

Coach's role in encouraging parent–child educational interaction in sports

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Abstract

The research into the educational effect of sport for youths aims at finding the ways for the coaches and parents to create a positive motivational environment for young athletes. Participation of family members in youth sports has a great effect on young athlete's development and continuation of sports activities. In this background coaches have ample opportunities to influence parent–child relations and positive development of these relations. The coach can unite parents and children through sport, encourage their collaboration, act as a moderator, mediator, and counsellor. The article analyses the coaches' influence on parent–child interaction in sports activities, as well as prerequisites for the effectiveness of such influence.

The aim of the article is to reveal the coach's role in encouraging parent–child interaction in sport activities. Objectives of literature review: 1) Analyse the factors of coaches' role in encouraging parent–child interaction in sport activities; 2) reveal the importance of the coach's competence for the stimulation of parent–child interaction in sport activities. Applied research methods: scientific literature analysis and generalization.

Scientific literature analysis revealed the importance of the coaches' role in encouraging parent–child interaction in sport activities in order to create a positive motivational environment for young athletes. A more or less positive training and education strategy used by the coach, the coach's ability to create parental interest in the child's sport, to build and maintain positive relationships between sport participants, solve ethical and social problems arising in the sporting environment have a significant influence on parent–child interaction. The effectiveness of the coach's influence on parent–child interaction in the sporting environment largely depends on the coach's basic professional skills and intrapersonal competencies acquired in higher sport education institutions, through growing work experience and various professional development programmes. In terms of methodological skills and intellectual proficiencies, the importance of metacognitive competency involving a coach's reflection and the need for self–study is highlighted along with the importance and benefit of long–term educational programmes.

Keywords: sports activities, educational interactions, parents, children, coaches, competences, sports coaching degree and certificate programmes

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1. Introduction

Psychologists assess the benefit of sports in youth education by looking into the ways how coaches and parents could create a positive motivational environment for young athletes. Participation of family members in the child's sports activities has a great influence on the young athlete's performance improvement and continuation of sport activities. Few young athletes can remain in sport without a moral and financial support by the family. Unfortunately, not all parents are interested in their children's sport and understand the importance of children education in the sporting environment. In such cases coaches' can play a very important role: they have a possibility to unite parents and children, to encourage their collaboration, act as moderators, mediators and counsellors. In the context of sport activities coaches have ample opportunities to positively influence the development of parent-child relations. A young athlete, parents and a coach are the three key elements in the educational interaction process. Therefore, coaches play a significant role in the educational interaction in the sporting environment and the development of parent-child relations (Domingues, Cavichioli, & Concalves, 2014). Coaches' support and advice are some of the motivating factors for parents to become involved in their children's sport activities (Bailey et al., 2013). Coaches may take the role of a moderator, mediator, and counsellor (O'Connor, 2011). Research findings show that shaping a child's identity in sports is a great challenge for coaches (Domingues et al., 2014; Knight & Holt, 2014). The importance of the coach's role in encouraging parent-child interaction in sport activities and development of such sporting environment that would create positive motivation in young athletes is highlighted. A positive coaching and educating strategy used by the coach, the coach's ability to arouse parental interest in the child's sport, efficient solving of ethical and social problems in the sporting environment have a great effect on parent-child interaction. The effectiveness of the coach's performance in parent-child interaction development depends to a great extent on the coach's basic professional, social and intrapersonal competences that are acquired in higher education institutions, through professional development programmes for sports coaches and later through practical experience.

Coach-child-parent interaction in sport activities, which is developed in one direction with the common goal to increase the benefit of sport for youth, is regarded to be an educational system in the sporting environment.

2. Aim of the article

Reveal the coach's role in encouraging parent-child interaction in sport activities. The aim is achieved through the following objectives:

1. Analyse the factors of the coach's role in encouraging parent-child interaction in sport activities.
2. Reveal the importance of the coach's competence in encouraging parent-child interaction in sport activities.

3. Applied research methods

Scientific literature analysis and generalization methods to reveal the coach's role in encouraging parent-child interaction in sport activities.

The article consists of two parts: the first part analyses the factors of the coach's approach in encouraging parent-child interaction in sport activities; the second part reveals the importance of the coach's competencies for a more effective parent-child interaction in sport activities.

