

Fundamental Paddlesport Skills Workshop

Introduction:

Welcome to the Fundamental Paddlesport Skills Workshop Notes. These notes aim to provide coaches with the supporting information for the workshop. The workshop has been developed for coaches working with paddlers in their first few years of paddling activity. It aims to help ensure that paddlers develop quality skills during these formative years by expanding their:

- understanding about what is required to add quality to performance
- observation skills
- ability to use appropriate games / activities and practices

Learning Outcomes:

After the workshop the coach should be able to:

1. Understand the four concepts that underpin quality paddlesport skills.
(Active posture, connectivity, power and feel).
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the four concepts through performance of a variety of discipline specific skills.
3. Observe and evaluate performance in relation to the four concepts.
4. Develop practices to improve observed areas of weakness.

Contents:

These notes support each section of the workshop:

Section 1: The Fundamental Paddlesport Skills

Section 2: Observing and Analysing Fundamental Paddlesport Skills

Section 3: Coaching the Fundamentals Paddlesport Skills

Section 1

Fundamental Paddlesport Skills

Quality Skill Development:

The skills we learn in paddlesport are all about being able to move the boat to a desired destination, preferably in a controlled, efficient, and economic fashion, in order to achieve this we need to:

- Have an **active posture**, allowing the body to move freely, with the muscles sensitive to movement and free to act quickly. Whilst being able to effectively transfer our weight, changing the centre of gravity and remaining in balance.
- Be **connected to our boat** allowing us to react to the movements of the boat, paddles and water around you.

This allows us to **feel** and anticipate the movement of the boat through the water and efficiently **transfer power** from the body to create movement of the boat. The paddler can generate power, turning and stability; control the speed, angle, edge and trim of their boat; and move efficiently and economically. Resulting in the controlled and efficient movement of the boat to achieve a desired outcome.

In order for the paddler to be able to achieve this skill level it is imperative that they have a base of fundamental movement skills, (e.g. agility, balance and co-ordination) this Fundamental Paddlesport Skills workshop assumes that the performers you are working with have developed these abilities. The level of skill development we are expecting is too advanced for children under 10, and equally challenging for over 10's who have gaps in their fundamental movement skills. Sports Coach UK deliver a specific workshop on 'Fundamentals' see their website www.sportscoachuk.org for details for workshops running in your area. They also have a useful audit of fundamental resources on their website if you are interested in this area.

Let us look at each of the four concepts outlined above in detail:

1. Active Posture

An active and secure posture is essential in paddlesport in order to feel in harmony with the water underneath you, achieving a state where the boat is part of you, rather than being an object you sit on/in. The muscles through the legs and into the trunk are responsible for establishing a good posture, they must possess a basic level of tension without causing stiff and uncoordinated movements.

An active posture allows us to:

- Move freely, with the muscles sensitive to movement and free to act quickly.
- Remain balanced throughout the movement of our bodies, paddles, boat.
- Feel and anticipate what is happening to the boat and paddles as a result of the external influences.
- Efficiently transfer power from the body and water to create movement of the boat. Being able to perform strokes that generate power, turning and stability; control the speed, angle, edge and trim of their boat; and move efficiently and economically.

This is the foundation to quality skill development, without an active posture the paddler will be limited on efficiency and control. Hence it is the first component we are going to look at.

Key point: The position of the pelvis is the key to good posture

The pelvis needs to be rotated into a neutral position. This allows the surrounding muscles to be in the 'ready' state. The 'ready' muscle is able to contract quicker, is more sensitive and mobile than a muscle under excessive tension.

2. Being Connected to the Boat

A secure sitting or kneeling posture is vital for the paddler, it is not simply enough to 'hold' onto the boat with the knees, but a light pressure through the feet, knees, hips and into the trunk, allowing the lower body (from feet though into the lumbar spine) move in unison with the boat. The body follows the movement of the boat in a balanced and supple fashion. The lower body connected to the boat, the trunk doesn't avoid the movement of the boat, and doesn't allow the boat to escape from the body.

The more balanced the paddlers posture the less strength they require to remain connected to the boat. A basic tension throughout the lower body becomes enough. The more the balance of the boat is challenged the more strength is required to remain connected.

