

## CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN COACH EDUCATION AND LEARNING

### COACH LIFELONG LEARNING: A REVIEW

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#### ABSTRACT

*Becoming a good coach is not just about obtaining a degree in coaching or getting certified by an International or National organization. It is also about improving own theoretical knowledge and practical skills through practicing coaching and through participating in various refresher courses and seminars organized by various professional bodies. Practically speaking, it is only possible to stay at the top of the coaching cohort by constantly refining own professionalism through the lifelong development which comes through practice, learning and education. The forms of learning and education can be different, and it is predominantly in the hands of the coaches to pick any of those available forms and to keep own qualifications updated and to keep providing excellent services to their employers and to the community.*

*Keywords: coach, coach education, coaching roles, lifelong learning*

#### INTRODUCTION:

Learning and education are apparently not limited to the forms of learning and learning situations. Neither are they time bound or limited to weeks/years being spent attending courses or classes in colleges and universities. The lifelong learning concept is progressively gaining popularity among educationists and experts in learning. Lifelong learning can be viewed as an all-embracing concept that encompasses learning in many spheres of life (family, school, work, sport) and which occurs in the educational system and outside of it.

The difference though becomes apparent when comparing the meaning of lifelong education and lifelong learning. While the former suggests that the state or the employers are responsible for providing education, the latter (which focuses on learning), maintains the stand that the responsibility rests with the learners (Jarvis, 2006).

Therefore, the responsibility to develop as a coach should stay in the hands of the coaches. It might include the obligation to obtain a coaching certificate delivered by a recognized institution or national coaching governing body, but it will certainly not be limited to this one way of learning. As long as the sport system is not able to offer coaches a sustainable career pathway similar to other professions, (teaching, health sector, etc.) the responsibility to develop as a coach should stay primarily in the hands of the individual (Trudel et al, 2010).

### LIFE-LONG DEVELOPMENT THROUGH LEARNING AND EDUCATION

The notion of lifelong learning suggests that coaches, like any adult learners, learn how to coach through various learning situations across their life span. This conclusion is supported by the limited but growing, research available on coach learning. Considering that coaches learn to coach through a variety of situations (formal, non-formal, and informal), their involvement in coach education training programs will correspond generally to only a few hours of learning in their lifelong learning journey. In the literature though there are many studies where coaches said they had appreciated this type of learning situation (Salmela, 1995; Wright et al, 2007) and there is also evidence of impact on the coaches' belief in their coaching capacity (coaching efficacy) (Campbell & Sullivan, 2005; Trudel et al, 2010). Lifelong learning is as well encouraged by many National sports associations (e.g. New Zealand Football) and is promoting continued personal development and self-responsibility for learning (<http://www.footballsouth.co.nz/index.php?id=376>).

This new approach of lifelong learning provides a certain degree of synchronisation between learning opportunities that allows coaches to identify and fulfil their needs in personal development that corresponds with the players they are coaching and their specific developmental needs. The concept of Continuous Coach Education (CCE) grows in popularity around the world. The International Coach Federation (ICF) in particular, advocates for the continuity in coach education, especially for coaches who already have certain credentials. Continuing Coaching Education refers training, writing, or research in advanced coaching skills

directly related to ICF Core Competencies or the professional development of a coach (<http://www.coachfederation.org/icfcredentials/continuingeducation/>).

## EFFICIENCY, PRACTICALITY AND TRENDS IN COACH EDUCATION

It is a well-documented fact that experts make significant efforts and investments in learning what they need to know about their subject, their athletes and their coaching (Schempp et al, 1998; 1999). At coaching workshops, clinics or conferences many of the experts will be the presenters, but many experts also attend as learners. As such it is clear that expert coaches attempt to benefit from attending workshops and conferences. Moreover, they become experts partially because they seldom pass up opportunities to learn (Schempp & McCullick, 2010).

The issue of the professional development of coaches was addressed by Jones et al (2004) in a study of elite coaches. The authors suggest that in a critical number of cases coach education courses were found to be of little direct benefit to the professional development of different areas of sports coaching. The suggestion was that in the past coach education courses have tended to focus primarily on the technical issues of coaching, often ignoring the importance of the development of pedagogical and conceptual knowledge and understanding. The inherent failure to make the process more intellectual has been blamed for effectively undermining coaching in its claim to possess a theoretical body of occupational knowledge (Taylor & Garratt, 2010).

