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Using shared online blogs to structure and support informal coach learning

Part 1: A tool to promote reflection and Communities of Practice?

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Part 1: A tool to scaffold reflection and Communities of Practice?

Coaches' apparent preferences for informal and self-directed modes of learning have been highlighted in the literature. Consequently, there is a need for innovative coach education approaches that complement these clearly preferred, informal routes, and better provide coaches with the professional skills they need to deal with the complex nature of their work. Online blogs are one such tool said to have the potential to strengthen and promote critical thinking and reflection on professional practice; however, research evidence and theoretical frameworks for their use is inconclusive and currently lacking. Therefore, the purpose of part one of this two-part investigation was to explore the use of shared online blogs as a tool to promote reflection and community of practice (CoP) in a cohort of twenty-four undergraduate sports coaching students (5 females, 19 males). Four group blogs, purposely designed to support informal workplace learning, were subjected to content analysis in order to determine the emergent reflective quality of blog entries, and the extent to which functioning online CoPs emerged. Findings revealed that shared blogs were a useful tool to promote higher order reflective thinking, and fully functioning online CoPs emerged in all four groups.

Keywords: coach learning; coach education; coach development; reflective practice; communities of practice; online

Introduction

In recent years, a growing body of research has sought to better understand how coaches develop their craft and learn how to coach (Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2006). Typically, in light of coaches' self-perceived limitations of, and resistance to, formal coach education activities (Hughes, 2005; Trudel & Gilbert, 2006; Vargas-Tonsing, 2007), this research has suggested that the majority of coach learning occurs experientially through a broad and diverse range of informal and self-directed

learning activities (cf. Cushion et al., 2010; Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2006), especially those involving social interaction with other coaches during day-to-day coaching experiences (Erickson, Bruner, MacDonald, & Côté, 2008; Lemyre, Trudel, & Durand-Bush, 2007; Wright, Trudel, & Culver, 2007). As a consequence, it has been argued that there is a need for innovative coach education approaches that complement these clearly preferred, informal routes, and better provide coaches with the professional competencies they need to deal with the complex, problematic and dynamic nature of their work (Gilbert, Gallimore, & Trudel, 2009; Morgan, Jones, Gilbourne, & Llewellyn, 2013). For example, a reflective approach to practice is frequently advocated as a key skill for understanding and enhancing coach learning and raising the vocational standards of coaches (e.g. Cropley, Miles, & Peel, 2012; Gilbert & Trudel, 2006; Irwin, Hanton, & Kerwin, 2004; Knowles, Gilbourne, Borrie, & Neville, 2001).

Alongside this, the continued evolution of a wave of Web 2.0 technologies (e.g. blogs, wikis, social networking sites) has led to a fundamental change in the way that knowledge is produced and disseminated (Dixon, Lee, & Ghaye, 2013). These collaborative online tools are relatively simple to use, often free to access, and are said to foster social interaction, sharing and the co-construction of knowledge (Byington, 2011; Gunawardena et al., 2009; Hew & Cheung, 2013). As such, they are said to be ripe for exploitation in coach education (Piggott, 2013).

Web-logs (known as blogs) are one such tool said to have the potential to strengthen and promote critical thinking and reflection on professional practice in a range of learning environments (Boulton & Hramiak, 2012; Robertson, 2011). With little technical know-how, individuals can express ideas and share opinions in the form of authored 'posts' on a simple website and receive multiple responses from

others in the form of asynchronous 'comments' (Silva, Goel, & Mousavidin, 2008), both of which are generally written in conversational language, and archived chronologically for future reference (Gunawardena et al., 2009). This multi-layered interaction is said to provide the perfect platform for collaborative learning and reflective conversation (Godwin-Jones, 2003) and, consequently, has the capacity to form and maintain Lave and Wenger's (1991, 1996) concept of a 'Community of Practice' (CoP) (Stiler & Philleo, 2003; Yang, 2009), which are frequently recommended as a model for facilitating the development of coaching knowledge (e.g. Cassidy, Potrac, & McKenzie, 2006; Culver & Trudel, 2006; Gilbert & Trudel, 2005). Building on earlier work, Wenger (1998) and Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) propose that a CoP shares common elements, specifically a domain of knowledge, a community of people, and shared practices (Cassidy, Jones, & Potrac, 2004). Reflecting this, Wenger et al. (2002) defined a CoP as a group of people "who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (p.4). In a CoP, each member is said to actively engage with other members of the community (mutual engagement), actively share information and assist each other to pursue the jointly agreed goal (joint enterprise), and share the routines, gestures, words and actions that are common to the CoP (shared repertoire) (Galipeau & Trudel, 2006; Wenger, 1988).

Notably, however, the use of Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs is far outpacing the development of theoretical frameworks for their use in education (Gunawardena et al., 2009); instead, many claims and suggestions that have been made about the educational potential or benefits of these tools are often based on mere speculations as opposed to research evidence (Hew & Cheung, 2013). Indeed,

this evidence is only starting to emerge in coach education pedagogy. For example, in a recent preliminary study, Stoszkowski and Collins (2014a) asked 26 undergraduate sports coaching students to reflect on their practice over the course of two semesters using individually maintained online blogs. Although the study concluded that blogs were a useful platform for reflective thinking and the development of reflective skills, a number of issues requiring further investigation were identified.

Firstly, despite the collaborative and peer discourse features of blogs, overt dialogue and knowledge sharing between participants was entirely absent in Stoszkowski and Collins' (2014a) study. As such, a CoP was far from being an automatic consequence of the use of blogs for reflection (Chan & Ridgeway, 2006). Notably, this lack of peer interaction and the co-construction of knowledge is also a common finding in more dedicated 'offline' studies (e.g. Culver & Trudel, 2006; Culver, Trudel, & Werthner, 2009). Therefore, it appears that self-maintaining coach interaction representative of the CoP concept requires a more deliberate and carefully staged evolution than the individually maintained open access blogs operationalized by Stoszkowski and Collins (2014a). Indeed, they suggest that group based blogging, whereby a single blog functions as a communal online platform for a 'small' closed group of individuals to share their opinions and learning experiences, might better support the development of a sufficiently focussed and critical approach to the co-construction of professional coaching knowledge (cf. Abraham & Collins, 2011; Boulton & Hramiak, 2012; Hall & Graham, 2004).

Secondly, critically reflective coaches should be able to apply reflective processes that go beyond superficial and descriptive activities and harness the 'why' and 'what for' of their coaching practice and behaviour (Black & Plowright, 2010; Cushion, Armour, & Jones, 2003; Ghaye & Ghaye, 2010; Thompson & Pascal, 2012).

Specifically, critical reflection involves 'looking beneath the surface' of a situation in order to identify and critique any assumptions that are being made, as well as challenge the values and beliefs that are being drawn upon (Mezirow, 1990; Saylor, 1990), which are inevitably influenced and shaped by numerous historical, social, cultural, and institutional factors (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2002; Stoszkowski & Collins, 2014b). Whilst the majority of participants in Stoszkowski and Collins' (2014a) study exhibited a positive trajectory toward higher order thinking; consistent with other studies on the use of blogs for reflection (e.g. Lucas & Fleming, 2012; Yang, 2009), descriptive reflections far exceeded those of a critical nature and some participants struggled to adopt a sustained reflective practice orientation. This finding suggests that, if blogs are to be used to facilitate and nurture reflection in coach education, more explicit instructional strategies and support structures are needed in order to guide coaches towards higher levels of reflection and 'teach' the skill of critical reflection (Gilbert & Trudel, 2013; Knowles & Saxon, 2010; Peel, Cropley, Hanton, & Fleming, 2013).

Finally, detailed insight into coaches' perception and satisfaction relating to their use and experiences of blogs for reflection and social interaction, as well as their perceived impact on learning and practice, is currently lacking and therefore essential (Kim, 2008).

Accordingly, the purpose of this two-part investigation was to answer three specific research questions:

1. Does structured group blogging increase collaboration and facilitate the emergence of CoP?

2. Does structured group blogging help coaches become more critically reflective?

3. How do coaches perceive their use and experiences of structured group blogging for reflection and learning, and what are the implications for coach education practitioners?

