

1 **Reorientating Grassroots Coach Education – The Selection-Box Metaphor for**

2 **Curriculum Design**

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9 **Prologue**

10 From our interpretivist paradigm, Christmas and other cultural festivals can be experienced
11 differently. Sometimes they are for family. For many they are associated with religion, and
12 for some fortunate children, Christmas means presents. I (Colum) got a bike one year. A
13 barbell and weights another year. Most importantly for me, in 1994, I got a basketball hoop.
14 Thanks to some expertise from my Grandad and Dad, it was welded to a sturdy post in time
15 for the summer. These gifts reflect the privileges of an Irish teenager in a working-class
16 family at a time when much of the country was leaving behind the social conservatism and
17 the economic recession of the 1980s. The gifts were timely, influenced by my choices and
18 relevant to my needs. They impacted the rest of my life which has since focused on sport. To
19 draw relevance to this conceptual paper on coach education, these gifts show the value of
20 having a say in what we receive, of receiving what we need or want at the right time, and of
21 receiving support with our choices from experienced others. Lessons for coach education
22 perhaps? The gifts also allude to our theoretical sensitivities by showing how social structures
23 (e.g., macro and micro economic systems), coupled with relational support (e.g., grandad and

24 dad) can enable individuals to positively shape their own experiences (i.e., exercise their
25 agency within a given context).

26 Also related to this paper on coach education is another Christmas gift; ‘the selection
27 box’ (S-B). For those who have not had the pleasure, these were, and remain, a box of circa
28 10 assorted chocolate bars produced by a multinational company, individually arranged in a
29 plastic tray and placed within a cardboard box. The selection box of chocolate bars would
30 arrive on Christmas Eve. Excitedly, I took control. Some Christmases, I took my time, while
31 other years I would race through the chocolate in a couple of days. For me, and coincidentally
32 *Author*, the selection box was a real treat; our own little sweet shop where we could choose
33 what we wanted, when we wanted it, and in what order. Recently, our childhood memories of
34 the S-B have served as a metaphor for how we imagine formal coach education *could* be.
35 Epistemologically relative to our research (*Authors*) and personal experiences of English
36 grassroots sport, the metaphor may be relevant to other sport contexts too. To be clear, as
37 coaches, coach developers, and parents of children in this domain we are not saying that
38 coach education should be produced by a multinational company nor be seen as an annual
39 treat! Rather, on the basis that current formal coach education aims to support grassroots
40 coaches, often through mandated, predetermined and linear pathways, we argue there may be
41 value in policy makers and course designers 1) providing grassroots coaches with a variety of
42 coach education provision to choose from; 2) helping coaches to access this provision when
43 they want or perhaps need; and 3) using experienced coach developers to support coaches to
44 decide in what order they wish to engage i.e., a S-B approach.

45 Inspired by our Christmas experiences and using the S-B metaphor, we aspire to
46 coaches being excited by what is on offer, having a say in what coach education they access
47 and managing their choices *with* support (i.e., co-constructing their knowledge). Of course,
48 the S-B is not a wholly perfect metaphor, and some policy makers and course designers may

49 already be embracing these principles. Nonetheless, the metaphor may help other policy
50 makers and course designers to understand our argument. That is, there may be value in
51 (re)constructing coach education systems that enthuse coaches to select what they receive,
52 when, and in which order, and systems that provides them with the capacity to do so. To
53 further our argument, the paper begins by suggesting there is scope to reorientate formal
54 coach education systems from predetermined content focused linear curricula to more process
55 focused opportunities where the coach selects some of their education. Bernsteinian theory
56 (1990, 2000) that recognises the social construction of education systems provides a rationale
57 for our argument and aligns three features with the S-B metaphor (choice, time, and
58 knowledge). Because we are mindful of complexity and the contextual nature of learning, we
59 cautiously provide examples of our thinking. These are meant to be illustrative and not
60 prescriptive because as Wang, Casey and Cope (2025, p.360) state, each “National Governing
61 Body (NGB) has their own unique constraints and so these examples should be used to ‘think
62 with’, rather than as a prescription for what NGBs should do moving forwards”. Finally, in
63 recognising the complexity of developing formal coach education curricula, we highlight
64 some self-critical considerations of what we propose, and identify areas where further
65 research would add value. In sum, this conceptual paper aims to provide a theoretically
66 informed, yet practically relevant metaphor that aids researchers, policy makers and course
67 designers to reimagine, discuss and potentially reorientate their formal coach education
68 provision.

