



SPORTS COACHING

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Preface

The principal rationale for writing this book comes from our difficulty as lecturers, researchers and coach educators to find coaching literature that is informed by sociological and educational perspectives. There is very little available literature that questions some of the taken-for-granted practices in coaching and acknowledges the complex reality within which coaches work. It has been argued that despite the recent increase in research on coaching, much of the work remains unproblematic and developmental in nature. As a result, the research often gives an 'oddly inhuman account of this most human of jobs'. However, this situation is being increasingly questioned, with a call for coaching to be recognized as multivariate, interpersonal and dynamic; in effect this emphasizes the social within social cognition. Such a stance implores us to avoid treating coaches as 'cardboard cut-outs', and athletes as non-thinking pawns.

There is a small but growing number of coach educators and academics who currently engage with the sociology of coaching. Equally, there are a number who focus on the pedagogy of coaching. However, this latter group predominantly adopts a behaviourist teaching approach to the subject, and so concentrates on rather simplified 'how to' methods and effective coaching models. This differs from our interpretation of pedagogy, which we view as a problematic process that incorporates the interaction between how one learns, how one teaches, what is being taught and the context in which it is being taught. The key to adopting this view lies in making coaches aware of the social and educational dynamics which have created their identities and philosophies, and hence, their abilities to perform. Developing such an awareness in coaches provides them with the ability to evaluate information from a range of sources, and

the confidence and courage to take responsibility for decisions affecting their athletes.

We contend that a growing number of coaches want to develop athletes who can make decisions and adapt to changing situations on the field or the court. This trend implicitly supports the view that learning is less the reception of acts and facts, and more a social practice that implies the involvement of the whole person in relation not only to specific activities but also to social communities. In this respect, we agree that 'the study and education of the human is complex' and it requires sensitivity, subtlety and subjectivity. If coaches want to produce decision-making athletes it is useful if they adopt coaching practices that take account of, and can facilitate, such a socially determined cognitive goal. The significance of this book lies partly in a reality-based integrative approach to human movement. Such a stance is rooted in the belief that an interdisciplinary approach is imperative for understanding such a complex and dynamic activity as coaching, where, invariably, the whole is considerably greater than the sum of the constituent parts. Within this approach, the coach is viewed as a holistic problem-solver involved in the planning, prioritization, contextualization and orchestration of provision in an ever-changing environment. In this respect, it differs from the traditional approach to studying coaching from single and isolated sub-disciplinary perspectives.

Adopting such a framework means that our discussion can call on theoretical ideas from various disciplines as well as real-life sports coaching scenarios, as we seek to develop a holistic, credible view of the coaching process. However, despite our belief in the usefulness of an integrated approach to the coaching context, we cannot claim to wholly deliver it here. Rather, it is mentioned as a goal to which we aspire. Although a certain amount of integrating different disciplines is inherent in the book (i.e. the sociological and the educational), the principal aim here is to highlight the relevance of sociological and educational concepts to studying coaching, thus bringing different and previously lacking perspectives to the analytical table. Producing a truly integrated book, inclusive of all the disciplines that inform sports coaching, is another task.

Author

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INTRODUCTION

Unlike the more established subject areas of physiology, psychology, biomechanics and sociology, coaching, as related to improving others' sporting experience and/or performance, has only recently been recognised as a bone fide area of sport related study. Despite this late start, it is rapidly making up for lost time as evidenced by the increasing number of undergraduate and postgraduate courses on offer at different universities. This trend has also been echoed by governmental policy makers who recently sponsored both a Coaching Task Force and, in conjunction with other official bodies, a World Class Coaching Conference, in an attempt to improve the standards and efficiency of sports coaching. Consequently, there are expanding opportunities to develop both coach education and deployment, with over £25 million having been earmarked to develop a network of Community Coaches throughout the country by 2006.

Traditionally, coaching-related research has been rooted in the principal sport science fields, with psychology in particular being considered its parent discipline. This continues to be the case, although its appreciation as both a critical sociological and pedagogical endeavour has begun to challenge the tendency to portray it in terms of single variables and unproblematic models. Indeed, this growing school of thought believes that scholarly investigation has only begun to acknowledge and explore the essential nature of the activity, which is considered to be complex, multi-faceted and integrated. Such a

development has contributed to the debate surrounding the coach's role and associated responsibilities. These relate to the dynamic, intricate and ambiguous nature of the role often as dictated by the context, which demand considerable flexibility and critical thinking skills from practitioners as they seek to create the ultimate learning environment for their charges.