The present study aimed to answer the first two research questions. This was facilitated through content analysis of four separate group blogs that were maintained by practicing sports coaches over the course of an academic year. In the study reported in part two of this paper (Stoszkowski, Collins, & Olsson, under review), we then examined the specific perceptions of participants with regards to their learning experiences whilst using their shared blog and, from this, draw explicit implications for practice in coach education.

Method

Participants

The sample in the present study consisted of a module cohort of 24 undergraduate students (5 females and 19 males) in the final year of a sports coaching practice degree programme during the 2013/14 academic cycle. The average age of the participants was 21.63 years ($SD = 1.76$) and the median coaching experience was reported as 6 years, with experience ranging from 4 to 8 years in a variety of sports (see Table 1). All participants had completed at least one national governing body coaching award, with the highest awarded qualification translating to level three of the UK coaching certificate endorsed framework (Sports Coach UK, 2012a). Accordingly we took them as representative of developing coaches, notwithstanding theirs status as students as well. As part of the module, all participants were undertaking a work placement incorporating a minimum of 40 hours coaching practice, as well as concurrently coaching in the community in a variety of paid and voluntary roles (i.e. over and above any practical coaching linked to their course of

study). Nine participants had previous experiences with blogging.

Procedures

The module in question was titled 'Coaching Practice and Reflection' and was a compulsory element of the final academic year of the degree programme. The initial, introductory workshop was split into two. The first half of the session highlighted the module's aims, learning outcomes, and delivery method. The second half then focused on critical reflection, with a focus on its conceptual purpose, process, and pedagogical value (Thompson & Pascal, 2012). The following two weeks were then given over to tutor-facilitated discussion and debate, which aimed to both challenge and encourage each participant to question their existing and previously held values and beliefs in relation to their experiences, learning, and on-going practice (Cushion et al., 2003). This culminated in participants being asked to formulate their own structured vision (e.g. a philosophical standpoint) of what type of coach they wish, and perhaps need, to become (Stephenson & Jowett, 2009).

In the fourth week, students were advised that participation in an ongoing reflective group blog was a necessary element of assessment (worth 60% of final module grade). The module tutors divided participants into four separate groups and introduced to the externally hosted blogging platform WordPress (https://wordpress.com), which is free of charge to use. It was explained that they would each receive an email invitation containing a link to join a purposely-designed closed group blog in the role of 'author'. This would mean they could publish blog posts and comment on the posts of others in their group, as well as upload files and links, without the need for moderation. Blog content could only be accessed by other members of the group and two module tutors (who were required to set their own account password), and as such was private to each group (Boulton & Hramiak,

2012). Importantly, whilst allowing each individual to edit and delete their own posts, this role did not permit them to delete, change, or edit the posts of other group members, or any of the blog's administrative settings, which remained under the control of the module tutors. Next, the purpose of the group blog was clearly defined (Johnson, 2001) and, in order to promote trust and a non-threatening online environment (Andrew, 2010), each group was asked to negotiate 'rules of engagement' to guide use of the platform. This meant setting clear expectations of etiquette, shared practice, and knowledge exchange (Byington, 2011), which were subsequently combined into an overriding 'code of conduct' that all participants were asked to abide by (see Appendix A). Then, in order to help set the scene for the other members of their group, and identify any technical issues, each participant was asked to make an introductory post on their group blog outlining their current applied coaching context/s.

In the fifth week, the first of five periodic two-hour workshops, focussing on separate theoretical perspectives or 'themes' took place. The theme choices were driven by current but well founded directions in coaching and a desire from the module tutors to include topics they thought would be interesting and relevant (Jones, Morgan, & Harris, 2012). These comprised: (a) teaching and coaching styles (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002); (b) social role and impression management (Goffman, 1959); (c) the coach as a 'more capable other' (Vygotsky, 1978); (d) shared leadership and athlete empowerment (Kidman, 2001), and; (e) assessing thinking and learning (Bloom, 1956). Each workshop was interactive and involved tutor facilitated debate and discussion in small groups, the aim being to question previous assumptions, raise current theoretical knowledge, and provide a foundation on which to base their subsequent reflections and blog discussion. At the end of each workshop,

participants were signposted to appropriate theoretical literature and relevant material, and asked to use their group blog as a place to reflect on and discuss the theme in relation to their own experiences and on-going practice. As such, the adopted structure centred on collaborative group reflection through the discussion of situated learning, a process grounded in the CoP framework (Wenger et al., 2002). Each periodic workshop was separated by an average period 32 days for the remainder of the academic year (23 weeks). Throughout this time, both module tutors would read all of the entries that were made, and comment on the emerging discussion where appropriate in order to guide operation and progress of the blogs (Fontainha & Gannon-Leary, 2008) and 'nudge' discussion and learning in the right direction (Johnson, 2001); as such, the focus was on participant-generated content with the tutors acting as partners in the learning process (Gunawardena et al., 2009).

Data analysis

Content analysis was used to examine each group blog in terms of the number of entries (i.e. posts and comments), the frequency of entries, the word count of each entry, and the number of views each group blog received. Then, a group-by-group content analysis of all blog entries was conducted in order to examine the participant behaviour in each group and to determine the reflective quality of the writing exhibited. First, in order to help clarify the anatomy of any discussions occurring in each group blog, each entry was read multiple times and coded according to a coding scheme based on Hara, Shachaf, and Stoerger's (2009) categories for classifying the types of activities apparent in online messages. Hara et al. (2009) expanded on the earlier work of Hew and Hara (2006) and Hara (2007) to devise their coding scheme, and used it successfully to examine the primary activities that occurred during the online discussions of three separate CoPs. The scheme had nine categories, of which

we removed two (announcement and humour), due to their limited relevance in reflective blogs. In expanding on their work, we identified one additional category: acknowledgment. Thus, the final coding scheme was composed of eight categories and is described in Table 2. During this analysis, a blog entry could fit into more than one category.

Following this, any entries coded as 'knowledge sharing' (see Table 2) were further coded according to Hew and Hara's (2006) framework of knowledge types, who in their study of on online community of practice involving nurses, defined three broad types of knowledge, as described in Figure 1. During this analysis, a blog entry could again fit into more than one category. Although Hew and Hara's (2006) knowledge framework was used a priori, the coding categories were not forcefully imposed onto the data. Throughout the data analysis, new knowledge categories (if any) were also allowed to emerge inductively during the coding process. To increase the consistency of the coding process, exemplary entries (see Appendix B) that clearly illustrated the different types of knowledge were identified and used as initial codes to guide the continuing analysis (Hew & Hara, 2006).

Subsequently, blog entries were reread and coded in line with Hatton and Smith's (1995) reflective writing framework, which Stoszkowski and Collins (2014a) used successfully to identify levels of reflection in blog entries. Hatton and Smith (1995) based this framework on an extensive literature review and refined the categories and definitions it employs over several trials (Rourke & Anderson, 2004), they also provide detailed guidance for using the framework to support reliability when coding. The framework includes four types of writing, rising in ascending order of reflective quality: unreflective descriptive writing (i.e. basic descriptions of events with no attempt to provide reason or justification), descriptive reflection (i.e. attempts

to provide reasons for events or actions but reported in a descriptive way), dialogic reflection (i.e. more analytical reflection that involves stepping back from and exploring reasons for events, while evidencing attempts to appreciate wider contexts and alternative points of view), and critical reflection (i.e. awareness that actions and events are not only explicable by multiple perspectives, but are also located in and influenced by multiple historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts), with each blog entry coded according to the highest level of reflective writing reached in that entry (Freeman & Brett, 2012).

Finally, in order to determine the extent to which each group possessed the characteristics of a functioning CoP, the blog data from each group were compared against the three main interconnecting structural elements of Wenger et al's (2002) CoP framework. The applied criteria were:

1. Domain. A CoP is not just a network of connections between people: it has an identity defined by a shared domain of knowledge.

2. Community. Members of a CoP engage in joint activities and discussions, they share information and knowledge; as a result of these interactions and the relationships that develop, they address problems and learn together.

3. Practice. A CoP is not merely a community of interest. Members of a CoP are practitioners; as a result of their sustained interaction over time, they develop a shared repertoire of resources (e.g. a body of practical knowledge, experiences, stories, tools).

