Examining the role of peers and mentors in the shaping of swim coaches’ knowledge of best practice for coaching children with autism spectrum disorder

Erin Kraft, MA.Ed, PhD Student, Raymond Leblanc, PhD, Diane M. Culver, PhD

Context

• Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2012), significant increase in children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder

• Limited number of persons with disabilities engaging in sport. Canadian Sport Policy “… sport is more important to persons with a disability than to able bodied persons” (Canadian Sport Policy, 2011, p.5)

• CRPD same right to participate in sports as able-bodied peers (United Nations, 2006)

Review of Literature

Purpose

• The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of coaches who work with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, in their journeys to developing knowledge of best practice from their peers and mentors

Research Questions

• What are the experiences of swim coaches who work with children with ASD?

• How do swim coaches acquire knowledge to coach swimmers with ASD?

Methodology/Framework

• Constructivist Paradigm

• Sociocultural Framework

• Case study approach
Participants

- Three swim coaches currently coaching children with ASD recruited through purposeful sampling
- Adam located at a private swim school
- Jennifer and Jason recreational facility

Data Collection

Results

Accessing documentation from more experienced peers

- Overgeneralized documentation of strategies from L-S, formal training required for swim coaches did not provide strategies for coaching children with ASD
- Previous coaches of children with ASD document strategies for newcomers about specific swimmers

Context-specific formal learning with more experience peers

- Two coaches participated in additional, context specific, formal learning for coaching children with disabilities at their facility
- Also, in a Mentoring program implemented for newcomers to have practical experience with a more knowledgeable peer

Documentation from more experienced peers

Jason: (Use of intake forms)
"We do feedback kind of stuff at the end of every class or session. So just looking over that stuff to see more about the kids if I’m missing anything"

Adam:
"I just haven’t found a need for it [Canadian Red Cross documents]. For my older child with ASD, I’m not even sure the resources would go that high a level"

Jennifer:
"When I did volunteering, I learned a lot from that, because they’re [more experienced coaches] teaching me. So I’ve gained that from other instructors. So I do communicate with the other instructors who have them [swimmers with ASD] to get some tips on what I can do with them"

Jason:
"From volunteering in the adapted aquatics program, just volunteering in general. I have learned so many different methods of teaching drills, ways to just approaching a problem"
Results
Informal, on-going dialogue with more experienced others (both inside and outside of coaching)

- Informal discussions with bosses, other coaches and mentors, gave newcomers strategies for coaching this unique population.
- Coaches had discussions with practitioners who work with children with ASD from within coaching and outside of coaching.

Adam:
“Having my bosses telling me how to best approach teaching the specific child with ASD and what strategies work”. If another instructor has taught a child I have, they’ll maybe tell me something to do as a tip or strategy.”

Discussion

• As seen in previous research, L-S education not sufficient in training coaches with context specific competencies (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006), particularly because of varied backgrounds (Trudel, Gilbert & Werthner, 2010).
• RedCross and Lifesaving society provide documents or learning opportunities for persons with a disability, however, coaches did not know how to access these or did not find them helpful in practice.

Discussion – Social Interactions

• Coaches often learn through social interactions with other coaches (Carter et al, 2009; Werthner et al, 2009).
• Stoszkowski et al. (2016), revealed that coaches prefer knowledge building in formal or informal learning situations where social interactions are encouraged.

Discussion – Mentoring

• Context specific, nonformal education provided mentoring program for beginner coaches.
• Finding a mentor can be challenging (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006), and some previous research has suggested that formalized mentoring can limit coaches opportunities for learning (Jones et al, 2009).
• However, Bloom (2013) has indicated that formalized mentoring in coaching has received limited attention in terms of research.

Discussion – Sociocultural

• The coach participants found that formalized mentoring facilitated guiding them from peripheries to central participation (Lave & Wenger, 2001).
• ZPD
  - Coaches were able to observe lessons and learn from more experienced peers (Vygotsky, 1978)
  - In line with Bloom’s (2013) findings, the coaches learned from mentor coaches who were still relatively new to coaching. This is likely, at least in part due to the high turn over rate of swim coaches.
Conclusion

- With the increase in ASD, it is essential that recreational coaches are available to facilitate high quality physical activity programmes

- L-S coach education programmes should consider using this approach of setting up mentoring programs within their formal learning programs for more effective coach learning

- Coach education should consider teaching coaches to integrate strategies for effective documentation for coaches to pass on to future coaches to enhance preparedness

Bibliography


Bibliography, cont’d.


