

DEMERS, GUYLAINE

Laval University

Standard Research Grant 2006

Description of the First Years of Experiences of Novice Female Coaches

Project Summary

The objective of this study is to better understand the experiences of novice female coaches during their first two years of coaching. Conclusions of previous studies have shown an under-representation as well as a decreasing number of female coaches in the last 30 years. Not only are there less female coaches, those who chose this profession stay in it for approximately four years, in comparison to their male counterparts who remain in coaching for 11 years. Building on these conclusions, we have set two specific objectives: 1) describe the profile of women entering the coaching profession and 2) identify the different successes and difficulties they experience in their first two years of coaching.

Although this research is an exploratory one, identifying successes and especially problems has provided excellent leads in terms of the training of female beginner coaches. It appears, in fact, that their training should include a component on handling discipline. This is not surprising in and of itself, because young coaches often work with younger groups of athletes. The need for teaching strategies and access to a varied exercise bank appears critical to training women beginner coaches.

This study confirms that mentorship support should be available to beginners as it is for experienced coaches. The differences appear to relate to the objectives of the mentoring. Experienced coaches need more support to overcome obstacles having to do with the fact that they are women, while beginners seem to need more technical support, such as educational strategies or examples of exercises to apply.

In closing, we can state that the coaches appreciated opportunities to record their successes and problems. As one said, "It feels funny describing negative events; it gets them out of your system." They are increasingly sensitive to their experiences, and their descriptions are becoming more refined over time. This approach seems to hold potential for working with female beginner coaches.

Research methods

We have chosen a multiple case study in order to better understand the experiences of novice female coaches.

1) Recruiting the female coaches

We recruited the novice female coaches through the Quebec school sport system. We called the athletic director of every high school to have the contact information of any new female coaches in that particular school. We also contacted few gym clubs where we knew they had new females in a coaching positions. We were able to recruit 12 novice female coaches involved in gymnastics (6), basketball (1), soccer (2), taekwondo (1), curling (1), and cheerleading (1). Nine were coaching in the community stream and three in the competition stream.

2) Data collection on problems and successes

We used the critical incident technique in order to collect data on the problems and successes those novice coaches were experiencing. Each of them reported a minimum of two incidents per week (one linked to a problem, one linked to a success) for a period of time varying from 16 to 20 weeks. We collected between 32 and 40 incidents for each coach for a total of 462 incidents.

Research results

Although this research is an exploratory one, identifying successes and especially problems has provided excellent leads in terms of the training of female beginner coaches. It appears, in fact, that their training should include a component on handling discipline. This is not surprising in and of itself, because young coaches often work with younger groups of athletes. The need for teaching strategies and access to a varied exercise bank appears critical to training women beginner coaches.

This study confirms that mentorship support should be available to beginners as it is for experienced coaches. The differences appear to relate to the objectives of the mentoring. Experienced coaches need more support to overcome obstacles having to do with the fact that they are women, while beginners seem to need more technical support, such as educational strategies or examples of exercises to apply.

In closing, we can state that the coaches appreciated, and continue to appreciate, opportunities to record their successes and problems. As one said, "It feels funny describing negative events; it gets them out of your system." They are increasingly sensitive to their experiences, and their descriptions became more refined over time. This approach seems to hold potential for working with female beginner coaches.

Policy implications

This research is relevant to the new Policy on sport for women and girls. Specifically, it is linked to the following action plan activities (based on the Policy Intervention areas outlined in the policy):

- Program Improvement
Support and encourage organizations funded through Sport Canada via on-going liaison processes to actively engage women and girls as governance leaders, coaches, technical leaders, officials and athletes participants (as appropriate), including through the provision of facilitation expertise and use of readiness and gap analysis tools.
 - Strategic Leadership
Advocate with Provincial/Territorial Governments to support and/or develop sport programs and initiatives that actively engage women and girls in sport as athlete participants, coaches, technical leaders and officials, and as governance leaders (as appropriate).
-

Next steps

Research questions

- What would be the impact of women only training session on recruitment of women coaches?
- What is the impact of mentorship on women coaches' retention?
- What do the different sport organizations do to support their new female coaches?
- Why do women stay in coaching for a shorter period of time compare to their male counterparts?
- Qualitative study to describe women's experiences in a action research project where we help beginner coaches to learn their new profession.

Practical applications

- Design women-only training workshops including the new findings (e.g. how to deal with discipline issues, how to deal with parents).
 - Develop a mentorship program linked with the workshops; make that process automatic.
 - Develop a network to let the local sport organizations know about who are the trained women available to coach in their sport.
 - Work with the NSO so they would develop drills and exercises «handbook» for their sport (develop a template to help them).
 - Write a chapter to add to the material that is used to train NCCP Learning Facilitators about women learners in a coaching workshop.
-

Key stakeholders and benefits

- Coaching Association of Canada (NCCP and Women in coaching program)
- National and Provincial Sport Organizations
- Canadian Interuniversity Sport
- Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association
- Sport Canada (Women and sport)
- Canada Games council
- Provincial and territorial governing bodies (ministry or secretary of sport)