During each of the above content analyses, on the occasions where the authors, both of whom were experienced researchers in qualitative methods, disagreed about the categories in which an entry was placed (less than 5% of entries), negotiation was pursued until a consensus of opinion was reached. In addition, and following the

recommendations of Krane, Andersen, and Strean (1997), a reliability check was conducted at each stage by asking an independent researcher, trained in qualitative methodology but blind to the objectives of the study, to audit the assigned categories to ensure that they accurately reflected blog entries. No issues were found.

Results

A total of 569 blog entries were analysed. Table 3 and Table 4 show that the participants in each group blog actively engaged with one another by making blog entries for the duration of the module (i.e. for all five themes), with the number of blog entries made by each participant ranging from 5 to 99 ($M = 23.71$, $SD = 19.26$), and the number of entries per group ranging from 71 to 277 ($M = 142.25$, $SD = 92.14$). Entries ranged from a minimum of 22 to a maximum of 1446 words in length ($M = 264.04$, $Mdn = 220$, $SD = 183.91$). Tutors made a total of 49 comments across all four blogs during the year, commenting on entries an average of three times per theme on each group blog. The findings of the study are now arranged in such an order as to provide answers to the first two of the original research questions in turn. An exemplar blog thread is included as supplemental material for illustrative purposes and to allow readers to immerse themselves in the findings.

Does structured group blogging increase collaboration and facilitate the emergence of CoP?

Evidence that a functioning CoP emerged in each of the four group blogs can be seen by their ability to successfully fulfil all of the three characteristics put forth by Wenger et al. (2002). These are outlined below.

Domain. The participants in each group blog demonstrated a mutual interest in, and commitment to, the domain of sports coaching by being registered on the programme

of study (i.e. they had chosen to study it volitionally). Therefore, the area of knowledge brought the participants together and helped them establish the common focus and scope of their interactions (Byington, 2011); as such, the domain defined the key issues that each group needed to explore and develop through the joint enterprise of shared online reflection (Wenger, 1998).

Community. The participants in all groups primarily engaged in the activity of sharing knowledge, with 93.50% of all blog entries coded as such (see Table 5). Analysis of the types of knowledge shared revealed that practical knowledge was the most commonly shared type of knowledge in blog entries (see Table 6). This was further classified into: (a) personal opinion (77.60% of entries); (b) personal suggestion (16.31% of entries), and; (c) institutional practice (3.54% of entries). The second most frequent type of knowledge was a new category emerging inductively from the data, experiential knowledge (72.10% of entries), which included stories and descriptions relating to a participant's personal experiences as a coach or participant. Book knowledge made up the next most frequent type of knowledge (44.01% of entries); this predominantly involved in-text citations to evidence-based literature, with entries usually accompanied by a reference list of citations, most of which were outside of any tutor directed reading, and some of which included a direct hyperlink to the article or publication. In addition, entries often included direct signposting to a book, article, or video pertaining to the topic. The least frequently shared knowledge was cultural knowledge (8.06% of entries), which predominantly included statements relating to the general role of coaches and coaching in society.

The willingness to share ideas was apparent in the threaded discussion that characterised the knowledge exchange in all four groups (see Table 7); with 71.76% of new blog posts developing into a thread, which, on average, were 5.17 entries long

(see Table 7), with the longest extending to 26 entries. Blog entries were characterised by use of greetings and first names, expressions of appreciation (13.53% of entries, see Table 5), and positive feedback, which evidenced a supportive environment (Ramondt, 2008). Nevertheless, it was apparent that interactions were not always entirely 'harmonious' (Cox, 2005), and some discussions between participants would include challenge, disagreement, and criticism. Much of the observed peer interaction was initiated when participants posted a problem, or raised thoughtful and personalised questions; indeed, Table 5 shows that 57.47% of all blog entries included solicitation for help, ideas, or feedback. These interactions are indicative of sustained mutual engagement in collaborative enquiry (Bray, Lee, Smith, & Yorks, 2000) and the collective negotiation of learning; as such, each group formed a community around their domain and built supportive collaborative relationships with one another (Brown & Duguid, 2001). However, it was apparent that not all group members evidenced the same 'overt' levels of engagement, with some participants making far fewer entries than others (see Table 3). Nevertheless, although some participants wrote fewer entries than others, it was clear that all participants were reading the content of their group blog on a regular basis, with each blog receiving over 1000 views in total ($M = 1804.25$, $SD = 1031.17$). Interestingly, the size of each group (i.e. number of members) did not correlate with the number of blog entries; for example, the group with least members (group D, five members) had the second highest number of entries across the four groups, highlighting differences in intra-group patterns of engagement.

Practice. Each community was more than a community of interest in the domain. Each group blog fostered an online environment that enabled participants to mutually engage in the practice of shared inquiry and reflection on a professional activity (Hara

et al., 2009). Through this shared practice, each group developed a shared repertoire of practical knowledge (Wenger et al., 2002). More specifically, the content of each group blog represented a significant body of collectively developed and maintained practical knowledge, which functioned as a communal resource that participants could draw upon when reflecting on their everyday field experiences, on-going professional development, and when planning for future coaching practice (Gray, 2005). Similarly, the patterns of behaviour that characterised much of the observed blog interaction (i.e. the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and advice through threaded discussion) was indicative of a routine and/or method of shared problem solving, which participants developed together over time as a result of their history of mutual engagement (Culver & Trudel, 2006). Nevertheless, the content and routines of each group blog were unique to each group; as such, this 'shared culture' distinguished each CoP from one another (Galipeau & Trudel, 2006).

Does structured group blogging help coaches become more critically reflective?

A total of 509 blog entries were coded in line with Hatton and Smith's (1995) reflective writing framework. This analysis excluded 60 blog entries that had previously been coded as 'acknowledgement' or 'misdirected entry' (see Table 2) due to their short length and/or inapplicable content. Table 3 shows that the number of entries coded at the two upper 'levels' of Hatton and Smith's (1995) reflective writing framework made up the majority of entries, with 48.72% of entries constituting dialogic reflection, and 13.75% of entries constituting critical reflection. As Table 3 shows, the number of entries coded as descriptive reflection was 35.17%, whilst 12.20% of entries were coded as unreflective descriptive writing (the lowest level of the framework). Interestingly, Table 7 shows that when new blog posts (i.e. a new standalone post by an individual) drew comments from other group members, and

subsequently developed into threaded discussion, the highest level of reflection reached was higher than in standalone posts. For example, 16.22% of standalone posts were coded as critical reflection, whilst 37.23% of threaded discussions reached that level. Equally, descriptive writing (1.06%) and descriptive reflection (9.57%) represented the highest level of reflection in far fewer threaded discussions when compared to standalone posts (see Table 7).

Nevertheless, variability in levels of reflection was evident between both individual participants and between groups, and a minority of participants found it difficult to reach the critical reflection level. For example, of the 24 participants, eight failed to make a single blog entry coded as critical reflection; notably, however, five of those participants were members of the same group (i.e. group B, see Table 3). Similarly, Table 4 shows that levels of reflection did not develop in a linear process as the themes progressed during the year.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the extent to which structured group blogging resulted in increased collaboration between participants and the emergence of CoP, as well as the extent to which this activity helped groups of coaches become more critically reflective on their professional practice. The findings suggest that each shared blog functioned as a CoP, whereby participation served as a tool for reflective practice situated in the context of each participant's everyday coaching experiences (Gray, 2005). Additionally, the findings indicate that the levels of reflective thinking evidenced by the majority of participants were, on average, more critical and less descriptive than those in Stoszkowski and Collins' (2014a) study, which employed individually maintained reflective blogs. As such, these outcomes suggest that online group blogging might be a useful tool to facilitate and compliment informal coach

learning and development, which, it has been suggested, coaches prefer (e.g. Erickson et al., 2008; Stephenson & Jowett, 2009). However, whilst there has been clear progression in the levels of interaction and reflective thought in the present study, it is important to unpick further potential reasons for the differences with Stoszkowski and Collins' (2014a) findings.

