



## Coaching children and young people in the UK - current state of affairs 400 days away from London 2012

### *Entrenando niños y jóvenes en Reino Unido - Estado actual a 400 días de Londres 2012*

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#### ABSTRACT

On July 6<sup>th</sup> 2005 London was awarded the 2012 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Singapore. The promise of building a successful legacy for children and young people around the London Games (Our Promise for 2012, DCMS, 2007) was highly influential in swaying the votes of the members of the International Olympic Committee towards the UK's capital. In the years following the announcement, an unprecedented level of investment has been put into creating such legacy. Within this climate, coaching, and specifically the coaching of children and young people, has come to the fore as a key component of the system that will deliver on the legacy promise. In fact, in many cases, coaching has been the catalyst for systemic change in sport. As the leading national coaching agency, sports coach UK, has played a pivotal part in this process. The UK Coaching Framework (sports coach UK, 2008) established the direction of travel. Recently, sports coach UK has led an industry-wide group in the development of a Coaching Children Action Plan for the period 2010-2013 (Lara-Bercial and Fisher, 2010). With less than 15 months to the start of the London Games, coaching continues to play a big part in the delivery of the promise made by the London bid team in Singapore. The creation of a Coaching Children Curriculum (Haskins, Jolly and Lara-Bercial, 2011) has accelerated this development for a high number of sports. After a recent change of government, however, and deeply rooted in a global recession, there remain a number of key challenges.

Key words: coaching children, children sport, coaching curriculum, specialist coaches.

## RESUMEN

El 6 de Julio de 2005, en la ciudad de Singapur, Londres fue designada sede de los juegos olímpicos y paralímpicos de 2012. La promesa de desarrollar programas de actividad física adecuados para los niños y jóvenes con relación a los juegos olímpicos de Londres 2012 (nuestra promesa para 2012, DCMS, 2007) tuvo una influencia crucial para convencer a los miembros del tribunal que otorguen sus votos a Londres. En los años siguientes las inversiones destinadas para crear una esta estructura que deje un legado para los niños y jóvenes ha sido significativamente mayor que en los años anteriores. En este contexto, el entrenamiento y especialmente el entrenamiento con niños y jóvenes, ha pasado a ser un componente esencial para cumplir con las promesas realizadas. De hecho, en muchos casos, el entrenamiento ha sido el catalizador de muchos cambios en la práctica deportiva. Debido a esto, la Agencia Nacional de "Coaching" Sports Coach UK, ha jugado un papel fundamental en este proceso. En el área del entrenamiento, el Reino Unido (Sport Coach UK, 2008) ha establecido los pasos a seguir. Recientemente Sport coach UK ha liderado un grupo para desarrollar acciones de mejor de los planes de entrenamiento con niños durante el periodo 2010-2013 (Lara-Bercial and Fisher, 2010). A menos de 15 meses de comenzar los juegos olímpicos de Londres, las estrategias de entrenamiento con niños siguen siendo una parte esencial para cumplir la promesa realizada en Singapur. La creación de un curriculum para entrenar a los niños (Haskins, Jolly and Lara-Bercial, 2011) ha acelerado su desarrollo en una gran cantidad de deportes. Sin embargo luego del reciente cambio de gobierno y la recesión global, quedan ciertos desafíos claves por superar.

Palabras clave: entrenamiento con niños, deporte de niños, formación entrenadores, entrenadores especializados.

