

Implementing a Club Wide Curriculum

By

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INTRODUCTION

The future of youth soccer can be captured in two words: 'Soccer Academies'. Academy is the catch word. Everyone is looking to position their club as a soccer 'academy'. But what does it mean? Most people would agree that the word academy implies a school. A soccer school then. But schools have a curriculum that is utilized to teach and measure the effectiveness of teaching. Therefore, it doesn't make any sense to have an academy but not have a curriculum.

Most clubs already have a 'Club Plan' in place that might include a curriculum and job descriptions and club policies and guidelines. But the questions are: how effective is it? Do the coaches follow it? How is it monitored and evaluated? Does it reflect the club's mission and identity? Many clubs are so wrapped up in the day to day running of their club that they rarely have time to stop, take a step back and try to get a global sense of the direction the club is going.

This article attempts to provide clubs with the framework for implementing a curriculum. Each club can create a curriculum that takes into account its own unique parameters. But regardless of the club's situation, the key player development principles should still form the basis for everything a club does.

The benefits of having a well planned and progressive curriculum are many fold:

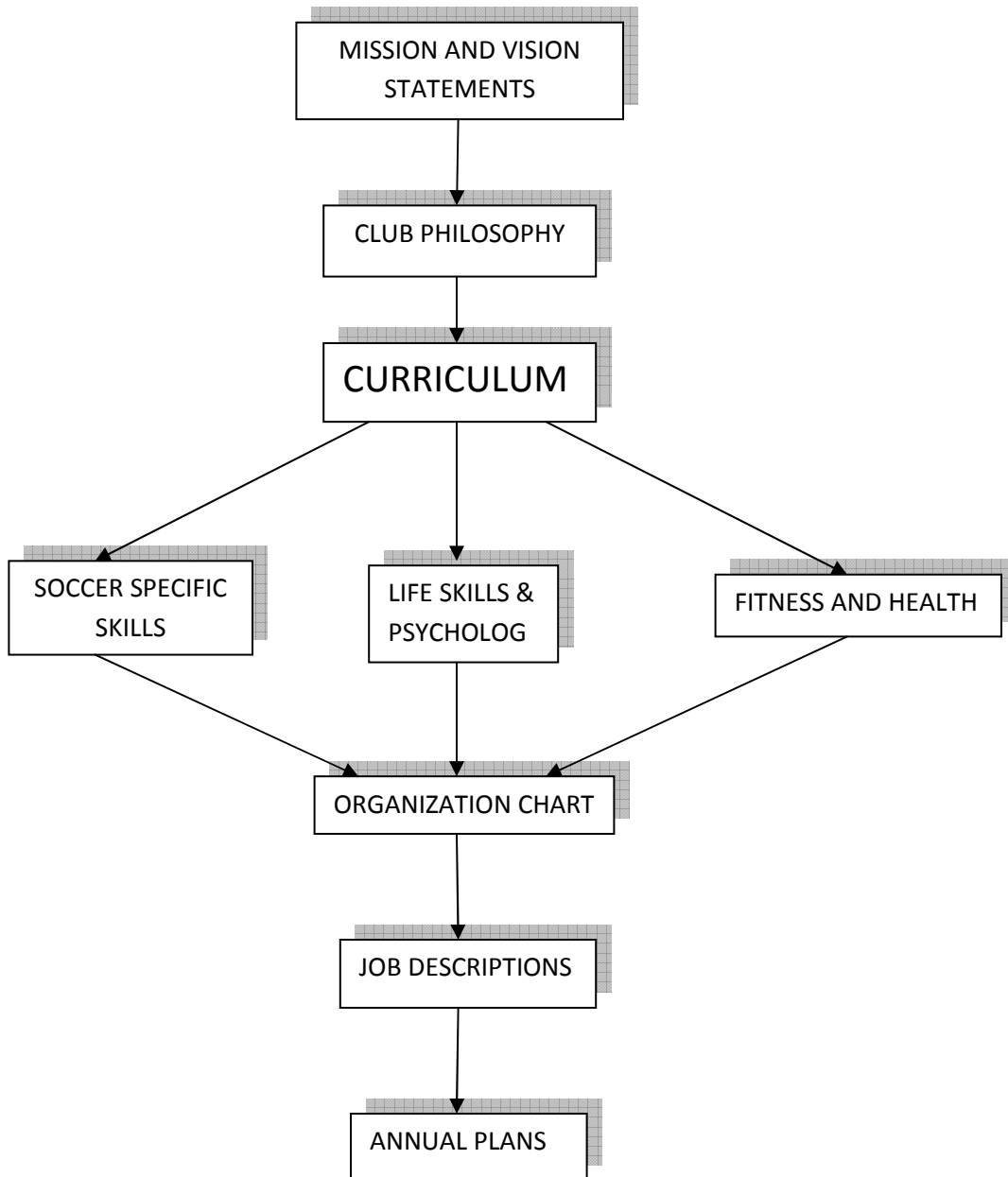
- Gives the club identity
- Thorough educational experience for the players that graduates a 'complete' athlete/person
- Gets everyone on the same page
- Coaching staff works as a team rather than a bunch of individual coaches
- Blueprint for staff training
- Easier to monitor and assess effectiveness of programs
- Selling point for the club, Branding
- Keeps administrators and parents from interfering with technical issues

