

Appendix 5.4: Learning to Play and Practise (approximately 8-12 years old) - Developing Skill and Understanding

The Big Picture

What is it about?

This stage involves the provision of appropriate, **fun** opportunities for participants to learn to **play and practise a wide range of different sports, activities and skills** in the later years of primary school. The focus is on **sampling** a range of sports and developing **foundational sports skills**. It continues to build participant **competence and confidence** and capitalises on the more **refined cognitive ability** of children.

Why is it important?

During this stage, children acquire more **sophisticated cognitive skills** and go through a period of **steady and slow growth**. This combination makes an ideal ground to enhance their **foundational technical and tactical skills** (both generic and sport-specific) while continuing to nurture their **love and enjoyment** of sport, per se.

What does it look like in practice for coaches and coach developers?

During this stage, children enjoy being active and using their **creativity and imagination** in physical activity. They learn new skills, find out how to use them in different ways and link them to make **actions, phrases and sequences of movement**. They **enjoy communicating, collaborating and competing** with each other and develop an **understanding of how to succeed** in different activities and evaluate and recognise their own success.

It's all about...



Figure 10: Learning to Play and Practise: The big picture

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The Detail - The What

Table 12: Children's capabilities for the Learning to Play and Practise stage

Learning to Play and Practise		
 Personal and Social: The 5Cs for Coaching (Coaching the Whole Child)		
Children should be:		
Competence		developing physical, technical, tactical skills by being involved in a variety of more structured activities (eg different types of games; simple running, jumping, throwing activities; making up gymnastic sequences)
Confidence		- developing mentally by showing optimistic perceptions of their own physical ability in a mastery/effort-orientated environment - taking responsibility for their achievements and improvement - experiencing a high level of success through the careful provision of differentiated activities - consistently coping with failure in a positive way (by learning from it). As before, the focus should be on effort and personal improvement
Connection		- demonstrating empathy, sensitivity and friendship skills - regularly engaging in physical play, with different social groups of different sizes (eg simple games of 2v2, 3v3) - choosing independently to join out-of-school-hours clubs - going with parents to outside clubs and beginning to take roles in teams and squads - explaining the benefits of regular exercise and how it can be undertaken safely
Character and caring		- understanding simple rules for specific activities and developing their own criteria for judging performance - developing wider understanding of fair play and why cheating harms activity
Creativity		- allowed to experiment in all practical situations as well as continue to play freely as much as possible - confident, supported and reassured when asked to make decisions or solve problems by themselves.

Table 12: Children's capabilities for the Learning to Play and Practise stage (continued)

 Physical	 Technical	 Tactical	 Mental
Children should be:			
confident and competent with basic and complex agility, balance and coordination activities	modifying basic skills to meet specific needs (eg tactical challenges in games or specific sports) and broadening their skill base	performing in modified sports with modified rules and scoring systems (eg games that resemble adult versions, like mini-basketball)	confident when active and showing a positive commitment to quality control
learning about speed and its uses and practising how to gain speed in different ways	showing quality with specific techniques/skills even when excited or competing	showing a basic understanding of force, space and time to develop more sophisticated tactics	setting simple goals and also beginning to use positive self-talk
able to demonstrate a wide range of movement and mobility in different directions (eg backwards, sideways) and different ways (eg hopping, skipping, running)	getting into a routine of practice as frequently as appropriate and necessary	- performing tactical challenges to shape technical work and working on skill development to service the game - making tactical choices based on their own and others' attributes	- able to combine basic skills efficiently - scanning and making decisions based on the information available - mastering object control in different environments
beginning to build the engine: initial development and use of strength, power, endurance and speed.	introduced to appropriate levels of competition.	refining attention to sensory input (eg auditory, visual and/or proprioceptive cues appearing at faster rates).	- showing mastery orientation and differentiating between ability and effort - recognising and using others' strengths and weaknesses.

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Table 12: Children’s capabilities for the Learning to Play and Practise stage (continued)

Physical and technical capabilities are inextricably linked in children. At an early age, technique is the manifestation of basic physical capabilities. As children grow and mature, more complex techniques can be learned and, in turn, sport-specific skills can be developed and refined (eg a simple batting action in cricket requires the child to have good balance and coordination before the actual technique can be considered).		Mental and tactical capabilities are similarly linked in children as basic tactical awareness arises from the development of mental capabilities. Children progress from a 'self-focused' to a 'social state', through an understanding of 'cause and effect' and making distinctions between the present and possible futures, based on the decisions they make (eg attacking space in a team sport requires the child to have an awareness of others and the ability to anticipate what others may do).
	Technical and tactical capabilities are also linked. At a certain point, the complexity of the skill necessary to solve a more advanced tactical challenge can be a limiting factor and will need to be taken into account. Tactical development then becomes the drive for technical development, and skills become techniques in context (eg a child tennis player might understand that causing his or her opponent to move from one side of the court to the other will result in success make them more successful, but may not have the technical proficiency required to do this).	

Top Tips

During the Learning to Play and Practice stage, coaches should generally be:

- working with small groups of children
- transferring physical competence in balance, coordination and movement into sport-specific activities
- building on good practice in high quality physical education
- allowing children to sample different sports in all sporting environments
- giving children access to Multi-skill Clubs and academies
- offering children the chance to practise and be successful, while starting to understand and cope with failure
- allowing children to input into the session content and to make changes to practices
- ensuring all children are able to approach activities with confidence by adapting practices for some children; ie providing the right level of challenge for the children, with an emphasis on effort over outcome and achieving personal bests
- structuring activities so children have to work in teams and respond appropriately
- encouraging children to talk about, evaluate and suggest improvements to their performance
- helping children use sport-specific skills in appropriate activities, games and competitions
- developing performance through structured but relaxed competitive situations
- helping children learn some simple rules of activities and how these affect fair play and sportsmanship
- getting children to talk about the benefits of exercise and eating, drinking and resting properly
- helping children learn where and how they can safely practise their sport.

Reference

DfEE (2000) *The National Curriculum Handbook for primary teachers in England: Key stages 1 and 2*, London: The Stationery Office Books. ISBN: 978-0-113700-66-0.