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Title: "The construction of elite coaching knowledge in swimming."

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Length of Presentation: 15-20 mins

Format of Presentation: Lecture with Q & A

Alan Lynn is an elite swimming coach and academic-practitioner. He is a former Technical Director of Scottish Swimming and now UG Course Director in Sport Studies at Strathclyde University in Glasgow. He has written two highly successful books on swimming and a third is in production. His ongoing doctoral project is investigating the development of elite sports coaches in the UK.

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Previous literature has established the importance of the elite coach in the implementation of the coaching process (Readhead, 1987; Sherman *et al.*, 1997). It is clear from this literature, and the comments of Lyle (2000), that the coach requires knowledge of the specific multidimensional nature of his or her sporting environment, and that the level of this knowledge and its application has a direct effect on the coaching process.

This study examined the construction of elite coaching knowledge in competitive swimming coaches. The aims of the study were first to establish where elite swimming coaches learnt the skill of coaching, and second to identify the methods currently used by these elite coaches to increase their knowledge base. Twenty (20) elite swimming coaches were interviewed using a combination of Repertory Grid and semi-structured interview techniques. Following analysis of the data the findings were contextualized within the framework of experiential learning (Gilbert & Trudel, 1998), reflective practice and the existing coaching literature. Specifically, these coaches displayed a high level of individualism in terms of how they learnt the skill of coaching. They identified that knowledge acquisition was facilitated mostly through coaching clinics, experiential learning and (informal) mentoring.

Methods

Twenty (20) elite swimming coaches were selected on the basis of 'purposeful sampling' Patton (1990). The participants (16 male and 4 female) were categorized as elite coaches based on multiple criteria: (i) they were actively involved in coaching at international level; (ii) they had at least ten years of coaching experience; and, (iii) they had produced at least one senior international performer. Finally, they were each classified as a high performance coach by the National Governing Body of sport (NGB).

Discussion

The findings of this study can be summarized through a comparison of the resources that these coaches used to initially gain knowledge and the avenues currently used to gain further knowledge;

- There is a great deal of individuality in terms of how these coaches learn and learnt the skill of coaching.
- The principles of experiential learning and reflective practice should be promoted in terms of coaching development (Kolb, 1984; Schon, 1991).

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- At the elite level more clinic-based squad sessions may promote the learning process and facilitate an increase in the already existing knowledge base.
- Mentorship's that promote reflection, critical enquiry and interaction between elite and non-elite coaches may provide a higher order-learning situation (Martinez, 1993).

References

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