Before a club can design a curriculum, it all must start with a mission and vision statement. The mission statement is followed by a club philosophy that everyone must buy into. And only then, one can start to design the curriculum. Lastly, the organization chart, the club policies, and the staff job descriptions are created to implement the curriculum.

The following pages provide examples of what a club's mission and philosophy could be, followed by a sample curriculum. This gives the reader an idea of how everything flows.

Once the curriculum is laid out, comes the more detailed summary for each age group that would assign priorities to all the topics, the training volume and key coaching points and objectives for each age group. Measurable expectations should also form a part of the age-specific summary. Playing style and formations could also be part of the curriculum for certain age groups and levels. And lastly, a set of activities that would represent the bread and butter of the training sessions prop up everything else. All this information that comes under the curriculum would vary from club to club and is not included in this article. This is where the club DOC would fill in the blanks and complete the whole document to suit his/her club.

THE CLUB CURRICULUM FLOW CHART



ELITE YOUTH CLUB MISSION AND VISION

The mission of _____ youth club is to help foster young players' physical, mental and social growth so they can reach their potential in life through their participation in soccer. The club will provide the highest quality staff, facilities, environment and curriculum to give players the tools to succeed.

The club's vision is to develop a reputation for producing well trained athletes and gain the respect of the national soccer community as a true soccer academy. College coaches, national coaches and professional coaches will recognize the standards of excellence embodied by the club and expect those who graduate from the club to be quality players with a solid soccer foundation and good citizens.

YOUTH CLUB PHILOSOPHY

The club's philosophy is founded on a set of **core principles** that govern the policies, direction, actions and structure of the club. These core principles are:

Develop the Person, Not Just the Athlete

A youth soccer club has a responsibility for the overall growth of its young athletes. Our club's philosophy embraces the holistic approach of developing the complete person. Our aim is to complement the home and school environments in the pursuit of developing character, values, self-confidence, independence, analytical skills, social skills, coping skills, and sports skills to prepare young athletes for life. Soccer is just the vehicle for achieving these aims and helping each athlete reach his/her potential in their chosen path in life.

Individual Development

Our philosophy is based on what is in the best interest of the individual athlete. This is done through maintaining a healthy balance between individual development and team building. The team is there to serve the needs of the players and no athlete should be expected to sacrifice his/her potential for the sake of the team. This does not preclude the fostering of team ethos and team spirit but the team dynamics should provide the platform for developing interpersonal relationships and social skills rather than surrender individual creativity and ambition. A youth team is just one temporary step in life's ladder, not the top of the ladder. Tomorrow, the athlete will be part of another team.

Intrinsic Motivation, Enjoyment and Natural Ability

Our club's philosophy is centered on the belief that athletes can only attain excellence when they are intrinsically motivated and are enjoying their experience. With children, enjoyment and commitment are interdependent and one cannot exist without the other. There are no guarantees for success and, ultimately, it depends to a large extent on the player himself/herself. We recognize that it takes a combination of hard work, strong personal traits and natural athletic ability to reach excellence. But inspiring players to become intrinsically motivated and measure themselves against high standards will be a core objective of our club.

