

Create the Experience for Coaches and Players

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There are plenty of formations and styles for soccer and each has its own benefit and purpose to playing the game. Soccer becomes a game of chess as formations match up and as styles of play come together. Each club has its own ideals of what formation, style, and skills should be taught for the game. Along with the clubs formation and style, every coach has their own experience within the game. Soccer, like many disciplines, is always changing and evolving into new forms and ideas. The game first began to take on some shape of formations and tactics, starting in the late nineteenth century, where teams had two or three center backs and eight to nine forwards. The game has come a long way since then and is more sophisticated, in the sense that, there are set positions, set styles of play, and set teachings for each formation. North Coast Football Club is trying to use a formation, widely known and well established within the soccer community, but in an era where soccer is starting to transform into an offensive game that relies on high pressure and quick transitions within the formation and the style. In order to get to the main content, for the North Coast curriculum, there needs to be some background information on what exactly the directors are trying to achieve at North Coast Football Club.

North Coast is a fairly new club that is based off of a fairly old Dutch system of play. This system of play consists of a formation built off of a number system, which follows as such: Goal Keeper is #1, Defenders are numbered from right to left (#2, #3, #4, #5), Defensive Midfielders #6 and #8, Attacking Midfielder #10, and forwards from right to left (#7, #9, #11). These numbers indicate what position each player is and where they are located on the field. Along with the formation is the system of play which

is broken down into four categories: Phase 1 Build Up, Phase 2 Possession, Phase 3 Creating Chances, and Phase 4 Scoring. The focus of this paper will be just on the first part of this system of play, which is Phase 1 Build Up. The directors at North Coast have developed a curriculum for how the Phase 1 should be taught and how each training for the next two months should go. These practice plans, for all teams ages 10 and up, are broken down into two week increments in which the first week is the introduction to the sessions and the second week repeats the same drills as week one. For the Phase 1 Build Up we are told what patterns must be used in order to build from the back; the ball starts from the goalie's hands or feet and then is distributed wide to the 2 or 5 and swung through the center backs (3 or 4) and then to our midfielders 6 and 8. The idea is to have a club-wide curriculum where players can easily assimilate to the style of play and the coaches can be held accountable for what they are teaching their players. What I argue is that this curriculum, specifically the Phase 1 Build Up, becomes too predictable and limits players creativity, has restrictions to age and skill level, and finally stifles the coaches creativity and approach to the game.

The benefit of this system of play and the curriculum the directors have made, is that it makes it easy for all players to quickly grasp the style of play. The curriculum can be taken to any team within the club and the players should be able to perform the drills once they have acquired the knowledge. The directors are trying to create a "measurable learner behavior", which means, they want to define "the particular kind of behavior changes in which will reflect such improvement" (Popham, 2013, p.95). This helps every coach understand the main focus of the club and evaluate their players. The curriculum keeps the coaches accountable for their teams development and guides

their team in the direction of the club's ideal style. What this does create, however, is a very one dimensional idea of how the game is played; the game changes into this pre-scripted format where players are supposed to perform as a machine with every part opening and closing at the right moment. Players are taught that this is the way we as a club build from the backline forward and there is no variation. This makes the style very predictable and limits the creativity of the player. As John Dewey (2013) states in his article, *My Pedagogic Creed*, "the child's own instincts and powers furnish the material and give the starting-point for all education" (p. 33). Dewey demonstrates that teaching cannot be done until the child, player in this case, experiences and uses their own ideas. For soccer, there should be ideas given to the players but they should also be constructing their own ideas about the game and be given freedom during drills to create ways out during build up. Short and Burke (1991) discuss that "Both teachers and children should be involved in learning and researching, in searching out the questions that are significant in their lives" (p. 55-56). This illustrates the need for players to have their own experience within the game, which in turn creates their own ideas and questions when they are unable to solve certain situations. From there the coach can then intervene and critique ideas they came up with or help them form an idea, based on the situations presented, and then inform them on what the best and safest way out of the back would be.

