

CONSTRUCTING EXPERT KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS: FORMAL, NONFORMAL, AND INFORMAL LEARNING CONTEXTS

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There is an increasing investment around the world in elite competitive sport. Olympic sport is heavily dependent on government funding for its survival. There are ongoing calls for this investment to be accountable. Accountability requires the knowledge of what factors contribute to success (De Bosscher 2008). The coach is central to the development of expertise in sport (Bloom, 1985) and there has been an increasing interest by coaching science scholars to support coaches in their pursuit of quality coaching. Many 'critical-success factors' interact and are associated with performance coaching and the development of elite athletes. Identifying which factors, in any given circumstance, lead to success is the subject of much debate and ongoing research. Despite a lack of systematic professional development opportunities and pathways for coaches in Brazil, there are ongoing and increasing pressures to achieve results at the highest level. According to Schempp (1993), "the degree of success that professionals experience in meeting societal demands is largely dependent upon the knowledge they generate and accumulate for the tasks and obligations that they undertake" (p.3). Nelson et al. (2006) explored how sport coaches acquire the knowledge that underpins their professional practice and they concluded that they learn from a wide range of sources, but formalized (i.e. formal and nonformal) learning episodes were found to be relatively low impact endeavours when compared to informal, self-directed modes of learning. However, the process with which coaches learn to coach is still of much concern, particularly in Brazil, where the majority of coaches have university degrees as it is mandatory to coach. According to an ongoing investigation on high performance Brazilian coaches, those courses are mostly general Physical Education qualifications and there is no government support for coach development in Brazil. Because the degree qualification only developed generic coaching skills its value was diminished in the eyes of the coaches for its lack of sports specificity related to performance coaching. A small number of Sport Brazilian Federations have adopted coaching certification systems including volleyball, track & field and recently soccer. But the certification is not mandatory as we have seen in other countries. Some other coach qualification programs are developed based on local or regional needs, but are not part of a standardized national program. Given the relatively strong international performance of Brazil in some sports such as volleyball and the occasional good results in gymnastics, swimming, judo, and other few sports it is hypothesized that coaches are developing informally and despite them having university qualifications. Are some coach qualities best learned informally and can opportunities be provided that facilitate informal learning? What are the shortcomings of informal learning? Given the widely acknowledged importance of the coach in the athlete success, more research needs to be done on the best combination of formal award-based professional development programs and informal learning.

Key words: Coach Education; Coaching Knowledge; Formal, Informal, Nonformal Learning.

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