questions and more responses.

If athletes are having difficulty with the answer after the wait time, a coach can break down, redirect or rephrase an open question so they can think carefully about what has been asked. However, the coach should not give the answer, as it takes ownership of the problem-solving process away from the athletes.

Coaches will notice that some athletes cannot wait to answer the questions while others prefer to remain anonymous in the background. The athletes who volunteer readily are probably the most confident in their skills and their cognitive abilities.

Research in teaching suggests that the teacher tends to neglect the students in the back. This same tendency will be found in sport settings as well. A coach must make a conscious effort to include all members of the team or squad in learning.

A coach should allow some time for all athletes to contribute to discussions within a session.

Through skillfully directing and distributing discussion, the coach will provide a fair environment where athletes can contribute equally. Directing questions to athletes in a non-threatening way can encourage those who still may prefer not to participate. If a reluctant participant responds to a question, the coach should accept this answer and use the content of the response in further discussion.

To encourage athletes' responses, an athlete-centred coach will:

- listen to athletes' responses (verbal and nonverbal) without interrupting and give them time to think in silence while they are formulating their thoughts
- be careful not to call an athlete's name immediately after posing the question. Once the coach identifies an athlete to answer the question, the other athletes tend to relax and discontinue their thinking process
- show he or she is listening by limiting comments. Also avoid using 'uh-huh' and 'okay' too much as athletes will focus on the voice gestures rather than the content
- avoid a 'Yes but ...' reaction to an athlete's response, which signals that coach rejects the athlete's idea
- allow the athletes to provide the answers.

MOVEMENT RESPONSES

Although questioning has always been considered a mental strategy, athletes can learn much through problem solving and questioning involving movement responses. A movement response requires a physical demonstration to answer a question. These questions often come as a result of the athlete response to the question, 'What did you notice?'

A typical example of a response that requires movement is after the athlete has said, "My arms are floppy when I hit the ball", and a coach could say "Hit a few more and concentrating on the floppiness of your arms". Even though the coach does not express either of these statements as a question, the athletes must provide answers by showing the coach how they understand.

Posing movement questions is an effective tool to enhance physical technique and tactical learning. In providing movement responses, athletes can identify faults or determine correct skill technique for them. If athletes have input into correcting skill performance, along with appropriate self-awareness, they tend to retain the information they have discovered.

Stage 4: Process Athlete Responses

With any questions, there are no 'wrong' answers as the athletes generally interpret the questions at their own level of understanding. Coaches need to listen closely to the answers, interpret the significance and respond accordingly. Often athletes come

up with answers that coaches may find useful to elaborate on or adapt to their own thinking. In other words, by listening, coaches can learn much from their athletes.

PROMPTING

Prompting is where a coach uses cues to 'remind' athletes of something that they have learned and help them to answer a question. Examples are 'How have you been sticking the landing?' or 'What did you notice about your swing.' It is important that in giving cues, a coach does not give athletes the whole answer. The purpose of prompting is to encourage athletes to provide a response. Prompting can help them gain the confidence to answer the question. If there is a response, to further prompt, ensure to use the athlete's words. The wait time after an athlete's response is also important. Coaches need to process the response showing that they have listened to the athlete and interpreted the answer from the athlete's point of understanding.

ASSISTING AN ATHLETE'S RESPONSE

As athletes offer solutions, either verbally or through a movement response, a coach should encourage any innovative ideas—no matter how silly or inadequate the coach may perceive those ideas to be. If athletes find no sincere support for answers (either verbal or nonverbal), they will be less likely to respond next time they are questioned. If the response to an athlete's answer was 'What a stupid answer', how would the athlete feel? Would the athlete feel respected by the coach? Thus part of the process of questioning is to encourage athletes to continue to try for a solution, even though they may appear to be a long way from it.

It is important to establish an environment in which athletes feel confident to volunteer responses. The difficulty, when a coach is deciding how to handle an inadequate answer, is to determine whether the athlete is off task or deliberately trying to be silly. If the response is off task, the coach should refocus or ignore it, then reinforce the athlete's next attempt to respond. Sincere positive reinforcement will be more likely to motivate athletes to respond enthusiastically to later questions. It should also be noted that different individuals respond to different types of reinforcement.