## INTRODUCTION

It is less than 400 days before the light of the Olympic Flame will illuminate the London sky in what will be, without a doubt, the biggest sporting event that has ever taken place on UK soil. On July the 6<sup>th</sup> 2005, the city of London was awarded the games of the XXX Olympiad in a very emotional ceremony in Singapore. The promise of building a successful legacy for children and young people around the London Games (Our Promise for 2012, DCMS, 2007) was highly influential in swaying the votes of the members of the International Olympic Committee towards the UK's capital. The legacy promise revolved around five areas:

1. Making the UK a world-leading sporting nation
2. Transforming the heart of East London
3. Inspiring a generation of Young People to take part in local volunteering, cultural and physical activity
4. Making the Olympic Park a blueprint for sustainable living
5. Demonstrate the UK is a creative, inclusive and welcoming place to live, visit and for business

The coaching of children (0-12 year olds) and young people (12-18) is clearly linked to points 1 and 3 of the Legacy Promise and, in the years following the Singapore announcement, an unprecedented level of investment has been put into developing the infrastructure and resource to make it a reality.

## The sporting landscape in the UK

In order to understand the needs of Children's Coaching in the UK, it is important to comprehend the current sporting landscape and its peculiarities. Three organizations play a lead role in the development and delivery of sport in the UK



Figure 1. The UK's sporting landscape

UK Sport are the strategic lead body for high performance sport in the UK (UK Sport in a Nutshell, 2010). It invests in Britain's best Olympic and Paralympic sports and athletes to maximise their chances of success on the world stage. According to their man-

date, UK Sport have no direct responsibility over the promotion or support of grass-roots sport.

The Home Country Sport Councils have dual responsibility to develop and sustain sport participation and performance from grass-roots up to the levels immediately below professional and high performance sport. For instance, Sport England's strategy for the period 2008-2011 (Grow, Sustain, Excel: Sport England Strategy 2008-2011, 2008) concentrates on three main areas, namely: Grow (increasing participation across the board); Sustain (ensure that those engaged in sport continue to be engaged over time); Excel (provision of pathways and opportunities for the more talented to progress towards the high performance echelons of sport).

The Youth Sport Trust have a remit of creating a world-leading PE and sport system that reaches, inspires and engages all young people – whatever their age or ability ([www.youthsporttrust.org](http://www.youthsporttrust.org)). Their focus is on supporting children and young people of school age to access high quality sport and physical activity in out of school hour activities (i.e. breakfast, lunch time and after school clubs)

Within the current global economic downturn, and as result of the UK Government's Comprehensive Spending Review (Comprehensive Spending Review, 2010), a merger between UK Sport and Sport England has been approved and will take place after the 2012 Olympic Games in April 2013. This amalgamation of the two organisations is aimed at making efficiency savings, but also, and most importantly, at resolving some of the issues created by the apparent disconnect existing between grass-roots and high performance and elite sport.

It is currently unclear the role and position that the Youth Sport Trust and school sport will have within the future schema.

### Investment in Sport in the UK

Over the past ten years, and more so since the Olympic announcement back in 2005, unprecedented levels of investment have been made into increasing participation in sport in the UK. This investment has mainly taken place in two separate ways:

- On the one hand, the school sport received in excess of 1 billion pounds to guarantee each child in primary and secondary school at least 5 hours of High Quality Physical Education and Sport through the implementation of the The National Physical Education, School Sport and Club Link (Department for Education, 2003) and The National Physical Education and Sport Strategy for Young People (Department for Education, 2008)

strategies. The evidence supporting the value and significant achievements of these programmes is somewhat inconclusive (Gove, 2010). Funding for this initiative has been recently stopped. One of the biggest points of criticism made of the PESSYP strategy is the lack of participation in competitive sport, which the new coalition government aims to tackle with the introduction of the Olympic-style School Sport Competition (Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2010)

- On the other hand, the Home Country Sport Councils have directly funded governing bodies of sport to produce whole-sport plans for the period 2009-2013 to increase participation figures across the whole of the UK's population. The results of the Active People Survey 5 (APS5, Sport England, 2011) show a disappointing trend of sports failing to meet their adult participation targets. As a result of this, a number of sports have been deprived of their funding going forward.

Coaching has been identified as one of the instrumental elements of the system to support the development of targeted interventions that address the aforementioned predicament.

