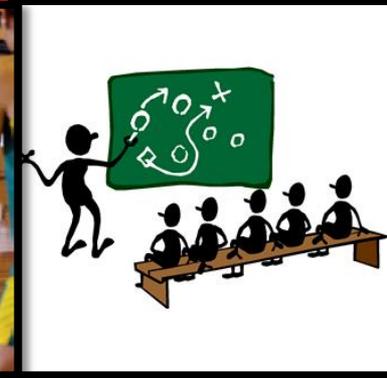


# *Creating a challenging learning environment to optimise athlete development*



*Donna O'Connor PhD*  
University of Sydney



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SYDNEY

- Definition of coaching effectiveness:

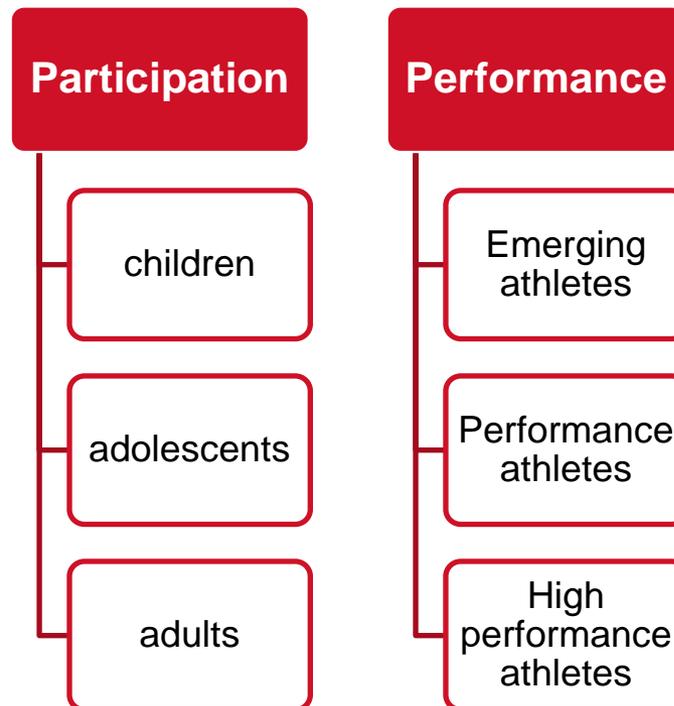
*“The consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes’ competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts” (p. 316).*



- Integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge:
    - To become an effective coach, an extensive knowledge of the sport (professional knowledge) is required.
    - Consideration also needs to be given to how well an individual connects with others (interpersonal knowledge) and their openness to continued learning and self-reflection (intrapersonal knowledge).
-

- Athletes' Outcomes that should result from Effective Coaching:
    - *Competence*: Skills, health and fitness
    - *Confidence*: Positive self-worth
    - *Connection*: Bonds and social relationships
    - *Character*: Respect for the sport and others
-

- Coaching effectiveness should be defined according to how coaches meet their athletes' needs and help them fulfil their goals, as defined by the specific coaching context.



## Ego

- Judged relative to others

## Mastery

- Judged with reference to own performance or benchmarks

- Self determination theory
  - Autonomy
  - Belonging
  - Competence



	<b>Mastery (task)</b>	<b>Ego</b>
T – TASK	Goals self-referenced	Compared players
A – AUTHORITY	Players have input	Coach makes decisions
R – RECOGNITION	improvement & effort	based on norms & comparisons
G – GROUPING	Mixed ability; frequent changes; attention to everyone	Fixed groups; focus on competition; attention to starters
E – EVALUATION	Private, criteria based; mistakes part of learning	Evaluation is public; mistakes reflect low ability
T - TIME	Time is flexible based on player needs; time shared among players	Everyone competes in a given time

- Athletic ability is \_\_\_\_\_% natural talent and \_\_\_\_\_% effort/practice.

	SD	D	U/N	A	SA
To be good at sport you need to be naturally gifted	1	2	3	4	5
In sport, if you work hard at it, you will always get better	1	2	3	4	5
You need to learn & work hard to be good at sport	1	2	3	4	5





# Mindsets can be taught by the way we praise.





## Fixed Mindset

Leads to a desire to look smart, so tends to:

- Avoid challenges
- Give up easily
- See effort as fruitless or worse
- Ignore useful negative feedback
- Feel threatened by the success of others

As a result, they may plateau early and achieve less than their full potential.

Leads to a desire to learn, so tends to:

- Embrace challenges
- Persist in the face of setbacks
- See effort as the path to mastery
- Learn from criticism
- Find lessons and inspiration in the success of others

## Growth Mindset

As a result, they reach ever-higher levels of achievement

- The *fixed mindset* coach -
  - Think first & foremost about their own record & reputation (a loss makes the coach feel a failure)
  - Are intolerant of mistakes (aim for the mistake free game)
  - Motivate players through judgement
- The *growth mindset* coach –
  - asks for full commitment & full effort
  - Gives equal time & attention to all players regardless of initial skills
  - The aim is to become better every day

Dweck, (2006)

- What language do you use?
- How and what do you praise?
- What message are you conveying?
- How can you develop a growth mindset?