For effective reinforcement, an athlete-centred coach will:

- praise based on the athlete's answer—for example, 'Great, can you tell us more?'
- praise with the focus on reinforcing the athlete's response
- praise honestly and sincerely
- give nonverbal reinforcement such as eye contact, thumbs up, smiling, nodding, and clapping hands—all extremely useful as forms of praise.

PROBING AND GUIDED DISCOVERY OF A NEW SKILL

Probing is a questioning strategy in which a coach asks follow-up questions so that athletes can extend, amplify or refine their answers. Probing questions work extremely well when trying to reinforce concepts for the athlete to discover and understand.

Many coaches believe that they must tell and show their athletes exactly how to perform a correct technique. In contrast, through Teaching Games for Understanding athletes learn technique through guided discovery (and through self-awareness). The coach gives guidance with a series of meaningful questions (including probes) about the athletes' technique (while recognising that athletes are capable of participating in

sport without being taught the perfect technique). Athletes then learn by discovering how to do the technique themselves. Learning is a result of self-discovery rather than of watching a demonstration.

Techniques do not have to be taught explicitly as athletes at all levels can often figure out the approach needed. A good example is found by observing children in action in the playground, where they are highly capable of discovering how to perform the 'game' without being told by someone else.

To use guided discovery as a coaching tool, it is useful to plan the line of inquiry. The coach should first understand the possible outcome that might be achieved, then arrange the questions for the athletes to discover an answer(s).

Probing and reinforcing promotes learning through extending current thought processes and encouraging athletes' responses. The coach never provides an explanation or demonstration, instead, the athletes figure out for themselves the best way to improve their technique. With any method where athletes have to figure out how a technique or tactic is performed, they will not only retain and understand that concept more fully, but also get more practice opportunities and take control of their own learning experience. Athletes tend to remember more because they are doing it, rather than watching a coach explain and demonstrate.

Stage 5: Reflect on Questioning Process

The last stage in ensuring that coaches practise becoming better questioners is to reflect on how their questioning is going. Coaches should be able to analyse the questions asked and reflect on who and how athletes responded. Evaluation of athletes' response patterns and examination of coach and athlete reactions will also help coaches' to reflect on their questioning strategies.

The following are questions that may be posed to reflect on the questioning process:

- How simple, meaningful, clear and coherent were the questions that you asked your athletes?
- When asking questions, did you have all the athletes' attention?
- Was your pause or wait time long enough (3-5 seconds)? Compare the answers by the athletes when you waited and did not wait.
- Did you listen and accept athlete responses?
- What reinforcement strategies did you use for athletes' responses? Were they relevant for your athletes' stage of development?
- After listening to the answers, were you able to probe to extend the athletes understanding? List examples of your probing questions and analyse them.
- Analyse how your questions encouraged athlete awareness.
- List the questions that you asked during the session. How did they encourage athlete learning? How did they set up problems for the athletes to solve?

Questioning is a key coaching strategy within an athlete-centred coaching approach because it is about encouraging athletes to enhance their awareness and learn in their context. The questioning strategies listed here are samples of what might be used within the sport setting. 'It depends', is still the underlying principle here as the whole strategy will depend on athletes' needs at that particular time in that particular situation.

Feedback

Feedback is defined as the information that is available during or after a performance. It is provided to enhance athletes' learning. Without feedback, athletes may not really know how they are performing, so their movement or decision making may not change. Athletes who obtain feedback tend to perform consistently.

Feedback fulfils two main functions: informational and motivational.

■ **Informational Feedback**

Informational feedback can be internal or external (verbal comments or nonverbal gestures) about how for example a movement was performed. A focus of informational feedback is to enable athletes to become self-aware, but without 'paralysis by analysis'.

■ **Motivational Feedback**

Motivational feedback can be internal or external (verbal or non-verbal gestures) feedback that encourages or discourages the continuing attempt of a skill or technique. Emotionally, athletes perform well when they have encouraging feedback. They love praise and it enhances their success.

The two functions of feedback often interact. In other words, informational feedback can be motivational in and of itself. A tone of voice or a nonverbal gesture combined with information of the performance can still be motivating or de-motivating.

Athletes in all coaching communities need to receive lots of positive feedback (both internal and external) and experience success to enhance learning of skills, tactics and techniques. This is crucial to ongoing development and participation. Potentially, sport can offer athletes the opportunity to demonstrate flair and experience excitement. Coaches need to encourage each athlete's thrill and excitement because these are great motivators. All athletes are motivated and learn well when their coach uses an athlete-centred approach to feedback.