Firstly, it is not clear whether the positive effects in the current study are attributable to the use of shared group blogs alone, or the way in which the collaborative tool was used (Hew & Cheung, 2013). Still, we can infer that what generally seems to be better quality peer interaction and collaboration and, therefore, we would suggest informal learning (cf. Nelson et al., 2006), was primed by a certain level of formal scaffolding and explicit structure 'up front'. Indeed, several authors have suggested that, in order to involve coaches in effective reflective practice, it is essential to put some structure in place beforehand (Knowles & Saxon, 2010). For example, the formal priming and 'set up' in the initial five weeks of the module appeared to equip coaches with the structures to ensure their ensuing blog interactions were sufficiently open-minded and reflective (Gilbert, Gallimore, & Trudel, 2009). Consequently, participants at least seemed to be more aware of the social norms and assumptions that might drive their behaviour (Abraham & Collins, 2011), and, it could be argued, were therefore less likely to engage in the mere transmission of dogma, a potential danger of knowledge sharing in CoPs (Piggott, 2013).

Similarly, the initial workshop for each focussed theme, and the directed reading and tutor guidance that accompanied them, helped equip participants with a primary knowledge base and/or set of theoretical constructs to allow them to ask thoughtful questions, provide productive feedback, and/or engage in asynchronous discussion on the theme on a more meaningful level (Choi, Land, & Turgeon, 2005;

Peel et al., 2013). This scaffolding of blog interaction also allowed tutors to monitor the appropriateness of new beliefs and knowledge that were being generated by participants, as well as raise awareness of potentially more 'effective' constructs in relation to each of the directed themes (Werthner & Trudel, 2006).

Secondly, the finding that, perhaps unsurprisingly, threaded discussion generates more reflective thought than mere statements or single blog entries is an important one. For example, when the participants in the present study received different perspectives and/or personalized questions from other group members (and on occasion the tutors) about their explanations, they had to justify their positions, which may have helped them to move beyond mere information exchange (Gray, 2005) and identify differences in understandings, as well as weaknesses in their initial explanations (Choi, Land, & Turgeon, 2005). This was especially apparent when two or more participants holding opposing views would engage in critical discussion (Piggott, 2013). Goos, Galbraith, and Renshaw (2002) define this type of peer collaboration between individuals of equal status as 'mutuality', whereby the varied reasoning and viewpoints build a shared understanding of the topic. Without this interaction (i.e. when reflecting individually), even with the priming of up front scaffolds, participants are limited by their own knowledge and understanding of practice (Cropley, Hanton, Miles, & Niven, 2010). Therefore, if our aim is to promote critical reflection in coaches, facilitation and active encouragement, maybe even the requirement, of thread like reflective conversations is needed.

Of course, the mixed nature must be acknowledged, since the levels of experience and qualification of coaches within the group varied from 0-6 years and L1 to L3. We saw no systematic differences or bias in response pattern or involvement however. It may be that their common status as students was more

influential than their coaching experience. Even so, our claims for the mutuality of the process seem justified.

Finally, in the present study, the fact that group blogs weren't open access, and information was confidential between group members, seemed to encourage interaction. Indeed, Hall and Graham (2004) argue that new knowledge generation is rare in open access communities, but more common in smaller and more closed groups. Similarly, the structured formation of each blog, and associated code of conduct, appeared to result in a certain degree of trust, rapport and empathy between participants (Johnson, 2001); which, it has been said, increase the likelihood of open exchange and knowledge sharing (Guldberg & Mackness, 2009). Nevertheless, whilst the majority of participants in the present study evidenced a willingness to engage in collaborative reflection, a minority of participants did not engage in blogging activity as much as others; instead, they tended to take a back seat, which Haythornthwaite, Kazmer, and Robins (2000) refer to as 'being absent'. However, this is a common finding in many online and face-to-face communities, whereby an active core group of posters make the majority of contribution, whilst other group members read the contributions of others but post less, sometimes known as 'lurking' (cf. Wright et al., 2007). Indeed, Wenger et al. (2002) outline three levels of participation in CoPs, whereby 10% to 15% of members form the core group and lead discussions, 15% to 20% are active participants and contribute to discussions, and the remainder of the members participate at a lower level of involvement, with more sporadic or no participation (Byington, 2011). Therefore, further insight is required into the reasons for, or barriers to, participants' engagement in blog discussion.

Conclusion

The present study provides important evidence-based practice concerning the educational affordances of Web 2.0 technologies for supporting the informal learning of sports coaches. We may tentatively infer from the current findings that small group blogs, supported by sufficient formal priming and ongoing scaffolds, lead to the emergence of peer collaboration and functioning CoPs. Similarly, this structured reflection as part of a community suggests participants were capable of achieving more in terms of their levels of reflective thinking than if they had reflected on an individual basis (Boulton & Hramiak, 2012). Clearly, therefore, such a tool holds potential in coach education pedagogy, especially when we consider many of the barriers to the uptake of face-to-face coach education solutions typically cited by coaches (e.g. cost, accessibility, timing, and travel, cf. Sports Coach UK, 2012b).

As with prior research into the use of blogs in learning, however, several methodological issues remain and we recognize the limits of what can be accomplished by a relatively small scale and short-term study of this nature. For example, as the current study used participants who were concurrently completing a formal course of study, some readers may be concerned that participants might have written strategically and 'faked' reflection in order to fulfil the assessment requirements (Hobbs, 2007) and/or 'perform' the role of the student (Ross, 2011), as opposed to treating group blogging as an authentic mechanism for developing their practice (Cropley et al., 2010). However, a linear trend to the progression of reflective thought was not apparent, and reflective blogging was not necessarily something participants warmed to over time; instead, it appears it was something participants engaged with when the topic was of particular interest, that is, mutual interest was not always apparent and certain themes gripped some participants and/or groups more than others. Getting improvement, therefore, could be down to, and may depend on,

judicious and clever use of theme, as well as leadership by the blog administrator, in order to pose interesting questions. This suggests that greater interest and commitment may result from sport and level-specific CoPs, such as would be expected if these approaches were used by sports organisations and governing bodies. Additionally, there are still many aspects that warrant further research. Most pressingly, there is a need to determine what makes an individual participate or not participate in a blog community (Silva et al., 2008); as such, insight into coaches' views and perceptions relating to their use and experiences of structured group blogs is essential. We turn to this issue in part two of this paper.

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Appendix A - Participant generated code of conduct

- Check blog at least weekly

- Reply to comments in a timely fashion

- Be specific and stick to the relevant theme

- Try and contribute to each post

- Don't over-post i.e. too often

- Be positive and constructive – try to avoid negativity

- Try not to be argumentative

- Use clear and understandable language

- No abuse, swearing, threatening or overly judgemental language

- Try to justify comments

- Respect the views of others at all times

- Try not to take comments personally

- Approach discussions with an open mind

- Upload a profile picture or 'avatar'

- Try to signpost others to relevant content

- Try to use a variety of media

Appendix B – Exemplary blog entries illustrating different types of knowledge

(see Figure 1 for definitions)

B1. Knowledge types in entry: PO, CK, PS, BK

Xxxxxx on **January 10, 2014 at 12:14 am** said:

X,
This was a very in depth blog post and i did enjoy seeing you're different views on what you perceive as the correct way to coach and deploy coaching methods for the scenario you are in. I also believe in just letting the kids play as that is what is seen as the best method for development and learning. If they do not fit the traditional mould then does that matter? Did Usain Bolt think he couldn't become a 100m gold medallist because he was taller than most sprinters? No! And i firmly beleive you have made some valid points in letting the kids develop through playing and developing their own style if it works for them through the Kevin Pietersen example. And i also feel your role in this is vital in that you become more or a guide than a coach, taking up a more guided discovery teaching method could help in sessions but also to appease parents on the sidelines to see their children be more involved in the sessions by actively seeking the answers to questions you put across. Dixon and Warner et al (2008) found that parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and coaches all play a role in influencing attitudes and behaviours, and if you do go ahead with the newsletter post (good idea!) then i firmly believe that the parents will better understand your role and take on your values and beliefs, or maybe even try a small meeting with them to see what they want for their children and try find middle ground?

Dixon, M., Warner, S. and Bruening, J. (2008). More Than Just Letting Them Play: Parental In!uence on Women's Lifetime Sport Involvement. Sociology of Sport Journal, 25 pp. 538-559.

