

The intersection of sport coaching and art crit: A narrative review of pedagogy in practice.

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Abstract

Delivering constructive and informative feedback from coaches to athletes is central to coaching effectiveness. Feedback has long been regarded as essential psychological and pedagogical competencies of sports coaches designing learning environments. Subsequently, the art “crit” is a widely acknowledged pedagogy which is increasingly being used in other disciplines. Nevertheless, there is a clear gap in the literature on the intersection of sport coaching and the art “crit”, highlighting the need for further exploratory research in this under-examined area. This narrative review: i) examined if the pedagogical practice of “crit” has been used in sport feedback and coaching contexts; and, ii) reviewed the literature for any pedagogical parallels of structured feedback practices that have been attempted between the domains of sport and art. The Scale for the Assessment of Narrative Review Articles was used to guide the development and content of this review. Findings indicated that there is the potential for individuals with multi-disciplinary knowledge in art and sport to demonstrate coaching qualities that support strong performance outcomes in an athlete. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that coaching frameworks and the coaching role can be integrated into, and learn from, different domains to support learning and performance outcomes. The co-creation and development focus inherent in art “crit” may provide opportunity for more constructive and collaborative dialogue. Although this crossover has not been studied, the clear theoretical and practical overlaps point to valuable opportunities for applying critique methods within sports coaching. This narrative review provides preliminary insight into the interdisciplinary link, and we conclude our study by providing new perspectives on key issues relating to the intersection of the art “crit” and sports coaching. It is proposed that “crit” as a multidisciplinary approach can help establish a shared language that supports constructive collaboration with a focus on excellence within a psycho-socially safe coaching environment.

Key Words: Sporting coaching, art crit, feedback, wellbeing

Introduction

Sports coaching encompasses multiple roles and responsibilities in a complex and changing environment. One key role of the sports coach is to provide the best possible feedback that allows athletes to learn, develop and improve performance (Nash, Sproule & Horton, 2016). Delivering constructive and informative feedback from coaches to athletes is central to coaching effectiveness (Lyle, Jolly & North, 2010). In addition, feedback is acknowledged as essential to elite sport, underpinning both athlete performance and wellbeing (Nicholls, James, Bryant & Wells, 2019). In the sporting domain, there are several methods of feedback transmission including verbal communication, visual demonstrations, and reflective or critical thought (Nash, Sproule & Horton, 2016). Contemporary research has found verbal instructions are the dominant feedback activity engaged in by coaches at all levels (Hodges & Franks, 2002; Potrac et al., 2000). Different verbal instruction properties, including timing, nature, and intent, have been studied, finding that verbal instruction has important effects on athletes’ learning and performance and athlete readiness to act on information (Cassidy, Potrac & Rynne., 2023; Corbett, Nicholls & White, 2024; Klatt & Noël, 2019).

Feedback (including verbal instructions, praise and criticism) has long been regarded as essential psychological and pedagogical competencies of sports coaches designing learning environments (Chow, 2013; Mason, Farrow & Hattie, 2020). Coaches are judged based on their ability to deliver ‘appropriate’ feedback, intended to manifest itself in the improved performances of the coaches, athletes, or teams (Nash, Sproule & Horton, 2016). With respect to learning experiences, the main goal of verbal feedback and instructions (often in integration with other sensory modalities, such as vision or proprioception) has been to educate the attention of a learner to utilise relevant information sources within skill (acquisition and refinement) training environments (Correia et al., 2019).

The field of sport coaching draws on knowledge from many relevant disciplines to assist with their approach to feedback, including psychology, teaching and sport sciences to influence practice (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). However, this can lead to questionable ideas being used which are not based in empiricism or are termed “pseudoscience” (Bailey et al. 2018). For example, one of the most questionable ideas is that of a preferred sensory learning style (visual, auditory, or kinesthetic) being objectively better than instruction which is not multi-sensory specific (Bailey, et al. 2018; Rohrer & Pashler, 2012). As sport coaching becomes an established profession, ongoing refinement of practice is essential to ensure evidence-based approaches and resist the influence of unscientific ideas driven by competitive pressures (Collins & Bailey, 2013).

In fine art education the art “crit” is a fundamental pedagogical tool (Greated & Quaife, 2025). Art “crit” typically follows a structured process involving description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation (Payne, 2019). Using critiques, the context is designed to foster psychological safety and mutual respect, ensuring constructive feedback is paired with recognition of individual strengths (Cooper & McIntyre, 2025; Rodrigues, 2025). By doing so, this method promotes collaborative skills, strong communication, and thoughtful analysis (Cooper & McIntyre, 2025). Sport coaching can draw valuable insights from the field of art. There is useful interdisciplinary connection between sport coaching and art, for example the perfection of the ideal or achievement of a function worthy of praise, be it to win or to demonstrate artistic quality (Platchias, 2003). The expression of a skill with aesthetic value, the demonstration of creativity, uniqueness and improvisation, or physical and emotional expression in the achievement of a creative outcome (Platchias, 2003).