### The role of sports coach UK in the UK's sporting landscape

Sports coach UK is the national lead agency for coaching in the UK. Its vision and mission are stated below.

**Vision:** UK Coaching Excellence enabling children, players and athletes to follow their dreams, have fun and realise their potential.

**Mission:** To support our UK partners to recruit, develop and retain coaches to achieve their participation and performance goals (in the context of The UK Coaching Framework).

In order to achieve its mission, sports coach UK works with a number of national and regional partners, some of which are listed below:

- Home Country Sport Councils: Sport England, sportswales, sportscotland, and Sport Northern Ireland
- 46 National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs)
- 49 County Sport Partnerships (CSPs)
- The Youth Sport Trust (YST)
- The Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU)

- The Association for Physical Education (afPE)
- UK Sport

To inform the development of a world-class UK Coaching System, sports coach UK developed the UK Coaching Framework back in 2008 (The UK Coaching Framework, sports coach UK, 2008). The UK Coaching Framework laid out plans for the development of a cohesive, ethical, inclusive and valued coaching system where skilled coaches support participants at each stage of their development.

### The Participant-Centred Coaching Approach

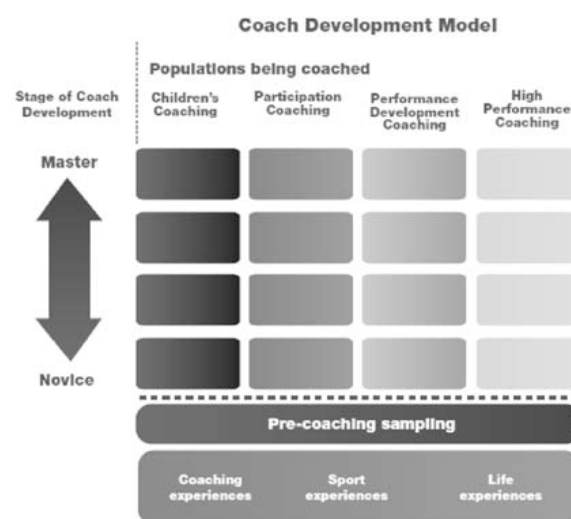
Key to The Framework is the centrality of the participant within the coaching system. In other words, there are coaches because there are people that take part in sport and physical activity. It is the specific needs and wants of each participant that coaches must fulfill as part of their day-to-day coaching practice.



**Figure 2. The relationship between the participant and the coach (The UK Coaching Framework, sports coach UK, 2008).**

It is clear then that a 'one size fits all' approach to coaching and coach development will not meet the needs of all participants. Different participant populations have different needs and wants; therefore coaches will have to be equipped with different knowledge, skills and attributes to be able to fulfill the needs of the specific populations they work with and the individual participants within such groups.

Based on the above, sports coach UK has identified 4 main typologies of coaches.



**Figure 3. sports coach UK's Coach Development Model (The UK Coaching Framework, sports coach UK, 2008).**

Initially, coaches of children and coaches of high performance athletes and players were identified as key priorities in the development of a skilled and qualified coaching workforce in the UK.

### The Coaching Children Action Plan 2010-2013

In 2010, sports coach UK, in consultation with industry partners such as the Youth Sport Trust, the Association for Physical Education, the Child Protection in Sport Unit, Home Country Sport Councils and a wide array of coach deployers and employers, developed the *Coaching Children Action Plan 2010-2013* (Lara-Bercial and Fisher, sports coach UK, 2010). In line with sports coach UK's overall strategy (sports coach UK Strategy, 2010-2013), the children's action plan covered four key areas: defining the landscape, coach recruitment, coach development and coach retention. One of the key priorities identified in the coach development section of the plan was the creation of a curriculum for children's coaches.

