

Dynamic Elements of Sports Development: Perceptions of Basketball Coaches

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to verify coaches' perceptions about the importance of dynamic elements in sports development of youth basketball players. Eleven basketball coaches from Santa Catarina (Brazil) participated in semi-structured interviews about youth engagement in activities, quality relationships, and appropriate settings for sports development. A deductive thematic analysis indicated that all coaches recognized the importance of diversified participation in physical and sports activities, gradually increasing the demands and specialization starting from the age of 13 years old. Although reporting the importance of play and tactical development in basketball, coaches also focused on developing specific technical skills. Concerning interpersonal relationships, coaches perceive themselves as responsible for athletes' development and emphasized the importance of peers in building positive relationships in sport. The coaches also reported the need for structured environments and resources for basketball development and highlighted the role of schools as settings that were conducive for developing general motor skills. In conclusion, coaches in the present study focused on basketball development and emphasized systematized environments, although also recognizing the influence of other the dynamic elements in the sports development process.

Keywords: engagement in activities, quality relationships, appropriate settings, team sport, youth sport

Youth sports coaches' perception of the factors that compose sports contexts directly impacts the development of children and young people in a long-term process, yet this is still obscure in the literature. Coach interventions require knowledge about specific issues of the sport as well as the understanding the contextual elements that are part youth athletes' lives (Côté and Gilbert, 2009; Côté, Turnidge and Evans, 2014; Lindgren, Annerstedt and Dohsten, 2017). Coaches have a crucial role in building appropriate sports programs that focus on valuing strengths and personal resources of athletes (Côté and Gilbert, 2009), and are responsible for fostering physical, psychological, and social development of young people during sports participation (Strachan, Côté and Deakin, 2011).

The dynamic elements of sports development, related to engagement in activities, quality relationships, and appropriate settings should be combined and constantly interact to increase the quality of youth sports programs (Côté et al., 2014). This has been applied to the various contexts

to encourage the practice a high number of varied activities before specializing in one sport (Côté and Abernethy, 2012; Côté et al., 2014; Martínez-Fernández, García and Ibáñez, 2015), promote encouragement and support from those closest to the athletes (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas, Strachan and Jeffery-Tosoni, 2013; Keegan, Harwood, Spray and Lavallee, 2009; Storm, Henriksen, Larsen and Christensen, 2014), as well as the youth athletes be inserted in appropriate settings of practice (Fraser-Thomas, Côté and MacDonald, 2010; Lindgren et al., 2017; Pazo, Sáenz-López and Fradua, 2012). Such assumptions allow the development of children and young people in a healthy and rewarding way and, consequently, favor the expansion of individuals involved with the sport in their different performance levels.

Despite the importance of dynamic elements for effective and positive sports development (Côté et al., 2014), the literature on the interaction of these elements is still scarce and more studies on different sports and contexts are necessary (Lindgren et al., 2017). Therefore, the aim of the study

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was to verify the perception of basketball coaches about engagement in activities, quality relationships, and appropriate settings of sports development of young athletes.

Method

Research Design

The present study was an empirical investigation with a descriptive strategy aiming to describe and categorize coaches' perception about sports development (Ato, López and Benavente, 2013). In addition, the study has a non-probabilistic cross-sectional design, in which the information was

obtained from a group of coaches at one time-point and was analysed qualitatively.

Participants

Eleven basketball coaches from Santa Catarina, Brazil (C1 to C11) participated in the present study. Five coaches were women and six were men. All coaches were trained youth athletes (U12 to U17). See Table 1 for a description of coaches' characteristics. Coaches participated in a program of continuous professional development carried out in a partnership between the Santa Catarina Basketball Federation and the authors' Brazilian university.

Table 1

Characteristics of basketball coaches in the training environment

Coaches	Age (years)	Education	Gender	Assistant coach experience (years)	Head coach experience (years)
C1	38	Undergraduate	Female	-	10
C2	54	Masters	Male	1	31
C3	24	Undergraduate	Male	1	6
C4	38	Specialization*	Male	1	18
C5	27	Undergraduate	Female	4	9
C6	27	Undergraduate	Female	5	2
C7	34	Undergraduate	Male	-	9
C8	47	Specialization*	Female	-	13
C9	48	Undergraduate	Male	-	11
C10	24	Undergraduate	Female	4	6
C11	24	Undergraduate	Male	6	6

* Specialization courses conducted after Physical Education courses, with a minimum duration of 360 hours.

Instrument

The data was collected using semi-structured interviews prepared specifically for the study, with previously established questions and with additional questions that aimed clarifying the topics addressed (Sparkes and Smith, 2014). The questions sought to describe the coaches' characteristics and investigate the importance of dynamic elements of sports development, like engagement in activities, interpersonal relationships and appropriate settings (Côté et al., 2014).

