

FACILITATING ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING WITH PARTICIPANTS OF VARYING LEVELS OF EXPERIENCE

**One must learn by doing the thing, for though you think you know it-
you have no certainty until you try.**

- Sophocles

Introduction:

Coaching is a complex enterprise. Even a coach working at the lowest competitive levels, with the youngest participants must make decisions related to the quality of skill develop, and methods for enhancing skill. Upon determining these levels a coach must plan for strategies to enhance skill development and to support the participant in the performance of the skills. As well every coach needs to make a series of ethical decisions related to the participants' behaviour and the enforcement of rules. It is these decisions and corresponding actions that will determine the quality and length of experience a participant will have within the sport environment. The NCCP recognizes these demands in their list of overall coaching competencies:

- Valuing
- Interacting
- Leading
- Problem-solving
- Critical thinking

and specific outcomes:

- Making ethical decisions
- Providing support to athletes in training
- Planning a practice
- Supporting the competitive experience
- Analyzing performance
- Designing a sport program
- Managing a program
- Meeting sport specific demands

Upon recognizing these competencies and outcomes, the question is how to develop these in aspiring coaches through training. As all of these competencies and outcomes are actions, it would be difficult to develop and assess these in a training that was largely content oriented and lecture based. As well a content oriented lectured based model would not allow sufficient time for coaches to analyze the information and apply it to their specific coaching situations.

What is needed is a training model that:

- Involves the coaches in a process of interaction that demands there be a “give and take” of experiences, ideas, and opinions (valuing)
- Allows the coaches the opportunity to direct and lead their own learning
- Engages the coaches in critical thinking, problem-solving and decision making relevant to their coaching situation.
- Allows the coaches to practice performing the specific outcomes.

Educational research over the past twenty years has shown that involving learners through a series of activities fulfills the demands listed above.

Activity based learning:

The acceptance and application of activity based learning has become quite common- from primary school through to university and onto training and the education of adults (Paulson & Faust, 2006). The move to activity based learning is fueled by research that shows: learners are not attentive to 40% of the time during lectures, learners retain 70% of the information from the first ten minutes of a lecture and only 20% of the information from the final ten minutes, and four months after a lecture base course the learners who took the course knew only 8% more that learners who have never taken the course (Meyer & Jones, 1993). Activity based learning provides the learner an opportunity to take a more interactive relationship with the subject matter by encouraging the learner to meaningfully talk, listen, read, write and reflect on the content, ideas, issues, and concerns of the subject matter (Meyer & Jones, 1993). When learners are engaged in their learning, they use and build more neural pathways in their brains (Goleman, 1995; Jensen, 1998; Pinker, 1997). This means learners are more likely to be able to access their learning more easily when they need it at a later date. Research has shown that activity based learning is more effective than traditional methods of teaching. When the two are compared (regardless the subject matter), learners learn more material, retain the information longer, and enjoy the training more when activity based learning is implemented (McKeachie, 1986; Bonwell & Eison, 1991). K.P. Cross (1988) sites nine other pieces of research that illustrates the effectiveness of activity based learning. Through conversations in small groups, learners can check their thinking and performance and develop a deeper understanding of their learning. Studies focusing on the role of emotions and brain functions state that conversations in groups prepare learners to take the type of risks that promotes further learning (Le Doux, 1996 and Goleman, 1995). As groups form, learners talk, information is exchanged, ideas are challenged and reformed, understanding is shaped, and concepts are developed and applied. Pine and Gilmore (1999) call this situation the “sweet spot”.

While activity based learning has shown potential to enhance learning, activity based learning is not the “magic bullet”. Having learners working in groups does not guarantee that meaningful learning will take place. Having learners working in groups creates favourable conditions for learning to take place. These conditions are a(n):

- Social context where learners perform tasks with peer collaboration, that they could not have performed alone (Vygotsky, 1978)
- Opportunity to process information and construct learning/ meaning for themselves (Burke, 1993).
- Alignment of the learning outcomes, instructional process, and assessment strategies (Black and Wiliam, 1998)
- Environment that enhances brain function (Chapman, 1993)
- Model of appropriate group beahviours that could be learned through observation (Bandura, 1977)
- Application of adult learning principles (Knowles, 1994)

- Emphasis upon reflection upon past experiences (Kolb, 1984)

The potential of the group to be a vehicle of learning is determined by the quality of the discussion within the group (Barron, 2003). The quality of the discussion within a group may be affected by the skills and actions of the Learning Facilitator (Hyman, 1980; Lowman, 1984). What skills and actions do facilitators need to tap the potential of activity based learning?

Hersey and Blanchard (1988) state that leadership (and, by extension, facilitation) is situational. There is no one good way to facilitate all groups, yet every group can be facilitated in such a way that the learners learn and develop. Grow (1996) suggests that the key situational variable in facilitating groups is the readiness of the learners to be self-managing. Readiness is a combination of the learner's:

- **Motivation-** desire and willingness to learn
- **Maturity-** ability to take control of their own learning
- **Experience-** prior learning and background knowledge

Hersey and Blanchard (1988) assert that leadership involves choosing the right mix of direction and support that match the individual's readiness so that the task at hand can be accomplished, while preparing the individual to advance to a higher level of self-direction. Grow (1996) has adapted this assumption to training and states- good facilitation matches the learner's stage of self-management, while helping the learner advance toward greater self-management.

Grow (1996) has developed this assumption into a model he called the Staged Self-Directed Learning Model. The model put forth in this paper modifies Grow's model by expanding on the later two components of Grow's (1996) description of readiness-maturity and experience. The model in this paper provides four descriptions of the learner's level of experience, as well as outlining the appropriate facilitator response for each level.