Decision making is an important skill to develop. An athlete-centred approach encourages decision making in athletes. If children are given opportunities to interpret information (feedback) that is available to them while they are performing, and to decide for themselves the appropriate course of action, they will learn more and retain more information. They may not make the decision that an observing adult expects, but in making it, the young athletes will have learned something about their performance as they are being encouraged to be self-aware.

TYPES OF FEEDBACK

There are two types of feedback: intrinsic and extrinsic.

■ **Intrinsic Feedback**

Intrinsic feedback is feedback that athletes receive internally (their own perception) as a natural consequence of their performance. It comes in the form of kinaesthetic (feeling their own movement), tactile (touch), visual, and auditory sensory systems,

for example the feel of the ball as it leaves your hands, the sound of the ball hitting the racquet, or the sight of the ball going over the net. Intrinsic feedback provides an awareness of success (informational) or enjoyment (motivational).

Intrinsic feedback is most important. Research suggests that athletes are motivated if they take ownership for their performance. Intrinsic feedback comes from athletes using their senses to determine how they have executed a skill or technique, hence becoming aware of how it feels.

All athletes (depending on their experience and opportunities) become aware of a good catch or pass, for example, the soft sound of the ball hitting the fingertips, or the sound of the ball entering the right place in the glove. In tennis a good hit can be determined by the sound of the ball hitting the strings. In canoeing, an athlete knows what the sound of the paddle entering the water should be and determines success by the smoothness of the boat. Athletes can also feel how muscles are reacting while performing different movements. When athletes comment that 'it felt good!' they are reflecting positive intrinsic feedback. Athletes can also tell a successful or unsuccessful performance through the sense of touch. In diving, for instance, athletes can evaluate their dive according to how they enter the water. Coaches can, however, play a role in enhancing intrinsic feedback by asking their athletes how the movement felt, or sounded. The key here is encouraging the athlete to become aware of his/her performance. Intrinsic feedback develops an athlete's self-awareness and ability to determine how well he/she performed a particular movement.

■ **Extrinsic Feedback**

Extrinsic feedback is that which is given from an external source such as the coach, other athletes, parents and spectators. It can be verbal or nonverbal and can help or detract athletes from improving athletes' performance. Extrinsic feedback can supplement intrinsic feedback. Both are extremely useful all athletes.

Providing appropriate and timely extrinsic (external) feedback to athletes is a strategy that coaches should practice and review. As per the NZ Coach Approach, there are various levels of extrinsic feedback (see later section). It is important for coaches to increasingly work at the highest level of feedback using questioning techniques to get athletes to make them self-aware. 'What did you notice?' is a great question to ask athletes when working on technique.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

As a coach, there is a need to differentiate between when to provide feedback, known as a 'coachable moment' or when the activity or game or self-awareness will provide feedback. Determining when to jump in is an art and coaches need to practice interpreting coachable moments. Athletes gain feedback about their performance from carrying out the movements e.g. about the pass selection, option chosen, delivery of the pass. Coaches do not have to state the obvious therefore it is OK for a coach not to say anything. The athletes develop better through intrinsic feedback as they become self-aware.

Feedback does not have to be in the form of direct verbal or visual information. Asking relevant questions, listening to responses and then using those responses to probe further may often be a more effective way of providing feedback as the young

athlete becomes self-aware and responsible for any decision making involved. The secret here is to encourage 'in the moment' awareness, i.e. what is happening in that moment.

FEEDBACK USING QUESTIONING

The athlete centred approach encourages coaches to cater for the athletes' needs. The key in providing feedback is encouraging athlete awareness, rather than coaches telling what they know. To do this, coaches need to ask the 'right' question. The 'right' question is dependent on athlete understanding and needs and depends on the situation at that moment. As coaches, we want to promote athlete curiosity rather than judging athletes. In an athlete centred coaching environment, coaches try to create independent athletes, individuals who are self-aware and take responsibility for their learning. As Sir John Whitmore said, "Coaches will hold back their knowledge to get the best of others". For example, rather than saying, "Watch the ball", a better way to enhance athlete awareness is to ask, "What did you notice about the ball"? Instead of "Bend your Knees", coaches could ask, "Rate from 1 to 10 how far from the ground are your knees?", rather than saying "Pass to the striker", coaches could ask, "Who is available?". Rather than "They are beating us down the right side. Simon you've got to get back to cover this", coaches could say, "Where are they beating us? Who's going to take care of that?"