Recognition of this complexity and a willingness to engage with it then is where we currently stand; an exciting time when the boundaries of our knowledge, in terms of the what, how, where and when of effective coaching are being constantly challenged and shaped. The purpose of this section is to somewhat map out coaching research and texts so that students and scholars can see where concepts and information related to the activity 'fit' into the existing body of literature. It is organised along disciplinary lines with, for example, work rooted in sport psychology appearing under that subject area.

Undoubtedly, there are areas of overlap (which are also open to definitional debate), as one sub-heading cannot be easily divorced from another, hence, an occasional key text which covers more than one area is listed under both. Consequently, it is advised to treat the following listing as a guide to available research in the field as opposed to a definitive categorisation of work related to coaching. Finally, the guide also possesses a section on the teaching and assessment of coaching as an area of study, which is increasingly becoming a vibrant area of debate within the profession.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH TO COACHING

As a consequence of being considered coaching's parental discipline, investigations into the activity have traditionally tended to be carried out from a psychological perspective. Such work has utilised both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Topics covered include the perceived effectiveness of interaction, decision making and the complex cognitive thought processes of coaches.

MODELLING COACHING

Many have tried to capture and explain the nature of coaching through the development of models. The desire to do so is based on the assertion that the ability to identify, analyse and control variables that affect athlete performance is central to effective coaching. This loosely sequential view of the activity suggests that improved performance can be attained through a planned, coordinated and progressive process. Within this body of knowledge, two types of models have emerged, those 'for' and 'of' the coaching process. Models 'of' the process are based on empirical research investigating expert and/or successful coaching practice, whereas models 'for' the coaching process are idealistic representations that arise from the identification of a set of assumptions about the process.

A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO COACHING

This relatively recent line of enquiry is rooted in the perceived dissatisfaction of viewing coaching as a systematic, de-personalised set of standardised models and procedures. Hence, it tends to emphasise the problematic and integrative elements of a coach's role, elements that have often been defined as 'intuition' or the 'art of coaching'. It has also accused previous work of oversimplifying a very complex process, a claim supported by empirical work undertaken with coaches in the field. Consequently, it is based on the belief that a coach is much more than a subject matter specialist and a systematic method applier, with the most important professional consideration being how the individual perceives the situation, and the resulting interaction that takes place. Issues investigated here include the constructivist nature of coaches' knowledge, coaches' agency, interaction in the coaching context, coaches' power and how they use it, and the coach's social role.

A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH TO COACHING

Much early research into coaching was carried out using systematic observation instruments; such methods having been

pioneered within physical education. Their purpose was to better observe and describe what coaches (both 'good' and 'bad') actually do in practice. This work tended to emerge in psychology, and to a lesser extent pedagogy, related journals in accordance with a somewhat behaviourist paradigm. Although useful information has been gathered, the limitations of such studies have been recently highlighted as only providing a one-dimensional snapshot of coaching which cannot be generalised across contexts.

Alternatively, in an attempt to expand current conceptualisations of the coaching role, work is currently emerging defining coaching as being a critical pedagogical process above all else. In support of this position, examples from educational theory have been cited as being relevant to enhance our understanding of coaching and how to go about it. It is based on the premise that coaching is, at heart, a teaching activity, with the ultimate goal being athlete learning.

Decision Making in Sports Coaching

The importance of decision-making in sport has been well documented. There has been considerable debate about how much emphasis should be placed on physical and technical skills in good quality practice and how much on players' awareness of game strategies and their decision-making capacities. Two studies involving rugby and soccer players, respectively, shows using different methodological approaches focusing on how player's perceive their ability to make decisions in game situations, after participating in an experiential training based intervention.

Different instructional models involving an experiential learning approach used in the interventions over seven weeks and ten weeks, respectively. The findings, as a result of the interventions, suggest that the application of an experiential learning approach to deliberate and purposeful decision-based training may add-value and quality to player practice and develop their decision-making and skill execution on the rugby and soccer field, as the players' knowledge representation and game understanding have improved.

However in a coaching context, Kidman discusses reflection in terms of self-reflection which she argues is a 'particularly

significant part of empowerment, whereby coaches themselves take ownership of their learning and decision making'. She draws on what Fairs calls the Coaching Process - A Five-Step Model for Self-Reflection. This model encourages coaches to reflect on their coaching skills. Gilbert and Trudel use reflection as a conceptual framework to understand how coaches draw on experience when learning to coach.

While there are numerous interpretations of reflection, in and out of the coaching context, Smyth cautions us to be aware that there are consequences of reflection becoming so commonplace. One is that it has the potential to lose its intended meaning because it can be interpreted in so many different ways. Second, is that the popularity of the term has created what has been described as a 'paradoxical situation' where reflection is used in 'an unreflected manner'.