It should be noted that this model is a theoretical construct that allows us to discuss the very complex human interactions that take place during learning. This model simplifies the complexities of learning to the concept of readiness and its two variables maturity and experience, so as to allow us a beginning point in our analysis and understanding of how maturity and experience affects the processes of learning and facilitation. Grow's (1996) defense of his model can apply to the model outlined in this paper: "It maps new territory well enough, provides useful concepts, and shows you where the path begins...I treat models as ladders to pick fruit with, not as the fruit itself."

Most importantly this model allows for a response to one of the most common concerns raised by the Learning Facilitators- "How can we make activity based learning work for learners with varying levels of experience".

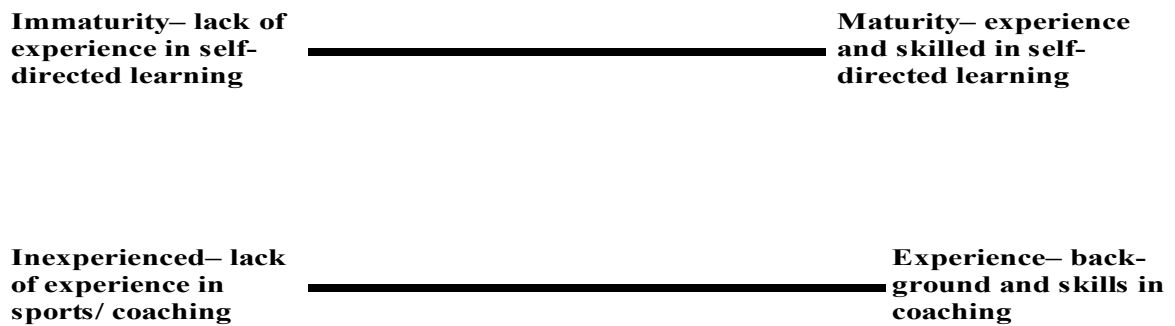
The sort of teaching we propose requires that we encourage active learning and that we become knowledgeable about the ways in which our students hear, understand, interpret, and integrate ideas.

-AAC Task Group on General Education, 1988

A model that describes the level of experience of learners

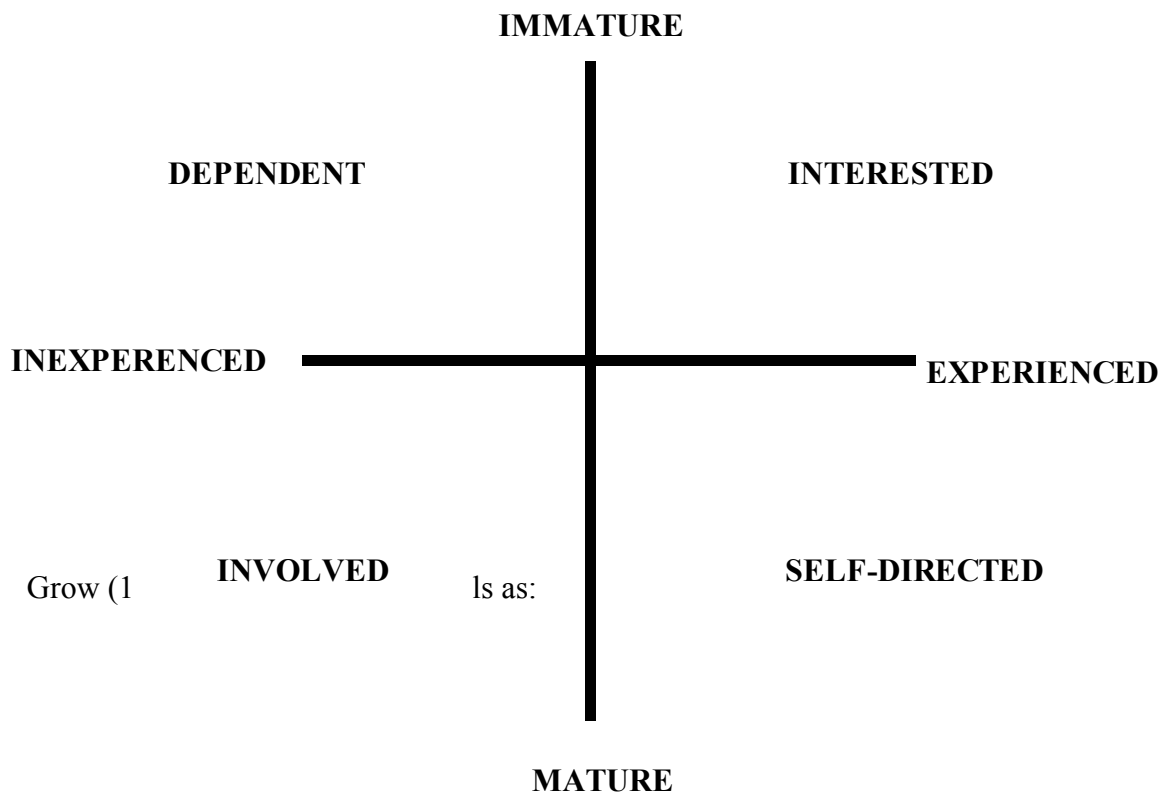
This model builds upon Grow's (1996) two components- maturity and experience. By focusing on these two components, two descriptors of experience are identified- level of maturity (experience in self-directed learning) and level of experience (experience within sports and coaching). Continuums for each descriptor of experience can be created:

Figure 1:



These continuums may be overlaid to create a grid that describes four typical levels of maturity and experience that coaches bring to training:

Figure 2:



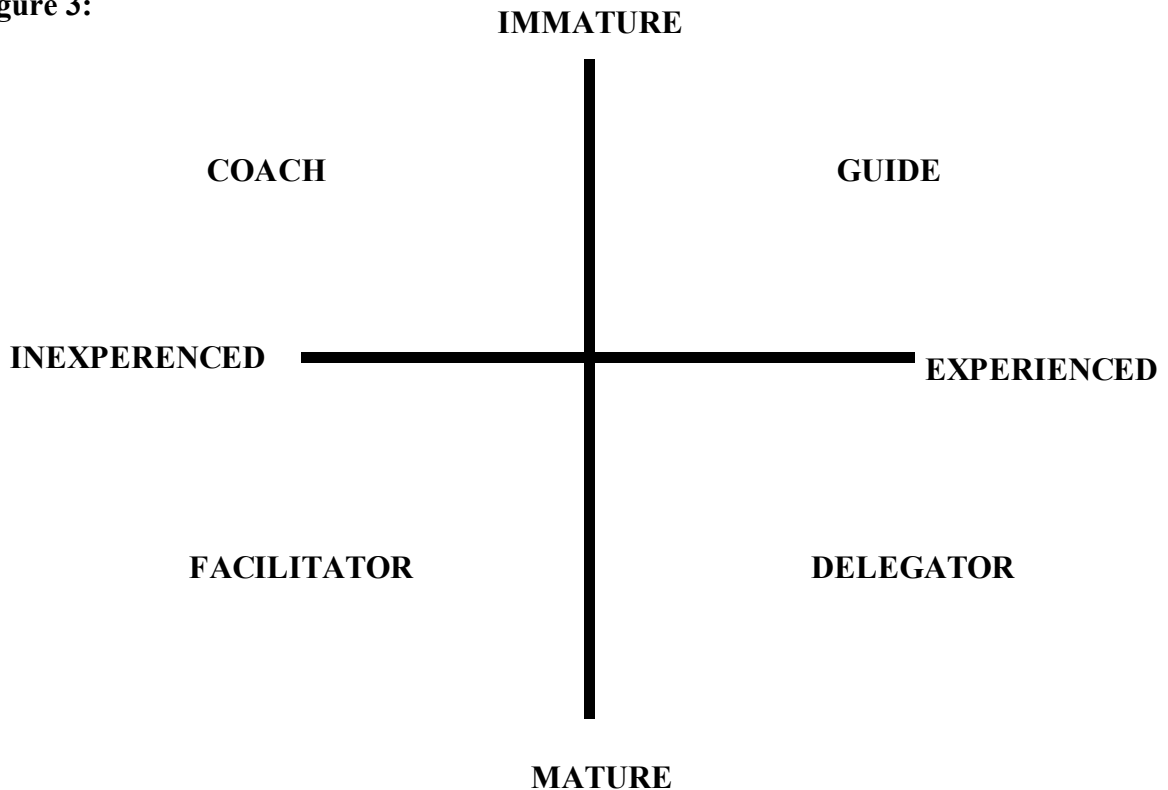
- **Dependent-** learner lacks the relevant knowledge and skills, while lacking the experience and/ or self-confidence to pursue learning goals on their own or as part of a group.
- **Involved-** learner has the skills and knowledge to learn with and from others, but lacks background and experience in sports/ coaching.
- **Interested-** learner has a background in sports/ coaching, but lacks the skills to be a self-directed learner.
- **Self-directed-** learner has a background in sports/ coaching and is able and willing to take responsibility for their learning.

Grow suggests that learners at each of these levels of experience require different styles of facilitation to successfully complete assigned learning tasks and to enhance their ability to be self-directed learners.

Levels of experience and appropriate facilitation styles:

Grow provides labels for the style of facilitation that is appropriate for the four levels of experience:

Figure 3:



Here is a brief summary that relates appropriate facilitation style to the learners' level of experience:

Coach/ dependent learner- Working with learners who lack both maturity and experience is a challenge and the facilitator needs to adopt the role of “coach”, transferring knowledge and developing skills. The transferring of knowledge is not limited to course content, but also includes information related to process and value of learning in groups. The same is true for the development of skills. The facilitator should provide the learners the opportunity to acquire skills that make them more self-directed learners, as well as acquiring the skills needed to achieve the learning outcome.

The literature (Center for Teaching and Learning, 2006) provides the following suggestions when working with learners who lack maturity and experience:

- Create opportunities for success and reward the attainment of success.
- Start small and simple with low risk activities such as think-pair-share. Here learners get an opportunity to think about the content (from a mini lecture or reading), find a partner and share ideas about the content. This is a low risk activity as it gives the learner a chance to think before they speak to only one other person.
- Give clear instructions- stating the goal of the learning activity, providing a time line, and explaining the tasks in detail
- Explain to the learners why you are using activity based learning
- Facilitator breaks the learners into groups. The groups should be created with purpose- ie: distributing more self-directed learning amongst the groups, or grouping learners with similar coaching context.
- Avoid giving the Dependent learner a choice.
- Learning activities should focus on either process or content (but not both)- early in the training the Learning Facilitator should implement activities that are process oriented. For a example an icebreaker helps the learners to be more comfortable with the other learners. Or the Learning Facilitator could provide an activity where the learners develop the ground rules for their group discussions. Activities that focus on content should be as simple and directive as possible. The activities in the Workbook are good for learners at this level.
- At the start of every learning activity the facilitator should monitor group process first. The facilitator should make sure the group is on task, has understood the task, and understands what the end product would look like.
- The facilitator should attempt to have everyone involved in the learning activity. This may mean the facilitator may have to sit down with a group and ask questions of the learners who were observed not being involved in the process.
- Only after the groups are working should the facilitator pay attention to the content being addressed.

Paulo Freire (1968) recommends when working with learners who lack maturity and experience to begin with learners' insights. Freire believes that all learners have worth no matter how little formal education or training they have. Though lacking formal education, Freire believes that all learners have learned throughout their lives. This

learning includes the development of characteristics like honesty, integrity, independence, and interdependence. Freire sees these characteristics as valuable first steps in training. To apply this notion, a Learning Facilitator may start a training by asking the learners who they are and what they want to learn. This validates who they are and what they bring to the training. This validation tends to increase the learner's efficacy and willingness to take a risk of actively participating in a group activity. By participating in group activities the learners will reveal more characteristics and skills, as well as developing new skills that will empower them as learners.