Key point: We use the points of the body that are in contact with the boat; and a basic level of tension through the core to connect the boat to the body.

3. Power transfer

In order to create powerful strokes we need to apply force through the paddle, if this is achieved by using the major muscles of the arms, but with a loose core, much of the power is lost and the centre of gravity challenged. If on the other hand we use the muscles from the feet through to the chest, we can be far more powerful and remain stable.

Key point: Power comes from the feet through to the core.

Key Point: When we plant the blade to perform a stroke we are aiming to move up to it, beyond it, or around it; we are not trying to pull the paddle through the water.

The BCU Forward Paddling DVD demonstrates this point well, see

4. Feel

We need to learn to work with the water around us and not against it. To do this we need to develop an awareness and sensitivity for how the boat / paddle interact with the water. The paddler who can do this looks like they are working together with the water and not fighting it. Paddlers who have developed this feel can anticipate and react to environmental challenges, as well as know when they can use the water to help them, or choose to over power it. The paddler is efficient in power, and well timed in boat and paddle placement / loading.

Key point: Work with the water – not against it!

Key point: Consider the movement of your boat and the interaction of your blade with the water in your actions.

Section 2

Observing & Analysing Fundamental Paddlesport Skills

Observation:

Let's go back to basics: Remember why we are observing, in this case to provide information that allows us to analyse performance, assessing strengths and weaknesses so we can help improve quality skill development and plan coaching appropriately. Observation is not about right and wrong – it is about what is happening – try to make your observation free of judgement, make it factual:

“I can see

“I noticed that

“The paddle was ...

Do not use terms like “too”, “right” or “wrong”

So rather than “The paddle was too vertical” it should be factual “The paddle was at 90 degrees”

This allows you to gather a full picture before making a judgement – jumping to a conclusion too quickly is a mistake many coaches make, more time needs to be spent gathering information and then taking all of that knowledge to compare it against the picture they want to see (that's the analysis bit).

First, take note of the things that jump out at you. Then delve into the performance for more detail. Specifically looking at the Boat, Body and Blade (in term) is a tool that many coaches use to help them make sure they have gathered all the relevant info.

You need to make sure you are in the best position to see, the more experienced coach will know where they need to be to see certain things. For example, if you watch someone forward paddling from the back – you can see body rotation, but not the length of the stroke. Less experienced coaches can simply improve their observation skills by moving around lots! They will automatically see different things as they move and get more skilled at observing in the process!