### The Coaching Children Curriculum

The development of a Coaching Children Curriculum (CCC) (Lara-Bercial, Jolly and Haskins for sports coach UK, 2011) was identified as a priority to start addressing the need to offer a differentiated service to different participant populations and a different educational route to those coaches working with a specific set of participants, in this case, children. Reasons to emphasise the strategic importance of children's coaching include:

- Early experiences of sport have been shown to greatly influence an individual's future involvement and engagement (Bailey et al., 2010)
- The development of Fundamental Movement Skills early in childhood has a significant effect in the level and quality of physical competence attained in maturity (Ratey and Hagerman, 2008)
- sport has been identified as a very important vehicle for the development of skills in children that go beyond the track, pitch or gym (ie social, personal and interpersonal skills, self-confidence, self-worth, community cohesion, healthy lifestyles etc) (Gould and Carson, 2008)
- Nearly 80% of coaches in the UK coach children (North, 2009)

It is important to note that the CCC is not a regulatory framework, but a blueprint for governing bodies of sport to base the development of training opportunities for the coaching children workforce. In that sense, it is intended as a guideline, not a straight jacket. It is also envisaged as a live document that will continue to evolve in light of new research findings, and following consolidation of best practice in the field. It provides governing bodies of sport with the most up-to-date knowledge and understanding of the generic needs of children in and through sport. As aforementioned, the adoption and application of the CCC will, overtime, lead to the development of a specialist workforce to ensure children across the UK follow their dreams, have fun and realise their potential in and through sport.

It is hoped that the enhanced awareness gained from the contextualisation and application of this curriculum to specific sports could also highlight the need for certain systemic and cultural changes (eg competition formats, talent identification systems, age groupings, etc).

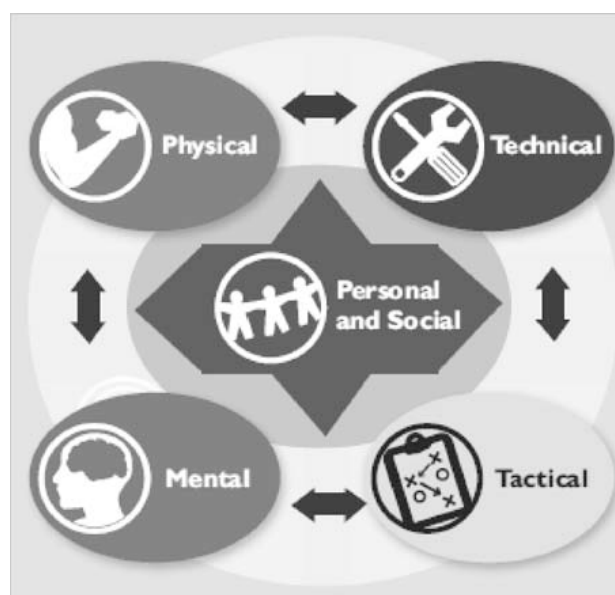
In sum, the Coaching Children Curriculum allows the different governing bodies of sport

- Understand the specific needs of the children that take part in their sport
- Evaluate the appropriateness of their current children's coaching workforce against current and future needs
- Identify key areas of development for their coaching system and coaching workforce
- Develop needs-led training opportunities for coaches and coach developers to strengthen and/or address key areas of development
- Provide children's coaches with a clear and inspirational and aspirational picture of what an effective children's coach looks like and kick-start a culture of continuous improvement, leading to a raised profile for children's coaches

- Support clubs, schools, parents, carers and others in the children's circle of influence to understand:
  - The wider benefits of sport for their children
  - How coaches are trying to enhance the quality and outputs of their children's involvement in sport.

### Overarching Philosophy: Coaching the Whole Child

The CCC is deeply rooted in the belief that sport, particularly at a younger age, has a much bigger role to play than just improving people's physical, technical tactical and mental skills. This is not to say that such skills are not important or that they should be put to one side to benefit the less tangible 'personal and social' development of the participants. On the contrary, the Coaching the Whole Child philosophy seeks to maximise the gains from developing those areas traditionally linked to sports coaching and use them as a vehicle to drive the personal and social development of the participants. The two areas are inextricably linked as opposed to mutually exclusive.