LEVELS OF FEEDBACK

The NZ CoachApproach introduces the concept of varying levels of extrinsic feedback (informational and motivational). At different levels, athletes gain information or motivation based on the type of feedback.

- No Feedback (lowest level) – No feedback is where the athlete completes a task, and the coach watches, without any word or body messages given.
- Negative Feedback – Negative feedback is neither feedback that is not positive nor informational. It often has a derogatory connotation, eg. 'That is terrible!'
- Zero Feedback – Zero feedback is when the coach or other person provides a general statement with no emotion, doesn't react, or doesn't really say anything, eg. 'That was good.'
- Objective Feedback – Objective feedback provides specific information without any emotional attachment. For example, giving a measurement of distance that a throw was made or how many points were achieved when hitting a target.
- Subjective/Objective Feedback – The athlete reports back on their idea of what happens; the coach reports what actually happened but there is no further information given.
- Subjective Process Feedback – For this feedback, the coach or person asks questions and completes a process of athlete awareness. An example is 'what did you notice about that salto?' or 'What could help the ball go faster?'

- Ownership of Process Feedback (highest level) – Ownership of process feedback is formulating a question to increase athlete awareness and giving him/her ownership of the technique or skill applied. For example, 'What would you do to change that move?' or 'who is available?'

Athletes should be able to understand the feedback and from it modify the movement. To ensure feedback is understood, use coaching cues to help remind athletes about parts of the skill or technique to focus on. After giving the coaching cues, observe subsequent performances to determine if the feedback was understood. Ask additional awareness questions if necessary.

THE NATURE OF FEEDBACK

The nature (positive, neutral, or negative) of feedback is an important element in the provision of effective feedback. **Positive** feedback provides encouragement (motivation) to athletes and may enhance the self-esteem of an athlete. All athletes like to receive praise, especially if it is sincere and honest. **Negative** feedback does not encourage or motivate athletes to perform, and sarcasm from a coach is counterproductive to athlete motivation and may cause them to give up easily. Coaches are notorious for recognising and correcting errors more often than noticing correct aspects of the movement. One of the most commonly used forms of negative feedback is the word 'Don't'. If you said to an athlete 'Don't think about how hard the landing is', you may have created fear for the athlete. What do you think of when someone says 'Don't worry'? Negative feedback can hinder athletes' learning. Be cautious in how and when you use negative feedback. **Neutral** feedback has no positive or negative connotations. It usually provides more of a prompt, such as 'Remember that you said you wanted to use one hand for balance'. Coaches often use neutral feedback when athletes are first learning skills, to remind athletes of important points (ones that the athletes have come up with) to the skill or technique.

Immediate feedback is more useful than **delayed** feedback because it provides the athlete with information just after the performance. Questioning the athlete prior to doing the movement also enhances self-awareness. Often coaches remind athletes of ways to perform skills or techniques several minutes after they were performed. Athletes cannot remember or feel exactly how they performed if the feedback is too delayed.

Whether the feedback is **congruent** or **incongruent** is also important. Congruent feedback corresponds to the idea just presented and focuses the athlete on the idea just verbalised or demonstrated to the team/squad. Congruent feedback is more effective because it relates specifically to what athletes are practicing. E.g. if a lacrosse team is working on creating space after a making a pass, it is important to focus only on the notion of space. Feedback on other aspects of the pass is incongruent feedback and would distract the athlete from focusing on his/her original goal - finding space. Incongruent feedback may load athletes with too much information. By planning the activity, coaches can focus on one or two aspects of the skill at one time.

In relation to congruence, it is crucial to listen to the athlete's answers. Often as coaches we know what to fix and interpret the athlete's answers to suit our understanding. However, it is crucial to listen to what the athletes are saying. For example, when working on a golf swing, the coach might determine that the problem

is that the knees aren't bent. But, when the athlete is asked, he/she suggests the elbows don't feel right. This is fine; the coach should not then say, "no it is the knees", but rather work with the athlete's answer of the elbows. So the next coach response could be, "great, focus on the elbows and let's see how that goes". Often, the flow of the golf swing will come as the athlete is concentrating on his/her awareness of the elbows and the knees will bend.