When attempting to gain an understanding of the complexities associated with reflection, it is useful to consider Tinning's point that 'if becoming reflective were simply a rational process then it would be easy to train ... teachers [read coaches] to be reflective'. He argues it is not easy to 'train' people to become reflective practitioners because 'many of the issues' on which practitioners 'should reflect are not merely a matter of rational argument', rather they 'have a large measure of emotion and subjectivity embedded within them'. Many coaches learn how to coach as a consequence of being an apprentice to another coach, often a coach they admire, and base their own practices on those of their mentor. Not surprisingly, reflecting on, and possibly critiquing, taken-for-granted practices that are associated with valued memories, that may also have become integral to a sense of self, can be challenging.

While there are people who support the increasing emphasis being placed on coaches becoming reflective practitioners, Crum questions if being a reflective practitioner should become standardized practice, in other words should it become the 'norm'? While he debates this question in the physical education context, the debate has relevancy for sports coaches. According to Crum, the answer depends on the definition of physical education, or coaching that is held.

If a practitioner holds a 'training-of-the-physical' view of coaching and believes his or her role is only to improve fitness and adopt a technical/utilitarian approach, then becoming a coach who reflects in depth is not going to be paramount. In contrast, if a coach holds a view that coaching is 'a teaching-learning process' does 'not focus on the body-machine ... but on humans moving' and views coaching as a process that is 'socially constructed and historically situated' then he or she is required to reflect in depth on a wide range of issues. Despite agreeing with Crum that it may not always be necessary for some coaches to reflect in depth, we contend that it is still useful for all coaches to engage in some degree of reflection, even if it is only at the technical level. As we said earlier, by reflecting on practice a coach may expose his or her perceptions and beliefs to evaluation, creating a heightened sense of self-awareness, which in turn may lead to a 'certain openness to new ideas'.

What is Reflection?

Many consider John Dewey to be the 'founder' of reflection. He contrasts routine behaviour with reflective thought, defining the latter as the 'active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends'. According to Dewey, those who adopt a reflective pose investigate the assumptions that inform their behaviour and accept responsibility for their actions. Dewey suggests that before an individual can engage in reflective thinking, three personal attitudes need to be present - open-mindedness, whole-heartedness and responsibility. These attributes are defined as follows:

- Open-mindedness is 'an active desire to listen to more sides than one; to give heed to facts from whatever source they come; to give full attention to alternative possibilities; to recognise the possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us'.
- Whole-heartedness, as the name suggests, refers to being 'absorbed' and/or 'thoroughly interested' in a particular subject.

- Responsibility refers to when the consequences of actions are not only considered, but also accepted, thereby securing integrity in one's beliefs.

Over eighty years later these attributes still appear to be relevant to contemporary coaches as evidenced by Wayne Smith's (assistant All Black rugby union coach) description of the attributes needed to be a quality coach. In his own words: the key thing I think is the openness to learning. I think coaches need to look at things on merit and understand that just because they've played the game, they don't know everything about it.... Having a passion to improve is important. Knowing that you are a part of the problem means that you can also be part of the solution.

Despite Dewey being considered the 'founder' of reflection, the increased interest in the term in the past two decades has been attributed to the work of Schön and Zeichner. In contrast with Dewey's view of reflection, whose focus is 'outside the action' and on 'future action rather than current action', Schön's interpretation of reflection takes into account practice. While Schön provides examples of practice from professions such as town planning and architecture, Zeichner provides examples from teaching and teacher education and, as such, we consider the work of the two former authors to be particularly useful when discussing reflection in a coaching context.

In discussing the concept of reflection, Schön introduces the notion of reflection-in-action, which, as the name suggests, describes what professional and lay people alike do in practice, namely 'think about what they are doing, sometimes even while doing it'. For example, a big-league baseball pitcher describes the process of reflecting-in-action by explaining how in the midst of playing the game 'You get a special feel for the ball, a kind of command that lets you repeat the exact same thing you did before that proved successful'.

Further, Schön stresses that phrases such as 'keeping your wits about you', 'thinking on your feet' and 'learning by doing' highlight 'not only that we can think about doing but that we can think about doing something while doing it'. Schön identified three general patterns prevalent in reflection-in-action. First, is that reflection is often

initiated when a practitioner is 'stimulated by surprise'. Here, in the process of dealing with the unexpected phenomenon, the practitioner reflects on his or her understandings that are implicit in the action and then critiques, restructures and embodies the practice in future action. In other words, when something unexpected happens 'they turn thought back on action' and then try and deal with it.

The second pattern prevalent in reflection-in-action is what Schön calls a 'reflective conversation with the situation'. What he means by this is that while an 'inquiry begins with an effort to solve a problem ... the inquirer remains open to the discovery of phenomena'. It may come to pass that in the process of attempting to solve the initial problem, a discovery is made that is incongruous with the initial efforts to solve the problem.