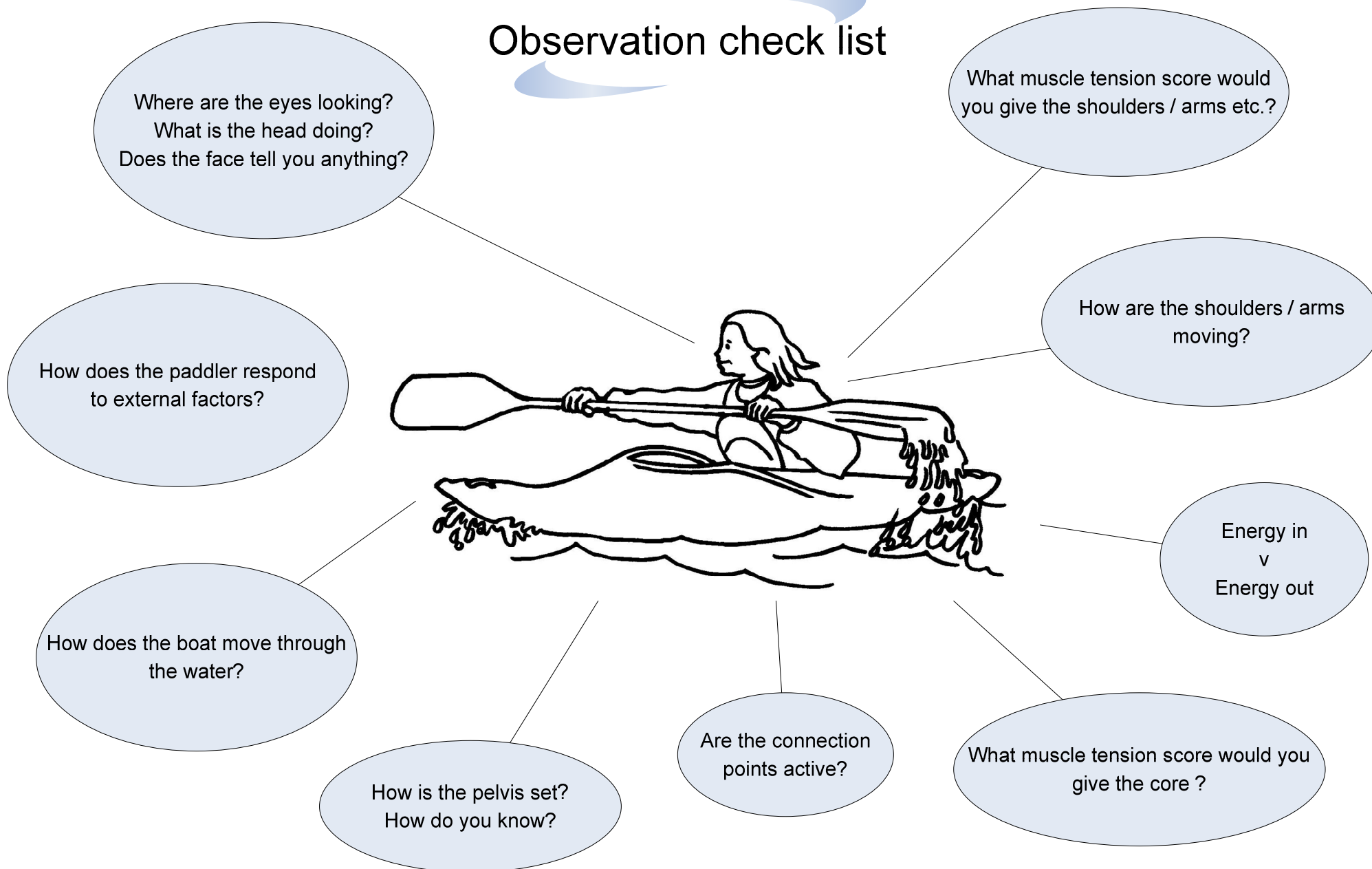
If your paddler knows they are being watched for something specific they will often perform differently. You can use games and activities so your performer is concentrating on the task set rather than on the specifics of your observation. For example, a game of tag gives you the opportunity to watch a range of skills in action and under pressure.

Your observation tools include, obviously your eyes and ears; what you can see and hear, and less obviously, your emotions and instincts; what do you feel? Do you cringe, or wince, does it look right or wrong, is something not quite right – but you can't put your finger on it? You can learn to use these feeling to help guide your observation. You can also use questioning to bring out from your paddler the things that you can't see. For example, "On a scale of 1 to 5, how hard are you working?"

The last point to make is that you need to be aware of how true your observation is, and treat that information accordingly. Some things you will know for definite (e.g. they are using the back of the blade) but others will be less definitive (e.g. the boat is wobbling or the edge is unstable).

The following check sheets can be used to help your observation of the Fundamental paddlesport skills:

Observation check list



Observation

Observing to reveal strengths & weaknesses

Holistic observation
What jumps out at you?

What type of activities do you need to set up?

Can you set up games or activities so the paddler doesn't know what you are observing to highlight certain key points?

Are you in the best position?
(Move around you will see different things)

Do you need to supplement your observation with other coaching techniques?
For example, questioning.

VAK
What can you see? What can you hear? What can you feel?

Have you considered
technical, physical, behavioural & tactical elements?

Have you observed enough?

Are you confident that your observation is true?

Analysis:

Now that you have a good picture in your head about what is happening through observation, you can begin to analyse this information.