# *The New England Patriots*

- Focus on results –
  - Envision your desired results & then work backwards to determine a tactical path that leads to your objectives.
  - Bill Belichick makes every decision based on what he believes gives his team the best chance to win football





# *Set goals and move toward them*

- The Patriots are masters at setting goals:
  - Individual, Unit & Team
  - Short, medium & long term
- Coaches & players seize every possible ‘hook’ to motivate themselves to push harder





	Individual	Unit	Team
Short term	Gain at least 4 yds on this (& every) run (Corey Dillon)	Block this field goal attempt (special teams)	Score first in this game (Belichick challenge before every game)
Medium term	In 2004, break Ray Clayborn's record of 36 interceptions as a Patriot (Ty Law)	Don't surrender any sacks (offensive line)	Play as well after Thanksgiving, as the 2001 Patriots (2003 Patriots)
Long term	Study the great players at my position & become the NFL's best player at my position (Richard Seymour)	Return 2 punts for touchdowns this season (special teams)	Repeat as Super Bowl champion (2004 Patriots)

# *Personal goals: “Do your job”*

- Team goals always trump personal goals
- Patriots set their personal goals in support of unit & team goals
- Grading & rewarding a player in a team sport according to individual statistics encourages him to pad his stats at the expense of his team & teammates



# *Anticipate & prepare for every possible scenario*

- Spread your knowledge
  - Practice as you want to perform
  - Situational practice
  - Clock management
  - Prepare for plan/tactics failure
  - Take calculated risks
  - Regularly review your assumptions
-

- Delegate decisions
    - Delegate all non-essentials
    - Let the best informed person decide
    - Trust, empower & hold accountable
    - Surround yourself with the smartest, most talented assistants
-



- Advice: heeding & ignoring
    - If you're an expert, trust your gut
    - If you're an expert, ignore non-experts
    - Listen when someone you trust knows more than you
    - Two heads better than one
-



# Win Forever...working to maximise your potential

Performance

**Knowing you're going to win focus**

- Always Compete
- You're either competing or you're not
- In a relentless pursuit of a competitive edge

Environment

**Confidence Trust Practice is everything**

**•Do things better than they have ever been done before**

*Beliefs*

It's all about the ball  
Everything counts  
Respect everyone

*Style*

Great effort, great enthusiasm, great toughness, play smart

*Rules*

1. Always protect the team
2. No whining, no complaining, no excuses
3. Be early

Central theme

**Competition**

Belief system

**Philosophy**



# *Weekly schedule...Pete Carroll (2010)*

Tell the truth Monday	Who performed well & who didn't; why did the game go as it did & what should we take away from this game experience? Did we accomplish our goals? Discussion of the game + video edits 1 hr practice
Competition Tuesday	Focus on competition with minimal attention paid to our opponent & the upcoming game Competitive matchups between individual players, position groups & off/def.
Turnover Wednesday	Dedicated to the factor we believed most determines the outcome of games 'family' night
No Repeat Thursday	Emphasise the execution & precision of the weekly game plan (shorter practice – focus on doing things right)
Review Friday	Final on-field practice; this was the most disciplined & regimented practice – attention to fine detail

## *Anson Dorrance ...UNC soccer program*

- Winning record: 719 – 39 – 24 (.935%; end of 2011)
  - Women are rewarded for having an aggressive desire to win
  - Women tended to play best in an atmosphere which focused on relationships
  - He develops a ‘competitive cauldron’:
    - Players are always competing
    - He keeps score as much as possible
    - Somebody always wins & somebody loses
    - Point scores are put on the notice board the following day
    - He is more interested in how they respond (who would be driven to improve & who would argue or complain)
-



- *“I saw that my strength in coaching is having the courage to constantly deal with the athletes that unconsciously try to take things a bit easier, and the way I’d lose the respect of my team is not by being demanding enough, not making a passionate, stressful investment. My challenge would be to never surrender my standards to be more popular with my team, but to push my players to transcend ordinary effort in every training session and every match.”*

(Dorrance, 2006)

---

# USA men's basketball team 2008 Olympics

## Gold standards – what we do all the time & what we hold each other accountable for

No Excuses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we have what it takes to win</li> </ul>
Great Defence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• this is the key to winning the gold</li> <li>• we do the dirty work</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we look each other in the eye</li> <li>• we tell each other the truth</li> </ul>
<b>Trust</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we believe in each other</li> </ul>
Collective responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we are committed to each other</li> <li>• we win together</li> </ul>
Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we have each other's backs</li> <li>• we give aid to a teammate</li> </ul>
Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we respect each other &amp; our opponents</li> <li>• we're always on time</li> <li>• we're always prepared</li> </ul>
Poise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• we show no weakness</li> </ul>





Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• we take good shots</li><li>• we're aware of team fouls</li><li>• we know the scouting report</li></ul>
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• we can handle any situation</li><li>• we don't complain</li></ul>
Unselfishness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• we're connected</li><li>• we make the extra pass</li><li>• our value is not measured in playing time</li></ul>
Aggressiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• we play hard every possession</li></ul>
Enthusiasm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• this is fun</li></ul>
Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• we're hungry</li><li>• we have no bad practices</li></ul>
Pride	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• we are the best team in the world &amp; we represent the best country</li></ul>



