

In the sports coaching profession education essay



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The main goal is develop flexibility. This is because insufficient flexibility hinders the performance of certain elements, for example, elements with splits needed or elements with a high degree of back flexibility needed. Development of flexibility in the joints is twice as effective between the ages of 9 and 13 years than in any other period of growth (Jastrjemskaia & Titov, 1999). So this is why improving flexibility is the main goal as if it is attained at this level is likely to stay with the gymnast at senior level (providing the continuation of stretching). Strength is also an important aspect as with the basic body movements, overall body strength is needed to be able to control the movements. Without this strength elements cannot be performed well, for example a gymnast may be flexible enough to make a splits balance but not strong enough to hold the balance as required. Coordination is just as important because the gymnast needs to be able to coordinate their body movements at the same time as apparatus work. Finally, included in the goals is motivation as it is important that the gymnast enjoys the sport and is motivated to continue. This is why my sessions must have a small element of fun added. An example of a progression I intent to make is from the basic split leap I want the gymnasts to be able to do a split leap with a back bend. Improved back flexibility and coordination will be needed to be able to do this.

The conceptual model (Figure 1) presented, clearly puts the coach in the ‘ driving seat’ of what is actually going to be taught, and importantly, how. This model emphasises the need for a high degree of technical knowledge and the ability to organise this knowledge in order for coaches to develop effective progressions and sequence them in an appropriate fashion (Irwin,

Hanton & Kerwin, 2004). The way in which I used progression of the skills taught proved to be effective. I broke down skills and progressed from the basics up to more difficult skills. I taught the skills this way and also by the end of the sixth week, the gymnasts were able to show the required skills with the use of apparatus at the same time. The apparatus used for this age group is rope, hoop and ball. I had a goal that by the end of the six week period the gymnasts must be able to produce a throw with two body rotations underneath. This was attained by concentrating on throwing technique and the speed of the movements underneath. All gymnasts managed to achieve this by the end of six weeks and they have now progressed their difficulty level with apparatus.

At the end of each session I evaluated the effectiveness of the programme. After some of the sessions I felt the need to make some adaptations to the programme. For example, during some of the sessions I found that I needed to engage the gymnasts more in the learning process. I did this by including the use of more questioning to make sure that they understood the corrections and by getting a gymnast to show the others a skill when she was good at it. I also developed the ability to have a back up plan and adapt the session on the spot when changes were needed.

Rhythmic gymnastics is concerned with the acquisition of a number of specific and identifiable skills or agilities and the process by which these and other skills are learnt is of equal significance. It is important that a variety of coaching methods are used to allow all gymnasts to experience satisfaction and appreciation of what the body is doing and when (Williams, 1987).

Without these feelings of the control of the body the gymnast would not be

able to progress very far in the sport. So in the sessions that I took I included several different delivery styles. It can be found that the best coaches can change their style to for different situations and have the ability to use several different styles in one session (Mawer, 1995 cited in Jones, Hughes and Kingston, 2008). Salmela (1995) found that experienced and expert coaches had a very athlete-centred approach to the role. Therefore the coach could adapt her coaching style to suit the gymnast's ability and learning style. For example, one of the gymnasts I took was largely only able to learn kinaesthetically. So with some of the body movements I had to manually help her to do it to be able to feel the right position.

Although I have used a variety of teaching styles, the practice style was the most predominantly used. It is very similar to the command style in that the teacher is the primary decision maker, and the task will also start with a demonstration and description of what is to be achieved. The students then practice the skill, either on their own or with a group, as the teacher observes their performance and offers feedback (Williams, 1987). One of the problems I encountered was that the group of gymnasts were of a varied ability. As the gymnasts were of a slightly different level to each other, I had to develop the capability to deal with this. I had the gymnasts doing same skill but with some of them, the skill had to be broken down into easier progressions for them to be able to master it. So using the practice style method the coach could give individual feedback, thereby catering for individual differences. Rhythmic gymnastics is all about intelligent performances as brain function is key when executing each skill. But it is also about the repetition of skill in training which is as Cross and Lyle (1999)

state, to reduce the unpredictability of performance. Using a variety of teaching styles should give all the gymnasts opportunities for satisfaction and success whilst also developing an understanding of the sport and training they are undertaking.

The most important factor of coaching effectiveness is the 'value added' by the effective intervention of the coach (Cross, 1999). The contribution that the coach makes to the learning process must have a positive effect. Adding value suggests that the coach's decisions and interventions will affect the output from the athlete. If the coach's decisions and interventions are positive this means that the coaching has been effective. Douge and Hastie (1993) put together a number of characteristics to identify effective coaching:

Frequent feedback and prompts

High level of correction and re-instruction

Use of questioning and clarifying

Predominately being engaged in instruction

Training environment order and management

As well as these factors the coach also needs an ability to adapt their coaching to fit the situation. As I was coaching young girls, I felt the need to adopt a more autocratic style as the gymnasts were fairly inexperienced. I feel that this was the most effective way to coach the group as the girls needed to be guided in their learning. They have little experience and

therefore cannot have much input into the coaching programme. Also as well as having knowledge, it is important that a coach is able to communicate this through to the athlete. If the coach's ability to communicate is poor, there will be no use for their knowledge.