4. The coach's role in encouraging parent-child interaction in sport activities

Coaches play an important role in educational parent-child interaction in sport activities (Domingues, Cavichioli, & Concalves, 2014). Parent's motivated participation in youth sport depends to a large extent on the coach's support and advice (Bailey et al., 2013). Coaches can act as moderators, mediators and counsellors (O'Connor, 2011). A young athlete, his/her parents and a coach are the three key elements in the process of educational interaction. Research findings show that shaping a child's identity in sports is a great challenge for coaches (Domingues et al., 2014; Knight & Holt, 2014).

Coaches can bring parents and children together and encourage their collaboration in sport by employing different methods. They can give tasks to young athlete's family that would not only make parents communicate with their children (O'Connor, 2011) and have fun but also build their relationship. In more frequent meetings with parents coaches could update them about their child's progress and achievements. This information would prompt parents to evaluate their child's progress referring to objective measurement instead of comparing them with other team members (O'Connor & Bennie, 2006).

The collaboration of coaches and parents should be regular and ongoing as long as the child is involved in sport. Coaches could influence the opinion of parents by devoting part of their time left from training sessions and competitions for educational communication with athletes' parents (Smoll et al., 2011). Coaches should explain to young athlete's family about the benefit of sport, present their coaching philosophy, advice how parents could enhance their child's experience. Parents should think of sport not only as a leisure-time or after-school activity but also as an educational activity that develops responsibility and interpersonal skills. Formal and informal conversations, personal experience sharing in meetings are good ways of finding out parents' expectations. (Knight & Holt, 2014). Communication is a two-way action (Smoll et al., 2011), therefore coaches should listen to parents' comments, answer their questions and give parents emotional support, especially after difficult competitions (Knight & Holt, 2012).

Parents demonstrate not only positive but also negative behaviour in sport activities and that behaviour may affect the child's progress in sport. The coach should note to the parents that too strong focus on competitiveness and winning, criticism towards the child and uncontrolled emotions are the major obstacles in young athlete's training and education. In contrast, parental love, unconditional support irrespective of the sporting results would develop the child's responsibility for behaviour during workouts and in competitions (Knight & Holt, 2014). By building strong relations with parents coaches should not forget that most parents genuinely care for their children with enthusiasm (Smoll et al., 2011). Unfortunately, sometimes parents do not understand the problems they cause. Instead of being angry with athletes' parents coaches should believe in their potential to help solving these problems (Smoll et al., 2011). Such parents should receive a discrete advice about the negative effect of their actions, about the appropriate behaviour in different situations for the benefit of their child (Knight & Holt, 2014).

Researchers have identified certain types of 'problem parents' and have described their habits and characteristics along with the recommendations for coaches how to communicate with such parents in order to give a more positive direction to their communication with youth athletes (Smoll et al., 2011). Children are especially disappointed with parents, who are not interested in their sport activities. Coaches should find out why parents are not interested in their child's sport activities and convince parents that their participation is always appreciated. In this situation (Smoll et al., 2011) coaches should avoid making the mistake of accusing parents who have reasonable reasons preventing them from active interest in their child's sport activities (responsibilities at work, illness etc.). Parents would be more willing to show interest in

their child's sport activities if they are explained about the added value of sport, about the possibilities of getting closer with their children through sport. In such cases young athletes also need support: coaches should explain their trainees that parents do care about them. Overly critical parents often scold and humiliate their children, are too strict, are rarely satisfied with their sporting results. Such parents should be advised that repeated criticism creates stress and emotional tension in children, that such annoyance can have a negative effect on the child's performance, that children should receive compliments and encouragement in order to be motivated (Smoll et al., 2011). Overprotective parents are another problematic group. They are excessively concerned about their child's playing, they give remarks and believe that their athlete child is in constant danger. The authors recommend that in such cases coaches should try to appease the fear of injuries, to reassure the parents that competition is sufficiently safe. Parents should be explained the rules of the game, acquainted with the sport gadgets that would provide higher safety to their child, asked to trust professional coaches and referees who assure the safety of the game. Noisy parents at competitions make their children feel ill at ease. They always shout louder than others making it difficult to hear even the coach. Team members, rivals, coaches and referees become objects of their verbal abuse. The coach should talk to such parents calmly, tactfully, but not publicly, and explain that such behaviour is a negative example to young athletes. Overacting parents should be asked to do something useful for the team (e.g. observe the rivals, make records, look after sports equipment etc.). Such tactics would enable to control noisy parents without lowering their self-esteem, and the parents, in turn, would feel being responsible and useful at the event. According to Smoll et al., another type of bewildering 'problem parents' are people who assume the role of coach's assistant. They always advise the players, argue the coach's instructions and thus interfere with the team play. In such a case coaches should explain the parents and young athletes that it is the role of the coach to lead and instruct the workout and the game, that athletes should listen only to the coach because following different instructions given by the coach and the parent is confusing and has a negative effect on playing the game.