69

70 **A Brief Introduction to Grassroots Coaching, Formal Coach Education, and the Value** 71 **of a Metaphor**

72 Within the participation/grassroots context (Lyle & Cushion, 2017) coaching often
73 involves planning, organising, and delivering positive sporting experiences through

74 interaction with a range of individuals (i.e., players, parents, club officials, etc.) (Cronin &
75 Armour, 2015). In the UK, this work is often undertaken by volunteers who typically¹ access
76 the grassroots coaching role as a parent of a young person, or through their involvement in a
77 specific sport club (UK Coaching, 2024; Watts, 2025). In practice, grassroots coaching may
78 manifest in weekly training sessions and competitions under the auspices of sport specific
79 clubs, leagues and NGBs. Such action is therefore interwoven into broader cultural norms,
80 social structures and interpersonal relationships. This means that meeting the sporting needs
81 of learners, managing relationships with stakeholders such as parents or club officials and
82 understanding wider ethical, social, economic, cultural, and political challenges of supporting
83 sport participation can be a complex and dynamic task (Jones & Corsby, 2015; Miller &
84 Cronin, 2012; Watts, 2025). It may require multidisciplinary knowledge and skills including
85 but not limited to safeguarding, first aid, pedagogy, skill acquisition, social skills such as
86 micropolitical literacy and sport specific insights. To both recruit and support individuals
87 with this demanding challenge and indeed to realise wider policy objectives (e.g., increased
88 levels of physical activity) there is a need for policy makers to support a coaching
89 ‘workforce’. In response, NGBs have for some time provided formal coach education
90 pathways.

91 Formal coach education within the English grassroots domain has traditionally, but
92 not universally, been associated with the social construction of linear, top-down and
93 standardised courses (see Chapman et al., 2020; Dempsey et al., 2020). For example,
94 Holdom, Nichol, and Ives (2024) found that community coaches often received poor initial
95 coach education that was focused on a technical syllabus rather than coaches’ personalised
96 needs. These courses have often been criticised for being decontextualised from the situated

¹ Part and full time coaches operating as sole traders or small sized enterprises in the private sector are increasingly also undertaking this work.

97 challenges that coaches experience in practice and for not involving coaches in the design of
98 their learning (e.g., Dempsey et al., 2021; Piggott, 2012; Stodter & Cushion, 2014). This
99 trend has been shown across a range of studies, although as Wang et al. (2025) recognise this
100 is a relatively niche area of research. More work examining grassroots domains and
101 populations would strengthen this evidence base. Beyond the limitations of the existing body
102 of research and the concerns expressed within it, it is important to recognise that courses may
103 provide a source of income for NGBs (Chapman et al., 2024). Furthermore, a stream of
104 safeguarding policy (e.g., Whyte Review, 2022) means that the priority for many NGBs is to
105 ensure that all coaches are non-malevolent and thus all coaches need to receive key
106 information (e.g., first aid, child protection). These sport development, economic and
107 political imperatives prompt a focus on quality assured assessment for certification, and
108 universal content to ensure *minimum standards* are attained by the maximum number of
109 coaches (Taylor and Garratt, 2010). In this scenario, it can be difficult to meet the individual,
110 temporal, situated and longitudinal learning needs of coaches.

111 Notwithstanding the challenges of existing systems, personalised approaches to coach
112 development have been developed in some contexts (e.g., high performance coach education)
113 (see McCarthy & Roberts, 2023; Cushion, Stodter, & Clarke, 2022; Chapman et al., 2020)
114 and in different parts of the world (see Milistetd et al., 2016; Trudel, Paquette, & Lewis,
115 2021). In contrast and most relevant to this paper however, Dempsey and colleagues (2021)
116 reported on observations of a grassroots football coaching course in the UK. Whilst coaches
117 benefited from attending the course, citing new ways of looking at coaching, activity on the
118 course was largely directed by predetermined assessment and content. The coach developers
119 and coaches had limited time and space to discuss coaches' particular contexts, beliefs,
120 practices, or challenges (i.e., the coaches' coaching process). Coaches also had limited
121 opportunity to select, sequence or pace content and therefore shape their own learning.

122 Rather, the course was led by the coach developer who was influenced by predetermined
123 assessment, quality assurance procedures, and content produced by course designers/policy
124 makers within a wider system. Thus, the social construction of the course, provided some
125 value to coaches but also limited time and space for coaches to explore their own practices
126 and learning needs. Whilst cautious about generalising, this example illuminates a need for
127 coach education *systems* to facilitate opportunities for coaches to *somewhat* personalise their
128 learning relevant to their biographical and contextual needs. Indeed, as many NGBs in the
129 UK (e.g., British Cycling, 2025; England Netball, 2025; FA Learning, 2025) and
130 internationally (e.g., Australian Athletics, 2025; USA Soccer, 2025) move their grassroots
131 learning provision either largely or entirely online, there is a danger that universal content
132 repositories will proliferate. Accordingly, it appears to us that there is a need to reorientate
133 initial coach education experiences away from providing decontextualised content towards
134 enabling personalised opportunities that develop coaches over their coaching lifespan.

135 To aid consideration and contemplation of how coach education provision could be
136 reorientated, we proceed by developing the S-B metaphor. A metaphor is “an idea, object, or
137 description used in place of another different idea, object or description, in order to denote
138 comparative likeness or similarity between the two” (Gass & Priest, 1993, p.19). Metaphors
139 may be powerful conceptual tools because they can poetically aid understanding of complex
140 everyday phenomenon. Metaphors can also connect the given topic to positive memories and
141 can evoke imaginative sensations, affecting how people feel, think, and behave (Cavallerio,
142 2022). As a result of this, metaphors are common features of everyday language and are
143 particularly well established in sporting circles where coaches, commentators and spectators
144 often use vivid and imaginative descriptions (e.g., a lion on the pitch). Due to their frequent
145 use, the function of metaphors as a non-literal means of sense making is well established
146 (Priest & Gass, 2006). Thus, metaphors are an acceptable and everyday means of influencing

147 how others consider and conceive phenomenon. Accordingly, we posit the S-B as a
148 metaphor, to prompt policy makers and course designers to consider what formal coach
149 education is offered to coaches, how grassroots coaches could be supported to experience the
150 exciting sensation of choosing their own learning, how they could do so when they need, and
151 in the order they deem most relevant to them.

