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## Why competition is not a 'C' word

**Much to Mr Gove's probable chagrin, coachings long-established and highly effective C-system does not include 'competition'. David Haskins, a highly experienced coach educator and a passionate advocate of the C-system, explains why it is not on the list.**

When Michael Gove congratulated a parliamentary colleague on the use of the latin phrase *festina lente*, it said a lot about him. Superficially it represented the elite system that Gove so proudly proclaims, but as to understanding the meaning of the term, well he doesn't have the time does he?

*Festina lente*: make haste slowly or more haste less speed. If only Gove understood its real meaning. It is one of the true principles of excellent sport development. When Gove made his 2010 statement that only a fifth of young people were involved in competition, he used it as a bare statistic without any explanation. He ignored the fact that the Youth Sport Trust had already made huge progress. Competition managers had been working away at improving the infrastructure of school sport since 2005 and many had made real progress at integrating school and national governing body (NGB) competitions. The wonderful Step into Sport programme had been producing high-quality leaders for many years and it was these leaders that made an expansion of competition possible as they were capable of organising and running intra- if not inter-school sport. And the School Games, first seen in Glasgow in 2006, was an embedded, high-quality competition capable of providing exciting spectacle in the Olympic arena in 2012.

When the necessary adjustment to Gove's cuts were made, school games organisers came into being. Some, sticking to the principle of *festina lente*, stayed as partnership development managers and thus retained as much of the school sports partnership (SSP) infrastructure as they could to help embed competition in a developmental way. This meant: sticking to the principles of wide participation; increasing the range of sports; using competition to enhance leadership; and embedding the principle that all can become involved. In this way competition can be seen as a process and not an outcome. It is not surprising that this view is reinforced by the work of another national organisation.

A year before Michael Gove's appointment, Sportscoach UK did some remarkable development work. Under the guidance of Graham Ross and Richard Bailey, it gathered a group of international experts to begin to unpick the difficult problem of appropriate coaching for young people. One of the group, Jean Côté, suggested the use of an American model called the 5 Cs for positive youth development devised by Richard Lerner and colleagues (Lerner 2005). Côté even developed a definition of coaching based on the Cs:

"Good coaching makes people **confident** about improving their **competence**, and encourages **creative** and individual ways of performing. It leaves people **connected** to sport and physical activity and builds **character** through being positively involved with others."

Sportscoach UK went on to develop the C-system, which has been positively received and even embedded into some NGB coaching frameworks. Sergio Lara-Bercial of the International Council for [www.theleisurereview.co.uk](http://www.theleisurereview.co.uk)

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Coaching Excellence at Leeds Met University has also taken the work to Northern Ireland and Scotland.

The C-system gives coaches a new and overt vocabulary for framing their work. It focuses on: connection; confidence; competence; creativity; character; and caring and compassion.

It is inevitable the C-system will have some interaction with competition in the longer term and an examination of how it could interact should have positive outcomes. Considering the words 'connection' and 'confidence' in relation to competition gives immediate insight. The terms were defined by Lerner and re-defined by Sportscoach UK [*Sportscoach UK 2010, Sportscoach UK 2012*].

	<b>Lerner</b>	<b>Sportscoach UK</b>
<b>Confidence</b>	an internal sense of self-worth and self-efficacy.	enjoy success when practising and receive positive and beneficial feedback
<b>Connection</b>	positive bonds with people and institutions, resulting in successful relationships with family, in school and in the community	work individually and in groups to enjoy the benefits of team play, working with others and, eventually, the independence of community sport

The main point of the C-system is that it gives us a vocabulary for things we had previously assumed were simply implicit in sport. When young people performed in competitions we assumed they increased their connection to sport and gained confidence. Well some of them did but as soon as we examine competition as something to help all young people connect and gain confidence we have to take a second look. What if exposure to competition starts with not being selected? What if it means being defeated in a game between two mis-matched teams? In Gove's UK this is a necessary part of the development of character in young people. In the words of the C-system it can leave young people disconnected and unconfident, a totally undesirable outcome. As long as competition is seen as the outcome of coaching and not simply as part of the process of coaching for young people then we have a problem. The C-system offers us a language in which we can begin to define that process and move forward with clarity.

The Youth Sport Trust has already started the work. Early primary competition takes the form of challenges in which young people can take part and monitor individual progress. They do so in a framework of Physical Me, Social Me, Thinking Me, Tactical Me and Sporting Me, and thus help teachers and coaches understand that the process of challenge and competition involves the overall education of young people. More than 30 sports are in the school games framework, including boccia, polybat, new age kurling so there is an overt inclusion of young disabled people. Even though the Youth Sport Trust is not yet using the vocabulary of the C-system in competition, it is embracing its philosophy. As a summary, look at how the process of competition can be enhanced by the use of the C-system vocabulary.

C system	Questions	Actions
Connection	How will this competition connect young people with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the skills and techniques they</li> </ul>	Is the competition the appropriate format? Could we use a challenge and coach type format? Do the parents

	<p>are currently practising?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• each other?</li> <li>• the wider aspects of competition?</li> </ul>	<p>understand the connection agenda?          Could connection be gained in other ways, eg press and publicity; taking photos/film; admin; officiating?</p>
Confidence	<p>How will this competition increase the confidence of the young people?          Do they have the required skills and knowledge to play or is there an assumption that exposure to competition is the only way to learn them?</p>	<p>How can individual challenges be used to increase confidence?          Does the coach always use positive and beneficial feedback, even if the result was not the one expected?</p>
Competence	<p>What specific skills will be learned through the competition?          Has this been shared with the young people?</p>	<p>Coaches should ensure young people want to try their skills in competition. Is it possible to arrange a coaching session shortly after the competition to enhance skills from what has been learned?</p>
Creativity	<p>Will there be an opportunity for all young people to be creative in the competition?          Do the young people understand what this means?</p>	<p>Is problem-solving encouraged?          Are competition scenarios used in practice sessions?</p>
Character	<p>Does the team have a code of conduct devised by members of the team?          Is there a code of conduct for coaches and parents as well?</p>	<p>Could parents be engaged in the process of developing codes of conduct?          Is the code of conduct something that really does affect the behaviour of performers?</p>
Caring and Compassion	<p>Is the atmosphere of the team one of sharing and cooperation?</p>	<p>Can team members be helped to understand how to tolerate mistakes, and the importance of everyone getting a chance to play?</p>

And as for Michael Gove... Well, he is confident and creative but as for connection, caring and compassion and competence? Perhaps he is the victim of an old and out of date competition system?

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