

Self-Identified Teaching Styles of Junior Development and Club Professional Tennis Coaches in Australia.

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Abstract

Many educational theorists believe that there is no ‘best’ teaching style. Apart from anecdotal reports, little is known about what teaching styles are being employed by Australian tennis coaches or if they are using a combination of teaching styles as recommended by coach education providers. This paper presents the findings of research completed on the self-identified teaching styles of 165 tennis coaches in Australia using Mosston and Ashworth’s *Spectrum of Teaching Styles* (2002) as a basis for identification. Exploring the teaching styles of Australian tennis coaches is significant because understanding what teaching styles tennis coaches are using can be used in the design of coach education programs and professional development initiatives. Results indicate that Junior Development and Club Professional tennis coaches predominantly use one teaching style (Practice Style – Style B) during their coaching sessions throughout the year. It also reveals that coaches spent most of their time using teaching styles that share common and complimentary pedagogical principles with direct instruction guidelines.

Introduction

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 and methods (terms which are viewed as interchangeably). This paper refers to the term ‘teaching styles.’ According to Ashworth (2009) 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

Tennis coaching has typically been represented by the coach dominating the decisions regarding the ‘how’, ‘why’ and ‘what’ of student learning. The coach typically explains, demonstrates, organises and conducts the lesson in addition to providing feedback in order to correct players’ errors (Crespo & Reid, 2009, p.179). Other terms that have been used to describe this instructional process include; direct, command, explicit, prescriptive and teacher-centered.

An alternative instructional process, however, that invites greater student decision-making in relation to the ‘how’, ‘why’ and ‘what’ of learning has found a place in the teaching repertoires of tennis coaches. This instructional process regards the coach as a *facilitator* of the learning process while students are encouraged to problem-solve and explore solutions to various movement challenges. Other terms such as; student-centered, indirect, implicit and guided discovery have been used to describe common pedagogical principles related to this instructional process.

So what is the ‘best’ teaching style for developing tennis players? This question has prompted considerable debate amongst tennis coaching practitioners. According to Rukavina and Foxworth (2009) using only one style of teaching is limiting. Possibly the most comprehensive teaching style framework is Mosston’s *Spectrum of Teaching Styles* (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002). The Spectrum has been widely employed in Physical Education and has been refined since its origin in the mid-1960s (Sicilia-Camacho & Brown, 2008). The latest version of the spectrum consists of 11 different landmark teaching styles (**Figure 1**).

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

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)

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.

There has been no research to date that has attempted to explore the self-identified use of various teaching styles that Australian tennis coaches use during coaching sessions throughout the year. This paper outlines research that has been undertaken to address a gap in the literature.

Research method

This study employed a survey questionnaire to determine which teaching styles Australian tennis coaches reported using. The survey questionnaire used an adapted description inventory (Hewitt, Edwards, Ashworth & SueSee, 2010)² of Mosston and Ashworth's landmark teaching styles designed for collecting teacher's beliefs about the teaching styles they use (SueSee, Ashworth & Edwards, 2006). The first part of the questionnaire posed questions relating to socio-demographic information (*Gender, Age, and State/Territory where you currently coach*). The second part of the questionnaire presented one question relating to each of the 11 teaching style descriptions. Each teaching description was followed by the question: *'How frequently do I use this teaching style in my coaching sessions throughout the year?'* A 5-point scale was used for participant ratings. The items used for the question consisted of, *'Not at all', 'Minimally', 'Here and there', 'Often' and 'Most of the time'* (Figure 2.)

Figure 2: An example of one scenario description from the Spectrum Inventory (2010) which shows a 5-point scale used to measure how frequently a teaching style was used.

Scenario Style	Scenario Description of Teaching Style				
A	The students perform the task, selected by the coach, in a unison, choreographed, or precision performance image following the exact pacing (cues) set by the coach.				
How frequently do I use this teaching style in my coaching sessions throughout the year?	Not at all	Minimally	Here and there	Often	Most of the time
	1	2	3	4	5

Participants for the study were recruited from two different coach accreditation course levels that were conducted by Tennis Australia (TA). These include the Junior Development (JD) and Club Professional (CP) coaching qualification. Overall a total of 165 tennis coaches enrolled in the (JD) accreditation courses (n=91) and the Club Professional (CP) accreditation courses (n=74) between the later part of 2010 and early 2011 agreed to participate in the study. A total of 139 respondents were male and 26 were female. The age of the respondents were; 15-20 years of age (n=49), 20-30 (n=72), 30-40 (n=23) and over 40 years of age (n=21).