Specific examples of what a Learning Facilitator can do within the NCCP are:

- At the start of the Practice Planning Module, the LF could provide the learners with a number of sample practice plans before asking the learners to design their own practice plan. The Learning Facilitator could have the coaches pair up and share their ideas about the sample practice plans.
- In completing the Make Ethical Decision Model, the LF may group the learners into pairs. This reduces the opportunity for "social loafing" as the learners will find it difficult to hide in a group of two. Also a group of two is more comfortable and less risky than a larger group.
- In the Designing Sport Program Module, the LF could group 2 coaches with less experience with a more experienced coach and together the trio could complete the Workbook tasks.

Another technique is to provide the learners with experiences through activities. A good example is the "wrong arm paper ball toss"- where one learner takes on the role of the coach and attempts to teach another learner, who has taken on the role of athlete, how to throw a paper ball with their non-dominant arm. From this activity the Learner Facilitator may de-brief: what it feels like to learn a new skill, how to prepare an explanation to teach a new skill, and what the athlete liked/ disliked about how they were coached. Starting with this kind of exercise reduces learner anxiety by providing a "fun" activity, that allows the learners to inform their own learning, and generates data/ observations upon which each learner may reflect. Through the reflection upon this activity, learners are able to create "new knowledge" that can be used to guide their coaching practices.

Facilitator/ Involved learner- Working with learners who have the skills and self-confidence to be self-directed, but lack knowledge of sports/ coaching challenges the facilitator to provide tools and methods that allow the learner to create his/her "new knowledge". Learners at this level see themselves as active participants in their own learning and require a facilitator to guide them through a series of learning activities. Grow (1996) suggests that activities for learners at the Involved level should allow the learner to interact with the content in such a way as to develop a deeper self-concept of their role as a coach, and to gain a sense of direction in their learning to be a coach. On the process side the learners need to: learn more about how they learn, make more conscious use of learning strategies (Derry, 1989) identify and value their own experiences in life and to learn from the experiences of others.

Working with learners at the Involved level, the facilitator should be prepared to share some of the decision-making with the learners. The sharing of decision-making should be primarily in the process of learning. The facilitator should attempt to exploit the learners' ability to be self-directed so as to broaden and deepen the discussions within the groups.

The facilitator should monitor closely the learning activities and intervene when the learner is struggling with the understanding or application of the content to be learned. Issues related to how the group operates and how it processes the content can be left in the hands of the learner. The Learning Facilitator must be diligent in monitoring the discussion and application of the content. If the content is incorrect or the application of the content is inappropriate, the Learning Facilitator must intervene and review the content. This may be done by sitting in with one group and reviewing the content and its application or the Learning Facilitator may identify this situation as a "teachable moment" and stop the learning activity and provide the group a mini-lecture that reviews the content and its application.

A review of the literature (Center for Teaching and Learning, 2006) provides some general recommendations when working with a group of learners who are at the Involved level:

- Design your learning activities with learning objectives that clearly indicate the content or skill that needs to be learned
- Focus on the content that is critical in the learning of the skill
- Use classroom assessment techniques to determine what the learners have learned and what is confusing them
- Avoid racing through the content. This tends to be counterproductive as the learners will not be able to "grasp" the content. As well rushing the process of learning usually turns off learners to the use of activity based learning
- If your goal is mastery of the content, you may need to spend more time on less material.

To engage the learners in the acquiring of content, Grow (1996) suggests collaborative tasks, open-ended questions that lead to the discover and application of the content, reciprocal teaching where learners teach learners the content, and context specific tasks that relate the content to the learner's coaching context. Grow indicates that problem-solving and decision-making tasks are effective in assisting the learners in developing the skills to become even more self-directed.

Specific examples of what a Learning Facilitator can do within the NCCP are:

- During the Make Ethical Decision Module, learners at the Involved level will be ready and willing to discuss the issues. The responsibilities of the Learning Facilitator are to ensure that the learners understand the content and that the learners internalize the six step process of making an ethical decision. With learners at this level it is quite possible to have a grand discuss about the issue without the content being examined and the overall skill not being learned. An old

cliché that sums up the role of the facilitator is that the job is to “separate the steak from the sizzle.”

- During the Practice Planning Module, the learners cover a variety of topics ranging from sport safety to identifying training factors relevant to their sport and context. At the end of each of these sections, the Learning Facilitator should bring closure to each section by summarizing the key learnings of that section. For sport safety the Learning Facilitator could emphasize the key points of the Emergency Action Plan. To assess the learners’ understanding of the determining physical factors section, the Learning Facilitator could have each learner verbally report to the group what factors are important to their coaching context.
- During the Nutrition Module, the Learning Facilitator could have the learners pair and share their suggestions for before, during, and after competition menus. The Learning Facilitator could move from pair to pair listening to the response to ensure the learners understood the content. As the Learning Facilitator “eavesdrops” on the group he/she could make a mental list of what areas the learners may lack understanding and he/she could provide a mini-lecture that clarifies these areas.

Individuals at this level of experience may “fool” themselves and the facilitator into thinking that there is a great deal of learning going on. Both the learner and facilitator must be able to separate discussion and activity from learning. It is important for the facilitator to provide activities that are content driven and to assess throughout the entire training if the content is being acquired.

Guide/ Interested learner- The challenge for the facilitator in working with learners at this level is to get the learner to “buy into” activity based learning. At this level the learners have a pretty good knowledge about sports and coaching.

This knowledge may have been acquired through prior training that emphasized the passive approach to learning or it may have been acquired through practical experience of being a coach. If most of the previous training has been passive the Learning Facilitator may have to overcome resistance if the learner wishes to stay in the role of a passive learner. This may be tricky. If the knowledge has been acquired through experience, the Learning Facilitator must tap into these experiences to engage the learner in activity based learning and to enhance the learners’ potential to be self-directed.