Once coaches understand feedback techniques, they need to practise formulating and giving feedback.

GUIDELINES FOR PROVIDING EXTRINSIC COACH FEEDBACK

Guidelines include:

- Extrinsic feedback is desirable for skill learning and improved performance. Insincere feedback is not desirable. However, less is often more in that coaches can over instruct (or give too much extrinsic feedback).
- Feedback should be sufficiently precise to identify relevant aspects of the skill performance, but not so detailed as to confuse the learner. Feedback should be given according to the developmental level of the athletes. If they are unskilled or young, coaches should provide more information about general and gross aspects of the skill.
- Feedback should be followed by opportunities to practice the skill and implement the ideas.
- Coaches should provide feedback equally to all athletes, no matter the skill level or person with whom the coach is working.
- Using questioning in feedback is a key component to enhancing athlete awareness and the most beneficial form of feedback for learning.

IS THERE A RIGHT TECHNIQUE?

It is clear that feedback is about giving athletes' confidence and enhancing their awareness. It is not all about giving athletes information that will allow them to fit the mould of the 'ideal' technique.

The question of a perfect technique has been a bone of debate amongst coaches, biomechanists and educators for many years. The answer to this question is, "Yes, there is a right technique, but the right technique is dependent on each individual". The right technique is what works for each athlete in a situation at a particular place and time. The right technique is personal; it depends on the athlete's cognitive, emotional, physical (biomechanical efficiency) and social development stages.

An example of someone who has challenged this misconception about right technique is Felix Erauzquin. Felix was a discus thrower who, in 1956, used the discus technique to throw a javelin only centimetres short of a world record. Felix was 49 at the time and athletics' officials banned the technique quickly because of safety issues. Innovation and creativity, such as illustrated by Felix, are an asset that coaches could encourage in each athlete.

If Fosbury hadn't flopped and Bjorn Borg hadn't used the two-handed backhand, where would high jump and tennis be today?