Rynne (2008) asked 24 high-performance individual and team sport coaches to rate the value of contribution of a variety of coach development activities at three stages of their coaching career: (a) first 2 years, (b) middle 2 years, and (c) last 2 years. The high-performance coaches in the study rated 'on the job experience' as the most valued coach development activity during all three stages of their careers. Personal reflection and discussions with colleagues were also highly valued by the participants in the study, although, interestingly, these were more valued as the coaches developed their craft.

Experiential learning and the significance of 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action' in sports coaching was highly valued too. Keys to the transformation of experience into coaching knowledge were 'reflection-in-action' (during coaching work), 'reflection-on-action' (post coaching work) and 'retrospective reflection-on-action' (after the season) (Gilbert &Trudel 2001;Trudel& Gilbert 2006).

Surprisingly, tertiary studies were not rated highly, but those who had actually completed tertiary study valued highly their university education, especially in the middle and latter stages of their career. Salmela and Moraes (2003) also found their coaches highly valued tertiary education. Overall, Rynne's data suggested that as high-performance coaches developed they seemed to value a greater variety of sources for developing their craft. That finding might be linked to an increase in self-efficacy (Eraut, 2004) and increased access to learning opportunities (e.g. working with other colleagues). In some cases the increase in access might be connected with a move from voluntary and/ or part-time to full-time coach employment (Mallett,2010).

Moving up the professional ladder from recreational/developmental coaches to high performance coaching brings along another professional opportunity - to deepen own coaching expertise (although possibly slightly narrowing it)by deputing certain functions/jobs to para-professionals/sport scientists.

It is known that success of the high performance coaching depends greatly on the availability and access to other expertise. Coaches often imply the services of a multidisciplinary team of sport scientists (e.g. sports medicine expert, psychologist, strength and conditioning expert, tactical analyst) in order to deliver the planned performance during main competitions. This requires the high-performance coaches to exercise managerial skills as well.

With obvious benefits of such union of highly trained professionals, the situation should not result in weakening the coaches' drive to master the basics of sports medicine, psychology, conditioning etc. in the process of their learning/education. Certainly, knowledge dissemination channels must also be adjusted through properly planned curricula of the university programs and certifying professional bodies.

## CHALLENGES IN COACH EDUCATION

In many sports, the coaching workforce has emerged directly from the field of current and ex-performers. Indeed, this relationship has been legitimized by a number of official (via state or sports organizations sponsorship) programs that have 'fast-tracked' elite performers in to senior coaching roles. The assumption is that because ex-performers have 'been there and done it'; this 'experience' alone provides the adequate know-how and legitimacy required to work with, and coach other elite performers.

Such schemes seem to have enormous attraction to policy-makers, who actively work to privilege and promote ex-athletes in order to allow them to remain in the sport at any cost. However, such fast-tracking schemes can have the effect of devaluing coaching and educational processes should be more properly based on professional reflection and development over time, with emphasis on learning the craft in the context of practice (Taylor & Garratt, 2010).

The problem isn't entirely new. It has happened before and in fact has been resolved quite humbly in Eastern Bloc countries in early 1960's. Erstwhile Soviet Union experience for instance, included encouraging ex-athletes with high sporting credentials to commit to coaching profession, provided they had a degree in any field, not necessarily in physical education or coaching thus retaining ex-performers as experts in the field and keeping the door open for them to come back to what they knew best if and when they wish to. The same approach is widely practiced in many now independent states emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Another possible solution to the issue is proper backing from the certifying professional bodies, national and international sports associations with their initiatives and 'level-based' short term coaching courses.

Right on the another pole of basically the same issue is the observed fact that for coaches in Western countries, there are very few if any prerequisites required before registering in a coach

education program as opposed to a specific list of credits or a diploma before starting a program in medicine, nursing, law, and so on. Also, coaches' previous athletic experience will vary extensively from one coach to the other while that type of previous experience does not exist in many professions (Trudel et al, 2010).