If the learner is comfortable being a passive learner, the facilitator should employ some of these general suggestions (similar to those when dealing with a Dependent learner) from the literature (Center for Teaching and Learning, 2006):

- Start small and simple with low risk activities
- Give clear instructions- stating the goal of the learning activity, providing a time line, and explaining the tasks in detail
- Explain to the learners why you are using activity based learning

- Facilitator breaks the learners into groups. The groups should be created with purpose- ie: distributing more self-directed learning amongst the groups, or grouping learners with similar coaching context.
- Avoid giving the learner a choice.
- Learning activities should focus either process or content (but not both)
- Early in the training the Learning Facilitator should implement activities that are process oriented. For an example an icebreaker helps the learners to be more comfortable with the other learners. Or the Learning Facilitator could provide an activity where the learners develop the ground rules for their group discussions.

If the learner's knowledge comes from experience, the Learner Facilitator needs to find a way to use these experiences. It is important to note at this time that the past experiences of learners can either be a barrier or a catalyst to learning. If the learner clings to his/her experience as the "truth", it will be difficult to get the learner to examine his/her experiences as the basis for new and expanded learning. If the learner is willing to examine their experiences, the Learning Facilitator must assist the learner in developing the skills required to value their experiences and the experiences of others and to reflect upon their combined experiences. The learner must be lead to the understanding that past experiences are only events and it is through reflection that these experiences become educational (Knowles, 1994).

Some general ideas when working with this stage of learners who have experience, but lack maturity:

- Facilitator can model the group process by leading large group discussions and then de-briefing afterwards what made the discussion educational
- For certain activities it would be more effective to group learners with similar experiences, while for others it may better to group learners of various experiences
- The facilitator should provide a demonstration of how the process works and a sample of the end product.
- The facilitator should assign roles to each member of the group when the group is given a task to complete
- At the start of every learning activity the facilitator should monitor group process first. The facilitator should make sure the group is on task, has understood the task, and understands what the end product would look like.
- The facilitator should attempt to have everyone involved in the learning activity. This may mean the facilitator may have to sit down with a group and ask questions of the learners who were observed not being involved in the process.
- Only after the groups are working should the facilitator pay attention to the content being addressed.

Grow provides some further general guidance when working with this level of learner- the Learning Facilitator should build confidence while assisting the learner to become more self-directed. Use praise (extrinsic motivation) at the beginning of the training and phase in encouragement (intrinsic motivation), as the learners participate in activity based

learning (Dinkmeyer & Losoney, 1980). There is an old say that “nothing succeeds like success”. Providing tasks where the learners are successful in sharing responsibility with the facilitator and other learners builds the learners efficacy in directing their own learning.

Specific examples of what a Learning Facilitator can do within the NCCP are:

- One of the learning activities in the Introductory Module is to have the learners write down the various jobs a coach has to do on sticky notes. These notes are then placed on one of three sheets- Pre-season, Ins season, and Post season. This task is a perfect opportunity to focus on process with learners at the Interest level. These learners will most likely find it is easy to generate answers and to place those answers on the appropriate sheet. With the learners feeling secure with the content, the facilitator can emphasize the process. These emphasis could include assigning roles to each member of the groups, outlining ground rules the facilitator expects the groups to follow, and pointing out that the breadth and depth of answers of the group is greater than what one person could list. At the end of the task the facilitator could de-brief the group on the process that they have just worked through. The facilitator could ask and list on chart paper what the group did to be successful in generating so many answers. As well the facilitator could ask how working in a group felt? How did it feel to have others listen to your ideas? What could your group do better next time it is assigned a group task?
- Prior to starting the Mental Skills Module, the Learning Facilitator could ask the coaches to share their experiences with mental preparation- as a coach or athlete. After hearing the various “war stories”, the Learning Facilitator could group the coaches and ask them to make some general statements about mental preparation. In providing instructions to the groups, the Learning Facilitator should ask the groups to first discuss what are the important types of information they heard in the “war stories”. After 5 – 10 minutes of discussion the Learning Facilitator should ask each group to select one type of information they would like to focus upon (the Learning Facilitator may have to coerce groups to choose different areas). After each group has selected a topic, the Learning Facilitator asks the groups to list specific pieces of information relevant to their topic. Each group will provide an oral report back to the large group. As the groups provide their information the Learning Facilitator expands upon key points, corrects any misconceptions, and incorporates an introduction to what is going to be done in the rest of the module. At the end of task the Learning Facilitator should point out to the learners the steps they have just completed: prioritized information, developed a category for that information, selected information that fits the category based upon criteria developed by the group, and shared their learnings with others. This is a great opportunity to praise the group and to encourage the group to build upon these skills.
- In starting the module on Nutrition, the Learning Facilitator could group the learners and ask them to list what they feel they need to know about nutrition to be a better coach in their context. The groups will post their lists and the Learning Facilitator will summarize key themes that he/she sees in the responses. Through

out the facilitating of the module the Learning Facilitator should refer back to the lists as items on the lists are addressed. Doing an activity like this allows the learners the opportunity to use their experience to predict what they need to know. These predictions assist the Learning Facilitator in focusing the module. As well it allows the learners to experience success in sharing responsibility with the facilitator and directing their own learning. This process builds the learners' skills of self-direction and enhances the learners self-confidence in directing their own learning.

When working with learners at this level, the goal of the Learning Facilitator is use the learners' past experiences and the process of facilitation to engage the learners in meaningful discussions. By engaging the learners in learning that they see as meaningful, the Learning Facilitator has the opportunity to develop self-management skills within the learners. As the learners become more confident in their ability to direct their learning, the more the Learning Facilitator can share responsibility for the process with the learners.