Playing Philosophy

Our club believes in playing open, creative, attacking soccer, where players are encouraged to express themselves. Ball possession is emphasized, with attacks built up from the back and players interchanging their positions, as dictated by the game. Aimless kicking, kick-and-chase, and over reliance on physical play are discouraged. Our teams will exhibit good support play around the ball and patience and composure on the ball.

Staff in Harmony with the Club's Philosophy

The youth club should foster a positive learning environment in which the technical and administrative staff creates a supportive, player-centered program. Each member of the staff strives to work in harmony with the overall club philosophy. The staff should be highly qualified and include all the diverse disciplines necessary for a sport academy. The staff should work as a team with the single-minded purpose of looking after the welfare of the players.

YOUTH CLUB CURRICULUM

Our club recognizes that an integrated, club-wide curriculum is the key for optimum player development. There must be a line that connects U-6 to U-19, a line that everyone in the club understands and follows. Without a curriculum, the player development process becomes disjointed, is difficult to monitor and evaluate, and players graduate with skill gaps. A deficit in one stage of the development process will tend to inhibit acquisition of more complex skills at a later stage.

Our club will focus on developing skills that go beyond the mere concepts of attack and defense. It's just as important to develop problem solving skills, communication skills, leadership skills, and foster a positive self image, a natural curiosity and an independent, inquisitive mind. This is accomplished by creating an integrated club wide, age specific curriculum that addresses progressively the following areas:

Character Development

1. Develop self confidence.
2. Demonstrate the value of sportsmanship and humility.
3. Teach the value of hard work and perseverance.
4. Promote leadership and taking responsibility for one's actions.
5. Teach respect for mentors and elders as well as opponents.
6. Promote academic education and school study.

Soccer Specific Skills

1. Teach individual technique and develop a comfort level with the ball.
2. Develop 1v1 skills that allow players to dominate opponents and win individual duels.
3. Develop tactical problem solving skills.
4. Develop creativity, versatility and adaptability.
5. Develop the ability to play in various playing systems.
6. Develop a self-reliant player who can make his/her own decisions on the field.

Fitness and Health

1. Develop a progressive program for long term fitness.
2. Develop the core soccer fitness needs of speed, agility, strength and stamina.
3. Teach and promote a healthy lifestyle with proper balance.
4. Develop a lifetime commitment to healthy living.
5. Teach nutrition and self-care.

CURRICULUM FOR SOCCER SPECIFIC SKILLS

OBJECTIVES OF SOCCER SKILLS CURRICULUM

Our curriculum is based on the Building Block concept, where players are taught age and level specific skills in a progressive sequence. One of the key objectives of the curriculum is to provide a strong foundation with a step by step, progressive plan that enables players to achieve mastery of the ball and develop the tools and skills needed to play at a high level. Skills from one age group are utilized to build more advanced skills later in the continuum.

Although soccer is a team game, its flow is characterized as a succession of individual duels. Team success hinges on the ability of players to win these individual duels. Hence, the ultimate aim is to develop players who can dominate their opponents and win the majority of their individual duels. Players who can dominate opponents are able to play at a high level, in any system and any formation, and are the type of players sought by top level coaches.

PRINCIPLES OF PROGRESSION

Players need technical, physical, tactical and psychological tools to win their duels. The technical tools are the foundation of soccer skills. **Technique** is the body's mechanical execution of ball manipulation, such as receiving, dribbling, passing or shooting the ball. Technique leads to skill. **Skill** is the ability to select and execute the right technique under pressure of the game. So, technique has to do with 'how to' while skill has to do with 'when and why'.

However, before a player can learn soccer techniques and skills, he/she must learn to control his body's movement. Players must first develop the full range of **locomotor** (running, jumping, hopping, turning, etc) and **nonlocomotor** (pushing, pulling, bending, twisting, etc) movement skills before they can become adept at **manipulative** skills (such as propelling or receiving the ball).