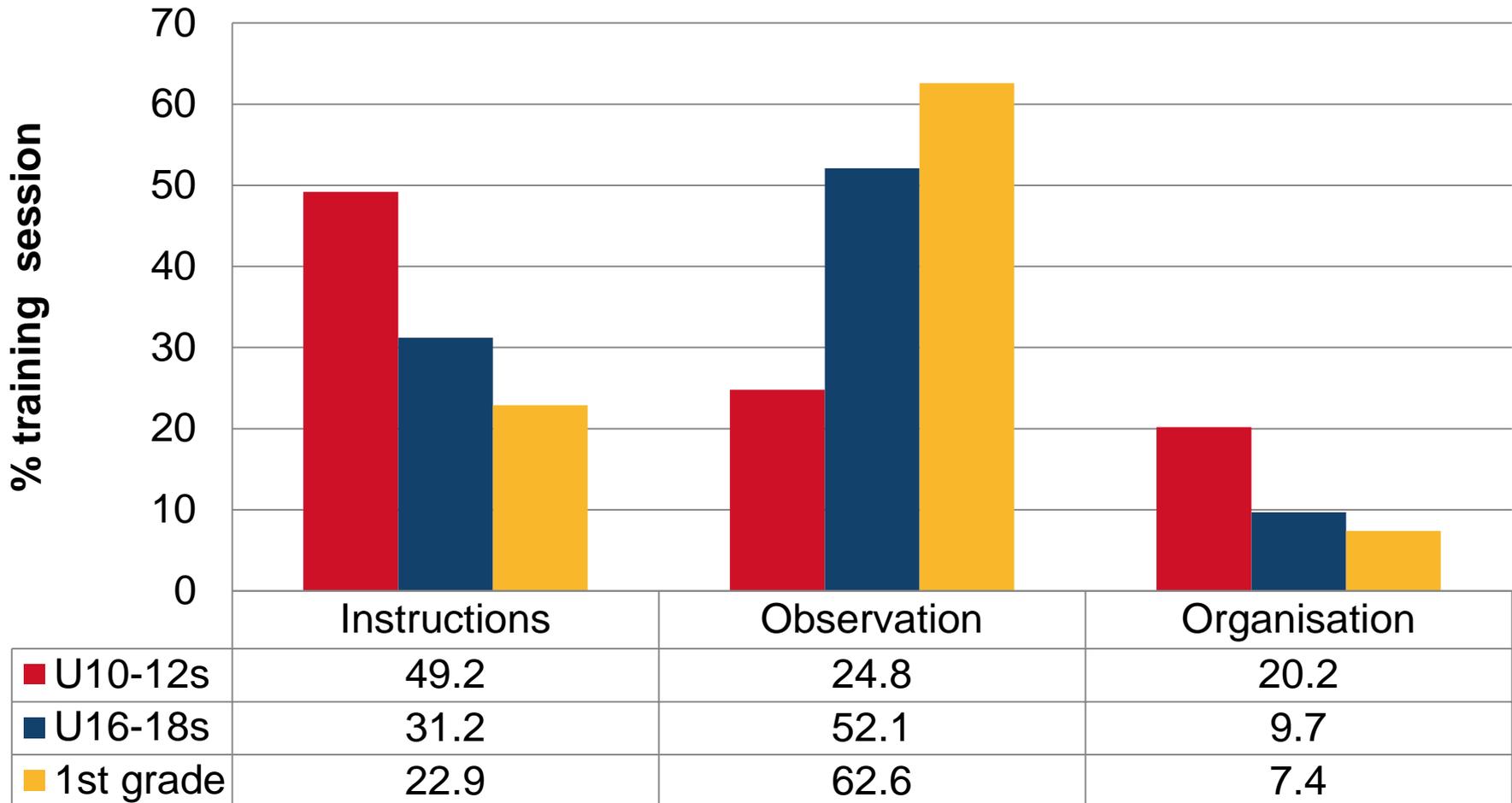
- **What is your goal during practice?**
- ***Learning sessions*** –
  - encourage trial & error
  - focus on technical skill production
  - De-emphasis on results/times
- ***Performance sessions*** –
  - Encourage technical excellence
  - Encourage fast times



- Videotaping expert coaches revealed practice sessions have an emphasis on –
  - Pressure
  - Intensity
  - Relevance to competitive situations
  - Simulated game conditions