It is often forgotten is that gymnasts rarely see themselves in action during training sessions. For example, a footballer will see when he has made a good pass and will celebrate when their shot hits the back of the net. The gymnast, however, may have only a feeling that they have done well and will almost certainly look to the coach for some reaction. Trevor (1981) states, that it is therefore, vital that teachers show their reactions in a positive way. In some respects the teacher is taking the place of a mirror into which the children look for assurance. In a study by Reid and Vallerand (1988) the results showed that, relative to negative feedback, positive feedback led to higher levels of intrinsic motivation and competence feelings for both males and females. Although there is a lot of literature to suggest that positive feedback is vital and it aids intrinsic motivation, it is a rare coach and gym in which we find predominantly positive coaching commentary and a positive psychological environment for gymnasts. A lot of coaches champion negative coaching pointing to the success of Eastern European and Asian coaches known for being negative to the point of yelling and screaming. I have observed that my mentor uses a lot of negative coaching but I have found that praising the gymnasts with positive feedback works better for me. This is my preferred coaching style and I have found it to be effective.

The way that a coach manages their relationship with their athletes is important. This is because it will have an influence on the enjoyment of the

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sport by the athlete, (Lee, 1993) and this in turn will affect the continued participation of the child. I feel that I am able to communicate and motivate well as the gymnasts enjoy the session and I can see an improvement in their skills and abilities week to week.

A coaching philosophy is a statement about the beliefs and behaviours of a coach that will underline the way in which the coach will carry out their role (Cross & Lyle, 1999). A set of values may be held by a coach and these beliefs and behaviours will be reflected in their coaching. Or the philosophy they hold may be due to a recognition of the expectations that are externally imposed upon a coach so they feel that they need to adhere to this. In my coaching I want the participants to enjoy the sport and become self-efficient in their learning. I feel that being a participant-centred coach will enable the athlete to become confident in their self. I would like to develop the athlete holistically. If the gymnast learns to analyse for themselves they can progress further more quickly. Each gymnast is an individual so the coach needs to cater for individual differences. Therefore I feel that a participant-centred coaching style is more appropriate and my coaching philosophy is as follows:

As a coach you are helping to develop children into who they will become. So having an open and friendly atmosphere for them to learn and feel safe in is essential for physical and emotional development. Treat each child as an individual, making sure that they achieve success, have fun and want to continue with sport.

Tinning et al (2001, cited in Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2004, chap. 3) state that coaches can better their practices by exploring ways in which they can be more meaningful, purposeful and enjoyable for the athlete. I will take away a lot from my coaching experience and I hope to continually develop my coaching skills and knowledge in the future. I will also continue with a reflective process throughout my coaching to be able to aid my developmental needs as Gilbert and Trudel (1999, cited in Denison, 2007, chap. 5) argue, coaching knowledge is not attained by the coach simply being there, they need to be actively engaged in the session and reflect on their own coaching performance. Also mentors become the facilitators for developing knowledge in reflective thinking, cognitive development, and problem solving with the protégés who they work with (Barnett, 1995). I will continue to learn from my mentor as she has a vast amount of knowledge and experience in the sport, and I want to take as much from her as I possibly can.

Self reflection is an important part of a coach's development. It is valuable for a coach to reflect on their own coaching practice to identify areas where improvements could be made by identifying strengths and weaknesses. This self-reflective action will enable the coach to develop themselves as well as improving coaching effectiveness. Robinson (2010), states that evaluation drives change for every next coaching session and it must be constructed in a significant way. One of my main strengths when coaching was my ability to encourage and motivate the gymnasts. I made sure that the gymnasts were always challenged but with attainable goals. I feel that I was able to establish a motivational climate and create an environment that ensured the

gymnasts want to achieve their goals (Ames, 1992) and so that the participant will feel more encouraged in their training. Another strength I have as a coach is my knowledge of the technical aspects of the sport as I have twenty years of experience as a gymnast. It is vital that the coach has a good knowledge of the sport because the participants need to be able to learn new skills from the coach. It may be said that being a good athlete does not necessarily transfer into being a good coach. However gymnastics is so technical that if you have tried the skills for yourself you are well aware of the best techniques to be able to accomplish it.

I still need to develop my confidence in coaching further. By the coach showing confidence in their decisions, the participant will follow the decision made with assurance (Chelladurai & Turner, 2006). Moore and Stevenson (1994, cited in Jones & Hughes, 2008) propose that this helps build trust between the athlete and the coach, as the athlete will then believe that the decision made is correct. So this is why the coach is required to be confident in their self and I need to ensure that I can show this confidence in my own decisions. However I feel that this will automatically grow after even more coaching experience as coaching has been defined as a learning process (Brock, 2008). I also found it difficult when coaching basic skills as it can be hard as a gymnast myself to be able to go back to the basics and remember learn how to teach them. I am well aware technically of how to do this but it is just that I was forgetful to put this into practice when I was coaching. Lastly to increase my coaching effectiveness, I need to develop on my ability to reflect (Crisfield, Cabral & Miles, 1998) and this should be incorporated regularly in my coaching.

I want to reach a high level of expertise in coaching and continual development is important even when this is achieved. The model below shows the nature of expertise but also recognises that expertise development does not have a finishing point, it is a cycle that incorporates continuous learning (Grenier & Kehrhahn, 2008).

There is a continuous need to be mentally and personally developed in order to continue at a high level. In my quest for expertise I have booked onto a technical module for the Level 3 course in rhythmic gymnastics. There are four technical modules and I hope to complete these as and when they are held. I want to become independent in my coaching and hopefully go on to reach a degree of perfection by advancing my knowledge with further aspects of coaching. For example, courses on sports psychology and nutrition as these are also an important aid to coaching in rhythmic gymnastics.