Peaceful, open and fair communication helps to coordinate the expectations of parents and coaches and pursue the same goal in young athlete education, namely positive emotions and good sporting experience (O'Connor, 2011; Smoll et al., 2011). Such a goal can be achieved by working together and attempting to avoid misunderstandings. Coaches should encourage parent to more actively involve in their child's sport activities and make them understand that such participation is a kind of education (Smoll et al., 2011). Parents should be advised that youth sport is first of all a game and that children should enjoy sport the way they like it. If young athletes follow their parents' philosophy 'play to win', they may stop willing to develop their skills, enjoy the participation, and grow socially and emotionally. Experienced coaches should convince parents that success cannot be attributed solely to victory, whereas failure can not be attributed solely to loss (Smoll et al., 2011). It is not only the result but also motivated collaboration of all participants – parents, coaches and children – that is important in sports (Bailey et al., 2013).

Coaches must have the knowledge about the methods for encouraging parent-child interaction in sport activities (O'Connor & Bennie, 2006). According to research results parents concerned about their children's education expect support from the coach that would help the child to open new possibilities (O'Connor, 2011), expect to receive information about the child's progress, training aims and envisage performance improvement (Knight & Holt, 2012). Parent-child interaction can be influenced by such factors as the coach's attitude towards parents, methods and forms of working with parents, the coach's way of treating parents and children, climate of communication with parents, continuation of such communication, ways of conflict resolution, coach's authority (Smoll et al., 2011). Coaches should regularly learn communication and psychological impact techniques and persistency. Persistent and proactive coaches take initiative when they see that young athletes have difficulties dealing with their parents and do not wait for the conflict to grow deeper.

The coach's input in parent-child interaction in sport depends on the coach's professional skills (Flett, Gould, Griffes, & Lauer, 2013). A competent coach is not the one, who is a nice or a

bad man, a popular or unpopular person, but a specialist whose communication with children has a positive effect on the development of the child's character and skills (Flett et al., 2013). Researchers have identified a group of less competent coaches with a strict military-like education approach, who use autocratic style of communication both with children and parents and set short-term goals, and competent coaches, who rely on scientific findings, are well-educated, avoid aggression and encourage independence of trainees, continue learning, exchange experience, are open to innovations (Flett et al., 2013).

5. Importance of coach's competences for parent-child educational interaction in sport

It is clear that for the achievement of more cooperative parent-child relations in youth sport the coach's competencies and experience come to the fore. Coaches are expected to acquire competences that would enable them to perform various tasks meeting the complex requirements raised for modern professionals (Mesquita, 2014). The effectiveness of the coach's actions aimed at closer parent-child interaction in sport depends on the coach's education, knowledge, skills, experience and moral values.

Inexperienced coaches face problems while working with youth (Flett et al., 2013). They have a serious responsibility to develop not only athletic but also social skills. Therefore it is very important for the coaches to understand the youth and have enough knowledge and skills to build a mentor-mentee relationship (Smoll et al., 2011). It is not only methodological and subject-specific competences in youth sports coaching that are required in order to change the behaviour of young athletes, solve ethical and social dilemmas. Coaches must be able to assume responsibility for social aspects and moral standards (Mesquita, 2014). Especially important are such social competences as ability to communicate, express personal opinion, persuade, motivate, communicate ideas, create a positive climate, objectively evaluate own strengths and weaknesses as well as strengths and weaknesses of others, ability to manage conflict situations (Duffy & Passmore, 2010). The ability to solve social problems in sport depends on the coach's intrapersonal skills: responsibility, pro-activeness, creativity, flexibility, patience, sense of humour, empathy, experience. The coach's intrapersonal and social competences show their ability to communicate, act responsibly (Duffy & Passmore, 2010) and they are of utmost importance in the management of various sport programmes (Jones, Hoigaard, & Peters, 2014). As coaching is an educational activity (Cassidy, Potrac, & McKenzie, 2006), coaches should use a critical approach to political, economic and social factors, learn to solve ethical and social dilemmas. In order to meet those requirements coaches should improve self-knowledge seeing it as a two-way process based on such systems of social interaction in relations with athletes and their family members (Gilbert, Côté, & Mallet, 2006).

