

Are the Learning Paths of Elite Canadian Coaches Idiosyncratic?

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Purpose of Study

Primary question was: how have you *learned* to be an effective coach? (what has helped you develop as a coach?)

Purpose: to better understand the *processes* involved in learning, from the 15 elite coaches' perspectives

Who were the coaches?

- 11 were full-time, 4 were part-time
- 10 male coaches, 5 women coaches
- All 15 had coached for at least 10 years at national/international level
- All were presently coaching athlete(s) with a top ten result in last two years
- 9 had coached athletes to an Olympic medal for Canada
- 5 were foreign coaches
- 7 had been Olympic athletes

Different learning situations:

Jennifer Moon(2004) view of learning as a framework:

- ✓ Mediated learning situations - learning is directed by a teacher or facilitator (importance of facilitator skills)
- ✓ Unmediated learning situations - learner is responsible for choosing when/how/what to learn
- ✓ Internal learning situations - where no new material of learning is presented - questioning oneself, reflection

What did the coaches say about their learning?

Common thread of:

- openness to learning, continual inquisitiveness
- 'Followed' the designed path, *and* 'created' new paths
- Reflection - self and others

What did the coaches say about their learning?

Formal (mediated) learning situations:

- All the coaches had post secondary degrees, 2 coaches had diplomas; others with degrees in business, political science, engineering, geophysics, sport science
- NCCP - all level 4/5 - exceptions - 1 Canadian coach (level 3), 2 foreign coaches
- Structure within the NSO (for 3 coaches) - created formalized meetings, conferences, workshops

What did the coaches say about their learning?

Informal (unmediated) learning situations:

- 'On-the-job' learning - the years of experience (and reflection on those experiences)
- Working with an 'expert', a 'informal mentor' - each of the 15 coaches 'created' this situation - they sought out someone to learn from
- Meeting as a group of coaches (communities of practice, Wenger, 1998)

What did the coaches say about their learning?

Reflective thinking (internal learning):

Moon's (1999, 2004), Schon (1983, 1987)

- The coaches spoke of thinking 'all the time' about coaching - both before and after practices (reflection-on-action) and for a few, during practices (reflection-in-action)
- Observation - 'paying attention to...'

So what does this mean for coach education?

- Learning is a process, not an event - it's life-long
- Base of knowledge is important (degrees, NCCP) - *and* it is a beginning
- We need to help NSO's create better learning environments
- Facilitating 'gatherings' of coaches - for dialogue, for discussions
- Setting up the environment of expert coaches with young coaches
- The coaches are learning from all three kinds of learning situations - but it is idiosyncratic, because of who they are (their knowledge structure)!