Procedures

After obtaining approval from the Ethics Committee in human research, individual interviews were conducted using the GoToMeeting (LogMeln™) tool, an online meeting software package. The interviews were previously scheduled at days and times that were most convenient to each coach.

The interviews lasted an average 89 minutes, and the recordings were transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Deductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was conducted to report participants' perceptions following 6 stages. The first one comprised the familiarization from reading and re-reading the transcriptions, and making initial notes of possible topics. Next, the relevant statements were systematically grouped through codes in Nvivo 11 software. Third, data were classified in the broader themes using in the literature (Côté et al., 2014: personal engagement in activities, quality relationships and appropriate settings) that could combine different codes, emerged from the interviews (sport diversification, start involvement in basketball, specialization in basketball, technical skills, Parents/

family involvement, coach roles, peers influence, structured environment, quality of specific materials, school). Forth, two independent researchers reviewed the themes to ensure a coherent pattern and the validity of individual themes in relation to data set as a whole. At this stage no themes or sub-theme were changed. Next, the researches performed a new analysis based on the verification of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Finally, a report was produced to represent the perceptions of coaches about youth sports development.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured by sending the transcripts to the participants prior to the data analysis for member checking, allowing them to verify de accuracy of the data.

Furthermore, the codes were categorized into themes by two independent researchers with vast experience in youth development research on long-term sports development, both of which acted as a critical friend. These procedures were similar to those performed in a study using the interview analysis (Franck and Stambulova, 2018) and considered a recent review study addressing commonly used reliability methods to ensure rigor in qualitative research (Smith and McGannon, 2017).

Results

Coaches’ perception on the influence of dynamic elements on sports development are summarized in Figure 1.

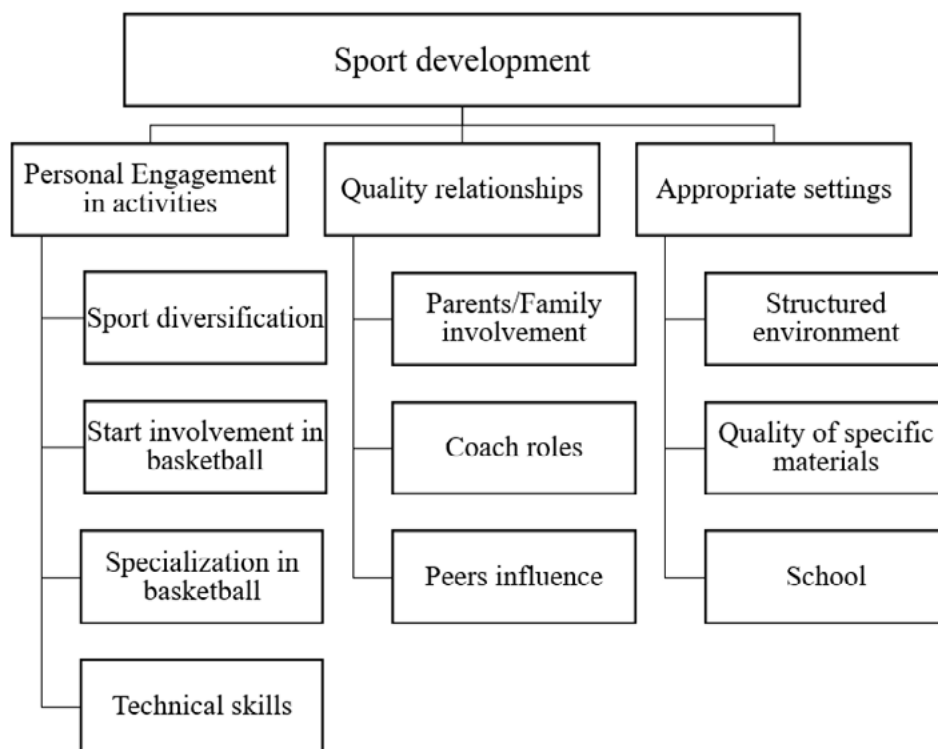


Figure 1. Basketball coaches’ perception about the sports development process

Personal Engagement in Activities

Overall, coaches recognized the importance of diversified engagement in physical activity, in order to try different sports and develop basic skills. Coaches believed engaging in various sports made athletes appreciate for practice and be more intrinsically motivated, an essential characteristic for continued engagement in sports.

I think children have to experience everything they want and enjoy. Over time they will choose the sport they really want to dedicate themselves to. Also, many sports can help the repertoire of movements, for example track and

field can help with the fundamental movements of basketball. (C6)

Coaches conceived that youth athletes should start practicing organized basketball at the age of 9 years old, but in a playful way and without demands. The increase in training requirements and specialization of specific basketball functions should be gradual, fitting to teams’ profiles, and begin between the ages of 13 and 15 years old.

