

Observed Teaching Styles of Junior Development and Club Professional Tennis Coaches in Australia.

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Abstract

As diverse learning conditions and experiences are often created by employing different teaching styles, the necessity for tennis coaches to understand and purposefully implement a range of teaching styles to achieve various learning outcomes is paramount. This paper presents the findings of research completed on the observed teaching styles of 12 tennis coaches in Australia using Mosston and Ashworth's Spectrum of Teaching Styles (2008) as a basis for identification. The 12 coaches were selected after completing a survey questionnaire about teaching styles and indicating their willingness to participate in the observations. In order for coach education providers to cultivate a comprehensive account of the coaching process, the implementation of systematic observations can assist in accurately identifying the instructional practices utilised by tennis coaching practitioners in the field. These findings can be used in the design of coach education programs and professional development initiatives. Results indicate that Junior Development and Club Professional tennis coaches use two teaching styles (Command Style-A and Practice Style-B) when coaching. These teaching styles share common and complimentary pedagogical principles with direct instruction guidelines whereby the coach is in control of what the students are learning in addition to how and why they are learning it.

Introduction

The objective of teaching or coaching is to connect learners in consequential goal-orientated activities with the aim of achieving instructional outcomes specific to an individual lesson or group of lessons (Mosston & Ashworth, 2008; Rink, 2002). The manner which tennis coaches organise and configure practice, deliver information and offer feedback has been represented by numerous terms including; strategies, styles, approaches, frameworks, processes and methods. This paper refers to the term *teaching styles*. According to Ashworth a *teaching style* can be defined as,

A plan of action that defines the specific decision interaction of the teacher or coach and the learner for the purpose of leading to the development of specific objectives in subject matter and behavior (S.Ashworth, personal communication, March 2, 2010).¹

Previous research has revealed that Australian tennis coaches believe they use a range of *teaching styles* during their coaching sessions throughout the year (Hewitt & Edwards, 2011). Literature has also submitted, however, that teachers have a tendency to overestimate the frequency with which they report to using *teaching styles* (Cothran et al., 2006; Mosston & Ashworth, 2008). Observing the instructional practices of tennis coaches can extend previous research endeavours and verify the degree of congruence between the *teaching styles* that tennis coaches believe they use and what they actually use. This information can establish a baseline of information which can be used in the design of coach education programs and professional development initiatives. These findings may also extend relevance into sports coaching more broadly.

It has been suggested that the instructional practices available to tennis coaches have been confused by the presence of various terms and coaching language (Reid, Crespo, Berry & Lay, 2007). Often their respective definitions are without conceptual agreement and exist within the individual perception of the tennis coach. The lack of information regarding the instructional practices of Australian tennis coaches is arguably due to the theoretical and practical difficulty of comparing multiple *teaching styles*. Many of these conceptions are not linked to a common theoretical framework.

The importance of coaches basing their practice on a theoretical framework has been well documented in the literature (Lyle, 2002; Mosston & Ashworth, 2002). A theoretical framework provides a general design and logical approach to teaching and learning. It offers clarity around the purpose and arrangement of activities that promote increased student interest, cooperation, and managerial effectiveness and more legitimate assessments of learning (Metzler, 2000; Mosston & Ashworth, 2002). In the absence of consistency in terminology, “reliable communication, accurate implementation, and assessment of ideas are difficult if not impossible” (Mosston & Ashworth, 2008, p.3).

Mosston and Ashworth's Spectrum of Teaching Styles

Mosston and Ashworth's *Spectrum of Teaching Styles* (Mosston & Ashworth, 2008) describes a *unified theoretical framework of teaching* that includes an array of *teaching styles* that have been arranged on a continuum. The entire structure of *The Spectrum of Teaching Styles* stems from the initial premise that “teaching is governed by a single unifying process: decision making” (Mosston & Ashworth, 2008, p.8). Every deliberate act of teaching is a result of a previous decision. For example,

how we organize students; how we organize the subject matter; how we manage time, space, and equipment; how we interact with students; how we choose our verbal behaviour; how we construct the social-affective climate; and how we create and conduct all cognitive connections with the learners (Mosston & Ashworth, 2008, p.8).

The latest version of *The Spectrum of Teaching Styles* consists of 11 different *teaching styles* which are represented by the corresponding letters: Command Style-A; Practice Style-B; Reciprocal Style-C; Self-Check Style- D; Inclusion Style-E; Guided Discovery Style-F; Convergent Discovery Style-G; Divergent Discovery Style-H; Learner-Designed Individual Program Style-I; Learner Initiated Style-J, and Self-Teaching Style-K (Mosston & Ashworth, 2008) (See **Table 1**).

