

SOURCES OF COACHING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN FINLAND



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INTRODUCTION

The general purpose of this three year research project is to examine how Finnish coaches learn to coach and develop their expertise during their coaching career. The main goal is to gain objective information to support the reconstruction of the present coach education system and programs in Finland.

According to Trudel & Gilbert (2006) coaches learn how to coach mainly through large-scale coach education programs (acquisition metaphor) and through experience (participation metaphor). Researchers have also proposed that formal programs are only one of the many ways to develop coaching expertise and that informal coaching activities are seen even more important when learning to coach (Lemyre et al., 2007; Gilbert et al. 2006; Wright et al 2007). Even though, internationally the development of coaches and coaching knowledge has received increased research attention in recent years similar studies have not been conducted in Finland. Thus the purpose of the present study was to explore the different learning situations reported by Finnish coaches.

METHODS

A web based survey was conducted for coaches at recreational, developmental, and performance levels (N=5064) in different sports. 49% of the coaches (N=2476) answered to the survey. The questionnaire contained the basic demographic and background information concerning athletic and coaching experience, coach education, current coaching position etc. To explore the different learning situations a list of 30 possible learning situations were given based on previous literature. Coaches were asked to choose from a list the ones they have used during their coaching career and to rate them based on importance on a three point scale (not important – important – very important).

RESULTS

Data description (N=2476)

- Gender: male 70%, female 30%
- Age: <30y 25%, 30-40y 25%, 40-50y 37%, >50y 13%
- Sports: 58 different sports, team 57% (football 21% and ice hockey 17%), individual 34% (athletics 8%)
- Highest coach education: 93% qualified, Level 0-1 49%, Level 2 15%, Level 3 9%, Level 4 9% and Level 5 12%
- Coaching experience: mean 11.3 ± 8.2 years (<5y 27%, 6-10y 29%, 11-20y 30%, >20y 12%)
- Competitive athletic background: 81%, mean 14.2 ± 7.3 years

The results revealed six different informal learning situations (table 1) which were rated either important or very important by over 80% of the coaches. Over 90% of the coaches identified everyday coaching practice and observing other coaches as the most important sources of coaching knowledge and skills. On the other hand formal coach education organized by federations was identified as an important learning situation by 72% of the coaches.

Table 1. Learning situations rated very important or important.

Learning situation	Sum %	Very Important %	Important %
Everyday coaching practice	97	68	29
Observing coaches from your own sport	91	47	44
Experience as an athlete	88	49	39
Reflecting on past coaching	82	39	43
Reading coaching books, magazines...	82	29	53
Interaction with other coaches (network)	80	39	41
Watching DVDs, videos CD-roms	77	32	45
Working with coaching team-members	76	30	46
Coach education (sport federations)	72	40	32
Learning from my own coach	71	31	40
Working as assistant coach	71	26	45
Experience of parenthood	62	31	31

Figure 1 shows how the selected learning situations rated as very important vary in terms of coach education level, coaching experience and athletic background.

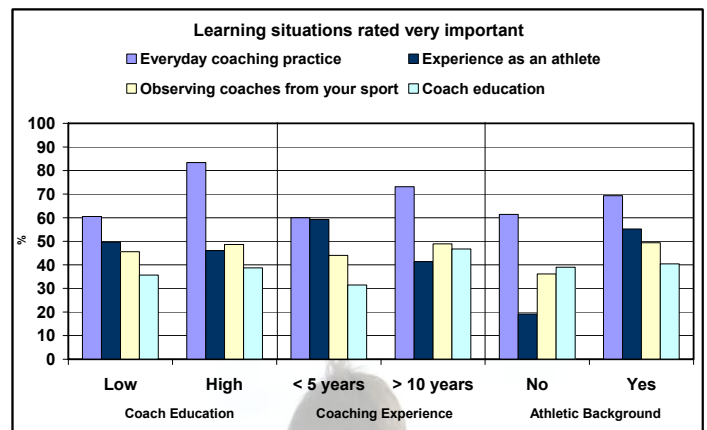


Figure 1. Learning situations rated very important in different subgroups.

CONCLUSIONS

- The importance of informal learning as daily coaching experience and observing were highly recognized by coaches.
- 28% of coaches had not participated or felt that coach education has not been important in coach development.
- Highly educated and more experienced coaches perceived coaching practice and observing other coaches very important in learning to coach.
- Less experienced and educated coaches relied more on previous athletic experience.
- The support systems and guidance for experiential learning and reflective practice should be emphasized in future coach education system.

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