

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.

The Epistemological Chain

Naïve coach	Epistemological Chain	Sophisticated coach
Coaching knowledge is passed down from coach to coach and from coaching 'experts'. Knowledge resides with the coach.	Epistemology	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.
Guru and disciple, Rules to follow, autocratic, disciplined, power relationship, dominating coach, compliant athlete, failure to perform is highlighted.	Environment created	Learning environment created, where athlete can experiment safely without fear of ridicule. Two way discussions and flow of ideas.
Transactional, Power roles, dictating behaviours.	Relationships built	Trusting, caring, nurturing, autonomy-supportive behaviours demonstrated
Coach prescribed, subjective to coach's beliefs, constant reliance on the coach	Goal setting	Athlete led in discussion with coach
Learn – drill- do, follow set practice regime	Methods	Challenges set for athlete, creating learning episodes
Success or failure determined by tangible markers or results e.g. changes in technique, improvement in coach's measure / statistics	Judgements made	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?"
Constant coach's revision of targets, technique, results. Coach led modifications to be practiced, re-learned, and embedded	Future Direction	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

Figure 1. The ECs of naïve and sophisticated sports coaches.

Player Centred EC	Epistemology	Coach Driven EC
Knowledge evolves, can be created, does not reside in any one individual		Knowledge is owned by the coach
Learning environment created, player is challenged to solve problems, explore solutions by trial and error	Environment	Player is given the coach's model, preferred technique or tactics to learn and perform
Trusting, caring, supportive relationship developed with player, friends and family	Relationship built	Player is pressurized, dictated to, and whose needs are superfluous to the task of improving their athletic performance
Two way discussion as equals to establish the player's own goals and targets	Goal Setting	The coach initiates a review to re-establish authority over the player, and setting new short, medium and long term goals
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	Methods	The player is told that their methods are incorrect. Remedial action is required which the coach will dictate. Coach prescribes practice schedule and roles of any support staff
Player reflects against own internal targets and agreed goals	Judgements Made	The coach makes a subjective judgement on the player's performance against the coach's own set of criteria
Player asked to decide on next course of action – coach accepts that this may mean they no longer need coaching!!	Future Direction	Coach sets a new 'cycle' of coaching

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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Abstract

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

Introduction

Effective learning has been shown to be an important precursor of performance (MacPherson, Collins and Obhi, 2009). Therefore the creation of an optimum learning environment and the promotion of learning itself are crucial affecting the quality of learning that will take place. In 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 regarding the knowledge transfer methods they adopt, the setting of their player or players' motivational climate, their creation and modification of the coach / athlete relationship, and so on (Poolton, Maxwell, Masters and Raab, 2005; Maxwell, Masters, Kerr and Weedon, 2001; Mageau and Vallerand, 2003). Researchers have offered support for these decisions via a plethora of templates and toolkits (Lyle, 2002; Cushion, Armour and Jones, 2006; Abrahams, Collins and Martindale, 2006). What has not been available, however, is a reliable and comprehensive method by which coaches themselves can evaluate their own and others' choices of such planning process and interventions; in particular, one which could be used to guide, or even self-guide, the coaches' future behaviour and provide them with a ready-made developmental framework. One method, hereto neglected but we 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 proposes the construct of an epistemological chain (EC) to support this process in the domain of sports coaching. First, the EC is outlined using examples from education and other parallel disciplines. What it looks like to sports coaches is then described, and its operation in a sporting context is explored. The article then discusses EC's further sporting applications. For coach development, it offers practicing sports coaches a useful framework by which to assess their own and others' actions and behavior. EC also enables coaches to optimally apply new ideas to their own practice and can be used to direct the search for new coaching knowledge. Finally, implications are discussed with reference to how EC could/should be implemented to select, educate, and develop coaches, leaders, and players.

Keywords Coaching, sports philosophy, teaching

Sports coaching is not merely the transferring of technical knowledge, but a complex process that takes place in an ever changing environment (Bowes & Jones, 2006; Cushion, 2007; Gilbert, 2007; Jones, 2000; Lyle, 2007). Coaches need to navigate through this challenging work environment and often use their own personal philosophies to guide them (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Lyle, 1999; Martens, 2004). For coaches, thinking through their actions and understanding the value system that drives them can be both helpful and enlightening. However, for this practice to be of value, coaches need a structure against which to frame their judgments (see Streaan, Senecal, Howlett, & Burgess, 1997). As epistemology is a key element of philosophy, consideration of this important element within a (hopefully) logical decision-making framework suggests the epistemological chain (EC) can provide a subtle yet valuable benchmark to aid sports coaches' assessment and planning. In this regard, EC offers coaches an internal standard or criteria on which to base their prospective planning or reflection and review. Accordingly, when examining why

The epistemological chain in action: coaching in high level golf

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Abstract

An epistemological chain, as it relates to sport, may be understood as the sequencing of tacit coaching knowledge that a coach may adopt or impart to a given performer in a given sport. It is a make-up of beliefs and actions that constitutes how they go about coaching. The aim of the study was to explore the nature and application of the epistemological chain (EC) construct in the decision making of high level golf coaches. In particular we were interested in determining whether the EC was evident and operationalized in a coherent manner. Five male high level golf coaches interviewed in an earlier study were observed delivering a coaching session. These observations provided the basis of subsequent semi-structured interviews which explored general behaviours in order to determine the overall implementation of the EC. Data were analysed to identify themes aligned to the core elements of the EC. Results indicate that the EC is indeed present in a coherent fashion and highlights its utility as a guide and framework for coach reflection and learning.

Key words: philosophy, professional practice, sports coaching, coach education

Introduction

The issue of how a coach's philosophy impacts, both directly and indirectly, upon their coaching practice is an area of growing interest (Partington and Cushion, 2011; Cassidy, Jones and Potrac, 2009; Jones, Armour and Potrac, 2004; Nash, Sproule and Horton, 2008; Lyle, 1999, 2002; Martens, 2004; Vealy, 2005). Research has shown that the values, experiences and beliefs of the coach can directly affect the actions taken (Camiré, Trudel and Forneris, 2012; Collins, Gould, Lauer and Chung, 2009; McCallister, Blinde and Weiss, 2000; Wilcox and Trudel, 1998). Furthermore, the coach's philosophy can also impact upon their reflection on these actions, and therefore indirectly influences future behaviour through potentially asystematic reinforcement. In short, the coach's philosophy is an important component in understanding and, potentially, refining his/her coaching behaviour.

One area of philosophy which plays a major part in the relationship between thought and action is that of one's personal epistemology. In this regard, epistemology is seen as 'the nature of knowledge, both how it is constructed and

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