On the contrary, in Eastern Europe and in some countries in Africa and Asia, pre-mediated experience as an athlete is the compulsory condition for the enrollment into the university coaching degree program. Moreover, individuals have to be able to pass the sport specific tests including skills proficiency in the selected sport of specialization right at the entry exam, irrespective of the diplomas or participation certificates the potential student can produce at the time of his/her enrollment into the program.

The International Council for Coach Education (ICCE), a not-for-profit, international organization with the mission of promoting coaching as an internationally accepted profession, plays a pivotal role in identifying and working on existing challenges in coaching and coach education. Special Assembly 5 July 2000 identified 10 central challenges facing the future of coaching and coach educators around the globe. Governments, non-governmental sports organisations, national Olympic committees, national and international governing bodies of sport and the International Olympic Committee, coach education agencies and institutions of high education were called upon to join together to address these challenges.

The Assembly committed itself to work with its members to develop a program of initiatives and events designed to address the challenges. The Assembly also called on all those involved in coach education to make greater efforts to ensure that coaching and coach education becomes fully inclusive and representative of all sectors of the community irrespective of gender, race, culture, disability, sexual orientation and religious practice.

Following the assembly, the following challenges were adopted by the resolution of the International Council for Coach Education (ICCE) at the Special Assembly, 5 July 2000:

- Establishing and educating sports organizations and individual coaches about standards of ethical behaviour and developing mechanisms for monitoring compliance.

- Identifying, developing and evaluating coaching competencies at all levels of coaching.
- Delivering coach education in a manner that will enable coaches to apply underpinning theory to their coaching practice and to meet the needs of their athletes.
- Ensuring that governments, sport and the wider community recognize, understand and acknowledge the vital role of the coach in the development of sport at all levels.
- Adopting a philosophy that promotes and supports athlete-centred coaching and coach-centred education and professional development.
- Enabling coaches to access and communicate with the evolving body of coaching knowledge and best practice in a manner that will foster and support continuous learning and development.
- Widening access to coach education and professional development opportunities, whilst still maintaining the quality of provision, delivery and outcome.
- Developing systems that will encourage and support the continuous learning and professional development of coaches based on identifying and responding to the needs of the individual.
- Working to develop and gain recognition for coaching as a profession.
- Developing coach education systems that support open learning and allow coaches to study at a time, place and frequency of their own choosing (<http://www.icce.ws/priorities/maggingen.htm>).

## CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

Major coach education initiatives are taking place at both international and national levels. The International Council for Coach Education (ICCE) hosts international conferences and develops a global coach network.

The European Coaching Council, a sub-committee of the European Network of Sport Science, Education & Employment has initiated a 'Review of the EU 5-Level Structure for the Recognition of Coaching Qualifications' fixing the long standing discrepancies in qualifications awarded by various certifications' agencies and creating the platform for professional bodies for future fruitful cooperation.

Individual countries have also invested heavily in re-organizing coach education, including the United Kingdom with the UK Coaching Certificate initiative, Canada with the National Coaching Certification Program (Coaching Association of Canada), the United States with the recent creation of the National Council for the Accreditation of Coach Education (National Association for Sport and Physical Education [NASPE]), and Australia with the Australian Institutes and Academies. These government and sport organization initiatives are taking place concurrently with a much-increased expansion of coaching science.

Further, in light of the importance of journals to coach education, new scientific journals have been created - *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, *International Journal of Coaching Science*, and the *Journal of Coaching Education*. Further evidence of this rapid interest in coach education and coaching science can be seen in the publications of extensive scientific reviews (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004; Trudel & Gilbert, 2006), comprehensive data-based texts on coaching and coach education (Lyle, 2002; Cassidy et al, 2004; Jones et al, 2004; Jones, 2006; Bloom, 2007; Lyle & Cushion, 2010) and a special issue of *The Sport Psychologist* dedicated to coach education (Trudel et al, 2010).

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### Online resources

<http://www.icce.ws/priorities/maggingen.htm>

Retrieved on June 24<sup>th</sup> 2015

<http://www.footballsouth.co.nz/index.php?id=376>

Retrieved on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2014

<http://www.coachfederation.org/icfcredentials/continuingeducation/>

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