

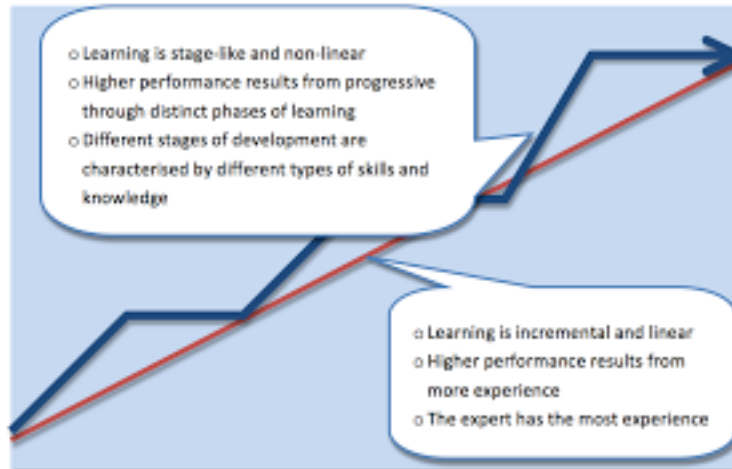
Moving Towards Coaching Expertise

How do coaches progress from beginner to expert?

According to some frameworks, coaches pass through a series of stages or levels. The knowledge and skills at each stage are, of course, more advanced. But they are different in other ways. In other words, the formal processes of coach education in most countries assumes punctuated development.

According to Pierre Trudel and Wade Gilbert, though, most coach education is based on an unchallenged presumption that coaches exist on a single continuum from novice to expert. My own research, on behalf of the PGA and others, suggests that coaches tend to share this view. Specifically, they conceive of their professional development in terms of a gradual improvement powered primarily through experience.

So, there are at least two views of the trajectory of coach education: stage-like or incremental.



If we assume for a moment that all coaches need some sort of professional development, the choice between these two positions is important. If coach educators assume one stance, but their students another, frustration is almost inevitable. Even if both parties agree, who's to say they bet on the right theory?

Where do you stand on this matter? What is your view?

To help you articulate your reflections, here are some questions for you to consider:

- **How might we distinguish between novices in a domain**

and so-called experts?

- o What types of experiences are associated with learning and progression towards expertise?**
- o Is learning, either in general or specific domains like golf coaching, really stage-like? In other words, are there discrete stages with their own distinctive characteristics? Or is learning actually an incremental development, with any stages nearly arbitrary assessment points?**
- o If learning is stage-like, how can these stages be differentiated?**
- o What is the relationship between such stages and any associated teaching and assessment?**

There is convincing evidence that novices (and for that matter competent performers) and experts respond to challenges in fundamentally different ways. In addition to obvious differences in terms of the amount of experience, research suggests that expert coaches deal with the challenges of their work in qualitatively different ways than their less skilled colleagues.

The influential report *How People Learn* identifies key principles of expert knowledge and their potential implications for learning and instruction.

- o Experts notice features and meaningful patterns of information that are not noticed by novices.**
- o Experts have acquired a great deal of content knowledge that is organised in ways that reflect a deep understanding of their subject matter.**
- o Experts' knowledge cannot be reduced to sets of isolated facts or proposition, but instead reflect contexts of applicability, so that the knowledge is set within the context of certain circumstances.**
- o Experts are able to retrieve important aspects of their knowledge flexibly and with little attentional effort.**
- o Experts have varying degrees of flexibility in their approach to new situations.**

To what extent are findings like these reflected and used in coach education programmes? If it is true that expert coaches operate in qualitatively different ways than others, how is such expertise assessed?

The evidence from research seems quite clear that expert coaches are not just competent coaches with a lot more experience. They coach in essentially different ways than others.

The question still remains: beyond bureaucratic expedience, are there genuine reasons to distinguish intermediate phases between coach novice and expert? This is not just an academic matter. If it is the case that there are distinctive stages, then practical implications follow. For example, different stages of learning suggest different methods of teaching and different methods of assessment, don't they?

The most influential model of expertise outside of sport is probably that of the American philosopher Hubert Dreyfus. His model was based upon detailed observation and experiments with a range of contexts, including nursing, chess players, aeroplane pilots and car drivers. Dreyfus identified five stages of development towards expertise. Each of these stages has its associated components, perspectives, decision-making and commitment.

<i>Level</i>	<i>Stage of Expertise</i>	<i>Characteristics</i>
1	Novice	At novice stage it is all about

		<p>following the rules. The novice thinks in terms of rules but has no context or ability to modify rules. At this stage the energy is focusing on following the rules rather than thinking.</p>
2	Advance Beginner	<p>This stage is still rule based but rules are now situational based. So instead of blindly using the rules at this stage you start using a set of rule in an A situation and different set of rules in B situation.</p>
3	Competent	<p>At this stage you start to realize that performing this skill has more to it than just following rules or changing rules according to situation. You start to see patterns and principles and start realizing rules are not absolute and they are guidelines or rule of thumb. You start performing the skills more by experience and</p>

		active decision-making rather than strict rules.
4	Proficient	At this stage you start thinking in terms of complete picture. You develop a perspective about your area of skill or focus.
5	Expert	At this stage it is intuitively appropriate action without being conscious of you skills.

Dreyfus's model is clearly useful, and it is quite easy to see how it might be translated into coach education frameworks.

How does the Dreyfus model relate to your own existing coach education frameworks?

However, one potential weakness of Dreyfus model – a surprising one for a philosopher – is that it does not properly specify the nature or type of the knowledge acquired at the different stages. On other words, the model is explicit about the development of skilled performance, but does not really tell us much about what is being learned.

From the perspective of coaching the most useful attempt so far to extend Dreyfus' account to include proper reference to knowledge is that of Paul Schempp and his colleagues. They settled on a four-staged framework - beginner - competent - proficient – expert - to describe the developmental stages of expert sports coaches. This work identifies skills, knowledge, characteristics and perspectives that are common to coaches at each stage of development.



So where does this discussion leave us?

It seems to me that in this case there are lots of reasons for thinking of

coach development as stage-like. Not the least among these reasons is the rather substantial empirical base supporting the view that there are qualitative differences between different stages of development.

If this is true, it follows that professional learning is far more complex than often thought. Not only must the *type* of learning be considered when thinking about pedagogy, but it is also important to think about the *different outcomes* desired. In other words, the teaching methods used ought to be appropriate to the phase of learning reached by the learner. This need not be the case if learning were linear and continuous, apart from a commonsensical differentiation in terms of, maybe, the amount of the teaching. But with a stage-based model of learning, coach educators are forced to think in terms of discrete types of learning experience for the different stages of learning.

And, if it is accepted that the development of coaching expertise is somewhat stage-like, then it follows that different teaching and assessment strategies need to be used to capture the different types of learning and competences being exhibited.

So, the question of whether coach development is incremental or stage-like is important practical consequences. Why? Simply because assumptions about the character of professional development track into decisions about frameworks and awards.

Remember the Cheshire Cat ...

‘Cheshire Puss,’ she began, rather timidly ... ‘Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?’ ‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,’ said the Cat. ‘I don’t much care where,’ said Alice. ‘Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,’ said the Cat. ‘So long as I get somewhere,’ Alice added as an explanation. ‘Oh, you’re sure to do that,’ said the Cat, ‘if you only walk long enough.’ (Lewis Carroll, 1865, ‘Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland’)

If we are going to escape cycles of reproducing traditional approaches to learning and education, we will need to reflect on our assumptions and the ways they translate to practice.

Which way should we go from here?