152

153 **Reorientating Grassroots Formal Coach Education**

154 As outlined in the prologue, the S-B metaphor conveys the sense that coaches can
155 benefit from choosing what they engaged with, in what order, and when. To embrace this
156 metaphor, policy makers could adopt what Priestley and Humes (2010) term a ‘process first’
157 approach to education (not to be confused with the widely understood conceptualisation of
158 coaching as a process). Priestly and Humes (2010) distinguished between three curriculum
159 orientations/models (i.e., process, content, product/objectives). Firstly, a *process model*
160 involves a shared and co-constructed learning ‘process’ between educators and learners. This
161 approach prioritises the development of learners as individuals in their own right, with a
162 focus on understanding their individual needs rather than a focus on predetermined content or
163 roles. Secondly, a *content model* prioritises the learning of predetermined content, rather than
164 the co-construction of curricula between educators and learners. Unlike the process model, a
165 content model often reflects particular priorities as perceived by those in power. Content is
166 likely to be based on what those in higher hierarchical positions see as valuable, rather than
167 shaped by what particular learners need at a particular time. Finally, a *product model* (i.e.,
168 objectives to be achieved) prioritises what a ‘competent’ learner “should” be doing.
169 Objectives may relate to the demonstration of behaviours, and as such, can direct specific
170 forms of behavioural change/development. Like the content model, objectives are often
171 predetermined by those in positions of power. It would appear, that many, though not all,

172 grassroots coach education adopts content led (i.e., what is the key knowledge coaches must
173 have?) or product led (i.e., what are the key behaviours coaches must display?) models. The
174 S-B metaphor, however, prompts a reorientation towards a process led model of education
175 (i.e., what do these particular coaches choose, in what order, and when?).

176 Crucially, within any curricula design, a mixture of all three foci (process, content,
177 objectives) will be in place. However, Priestley and Humes (2010) advocate that one model
178 should be used as an explicit starting point to guide curriculum making. This is because a
179 clear starting point can support the coherency and consistency of a curricula policy. In other
180 words, whichever approach (process, content, objectives) spearheads a curriculum policy,
181 influences how the other elements are ultimately imagined, created, disseminated and
182 reproduced in practice. For instance, a process orientation may guide the content and
183 assessment towards coaches' particular needs. Reorientating a curriculum is a complex
184 process because although each curriculum needs a clear focus whilst incorporating other
185 aspects of pedagogy (i.e., assessment, content), curricula are also subject to
186 recontextualisation by stakeholders in the system. This may involve a plethora of policy
187 makers, funders, course designers and coach developers as policy actors. In the face of this
188 complexity there is a need to effectively convey and communicate the curriculum design
189 approach. Here, the S-B metaphor can add much value.

190

191 **Theoretical Underpinnings of the S-B Metaphor**

192 The value of the S-B metaphor not only relies on its ability to portray the image of the
193 coach excitedly choosing and considering what formal coach education to access, when and
194 in what order. Additionally, the S-B is underpinned by the extensive educational work of
195 Basil Bernstein. On the basis that all education systems are social constructions, Bernstein

196 (2000) desired liberation for those receiving education. He was astute and clear that wherever
197 there is pedagogy, there is hierarchy, and thus liberating education would help break down
198 the hierarchical influence from governing organisations. Aligned with this, the S-B metaphor
199 promotes liberation through the desire for *some* power to flow to coaches so that they can
200 navigate a learning journey they feel is meaningful for their context. Indeed, because it is a
201 useful analysis of power within education systems, coaching researchers have utilised
202 Bernsteinian theory to explore coach learning in community and education contexts. For
203 instance, using Bernstein's pedagogic device, Griffiths et al. (2018) showed how knowledge
204 on coach education programmes can be interpreted, reinterpreted and even blocked from
205 coaches as part of a complex social process within sports clubs. Conversely, using
206 Bernstein's framing concept, Williams and Bush (2019) showed how coaches can positively
207 contribute to knowledge and discourse as well as curriculum and programme design. As such,
208 previous literature demonstrates that Bernsteinian theory offers a suitable framework to
209 examine the social construction of coach education provision and in particular coaches'
210 power within those provisions.

211 To achieve liberation, Bernstein (2000) identified three institutionalised and
212 interrelated rights of those receiving education. Firstly, the right to individual enhancement.
213 Here Bernstein (2000) highlighted that this does not simply provide the learner with the right
214 to get better. Instead, it involves exploring tension points between the past and possible
215 futures (i.e., learning). In S-B coach education this could occur through coaches' self
216 critically identifying areas of knowledge and practice they want/need to develop. Secondly,
217 the right to be included, socially, intellectually, culturally, and personally. Bernstein
218 acknowledged the complexity of this right and explained that learners not only have a right to
219 be included but also to be separate and autonomous. A S-B works with this right by enabling
220 coaches to choose and design some of their formal coach education, whilst also opting not to

221 engage with other aspects. Thirdly, the right to participate. Bernstein encouraged learners to
222 participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of their learning. Again, this
223 aligns with a S-B that is process orientated because it enables learners to participate in their
224 enhancement.

