

THE MIND...

Learning with the three Cs

Coaches must understand that confidence, curiosity and creativity are the basic principles that underpin all learning



John Morrison

SOME years back I had the pleasure of seeing the workings of the Ulster Rugby Academy at first hand and likewise, on the days when I was over with Leicester Tigers.

I was also interested to talk with Jason McGahan, managing director of Setanta Sports here in Armagh and he detailed his involvement with the Munster Rugby Academy whilst completing his Masters degree in sports science in Limerick University.

These insights help me with my current involvement as a member of the coaching staff of the Armagh GAA Academy, recently set up by Paul Grimley and overseen by Paul McGrane and Denis Hollywood. As well as Paul other members of the 2002 All-Ireland winning team involved as coaches include Oisín McConville, Diarmuid Marsden, Paddy McKeever, Brendan Tierney, Tony and John McEntee, Steven McDonnell, Cathal O'Rourke and John Toal.

All of these academies include elements of theory, research and scholarship and are based on the promotion of an innovative mindset. Their aim is to help players and teams bring great ideas to life in their sport.

Armagh, like all counties, continually focus or need to focus on innovation to rebalance and grow their team and sport. Why? The evidence is clear - innovative individuals, coaches and business men are successful. An innovative team is one that has innovative people/players.

Innovation, or the tools to survive and become better, we are all born with. The characteristics of a two-year-old child are confidence and curiosity. By four other positive emotional characteristics such as love and warmth, appreciation and gratitude, determination, flexibility, cheerfulness, vitality, contribution and excitement and passion are apparent.

Born, also with a high self-esteem and the ability to ask questions - the basis of discovery learning through understanding, we have the capacity to be creative.

Thus confidence, curiosity and creativity - the Three Cs - underpin all learning even in these sporting academies.

Are our young players reaching adulthood with these characteristics? Sadly not it would seem. 94 per cent of children, it is reckoned, have a huge self-esteem which reduces to 5% by the age of 18. Reason? Well, by age 12, it is reckoned, children have heard 100,000 negative feedbacks or put downs. Thus many of the innovative qualities for life are destroyed by others as children grow.

Questioning stops, curiosity becoming copying, creative thinking is replaced by waiting for the answer to be given.

Our coaching systems need to innovate, to implement root and branch change if full potential is to be reached. Much current coaching tells players what to do rather than facilitate a creative thinking and discovery learning approach.

Telling doesn't work. It breeds shallow learning. Children don't remember what you tell them, they do remember how you made them feel.

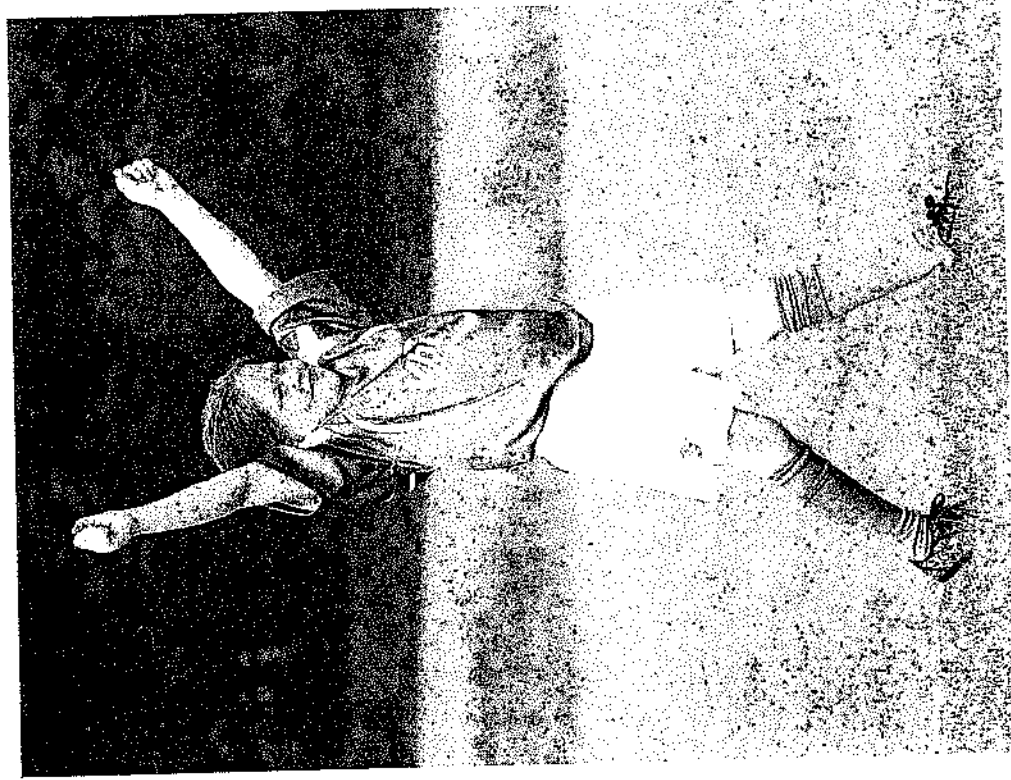
As coaches our highest ambitions must be to develop independent players who can in part by themselves purpose and direction to their game/sport and life. The need for imagination, a sense of truth and a feeling of responsibility are three forces which cultivate commitment and an invincible attitude in players.

As coaches, we must believe we can do it and instil that philosophy in players. Why not? Is the confident, curious answer a four-year-old child would give if others feel they can't.

Where there's a will, there's a way. If we can't find a solution - make one, that's creativity.

Imagine a coaching system in Gaelic or any sport that delivers innovative, self-thinking creative young players. Imagine confident young players who do not fear failure, who are not threatened by other cultures, teams or sports, who are creative and who've been educated about a healthy lifestyle.

This will happen if our young players' natural three Cs - confidence, curiosity and creativity are nurtured. Use three Cs to be what you want to be.



GO MEI... Young kids seldom have any problems with self-esteem

Picture: Brendan Moran / SPORTSFILE