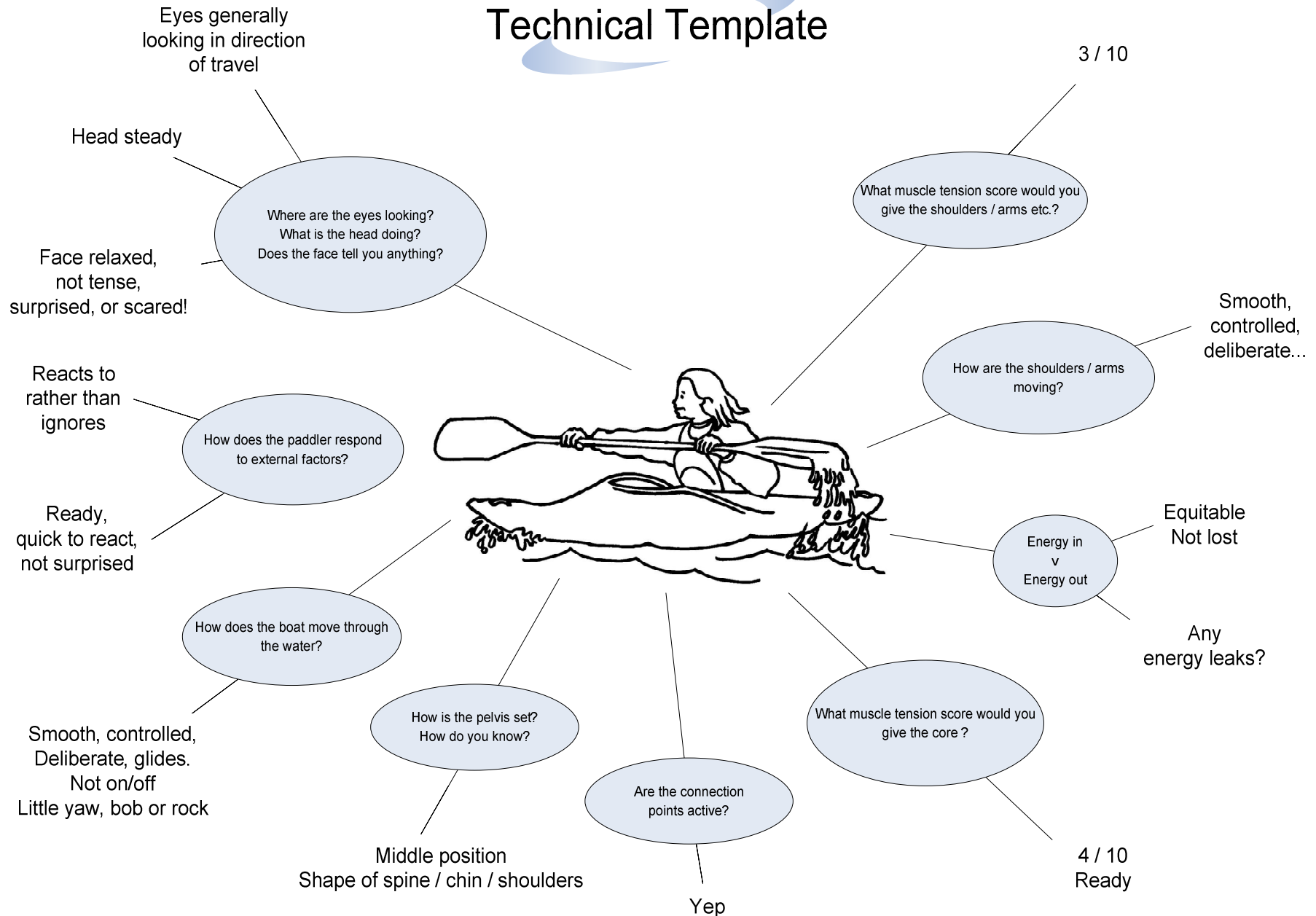
The first job is to compare the performance you see against your technical template. Once this comparison has been made you have a choice, do you:

- Reinforce the matches
- Correct the mismatches, or
- Do nothing

So which one should you do? This depends on many factors, each option has a series of positive and negative effects associated with it, the coach needs to make a conscious decision about which road to go down.