Therefore, the club's curriculum starts at U-6 with teaching locomotor and nonlocomotor movement along with simple ball manipulative skills. Additionally, motor skills acquisition typically progresses from gross motor skills to fine motor skills. **Gross motor skills** refer to movements of the entire body or large segments of the body, while **fine motor skills** refer to movement requiring precision and dexterity, such as manipulative skills. Manipulative skills are basically the eye-to-hand and eye-to-foot coordination.

The SKILL curriculum therefore should progress from **gross motor skills** (locomotor and nonlocomotor) to **fine motor skills** to **soccer technique** to **soccer skills** within the U-6 through U-18 continuum.

THE SKILLS PROGRESSION TABLE

In the Building Block approach, there are 4 main phases of **individual** player's development:

1. **Body & Ball Mastery Phase:** Player and his/her ball (ages 4-16)
2. **Individual Duel Phase:** Player versus opponent (ages 6-18)
3. **Partner Phase:** Player and partner versus opponent (ages 8-18)
4. **Team Phase:** Player uses ball mastery to help team (ages 12-18)

The starting ages for each phase depend on the natural ability and learning skills of the player and can vary from those recommended above. But failure to properly address each phase or skipping a phase or 'fast tracking' players will result in under-developed individuals.

Although each progressive phase starts at a different age, it's important to note that the four phases eventually overlap. Once they start to overlap, one should not focus on a single phase at the expense of the other phases. The curriculum should allow for work on phases one, two and three to continue well into the teens and constantly be reinforced, refined and not be neglected once the Team Oriented Phase kicks in.

SKILLS PROGRESSION TABLE

Age	Body & Ball Mastery Phase	Individual Duel Phase	Partner Phase	Team Phase
U-6	<i>Movement Education</i> (Running, Stopping, Balance, Jumping, Hopping, Turning, Skipping, Rolling, etc) Develop ball sense through <i>Dribbling</i>	-----	----	----
U-8	<i>Movement Education</i> (Same as U-6 plus Pulling, Pushing, Stretching, Bending, Twisting, etc) <i>Manipulative Skills</i> (Throwing & Catching rolling balls, Bouncing balls) <i>Dribbling, Juggling, Passing</i> ground balls, <i>Shooting</i>	<i>Dribble 1v1</i>	<i>2v0, 2v1</i> Cooperative and Competitive activities where two players work together to manipulate the ball	-----

Age	Body & Ball Mastery Phase	Individual Duel Phase	Partner Phase	Team Phase
U-10	<p>Movement Education (Same as U-6/8 plus Running backwards, Running laterally, Agility, Flexibility, Diving, Twirling, Shuffling, Leaping)</p> <p>Manipulative Skills (Throwing & Catching ground, bouncing and air balls)</p> <p>Feints and Dribbling, Receiving with deception, Juggling, Passing (ground and air balls 10-25 yards, inside and outside of foot),</p> <p>Shooting (instep drive),</p> <p>Heading</p>	<p>Dribble 1v1 Attacking skills: Feints, Shielding, Defending skills: Marking, Jockeying, Block tackling</p>	<p>2v1 and 2v2 Attacking skills: Support (angle, position, open body to field) Wall Pass, Overlap Defending skills: Marking (pressure), Positioning (cover), Intercepting (reading cues & anticipation)</p>	<p>Two line Interaction, Playing through The lines</p>
U-12	<p>Movement Education (Same as before, but increase complexity and utilize more agility equipment)</p> <p>Feints and Dribbling, Shielding, Receiving with deception, Juggling, Passing within 10-40 yards range (inside & outside of foot, bending passes), Chipping, Shooting (driving, bending), Volleying, Crossing, Heading</p>	<p>Dribble 1v1 Attacking skills: Feints, Shielding, Defending skills: Marking, Jockeying, Block tackling, Slide tackling</p>	<p>2v1 and 2v2 Attacking skills: Support (angle, position, open body to field) Wall Pass, Overlap, Crossovers, Off-the-Ball Running to Destroy Cover and create 1v1. Defending skills: Marking (pressure), Positioning (cover), Intercepting (reading cues & anticipation)</p>	<p>3v3 and 4v4 Attacking skills: Team shape (depth & width), Support angles, Triangles, Off-the-ball Runs, Switching Point Of Attack Defending skills: Marking, Positioning, Intercepting</p> <p>8v8 Three line Interaction Playing through The lines Zonal Defending</p>