B2. Knowledge types in entry: IP, EK, PO

Xxxxxxx on **February 14, 2014 at 4:14 pm** said:

X, I'm like u the majority of my coaching is done in schools and I also flit around from one school to another and usually end up in 4/5 schools a week. I also do a little bit of club coaching during the weeks when schools are on holiday. but more on the topic of age grouping, at the main school I am based at I coach football training after-school on a Wednesday. There we have all of KS2 (so yr 3,4,5 & 6, age range 7-11) we usually group 3&4 together and 5&6 together as this is how they play on the yard etc. and they seem not to be scared and if done with little ones intermingled it can be daunting. But occasionally there have been a few exceptions for example this year we have a yr 3 boy who is very talented at football and is miles ahead of the other yr 3 and 4s. so what can I do with him. we noticed this very early on and put him into the 5 & 6 group where he gets stuck in and doesn't show any fear and still plays at a good level that also challenges him a bit more as well. I feel I have done the right thing by putting him into that group and he will learn from it. I haven't noticed any negative points from the 5′s and 6′s about him being in their

group and they involve him as much as anyone. has this occurred in your coaching at all? and how did u overcome the situation?

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Group	Coach	Gender	Age	Sport coached	Years experience	Highest coaching award
A	A1	M	22	Soccer	7	L1
	A2	M	21	Soccer	7	L2
	A3[a]	M	26	Multisport	8	L2
	A4	M	22	Multisport	7	L1
	A5	F	20	Disability	5	L2
	A6	M	21	Multisport	5	L1
B	B1	M	22	Rugby union	5	L1
	B2	M	21	Rugby union	6	L1
	B3	M	20	Rugby league	6	L1
	B4	M	21	Rugby league	5	L1
	B5	M	25	Rugby league	6	L1
	B6	M	22	Rugby league	6	L1
C	C1	M	22	Soccer	7	L2
	C2	M	26	Soccer	5	L2
	C3	M	23	Soccer	7	L1
	C4	M	20	Soccer	7	L1
	C5	F	21	Soccer	7	L1
	C6	M	20	Soccer	5	L3
	C7	F	20	Soccer	4	L1
D	D1	M	21	Soccer	5	L2
	D2	F	21	Basketball	5	L2
	D3	M	20	Table tennis	4	L1
	D4	M	21	Soccer	5	L2
	D5	F	21	Gymnastics	7	L3

Note. M = Male, F = Female. Highest coaching award refers to level of UK coaching certificate endorsed framework.

[a]Coach withdrew from course after 19 weeks due to personal reasons.

Table 2

Coding Scheme for Activities Apparent in Blog Entries

Category	Definition
1. Solicitation	Request for help, ideas, or feedback.
2. Appreciation	Present the feeling of gratitude (e.g., by saying thank you).
3. Administrative	Provide administrative support for the group blog.
4. Clarification	Offer additional information when further questions raised after someone responds to the original question.
5. Knowledge sharing	Share any types of knowledge.
6. Acknowledgement[a]	Short entry of two sentences of less, simply acknowledging a response or notifying of further elaboration to come.
7. Misdirected entry	Entry posted by mistake or to rectify error (e.g., entry simply containing reference missing from previous entry).
8. Unreadable entry	Entry is not readable due to technical problems.

Note. Adapted from Hara, Shachaf, and Stoerger (2009).

[a]Category emerged during inductive content analysis.

Table 3

Number and Quality of Blog Entries by Participant According to Hatton and Smith's (1995) Framework

Group blog	Coach	Number of entries	Entries coded for reflection	DesW (%)	DesR (%)	DiaR (%)	CriR (%)
A	A1	14	14	1 (7.14)	1 (7.14)	12 (85.71)	0
	A2	12	12	1 (8.33)	3 (25)	5 (41.67)	3 (25)
	A3[a]	12	12	0	0	5 (41.67)	7 (58.33)
	A4	14	14	0	9 (64.29)	4 (28.57)	1 (7.14)
	A5	10	10	0	4 (40)	4 (40)	2 (20)
	A6	9	9	0	5 (55.56)	4 (44.44)	0
	Group total	**71**	**71**	**2 (2.82)**	**22 (30.99)**	**34 (47.89)**	**13 (18.31)**
B	B1	16	12	3 (25)	8 (66.67)	1 (8.33)	0
	B2	36	32	1 (3.13)	16 (50)	13 (40.63)	2 (6.25)
	B3	14	13	0	4 (30.77)	9 (69.23)	0
	B4	17	14	0	11 (78.57)	3 (21.43)	0
	B5	12	11	0	6 (54.55)	5 (45.45)	0
	B6	5	5	3 (60)	1 (20)	1 (20)	0
	Group total	**100**	**87**	**7 (8.05)**	**46 (52.87)**	**32 (36.78)**	**2 (2.30)**

				DesW	DesR	DiaR	CriR
C	C1	40	31	0	15 (48.39)	14 (45.16)	2 (6.45)
	C2	99	80	0	13 (16.25)	53 (66.25)	14 (17.5)
	C3	43	42	1 (2.38)	15 (35.71)	22 (52.38)	4 (9.52)
	C4	24	19	0	7 (36.84)	9 (47.37)	3 (15.79)
	C5	25	22	1 (4.55)	11 (50)	8 (36.36)	2 (9.09)
	C6	34	34	0	18 (52.94)	14 (41.18)	2 (5.88)
	C7	12	10	1 (10)	7 (70)	2 (20)	0
	Group total	**277**	**238**	**3 (1.26)**	**86 (36.13)**	**122 (51.26)**	**27 (11.34)**
D	D1	25	25	5 (20)	16 (64)	4 (16)	4 (16)
	D2	34	30	0	0	17 (56.67)	13 (43.33)
	D3	27	25	0	8 (32)	15 (60)	2 (8)
	D4	11	11	0	4 (36.36)	4 (36.36)	3 (27.27)
	D5	24	22	0	8 (36.36)	8 (36.36)	6 (27.27)
	Group total	**121**	**113**	**0**	**25 (22.12)**	**60 (53.10)**	**28 (24.78)**
	TOTAL	**569**	**509**	**12 (12.20)**	**179 (35.17)**	**248 (48.72)**	**70 (13.75)**
Stoszkowski and Collins (2014)		**448**	**448**	**50 (11.16)**	**253 (56.47)**	**134 (29.91)**	**11 (2.45)**

Note. DesW = Descriptive writing; DesR = Descriptive reflection; DiaR = Dialogic reflection; CriR = Critical reflection.

[a]Coach withdrew from course after 19 weeks due to personal reasons.

Table 4

Number and Quality of Blog Entries by Theme According to Hatton and Smith's (1995) Framework

Group	Theme	Number of entries	Entries coded for reflection	DesW (%)	DesR (%)	DiaR (%)	CriR (%)
A	1	20	20	1 (5)	7 (35)	9 (45)	3 (15)
	2	11	11	0	2 (18.18)	3 (27.27)	6 (54.55)
	3	18	18	0	9 (50)	9 (50)	0
	4	11	11	0	3 (27.27)	6 (54.55)	2 (18.18)
	5	11	11	1 (9.09)	1 (9.09)	7 (63.64)	2 (18.18)
	Group total	**71**	**71**	**2 (2.82)**	**22 (30.99)**	**34 (47.89)**	**13 (18.31)**
B	1	33	27	1 (3.70)	17 (62.96)	9 (33.33)	0
	2	15	12	4 (33.33)	6 (50)	1 (8.33)	1 (8.33)
	3	23	21	2 (9.52)	17 (80.95)	2 (9.52)	0
	4	18	17	0	3 (17.65)	13	1 (5.88)
	5	11	10	0	3 (30)	7 (70)	0
	Group total	**100**	**87**	**7 (8.05)**	**46 (52.87)**	**32 (36.78)**	**2 (2.30)**
C	1	46	37	1 (2.70)	28 (75.68)	8 (21.62)	0
	2	28	26	0	10 (38.46)	10 (38.46)	6 (23.08)
	3	66	56	1 (1.79)	17 (30.36)	29 (51.79)	9 (16.07)

	4	69	54	0	8 (14.81)	42 (77.78)	4 (7.41)
	5	68	65	1 (1.54)	23 (35.38)	33 (50.77)	8 (12.31)
	Group total	**277**	**238**	**3 (1.26)**	**86 (36.13)**	**122 (51.26)**	**27 (11.34)**
D	1	17	15	0	4 (26.67)	8 (53.33)	3 (20)
	2	19	19	0	4 (21.05)	9 (47.37)	6 (31.58)
	3	27	25	0	6 (24)	16 (64)	3 (12)
	4	33	32	0	6 (18.75)	16 (50)	10 (31.25)
	5	25	22	0	5 (22.73)	11 (50)	6 (27.27)
	Group total	**121**	**113**	**0**	**25 (22.12)**	**60 (53.10)**	**28 (24.78)**
	TOTAL	**569**	**509**	**12 (12.20)**	**179 (35.17)**	**248 (48.72)**	**70 (13.75)**

Note. DesW = Descriptive writing; DesR = Descriptive reflection; DiaR = Dialogic reflection; CriR = Critical reflection.