**Figure 4. The Holistic Coaching Model (Coaching Children Curriculum, sport coach UK, 2011)**

In a nutshell, the Coaching the Whole Child philosophy offers a holistic solution to the widely accepted view, held by the broader coaching community, that has tended to prioritise coaching outcomes directly related to sport (physical and technical improvement) and look at other areas, such as personal and social development, as peripheral to sport participation. Any



gains in the latter would be achieved as a consequence of good coaching, but would never be an explicit outcome for coaching or something coaches would have to plan for. We believe this limited understanding of coaching is selling sport extremely short. It is like saying that children only go to school to learn about maths and biology, not to become all-round better people and fully contributing members of society in the future.

In light of the above, the CCC offers a new definition of effective coaching based on the work of Jean Côté and Wade Gilbert (2009):

*Effective coaching is the integrated application of different knowledge bases (professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal) to fulfill the multiple outcomes and varying needs of all participants within a specific context.*

Within this definition, it is then necessary to understand both sides of the equation; eg:

- The 'multiple outcomes and varying needs of all participants within a specific context' would be the Participant Capabilities; in this particular case, the 'Children's Capabilities'
- 'Professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge' refers to the coach's knowledge domains and associated Coach Capabilities that, when applied in an integrated manner, allow coaches to fulfill their role.

### Children's Capabilities

Within the Coaching the Whole Child philosophy, children are able to develop a wide number of capabilities through their participation in sport; ie physical, technical, tactical and mental (PTTM) capabilities, as well as personal and social development (Duffy et al, 2008; Haskins, 2010).

### PTTM capabilities

Traditionally, it has been fairly straightforward to identify children's competencies and capabilities that sit within the PTTM structure, as outlined in the table below.

### Personal and social capabilities

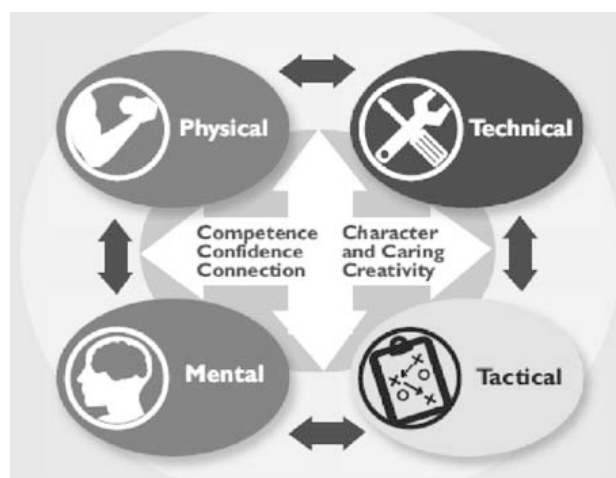
On the other hand, pinpointing the discrete areas of development that form the personal and social domain has been challenging. In an attempt to solve this dilemma, sports coach UK has drawn from current research into Positive Youth Development (Lerner et al, 2005) to provide a framework that clearly outlines the distinct outcomes and underpinning capabilities that form the core of personal and social development.

**Table 1. Capabilities**

<b>Physical</b>	Capabilities directly related to the development of the child and his or her bodily dimensions (eg fundamental movement skills, core strength and development of the different energy systems).
<b>Technical</b>	Techniques and skills required as a foundation or core competence for the game/event.  Particularly at a younger age, the development of these techniques is inextricably linked to and underpinned by the physical development of the child.  Inevitably, fundamental movement skills must be seen as the precursor to sport-specific Skills and paid special attention (eg a tennis serve combines the fundamental movement skills of throwing and striking).
<b>Tactical</b>	Knowing 'how to' play the game by being able to solve tactical challenges in live situations, through skilful application of core techniques, in order to maximise the chances of individual and/or group success (eg a player deciding to make a run into space in football or bat towards a particular area in cricket, applying the correct technique in a competent way to be able to perform the action).
<b>Mental</b>	Having the appropriate cognitive skills to support the learning and performing of physical, technical and tactical challenges (eg the ability to focus, a longer concentration span, decision-making skills, planning, organising, self-management etc).