Age	Body & Ball Mastery Phase	Individual Duel Phase	Partner Phase	Team Phase
U-14	<p>Movement Education (Same as before, but increase complexity and utilize more agility equipment) Feints and Dribbling, Shielding, Receiving with <i>deception</i>, Juggling, Passing Within 10-50 yards range (inside & outside of foot, bending passes), Chipping, Shooting (driving, bending), Volleying, Crossing, Heading</p>	<p>Dribble 1v1 Attacking skills: Feints, Shielding, Defending skills: Marking, Jockeying, Block tackling, Slide tackling</p>	<p>2v1 and 2v2 Attacking skills: Support (angle, position, open body to field), Wall Pass, Overlap, Crossovers, Off-the-Ball Running to Destroy Cover and create 1v1. Defending skills: Marking (pressure), Positioning (cover), Intercepting (reading cues & anticipation)</p>	<p>4v4 & 5v5 Attacking skills: Team Shape (depth & width), Support angles, Triangles, Transition, Off-the-ball Runs, Flank Play, Possession Rhythm, Switching Point Of Attack Defending skills: Marking, Positioning, Intercepting, Compactness, Balance, Transition 11v11 Three line Interaction Playing through The lines Zonal Defending</p>
U-16	<p>Movement Education Speed & Agility (Same as before, but increase complexity and utilize more agility equipment) Feints and Dribbling, Shielding, Receiving with <i>deception</i>, Juggling, Passing Within 10-60 yards range (inside & outside of foot, bending passes), Chipping, Shooting (driving, bending), Volleying, Crossing, Heading</p>	<p>Dribble 1v1, 1v2 Attacking skills: Feints, Shielding, Defending skills: Marking, Jockeying, Double Marking, Block tackling, Slide tackling</p>	<p>2v2 and 2v3 Attacking skills: Support (angle, position, open body to field), Wall Pass, Overlap, Crossovers, Off-the-Ball Running to Destroy Cover and create 1v1. Defending skills: Marking (pressure), Positioning (cover), Intercepting (reading cues & anticipation)</p>	<p>5v5 and 6v6 Attacking skills: Team shape (depth & width), Support angles, Triangles, Transition, Off-the-ball Runs, Flank Play, Possession Rhythm, Switching Point Of Attack Defending skills: Marking, Positioning, Intercepting, Compactness, Balance, Pressing, Transition 11v11 Three line Interaction Playing through The lines Zonal Defending</p>

Age	Body & Ball Mastery Phase	Individual Duel Phase	Partner Phase	Team Phase
U-18	<p><i>Power, Speed & Agility</i> (Same as before, but increase complexity and utilize more agility equipment)</p> <p><i>Technical Maintenance</i></p>	<p><i>Dribble 1v1, 1v2</i> Attacking skills: <i>Feints, Shielding,</i> Defending skills: <i>Marking, Jockeying, Double Marking, Block tackling, Slide tackling</i></p>	<p><i>2v3, 3v3 and 3v4</i> Attacking skills: <i>Support</i> (angle, position, open body to field) <i>Wall Pass, Overlap, Crossovers, Off-the-Ball Running</i> to destroy Cover and create 1v1. Defending skills: <i>Marking</i> (pressure), <i>Positioning</i> (cover), <i>Intercepting</i> (reading cues & anticipation)</p>	<p><i>6v6 and 8v8</i> Attacking skills: <i>Team shape</i> (depth & width), <i>Support angles, Triangles, Transition, Off-the-ball Runs, Flank Play, Possession Rhythm, Switching Point Of Attack</i> Defending skills: <i>Marking, Positioning, Intercepting, Compactness, Balance, Pressing, Transition</i></p> <p><i>11v11</i> <i>Functional Roles, Three line Interaction</i> Playing through The lines <i>Zonal Defending, High Pressing</i></p>