225 To enact Bernstein’s rights, education systems need to build and disseminate a
226 ‘pedagogic discourse’ (PD) that communicates and legitimises the purpose(s) of a curriculum
227 (Bernstein, 2000). A PD is created through the creation and development of two interwoven
228 discourses, instructional discourse (ID) and regulative discourse (RD). ID is related to the
229 content of a curriculum and the decisions of what is to be taught (i.e.,
230 subjects/topics/disciplines), and how (i.e., selected, sequences, paced, evaluated). Barrett
231 (2024, p.26-27) comments that RD is “the value system that is promoted among those who
232 encounter it as a way of seeing and acting within the world”. Bernstein (2000) terms RD as
233 the moral and philosophical (i.e. values and beliefs) discourse, where ID is very much
234 embedded in response to the RD (i.e., the values and approach). Here, the S-B metaphor may
235 be useful, as a discursive prompt that conveys a sense of choice, excitement and some control
236 for coaches. This prompt may help disrupt existing RD by proposing a reorientation from
237 providing universal content or assessment, to a primary focus on coaches’ processes. In this
238 way the metaphor may inform and clarify the RD, and in turn, a curriculum (re)orientation
239 could manifest via the ID. To explain how this ID (informed by a S-B RD) could be
240 operationalised, Bernstein (2000) introduced the concepts of *classification* and *framing* which
241 policy makers and course designers could use to practically shape courses i.e., akin to a
242 selection box.

243

244 ***Classification***

245 Classification is concerned with the boundary insulation between subjects (i.e.,
246 content) that has been determined to be known by those creating curricula (Bernstein, 2000).
247 Specifically, classification is concerned *not* only with *what* knowledge is included (e.g.,
248 psychology, biology, maths, etc.), but the relationships *between* knowledge to be transmitted
249 as part of a wider curriculum (Bernstein, 1975). Classification can therefore be thought as
250 sitting on a spectrum between strongly or weakly classified². Strong classification
251 demonstrates an insulated boundary between subjects that are often impermeable. This
252 signifies more of an isolated curriculum, where topics are taught in silos. An example in
253 coaching could be that physiology and psychology are often taught separately from each
254 other with little integration. In contrast, weak classification allows for the permeation and
255 integration of knowledge across different boundaries. This approach signifies a more
256 integrative curriculum design.

257 To date, coach education tends to provide strongly classified content. That is subjects
258 such as sport psychology are often isolated from other subjects such as technical knowledge
259 (Dempsey et al., 2022). This can work well for some coaches who wish to explore a specific
260 topic (e.g., how do I build confidence), but may be overly separated for those facing multi-
261 disciplinary challenges (e.g., how do I prepare for a competition final). A S-B coach
262 education approach could enable coaches to select more weakly classified support that
263 reflects the interdisciplinary challenges coaches face presently in their practice. In devising a
264 S-B, course designers could provide a mixture of strongly and weakly classified content for
265 coaches to select from.

266

² Strongly and/or weakly should not be considered as either good or bad. But instead as the strength of insulation (i.e., classification) or control (i.e., framing).

267 **Framing**

268 Framing occurs once satisfactory principles have been established as to *what*
269 knowledge will be used and how that knowledge is to be insulated (or not) (i.e.,
270 classification) (Bernstein, 1975). Bernstein (2000) developed and explained framing as being
271 the control of four core features at the micro-level of the pedagogic space (i.e., classroom,
272 pitch, court) which include: 1) Selection – this is the choice of *what* is to be taught and
273 conversely, not to be taught; 2) Sequencing – what is taught first, second, etc. that would be
274 most relevant for the learners at that time; 3) Pacing – the rate at which something is taught.
275 For example, how long to allow for activities, discussions, debates, practical demonstrations,
276 so learners can acquire the selected knowledge; and 4) Criteria/Evaluation – what is used to
277 determine success (i.e., what makes a ‘competent’ coach within the scope of a curricula).
278 Like classification, framing can sit on a spectrum of being strongly or weakly framed. Strong
279 framing represents a level of control over the features that lies with the educator (i.e., coach
280 developer) and therefore less control with the coach. Weak framing would see the coach have
281 more apparent control over the features (Bernstein, 2000; Aldous & Freeman, 2017).
282 Bernstein (2000) also identified that each of the features of framing can be framed
283 independently of one another. For example, a session could be weakly framed in terms of
284 selection (i.e., chosen by the coach), but strongly framed in terms of sequencing (i.e., decided
285 in which order by a coach developer). Logistically, weakly framing aspects of a curriculum
286 can be challenging for some course providers. However, a S-B approach does potentially
287 enable coaches to pace their learning over the course of their coaching careers, and to select
288 and sequence in relation to their contextual and personal needs.