Results

The table below (**Table 1.**) shows the self-identified teaching styles of JD and CP tennis coaches who reported using the teaching styles ‘*Most of the Time*’ to ‘*Often*’. The Practice Style – Style B is reported by respondents as their most frequent teaching style. This style was employed from ‘*Often*’ to ‘*Most of the Time*’ by over 60 percent of the participants. Results also reveal that JD and CP coaches spend most of their time using teaching styles located in the *reproduction* cluster of the *Spectrum of Teaching Styles*.

With the exception of the Divergent Style- Style H and the Self Teaching Style – Style K, participants from both coach accreditation courses reported similar frequencies of teaching style usage.

Table 1: Percentage of Junior Development and Club Professional tennis coaches’ self-identified use of teaching styles ‘*Often*’ to ‘*Most of the Time*’

Teaching Styles	Percentage of Junior Development tennis coaches’ self-identified use of teaching styles ‘Often to Most of the Time’ n=91	Percentage of Club Professional tennis coaches’ self-identified use of teaching styles ‘Often to Most of the Time’ n=74
Command – Style A	50.3%	52.8%
Practice – Style B	60.1%	63.5%
Reciprocal – Style C	15.1%	20.3%
Self Check – Style D	19.8%	20.3%
Inclusion – Style E	23.1%	32.4%
Guided Discovery – Style F	41.8%	41.9%
Convergent Discovery – Style G	22%	23%
Divergent Discovery – Style H	27.5%	45.9%
Learner Designated Individual Program –Style I	8.8%	8.2%
Learner Initiated Program – Style J	5.5%	0%
Self Teaching – Style K	11%	1.4%

Discussion

Tennis coaches reported to using all of the teaching styles in their coaching sessions throughout the year. However, only one teaching style (Practice Style-Style B) was employed from 'Often' to 'Most of the Time' by over 60 percent of tennis coaches. The Command Style-Style A was ranked second with over 50 percent of all coaches reportedly using this style from 'Often' to 'Most of the Time'. Although coaches reported to using teaching styles in the *production* cluster less frequently, two styles from this cluster were in the top four styles used by coaches. These styles included; Guided Discovery Style-Style F (JD =41.8%; CP=41.9%) and Divergent Discovery Style-Style H (JD=27.5%; CP=45.9%).

The results of this study have implications for coach education curriculum initiatives as well as future professional development opportunities. Despite the fact that two styles located in the *production* cluster were in the top four styles (ranked 3rd and 4th), the predominant use of teaching styles in the *reproduction* cluster (as reported by coaches) is not necessarily compatible with the pedagogical anticipations Australian tennis coach accreditation manuals. In interpreting the results it is conceivable that some respondents lacked an understanding and/or misinterpreted the teaching style descriptions. For instance, coaches reported usage of the Self-Teaching Style – Style K despite Mosston and Ashworth (2002) stating that “this teaching style does not exist in the classroom” (Mosston & Ashworth, p.290). Additionally, the teaching style description used in the survey questionnaire to describe Style K clearly states that “this style is independent of a coach and not initiated by a coach” (Hewitt, Edwards, Ashworth, & SueSee, 2010).

Conclusion

This paper reported on the self-identified teaching styles of 165 tennis coaches in Australia using Mosston and Ashworth's *Spectrum of Teaching Styles* (2002) as a basis for identification. Understanding what teaching styles Australian tennis coaches are using can be used in the design of coach education programs and professional development initiatives. Results indicate that Junior Development and Club Professional tennis coaches predominantly use one teaching style (Practice Style – Style B) during their coaching sessions throughout the year. It was evident that all coaches spent most of their time using teaching styles located in the *reproduction* cluster of the *Spectrum of Teaching Styles*. Through an awareness of a range of teaching styles,

coaches may gain a better understanding of their instructional. The information outlined in this paper forms part of a larger doctoral study. Further research will include the observation of coaches to verify the teaching styles they use as well as interviewing coaches to reveal insights into how they decide what teaching styles to use and when to use them.

Notes:

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

² Adaption of instrument for collecting teachers' beliefs about their teaching styles used in physical education. Unpublished doctoral dissertation University of Southern Queensland.

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