

Reflection in sport coaching



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Reflection is defined by Stenhouse 1975 p 144 as ‘ a capacity for autonomous professional self-directed through systematic self- study’. Discuss how a coach utilises reflective practice to enhance their coaching performance

The aim for this essay is to discuss how a coach can use reflective practice to improve his/her coaching. Reflective practice is an idea used in education studies and pedagogy. It was introduced by John Dewey, he defined reflection as ‘ active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends’ (Dewey, 1910). Dewey recommended that before a coach can achieve effective reflection three personal characteristics been to be in attendance.

1. Open-mindedness-this is the yearning to want to learn more than you already know
2. Wholeheartedness -this is the enthusiasm to want to learn more about a specific subject
3. Responsibility-this is to take the accountability of your actions, positive or negative.

However, it is also important to understand other definitions of reflection as not all research has reached an agreed definition

Jarvis (1992 p180) claims that “ reflective practice is something more than thoughtful practice. It is that form of practice that seeks to problematise many situations of professional performance so that they can become potential learning situations and so the practitioners can continue to learn, grow and develop in and through practice”.

Dewey (1910 p39) defines reflection as the “ active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusion to which it tends”.

Reid (1993) in her definition also noted reflection as an active process rather than passive thinking. She states: “ Reflection is a process of reviewing an experience of practice in order to describe, analyse, evaluate and so inform learning about practice.”(p305)

McKernan (1996) refers to reflective teaching as ‘... not a knowledge-bounded set of competencies which are learned during student teaching, but on the contrary teaching that reflectively supports... growth and professionalism through the questioning of policies, problems and the consequences of actions.’ This is true in relation to the coach.

Pollard (2002) suggests that ‘ Reflective teaching is applied in cyclical or spiralling process, in which teachers monitor, evaluate and revise their own practice continually.’

According to Reid (1993) cited by Ghaye and Lilleyman (1997) reflective practice is: ‘ Potentially both a way of learning and a mode of survival and development once formal education ceases.’ They believe that reflective practice is more than just skill to be used in one particular context but throughout life as well.

‘ Reflective practice requires professionals to step back from themselves and the situation to examine all aspects of the teaching/learning act, including essential dispositions. It implies that they use an empirical, analytical review

of their teaching and that they employ a moral and ethical framework to guide their analysis and modification of teaching behaviour.’ Boise State University (No Date)

In 1987 Schon stated that reflection can happen in two ways: ‘reflecting in action’ and ‘reflecting on action’. Reflecting on action occurs after the coaching has taken place, this can be aided with the use of another coach giving advice, or with the use of video. Fitzgerald (1994) defines ‘reflection on action’ as “The retrospective contemplation of practice undertaken in order to uncover the knowledge used in practical situations, by analysing and interpreting the information recalled”. ‘Reflecting in action’ refers to reflection taking place during the activity. It can be said that ‘reflecting on action’ is “engaging in a constant process of rapid feedback and adjustment by which skilful operators can adjust to circumstances and sustain high levels of effectiveness” Jackson et al (2004).

When reviewing a coaching session there are a number of topics to take into consideration. The first and most important aspect of coaching to take into consideration is if the aims and achievements for not only the coaching session but also for the season as a whole. Reflection to see if goals were achieved for the season can only happen once the season has finished. The goals may vary from winning every game, to trying to win one game, if the goals are not reached e. g. the team lost all games then the coach will know that his method of coaching might not have been the most effective to use for the athletes in his team.

After a session there can also be a time for reflection, each session should have a clear aim or goal of a specific skill that needs to be improved, if at the end of the session the athletes have become more efficient in that skill then they session can be see as a success. On the other hand however, if the athletes have not improved during the session then reflection needs to take place to see why this is the case.

Another way that a coach can use reflection to enhance their coaching performance is to evaluate if there coaching is time and cost effective. It is not good coaching if for example, it takes a whole session to cover a skill that can be covered in five minutes. To evaluate if the session has been cost effective, there are a number of factors to take into consideration. The first of these is have the athletes improved? If they haven't then they have paid to gain nothing. However, if the athlete pays very little for a session, where there is only one coach and a high number of children then the expectations of the athletes and parents will drop. Young children i. e. under 7s may be only attending the session as an alternative to babysitting, especially if the cost of coaching is less than that of employing a baby sitter.

A coach must make sure that what he/she is teaching is suited to the age group. For example, under 7s would not be capable of learning leg spin in cricket. Also at the other end of the spectrum you would not have the first team practicing basic drills such as hitting a tennis ball off a cone.

Sometimes however, this is not that easy to plan for. For example, a group may have very extensive knowledge of one skill e. g. the front foot drive, but have no idea how to play a pull shot. A coach can use reflection after the session to see if the performers have improved at the specific skill.