289 Overall, Bernsteinian theory recognises the importance of a regulatory discourse as an
290 influence on how education systems are designed. As a discursive tool, the S-B metaphor
291 may help policy makers and course designers reorientate their RD towards a process model.

292 A model where coaches can select what they need, when appropriate and in what order. To
293 support this, the next section explains how the S-B metaphor may help learners access their
294 rights of inclusion, participation, and individual enhancement relevant to their context,
295 practice and needs.

296

297 **The Selection-Box (S-B) Metaphor: Choice, Time, and Knowledge**

298 Key to the S-B metaphor are three features: *choice*, *time*, and *knowledge*. As part of
299 this, we cautiously explain and illustrate how each *could* inform coach education provision. It
300 must be stressed however, that this is *not* the only way the S-B metaphor could be envisaged
301 because all NGBs will have their own contextual influences that shape their provision (Wang,
302 Casey and Cope, 2025). In addition, we offer both macro and micro considerations to the
303 design. This is intended to demonstrate a broader perspective of how the S-B could be
304 imagined from a macro policy making perspective, as well as the micro considerations
305 undertaken during the course design stage.

306

307 ***Choice***

308 In the S-B, *choice* centres on creating suitable levels of *agency*. In this instance,
309 agency can be defined as “involving an individual’s will to act, as well as their capacity to act
310 in sociocultural terms” (Mercer, 2012, p. 42). Choice not only includes *what* potential
311 knowledge learners may wish to explore, but also *when* and *how* they choose to engage in it.
312 Akin to a S-B, the learner *decides* what to engage with, at what time, and in what order.
313 However, the S-B is not advocating for learners to lead all of their own learning. Instead
314 Figure 1. presents *an* example at the macro level of curricula design using the work of Côté
315 and Gilbert (2009). The example involves three strands of knowledge (i.e., intrapersonal (IA),

316 interpersonal (IR), professional (P)) with some additional ‘foundational pillars’. These
317 foundational pillars could reflect the ‘non-negotiable’ priorities of policy makers. In our
318 illustrative example we have included 1st aid, ethics, and safeguarding to align with typical
319 minimum legislative and insurance-based standards of initial knowledge deemed essential to
320 the coaching process. Crucially, these are just illustrative, and it is not for us as authors to
321 decide the themes/focus of all foundational pillars (i.e., ‘musts’). Rather these pillars could be
322 decided and created by policy makers and course designers as a reflection of the strong
323 classification of knowledge they deem essential to their sport or activity, their context (i.e.,
324 grassroots focus), and their coaching workforce at the time.

325

326

INSERT FIGURE 1. HERE

327

328 Subsequent to completing the foundational pillars, we suggest that coaches could gain
329 access to a S-B of disciplines/topics (e.g., practice design, reflection, building effective
330 relationships, etc.). Here, the principle of both weak framing and classification, including
331 selecting, sequencing and pacing of modules/topics could be offered to coaches. Reflecting a
332 collaborative and co-constructed approach to coach education (Paquette et al., 2014; Paquette
333 & Trudel 2018), the learners would have the opportunity to consider their context and current
334 practice. Here coaches could begin to map what topics they need to develop within their
335 initial and continued coaching process. Doing so reorientates from a content (you must know
336 this) or product model (you must behave like this), towards a process model (what do you as
337 a coach need). This may be a fundamental reorientation for many coach education providers,
338 although for others the reorientation may require a mere tweak in approach. To help conceive

339 what this involves, Figure 2. presents a hypothetical example of a combination of twelve
340 modules across the three knowledge strands (four modules per strand).

341

342 **INSERT FIGURE 2. HERE**

343

344 Again, twelve modules presents an illustrative example and should be amended
345 relevant to an NGBs focus, stance and resource (i.e., it could be 6, 12, 18, 30!). This not only
346 presents learners with choice of which strands they feel best to begin with, but which
347 potential topic(s) may best suit their current context and practice needs at a particular point in
348 time. Crucially, we also envisage a role for coach developers to help coaches reflect on their
349 process and choices. The agency that we aspire for can be supported by policy makers and
350 coach developers providing structures for coaches to access and support to do so. For
351 instance, the S-B could provide grassroots coaches with immediate exposure to a range of
352 modules that they then navigate through, selecting and sequencing their development in
353 relation to their biography, experience and context. In this way, power flows rather than is
354 retained.

355

356 ***Time***

357 A second feature of the S-B is the crucial element of *time*. Much formal coach
358 education at the grassroots level is time bound, occurring over a period of weeks or months.
359 Gao (2013) however, articulates that change occurs in temporal and contextually specific
360 ways, related to who the learner engages with at any given moment. Additionally, many
361 grassroots coaches will typically stay involved in a sport for the duration of their children's
362 involvement which may range from years to decades. Related to this, the S-B promotes the

363 idea that coaches do not need to eat all their chocolate bars all at once or even within a short
364 period of time. Although they can of course if they wish, this is choice! Rather the S-B
365 encourages learners to access content when it is relevant to them. Whilst some modules could
366 be strongly framed in terms of pacing (e.g., foundational pillars on safeguarding needing to
367 be completed quickly), others could be weakly framed to account for when a coach may need
368 some content or ideas. For example in six months' time.