I understand that basketball should be introduced around the age of 9 or 10 in a playful way, using games, joking, and making adaptations that appeal to children. (C9)

Even though I understand that it would be appropriate to specialize after the age of 15, in my club we begin to direct the specific skills and tactical movements of each position at the age of 13, directing. (C6)

Although participants mentioned the importance of play and tactical development, they reported focusing primarily on technical skills because they felt these were central to good tactical performance.

Good athletes need to be well-rounded, today they need to be playing from an early age to gain experience in youth sports, (. . .) have ball control, learn how to control their bodies to play. (C4)

Quality Relationships

Quality relationships addressed three topics: parents and family members, coaches, and peers. First, coaches recognize the importance of parents and family members supporting their children's sports participation, especially regarding emotional support. However, a concern of coaches is the overstated pressure from parents that may lead athletes to quit basketball.

I see that most parents have a positive influence encouraging their children to train more, or telling them to not be sad if they didn't play well. But I've had parents who ruined the child's motivation telling their son: "Your colleague is better than you, she scored more than you." Until the athlete did not want to play anymore. (C5)

Coaches can decrease the negative impact of some parents by recognizing their responsibility in athletes' development, as well as the building closer relationships with their athletes and serving as role model.

I once heard from an athlete's father that I was an example for his son. (. . .) today I understand as coaches we have a crucial role the development of athletes, not only on the court, but outside of sports. (C1)

Peer influence was also highlighted by participants describing that older athletes serve as role models and take on the responsibility of helping younger teammates. For example, captains must demonstrate leadership, responsibility, punctuality, and experience to support the other athletes.

For me, the captain is not the one who scores more, or plays better, but the captain has to have personal characteristics of being a role model, having attitudes, arriving on time, showing willingness, since others see him and want to be the same, has to be an example to be followed. (C4)

Appropriate Settings

Coaches emphasized the importance of structured training environments for athletes' development. Part of the coaches reported having a large number of resources and good settings because they worked in private schools or clubs, but most participants mentioned the need for better equipment and structure in order to improve their coaching.

To enhance the quality of training we would need a little more good setting. I coach in a municipal sport program and our challenge is to get good equipment, (. . .) we are always making requests to Federation, but they usually don't provide us enough. (C1)

The participants also described schools as a favourable environment for developing general motor skills and practicing various sports, which will help children's later involvement with basketball by teaching them play and enjoying playing.

I perceive that schools nowadays do not care as much about the quality of the Physical Education classes. (. . .) For me this is the main context to develop children for sports. I always achieved my goals within the schools I worked for. (. . .) it is not teaching sports, but to have a taste for sport, to experience all sports. (C9)

Discussion

The objective of the present study was to verify the perception of basketball coaches about the youth development through sports, considering the dynamic elements of this process. The perception of coaches regarding the importance of personal engagement in activities, the quality relationships, and the appropriate settings of sports practice facilitated the understanding of sports development as a complex process involving different aspects.

The evidence of present study corroborates studies related to youth sports development, from the diversification of activities with progressive increase in specific requirements during the sports development (Côté and Abernethy, 2012; Côté et al., 2014; Martínez-Fernández et al., 2015). Engagement in activities that develop general skills is considered important for athletic development and subsequent evolution in a specific sport (Milistetd, Mesquita, Nascimento and Souza Sobrinho, 2010).

In general, the stages of sports development based on specific age groups mentioned by coaches corroborate the literature in youth development through sport (Côté, 1999). Many studies have demonstrated the importance of diversifying activities and contexts in the initial years of sports development (Collet, Nascimento, Folle, Mendes and Ibañez, 2018; Côté and Abernethy, 2012; Mendes et al., 2018), favouring adequate human development and the possibility of developing future practitioners and professional athletes.

The quality relationships established during sport involvement is also an important component that favours positive results (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2013; Keegan et al., 2009; Lindgren et al., 2017). The coaches acknowledged the importance of interpersonal relationships in training contexts, and their role to conduct the process was prevalent. Coaches have a central role in coaching process being responsible for planning, executing and constantly evaluating the sports development process (Côté and Gilbert, 2009). In the present study, the coaches perceived themselves as a responsible agent for these tasks, being this similar to studies showing that coaches felt responsible for developing life skills, creating a good climate, and positively influencing and fostering positive psychological skills (Folle et al., 2017; Vella, Oades and Crowe, 2011), and often considered themselves as “second parents” (Strachan et al., 2011).