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A coach can reflect on the use of coaching points, there is no use in using advanced coaching points for athletes who are not experienced e. g. telling a 7 year old to rotate their shoulders vertically when playing the front foot drive. The same can be said for experienced athletes, you would not tell them for example to keep their eyes on the ball when catching it as they will already know this.

Coaches have to reflect on demonstrations, for the athlete to learn best the demonstrations need to be accurate and performed from many angles. The coach must also make sure that the athlete can see and is not obstructed by another athlete or the coach himself.

The coach can also reflect on the safety, this can be a rather easy subject to reflect upon. If there is an injury then the reason for that injury will need to be looked at and reflected upon. Safety could also be reflected upon when thinking about equipment, the equipment that is used may be faulty or broken.

All of the above are times when reflection can occur. Feedback from a number of people is very important when reflecting about a session. The athlete that you are coaching will give the coach a lot of feedback; this can range from the improvement they make to their body language. Some more elite athletes will know what works for them so will inform their coach how they learn best. It can be hard to judge how much an athlete has improved from the beginning of a session to the end of one. It is important to distinguish how much if an the athlete has gained so a test like situation could be helpful to ensure that the coach is coaching in a way that is

effective. For example, when coaching throwing in cricket, it can be useful to see how far the athlete can throw before any coaching has taken place, so that after the coaching you can see if the athlete can throw the ball any further.

Other coaches can help when reflecting about a session, especially if the coach is more experienced and or more qualified. The employer can also help with reflection, if the employer thinks that the athlete is improving then the coach will know that the way he is coaching is effective. But if the employer is not pleased with the improvement then change will have to be made. Parents can also play a large role in the reflective process, the parents may not be happy with the way that a coach is coaching. This may mean that the coach will have to change his coaching method, but only if the parent is knowledgeable.

Reflection can also be aided by the use of a video. A video can record the coaching session, and give the coach an incite to what he/she actually does. This can help as it will show demonstrations, body language and what exactly was said. It will also allow the coach to look back on sessions in the past looking to see how his/her coaching methods have changed. McKernan agreed:

‘...might use a video recorder to trap teaching performance as evidence or ‘ data’ to be analysed. More importantly, such a film becomes a critical documentary for reflecting on practice...research can be undertaken by reactive methods such as observers, questionnaires, interviews, dialogue journals or through such non-reactive techniques as case studies, field notes,

logs, diaries anecdotal records, document analysis, shadow studies.’

McKernan (1996)

Hanson believed that asking the students to fill in journals after each session would allow the coach to reflect properly. ‘ I’ve had students make brief journal entries at the end of each session...it doesn’t take much time but reading and responding to the journal entries is time consuming. An approach taken from the values clarification literature is to ask students for one word that represents their behaviour that day.’ Hellison (1985)

Reflection makes the coach test their own behaviour, reminding them to act sensibly in their actions. Reflective evaluation shows areas where population, for example, children, have a bigger social need in addition to their individual sport. When creating training session it is vital to think of the childhood of that child.

Reflective practice demands the coach to examine their own behaviour honestly, reminding them to act responsibly in their actions. Reflective evaluation highlights areas where the population, for example, children, have a great social need besides their particular sport. When designing training sessions it is important to consider the childhood of that child. Extreme training sessions may ruin their childhood.

Reflective practice is detailed as being essential in increasing coaching effectiveness (Crisfield, 1998; Clifford and Feezell, 1997). Crisfield (1998) considers coaching efficiency to be determined by factors such as knowledge, skills, experience and philosophy.

In conclusion Pollard (2002) states the importance of the reflection within coaching. ' The process of reflective teaching supports the development and maintenance of professional expertise.' If a coach feels that they have nothing more to work on then they are not using reflection correctly, every coach no matter what level needs to use reflection to become a more competent coach.

The importance of reflective coaching is not just about finding and defining the problem. Organising, planning and acting upon it are essential also. There must also be re-evaluation to see if it has solved the problem and continual evaluation resumed. Reflective practice lets the coach value for different styles or methods of coaching. If a coach did not use reflective practice then he/she could not guarantee continual re-evaluation of their work.

McKernan (1996) refers to the coaching process as a ladder. ' To get any higher performers must extend their ladder by making it longer through reflection and hopefully improvement, or they and their will be limited to the same level.'

Adapted from Department of Education for Northern Ireland (1999) cited by Pollard (2002) this mission statement sums up the truth of the reflective coach: ' At the heart of becoming a good teacher is, above all else, being a learner-a life long learner.

To learn one has to ask questions of oneself...'

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