369 To demonstrate combining choice and time within the examples of the S-B, Figure 3.
370 offers a diagrammatic view of a coach selecting specific modules across levels X and Y. The
371 diagram illustrates the personalised journeying they could take (choice), as and when it best
372 suits them (time). For instance, a coach may access support in dealing with parents as a new
373 season starts, or they may access support on tactical concepts as the participants progress
374 physically and technically.

375

376 **INSERT FIGURE 3. HERE**

377

378 The coupling of choice and time at the macro level of curriculum design presents
379 coaches with agency to select, sequence and pace learning journeys (i.e., 3 months, 12
380 months, 24 months, etc.). Learners could choose what order they wish to navigate each broad
381 module, and the time taken between each module. Providing the coach with the feature of
382 time offers a more permeable and integrated journey of disciplines and topics of knowledge
383 (see below). This iterative interaction of knowledge, mixed with practical experiences of
384 coaching in their context could present a nuanced and contextually relevant approach to
385 developing coaching practice over time. Crucially, as mentioned above, coach developers

386 may support coaches via reflective conversations that guide coaches to develop a meaningful
387 pathway of coach education.

388

389 **Knowledge**

390 To complement both choice and time, knowledge is the third feature of the S-B
391 metaphor. Although coaches develop knowledge in different ways (see Nash & Collins,
392 2006; Nelson et al., 2006) and while there are different conceptions of knowledge (see Côté
393 & Gilbert, 2009; Nash & Collins, 2006), traditionally, coach education has been associated
394 with top-down curricula that prioritised technical knowledge (i.e., a content model)
395 (Chapman et al., 2020, Holdom, Nichol & Ives, 2024). In the grassroots context, recent
396 courses have sought to ensure coaches can facilitate safe, fun, and inclusive, physical activity
397 (i.e., ‘how to coach’ via skills based or product model) (Chapman et al., 2020). For instance,
398 the English Football Association (an area we are familiar with) have promoted the use of
399 small-sided games and high ball rolling time (limited lines, laps and lectures) in sessions as a
400 means of engaging young players in football. In both cases (i.e., traditional or more
401 progressive), this may be well meaning but nonetheless represent what Muller and Young
402 (2019) conceive as ‘knowledge of the powerful’. Here powerful policy makers decide which
403 knowledge is valuable, to whom, and at what stage (e.g., all level one coaches must know X).

404 Critically, although predetermined curricula can serve many coaches well, they may
405 cause several challenges. Firstly, while much predetermined knowledge is evidenced based,
406 in some cases myths and pseudoscience (e.g., learning styles, neurolinguistic programming
407 (NLP)) have been included in curricula by stakeholders (see Whitehead and Coe, 2021).
408 Thus, coaches are not always accessing the ‘best of what we know’. Secondly, via levels and
409 associated accreditation, some knowledge (e.g., technical and tactical knowledge) is restricted

410 to advanced courses. This means that regardless of the coaches prior learning, competence
411 and goals, only those coaches deemed ready for higher levels (e.g., Level 3 for those coaches
412 working in developmental/professional contexts) can access this knowledge. Finally, a lack
413 of time and choice may somewhat limit coaches' opportunities to select knowledge that they
414 have experientially determined is valuable to them and their specific contextual challenges
415 and demands (Dempsey et al., 2021; Piggott, 2012; Stodter & Cushion, 2014). Thus, without
416 supporting coaches' agency, the knowledge provided on coach education provisions may not
417 always give coaches the 'power to do' anything new or contextually relevant.

418 In response to the above, the S-B approach, which reorientates towards a process
419 model, may be an opportunity to make knowledge more accessible and relevant to coaches.
420 Here the point is not for us to prescribe specific knowledge, nor to get bogged down in sport
421 specific vs. disciplinary knowledge debates which have swung over time. Rather the S-B
422 aims to provide the capacity for coaches to access different knowledges (whether sport
423 specific or disciplinary) that coaches themselves deem relevant. Specifically, at the macro
424 level (i.e. across courses and modules), the S-B could outline broad topics (e.g., relationships,
425 practice design, technical detail) via weak *classification* (i.e. not siloed by discipline) (see
426 Dempsey et al., 2022). To greater and lesser extents this could provide opportunities for
427 coaches to make interdisciplinary connections. For example, the topic of practice design
428 could be considered as part of a coaches need to develop physiological (e.g., aerobic
429 capacity) and/or psychological (e.g., confidence or decision making) areas of their players
430 development. In doing so, the coach may become an active participant in their coach
431 education process who excitedly examines the S-B to determine what knowledge they should
432 access next.