The following two pages provide some guidance regarding analysis of the fundamental paddlesport skills:

Technical Template



Diagnosing Errors

Active Posture	Error <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Round slouched back • Chin forward • Lazy core muscles 	Result <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tires quickly • Shoulders working hard • Stiff jerky movements of arms • Working hard for effort achieved • Unstable when challenged • Slow to react • Boat doesn't glide smoothly • Eyes looking down
Being Connected	Error <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No footrest • Poorly fitted footrest • Poorly adjusted outfittings 	Result <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow reactions • Steering more difficult & slower • Hull wobbling • Reserved / timid body movements
Power Transfer	Error <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pulling with arms, rather than using the feet through to core muscles 	Result <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional movement in boat (fore/aft; yawing) • Splashing • Tension in shoulders & neck • Time delay from "Catch" to boat movement (Look at the bow)
Feel	Error <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is usually as a result of one of the factors above • Over powering 	Result <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing of Sequences out • Strokes look hurried / late • Edge changes look early / late • Body movements as if 'by numbers'

Section 3

Coaching Fundamental Paddlesport Skills

You may find that in practice you do not have to develop many new 'tools' (games, exercises, or activities). But with some consideration we can modify our current coaching tools to develop these four key abilities in a more targeted way. But here are a few ideas:

ACTIVE POSTURE:

Imagery: Paddle like; a puppet, Lord or Lady of the Manor
Goalkeeper Position

Command Words: Tall, Ready, Elegant, Up, Back

Exercises / Games: Catch & Throw

Dwarfs & Giants Tag; appointed giants chase the dwarfs until everyone is giants. NB – must look like a giant to score!

BEING CONNECTED TO THE BOAT:

Imagery: Wear your kayak – see it as an extension of you!
Grip the boat in the style of "Arni", "Julian Clary", "X" (where X = the perfect image)

Command Words: Grip, Knees, Legs, Push (with the feet!), Nudge

Exercises / Games:

- Play with extremes using rating scales. Lock the lower body progressively more using a rating scale and then progressively less. That is going from 0 to 10 and then backs to 0. Then do this whilst doing a manoeuvre like forward paddling or sweep strokes. Decide on a "Best" number and use it as a self-check & command word.
- Slack & Tight. Explore these two extremes. Then: Paddle forward with eyes closed. When the boat veers you can correct it. This should have a slow

reaction time when loose fitting? Or wobble the boat with your eyes closed whilst still or paddling forward – which one gives you control?

- Whilst paddling forward in a kayak we can “Nudge” the boat if we are connected to it. That is, if forward is 12 o’clock, we can nudge it to 11 or 1 without breaking our forward paddling timing (This can be adapted to open boat by “nudging” and “pulling”). The Nudging should be done with the lower body.

POWER TRANSFER

Imagery: Move up to the paddle
 Static paddle / moving boat
 Push the boat where you want it to go!
 Gripping not splashing
 Be an Andrex paddler – “Soft and Strong”
 Imagine a piece of string pulling gently your navel back towards
 your spine

Command Words: Strong, Soft & Strong, Gut, Grip (the water)
 Number from scales (see below)

Exercises / Games:

- Rating scale for core tension. 0 = slack & wobbly. 10 = solid. What’s best?
- Then try it in exercises; sweeps, forward, sprints, edging.
- What’s best? Nudging, as mentioned earlier, works well for this also.

FEEL

Being pro-active but also re-active!

Every movement will have an optimum timing – When practicing, feel for the good ones and try and repeat them!

Imagery: “Dancing with the Water” – Sometimes you lead, sometimes you let
 the water lead. And/or – You lead but remember to work with your
 partner!

Command words: “Smooth”, “Clean”, “Flow”

Exercises / Games: Remember the Command words and try these:

Using a Hanging Draw, "Hang" as long as feels comfortable. You should sit upright as you feel the support reduced.

Try the above with you eyes closed

Using a bow rudder. Paddle forward; spot a point in a new direction, close your eyes and rudder/draw towards it. Open again when you think you are pointing in the new direction.

In pairs. Performer closes their eyes and sits "ready". Their partner moves their boat repeatedly (rocking or turning the boat). Then the student mimics this as accurately as possible.

With a vertical paddle try drawing shapes – triangles, squares, circles. Now do this with maximum or minimum resistance on the blade. Maybe with eyes closed. This can later be adapted to be done on a windy day or in waves.

These notes continue to be developed, the most up to date version is available to download on the BCU website.