Table 5

Types of Activities Apparent in Blog Entries

Group	Number of entries	Sol (%)	App (%)	Adm (%)	Cla (%)	Kno (%)	Ack (%)	Mis (%)	Unr (%)
					Category				
A	71	44 (61.97)	10 (14.08)	0	14 (19.72)	71 (100)	0	0	0
B	100	32 (32)	13 (13)	0	22 (22)	88 (88)	6 (6)	7 (7)	0
C	277	177 (63.90)	24 (8.66)	0	113 (40.79)	257 (92.78)	38 (13.72)	1 (0.36)	0
D	121	74 (61.16)	30 (24.79)	0	51 (42.15)	116 (95.87)	8 (6.61)	0	0
Total	**569**	**327 (57.47)**	**77 (13.53)**	**0**	**200 (35.15)**	**532 (93.50)**	**52 (9.14)**	**8 (1.41)**	**0**

Note. Sol = Solicitation; App = Appreciation; Adm = Administrative; Cla = Clarification; Kno = Sharing knowledge; Ack = Acknowledgement; Mis = Misdirected entry; Unr = Unreadable entry. Total percentage exceeds 100% as a single blog entry could fit into more than one category.

Table 6

Types of Knowledge shared in Blog Entries According to Hew and Hara's (2006) Framework

Group	Number of entries sharing knowledge	BK (%)	Practical knowledge			CK (%)	EK (%)[a]
			PO (%)	PS (%)	IP (%)		
A	71	30 (42.25)	52 (73.24)	22 (30.99)	4 (5.63)	14 (19.72)	56 (78.87)
B	88	75 (85.23)	56 (63.64)	18 (20.45)	0	2 (2.27)	53 (60.23)
C	257	79 (30.74)	182 (70.82)	34 (13.23)	10 (3.89)	17 (6.61)	176 (68.48)
D	116	40 (34.48)	105 (90.52)	9 (7.76)	4 (3.45)	24 (20.69)	82 (70.69)
Total	**532**	**224 (42.11)**	**395 (77.60)**	**83 (16.31)**	**18 (3.38)**	**41 (7.71)**	**367 (68.98)**

Note. BK = Book knowledge; PO = Personal opinion; PS = Personal suggestion; IP = Institutional practice; CK = Cultural knowledge; EK = Experiential knowledge. Total percentage exceeds 100% as a single blog entry could fit into more than one category.

[a]New knowledge category emerging from inductive content analysis.

Table 7

Number and Quality of Blog Entries by Thread According to Hatton and Smith's (1995) Framework

Group	New blog posts	Number of posts developing into threads (%)[a]		Average thread length (*SD*)	DesW (%)	DesR (%)	DiaR (%)	CriR (%)
A	25	Threads	17 (68)	3.47 (1.5)	0	0	10 (58.82)	7 (41.18)
		Standalone	8 (32)		0	3 (37.50)	4 (50)	1 (12.50)
B	18	Threads	17 (94.44)	5.41 (3.36)	1 (5.88)	3 (17.65)	11 (64.71)	2 (11.76)
		Standalone	1 (5.56)		1 (100)	0	0	0
C	62	Threads	42 (67.74)	5.51 (4.54)	0	6 (14.29)	21 (50)	15 (35.71)
		Standalone	20 (32.26)		0	13 (65)	6 (30)	1 (5)
D	26	Threads	18 (69.23)	5.72 (3.49)	0	0	7 (38.89)	11 (61.11)
		Standalone	8 (30.77)		0	1 (12.50)	3 (37.50)	4 (50)
Total	**131**	**Threads**	**94 (71.76)**	**5.17 (3.79)**	**1 (1.06)**	**9 (9.57)**	**49 (52.13)**	**35 (37.23)**
		Standalone	**37 (28.24)**		**1 (2.70)**	**17 (45.95)**	**13 (35.14)**	**6 (16.22)**

Note. DesW = Descriptive writing; DesR = Descriptive reflection; DiaR = Dialogic reflection; CriR = Critical reflection.

[a]A thread is defined as a post with at least one comment. Posts without comments are defined as standalone.

Type of knowledge	Definition	Exemplary quotes
1. Book knowledge (BK)	Factual knowledge, general regulations, or published works.	"As Zeng and Gao (2012) explained when examining Mosston and Ashworth's spectrum…" "Try having a read of Whitmore (2009) coaching for performance chapter 5, this book helped me develop knowledge about how to word your questions…"
2. Practical knowledge	The use of book knowledge in practice, further classified into three categories:	
a) Personal opinion (PO)	Individual opinion not necessarily representing best practice.	"I think lower order questions are good for identifying someone's knowledge, or lack of it."
b) Personal suggestion (PS)	Personal recommended solution to a problem or issue.	"I would suggest you keep going the way you are, just ask plenty of questions and let them do the talking."
c) Institutional practice (IP)	Knowledge related to what an institution currently practices or has practiced in the past.	"At most development centres and academies we take the players school work into account to make sure we are not affecting their education."
3. Cultural knowledge (CK)	What it is like to practice in the field, including one's philosophy toward a practice, as well as one's professional responsibilities in a practice.	"Coaches are mentors to young children, whether that be in sport or in life."
4. Experiential knowledge (EK)	A description of a participant's own experiences as a coach or participant.	"By including them in the brief of the session, I instantly received positive feedback from the players." "I was involved in academies from a young age and I found there was too much pressure and the enjoyment factor went, it felt like I was a robot."

Figure 1. Hew and Hara's (2006) framework of knowledge types. The fourth category (experiential knowledge) emerged inductively during the data analysis. The exemplary quotes emerged during the data analysis process.

Supplemental online material

An exemplar blog thread is shown below for illustrative purposes and to allow readers

to immerse themselves in the findings. This material has been 'cut and paste' from the

group blog. In transferring to a Microsoft Word document format, colours and online

design layout are lost. Pictures, names, places, and other identifying information have

been redacted in order to protect the anonymity of participants.

Assessing Thinking & Learning
Posted on **March 21, 2014** by **Coach C2**

Following on from Thursday's lesson, I was involved in a discussion involving the deeper
thinking research of taxonomy.

I wanted to get your guys opinion on this…..

*"Do you think there is a certain age limit as to the terminology you can use and the depth
of questioning that can be applied to the player's critical thinking of certain situations?"*

So for example **REMEMBER:** ages 5-10?
UNDERSTAND: ages 5-15?
APPLY: ages 10-15?

I ask this because I'm simply not sure, it could be associated with the Long Term Athlete
Development continuum, so as the players become older the more thought is required to
critically analyse a situation. In an ideal world I believe we all want to players to learn
and develop at the same rate collectively, would you agree? This is sadly not the case,
which requires us as coaches to adapt, simplify, and complicate instructions or drills. So
to contradict the previous statement does it take a deeper level of thinking for a more
intelligent *(by intelligent I mean a more technically able, game understanding)* player.
This could highlight the need for more rigorous observation research to address if a range
of questions regarding the impact of terminology on learning and understanding. Would
you agree, Evaluation systems will be most effective if they include feedback loops to
shape improvements? It is also thought that if children understand the need for in-depth
critical thinking which as Hylén (2010) suggests they do not yet fully comprehend, would
also support the need for critical thinking at an earlier age than thought possible?

