

Research Essentials: How Coaches Learn

1 Coach learning is optimised through a mixture of formal, non-formal and informal opportunities.

People learn in very different ways. Formal learning involves courses with standardised curricula and certification; non-formal learning can be in the form of coaching conferences, seminars and workshops; and informal learning is considered as practical coaching experience, experience as an athlete and working with peers. The blending of each of these learning opportunities is the key to successful learning; although the optimal blend of these learning styles will depend upon the individual coach and his or her stage of development.

2 Formal learning is best received by less-experienced coaches.

Research focusing on experienced coaches has found formal learning to be of limited value; however, for less-experienced coaches it is more effective. Formal learning provides these coaches with an initial source of interest and enthusiasm, practical tips to use in their own coaching and the chance to meet other coaches.

3 Coaches can learn by building upon their existing knowledge and experience.

The experiences of doing, observing others and interaction among coaches is the dominant theme in coach learning. Almost 90% of coaches in the *UK Coach Tracking Study* (2010) used 'coaching practice' as a learning source, compared to 51% who used 'coaching qualifications'.

4 Create environments that motivate learning.

Engagement with learning is driven by a desire to acquire knowledge and enhance practical competencies. A lack of this inner drive will contribute towards non-participation in learning. Being able to create different environments that motivate different individuals to learn can increase participation in coach education.

5 Helping coaches develop critical reflection skills is essential for learning.

Through critical reflection, coaches can become aware of their learning preferences and the impact of different learning styles. Without such skills, coaches may reflect in superficial and descriptive ways that will prove inadequate for learning.

Further Reading

Cushion, C. et al (2010) *Coach Learning and Development: A Review of the Literature*

A comprehensive review of research into coach learning and development.

Timson-Katchis, M. and North, J. (2010) *UK Coach Tracking Study: Year Two Headline Report*

Primary research on coaches and their development.

Apply the Theory

sports coach UK (2009) *The Coach Development Model User Guide*

A guide to help individual sports develop and refine their models.