The studio “crit” is a widely acknowledged pedagogy which is increasingly being used in other disciplines (Rodrigues, 2025). The “crit”, is focused on the instructor providing guidance, equally acknowledging the process of development and the final product (de la Harpe, et al. 2009; Sawyer, 2017). The usefulness of the “crit” stems from the emphasis on the development of an artefact within the contextual framework in which the work is positioned and which is achieved through cumulative feedback sessions (Rodrigues, 2025). “Crits” make use of multiple perspectives including self-assessment, peer commentary, and expert feedback, supporting the individual to enhance technique and reflective capacity to advance both technical skills and creative purpose (Cooper & McIntyre, 2025).

In this interdisciplinary crossover, the sport coach would be the fine art academic, the athlete/s would be the artist/s, and the training/performance would be the work being read. Of particular importance to any athlete-coach interaction is the use of a communicative framework that promotes a high-quality interpersonal relationship (Jowett, 2025). Communication, including conflict management and resolution is a central function (Wachsmuth, Jowett & Harwood, 2018) and is the fuel for the development and maintenance of quality coach-athlete relationships (Jowett, 2025). In the era of technological advancements, communication can be affected in a positive or negative manner (Jowett, 2025). There is extensive evidence of the negative effect of a coaching style whereby the athlete is a passive recipient of the coach (Jowett & Wachsmuth, 2020; Kerr, Wilson, & Stirling. 2020). For example, coaches who adopt a controlling communication coaching style may result in an increase in athlete competitive anxiety (Ramis, Torregrosa, Viladrich & Cruz, 2017), a decrease in athlete motivation (Haerens et al., 2018) and increase symptoms of athlete burnout (Barcza-Renner, Eklund, Morin, & Habeeb, 2016). An athlete-centred approach seeks to overcome this and ensure the safeguarding of athlete wellbeing and improvement to personal growth, innovation, creativity, and fulfillment (Jones, & Ronglan, 2017; Jowett, 2024).

Cycles of feedback are therefore essential to both high performance sport and creative practice. Nevertheless, there is a clear gap in the literature on the intersection of sport coaching and art “crit”, highlighting the need for further exploratory research in this under-examined area. An initial search conducted with a university librarian found no review papers addressing this topic. Therefore, this narrative review aims to summarise existing literature on the application of art “crit” within sport feedback and coaching, representing the first attempt to explore this interdisciplinary link.

The overall purpose of this narrative review was to examine how, if at all, the pedagogical practice of “crit” has been used in sport feedback and coaching contexts. Given the paucity of literature on the topic, the secondary purpose of this review was to examine the literature for any pedagogical parallels of structured feedback practices that have been attempted between the domains of sport and art.

Methods

Initially, a scoping review was planned in accordance with the JBI Manual for Evidence Synthesis for Scoping Reviews (Peters et al. 2020). Following an initial search suggesting a lack of research on this topic, a narrative review was deemed the appropriate methodology for this review to explore the topic in depth (Covidence, 2025). Narrative reviews permit a descriptive, flexible, and subjective summary on the topic, allowing for a qualitative synthesis and theory of development for future research. To ensure the highest quality narrative review could be produced, the Scale for the Assessment of Narrative Review Articles (SANRA) was used to guide the development and content of this review (Baethge, et al., 2019). The SANRA scale is a brief 6-item quality assessment instrument that assists in the assessment and writing of narrative reviews. This includes

an explanation of the review's importance, statement of aims, description of the literature search, referencing, scientific reasoning, and appropriate presentation of data (Baethge, et al., 2019).

Search Strategy

Four databases were systematically searched (ProQuest Central, Scopus, SportDiscus, Web of Science) from inception until the 24th of September 2025. The search strategy was iteratively developed and peer-reviewed with a University Librarian (Table 1). The search strategy sought evidence from secondary, primary, and grey literature across all formats and languages. Only resources that were translated into English were included. Any secondary, primary or grey literature which was relevant to the review were retained for hand searching reference lists and forward citation searching. The database search results were uploaded to Covidence (Veritas Health Innovation, Melbourne, Australia). Two reviewers engaged in title, abstract, and full text screening (RM & MR).