Delegator/ self-directed- Grow (1996) describes this level as the “Learners...are both able and willing to take responsibility for their learning, direction, and productivity. They exercise skills in time management, project management, goal-setting, self-evaluation, peer critique, information gathering, and use of educational resources.” This level of self-manage does not mean being a loner- it means the learner is capable of directing their learning individually or as a member of a group. As well the learners at this level tend to have a background in sports and coaching. They are capable in making connections between the content of the course and their coaching context. Interestingly attainment of this level does not do away with a facilitator, it only means that the learner requires a different style of facilitation. Candy (1987) states: “There are certain skills and other bodies of knowledge which are best and most easily mastered under the tutelage of an expert”. Candy summarizes the role of a facilitator as that of a consultant under whom knowledge and skills are mastered. The consultant allows the learner to share in the direction of the process of learning. As a consultant the facilitator maintains the process of learning, while directing the learners to the appropriate reference material. Grow (1996) further describes the role of a facilitator working with self-directed learners as no longer the teaching of the content nor the development of self-management skills but to “to cultivate the student’s ability to learn”.

Grow expands upon this description by providing some specific actions a facilitator could implement:

- Provide more advanced tasks that demand the application of the content outside of the training
- Assist the learners on being productive (organizing the work in such a manner that it is done quickly and with understanding)
- Consult with learners to develop criteria of what a completed project would look like

- Emphasize the need for on going learning through the development of skills that allow the learner to learn while applying the content in their coaching context
- Implement collaborative tasks that focus on the learners working with other learners
- Allow the learners to initiate tasks

Hersey and Blanchard (1988) advocate a gradual reduction of facilitator/learner communication and an increase in learner/learner communication. Through these communications learners should be able to define tasks in context specific terms, generate options/ solutions, problem solve and make decisions. The Learning Facilitator actively monitors the learning to ensure success, intervening only to assist the learners to examine their process or to direct the learners to appropriate resources.

Millis (2006) provides a variety of strategies for activity based learning. She classifies these strategies as basic and advanced. Some of the advanced strategies that would be affective with this level of learner:

- Value line- The facilitator creates a continuum by marking two points on either end of a wall. One point is labeled strongly agree, while the other point is strongly disagree. The facilitator reads a statement out loud (ie: athletes should be grouped by ability not age). After reading the statement the facilitator asks the learners to stand at a place along the continuum that best represents their opinion (the closer the learner is to strongly agree the more learner agrees with the statement and vica versa). From here the facilitator could make this a pairs task or a small group task depending upon how the learners are grouped. If the facilitator wanted a pairs task he/ she could group: the learner who most strongly agreed and with the learner who most strongly disagreed, the learner who was next to the learner who most strongly agreed with the learner who was next to the learner who most strongly disagreed, and so on until everyone has a partner. This would create pairs whose viewpoints would vary from extreme differences to slight difference. Another way of using the Value Line to create groups is to number the learners from one end of the line to the other (to develop trios that represent the full spectrum of view on the issue divide the number of learners in the training by 3 and then use that number to count off. For example is there were 15 learners divided by 3 would give you the number five. So the facilitator would count out the learners 1 through 5. The facilitator would ask the learners to create groups with one 1, one 2, one 3, and so on. Each group would be composed of one learner who strongly agrees, one learner who does not have a strong view on the issue, and a third learner who strongly disagrees. Once, either in pairs or trios, the facilitator could assign a variety of tasks (ie: create a list of pro's and con's related to the issue).
- Jigsaw- Facilitator creates "home groups". Each member of the "home groups" joins a "subject expert group". Sometimes each of the "subject expert groups" is assigned an article to read. In the "subject expert groups"

information from the article and from the learners' experiences are synthesized into a body of knowledge. Then each subject groups is tasked to design a learning activity that will be used to transmit this body of knowledge to other learners. Once the "subject expert groups" have developed a learning activity, each member returns to his/ her "home group". In these "home groups", each member facilitates the learning activity their "subject expert group" had developed.

- Send/Pass a problem- Learners are divided into groups of 3 or 4 (These groups should share a common contextual feature (ie: work with the same age children). In their groups they are asked to outline one of the biggest problems they face. They write this problem on a large sheet of flip chart paper. After writing their problem, the group passes their problem to another group. This second groups generates potential solutions to the problem. These solutions on written on the back of the flip chart paper. Next the papers are passed to another group (who did not generate the problem). This group adds to the list of potential solutions, as well as placing a "star" next to solutions that the previous group generated and which they are in agreement. This can be done a number of times and then the sheet is returned to the group who wrote the problem. This group would review the potential solutions and develop an action plan for addressing the problem.

Johnson and Johnson (1998) advocate for using intellectual conflict (or academic controversy) to improve learning. Their research has shown academic controversies to be one of the most powerful and important instructional tools. This strategy is particularly well suited for learners at level 4. Learners at this level have the background knowledge and experience as well as the skills to develop and articulate a position on an issue. Also learners at this level are able to see the activity as a learning opportunity and tend not to take the disagreement personally. Johnson and Johnson outline the following steps:

1. Choose a manageable topic and prepare 2 packets of information- one pro on the issue and one con.
2. Divide group into groups of 4
3. Assign one pair in the group the pro side and one pair the con side
4. Each pair is assigned to research the topic and prepare a number of persuasive arguments
5. Highlight the goal of reaching consensus on the issue by mastering all the information on both side of the issue
6. Have each pair present it position to the other pair.
7. Have the groups discuss the issue, asking for data that supports the position, critically evaluating the opposing position, and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of both positions.
8. Have the pairs research and present the opposite position.
9. Have the groups drop their advocacy roles and ask them to reach consensus.

A specific example of what a Learning Facilitator can do within the NCCP is:

- For any module a Learning Facilitator could do a task using the Reference Material. Have the learners look through and select the piece of reference material that is most relevant to their coaching context. After selecting the piece of information, the learner studies the information in detail and prepares a summary of the information and designs a practical example of how they could apply this information in their coaching context. Each learner will make a sign listing the topic they have prepared. Have half the learners set up their signs on a desk. The other half of the learners will look at these signs and choose a topic they would like to learn more about. After 10 minutes have the learners select another topic. Repeat process one more time. Now have the learners who taught in the first round set up their signs and instruct the learners who just taught their topics to select topics they would like to learn more about. Repeat twice more as in the first round.