Positive Youth Development researchers state that children and young people who score higher in the areas of competence, confidence, connection, character and caring thrive in comparison to their peers and make a more successful transition from childhood to adolescence and adulthood on their way to becoming fully contributing members of society.

Sports coach UK has adapted this research to sport and developed what is commonly known as the '5Cs for Coaching'.



**Figure 5. Adapted model of coaching to show the position of the 5 Cs (Coaching Children Curriculum, sport coach UK, 2011)**

The following table defines each of the 5Cs and how they can be applied to sports coaching.

**Table 2. 5 Cs. Definitions and application**

Competence	A positive view of one's actions with appropriate capability.  In sport this is achieved through the provision of carefully planned, developmentally appropriate activities, including PTM and psycho-social competence
Confidence	Having an internal sense of overall self-worth (eg 'I am OK; you are OK') and self-efficacy (eg 'I can do things').  This is promoted in sport through exposure to appropriate levels of success (internally referenced) in realistic individual and/or group challenges that build up learning strategies, overall resilience levels and the ability to cope with failure.  All of the above must be done in an environment that stresses personal improvement and values effort and persistence over outcomes and results.
Connection	Building positive bonds with people and institutions, resulting in effective and mutually beneficial relationships between the individual, others and the environment.  In sport this is achieved through the opportunity to work with and help others, be part of a group and understanding the benefits of sport participation.
Character and Caring	Exercising respect for societal and cultural rules, possessing standards for correct behaviours, a sense of right and wrong and a sense of sympathy and empathy for others.  Sport participation supports these developments when it takes place in an environment that respects participants, coaches, officials, parents and the rules of the sport.
Creativity	Finding one's own solutions to problems.  Sport is ideally placed to promote this outcome by putting children in situations where they have to think for themselves and understand things in order to learn rather than copying and repeating.

### Fitting it all together

In sport, the development of the 5Cs and their underpinning capabilities is linked to the development of the PTM areas in a mutually inclusive way (see Figure 5 above).

Moreover, these capabilities are not developed in isolation and Table 3 below shows examples of how the various areas interact and support each other's

growth. It also helps bring the 5Cs concept to life and shows how coaches can contribute to the achievement of multiple outcomes for participants. For example, a coach can increase children's physical capabilities and, at the same time, develop creativity by running physical challenges in a problem-solving environment (see area highlighted in yellow).

**Table 3. Interaction between PTM capabilities and the 5 Cs**

	Competence	Confidence	Connection	Character and Caring	Creativity
The Coach may...					
Physical	Use developmentally appropriate content for the sessions	Show how participants are developing physically	Allow participants to work with others	Ensure participants learn why and how to respect their own bodies	Run physical challenges in a problem-solving environment
Technical	Use coaching skills appropriate to the development stage of the child	Provide good explanations and high achievement rate	Encourage participants to give feedback to each other	Develop participants to be able to practise for extended periods and understand why	Allow room for individual approaches to technical skill development
Tactical	Develop tactical awareness alongside technical skills	Ensure tactical demands are understood and the necessary skill level is established	Support participant understanding of roles and importance of others	Help participants to appreciate how different positions/activities contribute to the overall outcome and accept their role	Support young people as they create their own tactical solutions to problems
Mental	Promote a strong focus on the task at hand	Provide good evaluative feedback and an understanding of failure and learning	Work in an appropriate format and numbers for ability and social capacity	Allow participants to explain and accept codes and rules	Set appropriate open tasks that support cognitive development

### Coach Capabilities

In order for coaches to support the wider development of children in and through sport, they will need to be in possession of certain knowledge, skills and attributes that will render them fit for purpose and able to do the job. These are known as Coach Capabilities.