Landmark Styles	
Reproduction	Production
• Command (A)	• Guided Discovery (F)
• Practice (B)	• Convergent Discovery (G)
• Reciprocal (C)	• Divergent Discovery (H)
• Self-Check (D)	• Learner-Designed Individual Program (I)
• Inclusion (E)	• Learner-Initiated (J)
	• Self-Teaching (K)

Table 1: *The Spectrum of Teaching Styles with the Reproduction and Production Clusters located.*

The first five styles (A-E) form a cluster that represents teaching options that foster *reproduction* of existing (known, past) information and knowledge. The remaining styles (F-K) form a cluster that represents options that invite *production* (discovery) of new knowledge. Following an extensive review of the literature it appears that no published research to date has attempted to analyse the observed *teaching styles* of Australian tennis coaches. This paper outlines research that has been undertaken to address a gap in the literature.

Research Method

The coaches in this study were selected for the observations after completing a survey questionnaire on *teaching styles* and indicating their willingness to have their lessons recorded. Systematic observations were used to identify the *teaching styles* that Australian tennis coaches employ during lessons. The Junior Development (JD) and Club Professional (CP) coaches were observed and videotaped during three tennis lessons of 30 minutes duration with four players. The lessons were performed during the coaches' formal certification coaching courses conducted by Tennis Australia (TA). The recorded tennis lessons were analysed using Ashworth's *Identification of Teaching and Learning Styles* (2004), which is based on the *Spectrum of Teaching Styles* (Mosston & Ashworth, 2008). The tool focuses on subject matter and learner behaviour expectations. In order to code and record the coaches' teaching behaviours during lessons, the *Instrument For Identifying Teaching Styles (IFITS)* (2004) coding sheet was used in conjunction with Ashworth's *Identification of Classroom Teaching Learning Styles* (2004). The coding procedure employed in using *IFITS* consisted of a ten second observation proceeded by a ten second recording of this observation. In other words, every 20 seconds the coder using *IFITS* made a decision regarding which *teaching style* the coach was using or whether they were engaged in a class management activity. Class management is defined as any activity that is not directly related to instruction. All of the 36 videotaped lessons were coded by the researcher and a second trained individual. In order to further develop the coders' competency in recognising *teaching styles* and to clarify any queries during the coding process, Prof. Sara Ashworth provided extensive assistance and advice.

Participants and Setting

Participants for this study were recruited from earlier research by Hewitt and Edwards (2011) who conducted a survey questionnaire on the self-identified *teaching styles* of 208 tennis coaches in Australia. From the 208 coaches, 56 expressed an interest in having their lessons videotaped and coded. The characteristics of the final observation group were,

- Female JD coach from Victoria (VIC) (0-3 years coaching; 15-20 years old; mostly coaches 4-7 age group; mostly coaches beginner players)

- Female JD coach from New South Wales (NSW) (4-10 years coaching; 20-30 years old; mostly coaches 10-12 age group; mostly coaches intermediate players)
- Male JD coach from VIC (0-3 years coaching; 30-40 years old; mostly coaches 7-10 age group; mostly coaches beginner players)
- Male JD coach from NSW (4-10 years coaching; 50+; mostly coaches 4-7 age group; mostly coaches beginner players)
- Female JD coach from Queensland (QLD) (0-3 years coaching; 30-40 years old; mostly coaches 7-10 age group; mostly coaches beginner players)
- Male JD coach from QLD (0-3 years coaching; 15-20 years old; mostly coaches 10-12 age group; mostly coaches beginner players)
- Female CP coach from VIC (4-10 years of coaching; 20-30 years old; mostly coaches 10-12 age group; mostly coaches intermediate players)
- Male CP coach from VIC (11-20 years of coaching; 30-40 years old; mostly coaches 4-7 age group; mostly coaches beginner players)
- Male CP coach from VIC (20+ years coaching; 40-50 years old; mostly coaches 17+ age group; mostly coaches intermediate players)
- Female CP coach from NSW (4-10 years of coaching; 20-30 years old; mostly coaches 12-15 age group; mostly coaches intermediate players)
- Male CP coach from NSW (4-10 years of coaching; 30-40 years old; mostly coaches 15-17 age group; mostly coaches advanced players)
- Female CP coach from QLD (4-10 years of coaching; 20-30 years old; mostly coaches 10-12 age group; mostly coaches intermediate players)

Results

Table 2 shows the participant breakdown of the range of *teaching styles* observed during the coaches' three by 30 minute coaching lessons (n=36).

