

Adaptability in Sport

Defining Adaptability

- “The quality of being able to adjust to new conditions”.
- “The ability to learn from experience, and change to become more effective”
- “Reacting with increasing effectiveness following repeated exposure or stimulus”

Adaptable people:

Experiment	See opportunity not failure	Are resourceful	Think ahead
Don't blame others	Are curious	See contextually	Are open minded
Have strong values	Self-talk		

(Boss, 2015)

Research on Adaptability

In a recent study, researchers looked at success rates when pupils were asked to throw bean bags in to a net from 3ft away. The group was then split in to two based on their throwing success. Both groups were given the same additional practice time but with one group completing the same task while the other group had to repeat the task at distances of 2ft and 4ft. The results indicated that those who practiced from varying distances were more successful when retested from 3ft than the group who had spent their whole time from that distance. This indicated that the pupils were learning to adapt their skills under new conditions and were more successful when faced with the initial task as a result.

This can be extrapolated in to competitive sport. Don't practice drill after drill to hone a specific play if, when under pressure, the possible outcomes and, therefore, the decisions are more numerous than when you practiced. The old adage: “Practice how you play” rings true here. We must foster conceptual learning where pupils are encouraged to face a variety of different situations so that they can begin to discriminate between similar but different situations rather than a one-size fits all approach.

When you have struggled before learning something, you are much more likely to remember, as long as the challenge is of an appropriate level. When the brain works harder to solve a problem, the neural connections linked to that line of thought are strengthened. So when a gap is filled by the brain, the memory is longer lasting and retrieval rates are higher. Take these two examples of how easy it is to remember words. Retrieval rates are lower when reading the words in the left column as the brain is less active when reading them. This effect has also been shown in studies where participants simply read a chunk of text which was either in or out of focus. Those who read the out of focus text had to concentrate more to decipher the words and therefore the meaning and so had better retention rates.

Car Petrol	C_t Meow	Sweet Sour	Pen_il Paper
White Swan	Bas_ Drum	Gasoline Engine	River B_at
Cold Fridge	J_m Sandwich	Turkey Stuffing	Cris_s Salsa
Wood Fire	Fo_tball Pitch	Fruit Vegetable	Music L_rics
Desert Sand	History Te_tbook	Movie Actress	Be_r Wine
Ocean Waves	Sia_ese Twins	Computer Chip	Sh_e Sock
Chocolate Fountain	_irthday Card	Mountain Peak	S_nny Day
East Germany	Brown B_ar	Red Bus	Step Lad_er

Teaching for Adaptability

- Do pupils need to wait until half time or the end of the quarter for the coach to analyse the opposition and then to tell them how to play? The role of the coach should not be to instruct the players but to facilitate their own decision-making and to support them in this process.
- Create an environment which is supportive but that has player decision-making at the heart of it
- Attempt to come up with as many new conditions as possible.
- Get players to make decisions about the session design too. This works best if you start with asking pupils for feedback on your session / lesson design first. When they begin to understand more about what you are trying to achieve, they are more likely to effectively design their own sections of lessons.
- See the working document for more ideas.