The coaches reported the importance of parents’ involvement in the sport setting, but they highlighted they must respect the children’s desires and the work developed by the coach without pressure them. The involvement of children in sports depends on personal experiences, which are deeply influenced by their family environment (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2013). Thus, it is essential for parents to be involved in the sports development process, following the children’s progress, and giving encouragement without excessive demands, that can lead to frustration and dropout. Coaches also reported the importance of peers in establishing frequent and supportive conviviality in training and competition settings. Thus, it is also the coaches’ responsibility to encourage positive interactions among teammates (Lindgren et al., 2017; Strachan et al., 2011).

Finally, other important element is the quality of the practice settings in which players are involved (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2010; Lindgren et al., 2017; Pazo et al., 2012), including the maintenance of equipment, a clean and safe location, and a good training structure (Strachan et al., 2011). The coaches reported the need for proper structure and specific materials for basketball training. They also mentioned the school as an essential setting to help sports development. Schools and Physical Education classes can promote cognitive development and immediate and long-term sports educational benefits (Bradley, Keane and Crawford, 2013).

Conclusions

Although coaches demonstrate a coaching perspective towards the achievement of competitive results, technical skills, and systematized practice since underage teams, they exposed concerns about the positive youth development of their athletes. These findings pointed that stakeholders should support the athlete development by fostering greater interactions between coaches, parents, and peers in order to create a positive climate for the basketball. The evidence of this study can help inform sports directors and coaches to consider the importance of the dynamic elements (activities, relationships, context) on athletes’ development. For example, clubs and sporting associations should foster the creation of learning environments and strategies in which parents and peers have greater interaction with athletes to create a harmonious climate of training. Therefore, the recognition of sport as tool for human development is pivotal, since the proper interaction of all aspects that lead to the positive youth development in sporting contexts.

Elementos dinámicos del desarrollo deportivo: percepciones de los entrenadores de baloncesto

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio fue verificar las percepciones de los entrenadores sobre la importancia de los elementos dinámicos en el desarrollo deportivo de los jóvenes jugadores de baloncesto. Once entrenadores de baloncesto de Santa Catarina (Brasil) participaron en entrevistas semiestructuradas sobre la participación de los jóvenes en actividades, calidad de las relaciones y contextos apropiados para el desarrollo deportivo. Un análisis temático deductivo indicó que todos los entrenadores reconocieron la importancia de la participación diversificada en actividades físicas y deportivas, aumentando gradualmente las demandas y la especialización a partir de los 13 años de edad. Aunque informaron sobre la importancia del juego y el desarrollo táctico en el baloncesto, los entrenadores también se enfocaron en desarrollar habilidades técnicas específicas. Con respecto a las relaciones interpersonales, los entrenadores se perciben a sí mismos como responsables del desarrollo de los atletas y enfatizan la importancia de los compañeros en la construcción de relaciones positivas en el deporte. Los entrenadores también informaron la necesidad de contextos estructurados y recursos para el desarrollo del baloncesto y destacaron el papel de las escuelas como contextos propicios para el desarrollo de habilidades motoras generales. En conclusión, los entrenadores en el presente estudio se centraron en el desarrollo del baloncesto y enfatizaron los entornos sistematizados, aunque también reconocieron la influencia de otros elementos dinámicos en el proceso de desarrollo deportivo.

Palabras clave: participación en actividades; calidad de las relaciones; contextos apropiados; deporte de equipo; deporte joven.

Elementos dinâmicos do desenvolvimento esportivo: percepções de treinadores de basquetebol

Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo foi verificar as percepções dos treinadores sobre a importância dos elementos dinâmicos no desenvolvimento esportivo de jovens jogadores de basquetebol. Onze treinadores de basquete de Santa Catarina (Brasil)

participaram de entrevistas semiestruturadas sobre engajamento de jovens em atividades, qualidade das relações e cenários apropriados para o desenvolvimento esportivo. A análise temática dedutiva indicou que todos os treinadores reconheceram a importância da participação diversificada nas atividades físicas e esportivas, aumentando gradativamente as demandas e a especialização a partir dos 13 anos de idade. Embora relataram a importância do jogo e do desenvolvimento tático no basquetebol, os treinadores também se concentraram no desenvolvimento de habilidades técnicas específicas. No que diz respeito às relações interpessoais, os treinadores percebem-se como responsáveis pelo desenvolvimento dos atletas e enfatizam a importância dos pares na construção de relações positivas no esporte. Os treinadores também relataram a necessidade de ambientes e recursos estruturados para o desenvolvimento do basquetebol e destacaram o papel das escolas como cenários propícios ao desenvolvimento de habilidades motoras gerais. Em conclusão, os treinadores do presente estudo tiveram como foco o desenvolvimento do basquetebol e enfatizaram ambientes sistematizados, embora também reconhecessem a influência de outros elementos dinâmicos no processo de desenvolvimento esportivo.

Palavras-chave: engajamento em atividades; qualidade das relações; contextos adequados; esporte coletivo; esporte juvenil.

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