References

Hylén, J. (2010) Can Digital Learning Resources Spur Innovation? (pp.45-64) In. OECD
(ed.) *Inspired by Pedagogy, Driven by Technology*, OECD, Paris.

14 THOUGHTS ON "ASSESSING THINKING & LEARNING"

1.   **Coach C3** on **March 22, 2014 at 2:10 pm** said:

   Hi ▮,

   I think that's a very good discussion to start off with and I would agree in regards to wanting the players to develop at the same rate, however like you said this isn't the case when coaching. Although, I believe we should utilize all levels of the thinking order and tailor it to the right situation and player. As coaches I don't think there is any reason why we shouldn't be encouraging are players to critically think, after all when the players in a match they have to work out decision for themselves, so by implementing it in training we should hopefully see are players become better decision makers and problem solvers, would you agree?

   In regards to your last paragraph could you please elaborate on when said "Evaluation systems will be most effective if they include feedback loops to shape improvements?". I think I kind of understand where you are coming from, however I'm not entirely sure if my thinking is correct.

   Reply ↓

2.   **Coach C2** on **March 22, 2014 at 4:30 pm** said:

   Hi ▮,

   I agree in time we would see a more intelligent player but do you think we place too much pressure on players at a young age? We sometimes ask them questions at a depth that some adults would be incapable of answering. This is what got me thinking about the age related questioning, to support what I am trying to say Mischo & Rheinberg (1995) and Köller (2001) found positive effects in several experimental and field studies where facilitators observed student progress over time through age related questioning and strategies. These included academic understanding, reinforcement theory and self learning methods.

   In response to the last question,I was just asking your opinion of evaluation systems, and if they are at their most effective when they entice feedback from players. So using open questioning basically and allowing input from players to aid improvement. Although this could go back to the level of depth when asking players in regards to their age?

   Bibliography

   Köller, O. (2001) Mathematical World Views and Achievement in Advanced Mathematics: Findings from the TIMSS Population III, Studies in Educational Evaluation, 27,65-78.

Mischo, C. & Rheinberg, F. (1995) Erziehungsziele von Lehrern und individuelle Bezugsnormen der Leistungsbewertung, Zeitschrift für Pädagogische Psychologie, 9,139-151

Reply ↓

3. **Coach C3** on **March 23, 2014 at 3:05 pm** said:

    I think there is positives and negatives to applying pressure, however we were having a similar discussion in elite coaching practice the other day, we were talking about in some countries the coaches set challenges for their players which are basically impossible to achieve, I personally think this is quite cruel, although it does make sense and does divided the players who have mental toughness and the players without. What I'm trying to say is that sometimes we can delay progress through being too worried about applying too much pressure, now don't get me wrong I'm not saying pressure the players till breaking point, but I do believe we should be challenging are players from a young age, and from that create an environment which is rich in thinking.

    My thought on the order of thinking is that we should be use all the level no matter the age. I can't understand why we judge are players on age and treat them all the same in regards to intelligence. Everybody is different and developments in diverse ways, I think we as coaches need to find a balance and treat are players as individuals rather than age related. So in regards to different levels I think we should be tailoring to the specific situation and player.

    I think the lecture which I have attached has been a big inspiration in regards to my opinion on age related (even though it is not sports related). I don't know if you've seen it yet or even if you'll take much from it, but I thought it is worth putting on as it has helped me a lot in regards to my thinking.

    http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_changing_education_paradigms

    Reply ↓

    o   **Coach C2** on **March 24, 2014 at 11:00 am** said:

        Hi ▮,

        I believe In general, there is a need for more of a deeper understanding critical thinking when involving children i.e. what works and why (or why not), for whom and under what circumstances. Beatty & Gerace (2009:146-162), for instance, call for more systematic research to *"...define, ground, justify and thoroughly explicate coherent pedagogies"* for coaching and the people involved. I, as everyone else on here have a good Idea of what their players are capable of, and I think asking them questions and using terminology which is above their ability, can only frustrate them when they cannot understand. When I

started using what I would class as simple terminology for example, "goal side" or "between the lines" it took a long time for the players to understand this.
So I ask the question "Should we only ask relevant age questions?" or at least wait until they fully understand a depth questioning before progressing on?

References

Beatty, I.D. & Gerace, W.J. (2009). Technology-Enhanced Formative Assessment: A Research-Based Pedagogy for Teaching Science with Classroom Response Technology, *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, 18,146 – 162.

Reply ↓

Coach C3 on **March 24, 2014 at 6:57 pm** said:

I understand what you are saying and I totally agree everyone on here has an idea of what their individual players are capable of, however, in regards to my team there is a quite a divide amongst my players ability, that is why I suggest the utilization of the taxonomy with individual players and for the specific moments. For example one of my players has an unbelievable attitude towards learning and I feel by using higher levels with this player I will receive a positive response and progression. Although there is some players which struggle to obtain the information which I am coaching, so I personally think by using the low levels it would be good in order to create a good foundation to work off.

So to answer your question I don't believe we should ask relevant age questions, we should treat the players on ability rather than age. However this is my opinion off what I have read and from the seminar, I am planning on attempting this approach to questioning in this week's training session, and hopefully I'll receive a good response.

Have you been able to try it in a training session yet? If so how did it go?

Reply ↓

Coach C2 on **March 25, 2014 at 12:40 pm** said:

When using taxonomy I believe that you probably should use it for individuals but is there any evidence to suggest that it works as well as we think? From what I have read it is only opinions of authors (almost like ourselves on this blog, yet just because it works for some it might not work for others). I do think in certain situations you could use taxonomy with more intelligent players, but is it right to almost favour certain players with specific questioning? It's like presuming the less abled cannot answer them wouldn't you agree? I think the only way to know this is by rewording the same depth of questioning.

Ok so here is a question, how long do you think it would take your players at the ages of 6 to 7, learn how to close the *"corridor of uncertainty"* is, and *"how do we deal with*

*zonal marking with a view to neutralise recovery runs"*are?, I am going to guess longer than somebody who is older and has more experience.

To answer your question, I have not made a special effort to include the additional depth of questioning as discussed on this blog, simply because myself, the other coach and the players are comfortable with the way we are progressing already, before you ask, I know this because I have asked. Although this is interesting and the discussion is great, I still think we should not forget these are children and although they do have these "windows of opportunity" for enhanced learning we should not overload them with information.

Take a look at this:http://www.unchainedfitness.com/blog/windows-of-opportunity-and-athlete-development

The conclusion in a way supports my theory of that when training (both mental and physical) does occur outside of these windows, there is no evidence to suggest that it increases learning (Ford et.al, 2011). Also the term "window" suggests that these opportunities for learning open and close, which I believe is not the case.

Bibliography

Ford, P., De Ste Croix, M., Lloyd, R., Meyers, R., Moosavi, M., Oliver, J., Till, K. & Williams, C. (2011) The Long-Term Athlete Development model: Physiological evidence and application. *Journal of Sports Sciences*. 29,4,389-402.

Reply ↓
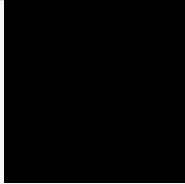
4. ⬛ **Coach C1** on **March 23, 2014 at 5:15 pm** said:

Really interesting conversation there, just reading ⬛'s last post it just got me thinking about how long term goals affect how we question our players, and in turn encourage them to think? and if we see our players progressing in a different way does this influence how we get them to think, for example if one player is playing very well and showing sings of a higher level of thinking, so therefore we look to encourage that….whereas another player might be lower down the spectrum so do we tend to settle with the fact that that player may not be able to deal with the higher level, and if so, how do you get that player to progress further up?

I have personally found that there is sometimes a tendency to push the more "excelling" players with a higher level of thinking and then almost accept that others who aren't necessarily as high up cant handle these questions. I think i have been guilty of this at times, and now im challenged to not do that. Have you both found this in any of your sessions before? and how would you go around trying to develop a higher level of thinking in those less developed players?

