The application of the concepts of deliberate practice to coaching sport can have a positive and significant impact on performance, skill acquisition and learning. There is a significant amount of literature and research in this area – *The Talent Code* by Daniel Coyle, *Peak* by Anders Ericsson, and *The Two-Second Advantage* by Vivek Ranadivé and Kevin Maney are really useful sources of information. The question for me, however, is ‘What does it look like in practice?’ How can I transfer all this knowledge into applied practice? And so I decided to design planning guidelines as a reference point to influence and shape coaching sessions. These came down to nine critical areas that emerged as key themes for improving performance through deliberate practice.

The following infographic aims to recognise those themes and detail the context in which they are applied.

The session is designed so that it encourages **commitment** from the players to work at an **intensity** where they are challenged, stretched and pushed to the fringes and beyond their comfort zone. If there was a setback or failure, they would be eager to correct their mistakes. But in demanding this, I always seek to ensure that the session is engaging and appealing. How can we expect these outcomes from our players if these are absent in the sessions that are planned? Don’t go through the motions because that can be infectious for all!

If we work on footwork, balance and agility then provide the context – ‘**situational probability**’ (the likelihood of these skills being required in the game situation is high). Therefore, as a performer, when they **reflect** on the training they have undertaken, they feel more **comfortable** in the performance environment because it replicated the match conditions as closely as possible. It always had purpose and relevance. There were ‘**decision-rich**’ **environments** created where, through small-sided games, players were actively involved in problem-solving activities.

Essential though was not just the provision of games, but the desire to be **accurate** in the movement skills we coached: ‘Is that good enough yet? Are we now ready to move on?’ What are the details in those movements that could be improved on, and importantly, which are recognised by the group?
Seek the answers from them with some guidance from the coach: ‘How can we improve the jump? What are the key aspects we are looking for? Which one aspect can you go away and practise to get better, and what will you use to regulate those performances?’ To encourage players to ‘own’ the learning is a very powerful coaching method with this approach to reflective practice.

This is the narrative for the session plan, and one I have found that acknowledges and applies those deliberate practice themes. I am currently working on the delivery of fundamental movement skills through play and storytelling activities using this template.

So what about performance measures? Well, the pirates are much better at fencing, and can use both hands, move swiftly across the deck in stormy seas and, when they do reach Treasure Island, easily evade the octopus when they get to shore. But this story is for another day!

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