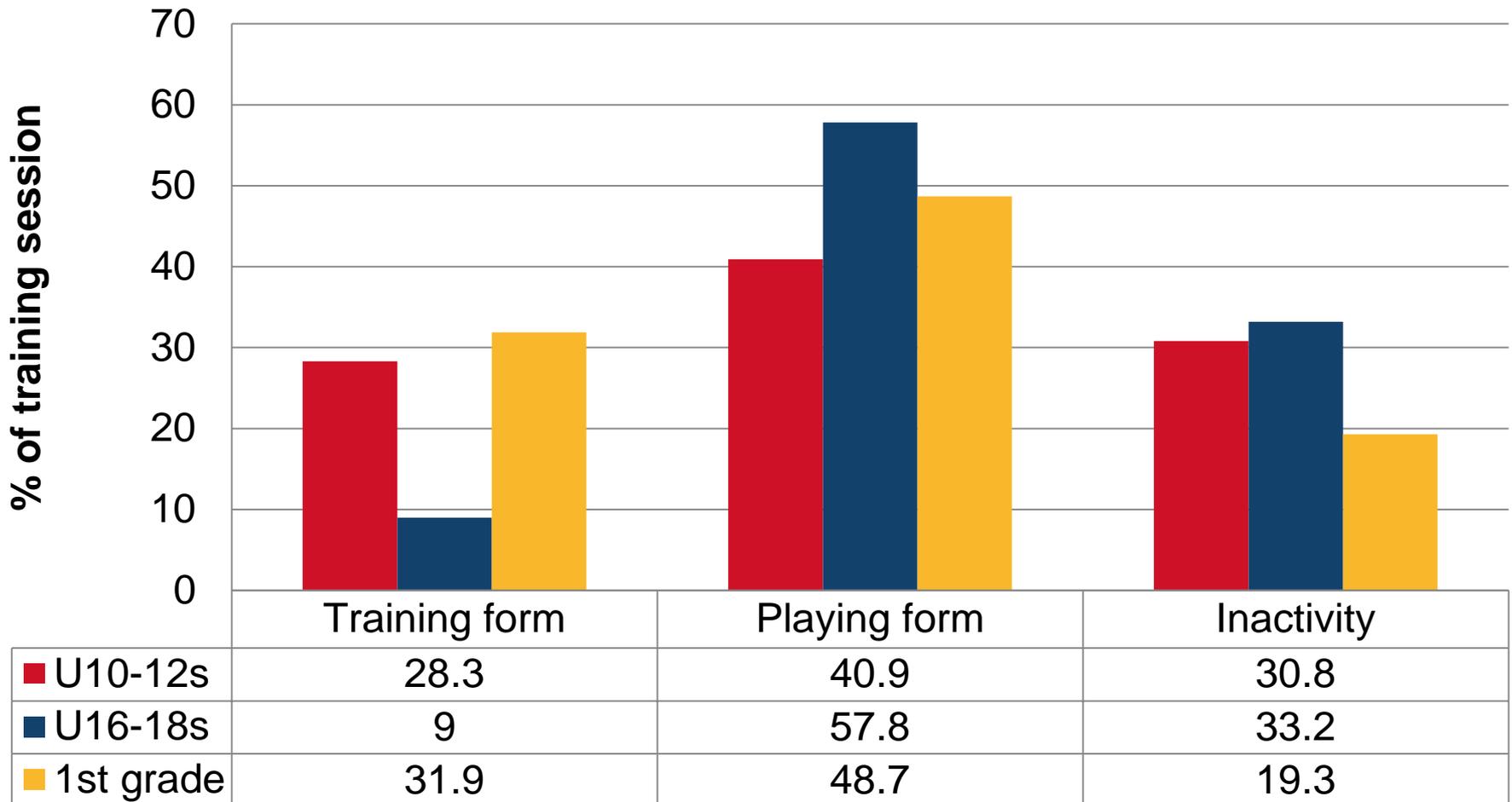
## Coach behaviour



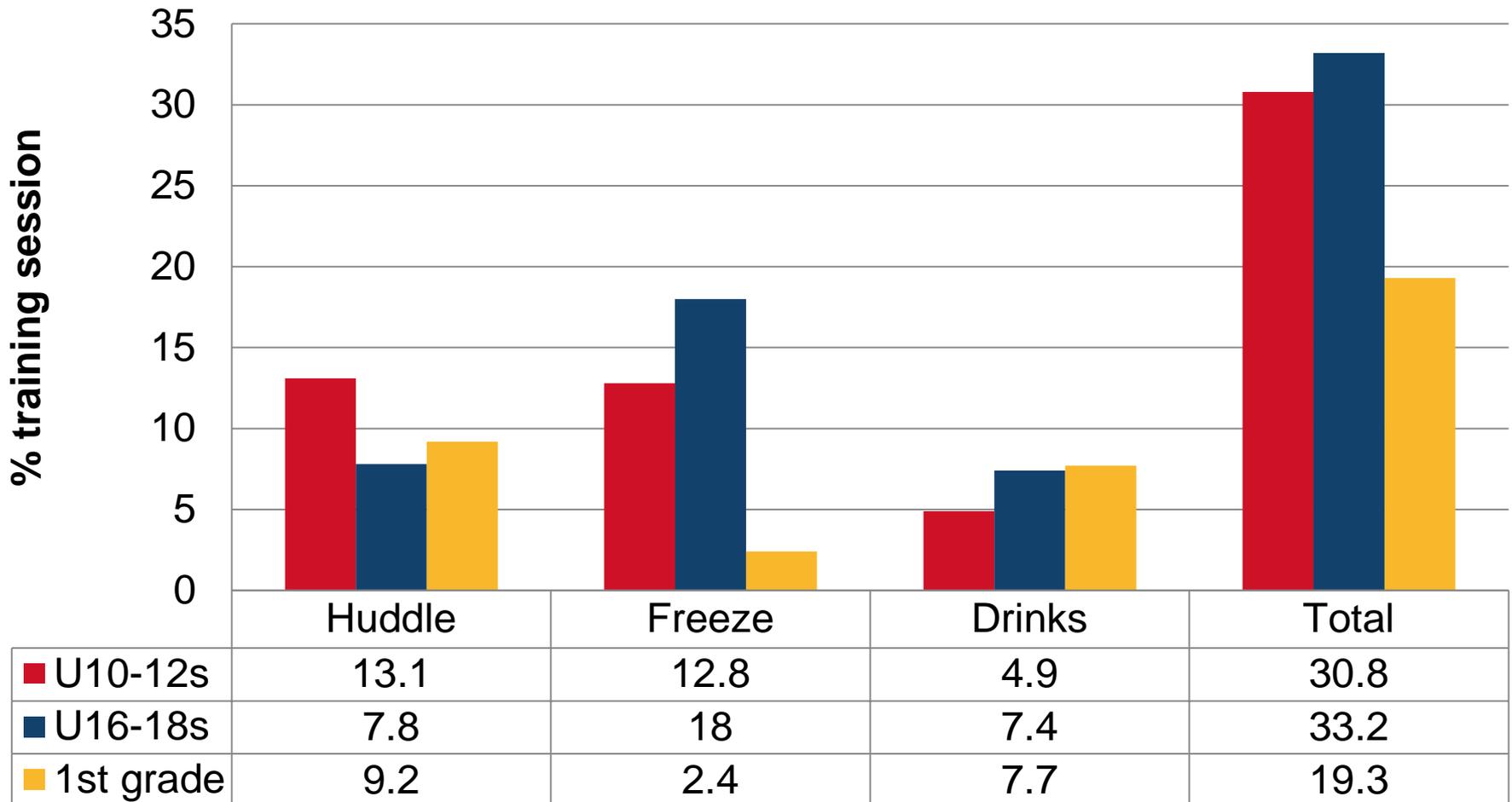
- **Training form** activities - those executed by individual players or small groups without a game play context:
  - fitness activity
  - technique practice
  - skills practice.
- **Playing form** activities – random manner; replicate game-like conditions:
  - phase of play activity
  - conditioned games
  - small-sided games