Coaches' awareness of their own competences and learning needs is related with different personal characteristics (Santos, Jones, & Mesquita, 2013). Competency perception is recognized as an important aspect of effective teaching (Jones & Wallace, 2005). Researchers investigated into the relationship between coaches' perception of competences and learning needs and different personal characteristics such as experience and academic education. The research topics shifted from the investigation into what coaches have to know to what they need in order to do what they know (Demers et al., 2006; Nelson, Cushion, & Potrac, 2013). The majority of coaches think they are competent, but also acknowledge the need of further learning (Jones & Wallace, 2005). This implies that coaches are interested in broadening and deepening their knowledge in many areas. Researchers also highlight the value of meta-cognitive competences related with coaches' reflection, critical self-assessment, social responsibility and professional ethics (Jones, 2006, Petipas, 2011). Coaches must be able to manage their own learning and professional development in order to meet the changing and new requirements for the profession.

According to Vargas (2011) study results, coaches want to learn more about communication with youth athletes and their parents. Coaches who participated in the survey claimed that positive social interaction depends on effective communication skills, moral values, social and cultural sensitivity (Potrac & Jones, 2009; Cushion, Ford, & Williams, 2012), whereas the coach's

success and social image depend on their ability to persuade all participants of the sporting activity (athletes, parents, school headmasters etc.) to trust their knowledge and skills (Abraham & Kerns, 2013; Vargas, 2011; Wiersma, & Sherman, 2005).

The studies conducted by Santos, Jones and Mesquita (2013) revealed that some coaches do not have the required higher education. Some have started coaching at the end of their professional athlete career without holding a higher education degree. Other coaches had degrees in the fields not related to the coach's profession: economics, management, agriculture, biology, military science. University education naturally increases the level of culture that may help coaches to perceive their competences and knowledge and to decide in which direction and to what extent they should be enhanced (Santos et al., 2013). Among the learning outcomes in higher education curriculum there are basic subject-related competences and generic competences related to communication, leadership, problem assessment and solving, and these competences enable the coaches to model their behaviour basing on the knowledge of didactics (Demers, Woodburn, & Savard, 2006).

The coach's activities in encouraging parent-child interaction in sport can be regarded as intellectual work that requires involvement in complex cultural processes and is similar to the school teacher's work (Morgan, Jones, Gilbourne, & Llewellyn, 2013). The coach's work is successful when his/her intellectual skills training system creates a clear and valuable athlete's identity in athlete training environment or sport competitions programme (McCann, 2011). Therefore, for the coaches to acquire competences enabling them to build a closer parent-child interaction in the sporting environment, coach training programmes and curricula should contain subjects and methods of instruction that would teach coaches to learn actively, analyse own experience, enhance assessment skills and ability to analyse and solve problems. There are broad discussions in the research community about the demand and advantage of long-term education programmes for coaches. Sports organizations participating in coach education programmes should highlight the importance of involving youth in sports and speak about parent-child interaction in sport (O'Connor, 2010).

A constructive strategy for coach education has a positive effect not only on the sporting results of youth, the continuation of sport activities, but also on youth's mental health, social relations with parents and more distant relationships, the development of youth's outlook and the system of values, future perspectives.

6. Conclusions and further research prospects

The analysis of scientific literature revealed the importance of the coach's role in encouraging parent-child interaction in youth sport, in developing a positively motivating environment for young athletes. Parent-child interaction is to a large extent influenced by a more or less positive youth training and education strategy used by the coach, the coach's ability to arouse parents' interest in their child's sport activities, build and maintain favourable relationships among the parties participating in sport, solve ethical and social problems in the sporting environment. The effectiveness of the coach's influence on parent-child interaction in sport greatly depends on the basic subject-related, social and intrapersonal competences acquired in higher sports education institutions, through work experience and in various coach education programmes. In terms of methodological skills and intellectual proficiencies, the importance of metacognitive competency involving a coach's reflection and the need for self-study is highlighted along with the importance and benefit of long-term educational programmes.

A growing interest in coaching profession research in recent years has proven the relevance of studies in this field. They help to identify the coaching competencies that should be included in sports coaching curricula in order to make the coaches' influence on parent-child interaction in the sporting environment more effective. Broad-based longitudinal studies into the development of child-coach-parent interrelationship have retained pertinence both on the global and national levels.

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