The challenge for a facilitator working with learners at this level is to control and direct the process of learning, while allowing the learner maximum input into the learning process.

Process of facilitation

From this adaptation of Grow's model we can summarize the process of facilitation to be a three-step process:

1. **Ascertain the level of the group-** Grow does not provide a scale for the measurement of the group's stage of readiness, but puts his faith in the facilitator to estimate the group's level from the classroom behaviour and the quality of the work produced. Behaviours that a facilitator can observe are learners who: act as leaders organizing the group to complete tasks, look to find information in the Reference Material, ask questions that clarify the assigned task, and complete tasks on time. While working in groups, the learners should produce work that shows breadth and depth of thought, as well as completely answering any questions posed.
2. **Provide the group tasks that it can successfully complete at their stage of readiness-** Providing tasks with which the group can be successful builds confidence and self-efficacy while assisting learners in developing skills to move to the next level of readiness.
3. **Provide the group tasks-** that challenge the group's newly discovered confidence, self-efficacy, and newly developed self-management skills through intrinsically motivating learning activities that are relevant, context specific, and draw upon the learners' experiences.

By following this process a Learning Facilitator can provide learning activities that:

- guide the learners to discover and apply content relevant to their coaching context,

- engage the learner through meaningful and relevant learning,
- enhance the learners readiness (increased self-direction and experience)

The task for the learning facilitator is first to work within the learners level of readiness and then to introduce a degree of challenge that promotes learning without producing discouragement. This challenge usually comes in the form of a problem-solving experience shared with a number of peers. Working in a group allows the learners to share information, examine options, and deepen their thinking in a supportive environment that encourages and rewards risk.

Grow (1996) concludes that good facilitation "...matches the students stage of self-direction and it empowers the student to progress toward greater self-direction".

All genuine learning is active not passive.

It is a process of discovery in which the student is the main agent, not the teacher.

- Adler, 1982

Facilitating groups with different levels of experience

In the real world, each group is unique and exists in its own context. This context most often includes learners who are at all four of levels of readiness. So the question is: How do you accommodate the four different levels of readiness in training? There is very little research that addresses this question directly, as most published material on activity based learning has been descriptive accounts, leaving a number of pedagogical issues to be explored. However from this research we can develop a number of guidelines in addressing the issue of multiple levels of readiness within a training:

Scaffolding- The structure of the NCCP provides tasks where a difference exists between what a learner can do on his/ her own and what the learner can do with help from the facilitator and/or a group of peers. In a learning design that is dependent upon the learners being able to work at a level of self-direction that is above where they currently are, the facilitator is responsible to provide the scaffolding the learner needs to make that leap. A broad definition of scaffolding is the facilitator connecting what the learners already know and do to what they need to know and do. Specific examples of scaffolding are the facilitator asking a series leading questions the forces the learner to look differently at a given topic/issue or the facilitator fostering discussion with the group that draws out new ideas from the group. Scaffolding requires the facilitator to provide the learners the opportunity to extend their current skills and knowledge. Through the provision of scaffolding the facilitator engages students' interest, simplifies tasks so they are manageable by the learner and motivates the learner to pursue the instructional outcomes. In addition, the facilitator must look for differences between the learners' efforts and the outcomes, control for frustration, and model the skills for effectively problem solving as a member of a group (Hausfather, 1996). A key component of scaffolding is the provision of descriptive feedback. Descriptive feedback comes during the learning and is part of the ongoing conversation as the task is being completed. Descriptive feedback assists the learner in seeing what they have to do in order to complete the task successfully. To reduce frustration in completing the tasks and to improve learning, researchers (Black

and Wiliam, 1998; Kohn; 1993) recommend increasing descriptive feedback while reducing the amount of evaluative feedback. Scaffolding not only produces results in the short term as learners master the content being taught, but also instills the skills necessary for becoming a self-directed learner.

Advanced organizers- From practical experience, we know that when an advanced organizer accompanies a task, it helps everyone do better and understand more. An advanced organizer describes what the learner is to learn in a language easily understood by the learner, provides a description of what the end product could look like, provides a clear set of instructions to guide the process, and finally relates the learning to the learners' contexts. Brain-based research (Restak, 1988) says that when the learner knows what they are going to be doing, the learner mentally prepares and activates more of their brain. Other advantages are that once the learner knows what they are supposed to do, they can be more self-monitoring, make adjustments to their learning, and ultimately learn more. The value of using advanced organizers with learners who lack readiness (maturity and/ or experience) is obvious.

Homogeneous grouping- If a significant goal of the learning activity is to enhance the readiness of the learners, then it is affective to group learners of similar levels of readiness. This type of grouping creates a situation where the less ready learners may adopt leadership roles within the group to successfully complete the assigned task. As well less experience learners may feel more comfortable sharing their experience with their peers. While developing these skills the data collected by some groups may lack breadth and depth of other groups. To rectify this you may rotate recorders with their data through the groups. In each group the recorder shares their original group's findings with the groups they are visiting. As well as reporting, the recorder can add answers and suggestions from the groups they have visited. So after all the groups have been visited, the recorder reports back to his/her original group with all the data they have collected. This allows the less experienced coach to be exposed to the thoughts and ideas of more experienced coaches and equalizes the data that each group has to work with. Using this type of grouping allows coaches an opportunity to enhance their readiness while exploiting the experience of the group.

Heterogeneous grouping- If the less experienced learners could benefit from working with more experienced learners then the Learning Facilitator could group learners in heterogeneous groups. Ideally, each group would have one level one learner, one level two learner, one level three learner, and one level four learner. This creates a situation where learners will be able to complete a task through peer collaboration that they most likely would not have been able to complete on their own. The more mature learners, those who are most capable to self-direct their own learning will provide structure to the group and guide the process. The more experienced learners will bring knowledge and background information to the task. This grouping also provides an opportunity for social learning, as the more self-directed learners model skills and behaviours for the less ready learners. As well there should be sufficient experience and maturity within the group to allow for successful completion of the task.