Table 1 Search Strategy for Art Crit Pedagogy and Sport Coaching & Performance

Concept	Context
"Art Crit*"	Sport*
"Art teach*"	Athlet*
"Art education"	Near 5
"Critique seminar*"	(in proximity / within 5 words)
"Design critiques*"	Coach*
"Design education"	Development
"Design teach*"	Performance*
"Design jury"	
"Group criti*"	
"Studio critique*"	
"Studio feedback"	
"Studio-based learning"	
"Studio presentation*"	

Inclusion and exclusion

The criteria were aligned with the participant, concept, and context (PCC) due to the broader and more flexible approach to exploratory topics. The *population* included coaches, who are involved in facilitating an athlete or athletes' progress towards achieving goals in a competition or practice environment (Otte, et al. 2020). The *context* included any level of sport or performance, which was overseen by an official regulatory body. For example, Athletics Australia has a level 1 through to level 4 framework (Athletics Australia, N.D), whilst the Australian Football League uses an ordinal scale with a point system, from a registered coach to a gold coach (Play AFL, N.D). This is consistent with coaching organizations in the United Kingdom (Nash, et al. 2017). The *concept* required a pedagogical practice commonly used in art "crit" to be used in a sport setting to deliver any type of coaching to athletes. The "crit" can be referred to various names, such as a design jury, critique, or review (Healy, 2016).

Data Extraction

Data was extracted from sources verbatim and/or paraphrased. The data extracted, where relevant, included study characteristics (author, year, study design), objective of the paper, the context of the coaching or performance setting, and the concept of an art pedagogical framework being used in a novel manner in sport, or vice versa.

Results

Across four electronic databases, 136 records were identified following the removal of duplicates. There were no (zero) resources found which directly related to the primary research aim concerning how the pedagogical practice of the art 'crit' been translated into the sport feedback and coaching. Three resources provided insight to the secondary aim of this narrative review which described the pedagogical parallels of structured feedback practices in art and sport.

The first source described the success of a sport coach with a part-time career in art teaching. The *Daily Telegraph* published a newspaper article describing the background to Ian Thorpe's former coach (*Meet Ian Thorpe's secret weapon*), Tracey Menzies, who transitioned from art teaching and part-time swimming teacher to a high-level swimming coach (Coombs, 2004). Consequently, we located an ABC interview in which Tracey highlighted her coaching approach. In the interview, Menzies emphasised her coaching philosophy centred on fostering enjoyment, cultivating an appreciation of purpose, and inspiring passion. These were the factors she identified as crucial in bridging the gap in Ian Thorpe's journey. Furthermore, Menzies underscored her collaborative coaching approach, characterized by mutual respect for each other's beliefs and ideas. Menzies draws one clear analogy to her classroom experience; being able to bring out the best qualities in students and helping them recognise their talents, and her approach to athlete development (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2004).

The next two sources applied the practices of sport coaching to art education and practice. Faizrahmanova et al. (2018) explored the application of coaching methodology to teaching the history of visual arts within a university setting at Kazan Federal University in Russia. This study used a non-randomised experimental design whereby 135 students used the coaching method and 230 students served as controls for a time equated to 18 hours of seminar and lectures in each group. In this study, coaching was defined as “*a process furthering implementation of training and development and consequently improvement of the trainee’s competence and professional skills*”. The coaching framework described, provided a four-step phase: goal setting, reality check, courses of action and will to act. The structure allowed students to autonomously and systematically develop a plan to improve learning of the visual arts. The professor only intervened in the third stage to assist with potential options. During the final stage, students were presented with various educational options to guide and direct their efforts. The findings indicated an increase in retention of information by approximately 100% in the experimental group (15.5 vs 7.8 average number of artists mentioned). The authors claimed that coaching methods used in sport can transfer to educational settings due to the clear working states, sequential steps and the effect on overcoming intercultural barriers.

Ledsome and Dowlen (2007) reported the value of the *coach’s eye* in design education and practice, highlighting the application of established coaching principles to the field of art design to produce novel insights. In this reflective article published for the International Conference on Engineering and Product Design Education, the authors identified several parallels between sport coaching and the design process. These include the incremental efforts across changing circumstances with periods of routine activity and rest. The need to train and perform at the best of one’s ability, analyse and learn from past performances and relax and recover for the next event. As a parallel, the coach and the design manager are there to support others by creating a secure and protected environment, draw on the necessary expertise of others to help achieve the goal at hand, establish clear communication with all parties involved in the final product, record progress and learn to improve future outcomes. The authors describe the best design managers taking on the coaching role throughout the whole design project. This parallel is described via the example of learning to be a proficient archer and designer (Table 2).