(Ford, Yates, & Williams, 2010; Low, Williams, McRobert, & Ford, 2013)

## Structure



## Inactivity



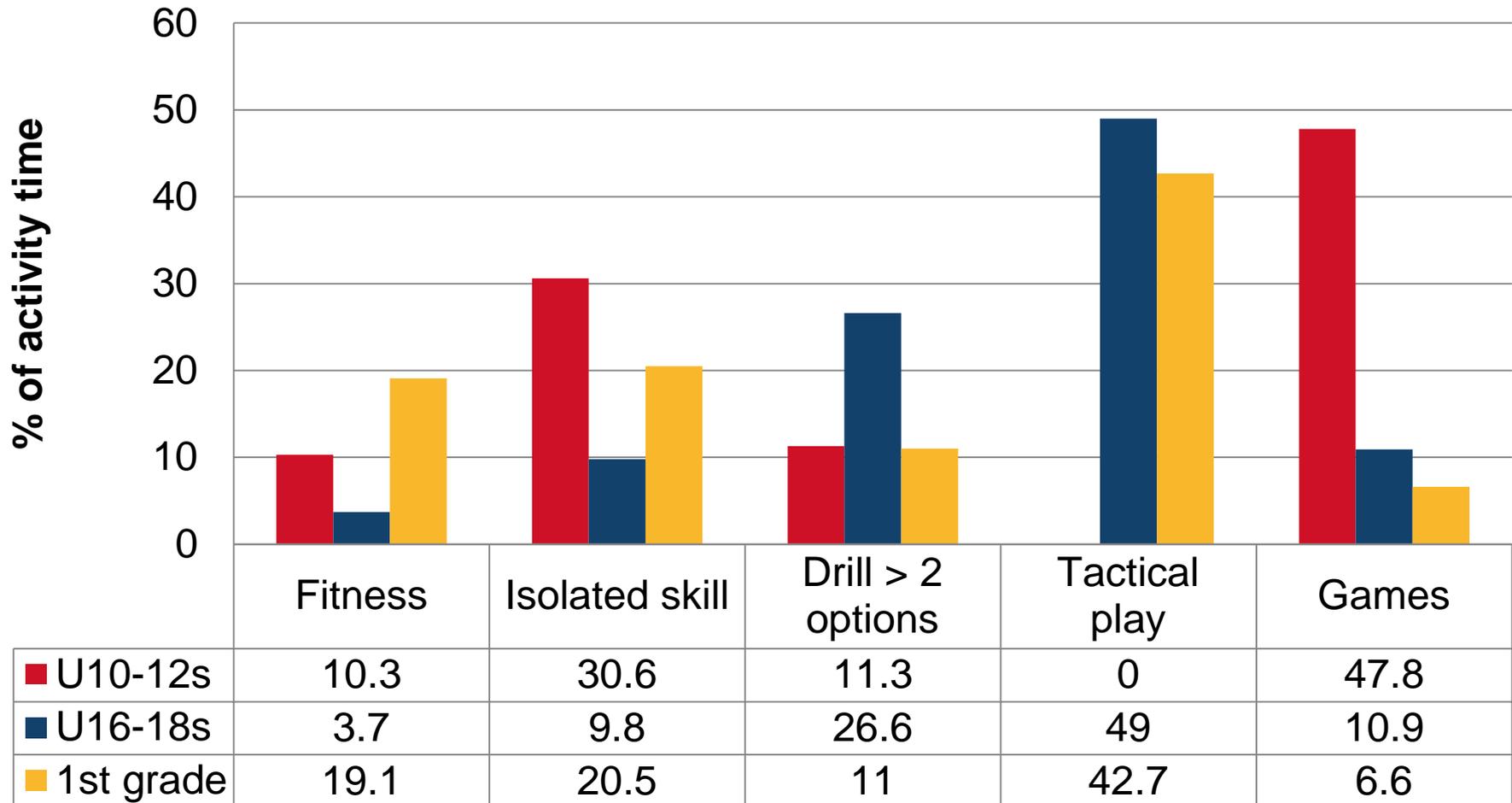
- Activity-to-inactivity ratio (work-to-listening to the coach)

