

Learning from Learners' Learning

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When attending coaching courses, or completing a formal qualification, there's generally someone else nudging us to learn new things. We've got to try things out in practice and maybe even do things that we'd prefer we didn't have to – to help us develop as a coach but also, so we meet the demands of the qualification.

But what happens when the course is over? More often than not we go back to the comfort of our own club or setting, and do what we did before (but hopefully somewhat better, with a greater depth of knowledge and application). But certainly in the **safe surroundings we're used to.**

However, consider the demands we place on players (and students) – the expectation that they should be hungry to learn, willing to take risks and find ways to challenge themselves to get better – **do we actually address our own ongoing development as a coach in the same way?**

I'm a firm believer in practicing what you preach – whether that's as a coach working with players or a teacher working with student-coaches. When we watch these students coach, what do we want it to look like, feel like, sound like - and how can I model that in every session in my teaching with them, whether that's on the pitch or in the classroom?

Because if I don't approach teaching them in that way, am I really in a position to comment on a student-coach's autocratic delivery style, or to challenge their attempts to engage players in their session if in my own teaching of these students I've paid little attention to those same points!?

As you can imagine, it certainly doesn't always go to plan, but the intention to respect them, engage them and connect with their 'why' is omnipresent. And whether it's gone well or badly, I'll always reflect on why.

I'm incredibly grateful for these interactions with students-coaches. **It continually challenges me to consider my practice and reflect on what works and why.**

And then there are the **light bulb moments** – when it clicks and makes sense; when they find a different solution to a problem; when they realise that the answer isn't black or white, and there's not necessarily a 'right way' of doing something; when they begin to question their beliefs and assumptions and what that means for them as a coach.

These are great for the students, but **equally are great learning opportunities for me as a coach / teacher to unpack the learning** environment and see what role it may (or may not) have played in these important moments.

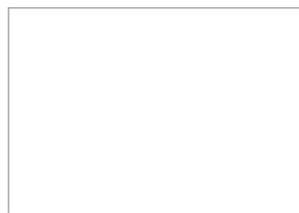
So recently, when a number of students share that they've begun to have a shift in their thinking, and are starting to **really question what coaching means to them, resulting in changes in how they coach** – I definitely want to understand the contributing factors to this to hopefully make it happen more often!

In this instance, an important trigger appeared to be a recent assessment activity. An assessment that many of them expressed that they didn't want to do, yet resulted in the students gaining valuable insights for developing their coaching. In essence it encouraged students to do the following things:

- **step outside of your comfort zone**

- collaborate: support each other
- collaborate: innovate together
- be brave – try new approaches
- be curious - question why things worked, didn't work, why you do things the way you do
- challenge assumptions
- celebrate new insights

Gary Klein discusses how performance improvement happens by decreasing errors and increasing insights – the **light bulb moments**. He did a great TEDtalk on insights and how to increase the likelihood of insights occurring (**watch it here**). Reflecting on this recent assessment, it sits nicely with some of his advice, potentially enabling students to have more insights in to what worked and why.



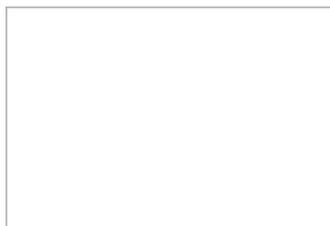
So, thinking back to my own ongoing development as a coach (and teacher), **what can I learn from this?**

Klein's advice centred around being **curious and challenging assumptions**. Well, I'm certainly curious and reflective – and although I probably spend way too much time thinking about all sorts, this undoubtedly informs my coaching. In fact, in the process of writing this post I've started to question my understanding and application of a framework which I frequently use...

Similarly, I definitely feel the benefit of collaborating and taking time to talk with colleagues and other coaches – this community of practice type approach is really beneficial with sense making, innovating and challenging assumptions – but would be better if it happened more often.

However, one part of the students' experience that I don't think Klein's talk highlights is willingness to put yourself outside of your comfort zone – **to take risks which might challenge or even scare you**, but may bring about a different way of seeing things or new insights. I think the change of environment was key in kick starting the process. I'm not sure how often I put myself in a new context with my coaching or teaching which takes me out of my comfort zone... something to consider.

And finally, I love the notion of **celebrating new insights**, even if its just a little smile to myself to acknowledge that my thinking is evolving



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