433 At a micro level (i.e. on modules), existing research (see Dempsey et al., 2021,
434 discussed earlier) suggests there is little time and space for exploration of different

435 knowledge due to narrow objectives, and plentiful predetermined assessment and content
436 (e.g., learners must demonstrate...). With a longer view of coach education (time) across the
437 S-B, singular modules might not need to cover as much content and assessment, and this may
438 allow more time and space for iterative dialogical co-construction of knowledge between
439 coaches and coach developers. With such modules in place, and via weak framing of
440 selection, sequencing and pacing, coach developers via dialogical relationships could support
441 coaches to determine what modules in the S-B are most relevant over the course of their
442 coaching tenures. For instance, in a weakly framed module on games-based practice design,
443 which has time and space for dialogue, one coach could develop technical knowledge (i.e.,
444 body positioning to pass and receive), while another could develop psycho-social knowledge
445 (i.e., how do we encourage teamwork). This could also involve coach developers initially
446 spending time to understand coaches, including their prior learning, goals and context before
447 collaboratively selecting and sequencing relevant and meaningful knowledge and resources
448 (e.g., podcasts, reading materials, practical demonstrations, etc.).

449 The process orientation embedded in the S-B metaphor is crucial in the RD, so that it
450 is understood in the ID that the priority is not always imposing predetermined content but
451 working with coaches to help them excitedly access knowledge relevant to their coaching
452 process. Subsequently, coach developers embracing a weak framing approach on course may
453 support learners to decide if a learning activity may be extended, halted or removed, rather
454 than implementing a one-size-fits-all approach. In this way, modules can move beyond a
455 tyranny of limiting learning outcomes and instead encourage coaches to ‘explore’, ‘discuss’,
456 ‘design’, and ‘reflect’ on topics that are meaningful to them. Critically engaging coaches in
457 such action moves beyond ‘knowledge of the powerful’ (i.e., knowledge determined by
458 stakeholders). With support from skilled coach developers, time, and space, coaches could

459 access knowledge that gives them the ‘power to do’ (Muller & Young, 2019) in their own
460 context.

461

462 **Coach Developers and the Selection Box**

463 Any manifestation of a S-B will necessitate consideration of knowledge both at the
464 macro level where a suite of modular design could be provided, and also at the micro level
465 within modules, where coaches need time and choice to access knowledge relevant to them.
466 The capacity of coaches to curate their own learning experiences also needs to be considered
467 within the context of the S-B. Some coaches will have self-critical awareness of the areas
468 they wish and need to develop. Others less so. Indeed, previous literature has posited that the
469 powerful influence of contextual socialisation can result in circular thinking by coaches and
470 limit their development (Cushion, 2016; Stodter & Cushion, 2017). The S-B therefore
471 necessitates that policy makers and coach developers, or those responsible for deploying
472 coaches, actively attend to the needs and contexts of those coming onto modules. Coaches
473 may upon occasion require support, challenge or disruption. For instance, although often
474 overlapping, there may be a need for coaches to distinguish between wants (generally desired
475 and fleeting) versus needs (generally stable and beneficial). This could happen as part of
476 design of a S-B (via foundational pillars), and through dialogue prior to or on modules.

477 Crucially, agency includes opportunity for coaches to make both correct or incorrect
478 choices, and not choose at all. What is therefore required are coach developers who are given
479 their own agency within the broader coach education system, who can listen, understand and
480 guide coaches, whilst simultaneously drawing upon a range of pedagogical approaches,
481 disciplinary knowledge and experiences. Such knowledge, skills and dispositions may enable
482 coach developers to actively engage learners in their own development, mediate between

483 knowledge, and empower coaches ‘to do’ in their context. This is not an easy task because
484 extant research suggests coach developers often rely on their own experiential learning and
485 lack pedagogical understanding (Walton et al., 2024). However, optimistically, we see
486 potential in the coach development workforce and system to co-construct learning with
487 coaches.

488

489 **Critical Considerations of the S-B Metaphor and Areas for Future Work**

490 Notwithstanding the propositions above, we are very aware that a S-B metaphor is not
491 a panacea for all the previous criticisms of coach education. Nor do we intend it to be. Rather,
492 we aim to provide a theoretically informed, yet practically relevant metaphor that could aid
493 policy makers and course designers to (re)consider and perhaps reorientate how they design
494 formal coach education. Even on this basis however, there are critical considerations to be
495 made.

496 Firstly, policy change is difficult and complex. Indeed, the theoretical underpinning of
497 the metaphor which is rooted in Bernsteinian analysis of education policy illustrates that
498 policy is open to power fluctuations, wider discourses, and recontextualisation. This is both
499 the strength and limitation of a metaphor. Specifically, the S-B provides a flexible and
500 clarifying conceptual tool to prompt discussion and consideration of more agency within
501 coach education, and in particular the participation domain. Indeed, McCarthy and Roberts
502 (2023) commented that despite attention given to coach education in the literature, few
503 constructive provisions have been offered, and therefore, the S-B metaphor provides an
504 accessible discursive tool to help coach education providers conceptualise how coach
505 education could be. However, to realise the metaphor in a contextualised practice will require
506 policy makers to utilise resources and these are likely to be shaped by specific political, social

507 and economic conditions (Chapman et al., 2024). Accordingly, the actualisation of the S-B
508 metaphor is likely to be delimited and differentiated between contexts rather than universal.
509 This is because grassroots coach education is part of wider and somewhat fragmented system.
510 Indeed, the S-Bs offered by providers (i.e., specific NGBs, private coach education
511 provisions, internet and social media-based providers, non-governmental organisations, and
512 Higher Education) are likely to be quite different, and future research should rigorously
513 explore how a S-B is actualised in specific contexts. In effect, not all S-Bs will be the same in
514 terms of time, choice and knowledge, nor equally effective for coaches. Therefore, the S-B
515 metaphor although aiding discussion and thought, requires much ‘heavy work’ from coach
516 developers and policy makers to realise in their context, and for researchers to evaluate.