Regular activity	DM activity
Ratio 2:1	Ratio 1.5:1
135 s activity: 60s listening	130 s activity: 85 s listening
5-7 cycles	6-7 cycles

- Concurrent instructions: 5 sec every 20sec

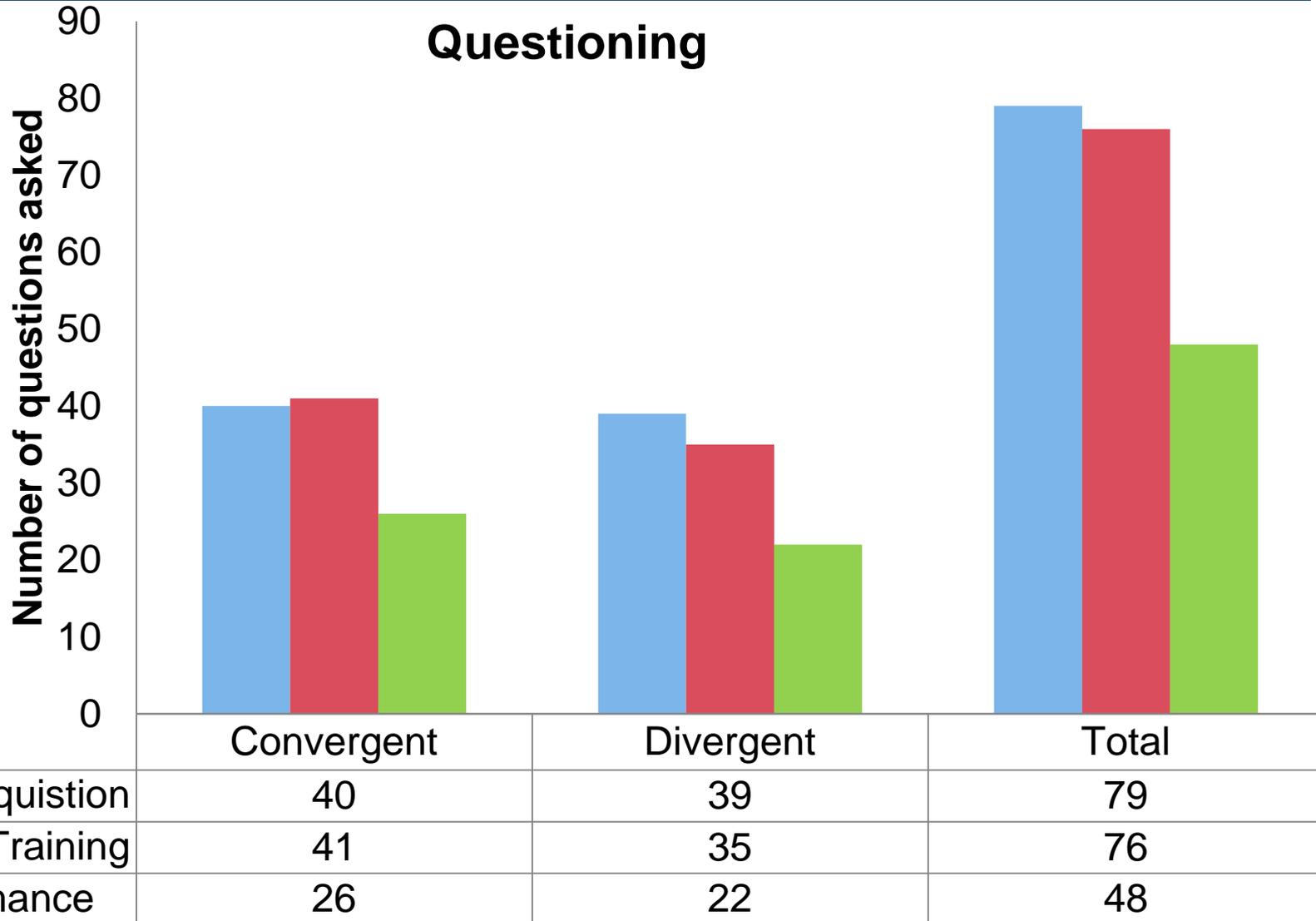


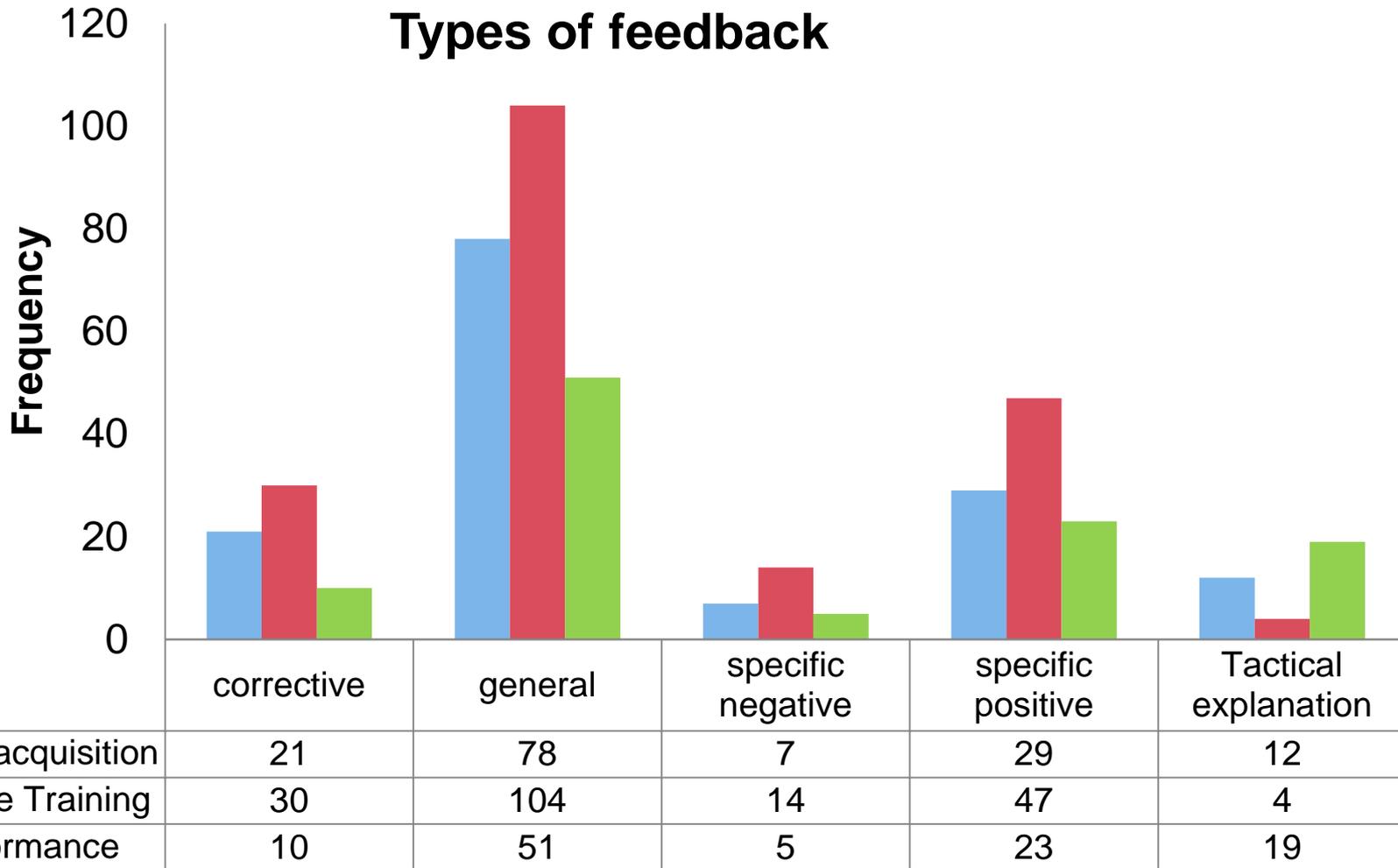
## Type of activity





## Questioning



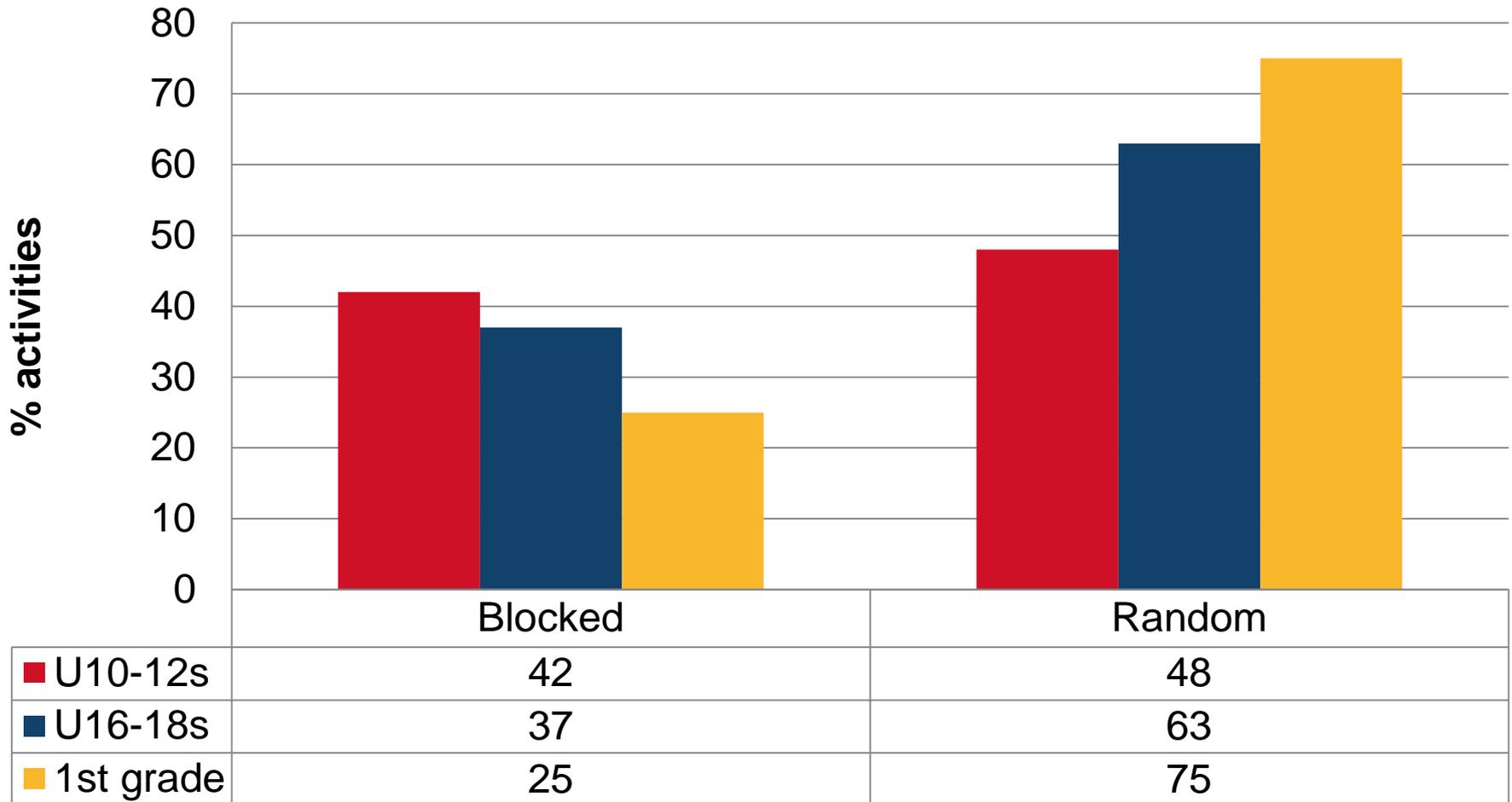


- Wrong message at the wrong time = **disaster**
- Right message at the wrong time = **resistance**
- Wrong message at the right time = **mistake**
- Right message at the right time = **success**

(Vealey, 2005)



## Practice



## ■ Deep Practice

- Deep practice involves struggling in a targeted way so that the learning happens at an accelerated pace.
- Error induced learning
- You must make mistakes and pay attention to them if you are to become skilled.



Coyle, 2009

- The trick is to choose a goal just beyond your present abilities.
- Its all about finding the sweet spot..... The optimal gap between what you know and what you are trying to do



*"All your shots are coming up short, so to strengthen your arms, you'll be practicing with a larger ball."*





# *R.E.P.S Gauge*

- **R** - Reaching/Repeating.
- **E** - Engagement.
- **P** - Purposefulness
- **S** - Strong, Direct, Immediate Feedback.



# *Reaching and Repeating*

- Does the practice have you operating on the edge of your ability, reaching and repeating?