If this happens, the inquirer then 'reframes' what is considered to be 'the problem'. Schön argues that one of the consequences of having such a reflective conversation with a situation is that it is possible for practitioners to achieve some degree of professional growth by reflecting-in, and reflecting-on, practice. The third pattern in reflection-in-action is what Schön calls the 'action-present'. He describes this as the 'zone of time in which action can still make a difference to the situation'.

While all processes of reflection have an 'action-present' it 'may stretch over minutes, hours, days, or even weeks or months, depending on the pace of activity and the situational boundaries that are characteristic of the practice'. For example, in the middle of a verbal exchange with an athlete, a coach's reflection-in-action may occur in a matter of seconds, but when the context is a season, the reflection-in-action may occur over several months. As the example illustrates, the duration and pace of when reflection occurs will vary depending on the duration and pace of the context. Arguably, the way one interprets the 'action-present' will dictate whether the more generic reflection-in-action term is utilized or whether reflection-on-action or retrospective reflection-on-action is used in describing the reflection process. As illustrated above, reflection-in-action enables practitioners (athletes and coaches) to engage in 'on-the-spot' experimentation. Yet, not only are they reflecting-in-action but they

are also reflecting-on-action. While it appears Schön views reflection-on-action to be integral to reflection-in-action, others such as Gilbert and Trudel view it as a separate type of reflection. What is more, the latter argue that reflection-on-action can be further broken down and, as a consequence, suggest that there is a third type of reflection which they call 'retrospective reflection-on-action'. They describe this type of reflection as 'that which occurs outside the action-present (e.g. after the season or after a coach's reflection can no longer affect the situation)'.

In addition, Gilbert and Trudel argue that reflection-on-action is reflection that 'still occurs within the action-present, but not in the midst of activity'. For example, a coach reflecting on an issue in between practice sessions. Another who also views reflection-on-action as separate from reflection-in-action is Bengtsson, who suggests that the former type of reflection can also occur before the action and when the problems arise.

Why is it Useful to Become a Reflective Coach?

There are a number of parallels between the way many teachers were trained at the end of the nineteenth century and how many coaches are still being trained today, namely via the apprenticeship system that emphasizes the technical skills and the 'expert'. The following example, albeit from the physical education context, has many parallels to the current debates within the coaching community regarding coach education. Also the example highlights the way an increasing awareness of the limitations of a technical approach to practice has resulted in the promotion of a more reflective pose.

Traditional practices in physical education teacher education have been generically classified under the nomenclature of 'craft' pedagogies, a notion that stems from 'teacher education's roots in the apprenticeship system'. Within the craft perspective, teacher-education students are often placed in schools for lengthy terms of 'teaching practice'. One consequence of this practice is that little value is placed on theory and the emphasis is on the technical teaching skills and the 'expert' teacher. According to Hoffman the hallmark and rationale of craft pedagogies 'has its basis not in science or even

theory, but in the unglamorous realities of life'. There continues to be plenty of support for 'on the job' teaching practice experience 'by school and college or university supervisors. The school practice is also supported by courses in "methods" which attempt to provide students with "how to teach" skills', or what Lawson calls a 'methods-and-materials orientation'. Despite the continued support by some physical education teacher educators for the craft perspective, others have turned to the natural science paradigm in reaction to perceived shortcomings within it and in an attempt to gain credibility in the education community.

The primacy of the natural science paradigm means it has become acceptable to privilege rational thought and scientific logic, and compartmentalize the teaching act into 'a discrete series of skills that could be isolated, practised, and applied in a systematic manner'. Yet Lawson observes that, while 'scientific-technological discourses dominate the research literature, this does not guarantee their domination of actual practices in PETE [Physical Education Teacher Education] and school programmes'.

The dominant discourse of modern sport is embedded in performance pedagogy and technical rationality that is based on scientific functionalism. So if we accept Schön's argument that the notion of reflection-in-action has emerged as a consequence of the limits of technical rationality what are some of the issues for the coaching community to consider?

BECOMING A REFLECTIVE COACH: ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Drawing on the work of Tinning *et al.* we argue that there are numerous benefits of a coach reflecting on his or her practice. Specifically, a coach may become more sensitive to the backgrounds, needs and interests of the athletes and may develop practice sessions that are more meaningful for all concerned. Also a coach may become more aware of the values and beliefs that shape their practices which may result in better and more inclusive coaching, leading to enhanced athlete learning and therefore performance. We recognize that reflecting on one's practice is not an easy or quick exercise and that