517 Secondly, coaching research has a long history of translational difficulties, and myths
518 abound in many practices (Whitehead & Coe, 2021). Coach education ideas such as the S-B
519 metaphor are therefore at risk of both misinterpretation and misrepresentation. For instance,
520 whether through Machiavellian or unintentional motives, and with the limits of our writing in
521 mind, some may consider the S-B presented herein as an attempt to say that 1) coaches
522 should have complete control of curricula; 2) that there is no place for policy makers or coach
523 developers; or 3) that there is no clear core knowledge that coaches need. To be clear, we
524 refute all of these. But even still, while doing our best to clarify and illustrate the metaphor,
525 we are aware that the contextual flexibility provided by a metaphor rather than a prescriptive
526 framework for example may also lead to further frustration (‘just tell us what it looks like’),
527 and misunderstanding (‘I thought you meant this’). Of course, without inhabiting specific
528 policy contexts, we cannot meet these expectations.

529 Finally, as illustrated from the prologue and epilogue (to come), the S-B metaphor is
530 grounded in our experiences, particularly grassroots English football and basketball. We have
531 been cautious not to generalise to other contexts (sports, domains, countries). Rather we

532 encourage readers to consider the transferability of the S-B metaphor to their own situated
533 experiences. Once more, there is a need for more research, beyond this conceptual paper, that
534 considers how the S-B is understood and operationalised in specific contexts. As such, the S-
535 B metaphor prompts considerations of areas not explicitly addressed within the confines of
536 this paper. For example, assessment, although explored by others (see McCarthy, 2024),
537 needs to be considered in the context of choice, time and knowledge, as does the resources
538 required. Similarly, the S-B metaphor might prompt consideration of the purpose(s) of coach
539 education (e.g., an income stream, licensing and insurance mechanism, lifelong learning
540 provision), and other questions such as: Is a S-B more equitable than current provision?
541 When coaches have power to choose via a S-B, which coaches choose and which are
542 marginalised? What are the non-human influences on the S-B? Is the S-B metaphor beyond
543 the current conventions of readers' coach education experiences?

544

545 **Epilogue**

546 With extensive time served as coaches, coach developers, and researchers, we (the
547 authors) each have developed our own form of ad-hoc and partial S-Bs. These consist of
548 courses, colleagues, ex-colleagues, and resources (e.g., podcasts) that we turn to when
549 needed. Just last week, I (author 2) was observed by an old coach developer friend who
550 serendipitously happened to be on a neighbouring pitch. I asked him to watch a bit of my
551 session and provide feedback. The coach developer offered some great reminders (e.g., using
552 games to start the session). But while we can dip into resources and learn through our
553 informal contacts, we recognise that we are privileged to do so. Many novice coaches (read
554 volunteers such as parents) may not have these opportunities to get contextually relevant
555 support. Although developments have occurred (see Chapman et al., 2020, 2024) and

556 personalised approaches are available in other contexts (e.g., high performance), it
557 nonetheless appears that at the grassroots level many coach education curricula remain
558 largely top-down uniform prescriptions. Furthermore, in our experiences, coach education is
559 increasingly delivered asynchronously online to mass audiences, with limited interaction, or
560 in-situ support. In response, in this conceptual paper we argue for the consideration of a
561 ‘selection box of support’ in coach education provision. One which includes knowledge
562 deemed foundational by policy makers and course designers, but also a range of modules that
563 will tempt and excite coaches through access, relevance, and timing related to their practice.
564 In doing so, we recognise the social construction of education systems, and the S-B metaphor
565 advocates for coaches to have a greater active role in classifying and framing what they learn,
566 when, and in what order (i.e., co-constructing their learning). Afterall, they all arrive at
567 coaching from different positions, and if supported they may be excitedly selecting learning
568 for years to come.

569 Of course, a S-B will still be influenced, and perhaps rightly so, by powerful
570 stakeholders who will also contribute to the co-construction of provisions. Challenges may
571 include, but will not be limited to, resources, assessment, technology, and quality assurance.
572 Accordingly, future research is needed to explore how and to what effect the metaphor can
573 manifest in specific contexts (e.g., HEIs, large/small NGBs). To begin this process, this
574 conceptual paper provides an original theoretically informed proposal which challenges
575 existing regulatory discourses and some provision. We also provide illustrative examples to
576 hopefully inspire researchers, policy makers, course designers and coach developers to
577 explore innovative course design in their own coach education contexts. Finally recognising
578 that coach education provision is part of a complex social process, we provide the metaphor
579 as a discursive tool to prompt discussions and contemplations. We hope such considerations
580 lead to coach education provision design that excites grassroots coaches like ‘kids at

581 Christmas'; where grassroots coaches return year after year, with well thought out lists of
582 what they would like to receive. Indeed, we are reminded of Dewey (1916) who argued that
583 the aim of education is to enable and prompt more education.

584

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