Table 2 The Parallel Between Archery Coaching and Design Coaching

Archery	Design
Teach basic warm-up exercises to prepare he body for activity	Develop basic drawing, design thinking and Coaching and Design (CAD) skills to provide the necessary basis for the design process
Make learners aware of basic safety procedures.	Make learners aware of the responsibility implications of design decisions.
Demonstrate the action of shooting a bow	Outline the basic design process and present key case studies
Allow practice at short range under close supervision and guidance; analyse, critique, and repeat.	Provide simple design exercises with advice and guidance; analyse, critique, and repeat.
Show how to score, keep records, and analyse personal performance.	Show how to assess design qualities and learn methods for improvement.
Progress to longer ranges as ability improves, with reduced supervision.	Introduce more challenging design exercises as ability increases, with guidance available on request.
Encourage observation and critique of expert archers.	Present a range of well-designed artefacts for analysis and critique using insights from exercises.
Run a beginner tournament to provide incentive, experience, and performance analysis under competition.	Run a competitive design challenge to motivate students and focus on solving real-world needs.
Introduce regular practice sessions with occasional constructive criticism of technique.	Conduct a series of design exercises with varied challenges to broaden insight, offering guidance as needed.
Offer occasional constructive criticism as experience grows.	Offer occasional constructive criticism as experience grows.

Adopted from Ledsome and Dowlen (2007), p6

Ledsome and Dowlen (2007) describe the practice of art and design skills progressing from apprentice, journeyman and master craftsman, or more modern terms being student, member, and fellowship grades. The reputation of a master was evident in how one developed quality apprentices. The scarcity of true coaching roles in design-related professionals results in limited pedagogical development in these areas.

However, in sport settings there are many talented performers who go on to coach and bring with them an in-depth understanding of the technical demands, personal experiences of success and struggle, psychological pressures and discipline required to excel. These individuals utilise their firsthand experience to craft training methodologies that are grounded in real-world performance. Their transition from performer to coach becomes a natural extension to their passion. The applicability of this connection was tested with a program of design coaching at London South Bank University. The program, developed in collaboration with the teaching team, included coaching strategies such as goal setting, collaborative problem solving and future planning. Staff subjectively reported positive experiences with this coaching approach.

Discussion

Collectively, the sources found in this narrative review indicate that there is the potential for individuals with multi-disciplinary knowledge in art and sport demonstrating coaching qualities that support strong performance outcomes in an athlete. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that coaching frameworks and the coaching role can be integrated into, and learn from, different domains to support learning and performance outcomes given the similarity presented across the fields of education, art and design, and sport. The evidence is highly variable in study methodology, and currently there is no indication of the use of art “crit” as a framework to support sport coaching and performance enhancement. The lack of research investigating the application of evidence-based art “crit” approaches to the sport coaching context provides an opportunity for new and novel interdisciplinary approaches.

The similarities between art and sport as public performance and contexts of individual and group excellence are clear. However, the pedagogy of sport coaching feedback and art “crit” are quite different. This work identified that those with experience in both sport and art may bring different levels of expertise and skills to their work. The co-creation and development focus inherent in art “crit” may provide opportunity for more constructive and collaborative dialogue, compared to more traditional and hierarchical coach-athlete relationships.

An additional key difference between the two domains is that art “crit” is a well-developed, evidence-based and well-established pedagogy that is art and artist agnostic. Whereas, historically, the science of sport coaching (which is a novel discipline) has remained heavily focused on technical skills. More recently the progression of coaching practices in sport has moved significantly from a “coach-centered” approach to an “athlete-centered” approach driven by changes in learning theory, sports science, athlete welfare priorities and cultural literacy. The formalisation of “crit” as an approach that is learned and understood across all disciplines of the arts can create a clear, common language for constructive engagement with a focus on excellence within a psycho-socially safe environment.

Conclusions

Art critique pedagogy provides a structured and dialogical approach to feedback in a psychologically safe environment, offering a contrast to the more hierarchical styles commonly found in elite sports coaching. In fields like dance and performing arts such as a circus, critique is effective in hybrid performance environments where artistry and athleticism intersect, highlighting its potential for application in high-performance sport. Although this crossover hasn’t been studied, the clear theoretical and practical overlaps point to valuable opportunities for applying critique methods within sports coaching. Dance, circus, and cheerleading already demonstrate how critique supports settings that demand both creative expression and physical precision. Bridging this gap creates an opportunity to foster meaningful and collaborative dialogue between art pedagogy and sport science in elite sport. By positioning art critique feedback as a transferable pedagogical framework, it can enrich athlete development, encourage reflective practice and cultivate more collaborative feedback cultures within elite sport.

This narrative review provides preliminary insight into the interdisciplinary link of coaching frameworks to enhance outcomes in art and design education and practice. There may be potential value in applying the strengths of art-based pedagogy and design frameworks within sporting contexts, given the substantial similarity between art and sport. The case study of Tracey Menzies demonstrates the positive impact of a sport coach with a career in art teaching and her ability to bring out the best qualities in the “learner”. Therefore, it is proposed that “crit” as a multidisciplinary approach can help establish a shared language that supports constructive collaboration with a focus on excellence within a psycho-socially safe environment. However further research is needed to ascertain a clear link between art teaching pedagogy and sport coaching practices.

Conflicts of interest

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

AI was not used to create or develop this content.

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