Another factor that comes with this set of curriculum on build up is that not every team can perform the set drills and patterns due to age level, knowledge of the game, and skill. The directors coach the top teams in the club and the older aged teams, which have players that are at the top of their respective age group based on skill level and

already have years of experience. These players are able to perform the build-up curriculum with ease because of their experience and skill. Eisner says that “Some educationally appropriate means must be created to enable students to interact with problems or situations that will yield an understanding of these concepts and generalizations” (Eisner, 1979, p.138). The players do not yet realize at the young and second team levels quite what is going on and what is trying to be achieved by the build-up phase. When coaches try to use these drills with the younger ages, which are still learning the system of play and still acquiring the skills necessary to perform, they cannot execute the drills quite the same and can become discouraged when they cannot perform the build-up phase within live games. The same thing goes for coaches who coach at the second team level in the club; they try to put these drills to use and the players struggle to perform them properly because their skill and knowledge of the game is not as high and the main focus for most players is on doing the basic skills in order to just complete the pass. As Maxine Greene (2013) discusses in, *Curriculum and Consciousness*, “If the curriculum... is seen as external to the search of meaning, it becomes an alien and an alienating edifice” (p. 136). For those children in soccer who are too young to understand and those who are still acquiring the necessary skills will view these trainings as some foreign incomprehensible being. The activities within the build-up phase become overwhelming and players become discouraged because they cannot properly perform or are unsure of how to perform the specific activity. This does, however, become the coaches responsibility to relate and help players figure out the ideas in the drills, but the coach also may feel like their own creativity has been taken out of the game.

Lastly, the curriculum that is put in place by the directors stifles the coaches creativity and approach to the game. The curriculum gives good ideas for coaches to utilize for trainings but should not be the set drills that they need to perform every week. Apple and Teitelbaum (1986) discuss, in *Are teachers losing control of their skills and curriculum?*, this same idea that “the changing structures of the control of teachers’ work in areas somewhat removed from the classroom” (p. 178). The directors of our club may not be removed from the field or the club but they are removed from the younger teams and the second teams; they do not spend much time looking over what is going on at the young level and developing a curriculum for those specific age groups. Instead they are focusing on their teams and believe that they can move the same drills down to the younger age groups. In a sense they are taking control of the teams and coaches and as Apple and Teitelbaum (1986) describe it they are “deskilling” the current coaches (p. 179). This means the skills the coaches have acquired to interpret the needs of their players and their current level is being condensed to a simple reiteration of prepackaged practice plans. Why must coaches be held to these set trainings every week? Coaches must be adaptable to the needs of their players; William Doll Jr. (2013) dives into this concept of “richness” within a curriculum, which he refers to as “a curriculum’s depth, to its layers of meaning, to its multiple possibilities or interpretations” (p. 216). Coaches must have their own creativity for the game and what their players need in order to have success. If coaches do not get this experience, how will they grow and learn the game themselves? If they are always fed specific trainings, how will they adapt in live game situations when teams play in different formations and styles? Doll states that “In order for students and teachers to transform or be transformed, a

curriculum needs to have the 'right amount' of *indeterminacy, anomaly, inefficiency, chaos, disequilibrium, dissipation, lived experience*" (Doll, 2013, p. 216). Both the teacher and student need these "right amounts", as Doll describes above, in order to reform their ideas and inform the decisions that need to be further explored. It is experience and inquiry that will drive coaches and players to grow together and form the ideas most relevant to work on in trainings.

The competitive game is the test for the players and like in the classroom the coach can only help to a certain extent without providing the answers right away. It comes down to the players and their ideas during that moment. The coach's responsibility should be to provide them with the basic skills necessary to perform the simple tasks of the game and give them some ideas to help with situations, but not manipulate the game into a pre-scripted play that must be followed word for word and scene by scene. Maxine Greene (2013) suggests that the individual:

Will only be in a position to learn when he is committed to act upon his world. If he is content to admire it or simply accept it as given, if he is incapable of breaking with egocentrism, he will remain alienated from himself and his own possibilities; he will wander lost and victimized upon the road; he will be unable to learn. He may be conditioned; he may be trained. He may even have some rote memory of certain elements of the curriculum; but no matter how well devised is that curriculum, no matter how well adapted to the stages of his growth, learning... will not occur (p.136).

This, for me, is the fear in having such a strict curriculum. The players may learn through conditioning, training, and memorizing but they are not learning through their own experience and enjoyment. They are passive in an active game. They are encouraged to assimilate to life,

rather than be creative and engage in life itself. As teachers and coaches, we must foster the experience through engaging activities and we must be the catalyst for creativity and discovery.

## References

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