Participant	<i>Teaching Styles</i> that were observed during the 12 participants' three 30 minute coaching lessons (n=36)
Participant 1 Junior Development	A, B
Participant 2 Junior Development	A, B
Participant 3 Junior Development	B
Participant 4 Junior Development	B
Participant 5 Junior Development	A, B
Participant 6 Junior Development	B
Participant 7 Club Professional	B
Participant 8 Club Professional	A, B
Participant 9 Club Professional	A, B
Participant 10 Club Professional	A, B
Participant 11 Club Professional	A, B
Participant 12 Club Professional	A, B

Table 2: Participant breakdown of the range of *teaching styles* observed being employed during the coaches' three by 30 minute coaching lessons (n=36).

The coaches in this study were observed implementing two *teaching styles*. These included, Practice Style-B and Command Style-A. Practice Style-B was employed by all 12 participants, while Command Style-A was used by eight of the coaches. A depiction of the breakdown of total time (%) that the 12 participants' employed these *teaching styles* during their three 30 minute coaching lessons is displayed in

Table 3.

Teaching Style	Percentage of time that <i>teaching styles</i> were observed from the 12 coaches' total lessons (n=36)
Command Style-A	10.58%
Practice Style-B	84.25%
Reciprocal Style-C	0%
Self Check Style-D	0%
Inclusion Style-E	0%
Guided Discovery Style-F	0%
Convergent Discovery Style-G	0%
Divergent Discovery Style-H	0%
Learner Designated Individual Program Style-I	0%
Learner Initiated Program Style-J	0%
Self Teaching Style-K	0%
Management	5.15%

Table 3: The breakdown of total time (%) the 12 participants were observed using teaching styles.

From the 36 lessons that were observed, Practice Style-B was used 84.25% of the time while Command Style-A was used 10.58% of the time. No other *teaching styles* were observed.

Discussion

The results indicate that tennis coaches in this study employed two *teaching styles* when instructing tennis. These *teaching styles* were Command Style-A and Practice Style-B. The predominant *teaching style* was Practice Style-B with coaches implementing this style 84.25% of time during their lessons. The use of these *teaching styles* strongly correlate with the pedagogical principles associated with direct instruction guidelines whereby the coach makes decisions about what the students are learning in addition to how and

why they are learning it. Australian tennis coach accreditation manuals (*Tennis Australia Learner Guide*, 2010; Crespo & Reid, 2009) recommend that tennis coaches should combine the use of direct and discovery *teaching styles*. The predominant use of *teaching styles* in the *reproduction cluster* (as observed in this study) is not necessarily compatible with the favoured teaching processes identified in these publications. The necessity for coaches to understand and purposefully implement a range of *teaching styles* to achieve various learning outcomes is paramount. As no one *teaching style* encompasses all learning eventualities, an effective coach must possess the capability to change and combine *teaching styles* during lessons. Previous research has suggested that tennis coaches believe they use a range of *teaching styles* during coaching sessions throughout the year (Hewitt & Edwards, 2011). These results, however, suggest that there is a lack of congruency between the *teaching styles* that tennis coaches believe they use and what they actually use. Through an awareness of a range of *teaching styles*, coaches may gain a better understanding of their instructional processes and how their coaching can be changed, modified, or supported to maximise their interactions with students.

Conclusion

This paper reported on the observed *teaching styles* of 12 tennis coaches in Australia using Mosston and Ashworth's *Spectrum of Teaching Styles* (2008) as a basis for identification. In order for coach education providers to cultivate a comprehensive account of the coaching process, the employment of systematic observations can assist in accurately identifying the instructional practices utilised by tennis coaching practitioners in the field. Results indicate that Junior Development and Club Professional tennis coaches in this study use two *teaching styles* when coaching tennis. These *teaching styles* included, Command Style-A and Practice Style-B. The predominant *teaching style* was Practice Style-B. The findings from this study can be used in the design of coach education programs and professional development initiatives and may also extend relevance into sports coaching more broadly. The information outlined in this paper forms part of a larger doctoral study. Further research includes exploring the many teaching and learning experiences called *canopy designs* that are located between each *teaching style*. Interviewing coaches to reveal insights into how they decide what *teaching styles* to use and when to use them has also been undertaken. It is

anticipated that these findings will present coach education providers with valuable information about tennis coaching behaviour.

Notes:

¹ The term teaching style is synonymous with coaching style in this paper.

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