It is important to note that coach capabilities:

- develop along a continuum of status from emerging through to established and embedded (expert).
- develop independently and at different rates based on the prior knowledge and experiences of the coach (eg a coach may be an expert in one area, but only of emerging status in another).
- are generic, broad statements and, while useful, will need to be contextualised to specific environments and sports to achieve their full meaning.
- need to be applied in an integrated, blended way in order to lead to successful coaching that meets participants' needs. This ability to integrate different coaching capabilities is a capability in itself.

### Coach Capability Classification

In line with the aforementioned definition of coaching effectiveness, sports coach UK have proposed a classification of coach capabilities based around three knowledge domains.

### Applications of the CCC

Since its publication in April 2011, sports coach UK's CCC has affected a considerable impact on the way in which governing bodies of sport in the UK think about the development of their coaching workforce. There is now an ever increasing number of sports that have identified the need to create a specialist children's workforce to meet the demands of this very specific population of participants. As anticipated by sports coach UK, the application of the principles of the CCC varies from sport to sport and so does the solutions generated to create a fit-for-purpose critical mass of specialist children's coaches.

A number of governing bodies have opted for a full review of their current qualifications at level 1 and level 2 to contextualize them to children. This is the case of sports like Rugby Football Union and Rugby Football League. Meanwhile, other federations such as British Cycling and England Netball, have opted for the creation of continuous professional development modules delivered as a bolt on to generic qualifications. Whichever the implementation model, the ideas and principles presented in the CCC pervade and inform this work.

### REMAINING CHALLENGES AND CONCLUSION

The CCC has arrived on the scene at a time of tremendous uncertainty around the future of sport in the UK. Funding cuts as a result of the global economic

**Table 4. Classification of coach capabilities**

Knowledge Domains				
Professional (The participant and the sport)		Interpersonal (‘Doing’ coaching)		Intrapersonal (The coach)
Capability Categories and High Level Descriptors				
The participant:	The sport:	The context:	The craft:	The self:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Knowledge of participant development</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Knowledge of the sport</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Knowledge of the environment in which the sport takes places and the purpose of the activity in relation to participant outcomes and implications to coaching practice</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Knowledge related to the planning, doing and reviewing of coaching practice</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Knowledge of the self as a developing and effective coach</li></ul>

Coaches will need to apply these capabilities in an integrated manner to fulfill the needs of participants at each stage of their development. For a more detailed discussion of how this may happen please refer to the original curriculum document (Haskins, Jolly and Lara-Bercial, 2011).

crisis coupled with uncertainty about levels of investment into sport post London 2012 make it ever more important that sport is able to show added value that goes beyond ‘skills and drills’ (Lara-Bercial, 2011). The obesity epidemic and ever more sedentary habits of today's youth (Jackson-Leach and Lobstein, 2006), the



lack of engagement in sport by children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (de Giorgio et al, 2011), the non-existence of specialist Physical Education teachers in the majority of primary schools in the UK and a high rate of sport drop-out in the teenage years (Allender et al, 2006) makes for a less than ideal starting point. If we are to ensure that children and young people stay in sport with all its associated benefits, it is compulsory that their experiences in and through sport and physical activity are of the highest possible quality. Only a specially trained new breed of children's coaches will be able to achieve this

positive outcome and the numerous related benefits to society and sport alike. This paper has looked at how a specialist curriculum for coaches of children in the UK, deeply rooted in the positive youth development psychology school of thought, has started to make inroads towards the consecution of these objectives. Keeping the child at the core of the coaching interaction and working towards the development of tailored training opportunities for coaches working with children is starting to render a new landscape amongst a growing number of governing bodies of sport in the UK.

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