

# **ECB Tutor & Assessor Training**

**James Bogue**

## **A “PRICELESS” experience**

During the latter part of last summer I had supported Andy Fairbairn in delivering Cricket Young Leaders courses to aspiring cricket coaches in Devon secondary schools. This had given me the taste for tutoring, so I was delighted when Matt Theedom approached me enquiring if I'd be interested in attending the ECB national training programme.

For two consecutive weekends in October 2010 Caroline Atkins and I travelled to Northampton for the ECB Tutor & Assessor training programme, the beginning of our journey to become part of the Devon Coach Education team. Colleagues that had previously been on the training programme promised an invaluable, yet exhausting experience! They weren't wrong - the long days, 'evening homework' and information overload mixed together with a cricketers need to unwind at the end of the day meant for a very tiring few weekends.

I could write at length on our experiences, personal development and plenty of comical moments, but have tried to draw out some of the aspects of training that particularly struck a cord with me. Hopefully tutors, coaches and players might benefit from a few nuggets of my own experience.

## **Peer Support Network**

The first weekend began with the usual ice-breakers, there were 24 tutor candidates on the course from around the country representing around 15 different cricket boards. I had attended a pre-course meet and greet earlier in the year along with other representatives from the South West. As well as Caroline the regional group comprised Eric Woodmason & Ross Farrer (Gloucestershire Cricket Board – many of you will know Ross from Devon playing and coaching circles and his time on work experience with the DCB) and Graham Charlesworth, Head of the Oxford University Cricket Academy. Our Regional Tutor Trainer was Gary Worgan, he would be assisted in delivering the programme by Cookie Patel (Mids), Tony Robson (North) and Sarah McQuaid (East). Back in Devon upon completion of the training we would be supported in the field by Matt Theedom and Martin Webb.

It was evident from the very beginning that there was a huge support network, both with colleagues and ECB staff, to ensure every potential tutor was guided through the training programme. The course was intense from the outset and for the next five training days it was non-stop ice-breakers, energisers, role playing, mentoring, group tasks, individual reflection, peer reviewing barely stopping for breath. The role of other candidates was vital in maintaining focus, sharing knowledge, as well as enjoying the inevitable comical moments (and there were plenty!) and relaxing & unwinding in the evenings. The relationships and camaraderie amongst the group grew and became the defining characteristic of the training programme. I would liken this to a coach education course and the bond that grows amongst candidates as they develop together through trial and error. You can never underestimate the role of your peers in providing honest feedback and support at the times you need them most!

## **Learning Preferences (A Visual Activist!)**

The first weekend focussed on learning styles and facilitation skills, namely how to understand your candidates (coaches) way of learning and providing them with a comfortable environment in which to learn. In the same way school children, university graduates or members of Mensa will all have varying ways in which they learn, coaches will also react to different types of learning methods. A good tutor will adopt their style to suit the way in which a group of coaches learn most effectively.

I found out that I was an *Activist*, someone who enthusiastically throws themselves into situations and needs to be constantly doing things. I've always tried to achieve things by trial and error and have the tendency to jump in feet first. I am motivated by a constant change of pace and variety of activities. The *Theorists* (rational thinkers and analysers), *Reflectors* (thoughtful listeners) and *Pragmatists* (logical and systematic) amongst you may find me impulsive and rushed, but are glad I'm the first one to put my hand up!

We attempted several exercises on providing the right learning methods for each grouping (visual, audio, and kinaesthetic). The conclusions drawn highlighted there is not one specific learning method that can suit group environments, a blend of practice is required to keep everyone engaged. This can be seen in action during a coaching course when tutors will move from classroom to sports hall, use video & presentations and switch between deliverers. At times tutors will give a lot of information, in other situations they will draw answers from the group. This prevents training from becoming bland and losing the audience, whilst ensuring the pace is appropriate for effective learning. This is well worth remembering when session planning as a coach!

To find out more about learning preferences you can search for **The Kolb Learning Cycle** and **Honey & Mumford** – material on the internet will explain much more eloquently than I can but not necessarily in language you will understand! At times throughout the tutor training there was a fair bit of head scratching going on – nothing that a chat at the bar later on couldn't clear up though!

### **PRICELESS principles**

The PRICELESS acronym would soon become the bedrock of the course, I remember one of the trainers saying on the first morning – “if you take one thing away with you from tutor training, make sure it's PRICELESS”. When planning and reflecting on tutoring (or coaching) they are key principles that help you identify the success of a session.

