

# English youth football coaches cognitive rationale for the application of 'Playing Form' and 'Training Form' practice activities

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## INTRODUCTION

- In sports such as football, practice tends to be a linear, process-product approach to learning, where 'technique' and 'skills' are to be mastered first and form the basis for games play (Harvey, Cushion & Massa-Gonzalez, 2010).
- Football coaches have been found to use more 'training form' than 'playing form' practice activities (see Table 1):
  - More 'training form' (65%) than 'playing form' practice activities (35%) (Ford, Yates and Williams, 2010).
  - More 'training form' (1818 minutes, 53%) than 'playing form' practice activities (1635 minutes, 47%) (Partington & Cushion, 2011).
- Recent research suggests that 'playing form' is more relevant to performance (Ford et al., 2010), as this is a random and variable activity with higher contextual interference, which is better for long-term retention and long-term learning than 'training form' (Lee & Simon, 2009).
- The purpose of this study was to identify the cognitive rationale of 11 English youth football coaches use of 'training form' and 'playing form' activities.



## METHODS

- 11 male professional English youth football coaches at a Premier League Centre of Excellence (see Partington & Cushion, 2011).
- Each coach was interviewed using open questions and probe questions until saturation was deemed to have occurred. The framework for the questions was adapted from the Coach Analysis Intervention System practice categories (see Table 1) and systematic observation data (see Partington & Cushion, 2011). Each interview lasted between 20 and 35 minutes.
- The value of interpretive inquiry is to develop a deeper understanding of coaching due to the complex interactions that take place in such a dynamic process (Potrac, Jones & Armour, 2002).
- Interview data were analysed using inductive content analysis (Patton, 1990).

TABLE 1: State categories including definitions (Cushion, Harvey, Muir & Nelson, 2011)

State - Training Form	Definition
Fitness	Improving fitness aspects of the game (e.g. warm-up, cool down, conditioning, rest)
Technical	Isolated technical skills unopposed alone or in a group
Skills	Re-enacting isolated simulated game incidents with or without focus on particular technical skills

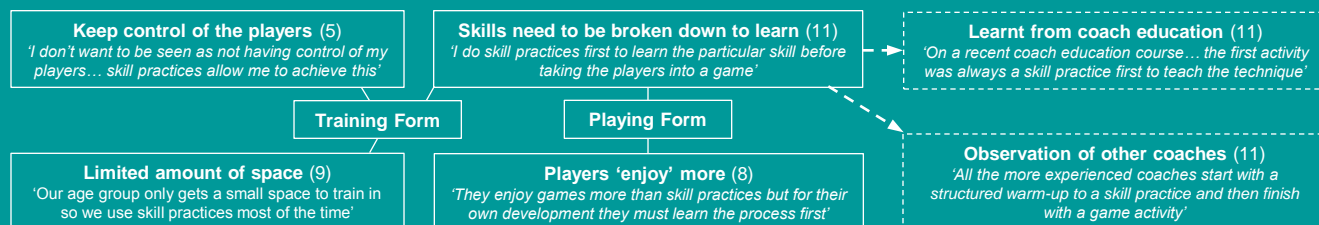
  

State - Playing Form	Definition
Small-sided game	Match-play with reduced number of players and two goals
Phase of play	Uni-directional match play towards one goal
Conditioned game	As small-sided games, but with variations to rules, goals or areas of play (e.g. possession/ ball retention only games, or teams scoring by dribbling across end-line)

## RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

- Interpretive interviews identified the coaches' cognitive rationale for the choice of practice and gained understanding of practice knowledge. Results from the inductive analysis of the interviews are presented with exemplar quotations and number of coaches.

FIGURE 1: Major themes identified from the inductive analysis



## DISCUSSION

- The coaches cognitive rationale for more 'training form' activities is based on the view that 'skills must be broken down' into smaller constituent parts first during acquisition rather than practicing the skills together as a whole. Coaches perceptions that players enjoy 'playing form' more than 'training form' activity did not influence the choice of practice.
- Contextual and sociological factors affected the coaches choice of practice. Coaches wanted to be seen as having 'control of the players' and 'the limited amount of space' instigated more 'training form' activities.
- Coaches practice knowledge is learnt through 'observation of other traditional coaches' and 'current coach education courses' as opposed to theoretical underpinning or evidence based research.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Coach education should give coaches a theoretical underpinning of different practice activities and an understanding of contextual and sociological factors to facilitate the most appropriate environment for athletes to develop.

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