Coach Nudge#15

We are in your coaching corner
Life isn't black & white, but a billion shades of grey.
How do you think?

How do you acquire and develop knowledge?

What are your beliefs about learning?

What could this mean for you as a coach?

Why should you know more about Epistemology?
An insight into Epistemology

- Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge. It is concerned with answering the questions of what is knowledge, how is it acquired, and how do we know what we know (or conversely know what we do not know).

- It is also fundamental to discussions on the production of knowledge, as well as when making judgment upon various knowledge claims.

- Epistemology is important because it is fundamental to how we think and without the ability to understand how we acquire and develop knowledge, we have no coherent path on which to base our thinking.

- The link, therefore, between epistemology and the coaching process should be evident.

- At a personal level epistemological beliefs are defined as beliefs about knowing and learning that reflect views on what knowledge is, how it is gained, and the limits and criteria for determining knowledge.
So as a coach what do you see?
Black or White or Shades of Grey

• A person who holds naïve epistemology generally believes that knowledge is simple, clear, and specific; “accordingly” knowledge resides in authorities, is handed down rather than developed from reason, and is certain and unchanging.

• Such a person also believes that concepts are learned quickly or not at all, and that learning ability is innate and fixed rather than developed and acquired.

• A person who holds a sophisticated epistemology believes that knowledge is complex, uncertain, and tentative, that knowledge can be learned gradually through reasoning processes and can be self-constructed by the learner.

• Notably, some individuals may hold different levels of belief on different dimensions. Such a mixed view may characterize an individual in developmental transition.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Naive coach</th>
<th>Epistemological Chain</th>
<th>Sophisticated coach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coaching knowledge is passed down from coach to coach and from coaching 'experts'. Knowledge resides with the coach.</td>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Coaching knowledge can be discovered in many places. Constant journey of discovery. Experimentation and reflection to create new knowledge. Aim that knowledge is created and owned by the player.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guru and disciple, Rules to follow, autocratic, disciplined, power relationship, dominating coach, compliant athlete, failure to perform is highlighted.</td>
<td>Environment created</td>
<td>Learning environment created, where athlete can experiment safely without fear of ridicule. Two way discussions and flow of ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transactional, Power roles, dictating behaviours.</td>
<td>Relationships built</td>
<td>Trusting, caring, nurturing, autonomy-supportive behaviours demonstrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach prescribed, subjective to coach’s beliefs, constant reliance on the coach</td>
<td>Goal setting</td>
<td>Athlete led in discussion with coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn – drill- do, follow set practice regime</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>Challenges set for athlete, creating learning episodes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success or failure determined by tangible markers or results e.g. changes in technique, improvement in coach’s measure / statistics</td>
<td>Judgements made</td>
<td>Dependent on how the player develops as an athlete and person with life skills, whilst working towards the athlete led targets. Decisions based on “Is the athlete now an autonomous decision maker confident in their own ability?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant coach’s revision of targets, technique, results. Coach led modifications to be practiced, re-learned, and embedded</td>
<td>Future Direction</td>
<td>Future path determined by how self-reliant the player feels. Possibilities include requests for future guidance/ mentoring, or removal from the coaching process if it is no longer needed</td>
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</table>

Figure 1. The ECs of naive and sophisticated sports coaches.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player Centred EC</th>
<th>Epistemology</th>
<th>Coach Driven EC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge evolves, can be created, does not reside in any one individual</td>
<td>Knowledge is owned by the coach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning environment created, player is challenged to solve problems, explore solutions by trial and error</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting, caring, supportive relationship developed with player, friends and family</td>
<td>Relationship built</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two way discussion as equals to establish the player’s own goals and targets</td>
<td>Goal Setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Player discusses and selects methods best suited to own perceived needs. These methods, practices are determined by the player but still ‘guided’ by the coach to maximise their positive impact</td>
<td>Methods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Player reflects against own internal targets and agreed goals</td>
<td>Judgements Made</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Player asked to decide on next course of action – coach accepts that this may mean they no longer need coaching!!</td>
<td>Future Direction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2.** Player-centered and coach-driven coaching ECs.
Seeing the Shades of Grey

• Naturally question the traditional sources of information
• Engage in a much more boxer-person-athlete centred approach
• Look to become an effective problem setter and challenge the boxer to solve them
• Involve more random practice and support implicit learning
• Provide delayed and faded feedback and probing questions
• Focus on the outcome goal as opposed to a performance goal
• Strive to create independent autonomous Boxers that no longer require coach input
Consider Your Planning
Decision Making
Critical Reflection
So where are you in the chain?

- Naïve Coach
- Sophisticated Coach
- Boxer Centred Coach
- Coach Driven
- Am I transitioning
- I see coach as black and white
- I am starting to see the different shades of grey of coaching
- It starts with depends..... Depends on what, everything that is relevant at the time and context of the coaching moment
A qualitative investigation of elite golf coaches’ knowledge and the epistemological chain

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(University of Central Lancashire)

Abstract

The aim of the study was to explore the existence and application of the epistemological chain (EC) construct in the theorizing of elite golf coaches. Eight male expert golf coaches were recruited for the study. Employing a qualitative methodology, semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to understand the participants’ perceptions and application of the EC and to determine its overall effect on their knowledge development. Data were analyzed to identify themes using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Results indicate the EC is indeed present in the coaching of elite golfers and integrated in a structured and coherent form. This raises a number of interesting issues regarding coaches’ and players’ development that may impact upon future pedagogical provision.

Introduction

Effective learning has been shown to be an important precursor of performance (MacPherson, Collins and Ollis, 2010). Therefore the creation of an optimal learning environment and the promotion of learning itself are crucial for the quality of learning that will take place. Deciding what where and how to teach something, sports coaches are faced with a number of choices regarding aspects of their professional practice. For example, coaches are confronted with challenges requiring the knowledge, mindset, methods, styles and the setting of their players or players’ experiences within their own context and development of the coach’s/athlete relationship, and so on (Sheard, Moores, Masters and Rush, 2005; Masters, Masters, Karr and Woodling, 2001; Magnus and Vollmar, 2003). Researchers have offered support for these decisions via a plethora of arguments and theories (Lyde, 2002; Cookson, Jones and Jones, 2006; Athletes, Collins and Masters, 2006). What has not been analysed, however, is a reliable and comprehensive method by which coaches themselves can evidence their own usage and others’ choices of such planning processes and actions. In particular, one which could be used to guide, or even safeguard, the coaches’ future behavior and provide them with a ready-made developmental framework. Our method, hence uncharted but yet to believe to be of great value to sports coaching, is the epistemological chain (EC).

The Epistemological Chain: Practical Applications in Sports

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This article highlights the role of personal epistemology in decision-making and presents the concept of an epistemological chain (EC) to support this process in the domain of sports coaching. First, the EC model is explained using examples from education and other parallel disciplines. What is fundamentally about the EC model is that it presents a process through which the coach can address the question of what knowledge they believe is needed to achieve the learning outcomes they desire. The second section presents the epistemological chain (EC) as a further application for coaching, which explains the process of how a coach’s personal epistemology guides the coach in making decisions about the kinds of knowledge they require. The EC model is presented as a guide to help coaches make their thinking explicit and guide their practice.

Keywords: Coaching, sports philosophy, teaching.