Providing a common experience- One way of raising and equalizing the level of experience within the group is to provide the group with a common experience. At a very simply level this could mean reading the same article, watching the same video, or experiencing the same demonstration. At a more complex level the facilitator could involve the learners in an activity that could be de-briefed (an example of this is the wrong hand paper ball too explained earlier in this paper). For learners who lack experience in coaching, this activity gives them a chance to coach in a relatively safe and supportive environment. From the activity the facilitator could de-brief what it felt like to be a coach or what areas the learner felt they needed to enhance their role as a coach. For learners who come with a background in coaching, this activity may allow them to experience what it felt like to be an athlete learning a new skill. “Walking a mile in someone else’s shoes” may develop empathy for the learner when they are fulfilling their role as a coach. When groups come with varying levels of experience, an activity with a common experience may assist in bringing the group together. Sharing an experience “levels the playing field” to a certain extent. This leveling usually lessens the risk felt by the learners, so less experienced learners contribute more often to the discussions of the group. An activity that provides the learners an experience to analyze and an advanced organizer that assists that analysis is an effective technique for guiding the learning of learners at all four levels of readiness.

De-briefing- After the completion of a learning activity, the Learning Facilitator should provide the learners an opportunity to de-brief. Far too often de-briefing takes the form of a summary of the content or skills that have been taught. A de-briefing has the potential to be more than a summary. A de-briefing can be used to access the feelings and reactions of the learners. These feelings and reactions are indicators of levels at which the learners are comfortable working. These feelings and reactions can be beneficial in informing the design of up coming learning activities. A de-briefing can also be beneficial in helping learners understand the process they have been through. By de-briefing the process and making the process overt, it allows the learners to see how they directed their own learning and how others assisted in their learning. The learners become aware of the skills and assets they carry to next learning activity. Also by making the learner aware of how they directed their own learning, it enhances their efficacy as a self-directed learner. De-briefing has the potential to validate the learning process and to motivate the learners to learn more.

Timing of activities- Learning activities at the start of a training should be low risk and emphasize the process. Learning activities at the beginning should provide little chance of judgment or conflict. A good example of this would be a brainstorming activity. Here learners are instructed to “think outside of the box” and that all answers should be recorded. In this type of activity all answers and therefore all learners are seen as equal. Learning activities at the beginning should also emphasize process. Key parts of the process are coaches getting to know one another, modeling a learning process that involves all learners, and developing behaviours (ie: listening, questioning, and waiting your turn to speak) that are necessary for the group to successfully complete the tasks. After completion of tasks early in the training, these critical behaviours can be brought to

the surface through a de-briefing. Early in the training, risk to the learner can be reduced by building learning activities based upon content provided by the coach. Later in the training, as the learners become more comfortable with each other and they become more confident in their skills to direct their own learning, content can be derived from the experiences of the coaches. As the content is being analyzed by the group, the learner who put forth the content will not see analysis and criticism as a personal attack. Near the end of the training, if the group has progressed sufficiently, the Learning Facilitator may want to induce conflict and debate. Conflict and debate are excellent strategies to engage learners emotionally and thoroughly analyzing an issue. It is best to start slow with safe activities. If the facilitator starts with activities that are beyond the maturity and experience of the group, adjustments to the next activities that reduce learner control and are more facilitator centred may be perceived as punitive by the learners. Learners may also perceive they failed at the earlier activity. This perceived sense of failure will negatively affect the learners efficacy. Facilitators should start with learning activities where most learners have the opportunity to succeed and proceed to activities that demand greater learner commitment and self-direction.

Learning environment- The learning environment is extremely important in activity based learning. Learners learn best in a friendly socially interactive and intellectually stimulating environment. Chickering and Gamson (1997) state that: “Learning is enhanced when it is more like a team effort than a solo race. Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated. Working with others often increases involvement in learning. Sharing one’s ideas and responding to the others’ improves thinking and deepens understanding.” This “team like environment” can be fostered by developing:

- Positive interdependence where learners perceive they need each other to successfully complete the task
- Interaction where learners explain, discuss, and teach what they know to the other learners
- Interpersonal skills such as asking questions, active listening, waiting for your turn to speak, problem-solving, and decision-making
- Group processing “savvy” that allows the learners to understand what makes the group successful and what interferes with the group being successful. At the highest levels of group functioning, learners are able to monitor for these items while the group is working on tasks.
- Accountability where members assess the contributions of the members of the group.

The Learning Facilitator guides group members in learning how to work together and how to contribute to one another’s learning. The facilitator does this by providing a structure, tasks, and tools (ie: advanced organizer) that lead the group to develop the skills listed above.

Conclusion:

Successful coaches must solve open-ended multidisciplinary problems, diagnose discrepancies between potential performance and actual performance, and exercise a range of leadership, communication, conflict resolution, and other interpersonal skills required to work effectively as part of a team. Studies have demonstrated that activity based learning facilitates the development of these skills (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 1991)

Activity based learning has the potential to engage the learner and to increase the learner's depth of understanding, without sacrificing breadth of the content. When process and content are aligned, "Alienation gives way to involvement, enjoyment replaces boredom, helplessness turns into a feeling of control, and psychic energy works to reinforce the sense of self, instead of being lost in the service of external goals." (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

The benefits of activity based learning more than compensate for challenges in learning how to implement this type of learning. Facilitators need to learn how to accommodate the various levels of readiness that appear in a training.

Good facilitation matches the learner's level of readiness (maturity and experience) and empowers the learner to progress greater self-direction. Good facilitation is: situational, promotes the long-term development of the learner and develops the competencies and outcomes outlined by the Nccp.

**Students learn what they care about and remember what they understand.
- Ericksen, 1984**

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