Reply ↓

○ ███ **Coach C2** on **March 24, 2014 at 12:21 pm** said:

███,

When thinking routines become part of the coaching environment through repeated practice, they create patterns of thinking and learning that become part of the child's intellectual character (Ritchhart, 2002). This could potentially assist in critical thinking? Would you agree that set routines work (so age related questioning?) or do you believe that more developed players should be asked more challenging questions? I think for the player to make a mistake could help the player to critically analyse the situation and possibly trigger that depth of thinking we are expecting of them, although I think this is a problem in itself….. that "we expect".

I rarely use terminology players cannot understand, I would only use it when rewording a simple question to see if they understood. I don't think we should really try to push deeper thinking on less developed players because it could have a negative effect. Research has shown that critical thinking is an active, purposeful, and organized cognitive process which can be explicitly taught (Barahal 2008; Salmon 2010). I also believe by having a routine both practical and to engage in questioning can help encourage players, a coaches' use of routines is significant, not only to give children a sense of security and self-confidence, but also to generate habits of mind as they develop an ethos of thinking (Salmon, 2010). Thinking routines are simple, easy to use and when age appropriate they can stimulate past knowledge to expand on potential options, this in time could allow coaches to progress with critical thinking.

It's a difficult one ███, I admit. What is your opinion of that in order to develop this level of deeper thinking in children (which I think still should be age appropriate), we as coaches need to do this ourselves, in order to come up with the questions in the first place?

References

Barahal, S. (2008) Thinking about thinking: Pre-service teachers strengthen their thinking artfully. Phi Delta Kappan. 90,4, 298–302.

Ritchhart, R. (2002) Intellectual character: What it is, why it matters, and how to get it. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.

Salmon, A. (2010) Engaging children in thinking routines. Childhood Education. National Association for the Education of Young Children. 86, 3, 132–37.

Salmon, A. (2010) Tools to Enhance Young Children's Thinking, Young Children. National Association for the Education of Young Children. 2,3,31.

Reply ↓

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5.   **Coach C6** on **March 24, 2014 at 8:47 pm** said:
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10   This is a very interesting discussion. My personal opinion is that I would use simple
11   terminology so the participants understood what I was saying. However I would break
12   down all the technical aspects into questions such as (If I was doing a passing/receiving
13   session) I would pose questions such as "What part of the foot would you receive with &
14   why, also could you tell me what we would do before we would receive the ball" In this
15   case the answers should be generally straight forward depending on the ability level. I
16   used those questions in a previous session and got really detailed answers back, the
17   children was only 6/7. I also find that posing a question and letting players work in small
18   groups to answer it is also a good way of them learning because they begin to value
19   others opinions and work as a team. Maybe you could try this if you haven't done so
20   already? Furthermore from the use of providing questions like this, it offers a greater
21   scope of answers. Don't you think? Additionally Barkley (2010) says that "A consciously
22   skilled coach is able to break down one of his or her own complex skills into teachable
23   steps. This mirrors what a skilled teacher does when explaining concepts or breaking
24   down information for students" Allowing participants to understand the session/practice
25   in place. Have any of you used this technique before? I have briefly used this before and
26   it really helps participants to learn, as I am constantly assessing their thinking and
27   learning.
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30   Bibliography
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33   Barkley, S. G. (2010). The Observation. In S. G. Barkley, Quality Teaching in a Culture
34   of Coaching (pp. 101-107). United Kingdom: R&L Education.
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37   Reply ↓
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42   o   **Coach C2** on **March 25, 2014 at 1:02 pm** said:
43   I support the idea of using simple terminology so the players understand, because after all
44   they are children and we should not overload them with information and critical thinking.
45   From reading your next paragraph, you ask the same question which are reworded to
46   encourage deeper thinking, is that right? I personally think that this is the best way
47   forward to encourage deeper thinking as it then involves all the players.
48
49   I do have one question, you say this helps you assess what the players are thinking. How
50   are you so sure that the taxonomy is helping you do this and that the players do not
51   already know the answers to your questions?
52
53   I ask this as I was speaking with a fellow coach at the academy, and he said to be at an
54   academy you have to have a good/advanced understanding of football and already be
55   thinking of your next move before you play your first, like chess I suppose.
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As I coach at grassroots and academy, like yourself, do you find you question players more simply than with your man city team where they are already at a more advanced stage in their development?

Reply ↓

Coach C6 on **March 26, 2014 at 5:20 pm** said:

From my perspective, it is crucial as a coach to allow players to self asses themselves. They may not know they are doing such a thing but from providing them with correct questions, suitable answers will be given as feedback towards the session. I wouldn't expect them to know the answers immediately, however as the session progressed and I reviewed each part (technique, skill and game) I would hope the participants had a better understanding of the "aims and objectives/key points" of the session.

And that is correct, I try to learn my players this all the time as you said "like chess" it is important to implement this decision making aspect into their sessions. And I always encourage grassroots players to think like academy players. After all, all academy players started off playing grassroots football somewhere. However if they did struggle I would break the session down so it became more understandable.

How do you compare this towards the players you coach █████? They are a lot older which means you could advance your questions more, is this true?

Reply ↓

Coach C2 on **March 26, 2014 at 9:24 pm** said:

To a certain extent possibly, but I rarely do ask critical thinking questions as I personally prefer to get down to training and have all players playing at once so nobody is stood around becoming bored. When I do ask, I usually ask the question to several player but reworded. For me this tells me they understand and understand different terminology used.

I do always however ask questions at the end, as a recap, but as also as part of the remembering stage. I have come up with a good way which I find really effective. The players are stood in a circle with myself in the center with a ball, I then ask a question and pass to a player who I want the answer from. They answer then, pass the ball back and we go again. It's good fun for the players I have found, give it a go? See what you think.

I still believe regardless of the ability of a child, they are still children and we should just let them play with minimal interference. I think this improves the players better than we can coach them sometimes, as they learn from their mistakes plus receiving guidance from the coach.

Reply ↓

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6. ████ **Coach C1** on **March 25, 2014 at 11:40 am** said:

████,

I really agree about what you say about with thinking routines and i really value that in my coaching, and i do think that does assist in critical thinking for the players, because they get used to it and in turn are thinking within their practice about what they are doing and why they may be doing it. Where i think it does become a bit clouded is the whole area of age appropriate questioning, i do think there are a "core" group of questions that will sufficiently challenge the group as a whole.

However i do think on an individual basis the more developed players should be challenged to think at a higher level simply because i think that improves them and challenges them more. I do think for the lesser developed players that practical learning from mistake approach is more applicable, because it is on a much more simple level for them, so they make a mistake and the coach may ask them "ok, what happened there?" the player reflects (remembers) then suggests how they could improve next time, and then they go and try it. I think that is the easiest way for a less developed player to think a little more about their performance.

Well i think its a real skill of coaches to be able to intervene and ask the right questions at the right times to be able to develope that deeper level of thinking in children. My own process is to be more individual. I try to understand some of the individual needs in my group, and assess their level before actually intervening, i find the real struggle is really nailing the concepts down over a long term basis, in the short term it can be easy but really challenging the players to think highly up the scale can be really difficult, as children are unpredictable. I often find that in terms of thinking, some weeks some players do it, and others those players may not. What my experience has taught me though, is that the better players will show signs of this every week and have a level of consistency to how they think and play the game.

What do you think about the question you asked ████? im interested to hear how you take your age appropriate ideas into your sessions? Thanks for the question

Reply ↓

o ████ **Coach C2** on **March 25, 2014 at 1:14 pm** said:

Hi ████,

To answer your question, I left ████ a comment (please read) which should hopefully explain my beliefs on this subject. As you say deeper questioning should be encouraged for more developed players, which I totally agree with but it should be age related.

I have noticed that throughout this blog nobody has ever mentioned coaching players with disability. I think this is down to choice rather than opportunity because there are so many disability teams available to coach. I personally have coached a deaf team for several months and it really is a shock to the system and does stretch your coaching abilities, so how could I ask for a deeper level of thinking when I have players who cannot even hear me? From my experiences I simply could not do this, I just made sport as enjoyable and safe as possible.

So my question to you is *"Does taxonomy apply to disability teams? If so on what level?"* As it is apparent from the posts so far (including mine) deeper thinking for situations is encouraged in ALL children. Do we encourage disability players in this? If so to what extent?

This is to all on this post as I would like to know your view/beliefs on taxonomy and disability players!