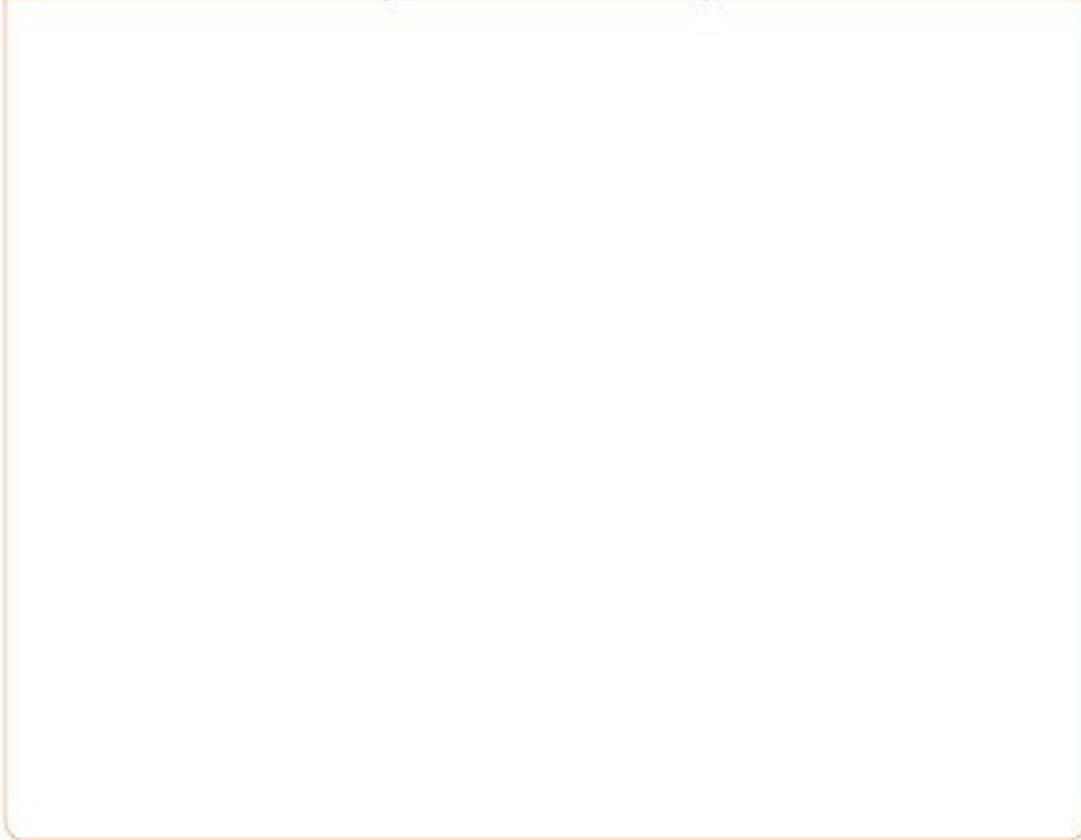
FEEDBACK SUMMARY

- Feedback serves informational and motivational purposes and provides athletes with information and reinforcement to help make them aware of their performance.
- Intrinsic feedback comes from athletes themselves and is a natural consequence of movement or decision making of their performance. Extrinsic feedback is obtained from external sources such as the coach or parent. Coaches, in general, give too much extrinsic feedback.
- Questioning for feedback is a self-awareness strategy whereby athletes discover their own strengths and weaknesses of performance.
- The NZ CoachApproach introduces various levels of feedback including: 'no feedback', 'negative feedback', 'zero feedback', 'objective feedback', 'subjective/objective feedback', 'subjective process feedback', and 'ownership of process feedback'. Coaches should work towards the 'ownership of process feedback'.
- Feedback is classified as positive, negative or neutral.
- Congruent feedback focuses on the specific concept that athletes are practicing and is best provided in a way that builds on the athletes' own responses to questions.
- In general, coaches give too much verbal and non-verbal feedback. Athlete self-awareness through ownership and responsibility is encouraged.

ASSIGNMENT REQUIREMENTS

1. Develop and implement written plans for your next 5 coaching sessions incorporating all of the elements of an effective session plan.
 - The practical delivery of these sessions must be evaluated by a Senior or HP coach.
2. Using techniques of self-reflection analyse your performance with particular reference to the following:
 - Communication – how effective was the communication and what strategies were used to ensure this was athlete-centred?
 - Questioning – List the questions you asked during each session – Were they appropriate to the developmental level of your athletes? How did they encourage athlete learning? Did you listen and accept the athlete responses? Were you able to probe to extend the athletes understanding? Analyse how your questions encouraged athlete awareness.
 - Feedback – What forms of feedback were provided to athletes? How effective was this feedback in raising athlete awareness?
 - Reflect on your performance during all 5 sessions. As a coach how could you be more effective in fostering an athlete-centred environment?

**SESSION BREAKDOWN
(DRILLS AND DIAGRAMS ETC)**



EVALUATION NOTES



COACH'S SELF-EVALUATION FORM

This form is a tool for self-evaluating your practical coaching skills. It should be completed as soon as possible following a coaching session. Photocopy this page and use it to review your progress regularly.

Name:

Date:

Strategy/Characteristic	Rating 1(never)–5(all the time)				
I planned and prepared well for the session	1	2	3	4	5
I listened to my athletes	1	2	3	4	5
I was positive	1	2	3	4	5
I gave effective feedback	1	2	3	4	5
I was enthusiastic	1	2	3	4	5
I kept my cool	1	2	3	4	5
I provided quality learning experiences	1	2	3	4	5
I varied my tone of voice	1	2	3	4	5
I provided equal attention to all athletes	1	2	3	4	5
My demonstrations were understood	1	2	3	4	5
My explanations were clear and concise	1	2	3	4	5
I provided coaching clues	1	2	3	4	5
I allowed some athlete decision-making	1	2	3	4	5
My coaching actions matched my coaching philosophy	1	2	3	4	5
The training session was well organised	1	2	3	4	5
I found the session enjoyable	1	2	3	4	5
Equipment size matched the athletes' learning levels	1	2	3	4	5
The training environment was safe	1	2	3	4	5

EVALUATION

In evaluating your training session, on a separate piece of paper, write answers to the following questions:

1. What worked well during this coaching session?
2. What would you like to improve in your next session?
3. How did the athletes respond to your style of coaching?
4. How do you plan to follow up your suggestions for improvement in the next session(s)?