  - How many reaches are you making each minute? Each hour?
  - *Scenario: basketball team video meeting*
    - Coach A selects 1 player to watch an edit and respond
    - Coach B runs a video edit and then selects a player to respond to the situation they have just seen
    - *Which is more effective?*
-

- Is the practice immersive?
- Does it command your attention?
- Does it use emotion to propel you toward a goal?
- *Scenario: player trying to improve their 3pt shot in basketball*
  - Coach A asks the player to take 20 shots at the end of practice
  - Coach B asks the player to shoot 5 consecutive successful shots. If they miss they start again.
  - *Which is more effective?*

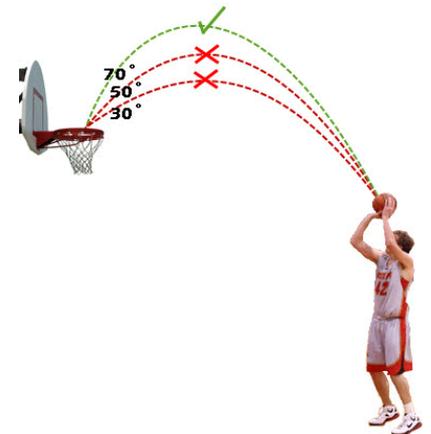


- Does the task directly connect to the skill you want to build?
- *Scenario: a basketball team keeps losing games because they're missing late free-throws.*
  - Team A practices free throws at the end of a practice, with each player shooting 50 free throws.
  - Team B practices free throws during a scrimmage, so each player has to shoot them while exhausted, under pressure.
  - *Which is more effective?*



# *Strong, Direct, Immediate Feedback*

- In other words, the learner always knows how they're doing — where they're making mistakes, where they're doing well — because the practice is telling them in real time.
- They don't need anybody to explain that they need to do X or Y, because it's clear as a bell.



## Make it stick (Brown et al., 2014)

- Getting players out of their comfort zone; embrace difficulties
- Massed practice is least productive
- Avoid the familiarity trap (drills, activities)
- **Interleaving** (spacing between skills or problems) & **retrieval practice**
- Effortful learning changes the brain
- Self-testing
- Engagement – player input (activities; drills; video session)



- Have an aim / focus
- Prepare variations
- Develop questions
- Keep explanations concise (3-5 points)
- Is there enough opportunity for repetition?
- Vary the pressure
- Ask individual questions during the activity (interchange etc)
- Ask team based questions at stoppages





- How can you add pressure into your practice sessions?



- *e.g. Unstructured games (at above game speed) with rules to emphasise themes – then get a player to perform a penalty shot at goal under pressure with a result if they win / fail*
- This emphasises learning the skill not the drill

- Thanks for listening.
- Any questions?



University of  
Sydney –  
*postgraduate studies  
in sports coaching*

[Donna.oconnor@sydney.edu.au](mailto:Donna.oconnor@sydney.edu.au)