**P**actice (ensure that all candidates have the opportunity to practice what they are learning)

**R**elevant (is material pitched at the right level for coaches, how can you adapt as a tutor)

**I**nvolved (including everyone and making sure that all candidates understand)

**C**limate (setting the right positive environment for people to learn)

**E**xperience (understanding prior knowledge and learning that coaches may have already)

**L**earner-Centred (the focus point of the learning is for the coach, think of their needs first)

**E**njoyment (people learn best when they are engaged in the subject matter, have fun!)

**S**elf reflection (the opportunity to think about what they have learnt and how to apply it)

**S**uccess (offer an opportunity for coaches to show they have learned a skill)

This is an invaluable tool in planning the delivery of your session (whether tutoring, coaching or other training environments you may be involved in). It provides a framework for you to check and challenge what and how you deliver and, more importantly, an opportunity to personally assess whether the learners have achieved the session outcome. The concept gives you a definitive criterion to reflect against when you have completed your session, and how to improve for the next time. If you can consciously tick off each of the principles of PRICELESS following delivery of a session there is a fair chance the candidates will have achieved the session aims.

## **Self-Reflection**

This is an area in which most trainers, tutors and coaches are fairly weak in, but is a great habit to form if you are seeking constant improvement. Self reflection is very much under-used and a potential barrier to improving your delivery. It can feel awkward (and brutally honest feedback can be painful!) but it is the key to becoming better at whatever you do. Reflecting on our own practice helps conclude the session, put things into perspective and context, and ultimately helps you prepare comprehensively for your next training session. Take time to think about how you have delivered; ask yourself questions...What went well? What can you improve? Who else can you get feedback from? Writing these thoughts down can give you real clarity on your own performance.

Having the opportunity to learn how to self reflect and also how to review a colleagues performance were key outcomes for me in the training programme. It is not something I have previously been comfortable doing. Now, not only do I realise the importance of self-reflection, but can also help others to critique themselves, an important life skill!

## **Listening & Questioning**

If speaking to my colleagues, friends and family these are not necessarily two skills that they would associate with me! However in order to become an ECB assessor I soon realised these were areas that I would have to drastically improve in order to support candidates through coaching courses. The second weekend of training was focussed on using listening skills and a strong bank of questions to help learners reflect on their own performance.

I hadn't realised that during my everyday life I didn't fully listen to people in order to ask appropriate questions to draw out further information. I would listen to what I wanted to, and start composing a question in my own mind before they finished speaking. Quite often this would result in asking a question I already had the answer to!

By conducting our own mock reviews and assessments with peers we put into practice the new listening and questioning skills learnt over the course. I was paired up with Graham Charlesworth, academy head at Oxford UCCE, and had to assess his tutor delivery of a Level 1 coaching module. This was an incredibly tough experience and has stood me in great stead for future reviews and assessments. Questioning and analysing a man dubbed as 'The Godfather of Reflection' was an intense process, three hours and a million questions later (or so it seemed!) I didn't even know what day it was! Mock assessing Ross Farrer a day later on his delivery of a level 1 coaching session was a lot easier – no offence Ross!

This role playing also gave us an insight into the reams of paperwork required to assess a candidate for a coaching course, something I found out the Devon tutor team are very skilled at completing in a short space of time. An area that will take me a while to master I think!

## **Field based training**

The training course has given me the tools and practice to apply tutoring and assessing skills in the field - a bit like the principle that you only really start learning to drive once you have passed your test! Since last October I have now co-tutored part of a Level 1 course in North Devon and also assessed two Level 2 courses at the Indoor Centre. Both tutoring and assessing coaches with colleagues from the Devon Coach Ed team has given me a much more detailed insight into the delivery of coaching qualifications. I have a lot to learn but am safe in the knowledge that Devon has a pool of experienced experts I can call upon to use my new found questioning skills!

I hope those coaches I have tutored and assessed so far have learnt something from me and I've helped them towards achieving their goal of moving along the coaching pathway. I look forward to helping develop Devon's outstanding coaching workforce and bank of volunteers that drive our sport in the county. And if there is a spare moment during one of the courses I'll

tell you about getting beaten at chess by a man blindfolded, probably the lowest point of my tutor training experience....priceless.

James Bogue  
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